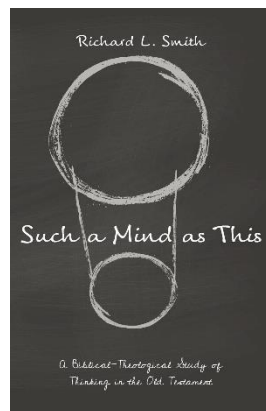


BOOK REVIEW

SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS

Richard Smith, *Such a Mind as This: A Biblical-Theological Study of Thinking in the Old Testament*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021, pp. xxvi + 418, £41.00/\$51.00 (ISBN: 978-1-6667-3216-0).

Christians have long been engaged in intellectual pursuits. This engagement has led Christians to be involved in developing various forms of educational systems. Historically, however, groups self-identifying as Christian have frequently drifted in one of two directions. On one hand, sometimes they prefer knowledge about the creation with too little concern for the Creator. On the other hand, sometimes Christians have isolated themselves from the world to pursue ‘spiritual enlightenment’. In modern terms, this division is best illustrated by Christians who identify as either intellectuals or anti-intellectuals.



The goal of *Such a Mind as This* is to demonstrate various ways in which the Old Testament deals with both sides of this bifurcation. As Richard Smith explains, the Christians who ‘suffer from a profound anti-intellectual inertia’ need to stop ‘thinking like consumers, shopping for knowledge, learning formats, and instructors that conform to their buying preferences’ (xx). Similarly, those involved in academia need to invest more in understanding biblical concepts, just as they have invested ‘many years of study and thousands of dollars in gaining an academic degree and a viable career’ (xxi). Smith seeks to explain how the Old Testament provides all Christians with a framework as to how they should ‘apply their mental capacity’ for God’s glory (xxiii).

According to Smith, there are four main ‘epistemological orientations’ by which one can examine the concept of thinking within the Old Testament. He labels these orientations as edenic, exilic, punitive, and redemptive.

The edenic orientation is the focus of section one (chapters 1 and 2). Within these chapters, Smith provides an interesting treatment of Genesis 1–2. He explains how God’s divine attributes are the source of our framework for thinking. He argues that God is ‘the supremely intelligent king, architect,

economist, and philosopher of creation' (16). Because of this, God made Adam and Eve the vice-regents of Eden so that they could model their 'cognitive abilities' according to God's pattern (21). While admitting that there is very little textual evidence for the initial 'state of consciousness' of the first couple (24–25), he provides a persuasive argument for several inferences that can be drawn from the text of Genesis.

The exilic orientation is the subject of section 2. Within these chapters, Smith covers a variety of texts ranging from Genesis 3–11 (chapter 3), Exodus 1–15 (chapter 4), and selected passages from Ecclesiastes (chapter 5), Proverbs (chapter 6), and the prophets and psalms (chapter 7). Although this section contains insightful information, it also includes a lot of repetition. For example, Smith explains that because of the fall, Adam and Eve sought to 'claim royal autonomy for and over themselves' (63), Cain saw worship as 'entirely self-directed' (65), Pharaoh was 'informed by his self-serving worldview' (83), and even Qohelet 'reasoned in a self-determinative and intellectually self-sufficient manner' (110). As such, readers may prefer to simply select the chapters from this section that cover the biblical texts they find most interesting and then move on to the next section.

Section three is primarily concerned with the redemptive orientation. For whatever reason, Smith deals very minimally with the punitive orientation. There are scattered references to this orientation throughout the book, mostly related to the negative elements of Isaiah 6:9–10, but chapter 7 contains Smith's most important analysis related to it (see 166–73). In some ways, this feels like a missed opportunity. As Smith explains, the punitive orientation is the logical extreme of living with an exilic epistemology (see 201). This reality implies that some unbelievers who exhibit an exilic worldview have been given over to punitive consequences. Given Smith's lack of attention to this orientation, one can assume that he believes punitive effects, which cause one to no longer be able to 'obey and thereby avoid judgment', are very rare.

The reader will find ample insightful statements in the book's last section, which begins with a summary of the book's contents, followed by a detailed reflection on the redemptive elements of Isaiah 6:9–10, Psalm 94, Noah, and Abraham (chapter 8). Then

two entire chapters (chapters 9 and 10) are dedicated to the book of Deuteronomy, because in this book ‘we discover the mental outlook God longs for in his people’ (220). The importance of Deuteronomy is connected to both the title of the book, which is drawn from Deuteronomy 5:29, and the primary ‘path’ by which one can move toward a redemptive epistemology (288). After that, Smith provides an analysis of Job (chapters 11 and 12), Jeremiah 29 (first half of chapter 13), Psalm 137 (second half of chapter 13), and the book of Daniel (chapter 14). He then concludes the book with a postscript explaining his concept of a ‘community garden’, which is defined as ‘a learning community...created to grow Christian minds (lay and academic) for the glory of God and the blessing of mankind’ (393).

Overall, I believe that readers will find *Such a Mind as This* to be enjoyable, engaging, creative, and perceptive. Although time will reveal if Smith’s book is one of the best in its field, it is undoubtedly a valuable contribution. True intellectual engagement is a topic that Christians everywhere should be discussing as we continue to navigate the various changes in both local and global cultures.

Ron W. Lindo, Jr., PhD
Professor of Theology
Jackson Theological Seminary
Little Rock, Arkansas (USA)