



Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire

Brian J. Walsh , Sylvia C. Keesmaat

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Have we really heard the message of Colossians? Is this New Testament book just another religious text whose pretext is an ideological grab for dominating power? Reading Colossians in context, ancient and contemporary, can perhaps give us new ears to hear.

In this innovative and refreshing book Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat explain our own sociocultural context to then help us get into the world of the New Testament and get a sense of the power of the gospel as it addressed those who lived in Colossae two thousand years ago. Their reading presents us with a radical challenge from the apostle Paul for today.

Drawing together biblical scholarship with a passion for authentic lives that embody the gospel, this groundbreaking interpretation of Colossians provides us with tools to subvert the empire of our own context in a way that acknowledges the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire Details

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Author : Brian J. Walsh , Sylvia C. Keesmaat

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From Reader Review Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire for online ebook

Joy says

This is a book I read because I wanted to stretch. I knew going in that it was something I'd likely not be comfortable with, but I hoped to gain understanding of "others" -- those I don't agree with. The shock was how much I agree with, and what discovered about myself.

Now the discomfort comes from being challenged to live a life that is in alignment with stated values and beliefs --not easy. This brings it directly to the choices I make and how I live everyday.

It's tough "chewy" read that I took (and take) in small bites. It's another that I keep in rotation of the books I read and reread.

The writing style makes it more difficult, it's written for a particular audience (and I'm not it), and the transitioning between the co-authors isn't smooth either.

Those are minor quibbles next to the valuable content. It's on my "rocked my world" list. The only reason it doesn't rank 5 stars for me is that I believe that the treasure doesn't need to be buried so deeply.

Jessica says

maybe I'll read this all the way through someday... if my brain feels really strong.

J.D. says

If I had read this book several years ago, I believe my review of it would have been even more positive. This is largely because this idea of subverting the empire was a fresh idea that was really beginning to take off in my mind and those of which I was reading. I was not at the point of reading more scholarly approaches to the concept(as this clearly is although extremely readable), but was learning how subversive Jesus was in the face of Rome at the time and so likewise as we found out here Paul as well.

At this point, however, this seems to be a preaching to the choir of me and actually seemed to be too skewed in favor of reading Colossians in this manner that it became reduced in meaning and power I feel. We are greeted with a forewarning of sorts that this will function as an "anti-commentary" and to change our expectations of what this will be. After hearing Walsh and Keesmaat speak at a recent conference, however, I was really hoping it would be a more intense approach(as in a commentary) because I really appreciate their outlook for interpretation of the Bible. Ideologically, they may be considered more liberal in their perspective, however they still maintain a fairly conservative approach to the Bible which I highly appreciate(combined with their ideology).

While there are many gems in this that definitely make it still worth reading, I couldn't help but feel that I was bombarded with a little bit of agenda in naming and blaming the powers and living consciously

(socially, ecologically, etc.). This is clearly an important aspect of Colossians (and I'm sure they would argue a sorely missed understanding among scholars) however it was staggering to see such imbalance in position.

Bill Norton says

I loved this book. I was new and returning to faith and reading Colossians. A faculty member at Bethel University, where I was teaching, asked me if I had read this. I liked this book because, to me, the approach was more relevant to me living day to day and the style was a revolutionary way (to me) of looking at biblical text. I'm not a student of the Bible. I wish I were. I crave books outside the Bible that lead me to appreciate Scripture. For me, this book did that.

E. says

I would have liked this book a lot if I had read it in 2004 when it was new. It would have resonated with things I was thinking and feeling at the time and depending on when I read it, may have influenced my thinking. As it stands, it simply affirms things I've already come to accept over the last decade.

This interpretation of Colossians asserts that Paul is doing anti-imperial theology, subverting the images and claims of Caesar. In the early and mid-Aughts this was refreshingly new for many of us and helped us to grapple with the issues in contemporary American life post-9/11 and the beginning of the Iraq War. In many ways the idea was not new (Wink, Brueggemann, and others had long made these claims) but I think many of us were open to it in new ways due to America's imperial ambitions.

This is not your standard commentary, but rather an interesting exercise in hermeneutics. The authors are primarily concerned with addressing the concerns of postmodern students who reject the Bible for making claims they consider to be absolute. There are some interesting epistemological discussions.

Their overall writing style is filled with imagined dialogues and targums upon the text -- either imagining the thoughts of historical characters like Onesimus and Nympha, or contemporizing Paul's language to deal with the imperial claims of our global economy.

So, this will help with my upcoming sermon series on Colossians (the first time I've preached a series on the book) but I feel that liberal mainline congregations are a little tired of the anti-imperial, social justice messages of the New Testament so I'll be looking for other approaches as well.

Joel Wentz says

This is one of the most refreshing and creative "commentaries" I've ever read (though the authors would probably cringe at the use of the word "commentary" to describe the book, it nonetheless functions that way). The authors do not shy away from specific claims of the political ramifications of the Christian life, but they also do a fantastic job at anticipating the questions/concerns/rebuttals many American Evangelicals would level at those claims. But the single aspect of this book that I appreciated the most was the way in which the authors truly, truly *get* the postmodern culture and climate. I felt like they were speaking directly to me, and the students I work with, in the ways they talk about "truth" and social engagement. This is the single

most (in my mind) powerful element of this book, and I highly, highly recommend it to anyone who ministers to "postmoderns" or simply has a desire to learn more about what is in the minds of young people today.

Wesley says

Topics: Christ as Lord, Knowing truth through Revelation not rationality, Ecological Stewardship, Financial Stewardship (including where are you investing for retirement), generosity, working conditions for the products you buy(are you a slave master?) , Rome. the Roman context, Today's empires, politics, "the least of these".

A challenging, thought provoking book on what it means to follow Christ in an age where it seems the Church is not oppressed, not subjugated, and even perceives itself as the Majority.

I thought this was an interesting read in conjunction with Russell Moore's "Onward".

The authors of Colossians Remixed make the argument that our imagination has been taken captive by Empire. Pax Americana, western civilization, etc has so totally shaped us that we fail to see how to live out our lives as Christians. The book has many challenges and over a hundred pages of praxis on questions we can ask and even actions to take to help live out a subversive life in following Christ and not the Empire.

In this book the Church's role is portrayed as working together to create a Christian imagination whereby we can actually see how we ought to live under Christ's rule and not the Earthly Empires around us.

If it doesn't challenge your daily life, your politics, and your imagination then you simply aren't reading the book or have never read the sermon the mount.

Samuel says

A refreshing anti-commentary on Colossians. I took away some interesting thoughts and interpretations of Paul's epistle.

I found the argument, indeed the hermeneutic of the book became progressively weaker through the epistle. For those familiar with the epistle, this is perhaps unsurprising. The stronger sections of the commentary are those on chapters one and two, contrasting Paul's gospel and message to the Colossians with the meta-narrative of the Roman Empire. Walsh and Keesmaat's reading of the latter half of chapter three was basically wishful thinking.

Still, well worth reading to get background on Colossians.

Laura Robinson says

Started out as an interesting take on Colossians through an anti-imperial lens with some exegetical issues here and there. Quickly became snobbish, smug, and sentimental. Particularly irritated at the authors'

comments on public schools. It's pretty easy to say that we should resist a culture that tells us to "get an education and get ahead" when you're benefitted from public schools, have stable work, and live comfortably. I suspect there are a lot of families in poverty all over America dreaming of a better life for their kids that would laugh pretty bitterly at the authors' rather flippant attitudes towards education.

I'm sympathetic to what these authors are trying to do (create churches that are dedicated to fighting for the poor, the environment, worker's rights, etc). But this book is incredibly irritating and utterly blind to the own privileged position from which it is written.

Huw says

Good fun, if occasionally quite hard work! You'd want to be a little versed in post-modernity to get the best out of it. I like the conclusions they come to but I'm not completely convinced they can come to them from Colossians, still feels at times that we want to make the bible (or in this case Paul) agree with us rather than accept that maybe he got it wrong :-)

random quotes

... the danger of wanting a god, without being willing to allow this god to speak in a voice that is radically *other* to our voice, is that the god we end up with is like any other consumer product we take off the shelf (p34).

... a worldview is only as good as the praxis or way of life that it engenders (p113).

There can be no indubitable foundation of knowledge, no uninterpreted experience, no completely transparent reading of the world. (Miroslav Volf) (p122)

We can probably tell as much about the real spirituality and the real worldview of a people by looking at the cars they drive, the food they consume, the gadgets that fill their homes and the garbage they throw out as we can by listening to the songs they sing and the prayers they pray (199)

Robert Irish says

It has taken me about a decade to actually read this book. I started it many years ago, but got bogged down. Parts of it are somewhat academic--discussions of Foucault and postmodernism--but ultimately it is a profound reading of Scripture in a way that opens out much. It demands a reader be ready to take on all of our presumptions about what the Bible says, about what it means to be godly, and especially about how we relate to our own Empire. I think the book is even more powerful and meaningful today, in the era of Trump

and Kim Jong-Un, the era of Walmart and overdevelopment, than it was 14 years ago when it was written. I love the fact that it is highly creative--the authors* imagine such things as letters from the time of Paul, or conversations between characters mentioned in Paul's letter to Colossians, they write poems that reinterpret poems within the Colossians text, and they construct an internal conversationalist who challenges them on points throughout--in its attempt to get us to connect meaningfully with what the text might be trying to say to us today. They read the text through a Foucault lens, and then critique that lens, they see in it the critique of capitalism, and the critique of environmental destruction. In doing so, they find incredible value in Colossians to help us dig in and live lives of impact and meaning. It is well worth the read, regardless of where one is on the spectrum of belief.

[*Note: Goodreads has erased Sylvia Keesmaat as one of the two authors. What gives Goodreads?]

Chris says

this was at times a very good book and at times frustrating. Their method and conclusions were quite challenging and worth the read to the standard "safe" evangelical commentaries. I recommend for the discerning reader because I felt their interpretative decisions were too secular in nature. The issue is with who are the "powers, rulers, authorities" Paul refers to. Their point of the subversion in the book against Rome was very good and should be considered in way most American Christians would feel uncomfortable with politically.

Eric says

Colossians Remixed was the fad book among my friends a few years ago. I went into this book expecting it to be a quick and easy read, as most fad books are.

It was not.

But it was definitely worth taking the time to slowly read through it and digest its contents.

Colossians Remixed is the exploration of three narratives competing for attention in today's world. The first is Globalism, or "cybernetic global optimism," as the authors like to call it. It is belief in the story that the interconnectivity of the world and the technological progresses being made will reform humanity. Things are looking up. The second narrative in the ring is Postmodernism. It is the suspicion of any "metanarrative," or attempt to explain why things are the way they are. Human history has failed time and time again, and this perspective is tired of being lied to. All in all, things are looking down.

The third narrative explored, and promoted, in Colossians Remixed is Alternate Empire.

Just as the original recipients of Colossians lived in the midst of a powerful empire, the authors of Colossians Remixed argue that we live under a similar "empire" today. Empires have some common ties around them. They are systemic centralizations of power, controlling by use of force. They exert oppressive socioeconomic control over those without power. To those on the fringes or outside their borders they exert oppressive military control, calling it "peace" (The Pax Romana, the Pax Americana). Empires saturate their residents with "imperial" imagery, reminding them who is in control, who has the power, who is "god."

After fleshing out how Rome and America both share many of these elements of empire in their respective ages, the authors go on to show how Colossians served as a rallying call for early Christians living in empire to reject the empire's claims to power and authority. Instead of serving the empire with Caesar as Lord, they formed their own alternate empire with Jesus as Lord.

Features of this alternate empire included building strong community with each other, withdrawing from participation in the empire's violence and economic control, concern for ecology, promotion of freedom and liberation, and identifying with those who suffer.

Of course the authors make a strong case for those of us who follow Jesus today to follow the same principles. Develop community. Identify economically oppressive structures and withdraw from them. Refuse to participate in violence. Promote freedom and liberation, especially of those enslaved in various ways by the empire. And become comfortable with the idea that we may be called to suffer.

Review originally appeared on my blog:
<http://mrsundquist.blogspot.com/2011/...>

Christy Joy says

It took me a bit longer to read this as it's fairly dense, but I appreciated the time the authors take to unpack Colossians, its socio-historic context, and what it might have to say to people in today's post-modern context.

Some of the ideas the authors discuss were quite familiar, but there were a number of things that stuck out to me, including: the discussion of the trajectory of pain and suffering that runs through the bible that has the potential to function as a counterideological dimension of the biblical metanarrative, the book's critique of rationalism as a form of idolatry, the re-framing of the idea of truth as having to do with faithfulness-truth and relationship, the book's discussion of Foucauldian regimes of truth and the question of if Colossians is simply another such regime, and the final discussion of ecological care as a matter of homemaking and attentive inhabitation of the world.

Even as parts of the book are fairly academic, the authors include imagined scenes and dialogues that ground their commentary in the lived experience of the original audience of Colossians, as well as making space for recognizable post-modern reactions to this kind of text.

Brent says

This work explores the contemporary meaning of the ancient text of Colossians. This very intelligent and somewhat academic text uses "targums" (translations that significantly expand on the original text in order to reveal the original meaning to today's culture). The authors pick through content in Colossians and elsewhere that argues that from the beginning followers of Israel's God were meant to live out an anti-empire lifestyle. The empire in question today is a consumption-driven, environmentally destructive, oppressive, global market. The empire is designed to draw people in by stealing the imagination and dreams that Colossians says should be found only in God (idolatry in church language). It's a heavy and revolutionary message that goes from the theological analysis down to the day-to-day ways to live out an anti-empire life style. Good stuff.

