

tradition, that is, the Pentecostal. It is clear that this approach is different from, e.g., the Frank Macchia's attempt to restore the noun *Spirit baptism* as a powerful metaphor of the pneumatological substance of God's redemptive work through Christ. Further discussion of the differences and possibilities of both approaches are important but surpass the limits of a review. What Baumert theologically achieves, however, is that the charismatic gifts definitely have their right and home in the life of the Christian community and that this community should reach out to receive these charismatic gifts. I regard the contribution of this German scholar to be highly important for the further theological debate within the Reformed community on charismatic renewal.

—Cornelis van der Kooi

*The Death Penalty on Trial: Taking a Life for a Life Taken* by Ron Gleason. Ventura, Calif.: Nordskok Publishing, 2008. Pp. xiii + 134. \$14.95 paper.

Gleason makes a bold and compelling case that the death penalty is the biblically mandated punishment for murder. While it is true that capital punishment was used in biblical days for a host of crimes, including Sabbath breaking, blasphemy, witchcraft, and belligerent children, Scripture teaches, he argues, that the death penalty for murder is for all time. A major point of the book is that while all murder is killing, not all killing is murder as in the case of self-defense, just wars, or the death penalty (59, 100).

Genesis 9:5–6 is “a foundational text” (24) because the covenant made with Noah was unilateral, universal, and everlasting (25–26). This text also provides the reason premeditated murder is a capital crime. “Murder is a capital crime because man is made in the image of God. Being God’s image bearer gives man a particular value that can never be eradicated” (26). Man’s divine creation provides the moral basis for the sanctity of human life. “Murder is punished with death because to kill another human being is to destroy one who is a bearer of the divine image” (27). Thus, murder is a direct assault upon God himself. Although Gleason does not address differences among theologians as to what extent God’s image remains in sinful man, Genesis 9:5–6 “direct us to the inherent value that every human being has due to the fact that he is created in the image of God” (27).

Bind to this Romans 13 and you have “an abiding principle for the civil magistrate to execute the death penalty upon those who struck at God by the murder of one created in his image and to purge the evil from the midst of the land” (27–28). For Gleason, the death penalty is appropriate and necessary whether the criminal has murdered once or a dozen times. Even unintentional killing is taken with utmost seriousness in Scripture with regard to the image of God in man as indicated in the fact that one committing the act must seek confinement in a city of refuge until the death of the high priest (30).

Gleason discusses whether the death penalty should be abolished if there is an outside chance that innocent people might be executed. That mistakes will happen cuts both ways, he counters. There are also guilty people walking the streets who slipped through the system. The fact is, according to Gleason, God was aware that fallible people would be administering his law. “This was, however, God’s will and way for his people” (75, see also 96).

The author does not address the justice issue with respect to capital punishment along socioeconomic lines. Would it make a difference if poor, innocent people tended to get convicted and rich, guilty people could slip through the system? Is there not something other than inevitable human error going on if some are unable to get a proper defense, as a growing number of DNA cases indicate? Does not the same Bible that prescribes the death penalty for murder also trumpet a blistering abhorrence for a society where the poor are unable to access justice in the courts (cf. Ex. 23:6; Amos 5:12; cf. with Gleason’s appeal to Lev. 19:15 for justice on 38)? Is it possible that poor, innocent “dead men walking” is something more than an outside chance for mere collateral damage in a system administered by fallible people?

To his credit, Gleason does hold that “we must do all within our power to strive for justice and to live by faith” (98). For his contribution, he offers that there would be much less of a chance of error if we insisted on the Bible’s requirement that there be at least two eyewitnesses to the crime (75, see also 34, 39). That should raise some eyebrows on the bench.

Gleason also makes a good case for the injustice of a lengthy stay on death row after the verdict is handed down. As he notes, in California, the most frequent cause of death on death row is old age. Biblical punishment is to be swift, he contends (41–42).

Not a fan of our culture’s “lock ‘em up and throw away the key” attitude, the author opposes long-term incarceration as such (74, 86). He traces the roots for it in pagan Roman society, not anywhere in Scripture (74). We would add that the practice was especially propelled into modern society by Enlightenment rationalism as alluded to in Gleason’s unfavorable quote of Bedau who incredulously suggests, “long-term imprisonment is severe enough to cause any rational person not to commit violent crimes” (85). Staggering recidivism rates would prove otherwise as Gleason also maintains. In fact, he states that “a good case can be made that a life-time of uselessness constitutes cruel and unusual punishment” (73). Furthermore, “life-time sentences without the possibility of parole can subject the perpetrator to incredible and unspeakable brutality and ‘injustice’ in the way inmates run their own subculture” (73–74). The mounting evidence of the debilitating emotional, physical, and spiritual effects of long-term incarceration upon an individual and his or her family also supports Gleason’s observations and raises issues with regard to alternative sentencing.

Is the death penalty a deterrent to murder? Gleason admits that it cannot be decisively proven either way (34, 83). It is impossible to show beyond a reasonable doubt how many murders have been prevented by executing one murderer. However, he sees the evidence bending in the pro-death penalty direction because the execution of a murderer certainly deters *that murderer* from repeating a crime (83). Further, he finds convincing an assumption of economic theorist, Dr. Isaac Ehrlich of the University of Chicago, who once estimated that “every execution of a murderer may have saved as many as seven or eight lives” (83). In the end, Gleason concludes, “clearly, God believes that the death penalty, properly administered, is both a deterrent and a proper form of retributive justice for society because that’s what he teaches in his Word” (85).

Gleason harbors strong doubts that convicted murderers can be rehabilitated in our humanistic prison system (88). As a Reformed minister, we would assume his answer to be in the affirmative with respect to the possibility for rehabilitation of criminals as such under Christian discipleship. In his system, of course, the issue is somewhat moot for murderers who are to be eliminated with swiftness.

When it comes to the death penalty for murderers, Gleason claims to stand shoulder to shoulder with Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and the Westminster Standards. Therefore, one would be remiss not to ask whether Calvin and the Genevan elders erred in the execution of Servetus for heresy. Though in his brief history of capital punishment, Gleason does acknowledge unbiblical excesses at points in church history that were in need of reform (10), a subsequent interview revealed that he does not think there was a failure by the church here. His exegesis regarding which “crimes” deserve the death penalty today, however, would appear to indicate otherwise.

Nordskog Publishing is to be commended for publishing this book on this controversial topic. The publisher includes extensive endnotes, a bibliography, and scriptural index. In addition, a subject index would be helpful. Gleason writes that he wants his book to reach Christians and non-Christians alike (134). However, while conservatives will undoubtedly applaud its release, *The Death Penalty on Trial* could have attracted a larger audience, including non-Christians, had derogatory labels for those with alternative viewpoints been toned down. Although the pastor clearly has strong feelings for the issue, we believe his arguments can by and large stand on their own merit.

As elsewhere, the death penalty is a hot topic in Gleason’s denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, which has those who favor the abolition of the death penalty and those in the reconstructionist wing of the church who would *expand* its application. The Christian Reformed Church’s centrist position is that Scripture provides the modern state the right, but not the requirement, to make use of it in the punishment of premeditated

murder, and that the ultimate penalty ought to be exercised with utmost restraint. That is a far cry from Gleason's position, which argues not only that the state has the *right* to execute but also the biblical *mandate* to do so. I could be dead wrong, but since we must "do all in our power to strive for justice" (98), one might suggest that a temporary suspension of the death penalty is in order until biblical justice issues can be addressed. In the book's own addendum, in an article by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, it is concluded that, "of course, there should be *every possible safeguard* in the exercise of capital punishment in order to protect the falsely accused from being put to death" (112, italics added). Could not opposing views here find common ground?

*The Death Penalty on Trial* deserves a seat at the table of the ongoing discussion. Regardless of your position, you will think differently about the death penalty after reading this book. For a three-part radio interview with Gleason on this subject, go to [www.cbi.fm](http://www.cbi.fm) on the web.

—H. David Schuringa

*The Decades of Henry Bullinger* edited by Thomas Harding, 4 vols. in 2. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004. Pp. cxxvii + 432. \$79.99 hard.

Henry Bullinger (1504–1575), best known as Zwingli's successor in Zürich, was a significant and influential systematizer of the Reformation in his own right. The *Decades*, first published from 1549 to 1551, was and remains the most famous and representative work from his vast corpus. These fifty sermons, grouped into five "decades," proceed through the most important and controversial theological topics of his day. This particular edition, bound in two volumes, is a reprint of the nineteenth-century Parker Society edition, which itself is a reprint of the 1587 translation from Latin to English. The Parker Society edition contains a biographical sketch between the fourth and fifth decades, which also includes a bibliography of Bullinger's works and their sixteenth-century printings. This new set adds a biographical survey of Bullinger by George Ella, a useful summary of the *Decades* by Joel Beeke, and a bibliography of some modern works. In light of Bullinger's significance for the development of the Reformed tradition, anyone interested in Reformation theology should have access to Bullinger's *Decades*. Although the work is available online, for those of us who still prefer a book in hand, this edition is the most accessible now available.

—Keith Stanglin