



Angels in the Architecture: A Protestant Vision for Middle Earth

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Christianity presents a glorious vision of culture, a vision overflowing with truth, beauty, and goodness. It's a vision that stands in stark conflict with the anemic modern (and postmodern) perspectives that dominate contemporary life. Medieval Christianity began telling a beautiful story about the good life, but it was silenced in mid-sentence. The Reformation rescued truth, but its modern grandchildren have often ignored the importance of a medieval grasp of the good life. This book sketches a vision of "medieval Protestantism," a personal and cultural vision that embraces the fullness of Christian truth, beauty, and goodness.

"This volume is a breath of fresh air in our polluted religious environment. Hopefully many readers will breathe deeply of its contents and be energized." -The Presbyterian Witness

"[A] delightful apologetic for a Protestant cultural vision. . . . before you write off these two as mere obscurantist Reformed types, take care. I found that some of my objections were, on the surface, more modern than biblical." -Gregory Alan Thornbury, Carl F. Henry Center for Christian Leadership

"[T]his book cries out against the bland, purely spiritualized Christianity to which so many of us have become accustomed. . . . I highly recommend it." -David Kind, Pilgrimage, Concordia Theological Seminary

Angels in the Architecture: A Protestant Vision for Middle Earth Details

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From Reader Review Angels in the Architecture: A Protestant Vision for Middle Earth for online ebook

Jacob Aitken says

Angels in the Architecture (AA) is a bold book. And when it is wrong in factual assertions, it is magnificently wrong. Ok, seriously. The authors propose against the stale, bloody worldview of modernity a rich, robust *paleo* medieval worldview rooted in Protestant Theology. My review will come from a number of angles.

What if Tolkien were a Calvinist?

The subtitle suggests Tolkienesque themes. But isn't the subtitle contradictory? Tolkien was a *Catholic!* This book (AA) should not be read as a historical survey of the middle ages that ends with the convenient conclusion, "Oh, the middle ages happened to be thoroughly protestant after all." No, this book reads as a reconstruction of the Christian worldview-praxis drawing from the finest elements of Medievalism. .

Pros of the Book:

1. Its hauntingly beautiful style. Chapters 2 and 3 are worth memorizing. They will teach you how to write well. The sections on Beowulf and "pure northerness" are worth the price of the book.
2. Its boldness. Modern-day Calvinism needs to make Calvinism beautiful. There is nothing wrong with that. Be winsome and witty in presenting the faith. More people might actually become Calvinists, who knows?
3. Its ability to say a lot with a little. At times the authors do engage in sweeping generalizations. Nevertheless, they also express some knotty problems with amazing ease.

Cons of the Book:

- ~1. Accuracy? Did the Middle Ages really teach this? Probably not. That's not the point, as I suggested earlier. This should be read as a future reconstruction of society along medieval lines, lines which have been purged (no pun intended) of its compromises.
 - ~2. I am not convinced of Wilson's argument for the Authorized Text. He makes a good case, but I am not buying.
 - ~3. The chapter on agrarianism has taken a lot of hits. I actually like it. But I was told that I shouldn't like it, so I acquiesced. Seriously, the authors could have better nuanced it to say "garden-city" as man's telos.
-

Shawn Paterson says

Really, really enjoyed this book. While some chapters I had no frame of reference for, others resonated with me deeply.

"...in a created world, beauty can only be reflected glory. Our world is filled with moons, and there is only one sun... A love for the triune and holy God is the foundation of any true love for beauty. Like the seraphim, we do not see this beauty directly, for our faces, like theirs, are of necessity covered. But the fact that this beauty is infinitely there means that other entities in this created world can reflect it, and we have the privilege to behold the beauty of the Lord in them." -- Doug Wilson

I plan on compiling more choice quotes later.

E. says

Wilson makes some excellent points in the course of this book, but I was surprised that someone so interested in classical education would attempt to create a strict dichotomy between Hebrew and Greek thought (Hebrew=good, Greek=bad, in case you are wondering). Trying to blame Aristotle for Aquinas's theology might make for a convenient defense of Protestantism, but I do not think it is a very accurate one. The Protestants, as Wilson notes, tended to love Augustine--who was strongly influenced by Neoplatonism. Wilson also claims that, until Aquinas's general time period, medieval writers were mostly Hebraic. But Wilson has read C.S. Lewis's book "The Discarded Image," which alone should have made him realize how much the early medievals leaned on Plato. If they were more "Hebraic," it was only because they didn't have the fuller philosophical texts that were accessible to Aquinas and his contemporaries.

Frankly, I question the value of creating a Hebrew/Greek dichotomy at all. Hebrew thought was primarily focused on action, on living a godly life within the Israelite nation. The Greeks, by contrast, thought much more about abstract concepts when no one else was really doing so. (The Romans, like the Hebrews, were more interested in ethics than metaphysics.) The Greeks shaped most of the questions, if not all the answers, of Western philosophy. Even the classical theology held to by the Church Fathers, which I presume Wilson supports, was influenced by Greek categories. Greek thought was also not one monolithic thing. If Wilson wants to criticize Greek thought, he needs to define it first. Then he needs to prove that there is a way to discuss abstracts without relying on Greek thought, as he defines it.

The book has other weaknesses, largely because Wilson seems to have attempted to write a manifesto, rather than fully engage each idea he discusses. As much as I like the King James/Authorized Version, I think most people would need better proof before accepting Wilson's Majority Text position. There are also some unclear sections--is he actually arguing that, since men should head their families, women should not vote? And how could he make a historical case for that, given that many men were restricted from voting for years because of their skin color or lack of property? At his best, Wilson is inspirational and thought-provoking. At other times, he makes a poor or confusing case for positions that he clearly considers very important.

Jeremy says

Wilson says that this is one of the three books of his that reveals what he thinks is important.

I read Ch. 3 (*Beowulf*) on April 21, 2016. Wilson writes here that this book is too friendly toward nominalism, but that this post should fix that.

Sally Ewan says

I read this book once before, when my now sixteen year old was a baby. I figured it was worth revisiting, particularly when I flipped it open to the chapter on "Poetic Knowledge", an important topic. The book is about medieval Christianity redux in this time, a "cultural vision that embraces the fullness of Christian truth, beauty, and goodness." I want my life to overflow with truth, beauty, and goodness. I want to delight in this God-made world while focusing on the ultimate joy of heaven! This work covers so much: worship, education, family and community, politics, etc. A compelling taste of what could be...

John Wise says

Just as it would be unfair to judge all modern Christianity by the televangelists, so it is unfair to judge Medievalism by the blatant public corruption and scandals (don't get me wrong, all that nastiness was there).

That being said, Medievalism has a lot to offer. As the world is seeing the weaknesses of both the stainless steel sterility of modernism and the fractured kaleidoscope of postmodernism, people will be searching for truth, beauty, and goodness, things the medievalists passionately pursued.

Wilson's thesis is that the Reformation was like war-time, but Medievalism is like peace-time. The Reformation was extremely important, but you wouldn't want to live in a peace-time culture as if it were a war-time culture. What he advocates is the Reformation's love of truth fused with the Medievals love of beauty and goodness that works itself in the practicalities of working, cooking, cleaning, lovemaking, and art.

Michael says

This book captures the deep angst that modernity has brought upon the modern man's soul and presents him with a road map to a richer and fuller life! Looking back to the medieval era, Wilson & Jones point out that the moderns have unfairly given the "dark ages" a bad rap. Wilson & Jones show that the medieval man was concerned with harmonizing all areas of his life to expand the goodness, truth and beauty that God has revealed and given to him in this world. Ever optimistic, Wilson & Jones are hopeful that modernity's grip on the world will give way to a second Christendom, a world where God's creational designs are not only excepted but celebrated!

Robin says

While not agreeing with every single point, on the whole I LOVED this book. The authors paint a clear picture of what they call "medieval Protestantism" - a rich cultural emphasis on truth, beauty, and goodness, lived out in joyful Christian community; which contrasts starkly with both secular and "Christianized"

versions of our ugly, fragmented modern/postmodern culture. (One of my favorite quotes from the book: "A postmodernist is simply a modernist who has admitted his cultural illiteracy.") I found myself wanting to underline about every other sentence, and I am looking forward to giving it a second read soon. This is not a long book, but there is an awful lot of food for thought here.

Tyler Holley says

This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to push their Christian worldview into all the nooks and crannies of their life, or even if you have no nooks but still want a good read, then this one would work.

Austin Hoffman says

Great collection of essays on cultivating a medieval view of life. The medieval protestant vision sees Christ as the integration point and beauty as non negotiable. What does our look like to build and live a consistent christendom? This book is a good start.

The book does suffer from Doug Wilson's dogmatic, yet vague take on some things like the *textus receptus* or the antebellum South. However, most of what he writes is solid.

Topics include family, feasting, stateism, poetic vision, equality, liberty, art, work, agriculturalism, and technology.

B says

The authors of this book present an attractive vision of a world in which we revel in the goodness of God. I was drawn to their desire to live in a world where Christianity is assumed, where we understand that beauty comes from God and he wants us to feast on his gifts. It is hard to do this book justice in a short review, the vision soars beyond that. I particularly enjoyed their emphasis on having a poetic view of the world, and I think they must have applied it well as they tackled our need for high views of God, his church, hierarchies of authority, work, family, stories, our relationships, art and theology because I felt myself being carried to a place of greater understanding and appreciation for a full and contemplative view of reality.

I wish they had gone into a few more specifics, particularly on the federal understanding of marriage, and while I agreed with much of the concept they were attempting to communicate as they discussed Bible translation (church authority) I simply cannot stand with them on the AV translation for today nor the *textus receptus*.

Job Dalomba says

Some books come along and sketch out many of the longings of your heart and say what you've been feeling better than you ever could. This book is one of those for me. A truly satisfying read. Beautiful.

Sarah says

Oh, I loved this book. Jones and Wilson make a claim that "the medieval period is the closest thing we have to a maturing Christian culture." This book doesn't explain a lot, it doesn't have lots of references and clear arguments. In fact, it left me open mouthed with random left-field assertions more than once. It left me with a lot to search out and sometimes it left me feeling really stupid. But that's the point- It's a vision, a mountain-top view of God's Kingdom in all it's truth, goodness and beauty. I think feeling worm-ish is appropriate. My favorite chapters were "The Font of Laughter", about Joy in the Christian life, "Mother Kirk", about the centrality, authority and "motherhood" of the Church, and "Nurturing Fat Souls" about raising children on a hearty diet of good stories.

Adam Ross says

Absolutely breath-taking. Some books can ruin you by revealing how petty you really were before reading it. This book is a beautiful ruination. Literary, witty, intelligent, it splashes in waters above all of our heads and reveals a vision for what Christianity once was, and what it will be again.

Nathan Huffstutler says

"'It's medieval!' I exclaimed; for I still had all the chronological snobbery of my period and used the names of earlier periods as abuse."

--C. S. Lewis

As people of the modern era, we tend to have what Lewis calls chronological snobbery: the notion that because our opinions are the most recent, they are therefore the best. But as Douglas Wilson and Douglas Jones show in *Angels in the Architecture*, when we compare our modern culture to many aspects of medieval culture, we actually fall far short.

For an example, as Wilson and Jones point out, we can simply compare medieval architecture and modern architecture. Medieval buildings are stunningly beautiful. Their cathedrals inspire our awe, having been built meticulously over several lifetimes. They are filled with intricate stained glass, sculptures, and other art, and they convey a sense of the glory and holiness of God. These buildings show a proper respect for beauty and reverence, and the builders recognized better than we do that God deserves intricate, extravagant worship--the *beauty* of holiness.

But when we look at modern buildings, as the authors demonstrate, we see what looks like sideways boxes covered with reptilian scales. Our modern buildings show that utility and efficiency are the ruling values--not beauty or reverence. Even our church buildings tend to be ugly.

Although I have problems with some assertions made in the book, I generally appreciate these comparisons of the medieval mindset with our own. Wilson and Jones take sixteen aspects of medieval life--beauty, work, technology, poetry, education, authority, reverence for God, etc.--and show how we moderns can learn from

them.

These comparisons are enlightening. I was amazed at how much our industrial, de-incarnated society, including even the modern church, has been affected by Modernism and the Enlightenment. One of our main problems is that we see human beings as mere minds, and we fail to see ourselves holistically--as *embodied* creatures whose physical being and affections were given to us by the Creator.

Here are some of my favorite quotations/ideas from the book:

Regarding the modern church's dualistic over-emphasis on the mind at the expense of the body: "As Christians, we do not hold to the immortality of the soul, but rather to the resurrection of the dead. We will live forever as sons and daughters of God--in the body."

Regarding technology: "If technology is directed by men who know themselves to be created in the image of God--who know themselves to be men--the problems begin to resolve themselves. As it stands now, technology is in the hands of men who believe themselves to be the products of a blind technology, made by that impersonal technocrat Darwinism. We are only machines, and we build machines, and why is everything around us so machine-like? The pride of modernity likes to ask the really deep questions.

Look at the arrogance of technopoly--the skyscraper, the outside covered with reptilian mirror-like scales. Look at the impressive design of the thing--a box set on its end. Now look at a medieval cathedral and explain to us all why you still believe in progress. The flying buttress was a technological marvel, but it was built by men who knew themselves to be such. Our skyscrapers were designed by empty men trying to forget their hollow chests. But it is not easy to forget the *imago Dei*."

Regarding the inferiority of modern art: "When the travesties scattered throughout our modern art museums are set alongside the glories of ancient Greece, the Christian heart should swell with pride....The modern materialist ... cannot have the Nike of Samothrace, and he cannot have Bach's Mass in B Minor. He cannot have Vergil [or] Milton. But he can hang a toilet seat on the gallery wall and apply for federal grants."

Regarding the medieval church: "One important objection to the papal claims of the Roman church is that it is a modern development. C. S. Lewis pointed to this tendency in his answer to one correspondent who asked why he was not a Roman Catholic. His reply was charitable, but profound in its implications from anyone anyone as well-versed in the literature of the medieval period as Lewis was. 'By the time I had really explained my objection to certain doctrines which differentiate you from us (and also, in my opinion from the Apostolic and even the Medieval Church), you would like me less.'"

Regarding the celebration, the feasting, and the physical pleasures Christians are called to enjoy: "For some reason foreign to our modern ears, God tells us that celebration is central to pleasing Him; it is central to leading a good life. Modern American life has no time for serious celebrations as did life in centuries past. We've got work to do; projects and deadlines press us. And yet for all our industrial-strength pragmatism, few if any truly important things get accomplished. We have forgotten that celebration isn't just an option; it's a call to full Christian living.

Celebration is worshiping God with our bodies, with the material creation He has set up around us. Celebrating--whether in feasts, ceremonies, holidays, formal worship, or lovemaking--are all part of obeying God's command to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength" (Deut. 6:5, Mk. 12:30). We are to show our love for God not just with one portion of our being (the spiritual aspect); we are to love God with our whole body, heart and strength and legs and lips."

Regarding the evangelical failure to understand the more scriptural sense of aesthetics that the medievals had: "Modern evangelicals like to compare holy things to soft drinks, designer clothes, [and other products in] our modern consumerist culture. The problem with this is not ... the comparison to a created thing. The problem is that it is ... bad poetry. The Bible compares God to very mundane things, but does so with poetic wonder. God "shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth."

Regarding parenting: "No child will be inspired to trust a parent who has only a 'too busy,' superficial concern for him. They flourish with our intimacy, especially with times all alone with one parent. When they are all grown, if they love our Lord, they do so because they love the love they saw in us. Arguments, proofs, and apologetics have their place, but not in nurturing deep trust. They will imitate what they find lovely. If our lives are not lovely, then our children will pursue someone or something else's loveliness."
