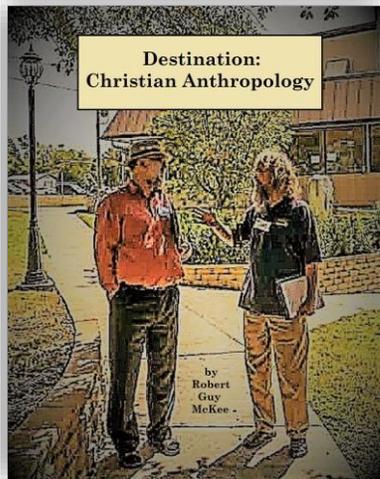


BOOK REVIEW

Destination: Christian Anthropology

By Robert Guy McKee

Reviewed by Daniel Baker



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In Robert Guy McKee's book, *Destination: Christian Anthropology*, the reader is invited to join an exciting development in the anthropological endeavor. As a Christian anthropologist, McKee attempts to lay out his thinking for a theory of knowledge based on the Genesis prologue myth. Such a theory of knowledge is founded on the semiotic acts of naming and eating as representations of an order of dominion presented through the myths found in the first eleven chapters of the Christian Bible.

Throughout the book, McKee recounts his journey of growth as a Christian anthropologist. Beginning by describing some of the initial frustrations that McKee encountered in the secular representation of human origin, he then utilizes a number of papers prepared for various anthropological conferences to help the reader understand the growth and development of a defensible Christian theory of knowledge founded on

Genesis which also allows for rational science and rational morality.

McKee's handling of the term "myth" is particularly important for understanding the author's intention. Although McKee does not see the early Genesis account's purpose to be primarily historical, he does claim that it has truth value nonetheless. The Genesis prologue as myth is understood in its anthropological terminology to mean a social charter. It makes no judgement on the historicity of events, rather the focus is on the ontological nature of the narrative for its intended audience.

McKee believes that a Christian anthropology will be founded in the Genesis prologue myth. From it, we find the basis for establishing a theory of Judeo-Christian epistemology and knowledge. It teaches us about the origins of all creation, that God the creator has ultimate dominion as the giver of life, and that humanity has received a limited-dominion as beings created in his image. God gave life and formed humanity, but he also released humanity to tend the garden and take dominion over the land. This limited dominion is the basis for understanding humanity's rightful capacity for creativity, both in culture and in all other aspects of human experience. However, the prologue myth also establishes the dependence of humanity on God the creator; it is only within him that we find the source of life. The fall of humankind, then, is seen as an ontological transgression; the disobedience of Adam and Eve was a coup attempt over the rightful order of dominion in the universe.

I have very few critiques of the book overall. One point that may come up for readers is the repetitive nature of how the book's material is presented. An explanation for the repetition is found in the historical development of the book as a collection of papers on varying topics that are driven by the same primary thesis. However, I personally feel that the repetitive nature of certain themes was helpful in understanding the development arch of McKee's thinking. Due to its brevity, the book can easily be read in a day, but in this

concise space McKee has summarized and communicated clearly the thoughts that have driven his anthropological work for decades.

One additional critique is related to the relevance of the Genesis prologue myth to the rest of the Christian scriptures. Although McKee does well in applying theological support for much of what is claimed in the book, there still seems to be, from my personal perspective, some poorly supported exegetical claims. A number of binary themes are identified in the Genesis prologue, and then are tied to other accounts throughout the Christian scriptures. Although these themes are certainly intriguing, it seems difficult to establish a real claim that they are intentionally repeated or that they can be pointed to as examples of biblical inspiration. Could these binaries from the Genesis myths not just be examples of certain elements that are sure to present themselves in time due to their prominence in the created order?

I think that McKee's book is a wonderful addition to the development of Christian anthropology. It provides a compelling argument for an epistemological, ontological, and teleological approach that challenges the accepted claims of the secular academy. Too often, knowledge, origin, and purpose are thought of in absolutes that can be explained by the ingenuity of humanity and the scientific process alone. This is a point that McKee challenges potently. The Genesis prologue myth provides the basis for the understanding of a rightful order of dominion in the universe. With God at the center of all, as the source of life and creation, we are called to align ourselves first and foremost to his ordering for our lives. With such a perspective, we can proceed with an anthropology that identifies humanity as inherently purposeful.

I found that McKee's understanding of the Genesis prologue myth and its implications for dominion tie well to many other theological texts. One example is Alexander Schmemmann's, *For the Life of the World*. Schmemmann makes a similar argument about the need for an ontological reorientation. As humans, we were created with a divinely designed appetite, we are *eating* beings. Our sustenance is God himself who graciously feeds us and pours life into the world through loving reciprocal relationship with himself. Understanding this order, this delineation of divine and human dominion, we respond in worship to God as *home adorians*. This is just one element of Schmemmann's argument, but I found it to be an incredibly relevant theme with many parallels to McKee's arguments here in *Destination: Christian Anthropology*. These are

themes that I believe need much more attention, and the increasing interconnectivity and cooperation of the fields of anthropology and theology promise to yield much in this regard.



Daniel Baker is a student in the MA in Theological and Cultural Anthropology program at Eastern University. He is currently living in the Sultanate of Oman, and is interested in interpretive anthropology and the role semiotics and narrative play in the development of human perception.

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