



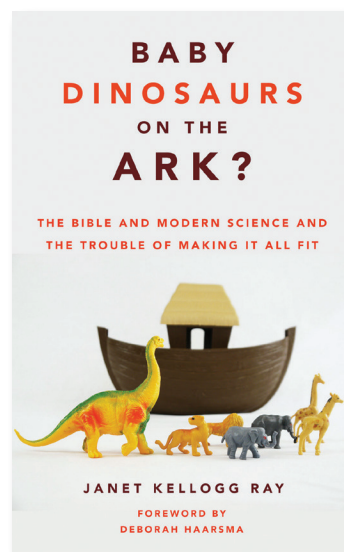
Book Reviews

January 2023

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

Currents in Theology and Mission is seeking to expand its number of regular book reviewers. If you have interest, please send name, contact information, and areas of primary interest to currents@lstc.edu.



Baby Dinosaurs on the Ark? The Bible and Modern Science and the Trouble of Making It All Fit. By Janet Kellogg Ray. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7944-8. vii & 213 pages. Paper. \$13.23.

Janet Kellogg Ray's *Baby Dinosaurs on the Ark?* attempts to bridge the supposed gap between faith

and science with hopes of revealing the false inescapable choice between either rejecting God or rejecting science. Throughout 12 chapters, Ray navigates the plethora of arguments, questions, and misconceptions within the evolution debate. These include questions such as "isn't evolution just a theory?" Or "if evolution is real, why are there still monkeys today?" She covers misconceptions like "evolution is a theory about the origin of life," "evolution requires atheism," "evolution is not observable or testable," "many scientists reject evolution," and "we have never found the missing link" (118).

Outlining the beliefs of various groups such as young earth creationists, old earth creationists, those who believe and hold to intelligent design, and theistic evolutionists, Ray strives to chart a course between the divisive voices of creationist Ken Ham and atheist scientist Richard Dawkins.

Many of the supposed problems between faith and science come from how one reads the Bible. Should one read it literally? Historically? Metaphorically? Theologically? Biblical literalism is a principal reason so many feel the need to hold to creationism. A primary argument of this book is that in light of scientific discovery, the "Scriptures still speak truth, but the truth they speak is not literal science truth" (173).

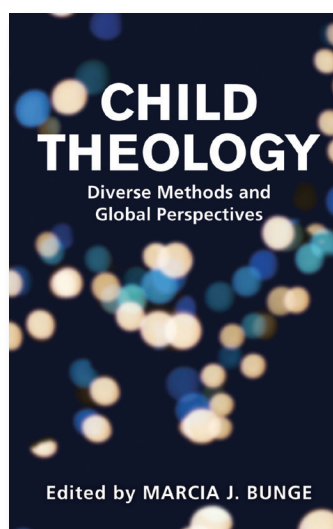
Ray explains various types of scientific evidence throughout

the book. Utilizing and presenting fields of study such as physics, chemistry, biology, geology, mathematics, archeology, and paleontology, she puts up scientific evidence against the arguments made by creationists. Additionally, she shows how everything falls apart when one is forced to accept science when it comes to gravity or medicine but not when it comes to the origin of the universe.

There are questions science answers and questions science does not. This book gives information and examples of science answering the questions it can. For example, science cannot answer whether Adam and Eve were real people. However, science does reveal that if they were real, they cannot be the genetic ancestors of all humanity.

Baby Dinosaurs on the Ark? would be an excellent resource for pastors to help them better understand the scientific landscape concerning the discussion between evolution and faith. Additionally, it could be useful as a book study with lay people in the church. By plainly laying out the science and faith conversation, Ray's book is easily accessible for those not trained scientifically or theologically. This book is for all, but especially for those who have been told throughout their life that the distinction is cut and dry: either you are a Christian who denounces evolution, or you are an atheist who holds evolution to be true. Janet Kellogg Ray argues that this is certainly not the case. Just as Christians found a way to continue being Christian while accepting the scientific evidence for a sun-centered solar system, Christians can continue to be Christian while accepting the scientific evidence for evolution.

Jackson Reynolds
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Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives.

Edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2021. 978-1-6269-8431-8. xxv & 245 pages. Paper. \$36.00.

Recent revelations of child sexual abuse within the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, follow closely the revelations of decades of child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. In addressing these crises, the media often focuses on the crimes committed by clergy and the cover up by church leaders.



In response to these scandals, some churches have enacted marginal policy reforms primarily designed to prevent sexual abuse within the church. This narrow focus on preventing sexual abuse within the church is likely rooted in a desire to stop abusing the children most likely to one day sue the church. As of this writing, the church has largely failed to enact reforms designed to protect children sexually abused in their home as well as children who are neglected or maltreated physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

If the church is ever to improve its response to the sin of child abuse and neglect, it must reform theologically. Specifically, the Bible's rich content about children, and our obligation to them must be addressed in seminaries, theological journals, Bible classes, and from our pulpits. According to Jesus, children are messengers from God and how we treat children speaks volumes about our true feelings toward the incarnate Christ (Mark 9:36-37).

The book *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global Perspectives* is a timely collection of essays that enables Christians to think theologically about children and the responsibility of adults to the "least of these" (Matt 25:31-46). One of the essayists, Ivone Gebara correctly observes that although "children both inhabit and inherit the same world as adults and have real experiences of evil and injustice, theologians and church leaders have neglected to take children's experiences fully into account, theologically and practically."

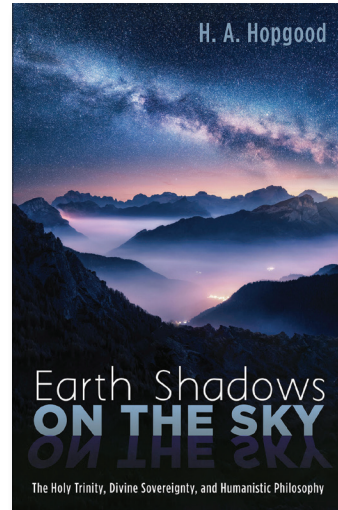
In his essay on liberation theologies, Craig Nesson laments "that most forms of liberation theology have underrepresented or entirely omitted attention to children, even though millions of children worldwide lack basic needs, suffer maltreatment or exploitation, and are 'systematically deprived of being a person.'" Nesson believes it "is imperative that theologians, whatever their context or method, take the personhood of children seriously." Specifically, Nesson calls on theologians to be a voice that frees children from material deprivation, neglect, corporal punishment and physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Nesson believes this can be accomplished through public advocacy, church child protection policies, and seminary coursework.

With respect to theological education, Nesson notes the pioneering work being done at Wartburg Theological Seminary in implementing coursework on child abuse. This includes a stand-alone course on child maltreatment as well as inclusion of this topic into ethics classes. Indeed, Nesson's ethics students researched and drafted a rationale for a proposed social statement for the ELCA on child abuse—a document that may be a catalyst for reform in the ELCA and a model for other denominations to follow.

Scholars have long noted the central role of children in the life and words of Jesus. At the same time, theologians have largely failed to infuse the radical words and actions of Christ into the Christian community. As a result, the church has been largely silent, even complicit in the abuse of countless children. With the publication of *Child Theology: Diverse Methods and Global*

Perspectives, there is hope that the Christian church is moving closer to the teachings of our Lord.

Victor I. Vieth
Chief Program Officer, Zero Abuse Project
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Earth Shadows on the Sky: The Holy Trinity, Divine Sovereignty, and Humanistic Philosophy. By H.A. Hopgood. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-7252-7532-4. Paper. \$20.00.

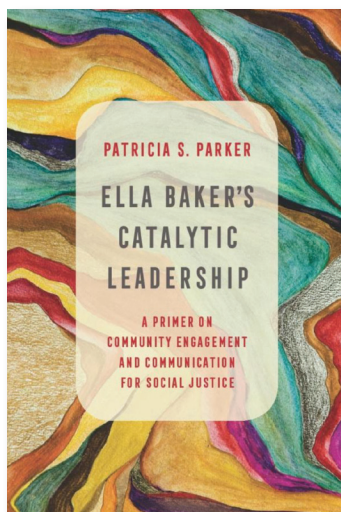
H.A. Hopgood, a Professor of Theology and New Testament Greek at Andersonville Theological Seminary, Camilla, Georgia, uses the concept of the earth casting a shadow upward to show how we project our own views upward onto God rather than gaining a true picture of the essence of God from "revelation from above." Hopgood explores how this upside-down picture came about by discussing how different theologies about God and the divine nature started already in the time of the early church fathers, through the different church councils and creeds, then through the Reformation and into the Age of Enlightenment.

Aspects of philosophy, theology, the ontology (the essence) of God, the Trinity, orthodox doctrine, and the Rule of Faith are explained, as well as challenges that came from Arianism, Rationalism, emphasizing the works of God in creation rather than God's nature, Hyper-Calvinism, and Puritanism.

Hopgood then discusses the theological impact of two eighteenth century religious leaders, Charles Chauncy and John Gill, and the resulting humanistic philosophy and upside-down picture of God that is now prevalent. The final chapter takes us back to what the author holds as the correct view of God as Creator, Savior, and King in the Holy Trinity.

The book is not an easy read. Fortunately, there is a glossary with definitions to assist the reader. For anyone who is a serious student of Scripture and wants to learn more about history of the church, theology, the sovereignty of God, and the nature of the Trinity, it will be worth the time and effort to digest this well thought-out and researched gem.

Linda S. Blais
Des Moines, Washington



Ella Baker's Catalytic Leadership: A Primer on Community Engagement and Communication for Social Justice. By Patricia S. Parker. Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-5203-0091-0. xvii & 177 pages. Paper. \$29.95. Ebook. \$20.99.

Patricia S. Parker's study poses questions for members of outside organizations who seek to enter partnership with people in vulnerable communities. How may such partnerships become mutual and trusting? How may outsiders engage in ways that respect the knowledge of people living within conditions of systemic injustices and disinvestment?

Ella Baker's group-centered approach to civil rights activism and movement building provides the vocabulary and vision which animate Parker's practical guide. An introduction draws from recent historical studies of Baker to elucidate key insights: her critique of leadership models centered around a single charismatic leader, her firm trust in dialogical and cross-generational processes which allow people from all walks of life to grow into confidence as activists, and her respect for the common sense for survival that oppressed people carry with them and which bears seeds of resistance.

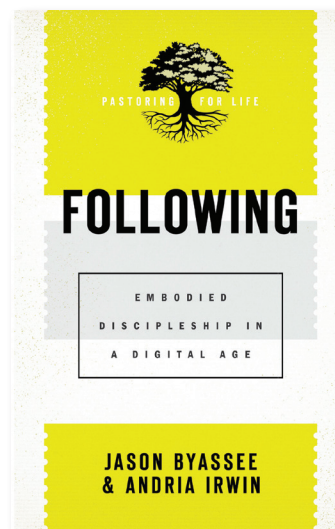
Three chapters narrate case studies from the leadership development program which Parker offered for Black teenage girls living in a public housing community adjacent to her university employer. Through her church involvement Parker developed trusting relationships with women whom she identifies as bridge leaders, those who may lack official leadership positions yet through church, school, and informal networks are rooted in a community and witness to its struggles and potential. Parker describes how the series of workshops she launched, together with a team of bridge leaders and student interns, intervened to displace the devaluing narratives that permeate Black girls' lives. The participants affirmed this empowering intervention in naming their collective "Striving Sisters Speak!" (S3!). Parker provides specific examples of formats and discussions topics which helped forge the trust between the members: recognizing different forms of expertise and identifying barriers to inter-generational cooperation.

As the case studies with the youth continue, the practice that emerges to most prominence is radical listening. Listening becomes radical when it attends to the hesitations, silences, and "hidden transcripts" which the back-and-forth of discussion

across differences will provoke. When the girls initially identified the local authorities' reduction of dumpster service to their neighborhood as a hardship for their families, the adult allies encouraged them to work toward the goal of challenging city hall. Adults continued to promote the organizing effort, while the girls' interest faded. Parker's reflections on this failure to cross difference account for how the adults, from a privileged outsider position, mapped onto the situation a formal strategy. The youth carried with them the situated knowledge of their vulnerability within public housing, and the awareness of "under-the-radar" ways of avoiding direct confrontation while still getting things done. The girls themselves proposed instead a community festival to bring together neighbors and build unity in a celebrative environment. Achieving this goal enhanced the feeling of collective power for S3! and the possibility of transforming the restrictive dominant narratives about their community.

Parker addresses her study to a secular audience, but the practices and vision she casts may apply to ministerial leaders working on relationships between congregation and oppressed or impoverished neighborhoods, youth work, and mission partnerships with non-profits. Listening for silences and hidden transcripts attunes pastoral caregivers both to the people they seek to assist, and to openings for the Holy Spirit's creative power beyond and within a situation.

*Ole Schenk
United Lutheran Church
Oak Park, Illinois*



Following: Embodied Discipleship in a Digital Age. By Jason Byassee and Andria Irwin. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-4934-3066-6. xvi & 208 pages. Paper. \$21.99.

Prepared as dialog between Jason Byassee, a Gen X digital immigrant, and Andria Irwin, a Millennial digital native, this work stimulates discussion about the church's need to thoughtfully and effectively employ diverse new technologies as gifts for ministry.

The Introduction outlines the core question: can churches use the internet and, if so, how? The Conclusion stresses that Christianity is at core a mediated faith. Eight chapters focus on critical issues, most focusing on the internet. The chapters



include the following topics: influences on personal identity, pastoral presence, sacraments and technology, families and technology, friendships and distractions, the internet as a place for mission, the Eucharist and online communion, and preaching, the pandemic and the internet. Each chapter is followed by questions for discussion.

Throughout the two writers both agree and sometimes disagree. That gives permission for participants to discuss each subject freely. This work is best used to elicit thoughtful group discussion, where participants read in advance, highlight, and make comments in preparation for discussion. I highlighted many comments: “Yes!” “???” and “Maybe not.”

The authors are Canadian and speak from that context. They also draw from studies and conversations with other students, scholars, and practitioners, ancient and modern.

Byassee introduces the book’s purpose: “We (Andria and Jason) nearly had a book proposal sketched out (online) about how the church can use technology, with hope, rather than being used by it. This is that book” (16). He presents two contrasting approaches to using technology. On the one hand, “Technology has always announced itself with fanfare as though Jesus’s kingdom has arrived, salvation is here, and all is well” (17). On the other hand, “Too categorical a denunciation of technology risks Manicheism” (23).

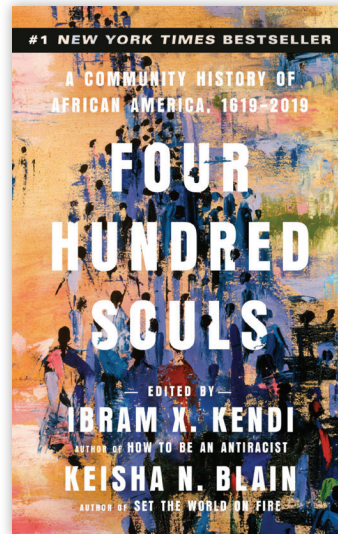
While the two often agree, one issue emphatically divides them “Can Christians celebrate the Eucharist online?” Andrea draws from the decisions of the United Church of Canada: “Nevertheless, the decision to have online Communion didn’t happen overnight. It is still taking shape as we navigate the extent to which we’ll be living like this and what a life post-pandemic might mean for those who choose to remain online. My prayer would be that we might save a seat for those for whom virtual Communion remains the only option now, or ever” (178).

Jason asserts: “The whole point is that Jesus gathers a people, like his Jewish forebears around the Passover, like his gathered saints at the eschatological banquet at the end of all things. You can’t transmit water or bread or wine through a computer screen. Don’t try” (156).

For me this issue needs to be seen within a wider context. Streaming services have permitted “attendance” at worship that can nurture, as surely as Paul’s letters and written Gospels have. But they may also encourage individualistic consumption (“I don’t need to take personal part in nitty-gritty church life”). Churches need to connect distant viewers with local congregations where they can be supported and, yes, sometimes challenged. If the viewers are homebound, that is all the greater reason for them to be served by a local church. Internet or broadcast services may, unwittingly, isolate viewers. Homebound members need human community. Many churches commission members to take communion to otherwise isolated members.

This book, used as a discussion starter in congregations, will stimulate creative discussion. It is also available as an e-book, which group participants might find helpful as they search and make comments in a discussion.

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Four Hundred Souls.

Edited by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain. New York: One World, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-5931-3404-7. xvii & 504 pages. Hardcover. \$32.00.

The book’s thesis can be summed up in two quotes from the authors. “Black America can be defined as individuals of African descent in solidarity,

whether involuntarily or voluntarily, whether politically or culturally, whether for survival or resistance” (xiv); and “We shall overcome, we shall overcome someday” (xvi).

The publication combines the stories and journals of hundreds of African American individuals. The combination of storytelling and daily plights of the African American community bring together a wealth of knowledge of history and theology. The information between these pages brings together the story of the African American experience from the landing of the first, well documented, slave ship (*White Lion*) to the present day. The ability to see these stories through so many different eyes is extremely helpful to not just the African American community of today but also any individual who is willing to dig into the liberation theology of said community.

Understanding the trials and tribulations of a community that was, and is, so marginalized by the government it currently resides under, is paramount to those who want to work in the teachings of Christ to ensure that justice and equity is given to all. *Four Hundred Souls* brings a truth to the history of America and the true understanding of the African American sojourn within. Often clashing against the historical status quo and whitewashed history of America, this book presents a historically accurate view of how individuals of non-European descent were treated by society and the church.

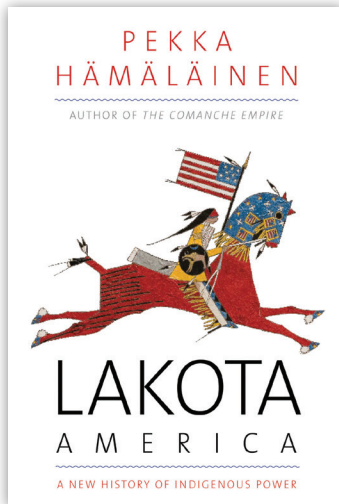
A great building block, this book allows pastors, council members, and congregations the opportunity to look into a community and history that is often lacking in congregations with little diversity. The chronological build of the chapters lends itself



to easy teaching in adult education classes or as a book study. I would recommend this book as one to help open the hearts and minds of Christians to the suffering and marginalization of fellow children of God throughout the country and within our own communities.

Joshua Gomez
MA Student

Wartburg Theological Seminary



***Lakota America:
A New History of
Indigenous Power.***

By Pekka Hämäläinen.
New Haven: Yale
University Press, 2019.
ISBN: 978-0-3002-
5525-6. 530 pages.
Paper. \$22.00.

What are the chances of finding a Finnish historian, now serving as Rhodes Professor of American History at Oxford, as author of the history of the Lakota People, who are often known as the Sioux? Given that a previous book on the Comanche people by this author won the prestigious Bancroft Prize in American History, it is evident that readers await a treat. The book contains a closely argued thesis regarding the Lakota's central role in America's westward expansion that is buttressed by over one hundred pages of footnotes and a useful glossary of recurring Lakota words. The author writes not only a "new history" of the Lakota people but a "new kind" of history centered on the Lakota people to provide a whole new perspective on the American past.

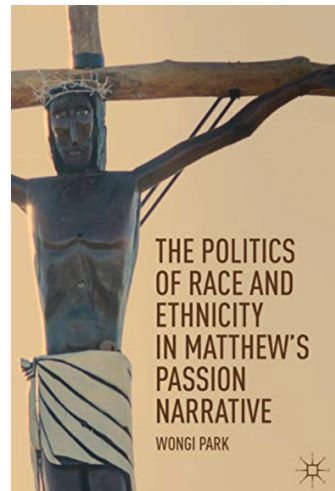
To accomplish this feat, the author makes use of manifold sources including the annual Lakota "winter counts," originally drawn on buffalo hides as pictographs retelling recent events in order to reinforce the people's historical memory. Because the Lakota were a highly mobile people across a vast swath of western territory that originally ranged from the upper Mississippi to the foothills of the Rockies, maps are conveniently provided to help the reader visualize the extent of the gradual drift of the Lakota in a northwesterly direction that became, from a white American point of view, the largest single impediment to the expansion of western settlement in the nineteenth century.

Hamalainen provides a broad and deep historical context for the Lakota's history, ranging back to the seventeenth-century beaver-skin trade with French fur-trappers and later the buffalo-skin trade with the French, British, and Americans that became central for the Lakota economy in its exchange for guns,

ammunition, food staples, whiskey, and other white-produced goods. The complicated relations with other indigenous peoples, sometimes violent, is also given close attention. This includes the Lakota's "shape-shifting," as the author calls their leaders' political savvy and diplomatic skill. Over the centuries the Lakota became—partly because of their large size among indigenous groups (which may once have reached 30,000 people)—the single most significant indigenous people's group with whom the American government had to deal.

"Custer's Last Stand," perhaps the main event involving the Lakota people known to many Americans, is recast by the author into an indigenous-centric tale of the "Battle of the Greasy Grass." In this battle, leaders such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull utterly outmaneuvered the narcissistic and violent American general in the summer of our nation's centennial year. However, the Lakota triumph was brief lived as it led quickly to an extermination campaign, which the author does not hesitate to call "ethnic cleansing." Consequently, the "Epilogue" describes how this shape-shifting people has barely managed to survive into the twenty-first century.

John Rollefson, retired ELCA pastor
Author of the trilogy, *Postils for Preaching:*
Commentaries on the Revised Common
Lectionary, Years A, B and C



***The Politics of Race
and Ethnicity in
Matthew's Passion
Narrative.*** By Wong Park.
New York:
Palgrave Macmillan,
2019. ISBN: 978-3-
0300-2377-5. xi &
160 pages. \$109.99.

In this, his first book, *The Politics of Race and Ethnicity in Matthew's Passion Narrative*, Wong Park examines

a new, fascinating interpretation of the passion narrative within the Gospel of Matthew. Park, who is an Assistant Professor of Religion at Belmont University, views this effort as a means of critiquing the dominant reading of Matthew's passion narrative and thus provides an alternative analysis framed under the politics of race and ethnicity.

Park fleshes out his argument concerning Jesus' minoritization through multiple lenses. Each chapter has a different focal point of expansion, from historical interpretations to modern implications. In these ways, Park aims to articulate and show how Jesus' Judaic racialization affects all aspects of how readers



understand the claim of Matthew 27:37 that Jesus is “King of the Jews” (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων) [*ho basileus tōn Ioudaiōn*]. The book concludes that the Roman act of crucifying this Judean Jew, Jesus, was an act of minoritization and racialization under the most extreme mode of Roman capital punishment.

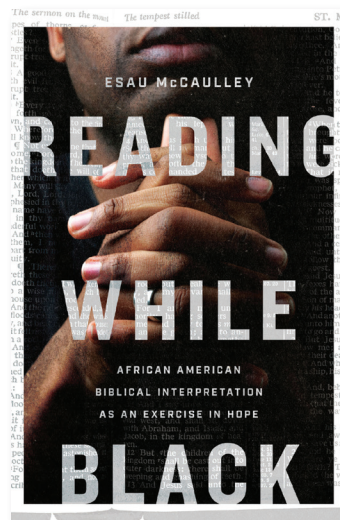
Park’s writing is easily digestible, even when he details the most complex of topics and ideas related to his argument. The overall thesis and chapter topics are easily outlined and make clear to the reader what Park is aiming to communicate in each respective chapter. The historical interpretation is done with grace and respective care to the places, times, and cultures which Park is addressing. Similarly, Park’s theological knowledge is demonstrated during his examination of what the minoritization and racialization of Jesus during the passion narrative means for readers today.

The book concludes with Park’s claim that Jesus being regarded as ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων [*ho basileus tōn Ioudaiōn*] was neither a joke nor an ironic statement. Rather such a mocking statement was meant to reinforce the Roman sense of superiority over the Judeans. Park’s book communicates the somber message of how the racialization of ethnic minority groups have existed since the time of Jesus Christ himself. Likewise, from the most ancient of times, God has not shied away from involvement in the needs of the minoritized.

The most significant question left for Park to consider is how Christians should respond once they complete reading his book. Park provides a thought-provoking interpretation of Matthew’s passion narrative but still leaves the reader asking “why.” Why does this minoritization interpretation matter for Christians today? In addition, what should Christians proceed to do as a result of such an interpretation? While an informative piece of writing, Park’s book might provide an opinion or option for Christians on how to faithfully proceed, which would benefit the reader—clergy, scholars, and parishioners alike.

In conclusion, Park’s narrative provides a thought-provoking interpretation of how to view Christ’s passion within a minoritized, racialized context. Faithful to the ancient text and context and well-informed on current, scholarly, and exegetical dialogue, Park’s book is multifaceted and judicious in all areas of interpretation it offers.

Addison Danielle Ream
Wheaton College



***Reading While Black:
African American
Biblical Interpretation
as an Exercise in Hope.***

By Esau McCaulley.
Downers Grove: Inter
Varsity Press, 2020.
ISBN: 978-0-8308-
5486-8. 198 pages.
Paper. \$22.00.

The author, Esau McCaulley, stated that the reason he wrote *Reading While Black* is that he believes

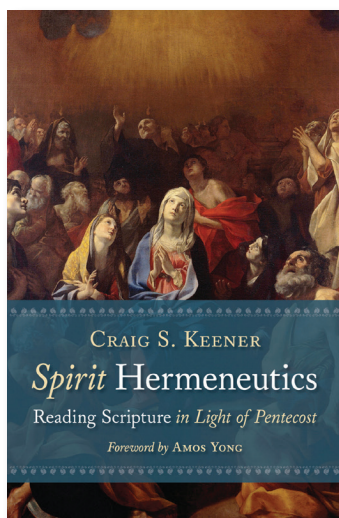
that “Black ecclesial tradition...has a distinctive message of hope arising from its reading of biblical texts.” He continues by saying this message is “living and active, having the ability to provide a way forward for Black believers who continue to turn to the scriptures for guidance” (164). It must also be stated, as per the author, that this book was not written to be innovative but as a way to bring African American readers back to a community that they remember.

Reading While Black is a wonderful walk through the lives and beliefs of a Christian community who has been continually marginalized through the improper use of scripture and economic greed. McCaulley uses these very scriptures, along with the full story of the Bible, to combat marginalization. By using ecclesiastical and exegetical work, the author is able to show the truth within the teachings of Christ. Also, using history, both biblical and cultural, he shows that the Word of God is one of reconciliation and liberation.

In naming his own personal conflicts with the status quo theology, McCaulley opens this book to be a great learning experience for any Christian having issues reconciling social movements of today with the teaching of yesterday. Pastors and lay people alike will gain insight on scripture and how God’s world is one of liberation. The author has also built a guide within this book for use as a discussion of the issues of community, individuality, and cultural liberation. Using these tools, one should have an easy time sharing the teachings of this book within and throughout their community.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is looking to expand their understanding of all those created in the image of God or to get back to their root beliefs in Christ while reconciling the atrocities of the past.

Joshua Gomez
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Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost. By Craig S. Keener. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-7439-9. xxviii & 522 pages. Cloth. \$48.00.

Craig Keener is F. M. and Ada Thompson Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, and

author of numerous books including *Galatians: A Commentary* (Baker Academic, 2019) and *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Baker Academic, 2011).

In his forward, Amos Young, informs the reader that *Spirit Hermeneutics* was originally slated to be part of the Eerdmans series titled Pentecostal Manifestos, but, due to its length, it was published separate from the series. Thus, as one would suspect, Keener's contribution to the larger discussion of hermeneutics is from a self-consciously Pentecostal perspective. Keener argues that "global Pentecostalism" offers a unique, insider perspective "on some of the sorts of Spirit-experiences emphasized in the NT" (6). Pentecostalism, in turn, provides a "preunderstanding" that better enables the reader to understand the text of the New Testament and the "charismatic experience" underlying it than a reading lacking said experience(s) (6).

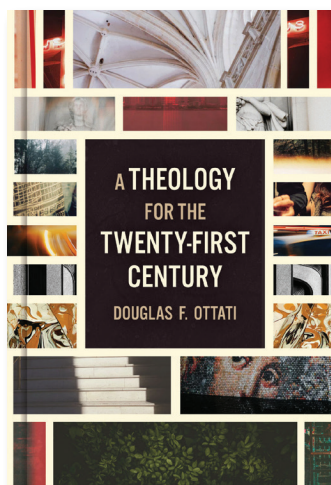
In the introduction, Keener helpfully clarifies that, by referencing Pentecostal experience, he is not referring to Pentecostal denominations but rather Pentecostal movements across the globe and across denominational lines as it is a "renewal of Christianity as a whole" (8). Because of his specific focus on the Holy Spirit, he emphasizes the Spirit's illumination of the text for the reader.

The book is divided into six parts, with three appendices, and consists of an introduction, eighteen chapters and a conclusion. In part I (chapters 1-2) he makes the case that experientially readings of the Bible are both inevitable and desirable and that our starting point should be the vantage point of Pentecost (Acts 2). In part II (chapters 3-6), he stresses the value of global readings of the Bible. In part III (chapters 7-10), he discusses such matters as the canon, context, authorial intent, and literary meaning. Part IV (chapters 11-13) focuses on epistemology. Here, Keener stresses the veracity of Scripture. Part V (chapters 14-16) explores the models the Bible provides us for how to read the Bible and, with part VI (chapters 17-18), he discusses specifically Pentecostal concerns.

Keener's book provides a thorough explication of biblical hermeneutics. He is charitable in disagreement, writes clearly

and is well-informed on the various issues that surround the topic. While not overly fundamentalist in his approach, he takes a conservative view of Scripture, advocating for the infallibility of the biblical text. The greatest strength of his contribution is his distinctly Pentecostal focus with its emphasis on experience and the usefulness of such encounters for one's grasp of the Bible. We recommend this work as it will prove to be a helpful conversation partner for students and scholars of biblical hermeneutics.

Thomas Haviland-Pabst
One Family Ministries
Asheville, North Carolina



A Theology for the Twenty-First Century. By Douglas F. Ottati. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7811-3. xxx & 770 pages. Cloth. \$60.00.

Douglas Ottati is Craig Family Distinguished Professor of Reformed Theology and Justice at Davidson College in North Carolina and the author of several books including *Theology for Liberal Protestants: God the Creator* (Eerdmans, 2013).

In the introduction, the author states that "Christian theology ... is a particular practical wisdom" (1). His theology is Christian "in the sense that it takes Jesus as the Christ to be paradigmatic for understanding God and human life," and, with this, his focus is on the various "contexts and circumstances" which we face in the twenty-first century. He goes on to define his approach to Christian theology with four adjectives: "Augustinian," "Protestant," "liberal," and "humanist" (3).

By "Augustinian," Ottati is emphasizing three emphases of the famous bishop of Hippo, namely, that "God is creator," "God is judge," and "God is redeemer" (4). "Protestant," for Ottati, denotes a readiness to critique and even reject traditional Christian teaching and a plurality of understanding. He defines "liberal" as (1) sympathetic to "critical arguments and scientific inquiries"; (2) a recognition that traditions, practices and "even species change and develop"; and (3) "a commitment to social criticism, engagement and reform" (8). Lastly, by "humanist," Ottati desires to understand what it means to be human in our specific context.

This system of theology is divided into three parts. The first part, consisting of two chapters, discusses theological method. The second part (chapters 3-6) discusses creation and God as cre-

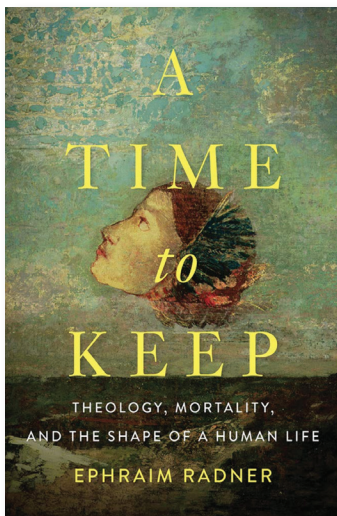


ator. The third part (chapters 7-12) discusses redemption. Ottati, then, offers an epilogue that discusses the Trinity.

Ottati's theology has a deep concern for ethical issues and resists discussion of speculative questions. For example, he rejects the hypostatic union of Christ that was promulgated by Chalcedon, and he sees himself at odds with orthodox Trinitarianism. Both theological positions make sense when one realizes that Ottati, while esteeming Jesus as the Christ, does not see him as divine, which is essential for affirming both classic Christology and Trinitarianism. One wishes he would have engaged with the arguments of such New Testament scholars as Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado regarding the Christology of the New Testament.

Ottati's relegation of his discussion of the Trinity to the end of his work and the division of his theology into seventy propositions bears a family resemblance to the so-called "Father of Modern Theology," Friedrich Schleiermacher. Beyond these structural similarities, there are several other parallels between Ottati and Schleiermacher. Both men are learned and deeply conversant with the theological literature and abreast of the cultural trends of their day and both are willing to revise and even eliminate elements in Christian doctrine that do not seem to be in accord with the broader truth claims of science and culture. Perhaps the greatest difference is that Ottati is an incredibly lucid, and even moving, writer. Given these characteristics, this will likely become the standard one-volume exposition of Christian theology from a liberal Protestant perspective for our generation.

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A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life. By Ephraim Radner. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4813-0545-7. 304 Pages. Paper. \$34.95.

Anyone familiar with the writings of Ephraim Radner, Professor of Historical Theology at Wycliffe Col-

lege at the University of Toronto, can attest that he is nothing if not a unique, fascinating thinker. This volume does not disappoint as he seeks to explore how our own morality shapes how we are to think about our life.

In the preface, Radner walks the reader through a variety of contexts which bear upon what he describes as "the extended temporal shape of our mortality" (xiii). These contexts include: a "figural reading" of Scripture (x), moving from Adam to the new Adam, Christ; the communion of the church; "human extension over time, or of genealogy" (xi); and, very personal for Radner and tragic, the suicide of his mother and subsequently one of his siblings. It is here his conviction that "the contexts of our experienced lives and context of the Scripture's unveiling of their meaning" (xiii) comes together with the shape of our mortality.

Radner contends in the first chapter that we have lost sight of time. More specifically, we have lost sight of time as "offered to us by God" (5). But not only of time, we have lost sight of "human life" as inextricably "bound up with the fact that we are temporal beings" (6). Put more positively, he is concerned to retrieve the insight that awareness of our own mortality, and hence of our life as given by God, brings to us as humans the meaning that is attached to our humanness.

The author provocatively follows this by offering a figural reading of our life span, giving attention the theme of "skins" or "mortal flesh" (16). He does so by looking at biblical instances, such as the character Job or the linking of tabernacle imagery with our "skinfulness" by the apostle Paul. This prepares the way for a discussion of "the Great Transition," a demographic transition identified by economists, sociologists, and historians which designates a "rapid increase in life expectancy ... from around thirty-three years ... to almost eighty years of age" (24).

This transition serves as a foil for Radner's exploration of morality since this transition, with its extension of the life span, has implications for how we understand core areas, such as family and relationships, the definition of maturation, and the meaning of work. These and other areas impacted by "the Transition" are explored in the subsequent chapters. Throughout Radner offers a penetrating and at times dense look at our mortality and how the gift of life informs our understanding.

Radner provides a provocative and fascinating look at how the limits of our life rooted in our mortality give necessary context for how we understand and experience our lives. One of the most prohibitive aspects of this book is his dense prose. The reader will need to recall his prior argumentation in order to follow his train of thought to the end. While not every conclusion will be agreeable for every reader, the uniqueness and sophistication of Radner's thinking will provide much food for thought for those with the patience to work through this book.

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