Book Reviews

October 2019

Section Editors: Craig Nessan, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

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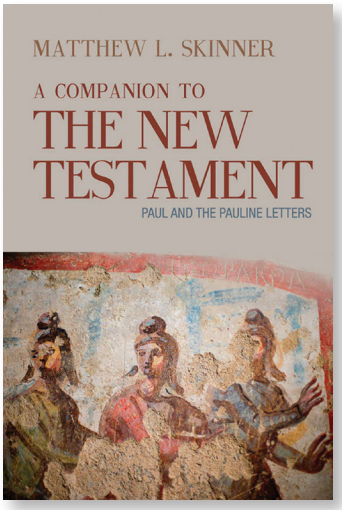


A Companion to the New Testament: Paul and the Pauline Letters. By Matthew L. Skinner. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4813-0783-3. x & 305 pages. Paperback. $39.95.

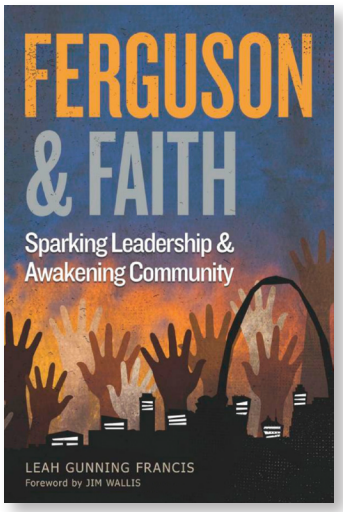
Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, Matthew L. Skinner here offers a companion volume for reading Paul's letters that demonstrates expertise in the classroom setting as well as a sensitivity for the needs of the parish. After an introduction and two chapters introducing Paul and his body of letters generally, the volume is divided into one chapter for each letter, except for a united treatment of the Pastoral Epistles (ch. 13) and a chapter on the possibility of disputed authorship (ch. 7). Skinner's treatments of each book introduce the major scholarly opinions or debates, address the letter in an outlined structure, and finally engage its key theological contributions or themes. He takes seriously the historical context of the letter, as well as discussing terminology and matters pertaining to the original language (without ever becoming too technical). In the Introduction he highlights five "interpretive foci," subjects that he has determined to treat with more depth than other potential interpretive issues: the Old Testament, the Roman Empire, women in the early church, apocalyptic theology, and ongoing theological relevance.

I adopted this text for an undergraduate course on Paul's Letters and found that it provided a solid foundation for class conversation for students from a broad range of backgrounds. It would also serve well an in-depth Bible Study in a congregation.

For a volume with such a broad scope, my critiques are admittedly minor, focusing on instances of interpretive disagreement. Nevertheless, it strikes me as an oversight never to use the terminology "Christ Hymn" in reference to Philippians 2:6-11. Skinner explains the passage well, but his avoidance of the short-hand title is perplexing. Skinner calls the passage an "early Christian hymn," "liturgical statement," "brief theological hymn," or simply "the hymn in Phil 2:6-11" (198–99; 205–06). Further, the book features a notable degree of caution by refraining from taking any disputed positions. Skinner shies away from most opinions that could be termed as "advocacy." For instance, the Philemon chapter remains all too conventional, in entertaining the notion that Onesimus was possibly a runaway slave. Given the lack of textual evidence for that claim, its potential for harm is far greater than its likelihood of being true. Skinner warns about the polarizing ways of reading Philemon, with good reason, with interpreters wanting to valorize or excoriate Paul in light of his approach to slavery.

Skinner handles the chapter on "Disputed Authorship" (ch. 7) very carefully, but with sufficient examples to make a clear case for acknowledging distinctive shifts in perspective, content, and writing between the seven undisputed epistles and the six disputed ones. For a textbook, there are some impressively constructed and theologically profound sentences throughout that will delight the reader. For teachers, ministers, church members, and students, *Companion to the New Testament: Paul and the Pauline Letters* provides ample opportunities to learn from the content and theological beauty of Skinner's reading of Paul's letters.

Kara Lyons-Pardue
Point Loma Nazarene University



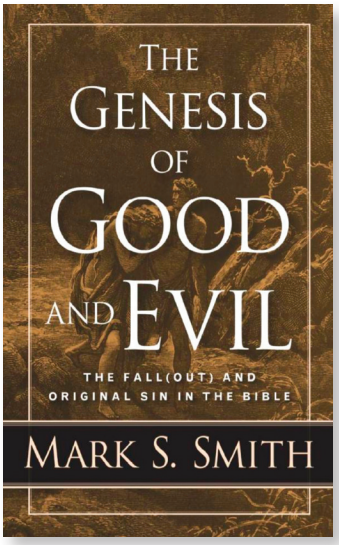
Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community. By Leah Gunning Francis. Foreword by Jim Wallis. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8272-1105-6. xiv & 178 pages. Paper. $19.99.

What can we learn from the tragic shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the organized community activism that responded in protest to insist that there must be an end to such deaths? Leah Gunning Francis provides a narrative that documents the efforts of those who affirmed that #blacklivesmatter and thereby helped to generate a movement that remains as needful now as ever before. The book includes the witness both of church members and church leaders who took to the streets. The ten chapters include extensive quotations from those who were actively involved in protest by "praying with their feet."

Gunning Francis, a dean and professor at Eden Seminary in St. Louis, draws attention to the need for church leadership that is deeply engaged in the community where church buildings are located. As one church activist claimed: "I'm telling you you're going to meet Jesus there. Jesus on the street and you're going to be transformed if you come to the street" (94). This is a form of contextual theology that understands its calling to connect ministry to the social conditions of those living in poverty and under racial oppression. Excessive use of force by police officers constitutes a pattern that unmasks the realities of structural racism. The author holds up a mirror from the case of Ferguson, so that we recognize how abuses in the exercise of power need to be held accountable by political activism, if not by the rule of law.

This book provides an insider look at the dynamics in Ferguson that serves as a call to discipleship. Spirituality and activism—mysticism and politics—belong together. Only so will the next generations discover an authentic church that takes seriously the way of the cross as it is borne by the crucified people of our own time.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary



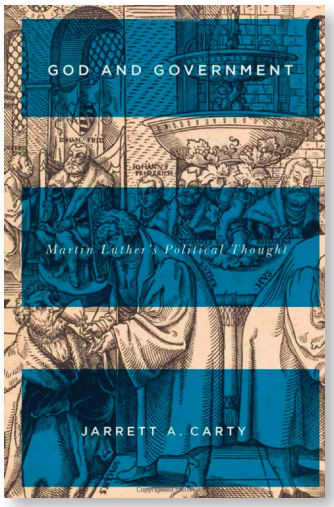
The Genesis of Good and Evil: The Fall (Out) and Original Sin in the Bible. By Mark S. Smith. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-6642-6395-9. 181 pages. Paper. $25.00.

Renowned Princeton Theological Seminary Professor Mark Smith comes to several strong conclusions: The Fall does not appear very often in the Bible. Historically many scholars see sin in Genesis 3, but the first actual reference to sin in the Old Testament occurs in Genesis 4, and the first reference to evil in Genesis 6. The vocabulary of sin, disobedience, and rebellion does not occur in Genesis 3. The story in Genesis 3 is not about the Fall, but about fallout: humans have not fallen but their conditions in life have—both humans now hold a problematic relationship with the nonhuman world (the woman with the snake and the man with the earth). The fallout brings birth pangs to the woman and hardship in agricultural labor for the man. The fallout in Genesis 4 is that sin is perceived as a potential feature of the human condition. In Genesis 6 the design of the human heart is evil from its youth. Catholic and Protestant theologies are wrong, according to Smith, in insisting that all humans are inherently sinful. Both the fall and original sin fall by the wayside.

Smith's argument is presented in ninety pages, while endnotes occupy sixty-two additional pages that clarify the argument and provide copious bibliography. The use of endnotes instead of footnotes means that readers have to be quite assertive in linking text to notes, but that criticism applies to the majority of publications today. Sometimes I feel that the absence of a word like sin or evil is overstressed in this argument because Smith also claims that the language of disobedience is lacking in Genesis 3 (59), but after all, God does say, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The word disobedience is not used there but the concept is clearly present. Smith provides plausible arguments that the author of Genesis 3, 4, and 6 worked in the late sixth century, but admits that proof is hard to come by.

Smith provides a very close reading of these chapters. But he nowhere raises the question that the idea of an original couple from whom all humankind descended is flatly contradicted by the current scientific description of how humankind developed.

Ralph W. Klein
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



God and Government: Martin Luther's Political Thought. By Jarrett A. Carty. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-7735-5151-0. xiv & 191 pages. Paperback. $34.95.

This book provides a reliable study and description of Martin Luther's political theology. Author Jarrett Carty previously edited a primary-source collection of Luther's political writings, *Divine Kingdom, Holy Order* (Concordia, 2012), which supports the well-rounded approach and diverse sources of this monograph. For instance, instead of dealing only with obviously political writings like *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* and *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed*, Carty also notes that Luther wrote works of biblical interpretation as explicitly political tracts, notably his commentaries on Psalm 82 and Song of Songs. Readers interested in the more biblical and exegetical side of Luther's political thinking will find some good resources here for further study.

The first chapter provides a basic introduction to Luther's life and theology. A second chapter similarly examines foundational concepts in Luther's political thought such as the two kingdoms

and the three estates. While neither of these chapters adds much new information to the field, they serve as good summaries of the material. One especially helpful observation comes in chapter two when Carty notes that Karl Barth coined the phrase "two kingdoms doctrine" in 1922; this helps show how Luther's political theology has often had a life of its own across the centuries and that historical assumptions can get in the way of what the reformer himself thought and taught.

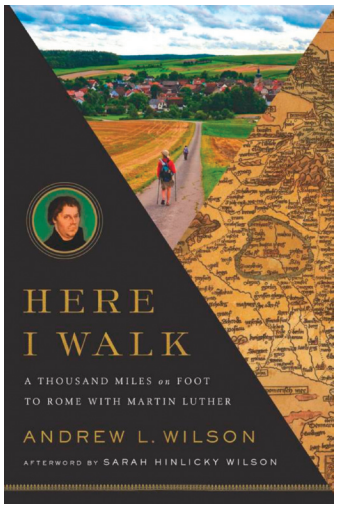
Chapter three introduces readers to the biblical roots beneath much of Luther's political theology. It begins with a discussion of law and gospel as a central concept for how Luther interpreted the Bible, then turns to Luther's uses of the "law" for Christian and secular life. Carty finds Luther writing positively about a "third use of the law," a concept which later became controversial among some Lutherans.

Chapter four, "Radicalism and Resistance," considers controversial political moments in Luther's life such as the Peasants War of 1524/25 and Protestant resistance within the Holy Roman Empire. Successfully attempting to show why Luther's response to the Peasants War was not "inconsistent or contradictory," more could still be said about why many people have criticized Luther's approach, both in his time and in the present. Chapter five adds some helpful study of how Luther's political and social thinking was put into practice during the Reformation. In addition to covering issues such as reforms of schools and poor relief, Carty also addresses the unavoidable topic of Luther's anti-Semitic writings and policy suggestions from the perspective of a political theology.

The final two chapters consider Luther's legacy for the political theology of other sixteenth-century movements such as German Reformed Protestants, the English Reformation, and the Catholic/Counter Reformation, before turning to a brief reflection on Luther's potential impact on modern political thinking.

Readers looking for radical new theses or insights about Luther's political views will be disappointed. However, this book makes a positive contribution through its grounded witness to primary sources, historical context, and the larger themes of Luther's theology.

Martin Lohrmann
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Here I Walk: A Thousand Miles on Foot to Rome with Martin Luther. By Andrew L. Wilson. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016. ISBN 978-1-5874-3305-4. 240 pages. Paperback. $17.99.

As a long-ago hitchhiker from one end of Europe to another, I find myself drawn to this account of the author's and his wife's (both pastors and theologians) strenuous effort to retrace the footsteps of the young monk, Martin Luther, on his trek to Rome in 1510. What a bright idea to jump on the Luther quincentenary by a pilgrimage along the trail he blazed. Truth be told, the exact footpaths he followed are not known for certain but can only be guessed at, outside of a few cities and towns along the way he is known to have visited. The author is scrupulously honest in admitting the tentative nature of the undertaking to follow Luther's steps and even confesses how an occasional lift eased the way through mountain passes, bad weather, or the sprawling exurbs of Italian cities.

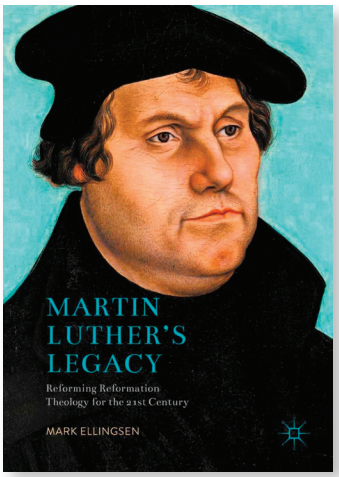
While the author's wife handled the social media/blogging responsibilities of conducting the hike for an immediate public in view, the author assumed the responsibility of recording details of the trek with a special eye to reflecting on the experience in light of its historical and theological implications. Here the reader is treated to the best of what a good guidebook has to offer about both scenic and historic sites encountered en route, interspersed with some wonderfully winning encounters with folks along the way—angels entertained unawares, as the Book of Hebrews describes the serendipitous encounter with local strangers who themselves become the bearers and embodiments of hospitality derived from the Greek word "*philoxenia.*"

Let one example represent the author's care in making astute theological observations (even on the scenery) as he discourses upon the nature of the contrasting appearance of the farmsteads and villages they encounter when moving from Roman Catholic- to Lutheran-populated agricultural areas. This occasion invites an extended reflection on the innovations introduced by the Luther's teaching on vocation in daily life in contrast to a Catholic understanding distinguished by the special status of saints, monastics, and clerics. A recurring theme is that of "pilgrimage" and how a genuinely Protestant sense of making a "holy journey" might become a possible spiritual/physical undertaking for good Lutherans!

Easing the task of watching this "slide show" of another's recent excursion, is the delight the author takes in describing the

sensory detail of what the couple encounters with much good humor evident in the great care taken in his word choice. I appreciate an author who reaches for a little-used and even arcane word to draw attention to what is being described. How about words like "katabatic" or "surfactant," "batholiths" or "crockets" for example? I wonder, however, about whether it is "foul pig silage" that is being sprayed on a farmer's field or, as this old farm boy supposes, just plain pig manure? I recommend this account of a long hike in the footsteps of brother Martin, although my experience was only of a hiker whose thumb failed to snag a hitch.

John Rollefson
Retired ELCA Pastor
San Luis Obispo, California



Martin Luther's Legacy: Reforming Reformation Theology for the 21st Century. By Mark Ellingsen. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISBN 978-1-1375-8757-2. xxviii & 348 pages. Hardcover. $119.99.

This is an odd addition to the spate of books marking the quincentenary of the legendary posting of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses in 1517. It is peculiar in aiming to present Luther's theology in all its diversity, including contradictions, as the Wittenberg Reformer's "pastoral–contextual" model of doing theology. The book is also peculiar in presenting Luther's unsystematic theologizing using an old-fashioned "loci" organization of his theology into traditional systematic topics such as Christology, The Holy Spirit, and Eschatology, among the sixteen chapter titles.

Most unusual, however, is the sheer volume of Luther quotes and references in the chapters, with only minimal introduction and commentary usually devoted to explaining the context Luther was addressing. This makes the book a valuable resource for discovering diverse comments by Luther upon various doctrinal teachings of the church, a kind of compendium of the reformer's views spread over his lifetime. For the reader, however, this can be a rather hard slog through quote after quote with little narrative connection. This is illustrated by considering Ellingsen's "Notes" found at the end of each chapter, which are unusually voluminous and include references to both German and American editions of Luther's collected writings, adding further citations not only in German but also in Latin. In the chapter on Justification, for example, the twenty-seven pages of English text is followed by 263 Notes, totaling twenty-three pages.

Underlying this massive scholarly apparatus is the author's simple point that Luther deserves appreciation as a pastoral theologian, whose varying doctrinal commitments can be best understood in relation to the contexts he was addressing. The author argues that Luther's "polar-dialectical" theologizing (grace/works, law/gospel, reason/faith) was prominent as the reformer engaged in polemics. By contrast, in his efforts to exhort Christian living or comfort those in despair such dialectical tensions tended to be "smoothed out" (335). Ellingsen finds Luther's contextualizing of theology a "rich resource for Pastoral Theology, for meeting different people's needs, an ecumenical approach to Christian faith since what is characteristic of most traditions of the Church is found in his thought" (337). He concludes that "Luther can help us get Systematic Theology out of the academy and into the pews and the streets" and "even on the net" which might just be sufficient to "turn things around for the Western church in the twenty-first century" (337). This is an intriguing idea for which I would have appreciated a stronger argument from the author.

John Rollefson
Retired ELCA Pastor
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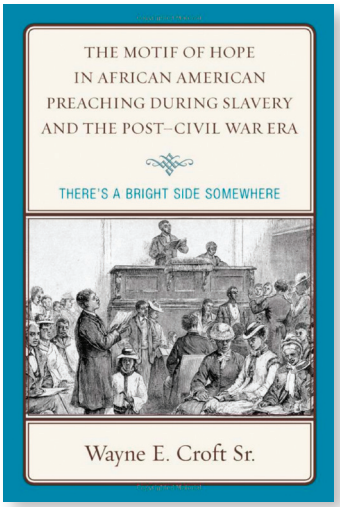


The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching During Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era. By Wayne E. Croft Sr. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017. ISBN-978-1-4985-3685-3647-9. xv & 141 pages. Cloth. $90.00.

When a black slave preached to his people, a youngster had to watch out for the "pater-rollers" who patrolled the place the slaves congregated. The preacher would be saying, "Lord, the load of slavery is so heavy, help us." As the pater-roller approached, the youth warned the endangered preacher who quickly changed his message to, "Help us be faithful to our masters." After the pater-roller passed, the preacher would pray, "Forgive us for what we just prayed, Lord; you know our suffering and how we pray for freedom."

In this excellent book, Wayne Croft extensively researched "Hope" in black scholarship, in slave preaching pre-emancipation (1800-1864), and in Post-Civil War to *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1865-1896). The hermeneutic for black preaching is rooted in the sovereignty of God and celebration, and a biblical view of God acting on behalf of dispossessed and marginalized people. Blacks find in the Bible a God who hears the cry of people and

calls for liberation of the captives, a way out of no way, offering hope in hopeless situations.

Although there is a lack of extant slave preaching manuscripts, Croft has us "steal away" to secret prayer meetings in the woods where slaves risked their lives to hear about oppressed Israel in Egypt. We hear the musical cadence, not only in singing but also in preaching in the praise houses, which eventually gave rise to independent black churches (American Baptist and AME). The black church is the only institution that has grown out of slavery.

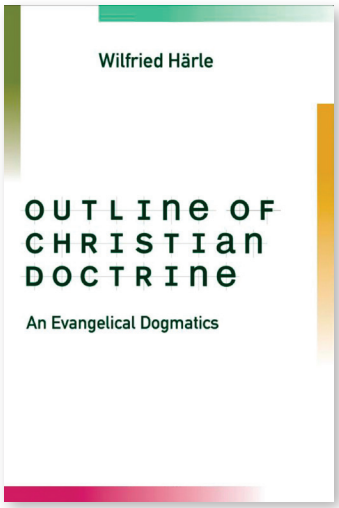
Slave preachers knew the difference between the Bible preached by slave masters and the message of hope and freedom in texts on Moses and Jesus, the suffering Savior, who led the oppressed from bondage. The motif of "Hope" empowered slave rebellions beginning in 1800, inspired by Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful revolution in Haiti. Revolts often ended in deaths, but protests and escape continued.

Croft uncovered hidden voices of black men. I yearned to hear the even-more-hidden voices of black women. What were they saying? What was their role on the road toward freedom.?

James Cone, father of black theology, says that after emancipation black preaching shifted to emphases on moral concerns. Croft, however, finds not only preaching about the afterlife but also expressions of hope for this life. He examines two preachers, Daniel Alexander Payne and John Jasper. Payne was educated at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg pre-Civil War. Ordained Lutheran, he jointed AME and became the first African American college president in the U.S. (Wilberforce). Not unlike Croft, professor at the Urban Theological Institute in Philadelphia (United Lutheran Seminary), Payne provided excellent education for African American preachers.

Croft presses for, "Hope." Today, amid re-segregation, racial injustice, and income inequality, we hunger for hope in seemingly hopeless times. We need the courage to claim the freedom we have to gather and publicly proclaim God's message of Christ's freedom from oppression. This book should be in many libraries to be accessible for those preparing to become not only black but also white preachers.

Norma Cook Everist, Professor Emerita
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Outline of Christian Doctrine: An Evangelical Dogmatics. By Wilfried Härle. Translated by Ruth Yule and Nicholas Sagovsky. Edited by Nicholas Sagovsky. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-4842-0. xl & 603. Paper. $50.00.

This first English translation of Härle's *Dogmatik*, which is in its fourth edition in German, fruitfully displays the work of a mature theologian. Yet, it is more than a translation of *Dogmatik*; it is an abbreviation and adaptation of the original text with the direct aim of contributing to the English-speaking theological landscape, including a "substantially extended…select bibliography" containing English works consonant with this aim (xxxvii). Thus, for readers familiar with the German *Dogmatik*, which is about one hundred pages longer than this adaptation, this volume should be seen as parallel rather than identical with the original.

Härle's starting point, as the editor notes, is from "within the German *Evangelisch* (that is, Lutheran) tradition" (xxvi). The author intends that this work be useful for those in service to the church; in fact, such usefulness is "a decisive test of the value of a theological work" (xxxvii). Though introductory in character, this volume has much to offer even the most theologically fluent reader.

A few features are worthy of mention. First, Härle distinguishes the structure of his work from others of its kind. He employs a Trinitarian structure to discuss theology proper, a salvation historical structure to better grasp the world vis-à-vis the Christian faith, dividing the book into two main sections, with the first finding its explication in the second. Second, he offers a cogent and fascinating account of God's essence as love. Third, the overall pedagogical method employed by the author can best be described as a spiral rather than linear movement. That is to say, upon entering into a topic of discussion, he approaches the question at hand from one angle and then another, illuminating it from these different perspectives.

We recommend this book to theological educators, theological students, and, if one has the patience, other church leaders. Though translated into clear English, the depth and spiraling pedagogical approach will stretch those less acquainted with technical theological works. A persistent reading will be met with fruitful thought and overall usefulness.

Thomas Haviland-Pabst, Deacon
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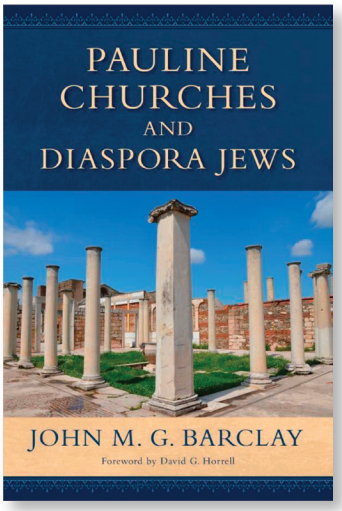


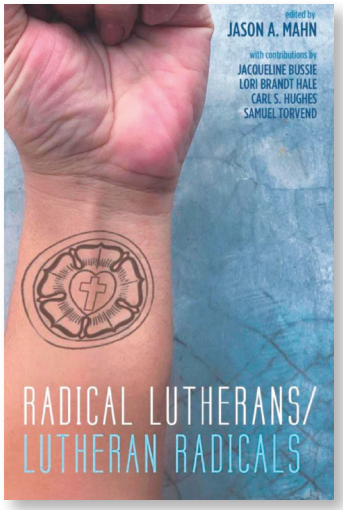
Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews. By John M. G. Barclay. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7374-3, xv & 454 pages. Paper. $48.00.

Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews is a fantastic collection of essays by John M. G. Barclay. The book was originally published in 2011 by Mohr Siebeck and reprinted by William B. Eerdmans in 2016. In republishing the book, Eerdmans has made Barclay's gifted scholarship available to more readers—and for this we should be grateful. The essays by Barclay were written between 1992 and 2011. All but three of them are available in other publications, but several are not easily accessible. The three new essays are an overview of the book, a significant revision of an earlier paper, and an essay that turns an originally oral presentation into a more developed written argument.

Overall, the essays deal with the formation of community identity in early Christianity. The primary point of comparison is Jewish communities in the Diaspora. This is not surprising given that the articles were written when Barclay was writing his excellent monograph, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (published in 1996 by T&T Clark), and his commentary on Josephus' *Contra Apionem* (published in 2006 by Brill). After an introductory chapter describing the scope of the essays, the book is divided into three sections: Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews (chapters 2–8), The Invention of Christian Identity in the Pauline Tradition (chapters 9–13), and Josephus, Paul, and Rome (chapters 14–19). Unlike most edited volumes, this book has incredible consistency. The essays can be read in order or by section. Each individual essay can be read on its own.

The book is really for specialists. There are Greek and Latin words and phrases left untranslated throughout. Some of the articles require some general awareness of contemporary scholarly debate. That said, the book is just plain fun to read. Barclay has command of so much literature and writes in a clear and lucid style. I was inspired to read and think more deeply about Paul, early Christian communities, and the world out of which they emerged. I was introduced to people and topics I had not considered before (here especially, chapter 11, an ancient epitaph in memory of Julia Florentina, and chapter 18, on the Imperial Cult in Tarraco, were a delight to discover). While the book may not be ideal reading for all pastors and lay leaders, those who venture into its contents will not be disappointed.

David Creech
Concordia College



Radical Lutherans/ Lutheran Radicals. By Jason A. Mahn, Editor. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4982-3491-7. xii & 156 pages. Paper. $22.00.

How was it that a theologian outlawed by the Holy Roman Emperor and excommunicated by the Pope came to be understood conventionally as a theological and political conservative? This question has haunted me over many years. For that reason, it is a gift to have this original and challenging book depict the thought and witness of four Lutheran theologians, including Luther, as "radical Lutherans." The five authors contributing to this volume—Jacqueline Bussie, Lori Brandt Hale, Carl S. Hughes, Samuel Torvend, and Jason Mahn—depict the radical consequences of the Christian faith drawn by Luther, Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Soelle, respectively. The concluding chapter by Mahn poses questions about the radical implications for the life of the reader.

The book is designed both for personal and group study. The introduction and chapters each conclude with a brief list of resources for further reference and discussion questions. One real strength of the book is that each theologian is interpreted not only in terms of authorship but also their biography. Each of the figures not only made substantive contributions to theological literature but embodied faith in response to the ethical challenges of their times. The reader thus gains insights both into theological reflection and into the courageous engagement of theologians as disciples within specific historical locations. Luther's responses to authoritarianism, Kierkegaard's attack on complacent Christendom, Bonhoeffer's resistance to Nazi dictatorship, and Soelle's prophetic critique against capitalism demonstrate the costs of discipleship in each given era.

Mahn's concluding chapter explores and queries the vocation of the reader: "What about *your* sense of vocation, of being called? Does that calling often or always affirm projects and professions that you find fulfilling and rewarding, for which you are rewarded? Or do you sometimes also feel called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (see Micah 6:8)—even when those undertakings are inconvenient, unrewarded, monotonous, or even precarious?" (133). While the authors, as university teachers, certainly intend to shape the vocations of their students, these are questions every reader does well to pose about one's own life. We desperately need models of courageous, radical Christian existence as we seek to respond to the challenges of violence, economic injustice, eco-destruction, and the violation of human rights today. This book provides theological

rationale from embodied witnesses to discern our path.

God's desire to bring forth shalom invites our active participation in the work of mending creation (*tikkun olam*). This book deserves wide circulation both in higher education and in the church as we rediscover faith as "a living, daring confidence in God's grace so certain that you could stake your life on it one thousand times" (Luther). The editor and authors have produced a book to inspire young people and all of us to take up the mantle as Lutheran radicals.

Craig L. Nessan
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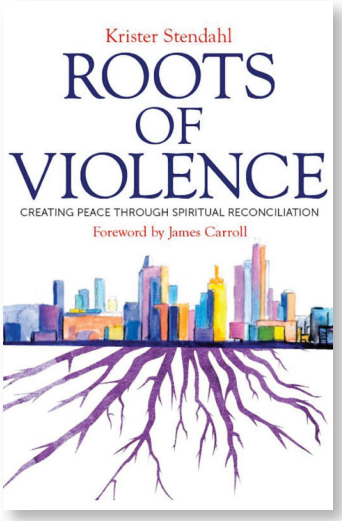

Roots of Violence: Creating Peace through Spiritual Reconciliation. By Krister Stendahl. Edited by Rebecca Pugh with Foreword by James Carroll. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-6126-1815-9. 101 pages. Paper. $16.99.

These lectures by renowned bishop and professor, Krister Stendahl, address one of the most urgent questions facing people of faith: the religious origins of violence in sacred texts and the implications for our engagement today. Rebecca Pugh has edited and prepared the text of her late teacher for publication, together with chapters reflecting on its significance from a Jewish and Muslim perspective. The heart of the book consists of four chapters exploring three contrasting metaphors for salvation—victory, nirvana, and shalom—with a concluding chapter affirming the ethical responsibility to employ language that serves peace rather than violence.

The standard metaphor understanding salvation as victory is fundamentally flawed by the assumption that there are enemies who must be conquered. Stendahl provides insightful examples from the Bible that demonstrate the limitations of this approach, which inexorably arises from a polarization between good and evil that legitimates violence. By contrast, Stendahl explores the value of the mystical tradition for grounding salvation in the mystery of God in a way that transcends violence. Most importantly, the author appeals to the biblical metaphor of shalom, which sets forth the goal of "mending the creation." The kingdom of God, central to the teachings of Jesus, and the Pauline focus on love as the greatest gift resonate with the central metaphor of salvation as shalom.

The book is written in an accessible, conversational style that makes it usable for group study. The chapters written as responses to Stendahl invite interreligious dialogue on the meaning of shalom and salaam in the other Abrahamic faith traditions. This book is a tribute to a great scholar who at the end of his life chose to contribute his energies to promoting reconciliation and shalom: "Now, in a world with an incredible escalation of violence and technology in the aid of violence, from gas ovens to biological warfare, perhaps we should be extra careful to find a language that is not violent" (56). We too need to commit ourselves to this challenge.

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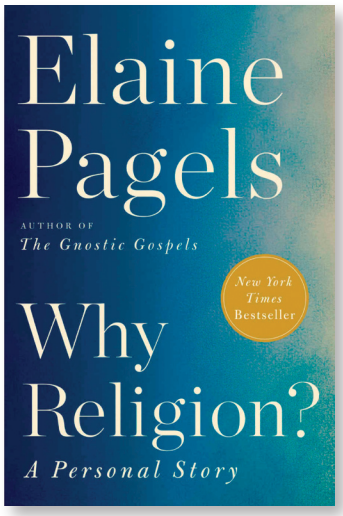

Why Religion? A Personal Story. By Elaine Pagels. New York: HarperCollins, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-0623-6853-9. xv & 235 pages. Cloth. $27.99.

A book with this title could infer many meanings. A defense of religion against its cultured despisers? An appeal to an expansive view of religion by a scholar of ancient Gnostic texts? The story of a successful academic career? One must brace oneself for the contents of this "personal story." Above all, this book is the memoir of loss and grief: the agonizing death of a young child to incurable illness followed by the sudden accidental death of a beloved husband. The well-known author of several major books exploring the meaning of ancient biblical and extra-canonical literature here takes a risk. Elaine Pagels narrates the story of these terrible deaths and her struggle for meaning in the aftermath.

Pagels finds exactly the right voice in telling this story. The reader is neither spared the agony nor invited into places that should remain private. Years of reflection yield a story that is measured to allow the reader to walk alongside and receive what might be useful for facing the crucibles of one's own life. Given the stature of the author, this book should assist many others to persevere authentically through unimaginable sorrow.

In the central narrative the reader catches illuminating glimpses of marriage between two academics—Heinz Pagels was a significant contributor to the field of physics—and their life as a family, a love story. Along the way, the reader also can locate this story in relation to larger and lesser cultural events of the era. The book is punctuated throughout by the author's search for meaning in relation to her scholarship, for example, on the Gnostic gospels, the origin of Satan, the misuse of Eve, and the book of Revelation. For her there is power in the ancient symbols

that needs to be gathered, strained through a sieve, and reinterpreted for life-giving purposes.

There is finally no tidying of the grief. Yes, there are new reasons to live and continue to love, including the lives of her other children, a supportive circle of friends, and a fascinating career. While leaning on the living, we take hope as we juxtapose our search for meaning with the wisdom of the ages: "What these sources do show is that many people in antiquity spent enormous time and energy searching for ways to 'heal the heart,' as countless people are doing today..." (207). We can be grateful for the integrity and honesty on the part of this well-known scholar of religion to invite readers to examine their quest for meaning in relation to her story and insights.

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Worshiping Politics: Problems and Practices for a Public Faith. By Luke J. Goble. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017. ISBN-978-1-4982-2588-5. xvii & 220 pages. Paper. $29.00.

Christians are called to care and caring takes us into the world, making us political. That is why the topic of this book is so important. Being political includes our public lives everywhere. Luke Goble in a book quizzically titled, *Worshiping Politics*, begins with two provocative chapters: "The Problem of Religion" and "The Problem of Politics."

Acknowledging that he is not a biblical scholar, Goble nevertheless, references many biblical stories and images in each chapter, presenting Bible history and gospel in a variety of ways. At times we see a fallen creation and redemption through Christ; at times the cross is a "sign" of forgiveness.

Goble provides extensive references to everyone from Aristotle to James Davison Hunter, William Stringfellow, Pope Francis, Chaim Potok, John Howard Yoder, Augustine, Chrysostom, and Karl Barth. He also refers to dialog from *The West Wing* TV series.

Two chapters are devoted to paradigms of Christian political relationships from the early church to liberation theology. Readers need to personally evaluate the representations. This reviewer found his presentation of the "Lutheran model" lacking, particularly in terms of law/gospel, the freedom of the Christian to serve in the world, and vocation. Goble's representation of liberation theology was limited. While he mentions Gustavo Gutierrez, more perspectives from liberation theology would enrich this book on the significance of what it means to be freed to care (including politically) in this contemporary world.

The book continues with five chapters on the problems of: Justice, Virtue, Practice, Formation, and Differentiation. An earlier chapter on "The Problem of Self-Deception" provided helpful insights into how we are deceived about our own capacity to be fair and honest, not being very good judges of what is good for others. He comes back to that in his chapter on "The Problem of Justice" in raising questions about "What is justice?" and "Whose Justice?" The author is excellent in drawing us into the complexity of the issues involved in living out our public faith. On "Justice," he turns to Justinian, Plato, and Scripture, but also again to *The West Wing*. I appreciated most his conclusion that practicing justice requires being formed and transformed in relationships with Christ and his body, the church.

The call to political engagement is more urgent than the author indicates. He writes that school shootings began with Sandy Hook (Columbine came earlier). He says the probability of shootings is low and does not mention the high rate of gun violence in this country. He says it is hard to imagine mass human rights abuses in the U.S. (184). I do not worry as much as he about co-optation, but rather wish to walk further with the author and all Christians to go out into the world for the "common good."

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