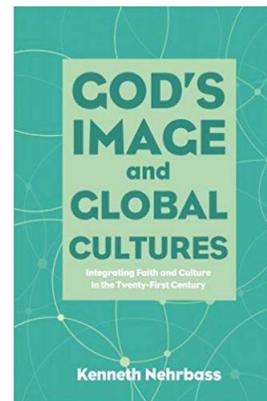

Kenneth Nehrbass. *God's Image and Global Cultures: Integrating Faith and Culture in the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016. xx + 229 pp. £23.00/\$30.00.

Kenneth Nehrbass of the Cook School of Intercultural studies at Biola University has produced a highly useful volume dealing with many of the leading issues in cross cultural ministry today. The work is essentially a treasure trove of anthropological information made practical by the lists of “reflection and review questions” that accompany each chapter.

The author begins with a discussion of the phenomenon of globalization and its implications for Christians in general. This chapter includes treatments of contemporary “hot button” issues such as immigration and the exportation of U.S. jobs overseas. He presents surprising statistics such as the fact that “during 35 years of increasing globalization, employment in the U.S. increased by over 80 percent” (p. 19).



Chapter 2 contains an excellent evaluation of “American exceptionalism” and explores many causes of anti-Western sentiment around the world. These topics are followed by an in-depth exploration of the relation of culture to biblical theology. Nehrbass includes an annotated list of the various theories regarding the classification of “culture” and “cultures”: the idealist, race/gene, functionalist, particularist, semiotics/structuralist, inclusivist, and Image Bearing explanations. Under this last topic are reflections regarding whether culture is essentially good, evil, or neither.

Chapter 5 offers tentative answers to such questions as whether God created an original, ideal culture along with speculations as to where Babel (Gen 11) fits into the scheme of things. Included here are some very helpful charts that allow for an instant comparison of several of the theories regarding the division of humanity into its various races and ethnicities.

Chapter 6 contains a very useful summary of the macro-explanations for why cultures differ: genetic determinism, unilinear evolution, functionalism, culture-trait theory, and environmental determinism. For those unfamiliar with the basics of modern cultural anthropology, this chapter will serve as an excellent introduction.

In Chapter 7 the author begins to explore some of the leading questions that divide Christian workers today: Are some cultures better than others? How do we make observations about cultures without stereotyping? Should we try to change cultures? Should we let other cultures change us? Chapter 8 continues this discussion, detailing various ideas regarding “the gospel and the role of Christians in culture.” Here we find H. Richard Niebuhr’s classic *Christ and Culture* critiqued, with the author finding fault with Niebuhr for “never conceiving of a God-directed cultural life” and believing that “culture [is] inherently against God” (p. 129). In conjunction with these criticisms, Luther’s “two kingdoms” approach to “the enduring problem” (i.e., the interface between Christians and culture) is dismissed out of hand in favor of a “holistic kingdom emphasis.”

Part III deals with “God’s thoughts about culture,” and ch. 9 details “God’s plan for culture” (politically, economically, religiously, technologically, socially, symbolically, medially, and medically). Nehrbass next examines “God’s plan for cultural variables,” including ideas regarding the variations that may be permitted with respect to individuals, society in general, being and doing, time reckoning, order and flexibility, risk and vulnerability, future planning, fate and personal efficacy, logic, hospitality,

hierarchy and equality, meritocracy, toughness and tenderness, and conflict resolution (ch. 10). The final chapter contains suggestions for how to become a “world changer.”

While I find the volume extremely useful in most respects, there are two aspects that I would personally view quite differently. First, with respect to Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, I remain firmly convinced (even after reading a plethora of critiques) that this is one of the most brilliant expositions in the history of the church. Niebuhr is entirely correct when he observes that evangelicals’ enthusiastic adoption of the “Christ the Transformer of Culture” position is almost always in complete ignorance of what Niebuhr actually says about this approach. However, I am decidedly upon Niebuhr’s side with respect to the idea that “culture [is] inherently against God.”

My basis for this conviction forms the essence of my second criticism. Where this work falls short—and where most such works fall short—is its failure to engage the Bible’s teaching regarding the effects of the Fall and the utter degradation that sin has brought to the human race. Indeed, the message of the Bible is that we as human beings are fallen to such an extent that we are unable to recognize how sinful we actually are. We read the Bible’s description of our depravity (hence our humanly-created cultures’ depravity), but our sin nature prevents us from grasping these truths to their fullest extent. When all is said and done, “Christ and Culture in Paradox”—the Two Kingdoms view of Martin Luther—most accurately reflects the teaching of the New Testament. The *imago Dei* remains in fallen humans, but it is a shattered, broken, ruined and wrecked-beyond-repair image that will remain until the end of the age. Any “good” that may be found in cultures is nothing more than a pale shadow of what humans were originally created to be and do.

I would recommend to all that *God’s Image and Global Cultures* be read together with David VanDrunen’s *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). These two works together would define well the parameters of the biblical “tension” regarding culture within which each of us is called to live.

Larry Poston
Nyack College
Nyack, New York, USA

Thomas Jay Oord, ed. *Theologians and Philosophers Using Social Media: Advice, Tips, and Testimonials*. San Diego: SacraSage Press, 2017. ix + 447 pp. £19.95/\$29.88.

As the new media of the Internet age continue to unfold, many scholarly Christians have tried to share their work and expertise effectively, particularly in the rambunctious world of social media. This concern is the primary subject of *Theologians and Philosophers Using Social Media: Advice, Tips, and Testimonials*. The book can best be described as a massive crowdsourced volume featuring ninety-one contributors, all edited by Thomas Jay Oord. While most of the authors are in the academy, several are simply effective users of social media who deal with theology or generally religious matters. The choice of writers is fairly diverse, but a majority of them seem to frequent or inhabit the progressive-revisionist circles. Oord himself is a self-described open theist and process theologian.

