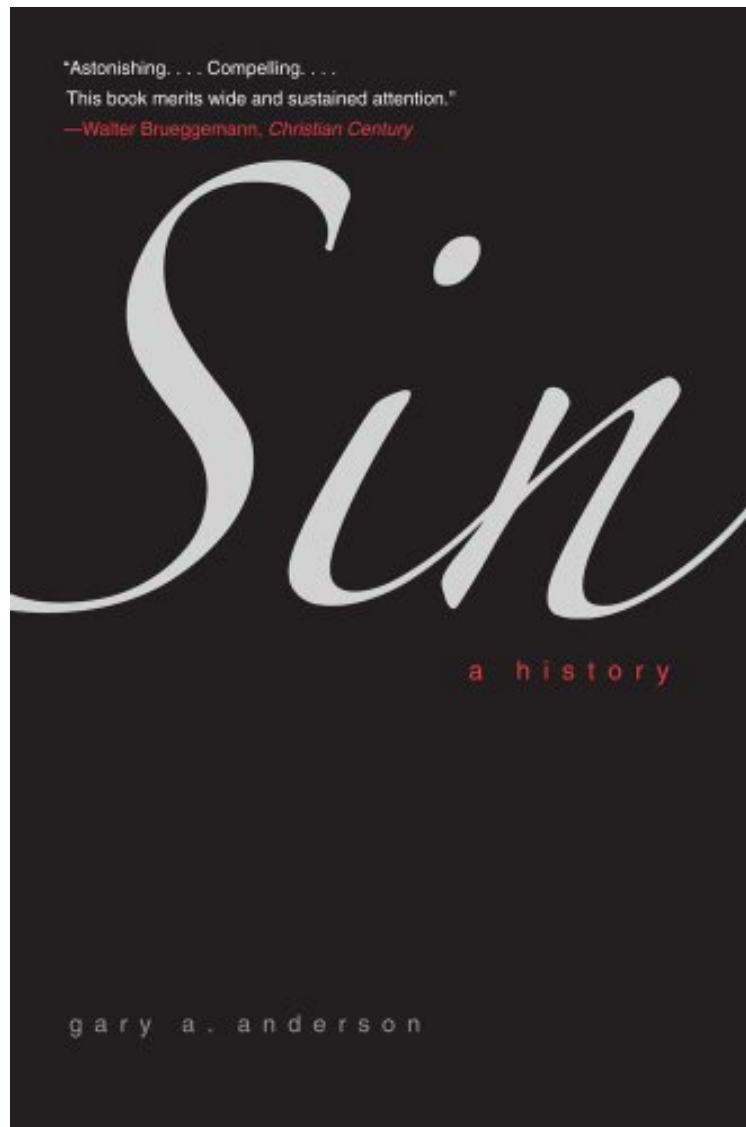


Sin: A History

Gary A. Anderson

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#950100 in Books 2010-08-31Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.25 x .69 x 6.12l, .68 #File Name:
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Gary A. Anderson : Sin: A History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sin: A History:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Unexpected, but Thought-ProvokingBy J. PizzutoGary Anderson's examination of sin was not the sort of book I was expecting when I chose it over and instead of Sin: The Early History of an Idea. The write-up on indicated his look at sin's progression from being seen as a weight to its interpretation as a debt. While this is technically true, the work is not as balanced as that description might lead you to believe. Anderson deals with the interpretation of sin as a weight or burden in very short order; after establishing that this was the most

common conception prior to the exile, he leaves it behind and spends the remainder of the book treating sin as debt. The initial chapters of the book come off as somewhat repetitive, as Anderson builds his arguments in short sections and then feels to the need to summarize them again only a few paragraphs later. As I continued to read, this problem became less apparent as he expanded the lexicon of ideas and managed to raise my level of interest. I cannot recall exactly when it clicked for me, but maybe a third of the way into the book I realized that Anderson is primarily concerned with linguistics. Theology is only secondary to him, and in fact he understands theology via language and its interpretation through translation. This is not a criticism per se, but it was unexpected. With this in mind, Anderson's arguments can be better appreciated. Some parts are more interesting than others. His examination of the interpolations into Leviticus and the importance of the Sabbatical years is of some interest but wears thin. His attempt to parse the meaning of some very similar phrases in Daniel ("when the transgressions have reached their full measure" and "to finish the transgression") seems forced. In these instances Anderson would benefit from taking a macro view of the subject book's theology (i.e., Daniel's focus on the degeneration of history), rather than focusing so exclusively on individual words and phrases. Rather, his look into Daniel and the writings of Qumran at first led me to suspect that he would turn to treating sin as a result of angelic contamination (i.e., the Enochic corpus), but he never explores these angles or their possible connections to the Christus Victor model. In view of what I know his book to have really been about, that subject matter would have been biting off more than either he or the reader could chew. Anderson connects the conception of sin as a debt between the Second Temple era and the early Christian period along an ingenious avenue. Noting the linguistic affinities between Hebrew and Aramaic (and detailing how the meaning of certain phrases would become incomprehensible if translated into Greek), he follows the development of the idea eastward into Syriac Christianity, which naturally retained the sin as debt conception. In this light, Anderson's exploration of how the Syriac fathers viewed Christ's descent into hell is my favorite part of the book. A close second is Anderson's investigation of the corollary of accruing sin as debt--giving alms as merit--in both the rabbinic and Syriac Christian traditions. It actually made me want to empty my own pockets! Anderson winds down with a look to the West at Anselm, a divisive figure who has had a profound impact on Catholicism's and Protestantism's view of Christ's atonement as a satisfaction of debts. In some ways the preceding chapters were an attempt to build up to Anselm, to make his assertions more palatable, and to give them biblical credibility. Regardless of whether you'd subscribe to Anselm's view of the atonement (and I don't), this work will still make you reconsider your past assumptions and leave you in awe of the remarkable impact of language in the history of Judaism and Christianity.

31 of 33 people found the following review helpful. Creative Idea, Brilliantly Executed By SK Who would have thought to write a history of sin? Starting from biblical sources, Anderson argues persuasively that the metaphors for sin change through time. This change had real implications for early Judaism and Christianity, including Syriac Christianity, an Aramaic form of the religion that offers unique insight into the metaphor of sin as debt. This development of the metaphors for sin are not isolated linguistic or textual issues, but rather have actual impact on church history, including Anselm's theory of atonement and Catholic/Protestant dialogue. As a result, these metaphors for sin have practical implications in the life of the church, and this careful study of the topic can have fruitful impact on both inter- and intra-religious dialogue. It is a rare scholar who blends cutting edge biblical scholarship with extensive knowledge of Jewish and church history. Anderson's book combines academic acumen, carefully executed methodology, and clear writing. The result is an innovative book on one of the oldest topics in the history of Judeo-Christian thought.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By David Dickieson Sinfully thought provoking!

What is sin? Is it simply wrongdoing? Why do its effects linger over time? In this sensitive, imaginative, and original work, Gary Anderson shows how changing conceptions of sin and forgiveness lay at the very heart of the biblical tradition. Spanning nearly two thousand years, the book brilliantly demonstrates how sin, once conceived of as a physical burden, becomes, over time, eclipsed by economic metaphors. Transformed from a weight that an individual carried, sin becomes a debt that must be repaid in order to be redeemed in God's eyes. Anderson shows how this ancient Jewish revolution in thought shaped the way the Christian church understood the death and resurrection of Jesus and eventually led to the development of various penitential disciplines, deeds of charity, and even papal indulgences. In so doing it reveals how these changing notions of sin provided a spur for the Protestant Reformation. Broad in scope while still exceptionally attentive to detail, this ambitious and profound book unveils one of the most seismic shifts that occurred in religious belief and practice, deepening our understanding of one of the most fundamental aspects of human experience.

"In addition to the valuable textual studies that make it a great resource for biblical students, *Sin: A History* appeals to a broader audience in the way it shows the relation of a particular understanding of sin to the meaning we give to associated concepts, such as atonement, penance, punishment, forgiveness, virtue and God." Richard M. Gula, America