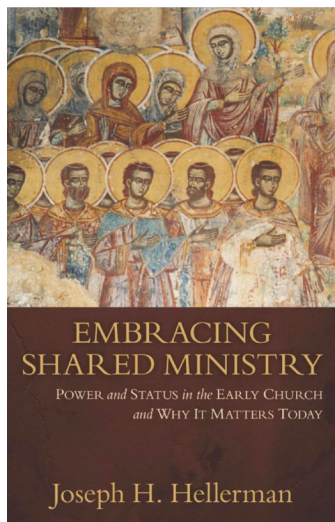




Book Reviews

October 2017

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben



Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today. By

Joseph H. Hellerman. Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8254-4264-3. 313 pages. Paper. \$17.99.

Who leads the local church? In most Protestant churches today in the United States, a senior pastor does. Is this a biblical model? In this book Hellerman argues that “none of Paul’s congregations had a solitary (or “senior”) pastor figure. All were led by a plurality of overseers. And Paul modeled team leadership in his own life and ministry” (193). The thesis of Hellerman’s book is as follows: that “the local church should be led by a plurality of pastor-elders who relate to one another first as siblings in Christ, and who function only secondarily—and only within the parameters of that primarily relational context—as vision-casting, decision-making leaders for the broader church family” (17). Hellerman contrasts this both with Old Testament and modern business leadership models.

The book is organized into three parts, with part one titled “Power and Authority in the Roman World: The Social Context of the Pauline Mission.” Here the focus is on Philippi as a Roman colony and how that informs its social stratification. The chief pursuit in this communal context was the pursuit of honor as “the *public* recognition of one’s social standing” (65, citing Moxnes), and Hellerman explains the ways in which people proclaimed their status-ranking as a result.

Part two is “Power and Authority in the Early Church: Paul’s Cruciform Vision for Authentic Christian Leadership.” Here Hellerman reads Philippians chapter two with an eye toward the background given in part one, demonstrating how Paul counter-culturally called the Philippians to live as a family (which often meant stepping down the status ladder, as Jesus did). And within families, jockeying for power and honor was off-limits.

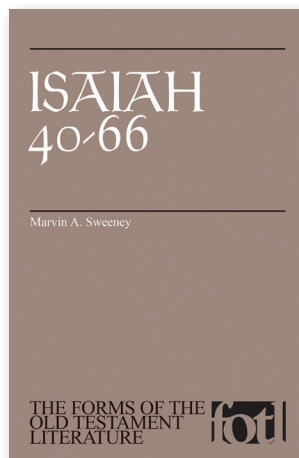
In part three, “Power and Authority in the Church Today: Cultivating a Social Context for Servant Leadership,” Hellerman draws practical connections between Paul’s ecclesiology and

churches today. While servant leadership is an obvious emphasis in the New Testament, he argues that the reason so many local church leaders struggle to embody it is because of the leadership structures in place. He calls for a new “social context” that structures leadership according to plurality and relationships.

This book will be of interest to anyone who is interested generally in New Testament ecclesiology as well as those who have questioned the ways in which most local churches “do” leadership. Its strengths are many, including the analysis of status and honor in the Roman world, the ways that Hellerman points out similarities and differences between their context and ours, and the many charts and illustrations. Possible weaknesses include the question of how (and why) women might fit theologically into the model Hellerman describes—the gender issue is only briefly mentioned—as well as more detail on how this “family” dynamic affects relationships between pastor-elders and the rest of the church community. And how might this affect the question of who is paid to be a leader and who is not?

Overall, I recommend the book highly as a way into thinking more deeply about New Testament ecclesiology and why it may matter in local contexts today.

Holly Beers
Westmont College



Isaiah 40–66. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature. By Marvin A.

Sweeney. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6607-3. xx & 412 pages. Paper. \$55.00.

This is the nineteenth volume in the FOTL commentary series published over the last five decades. Sweeney also wrote the FOTL commentary on Isaiah

1–39, but he undertook this second volume only when Roy F. Melugin, the original intended author died. Sweeney is among the leading Jewish exegetes of the Hebrew Bible in the United States and writes with authority and clarity. Readers will use this book with great profit.

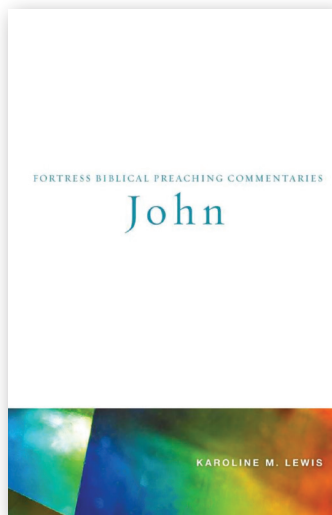
Sweeney begins with an introduction to the whole book of Isaiah. This analysis goes beyond the identification of the usual three editions of the book since both 1–39 and 56–66 in his view came from several hands. The chapters assigned to Second Isaiah, 40–55, however, stem from one hand and were written in Babylon. Sweeney identifies an eighth-, a seventh-, and a sixth-century edition of the book, with the final edition coming in the fifth-four century BCE at the time of Nehemiah and Ezra. The sixth-century edition served as part of the dedication ceremony



of the Second Temple and pays special attention to the division between the righteous and the wicked. Like other contemporary scholars he attempts to make sense of the book as a whole. Chapters 1–33 look forward to an ideal Davidide while chapters 34–66 look forward to the rule of Cyrus the Persian and the rule of Yahweh, but no longer to a Davidide.

The layout of the commentary can be sampled in his discussion of Isa 44:24–48:22. It consists of a very detailed outline called Structure (108–112), an explication of that structure (122–142), a discussion of this pericope's genre (142–146) and setting (147–156), and bibliography on this passage (156–157), in addition to an exhaustive bibliography of the whole book of Isaiah (1–10). Sweeny does not provide a new translation, but he refers to the Hebrew text a number of times in transliterated form. He is well acquainted with contemporary Christian scholars on Isaiah, but interprets the book within the context of the Old Testament period. A glossary of form critical terms is also included (386–412).

Ralph W. Klein
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries: John. By Karoline M. Lewis. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9924-6. vii & 263 pages. Paper. \$22.00.

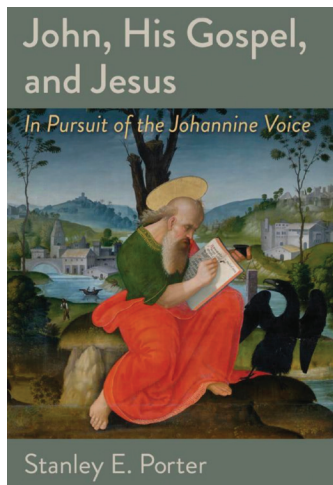
Karoline Lewis's goal in this Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentary is to help parishioners and preachers gain a deeper understanding of John's "unique appreciation of the Christ-event" (xiii), inspiring them to find meaningful ways to witness and/or renewing their eagerness to follow Jesus. To achieve this goal, Lewis includes an introduction, nine chapters that discuss fairly large sections of the text—to help the reader make the connections that John makes—and text boxes that highlight connections between John's text and the Revised Common Lectionary. Her hope is that her commentary will invite playful creativity and imagination, and stimulate a new encounter with John's text and with the Jesus presented there.

Lewis provides a concise but helpful introduction that has a twin focus on the context of the gospel as a whole, but also the specificity of the text. She stresses the importance of hearing the text instead of the world behind the text, but she does not hesitate to consider historical-critical information when it is important for understanding. Lewis pushes back against the understanding of John as "a spiritual gospel" with all the difficulties that come with that title, including its status as merely a supplement to the Synoptic Gospels. Her brief discussion of the history of interpretation of John captures the pulse of current scholarship and presents Lewis's perspective in a clear but respectful way. For Lewis, John's gospel "longs to be preached" (1). She concludes her introduction by identifying eight major themes, introduced in the Prologue and rehearsed throughout the gospel. These themes, for Lewis, provide a classification scheme that allows a reader to interpret any passage in light of the whole of John's story of Jesus.

Lewis spends a significant amount of time exploring the Prologue as a summary of John's gospel. Using insights from the Greek text, she points out how what appears first in the prologue comes back full circle by the gospel's end. The remaining eight chapters are a blend of concise commentary and insightful discussions of possible approaches for preachers. For example, Lewis's discussion of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus includes the importance of the nocturnal setting and the subtleties of the dialogue. She points out the connections in this part of the gospel to the themes of abiding and judgment, among others. Then, in her "Connections to the Lectionary" section, she reviews where the passage appears in the lectionary. She points out the importance of reading the entire passage concerning Nicodemus, even though the lectionary does not require it. She also urges the preacher to explore how the passage's themes are first presented in the prologue.

Karoline Lewis's book is an excellent resource for preachers, particularly those preachers who follow a lectionary and encounter long stretches of the text of the Fourth Gospel. It is a great resource for those scholars of John's gospel who want a concise, balanced, and well-researched summary of current Johannine scholarship. It will also be very beneficial for interested lay persons who want to participate in an engaging dialogue with the world of John's Jesus.

Allison deForest
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia



John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice. By Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7170-1. v & 297 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

Stanley Porter describes this book as a monograph in which he attempts to discern how a distinctive Johannine voice relates the story of

Jesus. The monograph is essentially a collection of essays that approach what are, for Porter, recurring and significant issues relating to John's gospel and the Jesus portrayed there. In contrast to other scholars, Porter attempts to integrate rather than juxtapose John's telling of the story with the person of Jesus seen elsewhere in scripture. There are five issues that Porter feels need discussion, all of which relate to a tendency by New Testament scholarship to downplay the historicity of John's gospel. He focuses in particular on theories regarding the gospel's composition and its literary features. Porter's work aims at demonstrating that John's gospel is a reliable historical guide for the life of Jesus, equal in this regard to the Synoptic Gospels.

Porter includes an introduction in which he details the issues of interest to him. The remainder of the book entails nine independent chapters that delve in greater depth into these issues as windows through which to view the historical figure of Jesus. The first essay revisits the dating of John's gospel based on manuscript evidence and aspects of the Greek correlated with archeological finds, which Porter believes points to an early date of composition. Porter's second essay addresses the purpose and original audience of John's gospel. Based on the narrative's structure, its vocabulary, its cast of characters and their presentation, and the final statement regarding Jesus' identity, Porter believes the gospel was intended as a public proclamation of the messiahship of Jesus.

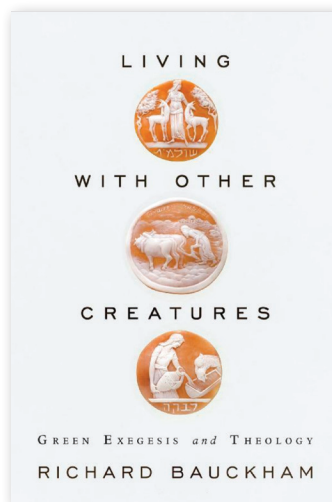
The rest of the book proceeds in much the same way. Porter examines source criticism regarding John's gospel, seeking to demonstrate that it reflects authentic source material. He conducts an analysis of the Prologue using a variety of critical methods to demonstrate that it is a creative and integrated introduction to the gospel—one that reflects the theological framework of Hellenistic Judaism in the first century. Porter then examines how the "I am" statements shape how Jesus is disclosed as Christ, the Messiah. Other topics include Jesus and the Jews, Truth, the Passover theme, and the 'double' ending to John's gospel.

Porter's writing is thorough, detailed, and careful to represent alternative positions in respectful ways. For those inter-

ested in questions regarding the historical Jesus and John's gospel, the book will be a valuable resource. It may also be a fine dialogue partner for scholars and interpreters interested in literary features of John's gospel, theories of its development, or the theology expressed in the text.

Allison deForest

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia



Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology. By Richard Bauckham. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-1-6025-8411-2. Paper. xiv & 256 pages. \$34.95.

This book presents a Christian approach to all living creatures with an awareness of multiple eco-

logical crises, undertaking a green exegesis of the Scripture for making it into the central themes of Christian theology. Jürgen Moltmann and Francis of Assisi remain influential thinkers in the author's development in critical response to the challenge of Lynn White. The latter accused Genesis and the Christian tradition to be the ideological roots of the ecological problem (xi). The author makes the case for a truly Christian "green theology" in terms of ecological hermeneutics. Over the course of some twenty-five years, the author has been committed to the field of ecology, Bible, and the community of creation. His theological project focuses upon the praise of God who is the creator and renewer of the whole creation. With this major concern in mind, the author warns modern humanity to end the war of aggressive conquest against God's other creatures. His major correction is given to human authority in creation in Genesis 1:26–28, which has been misused "to mandate the scientific-technological project of achieving unlimited domination of nature" (3).

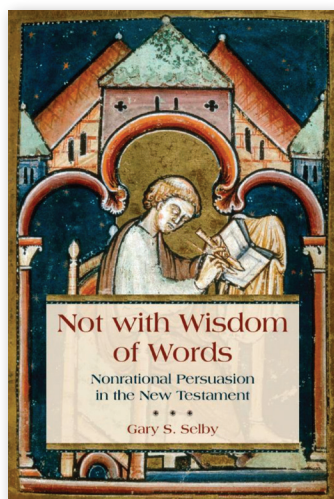
Against a mandate for dominion and exploitation, the Genesis story entails a more comprehensive horizon in terms of stewardship, which characterizes the human role as care and service, with respect to accountability to God and the glory of God. Human life is embedded in the natural world, with other creatures, plants, and animals. It is in dependence upon the natural systems of life, such that human creation in the image of God does not eliminate a fundamental relationship with other creatures. A theocentric understanding of creation with emphasis on God's Sabbath day (Gen 2:2) runs counter to an



anthropocentric notion of dominion. God's covenant with Noah includes his decedents together with every living creature, and it also retains divine promise never again to destroy the earth (6). In the author's biblical exegesis, the theocentric perspective on creation runs through the New Testament, and finally in the revelation, in which all creatures, both animate and inanimate, worship God (Rev 5:13).

This book is biblically grounded, theologically astute, and filled with historical current resources for promoting a green grace of Christian faith. I recommend this book especially to those who are interested in the biblical contribution to ecology for the responsibility of theology and church.

*Paul S. Chung, Th. D.
Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church*



Not with Wisdom of Words: Nonrational Persuasion in the New Testament. By Gary S. Selby. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8028-7300-2. x & 197 pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Not with Wisdom of Words challenges the *modus operandi* of rhetorical studies of the New Testament. Author Gary Selby sees in the discipline a rational bias. He finds an underappreciated aspect of ancient rhetoric, found in both Aristotle and Gorgias: the poetic's ability to absorb the reader through *mimesis*—the ability to transport an audience into an experience, and *phantasia*—bringing before the audience's imagination visions that they have not personally experienced. Aided by the work of a minority of rhetorical scholars, Selby argues that this “extrarational” communication can function as an end, not merely a means, of rhetorical persuasion. He makes the case that this rhetorical *telos* serves to nurture the experience of Christian faith, which is more *ecstatic* than rational. It is this ecstatic end, Selby argues, that many of the New Testament texts are attempting to reach. By absorbing their audiences into a Christian experience, they seek to cultivate Christian virtues.

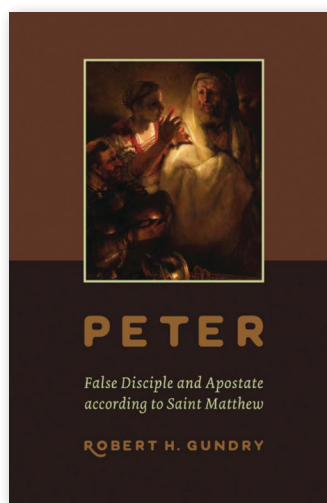
Selby chooses four Pauline texts to demonstrate his thesis. He locates these passages within the rhetorical structures of their books to show that their contributions to Paul's greater arguments are not aiming at rational persuasion but extrarational transport. First Thessalonians 4:13–18, for example, fosters hope amid persecution by drawing the Thessalonian believers into a vision of the eschaton. This vision was not cast to teach the church any-

thing about eschatology that Paul had not already taught them; rather, it was designed to give them a “vivid mimetic representation of . . . the second coming of Christ” (48) in order to stir their hope for it.

In one sense, Selby's book has a very narrow focus: it seeks to add an unconsidered element to the discipline of rhetorical criticism. The implications of his observations, however, are far-reaching. In his section on the liturgical nature of Ephesians 1, for example, he enters into a philosophical discussion of the persuasive nature of liturgy. In so doing, he not only sets up an ideological framework in which this passage can function, he gives philosophical fuel for guiding Christian worship. His work elsewhere suggests that we have an overly rationalistic interpretation of the Pauline texts because we have an overly rationalistic understanding of the Christian faith. Drawing on thinkers like Paul Tillich and James K. A. Smith, Selby gives a gripping description of the ecstatic nature of the Christian faith—using phrases like “re-orientation of one's fundamental way of being in the world” and “new social imagery” (169).

His observations would add depth to the minister's homiletical task. If what Selby says about these texts is correct, they should perhaps be preached with the purpose for which they were written: to draw the congregation into a mimetic communal experience.

*Joshua Cushing, Pastoral Apprentice
Crossroads Presbyterian Church, Middletown, Del.*



Peter: False Disciple and Apostate according to Saint Matthew. By Robert H. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7293-7, xx & 119 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

Robert Gundry is scholar in residence and professor emeritus of New Testament and Greek at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Author of many books (e.g., *Matthew: A Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*, 1994, and *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed., 2012), Gundry is known for work that takes New Testament texts seriously, argues persuasively, and is not afraid to offer new conclusions. This book reflects these scholarly traits very well.

Though comparatively short, *Peter: False Disciple* gives a non-traditional reading of Matthew's portrayal of Peter that is as substantiated as it is provocative: “the Gospel according to Saint Matthew portrays Peter as a false disciple who publicly apostate-

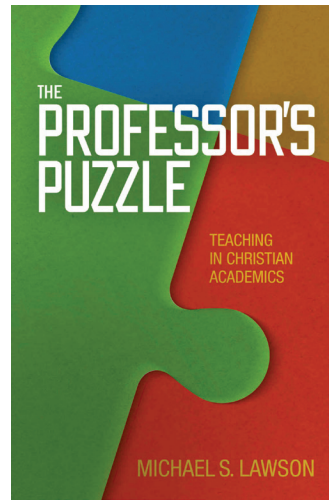


tized and who. . . is destined for eternal damnation” (vii). Drawing especially on careful Greek analysis and redaction criticism, the study walks systematically through each text in Matthew that pertains to Peter’s character, from major passages to passing references. Some distinctive interpretive moves are as follows: Peter is not among those confessing Jesus as “God’s Son” in 14:33, which makes Peter’s confession in 16:16 a matter of simply catching up; the “rock” of 16:18 is not Peter but Jesus’ word (cf. 7:24); that Peter receives “the keys” (16:19) implies no special status in the kingdom; and Jesus’ calling Peter a *skandalon* (16:23) associates him with the damned (cf. 13:41–42; 18:7–9). In short, Peter deserves no credit at all for his spotlight in 16:13–23. In addition, *Peter: False Disciple* interprets the narrative of Peter’s denial as his progressive distancing from Jesus’ presence into darkness “outside,” where Peter denies knowing Jesus, swears oaths, and weeps bitterly. Alongside Peter is Judas, who shows remorse and takes responsibility for his betrayal. Their juxtaposed depictions invite comparison of their commonalities. That Matthew’s empty tomb narrative does not single Peter out (cf. Mark 16:7; Matt 28:7) insinuates similar fates for both.

To its credit or its blame, Gundry’s analysis at points seems to find evidence for Peter’s apostasy in every Matthean passage that refers to him (e.g., on omitting “twice” and “vehemently” in 26:31–35, pp. 39–41; weeping “bitterly” in 26:75 as implying despair, not remorse [but cf. 2:18], pp. 54–55). Most of the time Gundry’s argumentation is carefully supported and quite persuasive. Key to his logic are the assumptions that Jesus’ parables about judgment in Matthew describe realities (vs. issue rhetorical provocation), and more importantly that all statements of forgiveness and grace simply do not pertain to Peter. Gundry considers pastoral implications of his conclusions, but finally believes “Peter appears to be headed for hell” in Matthew (104). This thesis seems contradictory to a gospel that associates Christ-following community with forgiveness (18:21–35), and depicts Jesus’ apostles—including Peter—as sent out with his presence despite their doubts (28:17–20). Gundry rightly challenges a long history of “airbrushing” Matthew’s Peter “because it offers comfort to the many who see in themselves a Peter-like mixture of good and bad behavior” (107). But Gundry’s “unblinking exegesis” (108) of Peter as condemned to hell presses one side of the coin a bit forcefully.

Focused, informed, textually-grounded, and original, *Peter: False Disciple* is as constructively argued as its conclusions are provocative. Despite its brevity and unsettling conclusions, the study’s coherence and clarity make it deserving of interpretive reckoning for years to come. Addressing New Testament scholars and secondarily church leaders, the book reflects the kind of quality scholarship and relentless focus on the text that Gundry has shown throughout his scholarly career.

Troy M. Troftgruben
Wartburg Theological Seminary



The Professor’s Puzzle: Teaching in Christian Academics. By Michael S. Lawson. Nashville: B&H, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4336-8410-4. xix & 296 pages. Paper. \$34.99.

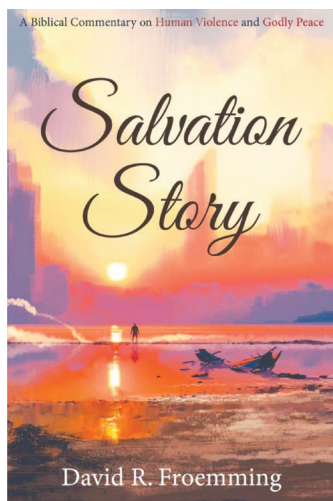
Michael S. Lawson seeks to provide a foundation and framework for Christians who teach in academic settings, especially for aspiring and recently hired educators. *The Professor’s Puzzle* succeeds in detailing the necessary skills for instructors and shares invaluable resources that Lawson encountered during his research. Yet the predominant appearance of Lawson’s Evangelical theology raises the question of whether this is truly applicable for Christian educators from other theological tribes.

The book begins with a foundational Christian philosophy for academic education, followed by a compelling argument for integrated learning and the necessity of exploring learning theories. The following chapters focus on practical aspects, such as designing a syllabus, how to create a constructive classroom experience, and how to operate within the various possible institutional settings. For any Christian whose vocation includes educating others, Lawson provides an opportunity to reflect on how faith informs our professions, as well as a valuable introduction to secular theoretical and practical tools.

Diligent readers must carefully sift the educational and theological content, especially for those who come from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or mainline traditions, because Lawson’s Evangelical background informs his conclusions, especially in the early chapters. Perhaps the most obvious example is Lawson’s tendency to speak of God with primarily male pronouns. Theologically, the apparent assignment of a single gender to God deviates from traditional claims about a God who holds attributes of all genders within the divine self. Pedagogically, only referring to God as a “him” makes it more difficult for female students and educators to see their place and role as God’s images.

Even with these limitations, *The Professor’s Puzzle* fills a needed gap in current educational theory for those Christians who consider their profession more than just a job but a vocation developed from God’s call. The referenced guidance and resources retain significant value. Before application in a classroom, readers must apply their own theological lens to Lawson’s work.

Rev. Andrew Tucker
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Lenoir-Rhyne University



Salvation Story. By David R. Froemming. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-5326-0277-1. xiv & 138 pages. Paper. \$21.00.

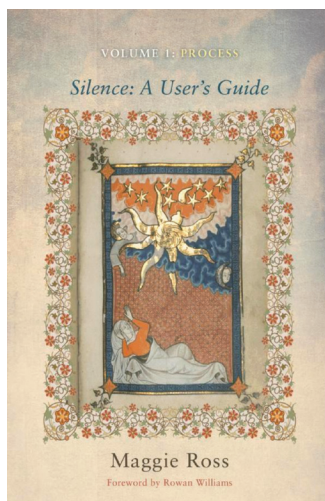
Froemming's *Salvation Story* sets out as a biblical commentary with its basis set in the mimetic theory of Rene Girard. Within the preface,

Froemming communicates his intention in this story: Christianity “marks the end of religion as a system that condones and conceals human violence” (viii). These guidelines form a powerful scope through which scripture is examined and engages contemporary culture.

This book represents a masterful approach at unmasking the human inclination toward violence. Importantly, it exposes the perpetuation of violence that has been carried out in the name of religion. At the center of this approach is the recontextualization of the scripture used for each commentary. One of the most impressive examples is the chapter dedicated to Romans 1–2 (117–125), which discusses ancient and modern attitudes on same-sex relationships. Throughout, Froemming employs the contexts of the biblical authors as well as the modern reader to interpret it against the *homo en cuvatus*, thus creating interesting access points for consideration of Richard Dawkins and his writings on religion and evolution in the conversation.

It is here that the book truly shines: the author forces the reader to consider the ongoing scapegoating within their own modern setting. However, Froemming stops short of telling the reader what to do. It is engaging in that it points out the violence and leaves the audience asking themselves “How do we go forward?” It seems commonsense to say that violence is not ended with further violence, yet the world continues to continue this model. *Salvation Story* sees the end of this cycle and the beginning of new life revealed in Jesus Christ.

Roger Fears
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Silence: A User's Guide. Volume 1: Process. By Maggie Ross. Eugene: Cascade, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-6256-4796-2. xiii & 233 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

Maggie Ross lives contemplatively and has shared the fruits of the labor of silence in several books. With the first volume of *Silence: A User's Guide*

she gives ordered reflection to the meaning of “the work of silence.” Whereas silence once was an indispensable dimension of the Christian tradition, the loss of silence, and even an appreciation for the value of silence, has impoverished our lives. A key claim: “Engaging deep silence does not depend on specialized language, celebrity gurus, exotic practices, weird phenomena, education, or belief. It costs nothing. It is quintessentially simple, and therefore difficult for modern people to realize fully; and it is, paradoxically, both far more personal and far more objective than any claims for the self-conscious mind” (25).

Ross is highly particular about defining what does and does not constitute silence. She precisely distinguishes what belongs to the self-conscious mind and what to the deep mind. The book is replete with references to classical literature to provide substance to the meaning of deep silence. Chapter Three: Language about Silence critically analyzes words used in reference to silence (for example, asceticism, experience, mysticism, spiritual direction) to reveal their validity and/or misunderstandings. One of the major contributions of the book is how it adds precision to the use of language about silence. The word “behold” from the Johannine tradition offers a hermeneutical key for entering into the way of silence.

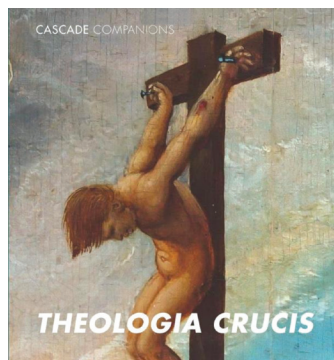
The work of silence is related to the process known in the Christian tradition as *theosis*. Through the recentering of the person in the deep mind one participates in the very life of God. “Early Christians were not preoccupied with ‘going to heaven’ but with heaven on earth, a new creation” (165). In three chapters devoted to “suppressing silence” Ross applies a surgeon’s scalpel to those authors misrepresenting the essence of deep silence, while reclaiming and interpreting voices resonant with the classical witnesses.

Ross invites us to imagine spirituality not as a separate compartment in life but to discover deep silence as a dimension of ordinary life. “Human beings have the potential, through intention and persistence, not only to receive discrete moments of



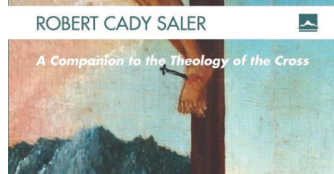
insight, but to re-center themselves so that their energy source arises from the unseen deep mind” (61). This book invites the reader to proceed with the journey.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Theologia Crucis: A Companion to the Theology of the Cross.

By Robert Cady Saler.
Eugene: Cascade, 2016.
ISBN: 978-1-4982-3191-8. Paper. 97 pages.
\$16.00.



Why? Ultimately, the sun's blazing heat melts all theologizing down to this one question. How do you think together God and

evil? Silence respects the honest questioner more than offering an answer, no matter how sincere. Job finally accepts no pabulum from his friends and prefers to rage. Fear and trembling is the only posture before the God who demands Abraham to sacrifice his Isaac.

By my best calculations no previous era has produced so many learned studies on theology of the cross. What is it about the end of modernity yielding putrid fruit, the proliferation of human beings as agents of hate and scapegoating, to generate cross theology? Every day instant news of tragedies and atrocities. *Theologia crucis* is never an answer, rather a poetics: Alyosha kissing his brother upon hearing the devastating logic of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor.

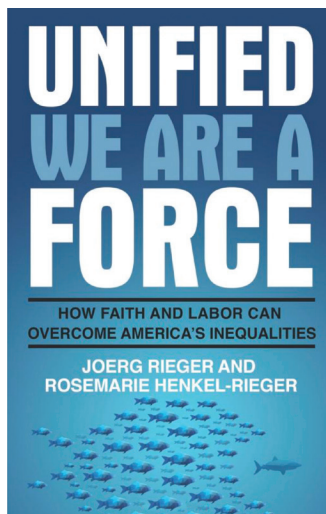
Saler is a creative and reliable guide to Luther's thought. The claim: "...Jesus' life, death, and resurrection [is] an event in the life of God that must impact all subsequent theologizing about the divine and God's relationship to a suffering world" (33). Religion has no answer short of "being in the world as Christ is...in the world as a people willing to be crucified, marginalized, and even—as Bonhoeffer was—martyred for obedience to the call of Christ to be against the forces of death" (41). Martyria is qualitatively different from offering cheap advice.

Crucified people (Song) are not seeking answers but interventions to end suffering: theology of resistance against the forces of death (62). Saler offers testimony from the lynching tree to the Latin American struggle against violent oppression to the civil rights movement in arguing that theodicy is addressed by praxis, not elocution.

The moment for becoming crucified Christ for the life of

the world is upon us again today. The "optics" of the marketplace is poised to keep the church distracted from its own most calling. This book is equipped by its length, price, and study guide to provide church leaders and adult educators a challenging resource for forming church as body of the crucified Christ for the life of the world. The world is waiting for this, our authentic response to its question why.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



United We Are a Force: How Faith and Labor Can Overcome America's Inequalities.

By Joerg Rieger and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger.
St. Louis: Chalice, 2016.
ISBN: 978-0-8272-3858-9. xvi & 176 pages.
Paper. \$15.99.

The coalition between church and the labor movement once was a force to be reckoned with. This strong alliance has been severed in the last decades both from the side of workers and from the side of the church. The erosion of solidarity among workers, once represented by labor unions, has been a targeted consequence of an increasingly globalized economy. Workers have been coerced to choose eviscerated wages and benefits under the shadow of threatened and real loss of jobs to workers in other countries. One of the greatest puzzles to be solved at the present moment is the alignment of many workers with an identity politics that only promises to increase their suffering. Meanwhile the church has retreated from labor advocacy on the basis of increasingly privatized understandings of religion and the proliferation of retribution theologies that God bless the prosperous and blame the working poor for their plight. The meanness of such equations has never been more apparent.

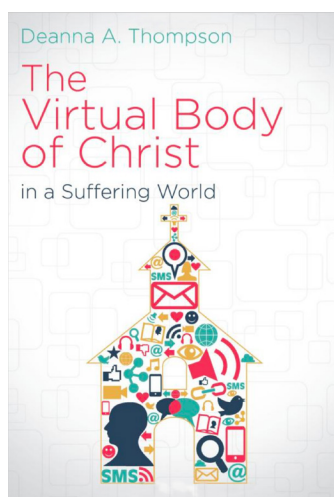
Joerg Rieger, liberation theologian, and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger, community and labor organizer, join forces to revive imagination for resisting the escalating economic inequalities and for rebuilding intentional collaboration between workers and church people. Their book is informed by their own extensive involvements in activism at the juncture of church and labor in Dallas, Texas, although their experiences transcend that locale. They propose moving the church beyond conventional understandings of advocacy to what they name "deep solidarity" (Chapter 3). This entails investing in relationships between church people and the cause of workers by engaged participation.



Endangered church and endangered labor reclaim ancient biblical purposes as they join together in common cause (Chapter 5).

This book could be used with great benefit by church groups seeking to reconnect faith and daily life concretely by juxtaposing faith and work. The wisdom of *United We Are a Force* is both theologically accessible and practically applicable. The authors encourage us to build relationships with people committed to economic justice, as is also in accord with the ELCA social statement on the economy, [*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*]: <http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Economic-Life>). “The good news is that we do not need to reinvent the wheel; we can join forces with existing groups like Jobs with Justice, Interfaith Worker Justice, CLUE, PICO and form alliances with others who are already involved in the struggle” (149). We are reminded that the status quo will only change when we choose to join and organize together. Only united are we a force.

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The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World. By Deanna A. Thompson. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-5018-1518-8. x & 131 pages. Paper. \$19.99.

The occasion for this book was the author's own crucible of diagnosis and treatment of life-threatening

illness. Thompson describes how the compassionate ministry she received from others through virtual communications transformed her own understanding of how the Spirit of God can and does employ these media as means of grace. She offers a deeply biblical and theological reflection on the nature of the church as body of Christ to tell her story.

The body of Christ has always communicated virtually from the times of the New Testament epistles to today's multiple means of virtual connectivity. Thompson is discerning in making her case for the value of these contemporary forms. She is fully aware of how online involvements can create dependency, be shallow, or even cause harm. Illness, however, was the occasion for her conversion from skepticism to critical appreciation of electronic communications to extend neighborliness.

Thompson makes clear the indispensable value of embodied relationships. Nothing can replace face-to-face encounters with other individuals. And where we already have personal relationships with others, these can be nurtured and deepened with the ongoing contact made possible over distance. Yet Thompson also testifies how messages from individuals previously unknown to her established bonds of affection and care even though these relationships were only formed through virtual means. At their best e-communications can provide a deepening of relationships through thoughtfully composed mutual sharing. “It is nothing short of astounding, this awareness I have been granted, of the power of the body of Christ and its ministry to the weakest members of the body, like me” (50).

Thompson affirms a theology of communal worship as formative for Christian existence as the body of Christ. Building on the liturgy with the sacrament of communion as the central practice, she stirs the imagination for how to extend with authenticity the reach of the worshipping community in ministering to the weakest members of the body and in connecting with young adults. These few pages (90-96) deserve careful attention for considering ways to steward worship faithfully, while also lengthening Christ's embrace to those who might only be reached digitally.

Very balanced and compelling in her argument, Thompson would have us take the time to pay attention to one another at the heart of the matter. “It is important for Christians to recognize that the body of Christ has always been a virtual body and that, in the digital age, incarnational living must be understood as incorporating virtual as well as face-to-face interactions” (110). God keeps calling us to creativity as agents of God's Word, Jesus Christ, for the life of the world.

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