

# Reviews



**FOLLOWING GOD THROUGH MARK: THEOLOGICAL TENSION IN THE SECOND GOSPEL**, by Ira Brent Driggers. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. Pp. 148. \$24.95 (paper).

In this book, Driggers answers the challenge issued by Nils Dahl in the mid-'70s—to attend to the neglected area of the New Testament's vision of God—by exploring the *theo*-logy of Mark's Gospel. He does so by exploring God's characteristic immanence and transcendence in relation to the disciples.

Driggers begins by distinguishing Jesus as main character and God as main actor of Mark's Gospel. This distinction allows Driggers to explore the characterization of God *through* Jesus (God's "invasive" role) and *apart* from Jesus (God's "transcendent" role). In Mark's prologue, Jesus is identified with Israel's God in a unique and intimate way, yet Mark does not collapse the distinctiveness of each character, according to Driggers. Such a distinction is also apparent in the baptism and temptation accounts. Driggers highlights the tensions between God as present in Jesus and "God's continued transcendent activity" (18).

Drawing on the characterization of God, Driggers argues for a continuing tensive relationship in the story of the disciples' call (1:16–20). The language of "making [the disciples] fishers of people" suggests that, while the disciples choose to follow, God also calls and draws the disciples. Mark's ambiguity in this pericope and the prologue creates a tension that shouldn't be collapsed into a single explanation. This passage also portrays the disciples as joined to Jesus' ministry; they are "to extend

God's transformative eschatological reign into the world" (34).

In chapter three, Driggers analyzes the theme of the disciples' hardening in Mark 1:21–8:21, which is tied to their misunderstanding of Jesus, his teaching, and ministry. They "fail to recognize Jesus' role as agent of God's eschatological reign" (38). Yet Mark also highlights God's action in hardening the disciples (e.g., 6:52). According to Driggers: "To the extent...that God continues to act *both* transcendently *and* invasively the growing rift between Jesus and his disciples will reflect that very tension" (50). Driggers applies this narrative tension to Mark's audience, who will experience it as indicating divine mystery.

In chapter four, Driggers focuses on God's action of scandalizing the disciples, first by the promise of Jesus' impending suffering and death and then by its realization. Yet even as Mark portrays the disciples in their darkest hour as they abandon Jesus (14:50), he includes Jesus' teaching about a faithful future for the disciples in God's purposes (Mark 13). The good news will be preached, and the Spirit will provide the disciples with words to speak (13:9–13). Mark's audience will perceive Jesus' passion as arising from human resistance to God's action *and* from divine necessity. The "crucifixion paradoxically implies both God's vulnerability and God's sovereignty" (82).

In the book's last chapter, Driggers argues that the final discipleship move of the women at the tomb (their fear and silence; 16:8) is a uniformly negative characterization. Every disciple character in Mark fails by the end of the narrative. Yet the ending also indicates the

good news that Jesus is raised and will await his followers in Galilee (16:6–7). This affirmation, coupled with Jesus' earlier promises about the disciples' future ministry, provides hope. Driggers centers that hope upon the audience of Mark, who are beckoned to "finish the discipleship story" in line with Jesus' ministry and by proclaiming and enacting the reign of God (95). The openness of Mark's ending (16:8), for Driggers, also points to God's mercy and power as the impetus for discipleship. Driggers interprets the ending of Mark as drawing attention to God's invasive action (in which the audience is to participate) and God's transcendent action of power and mercy. This tension highlights the mystery of God and of discipleship in Mark.

Driggers's study of God's character in Mark's gospel is an early offering in an important conversation. His work provides a holistic reading of Mark from the vantage points of theology and discipleship. As such, it offers pastors and teachers a good example of a narrative, thematic reading that addresses the whole plot of Mark.

Driggers raises two areas of tension in Mark's theology and discipleship. First is the tension between God's work as embodied in Jesus' person and ministry and God's work distinct from Jesus. Second is the tension between human and divine agency. Both tension pairs are discussed within the categories of God's invasive and transcendent actions, which results in some lack of clarity of the latter categories. Since the tension between human and divine agencies is not unique to Mark, but emerges from the Old Testament (e.g., Isa 6:9–13; 63:17), a greater emphasis on the biblical theme of covenant could help to elucidate this issue. While not dispelling the tension, the covenantal nature of God's relationship to humanity could provide a storied and relational context for discerning Mark's theological tension and its resulting mystery.

I appreciate that Driggers avoids muting the tension of Mark's portrait of God. He re-

sists reading a single meaning into a single story of the narrative (avoiding the less than helpful assumption that interpreters should read short narrative passages and simply compute their meanings together). Instead, Driggers reads the narrative coherently and thematically, though not simplistically nor devoid of appropriate tension. This reading strategy results in a narrative theology of Mark complex enough to account for the text's nuances.

Jeannine K. Brown  
Bethel Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**WE HAVE HEARD THAT GOD IS WITH YOU: PREACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT**, by Rein Bos. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. Pp. 384. \$28.00 (paper).

The author begins by telling about an aged church-going Scottish woman who read her Bible every day. She used to complain about the difficulties of understanding the *King James Version*. Her children bought her a copy of the *Living Bible* and she started reading through Genesis. A few weeks later she went back to her *King James*. She told her children that "some of the things the Old Testament talked about she was much happier not understanding."

Or what do we do, asks the author, about words such as these from Zeph 1: "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD. I will sweep away humans and animals. I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea."

Does the church need an *old* Testament when we have a *new* Testament? How should we handle all those texts depicting questionable morality as well as violence? These are the kinds of questions this protestant pastor and professor of preaching in the Netherlands is addressing in this book.

Part one reviews the Old Testament in the theory and practice of preaching. Bos offers a

clear and interesting survey of major approaches to the OT in the history of the church. Allegory makes it possible to find Christ all over the OT, and has the virtue of finding relevance all over the place as well. The story of David and Goliath, for example, demonstrates how the Lord will help us conquer the “giants” we face in our lives, such as worry, fear, anxiety, and insecurity (24). Typology sees in persons, places, and events prefigurations of the ministry of Jesus Christ. This method works with some texts, but the OT remains only the “starter” for the “main course” of the New Testament (41). The problem with the promise-and-fulfillment approach is that the only parts of the OT that are of interest are those that contain promises fulfilled in the NT.

Bos’s description of the salvation history approach, with its D-Day and V-Day analogies and focus on the “mighty acts of God,” sounds like what my generation learned in our seminary education. One of the problems with this approach is that Israel is seen as having defected from its calling, and after the appearance of the church disappears from further consideration. The section on Karl Barth is appreciative, but says that for Barth the *Magnalia Dei* have become the *Magnalia Christi*. The author summarizes by concluding that none of these methods provides the needed interpretive key for unlocking the meaning of the OT for the Christian. The final section is thus entitled: “Wanted: A Bunch of Keys.”

Part two offers the ingredients of a new model for understanding the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. Kirkegaard’s familiar “letter from a lover” analogy was on target: the OT must be read as something addressed *to me*. The author then offers a lucid discussion of the “world behind the text” (authorship, date, settings, etc.), the “world of the text as part of Scripture as a whole” (the canonical context), and the “worlds in front of the text” (the “reader response” enterprise). In connection with evaluating these approaches he cites a comment from David Buttrick:

Frequently biblical preaching has told a biblical story replete with oodles of biblical background, a holy history, but has not permitted God to step out of the biblical world into human history. The God of biblical preaching has been a past-tense God of past-tense God-events whose past-tense truth (original meaning) may be applied to the world, while God remains hidden within a gilt-edged book. (163)

Bos proposes that each OT text should be considered from four angles: (1) the *sensus Israeliticus*: What does this text mean for biblical Israel and for modern Judaism? What have Jewish commentators said about it? (2) the Christological sense: Does this text connect with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? (3) the ecclesiological sense: What word does the text have for the church today? and (4) the eschatological sense: What does the text say about “life in the world to come”? These are the “four keys” on the key ring of the biblical interpreter.

Part three, a four-voiced choir, illustrates the use of these four keys, with examples from a variety of sermons. The author concludes with his own sermonizing on Exod 3, the Servant Songs, and Ps 22. He also offers comments on sermon preparation and provides detailed bibliography, including resources on the internet.

I found this to be an exceptionally helpful study, fully informed by older and also more recent biblical and homiletical scholarship and written with admirable clarity, imagination, and good judgment. Especially valuable is the author’s concern for Jewish-Christian matters. To illustrate the attitude of the church in the past, he refers to a pair of sculptures to be seen at the entrance of the Cathedral of Strasbourg. There is *Ecclesia*, symbolizing the church, a proud and victorious young queen, holding a cross and a chalice. Next to her is *Synagoga*, representing Judaism, blindfolded, with her head bowed down, the tablets of the law in her hands cracked, and her crown fallen onto the

ground. The message is clear: the Jews and Judaism are spiritually and morally “blind” (185).

Here is the book for classes dealing with preaching the Old Testament, as well as for any persons wishing to invigorate their preaching, teaching, and understanding of these biblical materials.

James Limburg  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**SCRIPTURE, CULTURE, AND AGRICULTURE: AN AGRARIAN READING OF THE BIBLE**, by Ellen F. Davis.  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. ix+221. \$23.99 (paper).

Professor Ellen Davis of Duke Divinity School has provided us with a beautifully wrought collection of essays that demonstrates her ability to interweave sharp critical exegesis with contemporary “agrarian” perspectives on the human place in the world. Drawing from scientists, philosophers, and agrarian writers (especially Wendell Berry), Davis casts an ethical vision of the human place in creation that seeks to expound on and maintain the integrity of the “triangulated relationship among Israel, the land, and YHWH” (40). In her words, agrarianism seeks to “re-member a way of life that honors the wholeness of creation” (21). To “re-member,” in agrarian terms, is an act of the imagination that seeks to reinstate or restore a thing (e.g., land) to its God-given place as a genuine “other”; this act of the imagination is, in Davis’s terms, the reweaving of a “fragile web” (41) damaged by the human tendency to perceive the nonhuman as an object/commodity rather than as a genuine “other.” The agrarian ethical vision of the world is not only the message of a burgeoning countercultural movement; it is, she claims, fundamentally consonant with the thinking of the biblical writers themselves.

The initial chapters lay the methodological foundation for the essays that follow. Davis describes a crisis of perception in contemporary culture, perpetuated by “the numbness carefully wrought by industrial culture” (14). The crisis she detects involves an inability to perceive the moral and theological dimensions of the present ecological crisis. And while the ecological crisis was not predicted by the prophets, the prophets can, through depictions of creation’s undoing, “give us language...to see what we are doing and the likely consequences” (20). Davis then traces the outlines of an agrarian hermeneutic, which assumes that “agriculture has an ineluctably ethical dimension” (22). Agrarian concerns, she claims, intersect with biblical concerns on four levels: (1) the treatment of the land as a fellow creature; (2) the rejection of knowledge as a tool for the bending of nature; (3) a concern to order life “in ways that are consonant with God’s will and the design of the world” (36); and (4) the invaluable worth of the land.

The subsequent chapters engage specific texts through the “*theoria*” (3) of agrarianism. Chapters three through five, for example, involve an agrarian engagement with Torah and, more specifically, with the potentially problematic Priestly account of creation (P), the food-filled pages of Leviticus, and the “wilderness economy” of Exod 16. Memorable moments include her subtle reading of Gen 1:1–2:4a, P’s “liturgical poem” (43). As poetry, this passage contains language that is multivalent, overflowing with meaning and potential. Davis takes up P’s insistence that “mastery” and “conquest” (her translations, 53–63) appropriately, and sometimes ironically, describe P’s estimation of humanity. Human dominion over the created order, in her opinion, is not the exercise of disregard for the nonhuman; rather, “appreciation and enjoyment of the creatures are the hallmark of God’s dominion and therefore the standard by which our own attempts to exercise dominion must be judged” (65).

Davis sharply critiques contemporary and ancient practices of land use that involve the centralization of food production and the resulting disruption of “local farming communities” (102). Chapters six and seven, for example, draw from Kings, Amos, and Hosea, and critique a royal ideology that views land as a commodity to be sold, and not an inheritance to be maintained. Centralization beneath the crown, she asserts, results in “wealth flowing out of local communities, in direct contrast to the biblical model of communities first maintaining themselves and then engaging in a mutually advantageous exchange with urban populations” (105).

The final chapters are constructive in nature, painting portraits of faithful human work and faithful human cities. With Barth as a starting point, Davis highlights the often neglected matter of sloth and good (i.e., “wise”) work. Wise work has nothing to do with the amount of activity undertaken, but rather deals with the presence or absence of “love for the life of the community” (142). The construction of the portable sanctuary (Exod 25–31; 35–40) and the proverbial poem of the “valorous woman” (Prov 31:10–31) provide the textual moorings for her discussion. Regarding the faithful city, Davis asserts that since cities are loci of power, faithfulness is manifested there when “those who have some choice about how power is exercised remember those who have little or no choice” (156). To imagine our cities anew, argues Davis, “we need fresh counterimages on which to dwell” (163). Images of graceful Zion, the icon of God’s eschatological reign, provide such “counterimages” (163).

Davis helpfully utilizes the Zion images as icons of hope for a new tomorrow. I wonder, however, if her agrarian hermeneutic has muted the voices in Israel that understood Zion in terms of YHWH’s new *imperial* capital, to which all the *tribute* of the nations would flow (Isa 60:5ff.; 66:12). Do these images not depict a centralized “royal” economical the-

ory, clothed in eschatological accoutrement? While Zion is a helpful icon, it must be qualifiedly adopted, since the cultural baggage attached to the Zion image may in fact undermine the very agrarian worldview for which Davis has so effectively argued.

Just as contemporary feminist readings have contributed to the development of a “feminist consciousness,” Davis’s book, likewise, pioneers the development of an “agrarian consciousness.” And, if Davis is correct, the adoption of an agrarian consciousness brings us one step closer to a consciousness more closely aligned to that of many (though not all) biblical writers. The accessibility of Davis’s book, and its engagement with contemporary social issues, makes her book an ideal study for adults—urban, rural, and suburban. Additionally, the book’s engagement with secular thinkers and scientists makes it an ideal platform for conversation with non-Christians, who may share her environmental or agrarian concerns.

Michael Chan  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**THE WORD OF THE CROSS IN A WORLD OF GLORY**, by Philip Ruge-Jones. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008. Pp. 96. \$10.99 (paper).

On January 30, 2009, Garrison Keillor’s *Prairie Home Companion* included a tribute to the late John Updike. In his writings, Updike was known to throw barbs at the religious and their institutions, and Keillor quotes him describing an experience of church:

There was a time when I wondered why more people did not go to church. Taken purely as a human recreation, what could be more delightful, more unexpected than to enter a venerable and lavishly scaled building kept warm and clean for us one or two hours a week and to sit and stand in

unison and sing and recite creeds and petitions that are like paths worn smooth in the raw terrain of our hearts? To listen, or not listen, as a poorly paid but resplendently robed man strives to console us with scraps of ancient epistles and halting accounts, hopelessly compromised by words, of those intimations of divine joy that are like pain in that, their instant gone, the mind cannot remember or believe them. (*Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962).

It is this very description of the community of believers Philip Ruge-Jones takes to task in his book, *The Word of the Cross in a World of Glory*.

Ruge-Jones's little book offers a very big proposal. While perhaps many go to church, as in Updike's mind, to experience quiet splendors of tradition, Ruge-Jones believes Jesus' own cry is on the tongues of those gathered: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" (30). This is perhaps the polite way of asking the demoniac's crass question of Luke 8, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" What *does* God have to do with a world that looks more like it has been left to the powers of sin, death, and the devil? If God's response is as lame as a "poorly paid but resplendently robed man [striving] to console us with scraps of ancient epistles and halting accounts," we are most to be pitied. However, Ruge-Jones believes that it is the message of cross theology, the living God who comes in the person and work of Jesus Christ to conquer the work of pain and death in this world, that responds to the cries of humanity.

In this creative volume, Ruge-Jones introduces more than a theological proposition. He introduces God's Son, Jesus Christ, working power in the weakness of the cross to make the dead and dying alive. From the very beginning, when God speaks, things happen (17). Not only does creation spring up at the sounds of God's voice, but faith in the hearts of humanity as well. Ruge-Jones draws on the Apostle Paul's announcement in his letter to the Ro-

mans, "Faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 1:17). Words have the power not only to inform, but to transform the hearer. Ruge-Jones goes on to write a series of creative stories about the power of Jesus' cross in a variety of settings. He explains, "I write not so much to inform you of the way it was, but to invite you to feel the force of the words in order that your community of faith might be transformed by the word of the cross" (19). For example, he writes a fictional dialogue between a German couple during the Reformation and how they may have processed Martin Luther's preaching and teaching. In discussing the angry reaction of others to Luther's message, the couple seeks more information, and their continuing discussion finally brings the message of the cross to one another, locating their faith outside of institutions and fear and in Jesus Christ alone. Other experiences of the cross are located in Ruge-Jones's depictions of biblical characters hearing the gospel for the first time, and his own work in ministry. He also includes stories from Latin America that draw the reader into recognizing the ubiquity of the cross's power across nations, race, and gender.

This book is particularly helpful for small-group study, useful in its brevity and accessibility. Ruge-Jones includes a series of questions at the end of each chapter, encouraging reflection about the text and then drawing on personal experience. Group discussion is intended to mirror the stories in the book, as individuals share the power of the cross in their lives, oftentimes recognizing God anew in the very telling of those stories. Ruge-Jones's overall purpose is to encourage the reader both to grasp the power of Jesus' cross and to notice the cruciform nature of one's own life when drawn into faith. "What has made you alive because of this Word?" is the bottom line.

Ruge-Jones tells stories that may resonate with our own life circumstances. These stories do not skip over the painful or frightening parts, and because of this honesty, the stories draw the reader into God's purpose: to arrive

into the midst of the unholy and chaotic parts of life through God's cross. While many seek out self-help and personal perfection projects for comfort and escape in a world of pain and death, attempts to clean up the chaos by those means is futile in this life. God's church is designed to be a place that is more than "a venerable and lavishly scaled building kept warm and clean for us one or two hours a week and to sit and stand in unison and sing and recite creeds and petitions." God's church is its people, who are drawn into faith by the cross of Jesus Christ, who boldly answers what he has to do with you. God has not forsaken this world, but instead comes in the surprising power of the cross. God chooses to be revealed this way, and humanity hears these promises in faith. Ruge-Jones shares the story of God's continuing work in the world throughout history and the broader world. Cross theology is not a mere proposition. Cross theology is Jesus Christ breaking into the world as promise-giver: true God and true human, made graspable in faith. Cross theology is not the thing itself, but it points to the thing, which is Jesus Christ and his cross making new life and hope where there was none before.

Natalie Gessert  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**NATURE'S WITNESS: HOW EVOLUTION CAN INSPIRE FAITH**, by Daniel M. Harrell. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008. Pp. 165. \$18.00 (paper).

There is no shortage of books on the topic of religion and science these days. Some of them are amazingly popular, like Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, but are hardly helpful for the interested first-time reader. Spotting the errors in Dawkins takes a trained eye! Other books are quite helpful and informative, but are highly technical and academic volumes penned by real experts like Ian Barbour in *Re-*

*ligion and Science*. There are not that many readable, clear, and reliable books on religion and science that one could give to a friend who is new to the discussion. Polkinghorne's books for laypeople come to mind as exceptions. This new book by Harrell is another.

Harrell's volume comes to us in a series entitled "Living Theology," edited by Tony Jones, one of a cluster of emergent church gurus. My experience with emergent church folks is that they like to talk about big issues and think hard about interesting questions. They abhor preconceived answers, or worse, boring academic lectures. The series is meant to provide approachable, readable books on "hot" theological topics that may even be a bit of fun. This latest book in the series fits the bill. Harrell is a pastor with a Ph.D. in developmental psychology. He knows how to communicate to regular folks, and writes to the family of faith. Yet his knowledge of science is also pretty good, and he is clearly passionate about his topic. The book is written in a lively, fun, and entertaining style that does not detract from substance. On the contrary, this book does get at meaty questions for thoughtful Christians but also for anyone who wants to think about the broad implications of biological evolution.

Of course, as someone writing from an emergent perspective, Harrell has to begin with the bedrock of all truth: a personal story. Chapter one tells the story of his involvement in an interdisciplinary science conference in the Boston area, where he is a pastor. He tells us that he was to be "a religious voice" in a mostly secular context. He confesses to not being very good at natural science, and so this invitation got him interested in what science was saying these days about human nature, and how this connected with religious faith. He became interested in the dialogue between science and religion, as have so many intellectuals in our time. Harrell was especially interested in thinking through the basics of the Christian faith (including the Bible) and the modern scientific view of reality. The book he

wrote assumes the truth of evolution and asks: What does this mean for Christian faith?

Two of his chapters are well written, imaginative dialogues between himself and a close friend, with differing viewpoints. His Aunt Beatrice represents something like fundamentalism, while his friend David is an open-minded believer who does not think science and religion should mix. Why should he care about evolution? Both ask him hard questions, and this allows him the freedom to explain his perspective without having to sound like he is lecturing. He throws in lots of personal asides and humorous remarks, which keep the reader engaged. Chapter two presents the evidence for evolution pretty well, especially given the audience and style of the book (and his tough Aunt Beatrice!). Chapter three is a collection of theological musings based upon what was taught in chapter two. He covers issues such as purpose, randomness, faith and reason, and the image of God. In chapter four he presents a dialogue with David, arguing that, yes, scientific discoveries *should* influence our theological faith. I think he repeats the mantra “all truth is God’s truth” (and just where does that idea come from?), but overall he presents an engaging, thoughtful argument against both pure independence (David) and conflict (Aunt Beatrice).

Chapters five and six are the theological heart of the book. Harrell wants us to read nature and the Bible together, to allow both Scripture and science to inform what we believe about God. Chapter five presents an extended reflection on both the Genesis account and evolutionary theory. The author seems to come out of a conservative-evangelical background. I was a little surprised to see him go so far as to make the following statement: “[W]e could take the easy out and label Adam and Eve or the garden as *obviously* figurative. That’s too easy, I think, and doesn’t take Scripture as seriously as it deserves” (86). My reply would be: but of course it is obviously figurative. A man called “Man” (adam) and his wife

“Life” (eve) in a garden of “delight” (eden) with a tree of life and a talking snake? Please! Of course this is symbolic or figurative, and a literal reading is always a misreading of these chapters. What should trouble any theologically trained reader is the assertion that a figurative reading does not take Scripture *seriously*. Nonsense. Is a literalist hermeneutic that forces the Bible into modernist categories and falsifies its true message the way to take Scripture seriously? I certainly hope not. In the pages of this book, Harrell is often seen struggling with outmoded ideas left over from fundamentalist readings of Genesis, and he’s not afraid to drag them out and talk about them. That might just be one of the strengths of this book, just because evolution is often opposed by people on the basis of their (mis)reading of the Bible.

The end of the book is a Sunday lunch at Aunt Beatrice’s, with David and lots of good food and good talk. Things are left rather open and tentative, just as any good postmodernist would want it to be. The book itself is best as a conversation opener. It has problems, of course. It is too breezy at many points, gets some things just plain wrong, and trips lightly over deep matters. But it makes for a good read, and opens up the dialog in helpful ways, especially for those in a literalist frame of mind about Genesis. I like it. I might even give it to my Aunt Beatrice.

Alan G. Padgett  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**THE FIDELITY OF BETRAYAL: TOWARDS A CHURCH BEYOND BELIEF**, by Peter Rollins. Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2008. Pp. 196. \$19.95 (paper).

Peter Rollins, academically trained philosopher and founder of an alternative Christian collective in Ireland called *Ikon*, has presented a thoughtful and provocative piece in his second book, *The Fidelity of Betrayal: To-*



*wards a Church Beyond Belief*. Rollins possesses a unique gift, which is shown on almost every page of this book: he has a way of taking deeply philosophical ideas and making them understandable and engaging without lessening their richness. This book, like his first (*How [Not] to Speak of God*), focuses on issues of our conceptions of God, truth, and church. But here, using philosophical expositions of biblical texts and constructed parables that connect to Western philosophical perspectives, Rollins takes a radical step, by calling the reader to see that the most faithful way to be Christian and church is to deny or betray God. Rollins means for his thesis to be shocking and provocative, forcing the reader to really dwell on what he is presenting. Ultimately, what Rollins means by this thesis is that we have often taken on philosophical and cultural baggage in our conceptions of the Christian God. We have built frameworks and perspectives that deceive us into believing that abstract things like “truth” matter. We use these abstract, culturally-constructed understandings of Christianity to actually escape God and the world. Rollins believes, then, that we can only be faithful to God if we will betray our artificial conceptions of God to encounter God anew. He believes that within the very tradition of Christianity there is this understanding of the necessity to betray God (or the idea of God) in order to encounter the living God.

The book comprises three parts. In part one, Rollins seeks to show how betrayal itself is essential to our faith. This part, while engaging and thought-provoking, may be the weakest. Its struggle lies in his use of biblical narratives to drive home this point of needed betrayal. In chapter one, he reexamines Judas, looking deeply at the nuances of the narrative. Rollins explores interesting, and at times odd, assertions about whether Jesus somehow gave Judas orders to betray him, making Judas’s act of betrayal an act of fidelity. While at times his thesis seems simply weird, it nevertheless miraculously leads the reader to think deeply

about whether Christianity may call us to be faithful to it by betraying it, so that Christianity may not get stuck in stale cultural religion and instead might be a faith in a living God.

In chapter two, the author explores these points by turning to Abraham and the early chapters of Genesis. Rollins shows in this chapter how struggle and doubt are central for Christianity. This is, in many ways, the topic of chapter three as well, where Rollins closes part one by discussing the Bible as a whole, moving us away from a rational inerrancy to our seeing the Bible through an eschatological lens, seeing the text itself as the invitation to wrestle with it.

While part one has an odd kind of flavor, Rollins is really at his best in parts two and three. Here Rollins stops philosophically interpreting biblical texts and instead writes from his real expertise, articulating philosophical concepts that provoke deep thought about the life and action of the church. While biblical exposition is not absent from this section (he makes Moses’ burning bush narrative central), Rollins nevertheless turns to discussions of truth and how we should talk about God. Here he uses a number of engaging parables, and articulates the thought of Nietzsche to drive his point home. He argues, both through his discussion of the burning bush and his philosophical musings, that God is beyond a name, that God is not to be made into an object. God is rather to be experienced as an event of blessing. This allows the author to reveal how Christianity and the ministry of the church have often made God into an object, giving God names that allow us to “consume” God. The central point of the chapters of part two is the need to betray the names we have given God in order to experience God as an encounter.

Part three moves in the spirit of Kierkegaard, Barth, and Bonhoeffer, though Rollins continues to dialogue more with philosophical perspectives than theological ones. Nevertheless, in this part Rollins follows these past theologians by pushing the reader to contemplate

how Christianity is a religion without religion, a religion that is willing to even betray its practices to encounter God. Rollins works with these paradoxes throughout the whole of the book. This is his real strength as an author: he is able to take paradoxical concepts and keep them from dying away in esoteric articulations.

The book concludes with a final chapter that examines how the church might live into this fidelity of betrayal. Here Rollins draws from the practices of his own community. It is a relatively short chapter that leaves the reader wanting much more. It is fascinating to hear him discuss practices like the evangelism project, where his community *does not* seek to evangelize others, but invites others into the community to evangelize the members, all with the idea that we can only know what we believe through conversation with others and other perspectives. We can only really hold on to our faith if we are willing to continue to search. In this chapter he also discusses his community's (or "collective" as he calls it) practice of atheism for Lent: during Lent they read Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche, letting go of religious concepts of God in order to encounter God at Easter.

While this all sounds radical, this is the real genius of the book, and Rollins's very project. In his thoughtful and very unconventional arguments and practices, he leads those outside his community to deep thought and reflection about the purposes and actions of the church in our world. Where so many of the emergent-church types have received acclaim for saying very little of substance, Rollins is a rare exception.

Andrew Root  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY**, edited by Daniel E. Bornstein. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008. Pp. xvii + 320. \$35.00 (cloth).

This volume is the fourth in a series of seven volumes that are collectively known as "A People's History of Christianity." The title of the series indicates the approach it takes; this set focuses on the way in which Christianity was encountered and lived by ordinary men and women throughout the centuries. This volume itself is centered on the period from the sixth to the fourteenth century in Western Europe, between the third volume on Byzantine Christianity and the fifth on the Reformation era.

The approach taken in this volume is not to attempt a complete survey of Western medieval Christianity, but rather to focus on selected topics where the theme of "lived religion" might be best seen. The chapters themselves focus on such topics as the Conversion of the Barbarian West; Death and Burial; Relics, Ascetics, and Saints; the Impact of Architecture; Medieval Revivalism; Clerical Celibacy and the Laity; Hearing Women's Sins; Heresy and Dissent; Jews, Muslims, and Christians; Domestic Religion; Parish Life; and the Burdens of Purgatory. These chapters are not intended to be comprehensive; for example, the chapter on Jews, Muslims, and Christians is focused mainly, as one might expect, on medieval Spain.

The editor of this volume acknowledges that the sources for this type of history of medieval Western Europe are "unevenly distributed and far from exhaustive." This problem is compounded by the fact that most surviving records are administrative or ecclesiastical records. The authors of these chapters, then, must comb through the available documents with an eye toward the way in which people "lived" Christianity from day to day. They examine the reports of missionaries and priests; the comments of secular authors; the records of donations, wills, and legal disputes; devotional and theological materials (especially

those aimed at the laity); and the accounts of parish councils and lay confraternities, all seeking a different view of Christianity during this period of time.

This approach to the lived religion of medieval Christians is a very interesting addition to our knowledge about this period of time; much of this material is available, but scattered throughout specialized journal articles and monographs, and not very accessible to the general reader, or even to historians of Christianity. In the chapter on the conversion of the West, we see how the Christian missionaries transformed the conceptual world of both the common people and the ruling elites, not destroying their old ways but transforming them into the Christian ethos. Another chapter, on architecture, focuses on implications of the changing styles of church architecture, and on the more mundane aspects of how clergy and laypeople worked together to have such buildings erected and how they were to be maintained. A third chapter, on medieval revivalism, shows how wandering friars and inspired lay preachers sought to deepen the faith of the laity through impassioned and enthusiastic preaching.

Many of the chapters concentrate on how ordinary people lived out their faith on a daily basis. One chapter concentrates on practices surrounding death and burial, and how they were transformed by Christianity. So there are sections on saints and relics, on the development and theology of purgatory, on how religion was practiced in the Christian homes; these chapters deal with the ways in which people adapted to and accommodated Christian beliefs into their own personal religiosity, especially the development of more "popular" forms of religion, as opposed to the "official" religion of the priests and theologians. Some chapters examine the areas in which popular and official religion interact, such as the development of ideas and practices surrounding clerical celibacy, the question of priests hearing the confession of women, and the usual

rhythms of parish life. In these sections, the most interesting elements involve the ways in which the people and priests lived in the same world, but how they worked with different parameters of religious meaning, often overlapping but never completely the same. One other section has chapters concerning other boundaries, such as Heresy and Dissent, and relations between Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

This fascinating volume will be especially useful to broaden a reader's understanding of medieval Western Christendom. To me, the chapters on architecture, celibacy, and purgatory were the most interesting, but all the sections would have more than a little interest, especially if your education in church history was dominated by the accounts of popes, kings, and theologians. We have tended to think of medieval Christianity as being rather rigid and monolithic, but this volume shows both the internal development in this period of Christian history as well as its very obvious diversity and richness.

This volume is not a substitute for traditional works on medieval Christianity, but a very valuable supplement to them; it would assist the reader to have some of the basics of this history in front of them (or refreshed in their minds) before beginning to read the volume. But it is a very accessible and readable work, and in many chapters the narrative is well written and captivating. Most of all, it will transform your view of ordinary medieval women and men, transformed from stock characters to real persons, and seeming very similar to ordinary Christians of our day.

Mark Granquist  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**PRIESTHOOD, PASTORS, BISHOPS: PUBLIC MINISTRY FOR THE REFORMATION AND TODAY**, by Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008. Pp. 112. \$16.00 (paper).

Timothy Wengert, history professor at the ELCA seminary in Philadelphia, has given us a carefully researched review of issues surrounding priesthood, pastors, and bishops from the Reformation era and the Lutheran Confessions.

The book is an outgrowth of his 2005 essay, "The Priesthood of Believers and Other Pious Myths," which is the first chapter of this book. Wengert argues that Luther never used the terms priesthood of all believers, or the universal priesthood of all believers. These terms were coined later and then became the presupposition and basis for ordained ministry, in contrast to the intent of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

The heart of Wengert's argument appeared already in 1970, when Arthur Carl Piepkorn asserted in the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialog that the symbolical books nowhere attempted to derive the sacred ministry from the universal priesthood of the faithful. Piepkorn went a step further: "The doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers had receded into minor importance even for Luther himself by the time the symbolical books were being framed" (*Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: Eucharist and Ministry*, 1970, p. 107). Luther, however, did call all Christians priests, principally in the 1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility*, as well as in other works listed by Wengert. To emphasize the point, Luther wrote that in baptism each of us is consecrated a priest, bishop, and pope (11, 13). So, despite Wengert's label of pious myth, the phrase and concept of "priesthood of believers," even "priesthood of all believers," is here to stay. What is helpful about Wengert's book is that

he shows what Luther and the other reformers meant by the phrase; not that all Christians are also pastors, or that everyone is baptized, so anyone can do this (122, note 12), but that the distinction, so deeply entrenched in the medieval church, between religious persons (i.e., clergy, those in religious orders) and secular persons is eliminated. There is no separate spiritual state of clergy. We are all Christians in the one body of Christ.

Within this one body, however, there are different offices. Wengert claims, and this reviewer agrees, that in the Lutheran Confessions the office of ordained ministry is based on the sequence of Articles 4 and 5 in the Augsburg Confession. Article 4 establishes justification by grace through faith, and Article 5 states that to obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments...as through means. God established the *Predigtamt*, the office of preaching, to which people are called and ordained. Deriving the pastoral office from the priesthood of all believers leads, Wengert fears, to a practice where anybody can preach or administer sacraments, such as when (in an actual example) the pastor is gone on Sunday (30). On the other hand, Lutherans have always agreed that in an emergency a non-ordained person can proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments.

The problem is that the ELCA has no consistent policy or practice defining what constitutes an emergency. Surely people should not be deprived of word and sacrament, where needed, in the absence of an ordained person. Given the urgency of word and sacrament, ELCA practice is that non-ordained persons can be authorized to provide them in the prolonged absence or nonavailability of an ordained person. Wengert fears people doing ministry willy-nilly, but he also acknowledges the need for such word and sacrament where an ordained person is not available (31). Then there is the curious situation in the ELCA where laypeople are routinely invited to preach,

but administering sacraments is closely regulated. Which takes more biblical knowledge and theological training: to preach, or to read the words for Baptism and Holy Communion out of the hymnbook? With an increasing number of small parishes unable to support a pastor, I hope Wengert's book kindles discussion on this issue.

Most of Wengert's book concerns the office of bishop, arguing against those who read the Confessions as a rejection of the office of bishop. The Confessions do not reject the office of bishop, or the concept and need for oversight, he asserts, but reject those bishops who deny the gospel and abuse their authority. Melancthon's measure of a true bishop, as well as pastor, was fidelity to the gospel. Having established that, without pursuing the topic further, the conciliatory Melancthon was willing to accept the traditional role of bishops.

However, Luther and Melancthon's views were more ambiguous than simply to resume the Roman Catholic hierarchical system once bishops became evangelical. They subsumed both the office of pastor and of bishop under gospel: the sequence of Articles 4 and 5. Melancthon did not distinguish between pastors and bishops. The office of bishop is to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments (74, 82). Luther and Melancthon looked back to the early church, when a bishop was the equivalent of a head pastor of a large central parish. They were involved in regular word and sacrament ministry and ordained others to similar word and sacrament ministry. What happened, in fact, is that after the establishment of evangelical churches there was a great variety of types of oversight and processes of ordination.

Far from the Reformers' desire that pastors and bishops both be part of the same office, the ELCA has adopted the rituals that have elevated the office of bishop above that of a pastor. Anyone who compares the ordination of a pastor with the installation of a bishop cannot escape that conclusion. Supposedly the ELCA

does not embrace the belief in episcopal succession, that is, that apostolic succession is symbolized and conveyed through the office of bishop, a position that Wengert also disavows. But with *Called to Common Mission* (CCM) we have adopted the rituals of those who do believe that, and we have accordingly agreed that pastors cannot officiate at ordinations. Apparently to demonstrate that we do not concur theologically with what we have adopted liturgically, we allow exceptional ordinations by pastors, and then make the process so formidable that only a few venture to request it. All this we have done with scant theological discussion.

We owe Timothy Wengert gratitude for laying the foundation for a thoroughgoing theological discussion of the offices of pastors and bishops and the practice of ordination. It is a discussion that will range from the Bible, through history, to the needs of today's churches. I hope this book will launch such discussion.

Michael Rogness  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**THE AUGUSTANA STORY: SHAPING LUTHERAN IDENTITY IN NORTH AMERICA**, by Mark Granquist and Maria Erling. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008. Pp. 376. \$29.00 (paper).

Why did my mother always drink just half of her communion cup? Was it her Swedish roots or her old Augustana heritage that gave her the freedom to see and seek God's presence in great literature, classical music, and short stories? Was the source of my mother's love of worship and the liturgy and her engagement in politics the Augustana Synod? Was it their immigrant roots or Swedish ancestry or the Augustana tradition that propelled my grandmother and her sister and brother beyond even undergraduate study before women could

vote? Why was it that the Swedish side of my family voted Republican and was suspicious of unions, while the Danish side voted another way? Was my mother's love of Handel's *Messiah* and her Holy Week trips to Lindsborg, Kansas, to hear it played on street corners part of the "Augustana story"? As we laid my mother to rest just two years ago, she was remembered as that voice on the church council who made sure that the pastors received a just compensation, that benevolence and support of the larger church were central, and as one who, while others napped, was taking notes on the sermon, so engaged was she with that word that gives life. Was this part of her growing up in an old Augustana congregation in Ottumwa, Iowa?

For me, reading *The Augustana Story* was a search for the answer to these questions, a journey into the legends and myths of my childhood to discover the roots of my Swedish and old Augustana mother, and a glimpse into part of my own identity as a leader in the ELCA. But luckily, authors Erling and Granquist have not written this book in order to answer these questions; their vision is much broader. They wrote *The Augustana Story* in order to describe an Augustana *distinctiveness* that has made a significant contribution to the shape of American Lutheranism today (2). The authors define this distinctiveness as a strong sense of the broader church, churchliness and support for the wider church, convictions about stewardship and support of colleges and agencies Augustana founded, and a spirit of ecumenism. The authors explore factors that may have led to why the Swedish Lutheran immigrants stayed together for over one hundred years without schisms or divisions. "The Augustana story is a story of how church leaders taught immigrants that they belonged not only to an ethnic group, but also to a church with a role in the world" (4).

*The Augustana Story* is written in four parts with notes, an appendix, and suggestions for further reading. "Part 1: Through 1885: Begin-

nings” documents some of the faith movements these early immigrants brought with them. Through correspondence, letters, and diaries, Erling and Granquist describe the Awakening and Revival movement in Sweden, which formed an early vision of mission for the Synod. These immigrants established a seminary, mission societies, a newspaper, and shaped a Swedish ethnic identity. Though they were interested in a mission among the Native Americans and the freed slaves, soon the needs of their own younger generation and the newly arriving young immigrants became instead their designated mission field (58). In this first section, stories of early leaders emerge: names such as Esbjorn, Hasselquist, Norelius, and Carlsson.

In “Part 2: Through 1910: 50th Anniversary,” the authors trace Augustana’s interest in youth and the tensions surrounding language and the education of their young people. This young church wondered about the leadership

of women and the teaching of science. How would the Synod become—or would it become—an American church? This section pays special attention to hymnody and worship in Sweden and America. We meet an early pioneering woman of mission, Emmy Evald; experience the expansion of the Synod north to Canada and west to the Pacific; and watch the immigrant church engage issues of race relations, other religions and denominations, and labor disputes in this new country. Over and over again, growth and tension form new leaders.

“Part 3: Through 1935: 75th Anniversary” describes the growing structures of ministry within the Augustana Synod. Lutheran Bible Institutes and ministries of mercy emerge, as do educational institutions. The authors describe a growing professionalization of the clergy and changes in seminary education caused by a maturing of this immigrant church. Augustana expanded its mission field

around the world and renewed ties with the Church of Sweden in these years.

“Part 4: Through 1962: Merger” explores more fully the ministry and leadership of women in the Augustana Synod. It also documents the youth organizations that had developed by this time. There was a growing ecumenical spirit in the years leading to merger, and a maturing of a church body that never underwent traumatic leadership changes, but rather was served by capable and effective leaders who had a strong, cohesive national spirit, which Sydney Ahlstrom referred to as the “Augustana ethos” (344). Granquist and Erling define that ethos as a church “that always thought big, thought national, thought of itself not only as local congregations, but as part of the wider church” (345).

For anyone with roots in the Augustana tradition, this volume pulls together the stories of leaders, of institutions that gave vision and faith and shaped a legacy that is part of the fabric of the ELCA. I longed for greater depth in almost every chapter—to go into the homes and kitchens of those early immigrants, to hear their faith and listen to their struggles in ordinary voices. And what was the documentation

for the assertion that the United Norwegian Lutheran Church women patterned their fund raising and organizing after the work of Emmy Evald and the Augustan Women’s Missionary Society (120)? At times, I found the structure of the book confusing. The headings suggested dates and a chronology that often overlapped in chapters and sections. I wasn’t certain of the purpose of the insertions included in each part. The authors explored the development of the Augustana Synod into an *American* denomination, but I was unclear as to what made it uniquely American.

I am grateful to the authors for their acknowledgment of the failure of these Swedes to engage with Native Americans and African Americans in their early exploration of mission in this new land. Unfortunately, it is a legacy that we inherit in the ELCA. May we learn from them as we live faithfully in this time. For any church historian, or daughter or son, granddaughter or grandson of this tradition, or for those who want to learn from the past in order to view and shape the future of the ELCA, this book is a necessary companion.

Susan Tjornehoj  
Minneapolis Area Synod  
Minneapolis, Minnesota