

# Reviews



**SCRIPTURE AS COMMUNICATION: INTRODUCING BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS**, by Jeannine K. Brown. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. Pp. 315. \$24.99 (paper).

Why read another book on hermeneutics? Jeannine K. Brown answers this implicit question by proposing a fresh model for understanding Scripture. Brown makes “a plea for a more interpersonal model of reading and interpreting...one that does justice to the dialogical nature of interpretation and contextualization” (15). As is apparent from the second half of this quote, this is not an “easy-reading” entry-level survey of interpretation, but rather a fresh angle from which to read and understand Scripture. Brown does not simply rehash the same hermeneutical principles that can be found in most surveys. She begins with the larger question: “What is the Bible?” which then produces some related “how-to” skills.

It must be admitted that the heading to part one, “Theoretical Perspectives on Scripture as Communication,” does not grip the average reader with insatiable curiosity. Likewise, chapter one, “Terminology and Context for Hermeneutics,” does not increase the hope of a “fun” read. Yet, for those interested in what Scripture communicates to the individual reader and the church, these topics are important. Brown’s style of writing is compelling as she relates stories from her life and ministry that raise mundane topics to the level of relevance. A one-sentence example illustrates this well: “When living in England for a month, I

had the experience of reading a newspaper in my own language but without fully sharing the cultural backdrop of its writers” (21). Every serious interpreter of Scripture resonates immediately with this example and expects that the following pages will address interesting and important topics.

Chapter two provides a foundation for Brown’s approach to interpretation. Her “communication model of interpretation” leads into aspects of language theory such as speech act and relevance theories. The reader should be encouraged to wade through terminology like “illocution” and “perlocutionary intention.” A few pages of deep water here will shed light on the rest of the approach. A helpful five-point summary of “meaning in communication” (47–48) is also valuable for reference throughout the book. Brown concludes this foundational chapter with an application of the model to a passage of Scripture (1 Cor 8:1–13). In just a few pages, all of the theoretical perspectives are brought to bear on a classic hermeneutical debate: food sacrificed to idols.

The theoretical beginning to the book is developed in chapters 3–6. Her historical survey of the last two centuries of biblical interpretation is indeed a “road less travelled.” While most texts catalog the historical movements of interpretation, Brown focuses on interpreters’ views of author, text, and reader in the past two centuries. This leads to a chapter on meaning in a communication model as a relationship between author, text, and reader. Relationship is a key concept in this model, since communication requires some relationship, whether in-

cidental or intimate. With the communication relationship clarified, meaning comes back into focus. It is at this point that the reader again encounters speech-act theory and some of the definitions given early in the book now become vital to understanding the meaning of the biblical text. While the reader again enters some deeper water here, Brown does an exceptional job of leading through the theoretical back into the practical. Chapter six develops the relevance of Brown's interpretive theory with "An Invitation to Active Engagement." This chapter asks key questions about presuppositions and stresses the "ethics of reading" and "reading in dialogue" with those from other traditions and cultures.

With the foundational half of the book complete, part two works through some standard hermeneutical categories found in most texts on interpretation, including genre, language, historical background, literary and canonical contexts, and application. Brown's faithfulness to her own approach is what makes these chapters unique and valuable. For instance, Brown examines how major genres of Scripture (e.g., poetry, epistle, narrative) communicate meaning to the reader. In each case, biblical examples are plentiful. In another chapter, what some would call "historical background" is more accurately discussed as "social context." Along with more biblical examples in this chapter, she introduces several tools to access the biblical social context that help the reader move from awareness to effective study.

Brown disciplines her discussion of application by consistently referring to the topic as "contextualization." As any parish pastor or educator knows, the lay reader often leaps from text to application so quickly that textual meaning is sometimes discarded in the process. In chapter eleven, contextualization is discussed on a level that forces the reader to treat the original context of the text more seriously and thereby produces a better understanding of the meaning in a modern context.

After a thorough consideration of the process of contextualization, Brown concludes with a chapter that relates the application of Scripture as communication with the concept of incarnation. This was a particularly thought-provoking and satisfying ending to this fresh approach to God's word.

Jeannine K. Brown has provided a helpful reconsideration of hermeneutics for both pastor and scholar. Her style blends technical discussions with practical stories from her experiences as well as an abundance of biblical examples. Thorough footnotes and ample bibliography allow for either a quick refresher in hermeneutics or a deeper study of the topic of Scripture as communication.

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**DIVINE TEACHING: AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY,**  
by Mark A. McIntosh. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007. Pp. 272. \$37.95 (paper).

Mark McIntosh, a priest in the Episcopal Church and professor of spirituality and theology at Loyola University in Chicago, has earned a well-deserved reputation for his pastoral wisdom, theological depth, and clear prose. *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* is an unconventional and important introduction to theology that will surely reinforce that reputation. The superior strength of this book as an introduction to Christian theology comes from its central claim: *God is the Great Teacher*. This simple statement, that God is the teacher of theology, has the potential to reshape popular misconceptions of the purpose of theological study. McIntosh does his best to keep the gracious God at the center of this book, not just as an object for inquiry, but as the one who teaches us in personal encounter.

The book is divided into two parts: "Be-

coming a Theologian” and “Theology’s Search for Understanding.” In the first section, “Becoming a Theologian,” McIntosh argues (using Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth) that *God* is the real theologian, the one who teaches us in his own manner. The best theologians, writes McIntosh, “are content to teach the truth about God precisely by *letting* the ludicrous inadequacies of their art appear in broad daylight” (4). As such, McIntosh envisions this book as more of a guidebook to an astonishing adventure rather than a textbook (hence the title of the second chapter, “Strange Calling: Theologians as Adventurers, Pirates, Mystics, and Sages”). This understanding of the theologian and the theological task is unfortunately absent in many introductory textbooks to theology. Instead, conventional theological textbooks attempt to fit the mysteries of faith into a respectable discipline of “theology” as practiced in the academy. The result is a text wholly conformed to human expectations and wholly insufficient for those in a pastoral role, who, given the joyous task of expounding the word of God, need a deeper and more profound text. McIntosh’s book provides a brilliant and alluring alternative to the more standard introductory theological text available.

The second section deals with some of the usual topics that come up in an introductory text: salvation, creation, and Trinity. Yet in continuation with the emphasis on adventure and mystery, McIntosh approaches these particular Christian teachings in a unique manner. The material is divided into three areas that he calls “Orientation,” “Landmarks,” and “Pathfinding.” “Orientation” allows the reader to get a sense of the main questions Christians have asked in describing these mysteries. McIntosh does a wonderful job of identifying these crucial questions and displaying them in an easily accessible manner. In the chapter on the Trinity, for example, McIntosh provides figures and a “Terminology Survival Guide” to some of the more difficult trinitarian terms. The “Landmarks” section provides a more

penetrating look into a theological mystery by focusing on a great thinker or two (such as Irenaeus or Augustine). This strategy provides an added dimension to the book. McIntosh opens up the depth of the Christian tradition in a way that gives the beginning reader the confidence to approach primary sources, and provides the more seasoned reader an illuminating interpretation of classic texts. This is true especially of McIntosh’s defense of Augustine, who is often the scapegoat in contemporary circles for a variety of theological maladies. Finally, in “Pathfinding,” McIntosh looks ahead on the paths a theologian might take in the present and future. In these sections McIntosh interacts with contemporary trajectories, giving the reader assistance in understanding current problems and possible solutions. McIntosh interacts with many differing perspectives in these sections (such as Eastern Orthodox theology, the relationship between science and theology, and feminist theologies). He is particularly sensitive to ways that theology touches the practical life of Christians, such as using predominantly masculine language in reference to God and the centrality of the church life in understanding God. Each of these sections sparkles with judicious insight and pastoral concern, providing ways to think along with God on these matters.

Overall, this book has numerous qualities that would recommend it to the pastor, serious layperson, or the seminary and college classroom student. First, this text defies the typical introductory-text genre. For example, McIntosh glides effortlessly between biblical exegesis, historical theology, and interaction with contemporary texts. This synthetic approach provides the reader with a model that is not artificially confined by academic disciplines and also provides a richer description of Christian mysteries. Second, *Divine Teaching* invites the reader to interact with the ideas of important Christian thinkers in an instructive manner. But the most crucial contribution this book makes is the stalwart refusal to domesticate

and abstract the mystery of the Triune God. Instead McIntosh reveals the astonishing purpose of theology: for humanity to encounter this gracious and holy God.

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**PREACHING AND THEOLOGY**, by James F. Kay. St. Louis: Chalice, 2007. Pp. 166. \$18.99 (paper).

James Kay's book is the fifth and most recent addition to the *Preaching and Its Partners* series edited by Paul Scott Wilson. The entire series seeks to connect preaching with other theological disciplines in order to strengthen the church's proclamation. Fortunately for readers, this book follows in the accomplished footsteps of the series' previous volumes. Written for pastors willing to reflect on the theological assumptions of their own preaching, *Preaching and Theology* is informative and thought-provoking.

Kay, the Joe R. Engle Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics at Princeton Theological Seminary, begins by offering an invitation for "those who may have lost or never found their theological frame of reference" (5). The journey begins with an introduction to the three frames of reference available to one seeking to understand preaching. These frames of reference—rhetoric, poetics, and theological—compete with one another and strongly influence one's understanding of homiletics. While acknowledging the strength of rhetoric and poetics, Kay ultimately views each as inadequate for understanding preaching as the word of God. "Preaching as the Word of God," a term which comes from the Second Helvetic Confession and is the title of Kay's first chapter, reveals his obvious preference for a theological frame of reference (7). The most basic objection to this particular frame of reference is, How can the words of a simple preacher equate

to God's word? Kay works through this objection in a classic Barthian manner by pointing to the threefold Word of God. "There is thus a threefold form by which the one word of God comes into the world and all the way down to the likes of us: The Logos—enfleshed in Jesus Christ, attested in scripture, and proclaimed today in sermon and sacrament" (14).

Since the word of God then should be the ultimate subject matter of each sermon, Kay sets out to define how this word of God is for us. He does this by bringing the theologies of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann into conversation with the Apostle Paul. Thankfully, one can follow Kay's argument without combing through the many volumes of these colossal theologians. He notes their commonality and calls attention to the strengths of each argument. Included in this section are portions of two sermons for those wanting to see how Barth and Bultmann's theology influenced their own preaching. Kay concludes this section by summarizing the most important differences between the two theologians: "Whereas Bultmann orients preaching around the term *kerygma*, entailing a summons to decision, Barth prefers *epangelia*, widely used in the New Testament (e.g., Gal 3:16–17; 2 Cor 1:20; Rom 9:4) to refer to God's promise as something 'announced,' and in Barth's view, without connoting any human decision" (35).

As Kay demonstrates in his fourth chapter, both Bultmann and Barth continue to influence homiletics today. Barth's influence carries on under the banner of postliberalism, having been mediated by Hans Frei. Meanwhile, Bultmann's theology, with admittedly more modification, carries an even greater influence. Emerging from Bultmann and his students was the New Hermeneutic, which has informed the so-called New Homiletic in Western preaching. The fact that Kay refers to this progression as a "fateful" day gives one little question how he views this historical development. Still, he gives a thorough account of the rise of the New Hermeneutic and gives ample

space to its strengths. In fact, he even includes portions of a well-written sermon from Fred Craddock in order to demonstrate the potential of this approach. Still, in Kay's view, the major weakness in the New Hermeneutic is substantial and can be traced back to Bultmann's theology, which distanced the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. Kay applauds the New Hermeneutic's attempt to overcome this gap, but "the end result is to shrink considerably the saving significance of Jesus Christ, attenuating its cosmic implications to that of individual existence, transferring—rather than doubling up—the predicates of salvation from God to language, from the Christ-event to the Word-event, and, in the judgment of some, substituting the world of hermeneutics for the gift of the Holy Spirit" (104).

Kay refers to his alternative to the New Hermeneutic as preaching as "promissory narration" (105). He brings readers to the end point of their journey after a brief excursion through the work of others associated with postliberalism, including Frei, Charles Campbell, and George Lindbeck. While ultimately appreciative of their contributions, Kay chooses to draw upon Jürgen Moltmann's characterization of promise as a "speech act" instead of the narratology found in the work of Frei. Borrowing from Moltmann, Kay explains, "A promise, we are told, 'initiates' and 'determines' history; a promise 'binds' its hearers to the future; and a promise 'gives' its receivers a sense of history (and destiny and hope) by 'creating an interval of tension' between its uttering and its redeeming" (122). The performative power of promise is the foundation by which preaching is properly understood, in Kay's opinion. Consequently, "while the sermon should always speak God's Word of promise, in accordance with a theological frame of reference, the narrative rendering of Jesus Christ in his unsubstitutable particularity is not always required of the sermon" (125).

Many preaching books aimed at pastors read like how-to guides with seemingly little

time or development given to their theological underpinnings. This book is a welcome alternative to such works. It is insightful and nuanced without being overly technical. My only critique is that I wish Kay had taken another chapter or two to outline the practical applications of preaching as promissory narration so preachers could consider their own proclamation in greater detail. Still, many will be more than grateful to find that Kay's book delivers on its promise to aid those searching for a theological frame of reference for preaching.

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**THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE UNITED STATES**, by Nancy Koester. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. Pp. 239. \$18.00 (paper).

In 1972, Sydney Ahlstrom published his magisterial *A Religious History of the American People*. His one-thousand-page tome made subsequent four-hundred or five-hundred-page surveys seem remarkably succinct. Nancy Koester's recent work, with less than two hundred pages of text, demonstrates that even greater brevity is possible. Her brief overview aptly covers the vast terrain of American Christian history and introduces readers to important themes and interpretations in current scholarship. For her intended audience of those with little knowledge of the field, Koester's work provides a good entry point.

Koester's book focuses on "how Christianity has shaped and been shaped by American life" (196). She highlights Christian involvement in political, economic, and social issues as well as how these issues shape Christian faith and practice. She notes, for example, that the Puritans' sense of being a chosen people with a divine mission "runs like a red thread from the first Puritan settlements down to

politics and foreign policy in the early twenty-first century” (15). Likewise, Christians have responded to cultural change. Second-wave feminism, for instance, prodded mainline denominations to accept female clergy.

Koester’s focus serves her readers well. In a time when debates about the proper relationship between church and the public life have often been oversimplified, sound history offers perspective. Koester’s narrative demonstrates that Christian involvement in the public square is neither always good nor unequivocally bad. If, for example, some antebellum Christians used Scripture to justify slavery and a racially-stratified society, one hundred years later some African American Christians drew inspiration from the faith “to risk their lives to follow God’s call to freedom and justice” (174). Koester also reveals the moral ambiguity within particular movements. Her treatment of Prohibition is a case in point. While noting that Prohibition has been described as a movement of “petty moralists” intent on forcing their beliefs on an unwilling society, Koester reminds readers that Prohibition leaders wanted to alleviate poverty and domestic violence. If they imposed middle-class Protestant morality, they also offered systemic solutions to problems that disproportionately affected women and children.

The focus on the relationship between Christianity and American culture also enables Koester to bring groups who have not traditionally exercised significant cultural power into the main narrative. American religious historians have been trying to find narratives and themes that do not relegate non-white, non-evangelical Protestant traditions to the historical sidelines. The catch, of course, is to bring these groups into the main narrative without misrepresenting power dynamics. Some Christian groups have exercised more power than others. Eliding that reality serves no one well. Yet powerful or not, all groups had to interact with American culture. They did not

all have equal opportunity to shape it, but they had to respond to it.

American Lutherans profit from this approach. Lutherans often disappear in historical narratives. Neither true “outsiders” (such as nineteenth-century Catholics or Mormons) nor true “insiders” (like eighteenth-century Congregationalists or nineteenth-century Methodists), they do not fit standard categories. Still, Lutherans demonstrate how interaction with American culture affected religious groups. Nineteenth-century Lutheran debates about assimilation provide an example. In the nineteenth century, Protestant evangelicals exerted significant cultural power. Because Lutherans were Protestants, they were welcome in evangelical reform organizations and even in union churches. But the invitations came with a catch. To fit in with biblicist evangelicals, Lutherans downplayed their confessional identity. Some Lutherans, such as Gettysburg Seminary president Samuel Schmucker, advocated working with evangelicals and revising the Augsburg Confession in light of Americanized beliefs and practices. Other Lutherans, particularly recent immigrants, “prized Lutheran identity” (76) and rejected assimilation. Although these Lutherans wanted to limit the larger culture’s influence on them, they still interacted with the culture and their intra-Lutheran fights were shaped by it.

Highlighting the interaction between Christianity and American culture also allows Koester to examine the recent reconfiguration of American Christianity. Since the 1960s, Christianity in America has become less divided by denomination and more divided by ideology. Markers such as “mainline” and “conservative” often reveal more about a person’s religious outlook than “Presbyterian” or “Lutheran.” Koester explores how the Vietnam War, the rise of second-wave feminism, and the reentry of fundamentalists into politics contributed to this realignment. She also notes that identifiers such as “evangelical” and

“conservative” are often used too simplistically. According to Koester, “members of mainline churches tend to relegate evangelical activism to a cluster of right-wing causes” (190). Yet looking at how evangelicals engage in the public square reveals that “evangelical activism has not been confined to the right wing” (191). Like people in the mainline, some evangelicals have been active serving their communities through groups like Habitat for Humanity and addressing systemic injustice through organizations such as Evangelicals for Social Action. For readers wondering if divisions in American Christianity are bridgeable, Koester’s final chapter may offer some hope.

As one might expect in a short survey, Koester’s book skips some subjects and skims others. Readers interested in the history of doctrine, for instance, will find tantalizing insights but not great depth. Koester, however, accomplishes her goal. She introduces American Christianity in a manner that will make readers want to learn more. A few, indeed, might be inspired to tackle Ahlstrom.

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**IMAGING THE JOURNEY... OF CONTEMPLATION, MEDITATION, REFLECTION, AND ADVENTURE**, by Mark C. Mattes and Ronald R. Darge. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006. Pp. 120 (illus.). \$40.00 (cloth).

In recent years concerns about creation have been voiced in the media and elsewhere. The Lutheran church has increasingly recognized the importance of God’s creation in its theology and social statements. Theologians like Joseph Sittler have long written about nature and grace, while the new hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, has included numerous prayers and hymns on the subject of creation.

Awareness of creation is at the heart of *Imaging the Journey*. As its subtitle indicates, this is a book of contemplation, meditation, reflection, and adventure—with creation as its focus. “The authors of this book invite—even challenge—you the reader to see, to observe, and then to reflect on the messages found all around us, in nature as well as in the activities and creations of fellow human beings” (7). The challenge unfolds in a series of forty-five page-long meditations by Mark Mattes, each one accompanied by a photograph taken by Ronald Darge and a prayer composed by Ronald Taylor.

The meditations are informed by Lutheran theology, reflecting such themes as sin and grace, theology of the cross, the hidden God, and *simul justus et peccator*. A strong strain of Danish Lutheran piety also undergirds the book, partly because it arises from the culture of Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa, and partly because the admonitory thinking of Danish theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig is present in a number of references. The book begins and concludes with the popular Danish folk tune “Evening Star.” The eight stanzas of the song invite nature (the evening star, shady lanes, lonely heather, mighty ocean, etc.) to “teach me” (7, 110).

The seven themes into which the meditations are divided invite and prod the reader into a journey of spiritual reflections. Each reflection, accompanied by a photographic image, addresses our responsibility for the care of creation and the maintenance of human community. The photographs are often abstract and in soft focus, so the potentially frustrated viewer is twice advised to be patient and open to new horizons of meaning (7, 10). In his meditations Mattes often tries (not always successfully) to explain or interpret the abstract, impressionistic images by integrating them into his narrative.

For example, patience and visual exegesis would seem to be helpful in a rumination on “Resurrection,” which accompanies a predominantly black photograph with white high-

lights of an open C-shaped form. Imagination suggests it might be a masked rock formation or an ascending rocket trail. Mattes, however, suggests another christological interpretation of the photo. “The abstract image before us bears the patibulum of what is seen as a crucifix. The lower portion of the image appears as two legs in motion, as though Christ is emerging from the tomb” (30, 31). One is, perhaps, eventually able to make out the horizontal beam of the cross (the patibulum), but one may have to work much harder to discern the two legs in motion. In the end, one is obliged to yield to Mattes’s insight and concur that “[no] darkness can envelop the light of Christ.”

This method of reflection-and-image sometimes works in reverse, too. In a meditation on “The Whole Person,” a photo of a chunk of petrified wood is in sharp focus (45). The suggestive reflection examines our hope for wholeness in this life (44). However, the text uses the image of the rock in a way that

puzzled even my scientifically accomplished son. Mattes writes, “At the molecular level... rock is pulsating with energy, just like our own bodies....At the molecular level they both share the same energy.” “That may be so in some abstract way, but it doesn’t work for me,” said my commentator son. Since the authors at the outset gave us permission to see, observe, and reflect on these messages, it is liberating to ponder, discuss, agree, and differ from the text. That may be part of the journey of adventure, as suggested in the book’s subtitle.

While never relinquishing its focus on creation, this book of spiritual meditations shifts emphasis about halfway through. The first three sections (A Spiritual Communication, The Newness of New Life, and Fragmentation and Wholeness) tend to deal with faith issues. The final four (Ministry as Service, Renewal in the Midst of Conflict, Vocation, and Alpha and Omega) tend to deal with the activities of human beings, specifically in matters of church



life. Anyone who has worked in a parish situation will readily resonate with the three essays on conflict, where a forest fire is seen as a metaphor for church conflict. The photo images in this section are especially moving, for they show at once the beauty and disruption of creation.

The spiritual exercises in this handsome book might work well for many people as personal devotion or as opening exercises for church groups (church councils, committee meetings, adult forums, confirmation classes). The reflections could readily provoke thought and discussion. The prayers that conclude each offering both summarize and address the living God in creative ways. While the book is somewhat expensive, it might also serve as a thoughtful token of recognition for service in the church or as a confirmation gift.

The kind of spiritual writing in this book has a respected history in the Lutheran church. One thinks of Joseph Sittler's *Gravity and Grace* or Martin and Micah Marty's volumes *Places Along the Way* and *Our Hope for Years to Come*. This genre of inspirational writing attempts to address the hectic pace of life by providing space for reflection and introspection. The final word in *Imaging the Journey* is reserved for Philip Hougen, bishop of the Southeastern Iowa Synod of the ELCA. Hougen notes that this volume holds up two overarching truths: our identity from God's communication to us in the world, and the cross of Jesus, which ends the quest for self-security (116). These truths, addressed and amplified in text, image, and prayer, fuel the journey of contemplation, meditation, reflection, and adventure.

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**WHITEWASHING UNCLE TOM'S CABIN: NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN NOVELISTS RESPOND TO STOWE**, by Joy Jordan-Lake. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005. Pp. 204. \$27.00 (paper).

A novel soars off the sales charts. People stay up all night reading it. Stores can't keep it in stock. Fans adore it, but foes hurl editorial eggs and sermon stones. Then come the larger projectiles—"anti" books—written to debunk the offending novel. Bullets will follow. What novel could raise such ire? *The Da Vinci Code*? No, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel ignited anti-slavery zeal and inflamed pro-slavery wrath, moving the nation closer to civil war.

Joy Jordan-Lake's new book, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom's Cabin: Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists Respond to Stowe*, takes readers to the heart of this literary conflict. Jordan-Lake teaches English at Belmont University in Nashville. Her interest in white women's responses to slavery began with family history. She had a grandmother (add three "greats") who was so dependent on slave labor that she never even had to brush her own hair. Then the war killed her husband and freed her slaves, leaving her to raise a large family single-handedly. Jordan-Lake wondered how this grandmother survived. When Jordan-Lake was growing up in east Tennessee in the 1970s, she heard talk about the New South. But pom-pom girls saved their best routines for "Dixie," and there was a dance at which girls wore hoopskirts and couples had their pictures taken with a southern mansion as a backdrop. When a class was assigned to read *UTC*, Jordan-Lake recalls hearing someone taunt: "You're not really going to read that nigger-loving book, are you?"

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to evoke "sympathy for the African race," as she explained in the preface to *UTC*. Slavery was then at the height of its power, pushing to expand into the western territories. It also reached

north with a stronger grip than ever before, thanks to a “new and improved” fugitive slave law. As of 1850, northerners caught helping runaways faced harsher penalties. Professional slave hunters could seize northern blacks—fugitive or free—and force them south into slavery. Outraged by the fugitive slave law and grieving over the recent death of her youngest child, Stowe became, in a phrase dear to the Beecher family, “terrible as an army with banners.” Already an accomplished writer, she fought her battle with words, creating “pictures” and “sketches” of life under slavery. She knew that pictures could move people in ways that the abstract arguments could not.

Move people she did. And with such raw power that even today *UTC* “provokes lively, often heated, occasionally acrimonious scholarly and political debate...more than any other single American novel” (xiv). In Stowe’s lifetime, *UTC* outsold every other book but the Bible. By the close of the nineteenth century, however, her star was falling. Literary elites dismissed Stowe’s work, and that of other women authors, as sentimental. Several twentieth-century critics condemned *UTC* as racist; still others found Stowe’s focus on domesticity problematic. In recent years, however, scholars of women’s history and literature have reexamined Stowe’s work and opened her legacy to a new generation.

Joy Jordan-Lake makes a significant contribution to the new Stowe scholarship. Hers is the first major study of “anti-Tom” books written by women. She finds that the female-authored narratives “offer fertile ground for feminist and socio-economic analysis of racism’s inevitable, ongoing collusion with gender and class oppression” (24). Viewed through this lens of pro-slavery female authors, Stowe’s aims and methods come sharply into focus, including the religious and theological dimensions that are passed over by some scholars.

Jordan-Lake brings the literary debate over slavery up to the present in her chapter entitled “Still Playing With Fire,” in which she analyzes

plantation fiction authored by women, black and white. Not to be missed are her reflections on Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* (1936)—two novels that can hardly be on the same shelf without causing a meltdown.

The plantation literary tradition evolves with each generation, of course. But the question—*who is the story about?*—remains. For Margaret Mitchell, it was all about Scarlett. For Stowe, it was about slaves—those who escaped, and those who died in bondage. For the anti-Tom writers, it was about white planters, for whose benefit the slaves existed.

Scholars identify up to thirty anti-Tom novels published before the Civil War. Not all were written by slaveholders or even by southerners. According to Thomas Gossett, anti-Tom writers fail “to imagine convincing characters and incidents.” Worse, they “ignore the cruelties of the institution and, when such evils do appear in their works, they are often justified by appeals to a crudely racist theory which condemns the blacks to a hopelessly inferior status” (Thomas Gossett, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin in American Culture* [Southern University Press, 1985] 213). The anti-Tom books fail as literature, and they fail to describe slavery as it really was. They do, however, show how whites justified slavery. And they show, judging by the howls, where Stowe hit her mark.

Pro-slavery novelists had to “whitewash” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Under their pens—or brushes—plantation life became bright and cheerful. Black people were relegated to the sidelines, contra Stowe. Instead of finding freedom in the north, slaves find security on the plantation. *UTC* made thousands of anti-slavery converts, so anti-Tom novels had to narrate reverse conversions: a Yankee woman marries a slaveholder, repents of abolitionist sin, and embraces slavery as heaven-sent. Anti-Tom novels hop-scotched from fiction to polemics: slaves were fed, housed, and clothed, which is more than northern factory workers could expect. Hence John Page’s 1853

novel: *Uncle Robin in His Cabin in Virginia, and Tom without One in Boston*.

If all anti-Tom writers were engaged in whitewashing, what difference did the author's gender make? Quite a bit, it turns out. The male writers spilled more ink on the outside of Uncle Tom's cabin, offering formal defenses of slavery. Male authors usually showcased white male characters, restricting white females and all blacks to minor roles.

In contrast, the female authors worked harder to whitewash the inside, thickly coating family relationships and domestic concerns. Leading roles went to white women. And, unlike their male counterparts who could defend slavery from the top of the system, the women defended slavery from the middle, with the white male planter above them and the slaves below. Jordan-Lake shows that female anti-Tom writers sometimes called for greater freedom for white women, even as they defended slavery. Their pleas were futile, since slavery

rested on the three pillars of race, gender, and class. None of these could be moved without toppling the whole system.

Slavery gave wealth and status to white planter women—for a price. White women were expected to feign ignorance when their men broke marriage vows, raped or had liaisons with female slaves, and fathered “mulattos,” born into slavery. When slave families were torn apart by sale, or brutally punished, planter wives were expected to acquiesce (though some women arranged a sale or wielded a whip). The lives of planter wives were defined by slavery, which made them petty managers of homes fraught with abuse, deceit, and betrayal. All of this Jordan-Lake documents from antebellum diaries and letters of white planter women. These writings, never meant for the public eye, make for some telling contrasts with pro-slavery novels.

At least the female anti-Tom writers understood that they had to meet Stowe on her own

ground, inside the cabin, with a domestic perspective. *UTC* is a militantly domestic novel. Family ties are everything. The action happens in kitchens, not in Congress. For Harriet Beecher Stowe, motherhood was a holy calling and the family a means of grace. She hated slavery because it destroyed families. She urged American mothers, black and white, to rise up and rid the land of slavery. As Gillian Brown puts it, Stowe's novel may be read as "a manifesto for family integrity" (Gillian Brown, "Getting in the Kitchen with Dinah: Domestic Politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *American Quarterly* [Fall 1984] 503–523; especially 505–506).

Female anti-Tom novelists had their work cut out for them. Jordan-Lake shows them striving to portray plantation life as one "big, happy, bi-racial family." But stains kept seeping through the whitewash. For example, in Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis' Cabin* (1852) the Mammy character "always favored her white charges over her own children," holding the master's son in her arms while her own child lay in the cradle (66). Black mothers had to teach black children their "place," chuckling when white children bullied black ones. Both Stowe and her detractors featured "mother-savior" characters: Stowe's mothers help slaves to freedom; but the anti-Tom mothers merely polish chains.

Harriet Wilson, a free black writer in the north, was not much impressed with motherhood or domesticity. Her 1859 novel features grotesque women whose mothering powers have been destroyed by slavery. Wilson's book is intensely anti-slavery, but it "moves beyond *Uncle Tom's Cabin* toward a far more radical indictment of the endemic racial, gender, and class prejudices that infected the whole of American society, not just the slaveholding South" (127). Hence Wilson's title: *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*. By "Our Nig." Wilson's work anticipates, in some ways, twentieth-century critiques of Stowe by black authors.

Domesticity and motherhood (or its demise) were central for the female writers. But there was a deeper layer: theology. Just here, the female and male anti-Tom writers reconvened to defend what Jordan-Lake calls the "theology of whiteness." The reward for this religion is "economic profit." And its "primary religious practice" is to "reinforce racial, gender, and class boundaries. Its god is indistinguishable from its wealthy white male enforcers." Those who defended the theology of whiteness manipulated "religious language and ideology to support the economic interests of a white patriarchal culture, including the creation of a deity in its own image: white, male, indifferent to injustice, and zealous in punishing transgressions across the racial, gender and class lines it has drawn." Jordan-Lake rightly calls the theology of whiteness a heresy, since it departs from "classical Christian understandings of freedom, worth and dignity" (143, xvi, 161). This classical understanding was shared by Stowe. Raised by Calvinist evangelicals, she believed in salvation from sin by the power of Jesus Christ, working personal transformation and social reform. To be sure, Stowe sometimes portrayed black people in ways unacceptable today, but at her best, her theology inspired her to picture Christ as a black slave. In her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe asked, "Is not the doctrine that men may lawfully sell the members of Christ, his body, his flesh and bones, for purposes of gain, as really a heresy as the denial of the divinity of Christ?" (Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* [Arno, 1968] 407). The anti-Tom writers were right in this much: Harriet Beecher Stowe was an enemy of their faith.

Jordan-Lake's book will be welcomed by Stowe scholars. More broadly, her work explores how fiction shapes American culture, and how theology can shape fiction.

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