

# Reviews



**MARTIN LUTHER**, by Martin Marty. New York: Penguin, 2004. Pp. 199. \$19.95 (cloth).

The editors of the Penguin Lives series have assembled a prestigious roster of talent from the literary and academic worlds to write short biographies of figures that have made a large imprint on human history. The notables include Larry McMurtry on Crazy Horse, Garry Wills on St. Augustine, and Jane Smiley on Charles Dickens. And in a fitting nod to his stature as an historian of Christianity, they nominated Martin Marty to pen the life of Martin Luther. This was not a mistake. Marty's *Luther* is lively and engaging. It captures the German Reformer's social context while making clear that Luther's life and struggles were animated by an overwhelming desire to grasp the judgment and mercy of God.

Marty's method is to follow the basic chronological story of Luther and pause, where appropriate, to explain underlying theological concerns. This fits a life of Luther well, because the Reformer tended to write for the occasion and did not compose systematic treatises like his colleague Philipp Melancthon or the founder of the Reformed tradition, John Calvin. In other words, Luther's life story is never far from his treatises and commentaries. Marty is able to use this feature of Luther's life to his advantage as he allows his readers to see how the Reformer lived out his theology, as opposed to writers who did their work in relative isolation from the world. For example, Marty devotes considerable space to the three decisive treatises of 1520, *The Address to the Christian Nobility*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *Freedom of a*

*Christian*. He helps readers to see how the essential concerns of these writings flow from the hand of one who is in the middle of a dangerous fight with a hierarchical church whose authority structure is inextricably intertwined with its understanding of the sacraments.

Particularly instructive is Marty's summary of the *Freedom of a Christian*. He rightly locates the heart of that treatise in Luther's wonderful interpretation of "the happy exchange" where Christ's righteousness is traded for the sin of the believer. He quotes freely the marital images used by Luther to describe this transaction: "Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot...and adorns her with all his goodness" (64). Up to this point readers have followed Luther's story through his painful battle with doubt and unbelief in the monastery. Luther's inability to think, act, or feel his way to God has been highlighted. His liberation is grounded in the claim that God has made his way to him in Christ. But Marty the good Lutheran does not leave the relationship as an abstraction. He rightfully points to the cross and Luther's insistence that Calvary is not only an event in time but something that intersects the life of each and every believer.

Following this basic pattern of linking life and theology, Marty does justice (in summary form) to all the major crises that engulfed Luther. The 1520s covers the two-kingdoms doctrine (the Peasants' Rebellion), the bondage of the will (the challenge of Erasmus), and the sacramental controversies involving the Anabaptists and Zwingli. The last years of Luther's life

are punctuated by debates over the uses of the law (the debate with Agricola), obedience to rulers, the possibility of a rapprochement with Rome, and his harsh advice on the Jews.

Nor is the personal Luther lost in Marty's book. There are plenty of references to the swilling of beer, boisterous conversations with friends, and his ongoing struggle with doubt and despair. Luther's wife, Katherine von Bora, makes more than a cameo appearance. Marty makes clear the key role she played in the Reformer's latter years and how their marriage evolved into a relationship marked by tenderness and love.

Like other Penguin Lives, the text is not cluttered with expansive footnotes that speak to few outside the inner circles. Those interested in a more critical and extended study of Luther should follow Marty's advice and consult Martin Brecht's exhaustive biography or the numerous secondary works about his life and theology. The book also contains two helpful maps at the beginning (of Germany and the Holy Roman Empire) that help orient those unacquainted with the political and demographic peculiarities of early modern Europe.

However, this reviewer cannot resist a few critical comments as well. In searching for a framework to explain Luther's spiritual experience, Marty points the reader (25–27) to the patriarch Jacob's wrestling match at the ford of the brook Jabbok in Gen 32. Marty's claim is that Jacob's struggle mirrors Luther's own struggle with God. All this may be true, and Luther does comment insightfully on this text in his Genesis commentary. But the biblical reference remains obscure and is probably unknown (given current levels of biblical literacy) to most of this book's reading audience. Perhaps Marty has made a mistake in using this passage to illuminate a key incident in Luther's life. Care must be taken to not read modern psychological categories uncritically into the life of Luther. Marty is doubtless aware of this danger and this is probably why he references the Jacob text—it clarifies that the foe was external and not merely in-

ternal. But how many will understand this if they don't know the story in the first place?

A second criticism has to do with Marty's tendency to refer to Luther's apocalyptic and eschatological worldview without providing the reader with a wider historical frame of reference for these terms. Luther, like many of his fellow Reformers, believed he was living in the last days. This is essential to grasp in order to appreciate some of Luther's views on the papacy and the political tumult of his age. Most modern readers have difficulty understanding, let alone appreciating, such a perspective. Concern with the end times is associated with the loony fringe and the theologically unbalanced. Marty might have helped us by showing how and why apocalypticism pervaded the late medieval period and how Luther's views were actually "mainstream" for his age. Interested readers might consult Robin Bruce Barnes's *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* for a clear and helpful presentation of these issues.

Overall, Marty's *Luther* is a fresh reading of the Reformer. Pastors and church leaders who know the story well can still profit from this book. It covers familiar ground but is not pedantic or boring. It surely can infuse preaching and teaching with some of the Reformer's vigor and passion. And that would surely not be a bad thing in today's church.

Mark D. Tranvik  
Augsburg College  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

**THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY: RE-  
DISCOVERING A LIFE OF FAITH**, by  
Marcus J. Borg. San Francisco: Harper  
San Francisco, 2003. Pp. 239. \$14.95 (pa-  
per).

Marcus Borg writes that he has spoken over the past decade to "more than two hundred Christian groups throughout North America" (xiii). Originally invited as a historical-Jesus scholar, he writes that these talks inevitably moved to "larger

questions of the Christian life: God, faith, the Bible, biblical authority, atonement, resurrection, the creed, prayer, ethics, Christianity and other religions" (xiii). The fruit of Borg's thinking on these topics can be found in his newest volume, in which he presents what he calls the "heart" of Christianity. In these pages, Borg considers what is "most central to Christianity and the Christian life" (xiii), while reminding us that our faith is "deeper than any particular set of...ideas and beliefs" (1).

Indeed, Borg argues that ideas and beliefs are part of the problem faced by the church today. For millions, he writes, Christianity "makes little or no sense" (xi) and has become identified with "believing 'iffy' things to be true" (30). In response, Borg writes with two purposes. First, he writes with a conviction that Christianity makes sense, presenting "no serious intellectual obstacles" (xi). Second, he writes with a passion to communicate this to those "who have left the church," those who "remain within the church but struggle with the beliefs they learned in childhood," or those who "find little in Christianity that attracts them, but...are hungry for a source of meaning and values" (xii).

Addressing these audiences, Borg describes a vision of Christianity he calls "the emerging paradigm," contrasting this with what he calls "the earlier paradigm." Borg writes that the earlier paradigm—a "relatively recent way of seeing the tradition, shaped by the conflict with modernity over the past few hundred years" (12)—*sees the Bible* as "a divine product with divine authority," *interprets the Bible* through a "literal-factual" lens, *understands the Bible's function* primarily as a "revelation of doctrine and morals," and *focuses Christian life* on "an afterlife and what to believe or do to be saved" (15). Because it "dominates Christian television and radio," he writes, "it is the most publicly visible vision of Christianity and the Christian life" (6).

In contrast, the emerging paradigm—which Borg writes has been "visible for well over a century" (13)—*sees the Bible* as "a human response to God," *interprets the Bi-*

*ble* through a "historical and metaphorical" lens, *understands the Bible's function* primarily as being "metaphorical and sacramental," and *focuses Christian life* on "transformation in this life through relationship with God" (15).

While Borg is interested in promoting the emerging paradigm, he does not do so at the expense of the earlier paradigm. "It's not that one of these paradigms is right and the other wrong" (17), he writes, and in a compelling chapter on what it means to be "born again," he even suggests the emerging paradigm has something to learn from the earlier paradigm. "If mainline Christians can learn to speak of the importance of being born again," he writes, this image may serve as "a potential bridge metaphor between the two paradigms" (104).

Still, Borg believes the emerging paradigm "strikes a responsive chord among many" (xiii) who otherwise feel that Christianity has little or nothing to offer, and he spends most of his time explaining how for "these millions, the emerging paradigm provides a way of taking Christianity and the Christian life seriously" (18).

The first half of the book focuses on the major subjects of the Christian tradition—"Faith," "The Bible," "God," and "Jesus." Those familiar with Borg's work will not be surprised by what they find here, although he attempts to revisit these topics with new material and "in a fresh way" (xiii). The second half focuses on the Christian life, with chapters on "Born Again," "The Kingdom of God," "Thin Places," "Sin and Salvation," "Christian Practice," and "Being Christian in an Age of Pluralism."

There is much in these pages worth commending. In the chapter on faith, for example, Borg does a masterful job of affirming the sense of faith as assent to certain truths while enriching and augmenting this sense with three more relational and more dynamic definitions: faith as trust, faith as fidelity, and faith as vision. In the mind of this reviewer, this chapter alone is worth the price of the book. Similarly, the chapter on the Bible will be helpful for those who struggle with the earlier paradigm's "emphasis

on biblical infallibility, historical factuality, and moral and doctrinal absolutes" (43).

Borg's treatment of sin in the second half of the book—and his suggestion that we might be wise to more regularly lift up biblical images like "bondage and exodus, exile and return" (177) for "naming what is wrong" (167)—challenges the reader to seriously consider whether "the dominant place of the language of sin and forgiveness in the Christian imagination" (166) illumines or clouds the Christian life. And the chapter on Christian practice reminds us—particularly those of us who stand in a Protestant tradition often nervous about works—that "faith and practice are not opposites" (188).

Of this book, Frederick Buechner says Borg writes "with a simplicity that never becomes simplistic." And so he does. In this accessible and thoughtful volume that regularly succeeds at presenting a vision of Christianity that "satisfies both head and heart" (xiii), Borg offers much "for lovers of faith and those seeking a faith to love" (xiv).

Tim Westermeyer  
Mount Olivet Lutheran Church of  
Plymouth  
Plymouth, Minnesota

**ON THINKING THE HUMAN: RESOLUTIONS OF DIFFICULT NOTIONS**, by Robert W. Jenson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. 86. \$16.00 (paper).

Pithiness has consistently been a hallmark of Robert W. Jenson's theological project. His terse lucidity justifies Gilbert Meilander's comment on the back cover of the book that in reading Jenson, you must "eliminate the word *skim* from your vocabulary." Anyone who has read Jenson, especially such books as *The Unbaptized God*, or put themselves in the hands of Jenson's magnum opus, *Systematic Theology* (Oxford), knows this to be the case. But in Jenson's most recent collection of essays, this pithiness is on full display, combining the flash and energy of fireworks with the depth and profundity of still deep water.

His is a clever project. Take an anthropological notion from the theological and philosophical tradition, one beset with problems and confusions that have stymied even our best thinkers. Think about death, or consciousness, freedom, reality, wickedness, or love. Then in a neo-apologetic mode, find a "resolution" for the issue in the rediscovery and reapplication of trinitarian theology.

Then, pick only those anthropological notions "that do not merely pose certain problems but that are themselves hard to think" (xi). In this way, the essays become not only explorations, but actual confessions, the proclamation of the gospel in the midst of anthropological notions that are indeed hard to think, or maybe only thinkable by reference to the specifically triune God. Jenson, as a good rhetor, even heads off our question in advance. Since each essay follows a similar format of problem, reflection, and trinitarian resolution, he imagines the reader "coming to say at about the two-thirds point of each chapter, 'Here we go with the Trinity again!'" His simple reply: "Well—Yes."

Since Jenson's book is a collection of brief essays on "the resolution of difficult notions," I have not attempted to summarize his thoughts in this brief review. Rather, I provide three teasers, and one challenge, in the hope of furthering a conversation around this rich collection.

Teaser #1: Chapter one, "Thinking Death," was, according to Jenson, written first. As such, it functions as the paradigmatic essay. At the two-thirds point in this first essay, Jenson lays down the theme, "One among those who have died is the Lord Jesus" (9). This makes death a part of the Triune God's life. As such, death is not opposed to life but rather belongs to that life which is the ground of all life, namely that relationship between the Father and the Son as it is lived in the Spirit. If the Son can die, I too can die. To think this death, this specific death, means to think of death not as "evaded" but rather "transcended" (10). To think death properly is to pray, to speculate on the Trin-

ity, or to reverence an icon, among other things.

Teaser #2: Can the church baptize a robot that when asked, “Do you believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” responded, without explicit antecedent programming, “I believe, and ask God to help my unbelief?” (16)? So begins Jenson’s second chapter. Jenson’s critique of philosophical explanations of consciousness (especially Descartes’s) rests to a considerable degree on issues of grammar. This is not surprising, nor inappropriate, given the grammatical turn in much of contemporary philosophical reflection. Jenson’s non-reductive theory of consciousness distinguishes itself from the divinizing transcendentalism of much contemporary reflection (beginning with Kant and proceeding through Emerson up into present-day popular American mythology and religiosity, the little spark of divinity in each of us), and states, in effect, one is holy, one is divine: the creator God. Creatures, on the other hand, “are creatures all the way down” (25). Consciousness is wholly this Triune God, then, in God’s “transcendental unity of apperception,” as a result of the perspectives each of the Trinity has within their life as communion. Our consciousness, if it exists, exists only in participation in this consciousness, not a consciousness that God has, but that God is.

What is more, this divine consciousness is our consciousness because in the person Jesus there is a unity of the *divine* community and narrative with the *human* community and narrative. Jenson is then able at this point to define consciousness, a definition that is certainly unique, and profoundly differentiated from Descartes’s definition: “To be conscious...is to be [either] one identity of the living triune God or to be one of the community for which this God makes narratively structured space in life” (30). Jenson concludes, based on this definition, that no robot can be conscious, and so should not be baptized.

Teaser #3: Much has been made of the Real Presence. Some of our churches are divided one from the other over differing un-

derstandings of the Real Presence. Many children are kept from communing until we are sure they “understand” the Real Presence of Christ in his meal. In all these cases, at issue is our “thinking” the Real Presence. After a beautiful and profound examination of the film *A Beautiful Mind*, Jenson radicalizes the Real Presence in this way. Rather than trying to understand the Real Presence through our varying and inadequate notions concerning reality, “the Son’s real body and blood [should be] the criterion of all our other attempts to grasp something real” (57). This resolution of a difficult notion is itself worth the price of the book.

The challenge: Although Jenson’s resolutions do indeed resolve, I observe one weakness in his thought. At each point along the way, I see the clear interrelation of the Father and Son and their role in these anthropological notions. But I am sometimes left confused concerning the Spirit. Theology in the twentieth century has helped us understand, possibly as never before, the doctrine of the Trinity, as well as the doctrine of the church. I contend that in spite of our inroads regarding an adequate pneumatology in the twenty-first century, what we lack is a material spirituality that connects the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrine of the church, and this lack finds its locus in an insufficient pneumatology. It may be that Jenson’s work falls prey to this same weakness, theologizing on the doctrine of the Spirit in some traditional ways that do not keep up with the theological and Christological insights that undergird the entire work.

My final recommendation: Read the book in a group or at the same time as some friends or colleagues, read one essay per month, and read them slowly. There are a few exasperating asides (the danger of pith is its occasional slide into the obtuse), usually in the footnotes, where you want to ask Jenson for greater detail. But all in all, the essays are a grandiloquent introduction to an oft-neglected (and often confused) area of study in the postmodern era—theological anthropology. If our churches ever con-

vene another Council (another work of Jenson in our context is his cosigning of the Princeton Proposal, a call for Christian unity by an ecumenical group of Christian scholars), I pray Jenson will lead a much-needed conversation on a truly theological anthropology grounded, as his is, in the life of the Triune God.

Clint Schnekloth  
East Koshkonong Lutheran Church  
Cambridge, Wisconsin

**LIVING BY FAITH: JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION**, by Oswald Bayer, trans. by Geoffrey Bromiley. Lutheran Quarterly Books, 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. 89. \$20.00 (paper).

Oswald Bayer, a prominent systematic theologian at the University of Tübingen, covers an exceptional amount of theological ground in this short book on justification and sanctification. This book is both a careful exposition of Luther's theology and a careful use of modern and contemporary thought in connecting justification and sanctification to political life, human hope, creation, and not least, the importance of justification for God's own being among us. Bayer weaves these many important questions and topics together by seeing them all as God's creative act.

The book starts with some observations on human life. In countless ways of life people argue about themselves, each other, and the world. Some go unnoticed and unrecognized while others force still more to acknowledge them. This is the true home for the language of forensic justification. A forensic view of reality involves lawsuits and legal contentions (8). In addition to drawing human beings into question, the context of acknowledgment and challenge draws God into the forensic sphere. Before this court, human beings ask how God is justified in light of certain histories or events. Bayer uses this to show two alternative forms of

contending with God in light of human suffering or meaninglessness (14).

In the middle of these arguments, disputes, and law cases, Bayer utilizes the language of creation to summarize how Luther understands God's activity of justifying the ungodly. In the gift of God's righteousness, human beings find themselves "in paradise for the first time" (28). Human beings are given creation again. In this he draws a deep connection between God's act of creating and God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ. The relationship of these two activities can often go awry, especially when God's redemption seems to place human beings out of touch with creation.

Here English readers may discover one of Bayer's unique contributions to theology. Some of Bayer's many contributions to German Protestant theology involve his reflection on creation. This view draws from both Luther's thought and from the often neglected contemporary of Immanuel Kant, Johann Georg Hamann. One of Hamann's phrases is very important for Bayer. God does not condescend to creatures in using creaturely signs to communicate. In such a scheme human beings would be asked to seek God behind, above, or within the signs given. Rather, "God speaks to the creature through the creature." This pregnant sentence does not just bear an important way to understand God's communication but also God's action of justifying, creating, and consummating.

Bayer also has sought to connect deep theological reflection with writings not often utilized as theological sources: hymns, catechisms, and poetry. At the book's heart lies Bayer's examination of Luther's hymn "Dear Christians, One and All." This is for Bayer the most significant trinitarian confession in existence. It summarizes all the key features of his proposal. God enters into this realm of dispute and justifications and suffers it, dies in it, and carries out the dispute. "In this way God takes the dispute into himself and overcomes it on our behalf" (53).

The second part of the pairing—sanctification—encounters the usual problem with forensic justification: If I am really a sinner

and only declared just, then is sanctification the place where I acquire that justice and overcome sin? Bayer, consistent with his view of justification as a return to creation, sees sanctification as “the institutional side of the event of justification” (59). It is not just that individual Christians undergo some process such as sanctification in social and civic life but also that people are sanctified through institutions (60). Bayer uses Luther’s reflection on the three estates of household, government, and the church to discuss this aspect.

In sanctification the course of history is not progress towards something new but instead getting creation back again, the original gift of creation (64). This makes for a different sort of eschatology: “with this faith and hope we need not flee from the present twilight between creation and consummation into the supposed clarity of a ‘hope for better times’ in this world’s history” (67). The hope Bayer here represents is not a hope for something new but rather the world getting itself back again. If the world under sin and evil is seen as paradise lost, this proposal reverses the matter. Here paradise is given to the world for the first time in God’s redemption.

In various ways the doctrine of justification has been described as that doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. Bayer’s book claims more than that. Indeed, since God and the world fall under the very debate, justification is also the doctrine under which God and the world stand or fall. At the very end of the book Bayer rejoins the disputation of human beings with God. Only this time there is an added element. Those ungodly who are justified may lament injustice and hope for justice to come and protest God with God (70). This sort of dispute Bayer rightly claims is the most proper sort of challenge to God. It is the challenge that asks God to be God (79).

The translation of Bayer’s book in this new series of Lutheran Quarterly Books has done an enormous service to English-language theology. With the high scholarly quality and theological energy of his other work in German, one could hope that more

translations of his works will appear in the near future.

Gregory A. Walter  
St. Olaf College  
Northfield, Minnesota

**THE GOD YOU HAVE: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND THE FIRST COMMANDMENT**, by Patrick D. Miller. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004. Pp. 81. \$6.00 (paper).

Patrick D. Miller is professor of Old Testament theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. As the title hinted, this book is a theological exposition on God in relation to the first commandment, politics, and religion.

Beginning with acknowledgements and ending with notes, this book comprises eight chapters with the following topics: (1) The First Commandment as Political Axiom; (2) What Do You Do with the God You Have? (3) The Prologue as Political Announcement; (4) Translating Politically; (5) The Economic God; (6) The Political Order as Other God; (7) The Positive Meanings of the First Commandment; and (8) The First Commandment and the First Table.

It may be helpful to be reminded that the first commandment is preceded by the following prologue before discussing the content of this book:

I am the Lord Your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; therefore you shall have no other gods before me or make images of anything and you shall not worship them because I the Lord your God am a jealous God. (Exod 20: 2–5)

In the first chapter, Miller defines and treats the first commandment as the pre-supposition and therefore the basis for all arguments and conclusions in both theology and politics. He then proceeds to expound on the interrelationship between God and his people, as described in the Old Testament. He asserts the validity and relevance of that interrelationship then as

well as now. In chapter three, Miller affirms that the prologue is a political statement, and it dictates loyalty as a precondition for God's people before God. Next, after explaining the centrality of the monotheistic assumption, he guides us to look at the inevitability of God's people living in the tension of choosing between the Lord and the other gods and/or other worldly powers.

In "Economic God," the fifth chapter, Miller builds his argument on a discussion of Baal, Mammon, wealth, production, and consumption. He relates them to Jesus' opinion on the incompatibility—or rather the impossibility—of serving two masters simultaneously. In chapter six, Miller again reaffirms the distinction of worldly power from the worship of God, referring to Jesus' reaction to those who tested him on the issue of taxation. It is important to note that in this chapter Miller discloses his own theological journey of reading the ten commandments as having to do with *obedience* rather than *loyalty* (41). Turning to the positive formulation of the Shema—"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our Lord, the God alone; so you shall love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4–5)—in the seventh chapter, Miller reinforces its insurmountable implications for human existence, our ways of being and living, thinking and acting. In the last chapter, Miller calls our attention to the seriousness of God, with reference to the issues of who/what God is and is not. In conclusion, he ends the book with this question directed to all his readers: "What do you do with the God you have?"

"What do you do with the God you have?" This is exactly the fundamental question posed to us after reading the book. Miller attempts to convey the idea that our response to this question should be obedience as children to God, our Father, not merely loyalty as citizens to the King, our Lord. This booklet (only eighty-one pages) is another brilliant star of Augsburg Fortress's Facets Series. One of the beauties of the books in this series is that they each treat a serious theological inquiry in a condensed

discussion. This concise treatment of a critical and challenging question regarding our faith and life will be welcomed not only by Christians sitting in the pews but also by seminarians who are in the process of learning, surveying, and forming their theological perspectives.

Alan L. Chan  
Chinese Lutheran Church  
San Francisco, California

**REGULATING RELIGION: THE COURTS AND THE FREE EXERCISE CLAUSE**, by Catharine Cookson. New York: Oxford, 2001. Pp. 269. \$45.00 (cloth).

**GETTING OVER EQUALITY: A CRITICAL DIAGNOSIS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN AMERICA**, by Steven D. Smith. New York: New York University Press, 2001. Pp. 214. \$25.00 (cloth).

In matters of religious liberty, the U.S. Supreme Court has been widely criticized since its 1990 decision in *Oregon v. Smith*. In *Smith*, the court held that peyote use by two state-funded drug counselors during services of the Native American Church was sufficient grounds for denial of their unemployment benefits. This ruling brought forth a flurry of response. In 1993, Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, rejected by the Court in *Boerne v. Flores* (1997). The result of these decisions has been a foreshortening of protections surrounding religious liberty. With *Getting Over Equality* and *Regulating Religion*, Steven Smith and Catharine Cookson contribute further to conflicting jurisprudence surrounding the *Smith* decision and its offspring. Both are critical of the decision's impact.

Smith asserts that free exercise jurisprudence should be informed by "prudence over principle and tolerance over equality" in a context where courts are "more deferential to the nonjudicial institutions of our society" (6). Smith argues that rather than attempting to discover enduring principles of religious freedom, statesmen should



again envision the freedoms we wish to hold, a process informed by discussions among the Founders. Smith critiques the principle of “equality” for its ham-fisted application in the *Smith* decision; he does not critique equality among religious groups but rather the equal flattening of all religious practice before the law. In his last chapter, Smith proposes a new rationality for religious plurality—what he calls “ultra-protestantism”—based more on restructuring society than the courts alone. Smith’s proposal is somewhat confusing, especially since he switches in his final chapter from legal and historical analysis to making a theoretical proposal for toleration based on theological humility. While compelling, Smith’s somewhat limited exposure to the theology and practice of interreligious engagement, and inattentiveness to the possibility of systemic coercion, leaves his practical proposal less than convincing.

Cookson, while arguing many of the same points as Smith, puts forth a more convincing methodological approach. With Smith, Cookson harbors significant disagreement with Justice Antonin Scalia’s majority opinion in the 1990 *Smith* decision. She quotes his use of *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), in which Mormon claims to the religious nature of polygamous marriages were rejected: “Can a man excuse his practices to the contrary [of law] because of his religious belief? To permit this would be to make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.” If the courts accommodated such autonomy, Scalia goes on to argue, they “would be courting anarchy” to the extent that society is comprised of a diversity of religious beliefs and, presumably, practices. Cookson’s reaction to this line of reasoning is strong: “The problems, here, are the Court’s projections of monstrous Otherness onto non-mainstream religious people, and its either/or (no exemptions/anarchy) dualistic portrayal of the options” (106).

In *Smith*, Cookson argues, “the antidrug statute became a universal moral com-

mand” (144). Her reaction to this false zero-sum construct is to advocate a return to casuistry, a medieval form of jurisprudential reasoning that values the content of each case more highly than principles applied *in abstracto*. The method is a new/old paradigm for public epistemology and consensus. Such an approach opens the courts to the possibility of not only interpreting the law but interpreting its appropriateness in a given context. This new direction may cause some to argue that Cookson’s casuistical approach is more appropriate for legislatures than for courts. Still, her promotion of careful contextual reasoning vis-à-vis a sometimes mechanical application of principles, tests, and laws is quite compelling.

While engaging the history of free exercise jurisprudence in a context of religious plurality, both Smith and Cookson argue for something greater: the need for a revivification of American legal reasoning. Here, Smith is on the right track: the primary constituent of ‘jurisprudence’ is prudence (Lat., *prudentia*; Gk., *phronesis*), a knowledge of things that change, denoting political (i.e., public) wisdom, an insight developed hermeneutically by Hans-Georg Gadamer. While approaches to law that take religious particularity into account are necessarily less definitive, both Cookson and Smith assert that they are nonetheless necessary. Cookson’s final chapter is especially strong on this point.

Beyond the revivification of jurisprudence, Lutherans will be interested in how both authors employ Lutheran theological concepts to support their theories. Drawing heavily on primary sources in Christian and American legal tradition, Cookson outlines four “typologies” of relations between religious conscience and the state. She contends that the “two kingdoms type,” as elucidated through references to Tertullian and Luther, among others, provides “legitimate, helpful tools...for a casuistical free exercise jurisprudence” in this time of “bewildering religious pluralism and far-reaching government regulation” (98).

In contrast to Cookson’s careful construction of religious traditions, Smith’s

“ultra-protestantism” is based on a questionable interpretation of Luther’s key insight: *simul iustus et peccator*. Persons familiar with Luther’s thought will here find several caveats in Smith’s analogy of the Reformer’s insight to *belief*. While we might understand ourselves as justified (*iustus*), Smith says, our comprehension is likely flawed (*peccator*); the inadequacy of our beliefs does not threaten us, however, since “the position reflects a fundamental sense that a good and just God would not ask of us more than we are capable of giving (righteous conduct, correct belief) without providing a remedy for our inadequacies” (168). Here, by analogy, we have what Jim Nestingen has called “the late medieval ‘doing what it is within you to do,’ now empowered with a little more grace.” While Smith’s project is admirable—the next step in free exercise jurisprudence may well be critical engagement with theologies of religious plurality—his reading of Luther comes

up short, a danger inherent to any interdisciplinary appropriation.

As jurisprudence moves away from transcendent principles toward messy particularity, the Lutheran priority of pastoral concern over theological principle may be instructive. Still, while Lutherans should be pleased that their perspective has been employed in these monographs, they should wonder why Lutherans are not often among those making such assertions.

Robert O. Smith  
Baylor University  
Waco, Texas

**A STONE OF HOPE: PROPHETIC RELIGION AND THE DEATH OF JIM CROW**, by David L. Chappell. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Pp. 344. \$34.95 (cloth).

Martin Luther King Day is the high and holy day in the public schools—yet how

many children are told that King was a Baptist minister? When my seminary students watch a video of King's speeches, with old newsreels from civil-rights demonstrations, they seem surprised by the fervent preaching, praying, and singing. When the film shows King exhorting a crowd with the words of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, some of the students grow uneasy. They associate the Battle Hymn with warmongering and misguided patriotism, but for King the hymn invokes God's judgment and justice: "Glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on!" Somehow, the religion of civil rights is "other" than expected.

Sanitized views of the civil-rights movement do not report the deeply religious nature of the movement. That problem is addressed with verve in David Chappell's new book, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. Chappell, who teaches history at the University of Arkansas, describes himself as leaning more "in the direction of materialism and economic determinism" (193) than most scholars; yet his research into primary sources of the civil-rights movement convinces him that "the most important element...missing from the picture [of the civil-rights movement] shared by the reading public" (193) is religion.

Chappell notes two religious dimensions of the civil-rights movement. The first is *prophetic pessimism*. Jeremiah and other biblical prophets, together with Baptist views of sin, contributed to this stark view. And so did racism. Martin Luther King said that his experiences of racism made it difficult for him "to believe in the essential goodness of man" (50). Chappell probes Reinhold Niebuhr's influence on King, especially the idea that "coercion is tragically necessary to achieve justice" (53–54). King's statement that "we have come to hew a stone of hope out of the mountain of despair" expresses this prophetic pessimism.

The second religious dimension of civil rights, according to Chappell, is *revivalism*. Many of the participants—including some of the northern whites—reported experi-

encing "intense religious transformation" through their participation in the movement. And although civil rights "shifted the focus...away from eternal salvation and toward attaining justice in this life" (97), public displays of religious zeal were common. As civil-rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer told a group of "liberal" and "skeptical" white students who came south as freedom riders and marchers, "don't talk to me about atheism. If God wants to start a movement then hooray for God...our religion is very important to us—you'll have to understand that" (71–72).

Chappell sees the civil-rights movement in the tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Great Awakenings, in which religious zeal moves from the church to the streets, converting individuals and changing society. Civil-rights leader Andrew Young said that the whole atmosphere in the black South "became more religious, especially when people start shooting at you—you do a lot more praying" (99). Abundant testimony from people involved in the civil-rights movement convinces Chappell that the movement was, for many, "primarily a religious event, whose social and political aspects were, in their minds, secondary or incidental" (87).

The religious nature of civil rights comes into sharper focus as Chappell contrasts it with early to mid-twentieth-century white liberalism. Chappell asks why white liberals—for a time the dominant voice in American political culture—failed to achieve anything substantial for black rights in the 1930s and '40s. Intellectuals such as Gunnar Myrdahl and Arthur Schlesinger expected gradual progress in race relations: gain without pain. Such diffident optimism could never address racism as evil. Moreover, the arid rationalism of midcentury liberals had no mass appeal. Only black Christianity could supply the prophetic courage to confront evil, and the religious zeal to move the masses.

Then there were the white southerners. Chappell asks why these descendants of the Confederacy did not fight *as hard* to save Jim Crow as their forebears once fought for

slavery. Despite a deep-running racism, white southerners were fragmented on how to deal with “the race question.” Politicians, police, editors, and citizens’ leagues tried to save Jim Crow, while politely distancing themselves from overt hate groups like the KKK. But segregationists of all stripes found white southern clergy to be unreliable allies. (King was not alone in expressing his disappointment in these “white brethren”!) To be sure, some white ministers defended segregation, while others tried to stay out of the fray. But the fragmentation was deep, for Southern Baptist and Presbyterian assemblies voted in favor of desegregation in the 1950s and ’60s (5) and Billy Graham had integrated seating in his revivals, even in southern cities, as far back as 1954. The net result was that white southerners “lacked exactly the same thing that mainstream liberals lacked—a basis for solidarity and self-sacrifice” (189). The civil-rights movement did not enjoy the full support of all black churches, but it harnessed religious power much more effectively than either its white allies or enemies could do.

Chappell shows that “the irrational traditions of prophetic, revivalistic religion” advanced the goals of freedom and equality. Although he describes himself as an atheist, Chappell asks whether “our peculiar modern habit of separating religion from politics is entirely realistic” (101). For those who care about the role of religion in public life, this book offers not only a reckoning, but an awakening.

Nancy Koester  
Luther Seminary  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**THE BANK TELLER AND OTHER ESSAYS ON THE POLITICS OF MEANING**, by Peter Gabel. San Francisco: Acada Books, 2000. Pp. 242. \$15.00 (paper).

I consistently select readings from Peter Gabel’s *The Bank Teller* for my undergraduate religion classes because of Gabel’s radical clarity in exposing American cultural forces of alienation that deny our common human desire for genuine connectedness and community. Gabel’s “politics of meaning” is built upon Buber’s I-Thou and seeks the healing inherent in Buber’s ideal. This collection of essays focuses on several images of pseudocommunity and their legitimating myths and false moral visions. As students read, they realize the powerfully destructive nature of deceptive acculturation processes leading people to accept poor substitutes for community, and concealing personal isolation, longing, and pain, even within churches. Gabel’s emphasis on healing rather than societal norms of escape and denial is as refreshing as it is challenging, especially for intense group discussion.

Nearly all the essays were previous published in *Tikkun* magazine, through which Gabel’s visionary ideals and insights, especially on socially responsible legal representation, were developed and shared from its beginning in 1986. *Tikkun* remains one of the most prominent American magazines committed to spiritual renewal as a solution to social injustice and a foundation for global moral awareness. Both Gabel and Michael Lerner, *Tikkun*’s cofounder and chief editor, do societal analysis from the centrality of a politics of meaning, which seeks to address the crisis of universal meaninglessness experienced individually and nationally by identifying spiritual emptiness as its cause, and offering spiritual replenishment as a cure.

In order to fully appreciate Gabel’s contribution as a pioneer in the discussion one might consult Michael Lerner’s book *The Politics of Meaning* (Perseus, 1996) and his more recent book, *Spirit Matters* (Hampton Roads, 2000), in which he articulates the

healing (meaning of Hebrew *tikkun* [root *tqn*]) possibilities of Emancipatory Spirituality (see [www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org)). One of the essays, a contribution by Alan Dershowitz, is the result of a spirited debate that Gabel had with Dershowitz in *Tikkun* on the issue that lawyers ought to develop a sense of social responsibility leading them to care about the well-being of the entire community. Gabel's response argues for a "politics of meaning" approach to law, which considers a transformation of the legal culture "that fosters empathy, compassion, and mutual understanding and sees the longing for connection to each other, and the healing of the alienation that divides us, to be as important to the cultural aspirations of law, and as important to the achievement of social justice, as is the protection of individual rights" (138).

Organizationally Gabel's collection of essays is a six-part progression, first laying down a philosophical foundation in order to make practical application of the politics of meaning approach to various spheres of American and global culture. The book concludes with a very challenging practical prototype that reveals Gabel's attempt to implement his insights in the transformation of his own workplace, New College of California (San Francisco). Within each of the sections are several essays, short pieces generally, that illustrate Gabel's central themes. The opening essay, "The Bank Teller: The Experiential Origins of Hierarchy," is a metaphorically rich observation of the human condition, experience, and mixed perceptions involving the fears of alienation, our longings to be known, and the complexities of our interrelatedness and aloneness. This lead essay immediately reveals to the reader—emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually—the depth of pervasive meaninglessness, the hunger experienced universally for connection, and the inability of individuals and American society's inherent failure to provide this kind of security. The next three essays link this moral emptiness to philosophical underpinnings and their development (The Meaning of the Holocaust; On Passionate Reason; Crea-

tionism and the Spirit of Nature). Gabel admits that this section may be difficult for some readers, and urges those who have trouble connecting in part one to move ahead and first read the essay "What Moves a Movement" in part five.

The rest of the sections are: Part 2, The Meaning of American Politics; Part 3, The Spiritual Dimension of Public Policy; Part 4, The Law Not as Rules but as a Meaning—Creating Public Culture; Part 5, Short Essays on the Nature of Movements, the Media, and Foreign Relations; and Part 6, How Can We Build a Parallel Universe? Gabel examines the meaning of several nation-shaking and nation-shaping events including Clinton's political appeal and JFK as movie and reality. He dares to challenge the validity of the SAT, to address the community value of affirmative action, to argue the need to broaden the context for sex education, to expose the media's artificial moral consciousness, and to emphasize an intervention approach to war in the Middle East.

The final essay, "Generating Meaning and Connection in Workplace Culture," is Gabel's real-life attempt to practice what he preaches. Although some readers might be put off by the essay's subtitle "The New College Manifesto," and possibly be bothered by the intentional use of terms like "comradeship" and "revolutionary," Gabel very carefully chronicles the conflict between a communal ideology born out of the '60s and the emergent pressures of a twentieth-century institutional idealism. This cultural clash, which actually occurred at New College while Gabel was its president, demonstrates for Gabel the tremendous difficulty for actualizing his politics of meaning, even in a community that might recognize the value of doing so. What is most revealing for the reader is an exercise of extension, taking what Gabel so passionately and persuasively articulates about the politics of meaning and putting it into a personal context of community and culture, workplace and world.

The importance of effecting this for church leaders, as well as students of theol-

ogy and church history, will be realized when congregational resistance to change is understood more broadly as a fearful rejection of structures that are powerless to provide and preserve the kind of meaningful connectedness that all people so desperately desire. This realization, hopefully, will force readers to reevaluate what they have created and more dependently seek the face and presence of God whose creative Spirit truly

has the healing power to transform lives and heal the world. “Fear not...for your Creator is your Lord—His name is Yahweh Sabaoth, the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer, who is called God of all the earth” (Isa 54:4–5).

Craig Bowman  
Rochester College  
Michigan