tions is chapter eight, on Divine Determinism and Predestination, but that can still be read with some profit.

This is a great little book (176 pages). It would be a great refresher for pastors to read, to remind them of the prevalence of theological errors in our modern world, and as a diagnosis for proper preaching and teaching. It is also organized and written for laypeople in the church, who could read this book and study it together for their own edification. Olson is neither “preachy” nor condemnatory, but calmly and clearly sets out his positions and the core of Christian orthodoxy in an engaging manner. I heartily recommend this book.

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Although the title of Jennifer McBride’s new book trips splendidly through key words in systematic theology (liturgy, politics, discipleship, radical, gospel), and in fact is an exercise in theological heavy lifting, it is also wonderfully accessible. Its methodology is one of “lived theology,” which McBride defines as “theological reflection born from discipleship—from intentionally placing oneself in situations of social concern as one responds to Jesus’s call to follow him there” (8).

McBride, who currently serves as the president of the International Bonhoeffer Society—English Language Section, brings her Bonhoeffer scholarship to bear. But the beating heart of this work is her experience in community with the Open Door, “an intentionally interracial, residential, Christian activist and worshipping community in Atlanta, Georgia, that for thirty-five years has been engaged in works of mercy and justice focusing on homelessness, mass incarceration, and anti-death-penalty protest” (2).

If you follow McBride’s work, the serendipity here is not lost, that this book, the second academic work by one of our outstanding Bonhoeffer scholars, offers a report on what amounts to her own Harlem moment. Just as Bonhoeffer’s experience of the Harlem Renaissance affected his entire theological production, so too does McBride’s experience with the Open Door seem to have reoriented her approach to theology as a whole.

Back in 2013, I had the honor of reviewing McBride’s first book, The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness. In that work, McBride put forward the rather remarkable thesis that “acceptance of guilt is the only exclusive claim about itself that the church has over the world” (130). McBride seems to have taken this thesis and made it her life mission, because the work in which she has engaged at the Open Door is itself a life transformed by such confession. In fact, of her previous work I had argued that the ethnographic work she offered in the final chapters kept a bit of distance from the theology in the early chapters. Here, McBride has elided any distinction, because the entire book is an exercise in lived theology.

In particular, McBride believes, as she discusses in chapter 3 (Christmas), that it is only in the reducing of distance that we overcome the alienation that is part and parcel of guilt unprocessed. When we bring bodies into proximity, we habituate our actual bodies in the struggle. “If discipleship necessitates a new situation, this means that where we place our bodies matters. We learn through our bodies, our practice shapes our understanding, and so, like Jesus the homeless wanderer, the criminal on the cross, [we] intentionally place our bodies with the guilty” (22).

The focus on repentance is not ultimately
for the sake of feeling individually guilty, but rather as the energizing force for the shift that is necessary towards organizing and structural change. “As the definitive activity of the Christian, repentance arises from privileged disciples acknowledging their complicity in, and accepting responsibility for, societal structures, forces, and attitudes that bar [the condemned, excluded, and needy] from the abundant life of beloved community” (41).

McBride tells the story of the Open Door and her participation in it, often in incredibly moving detail. She offers, though, a rather compelling thesis, that the call to discipleship is for the whole church, and not just special set-apart people, even new monastic communities. She believes that standing with the guilty should not be the work of communities like the Open Door alone, but should be the central mark of discipleship and Christian community, precisely because this is how truth will be rendered, and the good news proclaimed, in all places.

If there is one weakness to the book, it is its attempt at doing too many things at once. It is a work of theological scholarship, a memoir of her experience with the Open Door, an exercise in lived theology, and a meditation on the liturgical calendar. It is a small criticism, nothing more, to note that it is this last structural element that feels the most forced.

But because it is an experiment in proposing radical discipleship for all, by necessity it must try to weave such discipling into the ordinary shape of Christian community, and so in this sense the intuition to traverse the liturgy has merit. It is a liturgical proposal with primarily ecclesial implications, as we then subsequently learn in the concluding chapters of her book.

“The renewing Spirit of Pentecost calls for a new ecclesial form, for privileged churches in the United States to become new social spaces that make beloved community concrete, however fragile their expression may be” (236). McBride’s radical proposal here is towards base communities in each congregation that commit to voluntary simplicity, a virtue ethic of freeing simplicity in place of the rule-based system of voluntary poverty. This is radical not in the sense of its hyper-spiritual practice but radical instead in its widespread repeatability/replicability in every context. She stakes as her inspiration the writing of Peter Maurin, who suggested the formation of hospitality houses rooted within existing congregations—“Christ Houses” rooting congregations in the works of mercy and justice that are the redemptive signs of God’s coming kingdom, the inauguration of beloved community. She concludes her book with brief descriptions of four communities that model this “Christ House” concept: Manna House in Tennessee, SAME Café in Denver, Colorado; Magdalene House, also in Tennessee; and New Hope House in Georgia.

I conclude here with a long but remarkable quote from her chapter on Lent. I had never quite considered the juxtaposition of morality and lament in these terms, but find the reflection so compelling. “‘Morality,’ as Barth and Bonhoeffer define it, not only impairs our hearing the alarm cries of conscience, it leaves us, in Barth’s words, ‘impertinent,’ dismissive and functionally unsympathetic to the needs of the strangers in our midst. Whereas lament is attuned to the audible and silent cries of the oppressed and despised, and drives us toward solidarity with them, a focus on ‘morality’ creates distance and division. Whereas lament opens the church up to a new love, new concern, and new creation, moralism closes Christians off to God and others. Moralism and lament are not only opposite dispositions, though; morality, as Barth defines it, actually ossifies faith into ideology—into rigid religious, social, and political
beliefs that resist the redemptive movement of the living God” (124).

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A popular series on Public Television for several seasons was Grantchester. The lead character, Sidney Chambers, in addition to being an Anglican clergyman, invested a significant amount of time helping local police solve crimes. To his credit as a parish priest, he was also seen attending to church concerns such as counseling those in need, running a parish, and delivering homilies.

One episode, however, showed the unmarried Chambers preaching on love, then rushing off to engage in episode-ending sex with a dear—but still married—female friend. The episode made for provocative television. Commercial popularity notwithstanding, the episode would have been less sensational, but more ethical, if Father Chambers had read and taken to heart The Minister as Moral Theologian. In her book, Sondra Wheeler insists that pastors teach ethics by how they handle (or avoid handling) morally challenging situations.

In the opening segment of the book, Wheeler discusses the necessity—and the difficulty—of faithful preaching. Preaching can be dangerous because there are many difficult texts in the common lectionary and many difficult situations in life to be addressed by those texts. But it is better and more honest to address such difficulties than it is to ignore them. Wheeler discusses four challenges in preaching: responding to issues of evil and suffering; confronting difficult biblical texts that are often ignored; discussing morally troubling texts that raise the issue of right action; and examining controversial and divisive texts. Wheeler offers and discusses seven guidelines for speaking the Word in the face of difficulty.

At this point Wheeler’s observations, while helpful, tend to read a little like a how-and-what-to-preach manual. She offers seven numbered guidelines on what to say about texts that make demands; eight guidelines for