

Yevgeny Ustinovich

Overcoming the World: Glory and Shame in the Gospel of John

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In his book, *Overcoming the World: Glory and Shame in the Gospel of John*, author Yevgeny Ustinovich points to the Fourth Gospel as a means of encouragement for Christians “who struggle with their identity in cultures where Christianity is less than welcome” (p. 1). The author’s background as both a biblical scholar and a Ukrainian refugee lends him credibility in his endeavor to show how John’s Gospel speaks to current issues of identity, suffering, and exile. Ultimately, Ustinovich presents a compelling argument for how even these uncomfortable realities in the lives of Jesus’ disciples ultimately bring glory to God.

The book is divided into two parts: “Not of the World” and “In the World.” This division immediately gives the reader a glimpse into how the author interprets and incorporates various elements of paradox and irony in John’s Gospel into his writing. The first part addresses Christians’ new, God-given identity, which John describes as “not of the world.” In the second part, the author discusses how those who find their identity in Christ are to function as they are sent into the world. Throughout the book, Ustinovich constantly shows how each discussion aspect is connected to God’s glory.

One of the key concepts for Ustinovich is being “torn.” In Chapter 1, he shows how the Old Testament describes the “torn nation” of Israel. It’s in this state of tension that we can understand how Jews can both be praised and criticized in the Gospel of John. The prophets, in their calling to identify with God’s people while communicating God’s truth to them, are “torn” individuals who ultimately point to the “torn Savior” to come. The “world,” according to John, is God’s creation currently “torn” between light and darkness, God’s glory and its glory.

Ustinovich, in Chapter 2, argues that Jesus’ disciples are called out of the world to be sent back into it. This paradox is resolved by understanding Jesus’ exhortation to abide in him. Disciples of Jesus find their identity as adopted children of God in the context of a community of resurrection, forgiveness, and hope – the Church. Therefore, a “disciple’s proper response to the world’s hostility is neither self-isolation nor compromising with the world’s values, but, rather, courageous witness” (p. 34). Christians keep their God-given identity as they are sent into the torn world because they abide in a torn Lord.

In Chapter 3, the author mentions that the disciples of Jesus move in the direction of God’s glory. He uses the blind man (John 9) to demonstrate how bearing

witness to the truth is one of the chief ways to give glory to God. Jesus' crucifixion, uniquely portrayed in the Gospel of John, is not ultimately a tragedy but a way of glory. This is a perspective Jesus' disciples can, and ought to, use in their own time and context.

This is why Ustinovich spends Chapter 4 looking at how some have eyes to see God's glory, while others do not. "[John] shows that on the cross of Jesus, God's glory was revealed in a visible, tangible way and made public and universal. Yet this was not obvious, which is why those who did not seek God did not see this glory" (p. 63). Readers of the Fourth Gospel have the advantage of understanding Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection from a "post-resurrection perspective." Here, the author makes a strong connection to our current situation. If we can read John from this perspective, we can also interpret our torn experiences as a means to glorify God. For the author, applying this perspective does not stem primarily from faith in Scripture, but rather from wisdom and experience in living as a disciple of Jesus.

Chapter 5 takes the reader on a brief tour through the biblical locations of God's glory—from the Tabernacle and Temple in the Old Testament to Jesus and his community of disciples in the New Testament. As long as disciples live for God's glory, they will overcome the world. The problem from John's perspective is that the world seeks glory for itself. According to the author, this comes in two forms: arrogance and people-pleasing. In the most personal section of the book, Ustinovich finds the path to God's glory through mistreatment, destruction, and persecution rather than seeking one's glory.

This is a theme with variations in Chapter 6. If suffering brought glory to God through the crucifixion of Jesus, it was also true for his first disciples and today's Church. As Ustinovich asserts, "God's plan was fulfilled not just despite that rejection, but through it" (p. 106). Ultimately, Jesus' disciples in all times and places are sent to the "torn world." Because they identify with the "torn Savior," they are equipped to bring God glory amid conflict, suffering, and humiliation. Because of Jesus' victory, his disciples were also conquerors. The thesis of the book is summarized toward the end: "The path to God's greater glory is through suffering and humiliation... The disciples are torn people sent into the torn world, but they will overcome the world if they live for God's glory" (p. 94).

Ustinovich's combination of biblical literacy, authenticity, and real-life experience commends this book to any disciple of Jesus Christ. Suppose readers find themselves in a torn situation — whether war, persecution, or other forms of suffering — *Overcoming the World* offers encouragement and hope. Those who may not currently be experiencing conflict can receive insight into the world of much of the suffering that the Church has endured throughout history, helping us gain perspective and empathy.

Overcoming the World offers a helpful resource in multiple contexts. Its accessibility and relevance would make it ideal for a Bible study series in a local church or an up-to-date companion to *The Cost of Discipleship* in a seminary course, for example. Those seeking a biblically informed perspective on the war in Ukraine may find value in reading this work alone or in a group discussion setting. In the end, through faithful study of the Gospel of John and genuine fervor, Ustinovich has achieved his goal of offering encouragement to disciples from various backgrounds who identify with the torn Savior.

Jeremy Bohall

Kevin J. Vanhoozer

Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically

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“Hermeneutics” is a scholarly, and somewhat technical term for interpretation. While its precise use may vary among the scholars who employ it, a book that includes the term in its title would appear to most observers at first glance to be either a technical methodological manual, textbook, or perhaps an abstract philosophical discourse on interpreting texts. However, the primary aim of the author, leading evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer, is quite different. While he no doubt considers interpretive methods and reflects on the philosophical underpinnings of interpretation, his major aim is to help Bible readers—whether scholars, clergy, or lay Christians—to “read rightly,” that is, not merely for “intellectual assent but wholehearted consent to God’s communicative intentions” (p. 21). This is evident in the introduction where Vanhoozer lays out what the Bible is, what it is doing, and what it is for, before then presenting who readers are in relation to the Bible: “answerable persons,” what they are to do with the Bible: “bear faithful witness,” and what the purpose of reading scripture is, “communion with God and training in godliness.” These words reflect Vanhoozer’s understanding of the Bible as a divine speech act, and readers as those to whom that speech act is addressed, who are therefore responsible to “follow the way the words go” for their understanding, including self-understanding, and discipleship.

Part 1, chapters 1–3, of Vanhoozer’s three-part treatise deals with the historical divisions of biblical interpretation. As a systematic theologian who has also been one of the foremost proponents of the resurgence of theological interpretation, Vanhoozer recognizes the “ugly ditch” that emerged between scholarly exegesis and theology at the advent of the critical period. While he affirms important gains