



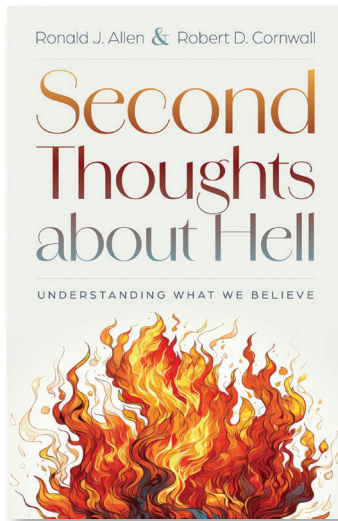
Book Reviews

January 2026

Section Editors: Craig L. Nesson, Cheryl Peterson,
Troy M. 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.



Second Thoughts about Hell: Understanding What We Believe.

By Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornwall.

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-6469-8434-3. viii & 192 pages. Paper. \$18.00.

Ronald J. Allen and Robert D. Cornwall team up once again, to offer a well-researched and balanced educational survey of historical and contemporary views of a hot topic: Hell. Like their first “Second Thoughts” book that was about the Second Coming of Jesus (WJK Press, 2023), *Second Thoughts about Hell* provides the reader with a breadth of theological perspectives.

Before surveying Scripture, Allen and Cornwall explain the importance of language surrounding this topic. While many may think there is just one word, Hell, Scripture in fact witnesses to others such as *Sheol*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna*, alongside other images (8). In Part One, Allen and Cornwall discuss the biblical views on Hell. Chapters One and Two look at the Old Testament and Early Judaism. Chapter Three moves to the New Testament.

Part Two presents a historical survey covering the Second Century CE up to the Reformation (Chapter Four) and the Reformers to the Twentieth Century (Chapter Five). While the authors imply Martin Luther “jump[ed] ship” (73-74) from the Roman Catholic Church, the reality is that it was never his intention to create a schism. Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X in 1521.

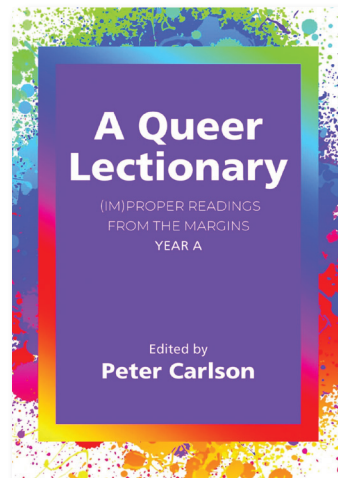
Part Three takes a deeper dive into particular theologians (such as Bultmann, Barth, and Moltmann) and schools of theology (Liberation in Chapter Ten and Open and Relational in Chapter Eleven). Part Four may be of most interest to general readers as it covers three main streams: a literal Hell (Chapter

Twelve), Annihilationism (Chapter Thirteen), and Universal Salvation (Chapter Fourteen). It was eye-opening to learn that Universalism is not a brand-new perspective in Christian thought (62-65, 147-151).

This text, as with their first, provides a Study Guide (163-177) together with suggestions on how to read and discuss in a group. The authors intentionally write in a voice most people can understand. Preaching help is offered through WJK’s website (ii). Yet in a change from before, Allen and Cornwall offer more of their own views. They clearly state their stance on human sexuality (44-46) and share, in depth, their views on Hell in the Afterword (153-162).

Second Thoughts about Hell is a useful text for those who desire to think critically about their personal belief on Hell or those who want to learn more. I hope Allen and Cornwall will make “Second Thoughts” a series and cover other theological topics.

Anthony G. Windau
St. Paul & Immanuel Lutheran Churches
Dixon, Illinois



A Queer Lectionary: (Im)proper Readings from the Margins—Year A.

Peter Carlson, Editor.

New York: Seabury Books, 2025.
ISBN: 978-1-6406-5795-3. xv & 400 pages. Paper. \$44.95.

The contributors to this resource offer a variety of fresh perspectives on Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). This ecumenical group of clergy and scholars have pieced together a collection of queer and inclusive interpretations of Scripture.

The book follows a typical commentary structure, being divided into sections of the year based on the liturgical seasons with each chapter being the week’s proper. The readings from the proper are included at the beginning of each chapter, followed by a sermon from one of the contributors. Despite the array of liturgical backgrounds represented by the contributors (including the Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Metropolitan Community Churches, United Methodist, and Unitarian Universalist Church), they all affirm the expansive love of God and the sanctity of all bodies.

This resource is not a strictly academic exegetical resource, nor does it claim to be. Instead, every Sunday and major feast day of the Church Year is accompanied by a unique, vibrant, and thoughtful analysis from one of the contributors. These sermons



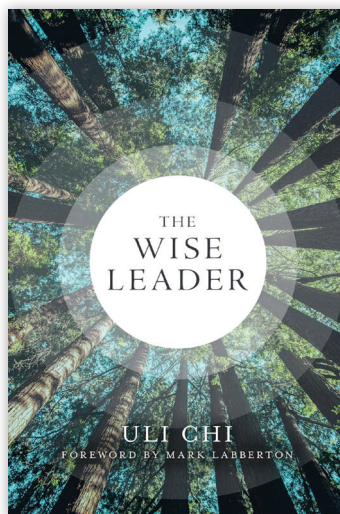
include stories from the contributors, exegesis of the texts, history of the LGBTQIA2S+ community, and challenges to the readers to expand their often heteronormative and exclusive readings of biblical texts.

In the introduction, Carlson writes that “queerness is the very *heart* of the Christian tradition,” because everything that Jesus taught about God “rejects what the world says is important,” focusing instead on life lived on the margins (3). I believe this collection of sermons illustrates the queerness of worshipping God who is present with us in the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit—a God who loves us so much that in Christ, God became human so that God knows what it is to be human, especially what it is to be human living on the margins.

This text is a valuable resource not only for queerfolx looking to hear stories of God’s love for their stories and bodies, but also for preachers and clergy seeking to expand their commentary collection. This resource is unique. I am looking forward to reading and making use of Years B and C in the future.

Riley J. Reed-Windau

Immanuel & St. Paul Lutheran Churches
Dixon, Illinois



The Wise Leader.

By Uli Chi.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-8404-6. xii &
180 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

Does the church really need another book on leadership?

Uli Chi, teacher, business leader, and member of the De Press Center’s advisory board, has spent decades pondering leadership, in both for-profit and nonprofit

circles. In this book, he reflects on the relationship of leadership and wisdom, and how this relationship has shaped and is shaped by themes of power, relationality, and community, and more specifically how wisdom is understood through the lens of a Christian imagination that is biblically framed.

Mark Labberton, in his forward to the book, proposes that this book is not so much about leadership, as it is on wisdom: “...wisdom is found in communal discernment, not merely by an individual” (19). Grounded in who God is and God’s creative and redeeming action in the world, Chi’s reflections emerge from his own experience as father, spouse, and grandson of a Chinese scholar. Part memoir, part Bible study, *The Wise Leader* guides the reader on a thoughtful, accessible journey of wisdom through self-reflection.

The Wise Leader is laid out in eight chapters and begins

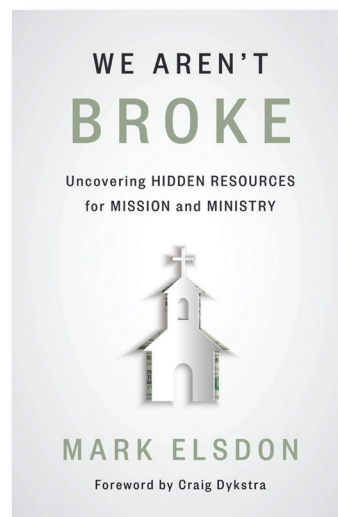
and ends with an introduction and an epilogue. Chapters cover sources of wisdom, power, authority, humility, mutuality, and formation. Woven throughout the pages of personal reflections are biblical insights, poetry, and illustrations from books, movies, television, and art. For Chi, wisdom is not some esoteric body of knowledge, but one that is, “...personal and mutual to the core” (166). Wisdom comes from God, but “not only from receiving ‘spiritual insight’ or ‘revelation’ but also from observation, reflection, and the hard work of study and practice” (36). Wisdom, for Chi, is how we understand who God is and how we live in this world through our relationships with one another.

I found *The Wise Leader* to be a beautiful introduction to wisdom for leaders from all walks of life including, but not limited to, profit and nonprofit leaders, rostered ministry leaders and leaders in their daily life, and both student learners and experienced practitioners. These pages show how reflection on wisdom makes a difference in how one leads in thought and practice.

Does the church need another book on leadership? Well, yes, at least this one.

Kristine Stache

Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, Iowa



We Aren't Broke: Uncovering Hidden Resources for Mission and Ministry.

By Mark Elsdon.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7898-4. xiv &
225 pages. Paper. \$18.99.

In a time when numerous churches are facing the stark reality of declining membership and the potential for closing their doors, Mark Elsdon offers a radical

approach for seeing abundance and hope. In *We Aren't Broke*, Elsdon, a Presbyterian pastor of Pres House in Madison, Wisconsin, tells the story of how he and the Board of Directors took a risk on doing something new. Committing to risk, innovation, and change, Elsdon saw the revival of a dead campus ministry and helped nurture it into a flourishing community that measures its impact not by church attendance, but by how many students are helped, impacted, and reached by the Pres House ministry.

Part One reframes the perceptions that inhibit many churches. In Chapter One, Elsdon begins this reframing by introducing “Impact Investing,” defined as, “... a particular kind of investing where money is proactively invested to produce social impact as well as financial returns” (22). It is a theme that returns constantly, for it was through Impact Investing that Pres House

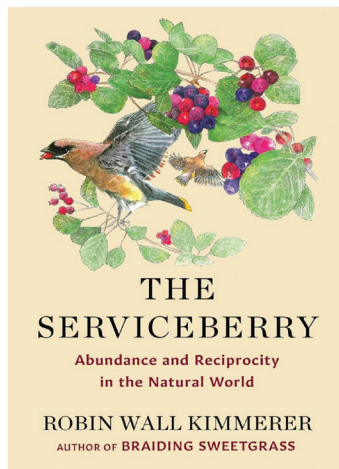


was saved. Chapter Two talks about the endowments many congregations and denominations have, while Chapter Eight mentions the blessing of property and its multitude of uses outside of a worship space. Another reframing is in Chapter Six where he talks about reparations, using Princeton Seminary as a case study.

If Part One involved the reframing of perceptions and explaining of ideas, Part Two of the book answers the “so what and now what” questions by putting Impact Investing to the test. Chapter Ten discusses business realities while staying committed to one’s mission. Chapter Eleven delves into the practicalities of Impact Investing, and Chapter Twelve concludes with notes of hope and faith.

There is no doubt that the work Mark Elsdon has accomplished at Pres House is impressive and is worthy of being studied by other church leaders. But it is also the unique situation of a campus ministry in the heart of Wisconsin’s capital. I wondered, frequently, “What would this look in small town Dixon, Illinois? Or rural Andover, Iowa?” Themes certainly translate, but a reader should not pick up this book expecting a silver bullet to solve a congregation’s problems. Elsdon ends with hope, “Membership and giving may have declined, but God has not ...” (166). The author includes a robust glossary of financial terms which might be unfamiliar to pastors or church leaders and includes discussion questions for each chapter in a final section.

Anthony G. Windau
St. Paul & Immanuel Lutheran Churches
Dixon, Illinois



***The Serviceberry:
Abundance and
Reciprocity in the
Natural World.*** By
Robin Wall Kimmerer.

New York: Scribner, 2024. ISBN:
978-1-6680-7224-0. 112 pages.
Cloth. \$20.00.

This brief book is filled with profound insights gleaned from the world around us. While not explicitly theological, the implica-

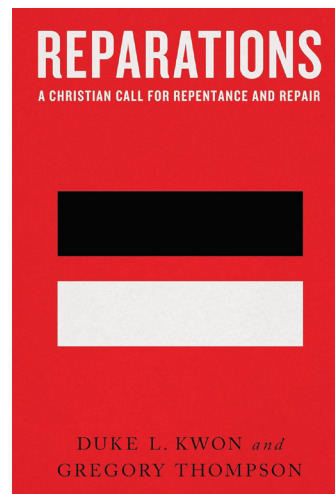
tions from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s work are plain to see. Kimmerer draws from the richness of her heritage as a member of the Potawatomi Nation and her background as a scientist. She connects well with nature and offers lessons from the world most Westerners might overlook.

In this easy-to-read text, Kimmerer speaks through personal stories and first-person narrative, while also being well-researched when she delves into more academic topics. The main point of the work is describing the “Serviceberry Economy,” which is best explained in contrast to our familiar market economy. In the

latter, money (or more likely a plastic card swiped or tapped) is exchanged for goods or services, often creating only a fleeting and impersonal connection with another human being. Whereas in the Serviceberry Economy, the sharing of resources inherently leads to conversation, development of relationships, and cultivates stronger communities. Kimmerer describes the Serviceberry Economy in this way: “In a gift economy, wealth is understood as having enough to share, and the practice for dealing with abundance is to give it away. In fact, status is determined not by how much one accumulates, but by how much one gives away. The currency in a gift economy is relationship...” (32-33).

By emphasizing relationship, connectedness, and seeking the wellbeing of others over material wealth, Kimmerer touches on the beauty proclaimed in Jesus’ preaching about the kingdom of heaven. Her language of gifts fits well into the belief that our life is a gift of grace from God. It is here this text proves to be a worthy read for any Christian, pastor, or theologian, who has an appreciation for ecology and is seeking new ways to relate God’s message to the world.

Anthony G. Windau
St. Paul & Immanuel Lutheran Churches
Dixon, Illinois



***Reparations:
A Christian Call
for Repentance
and Repair.***

By Duke L. Kwon and
Gregory Thompson.

Ada, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2021.
ISBN: 978-1-5874-3450-1. xii &
256 pages. Cloth. \$21.99.

Over the past fifteen to twenty years, racism stopped being just a personal issue in our national consciousness. Racism and its impacts were finally being recognized as a pressing and persistent structural issue.

In other words, as a society we have made some progress from a defense response to racism (“*But I have a Black friend named Joyce...*”) to an understanding of racism’s implications across time: “*Generational racism, from Jim Crow, to Brown v. Board, to redlining, to police brutality, still impact Joyce – and will impact the health, psyche, educational outcomes and economic opportunities of Joyce’s children, and her children’s children, and tens of millions of Black people in the United States.*”

As the U.S. made this shift in consciousness — pricked by watching Black men being choked to death on camera; distilled by the overwhelming numbers of Black people dying of COVID — books like *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* brought us closer to saying needful things about race



relations. It was released in 2021, shortly after we witnessed the extra-judicial murder of George Floyd in 2020. That moment was ripe for discussion and repair. White people were beginning to talk about race as an issue that impacted *them*, as a quality that they *themselves* had. The phrase ‘white supremacy’ was *almost* normalized.

This book is needed even more now, as some of that repair has been undone today; this book will need to shout even louder.

Reparations is important because of its theoretical underpinnings. A discussion of reparations must be presented as a scaffolded argument because unfortunately, many people, even Christians, dismiss the need for reparations as a scam.

The first three chapters chronicle racism and white supremacy in the U.S. both *de facto* and *de jure*, from the 1500s to the present day. The authors argue that white supremacy deformed how we as Christians (and how we as a larger society) defined humanity. Peoples with darker skin who worshipped foreign gods were “uncivilized” and soon to be classified as chattel, a state from which it was almost impossible to escape. These notions of white supremacy and Black inferiority were, in the authors’ words, “embraced” by the Founding Fathers. One of the best, and most uncomfortable, sections of the book, chapter 3, illustrates in detail the ongoing power of white supremacy to warp history and truth, and rob Black people of dignity, power, and wealth.

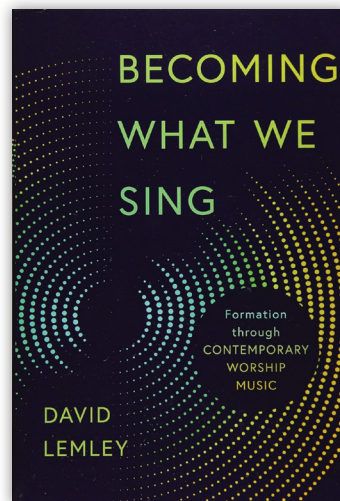
Reparations does not let readers separate Christianity from the interplay of racist white supremacy. This is because the contrast between racism and Christianity helps us see, theologically, what our response must be. The Christian mission calls for “God’s people to become agents of repair;” Christian moral tradition, chiefly the “ethics of restitution and restoration,” compel us. The church is uniquely suited for action – not to theory, not to immobilizing guilt, but *action*— in this “world of theft” (103).

Scripture, doctrine, theological insight, and even political essays are used as arguments to spur us to concrete actions. Restoration work is brought to life: as both personal and supernatural; as that which can initially generate hostility and resistance. Masterfully the end section of the book articulates how this mission and moral work reverses (repairs and restores) the truth, power, and wealth by white supremacy.

This book makes clear theological arguments, making it suitable for a group book study where group members have had prior conversation about structural racism and white supremacy. The book study leader should have experience in respectful communication, Eric Law’s mutual invitation technique, racial/ethnic caucusing, or other techniques for challenging conversations.

Denise Rector

Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University
Columbus, Ohio



Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music.

By David Lemley.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-7408-5. viii &
262 pages. Paper. \$26.99.

In *Becoming What We Sing*, David Lemley offers a theological and cultural exploration of contemporary worship music (CWM) focusing not on its stylistic

qualities or perceived shortcomings, but on its formative power. Rather than doctrinal correctness or musical excellence, Lemley’s central concern is what kind of people are being shaped through its use in worship. For those within liturgical traditions, this book presents both challenge and opportunity: to evaluate the music employed in worship as a means of formation for Christ-followers.

Using classical models of spiritual formation and the four-fold structure of liturgical worship, Lemley explores how music shapes the affections, imaginations, and practices of congregations. His theological orientation treats worship as participatory and sacramental, emphasizing that music does more than express beliefs, it helps construct them. This insight resonates with Lutheran understandings of worship as the place where God’s word is proclaimed and received, where the Holy Spirit is active in shaping faith, and where the community is formed around the sacraments.

A significant portion of the book examines the history and cultural foundations of CWM. Lemley traces its evolution from the Jesus Movement of the 1960s to its current forms, highlighting the influence of popular music styles, performance culture, and emotional self-expression. He raises important concerns about how such music may unconsciously support individualism, consumerism, or an avoidance of suffering, all of which stand in tension with core Lutheran convictions, particularly a theology of the cross.

One of the book’s strengths is its ability to frame contemporary worship practices within a broader theological imagination. Lemley is not interested in promoting or rejecting contemporary styles indiscriminately; rather, he calls for careful discernment of how these musical practices align with or diverge from the church’s vocation to proclaim the gospel in word and deed.

At the same time, some may wish the book engaged more directly with specific theologies espoused by some well-known contemporary worship songs or more practical concerns that churches face. For example, in chapter five, Lemley dives deeply into the “pop ordo of U2,” the rock band fronted by spiritu-

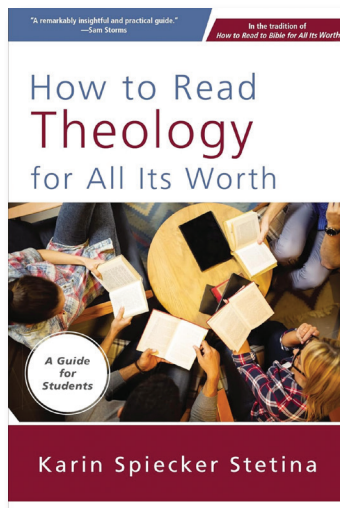


ally conscious singer Bono. However, most church musicians who lead contemporary worship every Sunday in a parish have very little in common with the pop music aspirations or creative vision of a band with worldwide commodity. This part of Lemley's evaluation feels obtruse and disconnected from the practical concerns of most churches.

Perhaps most fascinating is Lemley's own ecclesiastical tradition, Stone-Campbell Churches of Christ. This tradition carries an exclusive commitment to singing in their assemblies without instrumental accompaniment and may contribute to his analytical and detached approach to the subject.

Becoming What We Sing is a thoughtful and engaging contribution to academic conversations about contemporary music, worship, and spiritual formation. Lemley's interdisciplinary approach makes the book a thought-provoking resource for pastors, worship leaders, and theologians alike. For Lutheran readers, it offers a helpful framework for reflecting on how musical practices shape the life of faith and the witness of the church. Even though one might differ with some of Lemley's conclusions, the book prompts necessary questions about what it means to be formed by what we sing and whether our music is leading us deeper into the gospel.

Clayton Faulkner
Dean of the Chapel
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, Iowa



How to Read Theology for All Its Worth. By Karin Spiecker Stetina.

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. ISBN:978-0-3100-9382-4. xv & 224 pages. Paper. \$21.00.

Karin Stetina, a biblical studies professor at Biola University, has written this book for serious nonacademic readers to probe the art of reading theology and biblical books. Such reading

searches for deeper wisdom from God for lived faith, not a mere accumulation of information. The eight chapters are literary tools one may use to seek deeper meaning in theology beyond the devotional level. The author is grounded in Reformed thought with belief in a sovereign God who provides certitude about revealed truths. Thereby, she does not believe the Bible contradicts itself. She acknowledges other schools of thought, such as historical criticism as practiced by Adolf von Harnack (142-143).

One helpful metaphor compares reading to driving a car. The use of mirrors enables a driver to get a fuller sense for operat-

ing the vehicle. Reading the foreword and publication information (such as publishing house, author's credentials, and date of publication) provides the reader with awareness of the general audience for this publisher. A secular publishing house appeals to a different audience than a church or religious publisher.

Other chapters discuss the frame or approach of the author: Does the author write from a conservative evangelical, post-liberal, or neo-orthodox perspective throughout the book? Stetina goes into careful and readable detail in defining her terms, so the reader does not get lost in technical theological jargon (86).

Foundational sources for authors include topics such as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of: Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason are named together with Science and Sociology (106). Authorial presuppositions about Scripture are a factor in writing about theological topics. For example, Ulrich Zwingli in the Marburg debate with Martin Luther appealed to reason in arguing that Jesus' words, "This is my body," were metaphorical. Luther maintained, however, that revelation can contradict reason. Therefore, the elements are his real presence (62).

In another comparison, reading the Bible and theology is like looking at a Picasso cubist painting that can be viewed from different angles which result in differing conclusions. Readers bring their own faith backgrounds to the book (86). As one reads any theological work or Scripture, we continue to pray for discernment, test and evaluate texts, look for practical significance, and finally discover the value for daily Christian living (127).

Discussion questions and exercises are included for each chapter. Stetina does not acknowledge that readers may see contradictions in Scripture and suggests her disagreement with the use of historical critical methods.

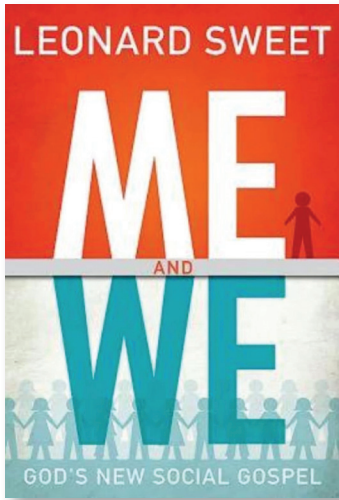
David Coffin
Retired ELCA Pastor
West Union, Iowa

Enjoy reading *Currents*?

Get a notification of each issue of *Currents* as it is published!

Issues are published four times per year; for January, April, July, and October. You can receive an email notice of the publication of each issue by becoming a registered reader.

Register as a reader! Visit currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/user/register



Me and We: God's New Social Gospel.
By Leonard Sweet.

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014.
ISBN:978-1-4267-5776-1. 184
pages. Paper. \$21.99.

Leonard Sweet has written a detailed vision for building a new social gospel community based on relationships rather than organizational or institutional structures. He critiques the social gospel movement for

addressing social and material conditions that may not translate into a mature spiritual community of faith (9). Using a vegetable garden as a metaphor, Sweet argues for relational theology which heals mind, body, and spirit. Christ did not merely die for “me” but for “we” as a community.

Three obstacles frame the chapters: individualism, racism, and consumerism. The latter is the longest chapter. Humans are not “me” without a “we,” those with whom we are connected, like plants in a garden. Despite cyberspace realities (such as Twitter, Google, Instagram, and Facebook), faith in Christ is not a “do-it-yourself” project. If a person does not get their own way in a group decision, they can remain united with others in the Spirit (35). Birthing a new creation, like growing a garden, means showing concern for others, especially the marginalized. By contrast, Babel-like communities are fed by consumerist desires (20).

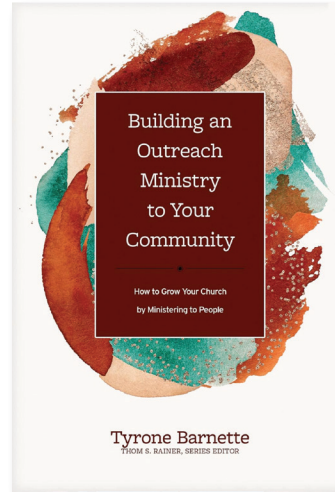
Racism has roots in ancient allusions that darkness is evil, while light is good. This idea was borrowed from Zoroastrianism. Darkness, however, can be a place of peace and reflection, such as Jesus’ prayer in the garden. And Lucifer can use light (fire) as his platform (53). We can imagine a tapestry of colors from God’s creation that includes a variety of colors, like garden plants. The image of light coming out of darkness persists. But light can also symbolize the narcissistic world of Las Vegas gambling. Darkness may have a calming presence on a retreat (84-85).

The longest chapter discusses consumerism as a barrier to any new relational social gospel. The church is deeply intertwined with the values of consumerism. Churches focus on 1) Getting people, 2) Getting money, and 3) Getting things for free (113). Congregations use attractional consumerist models saying, “Come we will meet your needs” (100). Christians should instead work to conserve and conceive new life in the common creation. Rather than being God’s co-creators, Sweet prefers to think of Christians as subcontractors who build on God’s social capital of generosity, sacrifice, loyalty, and forgiveness, none of which are virtues of capitalism (109).

This book presents a framework for building social outreach ministry by church leaders at every level. Sweet laments that

churches still prefer new buildings as a source of identity rather than building relationships (151-152).

David Coffin
Retired ELCA Pastor
West Union, Iowa



Building an Outreach Ministry to Your Community: How to Grow Your Church by Ministering to People.
By Tyrone Barnette.

Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-4964-6702-7 x & 192 pages. Cloth. \$16.99.

Building an Outreach Ministry to Your Community: How to Grow Your Church by Ministering to People

by Tyrone Barnette offers an easy-to-follow guide for leaders to equip the church to make an impact in the community they serve for Christ. Barnette asserts that the church is “called to reach every tribe, every tongue, every nation—starting with our own neighborhoods” (vi). This book is not simply a plug-and-play ministry plan. Barnette’s premise is simple. The church is God’s vessel to reach the community with the Good News of the gospel. The author states, “God has placed you and your church in that particular neighborhood to reach that specific population” (8).

The book is laid out in two sections. The first section puts forth a solid biblical foundation. The author uses the feeding of the five thousand to embrace Christ’s challenge to meet the needs of the community. The second section provides practical steps and ideas to assist the church in ministry beyond the confines of the church building.

The reader may be tempted to skip the first section to get on with the business of building a community outreach ministry. However, engaging in the deep spiritual truths presented is crucial. At the end of each chapter, the author includes questions to help the reader process and meditate on the Scripture. The questions serve to slow the reader down, carefully consider one’s motivation, and listen to God’s Spirit. The chapter titled “Better Together” is a good example. Barnette challenges leaders and churches to tap into the network of churches, and other organizations that share a common mission with the community.

The second section presents ideas, not specific solutions, that churches can implement to engage the community with purpose. The chapter on creating a 501 (c) (3) non-profit is especially insightful. Amid the practical aspects of building an outreach ministry, Barnette returns the leader to a core principle.

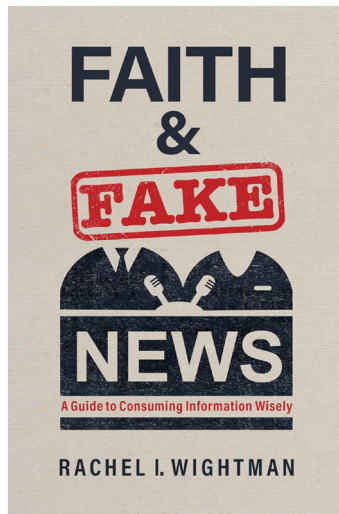


He states, “At the core of every Christ-centered and community-focused program strategy there must be the dominant presence of prayer that empowers the leadership... and opens the hearts of people to receive the gospel of Jesus” (155).

The strength of Barnette’s book is his use of the biblical foundation to set the stage for launching an effective outreach ministry. He includes interviews with ministry leaders who have successful outreach programs. The interviews serve to inspire and lend credibility to Barnette’s framework. Pastors and ministry leaders will benefit by putting the principles in this book into practice. Consider this book as a consultant in ministry.

Barnette includes a ministry plan format as well as outreach ministry ideas to assist the leader in moving the church forward. The ministry plan is a helpful tool for leadership development. Barnette states, “Do let prayer undergird all you do. Don’t underestimate its power to tear down strongholds and the spiritual resistance that exists in the community you desire to reach” (173).

*Keith Darlington, D.Min. student
Rawlings School of Divinity
Liberty University
Lynchburg, Virginia*



Faith & Fake News: A Guide to Consuming Information Wisely.
By Rachel I. Wightman.

Eerdmans, 2023. ISBN: 978-0-8028-8245-5. 192 pages. Paper. \$19.99.

Rachel Wightman, a university librarian, has written an easy-to-follow guide that provides tools for consumers of information to navigate online spaces (algorithms) by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (19).

Knowing about targeted algorithms, misinformation, and biases that support the views and searches of users, Wightman provides three pieces of advice for discerning facts from misinformation on emotionally charged issues (35). First, we need to understand that the information landscape is wide open and full of both useful and misleading news. Second, we need to evaluate the information by factchecking websites and examining the credentials of the sources. Third, we need to discern how the reader should engage with the information. Wightman believes that Christian humility and a prayerful attitude which seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit provides a path for Christians (22).

Consider the example of doctors who provided advice on social media during the COVID pandemic. Are they special-

ists in infectious diseases or physicians at a local hospital stating their opinions? Lateral reading dives into the history of sources to expose bias and discover the context of the information (99). How should one respond when detecting deceptive cues that are designed to provoke an emotionally charged response?

The acronym, *APPLY*, invites us to discern credible information. *Authority* examines whether the information is from an educated and reliable source in the field. *Purpose* probes whether the source has an agenda beyond education or information. *Publishers* can also have agendas to promote political and religious views that elicit passion. *List* the sources or bibliography to check for diversity of viewpoints. *Year* of publication is important to avoid outdated information.

While algorithms identify the search engine patterns of users (possibly to keep them in their own information bubble), Wightman encourages users of the internet to seek diverse points of view and expand their worldview. If done with a desire to build the kingdom of God and to seek truth for the sake of neighbors, the internet can help to engage people in a loving way (Mark 12:30-31; 150).

When communicating with people online, especially those from foreign countries, the author encourages relationship building tools: Listen more! Talk less! Focus on building relationships! (157). Christians are not to sit on the sidelines when discussing difficult topics but are called to find common ground with other people. Then the internet can become faithful news. This book is an easy-to-read and practical resource for those new to the complex and confusing world of social media, information technology, and online research. Reflection questions accompany each chapter.

*David Coffin
Retired ELCA Pastor
West Union, Iowa*

Enjoy reading *Currents*?

Consider supporting *Currents* with an advertisement of:

- Your academic program
- Publications
- Events and conferences

We can help you prepare your ad and find the best pricing for your needs.