

**Jesus after Modernity: A 21st-Century Critique of Our Modern Concept of Truth and the Truth of the Gospel. By James P. Danaher. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011. Pp. 158. Price \$18.00 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-6089-9639-1.**

**Reviewed by: Jonathan Burroughs, *St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland.***

*Jesus after Modernity* is an accessible and thought-provoking book, which attempts to bridge the disciplines of philosophy and theology. James P. Danaher, Professor of Philosophy at Nyack College, critiques the modern notion of truth which originated in the 17th and 18th centuries, that is, truth as objective, certain, precise. Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in his work is a postmodern critique of present-day fundamentalist understandings of the Bible and Jesus. Danaher aims to rethink the notion of truth in order to show its compatibility with the truth of the Gospel.

This book progresses in a relatively coherent manner. After a short introduction (chapter one), the main body of Danaher's work may be grouped into three parts: chapters two, three, and four broadly discuss objectivity, chapters five, six, and seven generally focus on certitude, and chapters eight, nine, and ten largely explore reason. These are followed by two concluding chapters in which he reflects on the Gospel and Jesus' teachings (chapters 11 and 12). In his work Danaher discusses the inadequacy of objective interpretation of Scripture, which associates truth with objectivity. He calls for a phenomenal study of Scripture, as 'it provides us with a way to understand the Scripture, not as an objective revelation of God's nature, but as God's revelation of how human beings interpret their God experiences' (p. 3). He shows how both the characters in the biblical text (such as Moses, David, and Jesus) and

the reader interpreting the text bring particular perspectives (and experiences) to God's revelation. Thus, the truth of the Gospel is not objective but rather phenomenal, perspectival, and interpretive. Contrasting it with the modern quest for certainty, the author contends that we are to understand the truth of the Gospel as a journey. John 14:6, where Jesus says 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' is foundational here. Danaher contends that Jesus 'calls us to a journey' and 'truth is the end of that journey' (p. 4). Ultimately, in *Jesus after Modernity* the author is calling for 'follow me' Christians; in other words, for us to try to do as Jesus did (pp. 117–18). In contrast to the modern notion of truth (with its reliance on analytic reasoning), this phenomenal understanding of Scripture embraces synthetic reasoning, contradictions, and ambiguity: 'even if we can come to an understanding of truth that is phenomenal, and a journey into that which is often vague, ambiguous or even contradictory, the Gospel is still not something that is easily grasped' (p. 110). The truth of the Gospel is not objective, certain or precise, but elusive. However, it may become clearer and transformative as we journey with the Gospel.

Much of this short book is written in an engaging style, with no dense footnotes to deter the non-academic reader. Yet, it manages to draw upon various significant thinkers (including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger) in an accessible way. Danaher competently sets up his philosophical critique of the modern concept of truth; however, the concluding chapters are not as impressive and somewhat lack rigour. It is particularly notable that he does not engage with (or at least refer to) any biblical scholar in his reflections on the Gospel in the final two chapters. Moreover, I would question whether he needs to be so provocative as to conclude that 'the mind we have inherited as modernity's legacy,' which he claims exclusively uses analytic reasoning and not synthetic, has left us 'half-witted' (p. 134). Overall, *Jesus after Modernity*, despite some limitations, would be

Adapted from: *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80(3), pp. 279-80. DOI: 10.1177/0021140015587066m.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140015587066m>. (Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019).

interesting reading for those who seek to understand better the truth of the Gospel in the 21st century.