

Reviews



SOLVING THE ROMANS DEBATE, by A. Andrew Das. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. Pp. 324. \$24.00 (paper).

Paul's letter to the Romans has long been the center of debate. One significant issue concerns the "double nature" of the letter—some passages seem addressed to Jews (2:17–29; 4:1–25; 9:1–11:32) while others seem to be addressed to Gentiles (1:13–15; 1:18–2:16; 14:1–23). To whom is Paul writing? A. Andrew Das's new book, *Solving the Romans Debate*, enters this complex debate and offers a more nuanced and fully developed argument for a Gentile audience than that previously championed by Stanley Stowers in 1994 (*A Rereading of Romans*, Yale University) and Neil Elliott in 1990 (*The Rhetoric of Romans*, Sheffield Academic). According to Das, the efforts of Stowers and Elliott have been dismissed too quickly. Yet, both authors failed to do justice to Romans 16 and 14:1–15:13. In this book, some of which is anticipated in his previous book *Paul and the Jews* (Hendrickson, 2003), Das proposes to put all pieces together in a way "that satisfies the full range of the evidence" (6). His thesis is that the Gentile audience consists of "God-fearing" and non-law-observant Christ-believing Gentiles.

In the introduction, Das sets the issue of the Gentile audience within the discussion of the purpose of Romans. For Das, if the audience can be shown to be only Gentile, then a new purpose should also be proposed. The first two chapters discuss the "internal evidence." Das argues that in Rom 1:1–7, 8–15; 15:15–16; 11:13; 6:19; 13:11–14 Paul directly addresses his audience and in each case the audience is Gentile. The sec-

tions that suggest a Jewish audience Das explains through appeal to the "concept" (72) or "category" (82) "God-fearer" (*not* a technical term)—those sympathetic to Judaism, but distinct from Jews proper or proselytes. These "God-fearers" account for the double character of Romans—Paul's audience is a mix of non-law-observant Gentiles and "God-fearers," and the tensions in the letter reflect tensions between these two groups.

In chapter three Das interacts with Mark Nanos (*The Mystery of Romans*, Fortress, 1996). He argues against Nanos that the synagogue is not the setting of Romans and the "weak" are *not* non-Christ-believing Jews. Das turns to the external evidence in chapter four, "Claudius's Edict of Expulsion: The External Evidence," "to consider possible corroborative evidence from the historians and other sources of the period" (149). The edict shows the plausibility of a group of Gentile Christians separate from the Jewish synagogue, but possessing a deeper than surface-level knowledge of Jewish Scriptures and custom. It also explains *why* the Romans audience was made up of "God-fearers" and non-law-observant Gentiles: to single out the troublemakers, the Romans would have turned to the Jewish community, who would have pointed the finger at Christ-believing Jews. "God-fearers," being on the margins of the Jewish community, posed no threat and would not have been expelled. Finally, in chapter five, entitled "Reading Romans with the Encoded Audience: Romans 7:7–25 and Romans 11:25–26," Das offers interpretations of the two texts in light of his thesis. In the conclusion Das nicely retraces his argument and reiterates that past attempts that argue

for a Gentile audience have failed not because of the implausibility of the position, but because not all of the evidence has been put together. Das's claim is that in this book this has finally been done.

I offer three critical remarks. First, Das assumes all of the "rabble rousers" blamed for the uprising in 49 C.E. were Christ-believing Jews, all of whom were expelled so that what was left was an exclusively Gentile Christian community (chap. 4). Though plausible, it seems an unprovable point given the scanty evidence, and one that should not weigh too heavily. However, it seems to weigh heavily in Das's case. While Das's case about "God-fearers" is persuasive, it does not prove the absence of Jewish believers. Second, and in light of this, Das would do well to give greater treatment to 2:17–29. His brief treatment on pages 87–89 leaves one thinking that the interlocutor *could* be a Jew, but need not be. I would like to see more argument from Das on such a significant passage, since it seems

imperative to eliminate the possibility that 2:17–29 may refer to a Jew. Finally, I remain puzzled about the relation of Das's argument to the overall purpose of Romans. Was Romans Paul's letter to quell the tensions between the "God-fearers" and the non-law-observant believers? Or did Paul write to simply clarify some things for the mostly Gentile Christian audience? How exactly is the purpose of Romans impacted?

Das's book has opened up a real plausibility that Paul's audience in Romans is Gentile, and it represents a wonderful piece of scholarship that offers both an insightful reading of Romans in its historical context and an attentive reading of recent scholarship on Romans. As Das claims, he assembles all of the most recent relevant evidence, and argues his case well, not only keeping the Romans debate alive, but pushing it in a fresh direction. In addition, his thesis affects one's exegesis of Romans, since an understanding of Paul's audience in Rome plays a role in interpretation—especially Paul's ar-

gument concerning the place of “Israel” in Romans 9–11. Chapters two and four are the most impressive. His exegesis of Romans 1:1–7 and 1:8–15 is insightful in itself and for its implications for the rest of Romans: if Paul addresses only Gentiles in the letter opening, it becomes necessary to explain where and why Jews are in view as well. In chapter four his interaction with ancient historians, archaeology, and conclusions of modern scholars is very nuanced and clear. In addition, his discussion of Romans 7:7–25 is well done and, combined with his argument in chapter two, provides a substantial case that Paul was writing to Gentiles. While not all aspects of Das’s case are ironclad—and his statement that “the time has come for a paradigm shift in the interpretation of the Romans situation” (264) may be a bit strong—his case is substantial enough to warrant serious reconsideration of this issue. This book offers stimulating and insightful reading for those interested in the question of Paul’s audience in Romans and for interpreters seeking to better understand the details of Romans.

Kyle Thomas Fever
Loyola University
Chicago, Illinois

SPEAKING OF GOD: RELATIONAL THEOLOGY, by Paul R. Sponheim. Saint Louis: Chalice, 2006. Pp. 187. \$24.99 (paper).

God is love. How simple, and yet how profound. Christians often have a case of theological amnesia in these troubled times. We forget that God’s gracious love is the center of the Christian faith, and that nothing can separate the creation from God’s love in Christ Jesus. In an era where the religious rhetoric escalates to a war of biblically flung epithets of who is right and who is wrong, Paul Sponheim’s latest work, *Speaking of God: Relational Theology*, needs to be read by parish pastors, college students, and any other Christian whose faith is in dialogue with the world at large. The main task of Sponheim’s writing is to un-

quivocally declare that God-talk not be used for violence or hatred, but instead for peace and wholeness. His hope is that “these pages can point a way ahead for the crucial conversations that must happen for healing and peace to come. What difference might it make if we understand with Søren Kierkegaard that God’s ‘omnipotence is in the power of love?’” (xii).

This speaking of faith—whether in first-order language of prayer and proclamation or in second-order theological reflection—is about the promise and task of God’s love for the world. God is love. While this theological work is indeed reflective (beautifully so), the call from Sponheim is one that calls us to be a witness to God’s relationship to and with the whole order of creation. Sponheim notes that he “writes for and to people interested in God. I say ‘God’ and not simply ‘God-talk,’ because I do not think we can be satisfied with talking about talking”(ix). Christians are responsible not only to their own communities, but also to the diverse communities around them for the “what” and “how” of God-talk.

Relationships are the central category of Sponheim’s constructive theology. The theologian begins constructive reflection within the narratives of the Christian faith (Scripture and tradition) but only so far as they are essentially rooted in and related to the world from which they come. Feminist theologians, Whiteheadians, Kierkegaard’s writings, the contemporary religion and science dialogue, are just a few of the partners that Sponheim engages in his theological task. His methodology is central to the task at hand and cannot be separated from the constructive claims he makes.

The Christian doctrine of creation claims that the most fundamental relationship is God’s love for the entire cosmos. What God accomplishes in creation is not separate from what God accomplishes in Jesus the Christ in redemption. God, as well as the claims that Christians make, is unity. “God is not divided and God’s action in the world has a fundamental unity” (71). For Sponheim, this statement has implications

for how Christians speak of and live out their faith in a pluralistic world.

The text divides into two sections: speaking of and about God, and what the implications are for that God-talk. In chapter one, Sponheim reflects on the omnipresence of God as love. His discussion of the traditional “omni” attributes of God is recast in a very helpful discussion. In the second chapter, the claim of God as love is the theological key to ongoing claims. Nothing can separate the world from the love of God in Christ Jesus, not even human hatred and sin. Surely this way of speaking about God needs to be heard in our world where our own hatred and sin prevent us from offering mercy and grace to our enemies. The third chapter ends the opening section, reflecting on how God works in the “middle” of things—in *medias res*.

The second half of the book helps Christians think about the implications of their God-talk. How, then, shall we live? Responses to this question frame the issues of the rest of the text. One of the most helpful sections is Sponheim’s careful analysis of prayer. He doesn’t offer a “one-size-fits-all” response to the complexities of our prayer life with God. From prayer to the pains of suffering and evil, Sponheim utilizes his helpful and familiar categories of interruption and transformation to reflect on questions of theodicy, compassion, and justice. Finally, the book ends with reflections on evangelism and apologetics—both of which are extensions of God-talk lived out in relationships with “the other.” Sponheim utilizes the contemporary religion and science dialogue as a means to explain how the theological task can avoid the trap of a simplistic hostility toward the claims of the sciences and the collapse of theology into science.

This book has been “test driven,” so to speak, in the classroom of my first-year religion students at Augustana College. This is one intended audience of the author. Students quoted this text again and again throughout the class, finding that it addressed their personal questions about faith from a well-reasoned and compassionate

perspective. While addressing existential questions of praxis, this text is a nuanced discussion of God-talk and its implications for life in the broader world beyond the Christian community. This, of course, is the strength of the book. If one wants to speak of God in simplistic ways, then this is the wrong book for them. But if one wants a simple, yet profound, text on the love of God, manifest in Jesus the Christ, for the whole creation, then this is the book to read.

Ann Milliken Pederson
Augustana College
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

THE ROLE OF JUSTIFICATION IN CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY, by

Mark C. Mattes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. 198. \$10.00 (paper).

The dethronement of theology from queenly preeminence and its severance from philosophy have, since the Reformation, been continually lamented by those who would revert, in the words of Mark C. Mattes, “to an allegedly secure and insulated ideal past” (20). For Mattes, what the Reformation sought was not a dethronement but a restoration of theology to its proper role as servant of the word and of the church that the Holy Spirit by the word brings to birth.

The end of the medieval synthesis did not spell the end of the theological *ambitio divinitatis*. The Old Adam continued to reassert itself, seeking to know and to see, comprehending both God and the world in a single coherent system. Turning its back on the servant role, theology ever and again looks to the academy as its principal audience, while disdaining the language of proclamation and prayer as mere piety to be relegated to the private realm.

In *The Role of Justification*, Mattes seeks to bring to postmodern theology the same corrective that the Lutheran reformers brought to the theology of their day, advocating a theology that “is subordinated to justification as its boundary,” the *discrimen* by which all theology is to be tested. Far

from being a retreat into a sectarian ghetto, such subordination to the “gift word of the gospel opens possibilities for mutual understanding, renewed communication, greater sense-awareness, and aesthetic appreciation” without reducing the gospel to any one or combination of these (19).

Simply put, Mattes’s appeal is this: that the theologian attends to equipping the church “to deliver the word of salvation, a word that restores humans to creation by liberating them from incurvation” and, in so doing, proclaims that “Christ is unbound” (20). This word is, Mattes affirms throughout, not informative but *performative*, because it is Christ who can only be received by faith, not comprehended by reason.

Mattes divides the main part of his book into two sections. In the first, he analyzes the work of three “accommodationist” theologians: Eberhard Jüngel, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann. In the second, he considers two “non-accommodationists”: Robert Jenson and Oswald Bayer. Except for Jenson, all are German academics related to the Protestant theological faculties of Tübingen (Jüngel, Moltmann, Bayer) and Munich (Pannenberg). Jenson was until recently the senior scholar at the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. Mattes’s mastery of so voluminous and varied a literature is impressive (see xvi–xvii). His analysis is thorough, penetrating, and fair. As to his Lutheran viewpoint, Mattes is altogether candid (see, for instance, 16).

The three theologians considered in part one all endeavor “to accommodate to the assumptions of the university and wider culture” (17). They all work within such (Weberian) antinomies as fact-value, cognition-affection, theoretical-practical, explanation-understanding, and nature-history. In his differentiating among the three thinkers, Mattes employs Schleiermacher’s tripartite classification of “feeling” (Jüngel), “knowing” (Pannenberg), and “doing” (Moltmann). His overall critique of the accommodationist strategy is that it reduces the gospel to psychology, on-

tology, ethics, or—as in the case of Paul Tillich (to whom Mattes appears to allude in connection with the 1963 LWF Assembly, 10)—all of the above.

Theologians of accommodation invariably turn the gospel-word of promise into some kind of law: right feeling, right knowing, right acting. Jüngel, in his appeal to a “meta-experience,” comes close to Schleiermacher’s “feeling of absolute dependence.” Pannenberg, in subsuming justification into a teleological process of divinization in which God and the believer realize themselves, seems to eliminate altogether the need for the “performative word” of preaching. As for Moltmann, Mattes is emphatic: “[W]e need liberation from liberation theology. We need justice, within the orders of creation, without ‘liberation’ with its inherent political soteriology” (109).

In part two Mattes presents two theologians who, while eschewing an accommodationist strategy, are otherwise radically different from each other. Jenson, who began his career advancing “the Christian story” and “the word as promise” (118), later shifted to a view of justification, church, and the Godhead in which justification is no longer central but, along with the church, part of a process in which the church, as a Catholic counterculture, mimes the social Trinity. In so doing the church becomes “a vehicle of the eternal divine life in its self-development toward its own telos, in which we are graciously privileged to share” (119).

Bayer, by way of contrast, rejects strategies that ask that metaphysical theory be accepted as good news (141). His project is to bring a corrective to bear on the pursuit of “an encyclopedic view of all reality” (148). Clearly, Bayer’s and Mattes’s projects are, with some significant differences (169–170), one. The chapter on Bayer and his relation of his thought to that of Luther and Johann Georg Hamann is brilliant.

Even the best of books must contain at least one flaw, if only to keep author and editor properly humble. In this book the flaw comes early, on page 13, text and footnote, where H. Richard Niebuhr’s oft

quoted description of American liberal theology, “a God without wrath...,” is attributed to his brother, Reinhold.

May the coming years see many more books by Mark Mattes.

Richard J. Niebanck
Delhi, New York

**A FORMULA FOR PARISH PRACTICE:
USING THE FORMULA OF CONCORD
IN CONGREGATIONS**, by
Timothy J. Wengert. Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 2006. Pp. 234. \$26.00 (paper).

Who in their right mind would respond to a notice in the church bulletin that reads: “Please join us on Tuesday nights for ‘a general, pure, correct, and definitive restatement and exposition of a number of articles of the *Augsburg Confession* concerning which there has been a controversy among some theologians for a time, resolved and settled according to the Word of God and the summary formulation of our Christian doctrine’”? No one, that’s who. Therefore, pastors interested in offering a study on the *Formula of Concord* should advertise with verbiage more appealing to present-day Christians—perhaps something like, “Purpose-Driven Questions and Answers for Life.” Whatever the title and whatever the format, Timothy Wengert’s wonderful guidebook, *A Formula for Parish Practice*, is tailor-made for conducting such a study.

Part of the premise of Wengert’s effort is the conviction that the issues addressed in the *Formula of Concord* (published in 1580) are not relics of some Reformation past but issues that are alive and kicking today. However, persuading others (pastors especially) that such issues matter is another matter altogether. Fortunately, via an engaging, accessible, down-to-earth, good-natured, and well-organized presentation of the *Formula’s* twelve articles, Wengert succeeds in convincing the reader that antiquated controversies regarding concepts such as original sin, free will, real presence, and *adiaphora* are in fact state-of-the-pastoral-art.

With this reintroduction of the *Formula of Concord* to modern readers, Wengert seeks to reassert the proper use of the Lutheran Confessional writings—writings which, according to the author, have been heretofore “underused and sometimes even misused” (1). Although Wengert does not elaborate regarding the manner of such prior underuse and misuse, one assumes that he understands that this pastoral analysis of the articles of the the *Formula* is an example of “proper use.” Avoiding heavy polemics on the one hand, and resisting a generic Protestant confession on the other, Wengert offers a middle way focused upon the original evangelical responses to these “Lutheran questions.” (Indeed, although the *Formula*—and therefore Wengert’s book—is explicitly Lutheran, readers from a variety of traditions will benefit from these discussions.) Wengert’s gentle-yet-forthright approach is by itself commendable, and one wonders if Wengert’s description of one of the *Formula’s* original authors, Jakob Andreae, might not also apply to Wengert: “generally Gnesio-Lutheran in persuasion but moderate in tone” (5). That said, quotations like “babies are not cute, they’re dying” (26) keep things provocative and, therefore, in keeping with the bold tone of the affirmative theses and antitheses of the *Formula* itself.

In addition to learning about the doctrinal specifics that lay at the heart of the controversies addressed by the original *Formula*, readers will also receive plenty of information and insight concerning the historical context that prompted the formulation of the *Formula* in the first place. Wengert does not assume that the reader has prior knowledge of Gnesios or Philip-pists or of the disputes that preoccupied “second generation” Lutheran pastors, nor does he oversimplify this history. In this way, Wengert’s book also serves as a fine appetizer for those looking to learn more about the development of the Lutheran movement after Luther’s death in 1546. On the other hand, readers looking for support of the (Gnesio) notion that Luther’s colleague, Philip Melancthon, eventually be-

trayed core Lutheran principles will not find such support here.

The author's organization of the material is as useful as it is unique. Each article of the original *Formula* is introduced with a relevant story from the author's own experience as a parish pastor. Perhaps the most revealing story—insofar as it regards this pastoral handling of the *Formula*—is the one that begins chapter five, "What God's Word Does To You," in which Wengert relates his own Mom's advice on his ordination day: "Now, Tim, when you preach, comfort the people" (77). After such a story (usually brief) Wengert offers the historical context and development of the issues addressed by each article of the *Formula*. Next comes a most helpful section, "The Heart of the Matter," in which Wengert delivers each article's core pastoral concern. Article Eight, "On the Person of Christ," for example, contains 38 theses in the original *Formula*—theses derived from ancient discussions of Christ's *hypostatic union* and *communicatio idiomatum*. A twenty-first-century reader may ask: "What does this mean?" *A Formula for Parish Practice* provides the answer: "It means that we receive Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, and not just his divinity or spirit" (141).

With the "Heart of the Matter" in mind, the reader at last reads the summary text, "Epitome," of the article in the original *Formula*. After each article there is a "Commentary" section—in effect, a refinement and clarification of the original text. For instance, five of the theses from the original article regarding *adiaphora* are recast as Five Rules for handling church disputes (174–177). Then there follows a discussion of the article's implications for parish practice, which—over the course of twelve articles—amounts to a lot of sound counsel, not only for parish pastors but for the whole priesthood of believers. Finally, at the end of each chapter/article, the reader/study leader will find a set of discussion questions.

As explained in his introduction, Wengert abstained from his usual scholarly (i.e., footnoted) prose in favor of a personal,

pastor-to-pastor approach. Nevertheless, *A Formula for Parish Practice* exhibits quite a bit of scholarship while remaining a highly readable and recommendable book. This book, one of the latest from Lutheran Quarterly Books, represents a winning effort by Wengert and a valuable resource and guide for pastors interested in the proper use of the Lutheran confessional writings.

Hans Wiersma
Augsburg College
Minneapolis, Minnesota

**RETHINKING CHRIST AND CULTURE:
A POST-CHRISTENDOM PERSPECTIVE**, by Craig A. Carter. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006. Pp. 254. \$19.99 (paper).

This book is difficult to digest. Craig Carter himself proclaims, late in the book, "Our goal is to be indigestible to the world" (203). His book is an exercise in spiritual indigestibility, calling all disciples of Jesus to follow Christ in the path of suffering by renouncing violence. Spiritual resistance/indigestibility equals repudiation of coercive violence. This is certainly a difficult pill to stomach, not to mention digest, because virtually all Christians living in the United States are so complicit in the coercive violence of the world that we hardly know where to begin in our repudiation.

Carter helps us pick up the cross and begin to follow. If I could, I would stipulate that every seminary professor who assigns Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* also require Craig Carter's new book to be read simultaneously. The book is that important, and the second chapter of the book provides a helpful and concise summary of Niebuhr's influential book.

Carter's first book was on the theology and social ethics of John Howard Yoder, and Carter's new book is, from beginning to end, "Yoderian." It is a sustained critique of Christendom as defined by Yoder. Carter provides a longish definition of Christendom in his book, but his best summary statement on Christendom is in his chapter on "Why Christendom Was a Bad Idea":

“Christendom is a series of compromises made by the church with the world so that the offense of Jesus Christ is watered down, mitigated, and obscured to the point that the world is satisfied that the church is no longer foreign and dangerous” (78).

What is the preferred alternative definition of the church and the life of discipleship? “According to Yoder, the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century was a challenge to Christendom to make the kind of discipleship that characterized the best of monasticism the content of the preaching of the church” (18). Great insight.

Carter’s commitment to the repudiation of coercive violence results in a substantially reconfigured “Christ and culture” typology. Carter maps six types, three of which are Christendom types and three of which are not. Within each typology, Carter lifts up representative examples, *à la* Niebuhr.

At the edges of the map are Christ legitimizing culture (examples include Crusades and Theodosius I) and Christ separating from culture (the Benedictines and the Amish). The sandwiched types, still divided by their acceptance of or rejection of violent coercion, are Christ humanizing culture (Luther [!] and Billy Graham), and Christ humanizing culture (Mother Teresa and the Mennonite Central Committee). Finally, two similar categories, divided only by their Christendom or non-Christendom commitments, are Christ transforming culture (Augustine and Cromwell), and Christ transforming culture (Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King, Jr.).

This newly mapped typology effectively widens and provides greater differentiation for Niebuhr’s rather narrowly defined and caricatured “Christ against culture” type. In fact, Carter admits that “for a while I was in favor of ‘Christ against culture for the sake of culture,’ which was a way of saying that attempting to transform culture without also being against vast tracts of it was a recipe for gradual accommodation” (25).

Is Carter persuasive? Like Niebuhr, he has an agenda—he wants to convince us of better and worse types. Although his map functions heuristically, he prefers the post-

or non-Christendom Christ and culture types, and he is not shy in saying so. Carter is most convincing in arguing that Niebuhr’s book is long overdue for reassessment. *Christ and Culture* needs substantial critique, at least or especially because it has for so long been the received wisdom of the dominant culture. Carter recognizes that “the most influential ideas and theories in culture are so ingrained in our thinking that they seem to be neutral descriptions of reality itself” (13). Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* is one such influential theory, and it is deserving of Carter’s critique precisely because it is not a neutral description of reality itself.

I do find Carter persuasive, and it scares me. I admit that it is difficult for me to imagine following the radical Jesus presented in his book, the Jesus I know I should be following. Comfort, accommodation, and compromise are easier roads to follow than discipleship, suffering, and the cross.

If I have one critique of Carter’s book, it is his tendency to make overly sweeping and simplistic generalizations. I doubt whether there is this thing called “Christendom” that is as easily defined and historically describable as he wishes to make it. Of course, that’s just me, a Lutheran, talking. I think anyone thoroughly immersed in the thought of Yoder and the Anabaptist, pacifist tradition needs to make such broad and strong claims precisely to wake me up.

Thank you, Craig Carter, for giving me indigestion.

Clint Schneklath
East Koshkonong Lutheran Church
Cambridge, Wisconsin

**AND GRACE WILL LEAD ME HOME:
IMAGES OF THE PRODIGAL SON
FROM THE JERRY EVENRUD COL-
LECTION**, by Robert M. Brusick. Min-
neapolis: Lutheran University Press,
2007. Pp. 191. \$40.00 (cloth).

This publication is a beautifully and thoughtfully orchestrated volume that the author has done in collaboration with Jerry

Evenrud. They have shared a friendship over several years with their interests and commitments to the visual arts as a medium for the proclamation of the gospel.

Jerry Evenrud's collection of art surrounding the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) is the basis of this volume in which fifty-one works dating from 1540 to 2005 are featured, selected from over two hundred works in the collection. An introductory essay identifies the genesis of this collection and describes how this rich and eclectic collection has come into being. The artistic media include etching, engraving, lithograph, linocut, mezzotint, serigraph, painting, ceramic, political cartoon, katazome, sculpture, and fabric. The works of art tell the story of the Prodigal Son with "visual exegesis" by Brusic.

Following the exhibit in Manhattan at the Museum of Biblical Art (MOBIA), from October 4, 2007 to February 17, 2008, the entire collection will be given to Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota. This gift from Jerry Evenrud is a tribute to the partnership he shares with the seminary.

Pastor Robert Brusic served as campus pastor at Luther Seminary through the time of this growing collaboration and is a most able and articulate "exegete" of the works in the volume. Lucy Brusic, Robert's spouse, serves as an excellent and intuitive editor of the volume. An introduction by Richard Bliese, president of Luther Seminary, essays by Sarah Henrich, assistant professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, and Wilson Yates, former dean and president of United Seminary in New Brighton, Minnesota, contribute to the interpretation of the parable within the wider world of art. This is truly a volume of education in the artistic expression of the Prodigal Son.

The daunting task of organizing a volume on the art of the Prodigal Son has been skillfully created by categorizing the art according to four major themes of the parable: (1) Departure, Debauchery, Degradation; (2) Return; (3) Reconciliation; (4) Celebration.

Sarah Henrich's essay, "A Parable of a Father and Two Sons," establishes the basis

for understanding the unfolding events of the entire story. She rightly argues that the parable does not conclude with the return of the younger son (Luke 15:11–24), but continues to include the response of the elder son (Luke 15:25–32). The relationship of the father and sons is the basis of the parable and interpretations of their relationships are integral to the way in which artists have given visual interpretation to the parable.

Wilson Yates's essay, "The Prodigal Son Through the Artist's Eye," takes the reader into the history of Western art. The way in which this parable has either been interpreted or overlooked is an insightful way into the visual images of biblical stories. Yates explores how artists have depicted the drama of the parable: "The emotions in the parable range from happiness to misery, from bewilderment to anger, from compassion to joy. The theological themes are equally rich: we glimpse the character of God, and we encounter the human need for love and justice, for repentance and forgiveness, and the reality of sin and grace, reconciliation and celebration" (31).

"Section 1: Departure, Debauchery, Degradation" opens with a citation from Henry Nouwen's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, describing the pathos of this section: "Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one" (37). This section of fourteen works of art includes five works that depict a series of scenes from the parable. The commentary on the art includes themes such as: The foolish son asks for money; The Prodigal says goodbye; The Prodigal departs jauntily; The Prodigal loses his purse; The wastrel is chased from the inn; The devil stalks the Prodigal; The Prodigal goes to live with pigs; The Prodigal is trapped in the barnyard; The son turns toward home; The Swedish son goes astray and then comes home. The commentary focuses on the artist, including the context of the time in which the art was created. Brusic's responses are interpretive, eloquently expressive, and reflective on the medium and composition of the art. His artistic eye scru-

tinizes the art, identifying objects that could be easily overlooked but which have their place in the message and context in which the art was created. The commentary is such that it can be read as a daily devotion with a focus on the commentary and work of art.

“Section 2: Return” includes thirteen works of art. The commentary provides reflections on: The son comes home to an empty house; A ragged son comes home; A hard welcome; An unsettling return; The grieving son comes home too late; An ambiguous return; Political scandal forces a prodigal son to resign; The surly elder brother skulks away; The prodigal on the Midway; A painful and angry return; The son brings home a fox; The son comes home through fire and tears. Judging by Brusic’s commentary titles one can see how artists have interpreted the return in terms of the pathos of the event. Emotions run high in these works that include the personal situation of the artist’s life. From this section, Thomas Hart Benton’s *Prodigal Son*, Ben Earl Looney’s *The Prodigal’s Return*, and Rembrandt’s etching *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, are gems of the collection.

“Section 3: Reconciliation” draws upon fourteen works of art that clearly reflect the compassion of the father upon the return of his son. Sybil Andrew’s dramatic linoleum cut, *The Prodigal Son*, begins this section. Throughout each section Brusic’s commentary provides insightful interpretive responses that engage the viewer’s response. His exegesis is expressed with eloquent language that is itself an artistic complement to the art on the facing page. A selection of themes in this section expresses the joyful reunion in the parable: The father seeks the son; The father hurries to greet his returning son; The father goes out to meet the son; A peaceful reunion; The father cradles the son; The father sweeps the son into his arms.

“Section 4: Celebration” begins with a citation from Helmut Thielicke’s *The Waiting Father*: “The ultimate theme of this story, therefore, is not the prodigal son, but the Father who finds us. The ultimate theme is not the faithfulness of men, but the faithful-

ness of God....The ultimate secret of this story is this: There is a homecoming for us all because there is a home” (29). There are ten works of art in this section. The full-color serigraph of John August Swanson’s storytelling art depicting five scenes telling the *Story of the Prodigal Son* is a highlight of this section, which represents English, Flemish, French, Spanish, and American artists.

European and American artists are dominant in this volume, but there are also excellent representations such as *Return of the Prodigal Son* by the Chinese artist He Qi, *The Prodigal Son* by the Japanese artist Sadao Watanabe, and *Return* by the Sri Lankan artist Nalini Jayasuriya.

An “Off the Wall” section draws upon musical works, literature, and a variety of expressions in related arts such as sculpture, calligraphy, bronze, porcelain, postage stamps, and even cartoons that give expression to the parable. The appendices identify further ways in which this parable is accessed in books, songs, hymns and anthems, together with references to the artists, exhibits, and contributors to the collection.

This is more than just another coffee-table art book. The complement of introductory and insightful essays to the art and the descriptive texts to the works of art all come together to identify this volume as a work of art in itself.

Paul Berge
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

WHEN FAITHS COLLIDE, by Martin E. Marty. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Pp. 202. \$16.95 (paper).

This is a gentle book. In his typically comprehensive way, Martin Marty kindly and patiently gives all sides a hearing, eager to make sure every position is fairly represented with its nuance.

This is also a radical book. It runs counter to the cultural grain. Against all the potentials for failure and all the hard lines that opposing parties drive to sometimes war-

like conclusions—all of which Marty realistically names and recognizes as a threat—he nonetheless proposes to embrace the difficulties of a pluralist polity and the risk of hospitality. The topic is what its title promises: the collision of faiths or peoples of faith. It is presented here as one of a series of “Blackwell Manifestos.” Marty notes the outrage and polemic that manifestos tend to bring with them. He wants instead to interpret this “manifesto” as a “bid for conversation more than argument” (12). The bid proposes to live constructively with the collisions of faiths. The nature of the conversation matches the nature of the thesis.

Marty has organized his book into seven chapters. He explains the problem and his response to it on the first page. The “ominous and even lethal” collisions we face “occur when two communities of faith which are strangers to each other have to share the same space and resources or when two factions within a faith community become estranged.” His “thesis” is not

“the conventional plea for tolerance,” but “a call that at least one party begin to effect change by risking hospitality toward the other.” Descriptions and definitions are given as the book proceeds, gradually leading to the risk of hospitality itself and then to a concluding chapter about theological integrity. Notes for all the chapters come at the end of the book, followed by an index. Sociologists, historians, theologians, and other analysts are called upon, and examples are drawn from many different religious and social contexts around the world in different periods.

Marty assumes with John Courtney Murray that religious pluralism “is the human condition” (90), defines it modestly and structurally as “competing or perhaps complementary spheres” in society (72), and likens it metaphorically to sports with four elements: “‘any number can play,’ a considerable number does play, there are at least minimal ‘rules of the game,’ [and] the game develops an observable ethos” (72).

Marty does not have much enthusiasm for tolerance as a way to play the game, at least partly because “those who tolerate often have the power or the will to remake ‘the other’ into some manageable image” (124). He moves gracefully through what he calls counter-intolerance and then counsels a “more elegant” (127) close relative, namely, being hospitable, finding reasons for it, and practicing it.

Marty brings to his task a broad historical understanding (he taught religious history at the University of Chicago for thirty-five years) as well as his knowledge of fundamentalism (he was director of the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences), but he also includes his own personal reflections. For example, he cites conversations with Joseph Lichten, head of the American Jewish visitors’ group to the Second Vatican council, who asked him how he could support Christian unity and James Madison’s pluralism at the same time. Marty admits his own uneasiness about this sort of seeming contradiction (111), but then goes on to note that in politics and practice “a different, messier but more productive reading than [Lichten’s] is possible” (12). It is perhaps at just this point that Marty is most helpful. He refuses to solve the collisions of faith either by a relativism that denies particularity or an absolutism that coerces it. The first leads to nobody having anything to offer anybody and the second to warfare. In place of these choices Marty proposes the risk of hospitality that will “promote engagement with the stranger, the different, the other [to] contribute to a world in which measured hope can survive and those who hope can guide” (178).

This proposal is not an easy one, and it does not promise more than “measured hope.” Though the writing is clear, the difficulty of the topic is equally clear. It means, for example, that Christians, Jews, and Muslims will not solve anything by taking down the pictures on their walls or by seeking to deny the commitments or patterns their faiths bring with them. Nor will anything be solved by using these same pic-

tures, commitments, and patterns as clubs. That is why the word “risk” is so prominent here. To engage the other is to risk both estrangement and allure, to realize there is a place both for conversation and conversion, and to enter a messy terrain with no preconceived outcomes.

The alternative, of course, is death. There will be those who want to choose this option, but it does not bode well for the public square, where life requires some form of mutual engagement. Marty’s proposal seeks the latter in a quietly reasoned yet peacefully radical conversation.

Paul Westermeyer
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

THE END OF MEMORY: REMEMBERING RIGHTLY IN A VIOLENT WORLD, by Miroslav Volf. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2007. Pp. 244. \$22.00 (cloth).

Miroslav Volf, professor of systematic theology and director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, has provided an intriguing and unique perspective on forgiveness in his new work, *The End of Memory*. Picking up on the larger themes presented in two earlier works (*Exclusion and Embrace* and *Free of Change*), Volf directly addresses the place of memory as it relates to issues of forgiveness and reconciliation. The book (at least a large part of it) is constructed from the author’s Stub lectures at Calvin Theological Seminary. But the text is more relevantly birthed out of Volf’s experience of being spied upon and interrogated as a potential threat to Yugoslavia in the mid-1980s. As a young soldier Volf was mentally harassed (bordering on tortured) by a Yugoslavian officer he calls Captain G. As the son of a pastor in the communist state who was educated as a theologian in the United States and then married a US citizen, Volf was seen as a potential threat. Some twenty years later this experience still lives on in the author’s memory, affecting him greatly. It is from this traumatic experience

that *The End of Memory* is born. In many ways the book never departs from this experience; the author continues to make his rich theological assertions alongside and informed by this experience of abuse.

The book begins with an anthropological focus, as the author discusses how memory works and how it is connected to our humanity. Chapter one sets the stage for the argument: he asserts that condemnation of wrongs comes only through the forgiveness of them. Chapter two focuses on the memory of wrongs suffered. In dialogue with Elie Wiesel, Volf discusses how identity is wrapped up in memory and how healing can only occur when wrongs are remembered. But this remembering is not neutral and can therefore be detrimental to the healing process; thus even the one hurt is obligated to remember wrongs correctly. Remembering correctly is the topic of chapter three. Here the author argues that remembering well is the key to redeeming the past, for in remembering we make truth claims. Such truth claims demand the truthfulness that leads to justice for the one hurt, but mercy for the violator.

The practical effects of memory on individuals and their relationships is the focus of chapter four. Here the author reiterates the importance of truthful remembering, but then he makes an intriguing comment that will direct the third part of the work. Volf asserts that healing happens when we no longer fear the past nor continue to return to it, or as he will say later, when we are able to forget our memories of the past. Therefore, chapter five examines how we might enjoy the blessings of memory without suffering its curses. Memories of the past can be catalysts for justice or they can be used as weapons to hurt others; they can be pillars used to solidify an identity able to survive severe storms or they can be haunting nightmares that attack, leaving us wobbly and fragile in the world.

The anthropological perspective of the first half of the book takes a deep turn into christology and biblical theology in chapter six. Here the author proclaims that to remember rightly is to remember through Je-

sus' cross and resurrection. The reader is then taken into discussions of the exodus and the passion of Christ, examining the lessons they teach us about correct remembering.

Chapter seven begins the most fascinating parts of Volf's argument. Here he takes up the question of how long we should remember. It has been common to assert that abuses must be remembered forever, for once they are forgotten justice is impossible because it is as if they had never happened. Yet, drawing on theological tradition, Volf shows (especially in the work of Dante) that forgiving and forgetting are linked in the Christian heritage. Therefore, the common cultural idiom that says, "I will forgive, but never forget," places the possibilities of true justice and redemption in question. Chapter eight takes this perspective deeper through a crucial conversation with three defenders of forgetting: the early Freud, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. The final judgment and reconciliation becomes the lens for examining the need to forget in forgiving in chapter nine. Forgetting, Volf asserts, allows us to be whole people, free to be ourselves, loosed from the ties of abuse and injustice. The book ends with a postscript in which the author seeks to forgive and forget the abuses of his own violator, Captain G.

The End of Memory is ultimately about loving our enemies—but to do so, Volf argues, one must remember their wrongs correctly. Two major themes come to the fore throughout the book: the need to remember wrongs correctly, and the importance of then forgetting our wrongs. Therefore, this book adds a distinct perspective to theses on forgiveness and reconciliation. I can imagine that those who have experienced deep suffering may find themselves tense when reading the second half of this text (it will be a challenge to some), but there just may be something significant here that we need to hear. In a globalized world in which traditions no longer bind us one to another, we have been stuck with the burden of remembering everything, for if anything is forgotten, we imagine that it will be lost forever in the same alternate universe that deleted

Word-documents and TiVo programs inhabit. Without traditions maintained by communities of memory, the burden rests on the individual to remember all. But what *The End of Memory* points to is the possibility (the hope) that we are free to forget, that we are free to make God responsible to remember even those experiences that have cut so deep that they have taken part of us with them.

The End of Memory asks that thinking and acting be drawn into a rich interaction, providing a unique and important perspective on forgiveness that could be very helpful to pastors, counselors, and theologians.

Andrew Root
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

COMING OF AGE: EXPLORING THE IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY OF YOUNGER MEN, by David W. Anderson, Paul G. Hill, and Roland D. Martinson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006. Pp. 214. \$15.99 (paper).

Where have all the young men gone? Why are they gone? What is going on with them and God? Has the church failed to respond to the realities of young men? With these questions in mind, the authors of *Coming of Age* address the declining presence of younger men (ages 18–40) in church. Authors Roland Martinson, Paul Hill, and David Anderson focus their book on the personal stories of eighty-eight young men of differing faith experiences, ethnic groups, and from six different regions of the country. I found *Coming of Age* both professionally and personally useful and inspirational.

The first chapter of the book introduces the reader to the survey of eighty-eight men and begins to explore the identity and spirituality of younger men.

These young men are spiritually complex. Their voices are poignant and powerful. They are multiply spiritually gifted! They present a huge asset as well as a daunting

challenge to the church and its ministry!
(11)

As a member of this age group, and someone working in the ministry, I found the authors' knowledge of these young men and "where they are at" spiritually to be quite accurate. In chapter two the authors lay out a vision for what ministry might look like for young men. Jesus "got real," "showed respect," and "called men and women to work together," and the church should do the same.

Chapters three through nine are the meat of this book. These pages gather the information gleaned from the interviews and arrange them around seven major themes: Relationships, Nature and Sports, Life-Defining Experiences, Crises/Stress and Balanced Life, Service and Care for Others, Work and Avocation, and Spiritual Hunger. Even if the book contained only the stories and personal experiences shared by the men in this section of the book it would be worth buying.

The pages of my copy of *Coming of Age* were underlined, marked, and written on frequently as I made my way through the words of these young men. The interviewees were honest, open, and real. I left this section of the book wanting to gather up a group of my peers and spend a night together over Scripture and some drinks. I personally need to have these real conversations about my faith, and as a lay leader I need to ask questions, listen, and wrestle with my faith along with other men.

In chapter three the authors offer us this overview of their experience of the interviews:

We walked away from the eighty-eight interviews with a sense of awe and reverence for the privilege of seeing beneath the veneer of these relationships to the depths of these young men's quest for a meaningful life and how they wish to make a difference in an often confusing, challenging, and conflicted world. Beneath the guarded nature of the public life of young men is a spirituality waiting to be explored, clarified, guided, and empowered. (44)

When asked how the church could connect better with young men, Steven, a twenty-seven-year-old, said, “Do *this*.” Steven’s words are simple and true. The church needs to sit down with young men and invite them to open up about their lives. Chapters three through nine are exactly that, men being open about their lives. Whether it’s an honest answer about seeking experiences in nature to hide out from real-world pains or longing to find meaning beyond work and the rat race, these men share some very useful insights into their lives.

The last of these chapters, chapter nine, talks about spiritual hunger. The authors define it like this:

“Spiritual hunger” is one’s desire to authentically be one’s self and make sense out of one’s life and one’s world. It involves a search for meaning in one’s daily existence and hopes for the future. A person’s spiritual hunger is expressed through a search for consistency and hon-

esty between one’s conduct and one’s understanding of life and God. (160)

This desire lies beneath the surface of the men I know. Believers, non-believers, and everyone else are spiritually hungry. We need to feed that hunger.

The final chapter speaks of transformation in men’s ministry. The church needs to shift from a “you-come-to-us” model to a “we-will-go-to-you” model. Go to them, select a few with leadership potential, and empower them to work with you. The book closes with excellent questions to get the conversation started. I will use these questions with my friends and in my ministry.

The authors of *Coming of Age* have done their research and delivered a very engaging, informative, and beneficial book. Buy it.

Billy Johnson
Mount Olivet Lutheran Church
Minneapolis, Minnesota