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Truesdale, Al. *Sin. The Wesleyan Theology Series*. Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2022. 192 pages. ISBN: 9780834139855.

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The Foundry Publishing has released several volumes in The Wesleyan Theology Series whose aim is ‘to discuss Christian doctrines in accessible language...’ (blurb). The series includes 12 books; the following are available: *The Trinity* by Samuel M. Powell; *Eschatology* by Eric M. Vail; *Holy Scriptures* by Stephen G. Green; *Christian Ethics* by Timothy R. Gaines; *Creation* by Eric M. Vail; *The Holy Spirit* by Frank Moore; *The Church* by Brent D. Peterson; *Holiness* by Diane Leclerc and, *The Sacraments* by Brent Peterson. Yet to be released are the following: *God the Father* by Frank Moore; *Jesus Christ* by T.A. Noble; and, *Atonement and Salvation* by Eric M. Vail.

Dr Al Truesdale, the author of the volume under review, is emeritus professor of philosophy of religion and Christian ethics at Nazarene Theological Seminary. He has authored or edited numerous books, including *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology* and *The Book of Saints*.

Chapter 1 raises the question, ‘Who Speaks for God? Jesus or the Pharisees?’ Truesdale pits Jesus against the Pharisees, the adherents of one of the sects of Judaism during Jesus’ time. While acknowledging the role of the Sadducees in history, Truesdale does not develop a dialectic with the Sadducees on one end of the spectrum, representing a secularizing force in New Testament society, and the Pharisees on the other end of the spectrum, representing preservers of the law. Instead, Truesdale chooses to depict a contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees. While recognizing some of the qualities of the Pharisees (10), Jesus is described as one in ‘whose presence sinners felt graciously and redemptively welcomed’ (22).

Chapter 2 is titled ‘Who Is God?’ In this chapter, Truesdale argues that sin is a religious concept that can only be rightly understood in ‘reference to God’ (27). The entire chapter develops the themes of God’s oneness, holiness, love and trinitarian nature. Occasionally, the author makes references to the doctrine of sin. While the reviewer accepts the fundamental idea of the correlation between the doctrines of God and sin, one wonders why the writer spills so much ink (29 pages) on the doctrine of God with little correlation drawn between it and the doctrine of sin.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss ‘Sin: The Sickness unto Death’ in two parts. The former discusses the idea that Jesus reveals sin. The author exposes two errors: 1) deriving one’s understanding of sin from the sin of Adam and Eve rather than beginning with Christ; 2) supposing ‘the goal of salvation is to restore us to Adam before the fall’ (57). The source of human knowledge of sin is revelation, broadly defined. Truesdale further describes sin as unbelief and idolatry and as living according to *sarx* (Greek), which he defines as ‘the entire creaturely existence, the inescapably fleshly character of human existence, not just our physical body’ (64). Sin is also controlling power resulting in sinful actions and a universal dominion enslaving all humanity (65). Chapter 4 discusses the Old and New Testament understanding of sin with the three following expressions of sin serving as the ‘map’ of sin: 1) rebellion against God; 2) enmity against other humans; and, 3) sin against oneself (72).

‘Without One Plea: Grace that Takes the Measure of Life’ is the title of chapter 5. Truesdale explores the theme of grace as the initiation and action of God. He notes two enemies of grace: antinomianism and legalism, and he explores the indicative and the imperative in the NT.

Chapter 6 focuses on the idea of perfection in the New Testament. The author explores the various Greek words that English versions translate as ‘perfect’ (or similar words). He summarizes his evaluation of the various Greek words as follows: ‘...the theme of wholeness according to purpose runs throughout’ (114). Even in Matthew 5:48, the author concludes that *teleios* (perfection) signifies completeness or wholeness in that context. However, his interpretation is a misinterpretation; unfortunately, he does not sufficiently explore the wider context of Matthew 5:48 and fails to understand the perfection which Christ commands as the impartial love that God exemplifies (cf. Matt. 5:43-47).

In Chapter 7, Truesdale focuses on Romans 7. He traces the history of interpretation of this passage in Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. He takes exception with their interpretation and holds with Ben Witherington III that Paul’s first-person pronouns do not refer to himself but are an example of prosopopoeia in which a writer employs a certain type of language to ‘persuade the audience to take (or not take) some action’ (125). Forgiveness is the solution for the sin described in Romans 7: ‘A new kind of power has been turned loose in to the world. The new power is “the chain-breaking, idol-smashing, sin-abandoning power called forgiveness, called utter gracious love, called *Jesus*”’ (131).

‘Sin as Socially Structured’ is the title of chapter 8. Truesdale holds that ‘An adequate examination of sin must include social structures’ (135). The author examines the order of creation and holds that the purpose of social structures is to accomplish human flourishing as God intended (137). However, social structures have been tainted by sin as the Jim Crow era illustrates (137f.). The author disparages the individualism characteristic of Western civilizations in favour of a biblical community spirit that the author explores in a section on personhood. In another section of the chapter, the author explores Paul’s theology of Christ who overcame the principalities and powers of the world.

Chapter 8 lays a foundation for what follows in chapter 9, ‘Christus Victor?’ In this chapter, the author explores an improved understanding of Christian holiness under four paradigms. The following four section titles reveal the paradigms: ‘George Weigel: Baptized into Holiness’, ‘N.T. Wright: “A Gospel-Driven Holiness”’, and ‘Fleming Rutledge: A New Adam and a New Humanity’, and ‘Michael J. Gorman: Holiness as Cruciform Theosis’. He argues that recent biblical scholarship has provided a very clear and compelling mandate ‘for understanding and declaring Christian holiness as the norm of Christian discipleship... today’ (171).

Chapter 10 is entitled ‘Divine Gift: Forgiveness that Leads to Eternal Life’. In this chapter, Truesdale explores three different passages of scripture in an exploration of the idea of forgiveness: the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16); the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35); and the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). The author underscores divine forgiveness as the remedy for sin.

As noted above, one of the goals of this series is to consider Christian doctrines in ‘accessible language’ (blurb); however, the purpose is further to state ‘clearly what we believe and why’ (blurb). However, there are some gaps in Truesdale’s presentation of the doctrine of sin. Curiously, he doesn’t include John Wesley in the conversation. None of John Wesley’s works are listed in the bibliography, and none are cited in the text of the book. Some of Charles Wesley’s hymns are cited (cf. 156, 157, 172). Truesdale cites very few Wesleyan scholars. One wonders how ‘Wesleyan’ this contribution to The Wesleyan Theology Series really is.

In chapter 9, Truesdale avers too late in the development of the book what seems to be a methodological approach to the topic of sin: ‘We live in an era of superb biblical scholarship that makes continuing many of our old theological disputes sound like defending “flat earth”. Whether one is Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Anglican, Wesleyan, or Pentecostal, the time has come to allow our theologies to be informed by current biblical scholarship’ (163). However, as pointed out previously, Truesdale consults very few of the Wesleyan scholars, including both the biblical Wesleyan and systematic and analytical Wesleyan scholars (such as Thomas H. McCall’s *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*).

Furthermore, Truesdale’s penchant for employing the theologies of other traditions leads him to address insufficiently certain Wesleyan concerns. For example, most (if not all) of Truesdale’s ink is spent on the *acts* of sin; he has very little to say about the *condition* of sin. In Wesley’s sermon ‘On Sin in Believers’, justification delivers one from the *guilt* of sin; regeneration delivers from the *power* of sin; and entire sanctification delivers from the *being* of sin. Truesdale doesn’t sufficiently address the *being* of sin. As a result, Truesdale accentuates forgiveness (cf. the title and emphasis of chapter 10) as *the* remedy of sin. Regeneration and entire sanctification are largely outside of Truesdale’s purview. The way in which the author casts the idea of perfection in Matthew 5:48 is furthermore inconsistent with sound biblical scholarship (in avoiding the immediate context) and the Wesleyan tradition. Wesleyan biblical scholar David R. Bauer, in *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction to Matthew*, offers a contextual and compelling understanding of the aforementioned passage.

The concerns expressed above are concerning. However, one must remember the focus of this series. This book proves to be accessible, but it is certainly not comprehensive and should not be read in this manner. Despite the reviewer’s concerns, the book contributes to the subject of the doctrine of sin.