



**Brian M. Howell and Jenell Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2019), pp. xvi + 282, ISBN 978-1540962102. £32.99**

People might wonder about a review of a book on cultural anthropology being found in a theology journal. For those who feel that way, it is my hope that by the end of the review they will be as convinced as I am that cultural anthropology has a place in our discussion of theology. One major virtue of this book is in how it demonstrates the value of cultural anthropology to the Christian life and mission.

Brian Howell and Jenell Paris primarily wrote this book with an undergraduate introduction to anthropology course in mind. However, they also intend it to contribute to missiology. I would go further and say that this book has value for practical theology as well. This book introduces the reader to anthropological language, theory, and practice across the major fields of cultural anthropology. At the same time the book situates cultural anthropology in a Christian context. Having been written with an undergraduate audience in mind, the language is academic but not excessively complicated. It should be accessible to anyone willing to engage with undergraduate-level work.

Howell and Paris begin by broadly describing the discipline of anthropology. This helps the reader understand what the academic discipline is and what it attempts to achieve. In subsequent chapters they cover (in order): culture; language; social structure and inequality in race, ethnicity and class; sex, gender, and sexuality; economics; authority and power; kinship and marriage; religion and ritual; medical anthropology; theory in cultural anthropology; and anthropology in action. In each chapter they discuss the anthropological categories relevant to the section. They also provide some historical background and give relevant evidence from various cultures. As a mark of the target audience for the book, the reader should be prepared to encounter familiar words defined in new ways: that is, defined in accordance with the use of these words in the discipline of cultural anthropology. Thankfully, Howell and Paris make this easy with careful definitions as each term arises and a list of relevant definitions at the end of each chapter.

Throughout their book the authors do an admirable job of relating anthropological concepts to faith, sometimes with contemporary reference, and sometimes biblical. An example of biblical application can

be found in the chapter on kinship and marriage. In it they refer to the story of Esau and Jacob and Esau's Canaanite wives. From an anthropological perspective they argue that Jacob and Rachel may have been motivated in their actions to secure the inheritance based on a desire to protect the lineage from the outside. Examples such as these demonstrate the value an anthropological perspective may hold for biblical interpretation. This is not to say that we should uncritically accept a description because it is 'anthropological', but it does broaden our understanding of how cultures and societies function, enabling us to see more readily those aspects lost to a Western worldview.

Although the authors integrate the value of anthropology to Christianity into each chapter, Chapter 12, "Anthropology in Action", forms a good summary of the ways we may benefit from an understanding of the study of anthropology. One point that struck me was the applicability of such study, not only to foreign missions, but in our own towns and villages. There is undoubtedly a significant cultural gap between many churches in Scotland and the surrounding culture. This raises two questions: 1) How well do we understand our church culture? 2) How well do we understand the wider culture? We will be more effective at reaching others with the gospel if we interact with an understanding of what we consider valuable versus what our culture considers valuable. To this end, gaining an understanding of the methods and categories of cultural analysis could benefit the church greatly, not just abroad, but at home too. This book provides an excellent entry point for a Christian to consider such things.

Of course we may not, and should not, accept everything wholesale. The book should be read as an aid and not long-lost truth. For example, there are some inaccuracies contained in the chapter on language. One that particularly pained me is in the description of Aramaic as 'another iteration of Hebrew' (p. 69). A simple Wikipedia search will show that Aramaic is considered a language in its own right. It most definitely was not a historical development of Hebrew. Despite such errors, the book is a highly valuable work. It should provoke us to consider how culture permeates every aspect of society and how individuals understand their world. This can be used to create and assess meaningful strategies for reaching the different people within the different subcultures around us. We may also be able to more critically evaluate our own church cultures

and find ways forward where these appear in conflict with what God requires of us.

At certain points this book may disappoint some people who hold committed theological views. It must be said that this book was not written as a theological argument of what cultural features are right and wrong. Rather, it is about analysis of culture, often leaving the judgement of right and wrong for the reader to make. It should be accepted for use on this basis.

This book could prove of great value to the church in Scotland and more widely. I wholeheartedly recommend it to the church and to theological college libraries to have on their shelves. It is well worth the read for anyone seeking to engage a non-Christian culture and even for those seeking to bring greater unity within a denomination containing multiple cultures.

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**Paul Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), pp. ix + 282, ISBN 978-1601786104. £23.99**

Although there has been a surge in scholarship aimed at retrieving the work of Reformed scholastics in their historical context, the majority of these studies have focused on the topics of prolegomena, doctrine of God, and the nature of free will. While such inquiries are helpful in revealing the fundamental methodological approach of Reformed Orthodoxy, there is another means of entry to their methodology which has yet to be directly surveyed: theological anthropology. Paul Helm contributes to the growing field of studies on the Reformed Orthodox tradition by providing a series of chapters surveying influential Reformed figures who wrote on anthropology from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Though containing some oddities which could be improved in a future edition, overall the work is an excellent contribution to Reformation Studies which