

Reviews



MINISTRY AND MONEY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PASTORS, by Janet T. Jamieson and Philip D. Jamieson. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009. Pp. 216. \$19.95 (paper).

Money has power. Most personal and institutional decisions are based on the financial cost or the potential gain. As Lynn Twist writes, “virtually everything in our lives and every choice we make—the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, the schools we attend, the work we do, the futures we dream, whether we marry or not, or have children or not, even matters of life—everything is influenced by this thing called money” (*The Soul of Money* [W. W. Norton, 2003] xxi). Our value as a person is often pegged on financial worth. In a book written as a research project, Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson document that most Christians, including pastors, find issues around money to be “complicated, unsettling, difficult...and frustrating” (*Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don’t Give Away More Money* [Oxford University Press, 2008] 102–103). Even our language is skewed. Stewardship is the “church word” for fund-raising. Stewardship sermons build the case for giving more money to the church. Fund-raising programs that will increase giving are sought without thought about the “theology” that they proclaim. We need to have a biblical theology of money, and champion practices that are faithful to that theology. We need to intentionally equip seminarians and pastors to be competent financial stewardship leaders.

For these reasons, I applaud the recently published *Ministry and Money*. The authors are a married couple on the faculty at the University of Dubuque. One is an accountant, the other a pastor. They combined their disciplines into a course titled “Money and Ministry,” and this comprehensive book grew out of their experience in the classroom.

The book is divided into two major parts. Part I is “Developing a Theology of Money.” In these chapters, they wrestle with the problem of money in the church. The Bible lifts up both the perils and the promises inherent in money. The core issue is “the choice between whether we serve God or Mammon.” The journey continues with a brief history of stewardship insights in the writings of the Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern periods. A theology of money in light of the Triune God is offered as a guide. In these discussions, the reader is invited to meet the challenge posed by money and its power. Is money intrinsically evil? Is money an active or passive agent? Is it corrupt and not worthy of theological discussion? Is money a rival to God? How does the biblical witness to the decisive victory on the cross relate to the Christian use of money? Why is the topic of money taboo in church and/or social settings? What power do we give money when we use it to measure the worth of a person or thing? Does money’s power foster practical atheism? How do we respond to the power of money?

The second part pertains to “Applying a Theology of Money.” It has two sections. The first is a primer to help pastors understand the

basics of church accounting, financial reports, budgeting, and the need for transparency. The remaining portion delves into money in the personal life of a pastor, the freedom that comes from giving and mentoring holistic money talk. I particularly appreciated their theological reflections on parish practices. The authors utilize four widely identified principal motivations for giving as a basis for their discussion: “reciprocity with God; reciprocity with the religious group; giving to extensions of the self; and altruism and thankfulness” (*Money Matters*, Hogue, Zech, McNamara, and Donahue [John Knox, 1996]).

The first motivation is “reciprocity with God.” God gives. What we give God will make a difference in what we receive. The more we give, the more we will get. This is the primary principle that underlies the prosperity gospel, which is biblically and theologically untenable. A second and very popular motivation is “reciprocity with the religious group”—or, how to be given public acclaim. Givers are motivated to give because they will be recognized publicly for their generosity. The theological message is that the more you give, the greater your value. This is divisive for the faith community. The third factor is “giving as an extension of self.” People give because of a personal identification with the cause. They are not looking for public recognition. The authors judge this to be “theologically neutral.” The final motivation is giving out of “altruism or thankfulness,” or giving out of gratitude. Although it is the least prevalent among church members, it embodies the most important theological vision. It is this end that pastors are encouraged to emphasize in their preaching, teaching, and parish practices.

Overall, this is a very helpful basic book for seminarians and pastors who seek to be competent stewardship leaders. Readers are offered an astute theology that can sharpen financial perspectives and practices. They can gain a vision on how to lead faithful and transformative conversations regarding the

place of money in their lives and in the life of the church.

Jerry Hoffman
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

BEING CONSUMED: ECONOMICS AND CHRISTIAN DESIRE, by William T. Cavanaugh. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. Pp 103. \$12.00 (paper).

ECONOMY OF GRACE, by Kathryn Tanner. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. Pp 158. \$17.00 (paper).

A few years ago, you couldn’t open a religious book catalogue without seeing a title related to “Christianity and empire.” If the current flyers are an indication, the newest theological preoccupation is with Christian assessments of economics and our current financial crisis. Do these trends do more than follow after societal drifts, slapping theological bumper stickers onto, say, the hubris of the subprime mortgage market or of international financial speculation?

Both William Cavanaugh and Kathryn Tanner wrote their theo-economics before the financial fallout. That is a boon—each book is more reflective and less reactive than many we are beginning to see. In fact, anyone familiar with Cavanaugh’s theological breakthrough (*Torture and Eucharist*, 1998) or with Tanner’s many deliberations on the noncompetitive relationship between Creator and creation will recognize how central economics, broadly construed as the circulation of goods among people and with God, has been to their theologies all along.

Cavanaugh begins with this: “Some Christians may be tempted to assume that economics is a discipline autonomous from theology” (vii). He not only suggests that theology addresses economics, but also refuses to grant economics a privileged place in the conversa-

tion. Christians will talk and act differently, prying open economic “spaces” (x–xii) to be filled with different kinds of transactions and businesses. Cavanaugh later offers practical advice about opening up such spaces, from buying local foods to producing your own. But the book centrally explores Christian conceptions of freedom, consumption, universality, and gift giving in ways that portray secular counterparts as cheap replicas.

For example, in chapter 1 he compares the negative freedom (freedom *from* interference) of the free market with Augustine’s positive freedom, whereby one is empowered to realize one’s true end. The former is an inverted parody of the latter. Thus, what looks free may be slavery (e.g., the indentured servitude of developing nations or of migrant workers in the U.S.), just as what looks like captivity—bondage to God—might provide economic freedoms that address the proper ends of human life.

Chapter 2 turns on a similar irony. North Americans conspicuously consume not because we are overly attached to worldly goods, but because we are not attached enough. This restless detachment from anything that might satisfy us mimics ascetic Christianity, but only as its counterfeit double, for what in one context leads to stronger attachment to God and solidarity with others leads to shopaholics in the other context. Chapter 3 follows suit: Global capitalism appears attuned to the missionary church, but only by abstracting “human relations—economic and otherwise—from their concrete embodiment in the local and the particular” (60).

At the heart of these ironic reversals lies Cavanaugh’s rich understanding of the Eucharist, which he fully explores in the final chapter. Each of the dualities that Cavanaugh considers—freedom and bondage, detachment and attachment, the global and the local—is finally dismantled at the eucharistic table. There, we find the strongest counter-narrative to the story of “the Market”—a story

of participating in God’s life, of being fed out of abundance, and of becoming food for others (97). The fact that many of us find ourselves consumed by our own consumption, by our own seemingly limitless desires, is but the final bad parody of our lives as taken in by God through the Eucharist, where the consumer is truly consumed.

Tanner’s first sentence is similar: “Does Christianity really have very much to say directly about economic matters?” (1). But whereas Cavanaugh answers quickly and moves on to Christian alternatives, Tanner spends her first chapter searching for a “non-reductive, comparative method” (xi) that might link theology to economy without yielding up Christianity’s distinctiveness and thus excluding the possibility of noncompetitive forms of circulation. She settles on the method of comparing different “economic” fields (including theology) by their structural, elective affinities. Chapter 1, while theoretically dense, reveals one of Tanner’s core concerns—her refusal to relegate religion to any private, noneconomic realm.

This concern emerges more fully in chapter 2, where Tanner explores historic alternatives to the present system, including those of Locke and of non-Western gift exchanges. Tanner works in two directions here. On the one hand, she ensures that her theological vision of non-competitive exchange and shared goods is not without historical approximations, and so can’t be written off as an “irrelevant pipe dream.” On the other hand, she continues to emphasize Christian uniqueness. The mutual indwelling of the Trinity, and God’s unconditioned gifting, might lead to human exchanges whereby my having enables my giving, and where your need constitutes your rights. These principles seem far from economics as we know it, which makes giving optional for those who have, and the reception of aid conditional for those who do not.

Although Tanner’s emphasis on Christian distinctiveness appears to undercut its appli-

cability, the two aims do converge. For instance, the “pure giving” of non-commodity gift exchanges falls short of Tanner’s theological economics because it, in imagining “disinterested gifts,” bases its vision on purity of motive—rather than on need—and so relegates religion to the private (anti-economic) sphere. Therefore, even as Tanner brings the “shape of God’s own economy” (85) into sharpest relief, part of its distinction is its concrete applicability to present structures of global capitalism.

Such is the topic of Tanner’s third chapter: “Putting a Theological Economy to Work.” I can’t here do justice to her detailed call to transform economic globalization, social welfare, and the capitalist goal of mutual benefit in light of Christianity’s theological economy, with its unconditional giving and principle of noncompetitiveness. Tanner calls the reader to pressure governing bodies to lift international trade restrictions that give developed nations systematic advantages, as well as to resist the privatization of public goods (indeed, to make “private” goods much more public). One drawback of this quest for systemic change is that most readers don’t know how to go about pressuring their governments and resisting global trends, and so remain without simple solutions.

Here we can see how different Tanner and Cavanaugh are, despite sharing a theological vision. Cavanaugh primarily maximizes the difference between “economics and Christian desire,” despite seeing the former as a parody of the latter. In carving spaces for alternative exchanges, he protects Christian particularity from the all-subsuming force of “the Market.” His simple practical suggestions do not transform economics so much as offer alternatives to it. Tanner, by contrast, finds the theological economy to “pay off” not only by preserving its distinctiveness but also by transforming worldwide practices. Her practical strategies are less neat and dramatic than those of Cavanaugh, but the communal will to implement

them would lead to more sweeping structural changes.

Cavanaugh’s prophetic voice needs Tanner’s transformative vision, and vice-versa. Christians today need both. I recommend each book highly, and especially as they are read together. They bring sharp focus to the nuances of secular society without bracketing out the theological spectacles that see it for what it is—and nowhere with more acuity than when these authors examine economic consumption and competition in light of the Eucharist and of God’s unconditional giving.

Jason A. Mahn
Augustana College
Rock Island, Illinois

OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND: CREATION THEOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF JOB, by Kathryn Schifferdecker. Cambridge: Harvard Theological Studies, 2008. Pp. 217. \$25.00 (paper).

Many scholars have pondered the divine speeches in Job, questioning the extent to which these speeches actually address Job’s situation of innocent suffering. Schifferdecker contends that the divine speeches in Job do provide a response to Job, but in a way that reframes the entire question of theodicy by refocusing Job’s understanding of creation and humanity’s place in it. The divine speeches, according to Schifferdecker, put forth a non-anthropomorphic view of creation, which views humankind as one creature among many—neither the apple of God’s eye nor one held to a higher level of accountability or scrutiny than any other creature. Unlike other creation theologies, humankind in the book of Job is simply one piece of God’s complex, multifaceted creation. Thus, the suffering that befalls Job is not a signal of God’s wrath, but of Job’s encounter with the creation of which Job himself is a part.

To show that the divine speeches offer a

corrective to the view of creation voiced in the rest of the book of Job, Schifferdecker first systematically traces the creation language found in the prologue, Job's first lament, the poetic dialogue, the wisdom poem, Job's final speech, and Elihu's speech. In each of these sections, humanity is placed at the center of creation, either in such a way that God offers protection to the righteous human or in such a way that God is overly concerned with humans and oppresses them. The prologue describes an ordered, domesticated, and hierarchical creation, and features a conversation in which the Satan and God discuss one particular human (Job), whom the Satan contends is pious only because of God's protection. In his first lament, Job incorporates allusions to the Priestly creation account as he voices his desire for God to "un-create" his life. The poetic dialogue offers Job the two-pronged solution of repentance and mercy-seeking, repeatedly maintaining that God's blessing is dependent upon human piety. Job's final speech again describes creation as hierarchical and ordered, relegating anything wild or seemingly unbounded to being outside God's creative design.

Schifferdecker begins chapter 2 by directly addressing creation imagery in the divine speeches. She notes that the divine speeches contain many allusions to Job's monologues. Whereas Job concentrated on his specific, human situation, God primarily focuses on the nonhuman world, including such undomesticated creatures as the leviathan and the lion. Job rued his birth and much of creation, but God celebrates the initial act of creation. While the divine speeches are a somewhat sideways response to Job's quandaries about theodicy, the suffering of the righteous, and divine justice, Schifferdecker shows that Job's questions themselves change when the divine speeches offer an alternate view of creation and humanity's role in that creation. God in essence changes the context of Job's complaints, thus rendering them no longer viable. Job's

problem is not that God has singled him out for suffering, but that Job fails to understand his place in the cosmos, as one creature among many.

Summarizing several other biblical creation accounts, Schifferdecker goes on to argue that the non-anthropomorphic view of creation espoused in the divine speeches is more radically theocentric than any other in the Bible. Both the Priestly and Yahwistic accounts in Genesis describe humanity as the crowning glory of God's creation. Creation psalms, such as 8 and 104, while extolling the wonders of the natural order, also intimate that God preferentially cares for humanity over the rest of creation. The non-anthropomorphic counterargument put forth in the divine speeches in Job opens up a tension within the Bible itself.

In Chapter 3, Schifferdecker addresses Job's final speech and the epilogue. Acknowledging that many find the epilogue an unsatisfactory ending that attempts to gloss over Job's suffering by providing replacement of children and possessions, Schifferdecker contends that the final materials in the book of Job describe a changed Job who has a wider appreciation for the seemingly nonordered parts of creation.

Schifferdecker concludes the book with a lengthy appendix in which she offers a translation, textual notes, and commentary on the divine speeches (Job 38–42). Given the linguistic challenges of translating the book of Job, this work is most helpful. While the textual notes are too technical for those without a grasp of the Hebrew language and the jargon of biblical scholarship, the commentary is much more accessible and helpful to one wishing to better understand the role of the divine speeches in the book of Job.

As ecological discussion becomes ever more serious in the wider culture, Schifferdecker's timely work offers a nuanced, careful read of a sometimes overlooked aspect of biblical creation theology, in which humankind is not the crown jewel of creation but one part of

creation's intricate web. She lifts this up without ignoring the questions of theodicy that are clearly paramount in the book of Job. To treat creation theology and theodicy in such a symbiotic manner is to speak an important word, or at least to raise an important issue, to a society wondering about the origin and meaning of the myriad of natural disasters occurring around the globe. This book, helpful for both the student of Job and of biblical creation theology, is a welcome contribution to the conversation.

Kristin J. Wendland
Living Hope Lutheran Church
Etrick, Wisconsin

CHALLENGING PROPHETIC METAPHOR: THEOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE PROPHETS, by Julia M.

O'Brien. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008. Pp. 202. \$24.95 (paper).

In this volume, Julia M. O'Brien, professor of Old Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary, seeks to find a middle ground between scholars who embrace the prophetic books wholeheartedly and those who find them hopelessly misogynistic and violent. She describes this interpretive problem in the introduction to her book: "Is it possible to take seriously the sexism and violence of the Prophetic Books and still find value in them, to refuse to pit appreciation against critique? Is there a way to do theology after critique, to let critique inform theological reflection rather than stand as its opponent?" (xiii).

O'Brien believes the answer to these questions is yes, and she sets herself the task of demonstrating just such a critical *and* appreciative engagement with the texts, using as her test case the prophets' use of metaphors to describe God and nations.

Before getting to the demonstration of her technique, O'Brien provides a helpful, if necessarily simplistic, overview of the interpre-

tation of the prophets, beginning with New Testament understandings of the prophets and concluding with the writings of Walter Brueggemann. In her next chapter, she provides a more thematic overview of feminist critique of the prophets, focusing specifically on feminist scholars' treatment of Hosea 1–2, and the marriage metaphor found therein.

O'Brien concludes this overview of scholarship by dividing interpreters into two camps: "love it" or "hate it." "Positions on the Prophets take one extreme or the other. Some positions claim to do both—to appreciate *and* critique the Prophets—but, in fact, they fail to recognize the difficulty of the task" (40). In this last category, O'Brien holds up for particular attention the work of Renita Weems, claiming that "Weems does not truly engage theology in light of feminist critique. Rather, she recognizes the problems of the text and warns readers of its danger, but she concludes that the text is so valuable that it must nonetheless continue to be read—problems and all" (44). Not just Weems, argues O'Brien, but every scholar, in fact, separates theology and ideological critique, and gives priority to one over the other. Brueggemann and Weems give theology more weight; other feminist scholars make ideology the priority and so must abandon the biblical text in order to do theology. The problem with all of these approaches is that "[i]n none of these commentators does theological reflection follow from ideological critique" (44).

In the rest of her book, O'Brien attempts to rectify this situation. She proposes reading the Bible as literature; that is, as a text that can shape one's understanding of oneself and the world. Despite this nod to the biblical text, however, O'Brien gives equal, if not greater, priority to ideological critique of the Bible, particularly feminist critique. Ideological critique of the Bible "can lead to greater understanding of oneself and one's culture" (60). O'Brien acknowledges the obvious criticism: "The degree to which those insights [into oneself and one's 'cultural scripts'] should be con-

sidered *theological* might be challenged.” So she offers a defense of her method:

Perhaps *not* insisting that the Bible teach us who God is will allow us to learn things about ourselves and our culture that have profound implication for our theology. Perhaps, as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament insists, in learning about life we learn about God. Perhaps we will find God not simply in the words of Scripture but instead in our wrestling with them. (60)

The rest of the book is devoted to demonstrating what this middle ground between appreciation and critique might look like. In each of the last five chapters, O’Brien discusses a different metaphor used in the prophetic books. In the words of the chapter headings, the metaphors covered are: “God as (Abusing) Husband”; “God as (Authoritarian) Father”; “God as (Angry) Warrior”; “Jerusalem as (Defenseless) Daughter”; and “Edom as (Selfish) Brother.”

As these titles indicate, O’Brien finds all of these prophetic metaphors problematic. She is not alone in her critique, of course. With the exception of the last one, each metaphor has been analyzed and critiqued by a number of other feminist scholars. O’Brien offers her own insights in conversation with this prior scholarship. She also draws on a variety of sources—psychology, literature, movies, personal experience, political theory, etc.—in her analysis of the biblical text. Such a variety of conversation partners makes for engaging and often insightful analysis. O’Brien is skillful at drawing out the cultural assumptions that underlie the biblical metaphors, and at finding parallels in our own modern context(s). She is careful to acknowledge her own biases and assumptions as a white, middle-class, American woman; and she includes a number of voices in the “dialogue” she has with the biblical texts, looking at those texts from a variety of angles. The conclusions she draws challenge not only the prophetic texts, but also various contem-

porary beliefs about power, family relations, gender roles, and God.

For all of these reasons, this book is worth reading. Whether one agrees with O’Brien or not, her analysis of the biblical texts is thought-provoking and accessible. There are points, however, where O’Brien’s claims and conclusions seem to me unwarranted or overstated. To cite one example, in her last chapter (the weakest one, in my opinion), she critiques Obadiah’s depiction of Edom/Esau as an unfaithful brother to Judah/Israel. She bases her critique in part on the highly disputable claim of another scholar (Theodore Mullen) that the stories of Jacob and Esau in Genesis were composed in the Persian period, after the exile (and after Obadiah)! It seems to me highly unlikely that Obadiah concocted the Esau/Jacob relationship himself (cf. Hosea 12:2–3). O’Brien also argues that Obadiah may be fabricating the actions of Edom/Esau against Judah during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem (a fabrication that, she speculates, serves to justify taking land from Edom). Strangely, she mentions but does not discuss the parallel charges in Ps 137:7 about Edom (“Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, ‘Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!’”).

These are relatively minor matters. What I find more disappointing is that O’Brien does not fulfill (in my opinion) the task she sets for herself. She criticizes other commentators for failing to allow “theological reflection [to] follow from ideological critique” (44). But she herself does not do much by way of theological reflection. That is, if “theology” is understood as the task of speaking about God, then this book does not do much theology. O’Brien does not agree with prophetic depictions of God, but she offers little by way of alternate understandings of God. If Weems abandons ideological critique in favor of theology, O’Brien does the opposite. She knows that this is a weakness of her approach, as noted above, and so she offers an alternate understanding of the-

ology: “A primary goal of this volume...has been to erase or at least blur the boundaries between the theological and the political....How we think about others, including how we think about other nations, constitutes theology” (172). This is not my definition of “theology”; therefore, I do not think O’Brien ultimately reaches the goal she sets out in the introduction to her book: “to do theology after critique” (xiii). Nevertheless, for its intelligent, insightful cultural criticism and for its honest struggling with problematic aspects of the biblical texts, O’Brien’s book is worthwhile reading.

Kathryn Schifferdecker
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

THE CHURCH’S GUIDE FOR READING PAUL: THE CANONICAL SHAPING OF THE PAULINE CORPUS, by Brevard S. Childs. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. Pp. 228. \$28.00 (paper).

Brevard Childs’s early work forged the terrain of contemporary canonical criticism, and his continued commitment to explore canonical issues is apparent in this book. His purpose is “to explore the exegetical and hermeneutical implications of canon” in an analysis of the Pauline corpus (3). He does this in conversation with a wide range of scholars, both past and present, and with an explicit commitment to interact with and illuminate both the historical Paul and the canonical Paul.

Childs begins by reviewing various interpretive issues related to a canonical reading of Paul, including questions of authenticity of the letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament; the problem of the tension between the Paul of history and the canonical Paul; and issues of the reception of Paul’s letters, both within the early church and today. Having raised this complex set of interpretive issues for canonical interpretation, Childs reviews a number of prominent scholarly proposals for

adjudicating them. He addresses the hermeneutical proposals of Ulrich Luz (history of interpretation/effects), Richard Hays (intertextuality), Frances Young (ethical readings), Luke Timothy Johnson (theological-hermeneutical approach), and Wayne Meeks (sociological analysis), interacting with each of these proposals in appreciation and criticism, with the goal of appropriating insights for his own canonical proposal.

That proposal emerges in the book’s next section, focused on the “shaping of the Pauline corpus.” Childs suggests that the thirteen New Testament letters attributed to Paul be read in light of their canonical contours. Specifically, Romans provides a hermeneutical key for a canonical reading of Paul, functioning to “universalize” the theological import of Paul’s earlier formulations (254). On the other end of the corpus, the Pastoral Letters indicate the reception of the authentic letters of Paul by the next generation. The location and shape of the Pastorals provide “the letters of Paul a normative role as truthful model by which to measure the church’s sound doctrine in the coming postapostolic age” (254).

Childs demonstrates his method of canonical interpretation in a series of exegetical analyses. In line with his claim of the centrality of Romans for understanding the canonical Paul, Childs analyzes Gal 3 with Rom 4 regarding the faith of Abraham; Gal 5 with Rom 8 regarding the law and the Spirit; 1 Cor 12–14 with Rom 12 regarding the use of gifts in worship (along with the Pastorals on church offices); and 1 Cor 8–10 with Rom 14–15 regarding the weak and the strong. In addition, Childs addresses the canonical function of the single, major section of Romans that does not fit his proposal of Romans as recapitulation of Paul’s earlier theological formations in contingent situations, namely, Romans 9–11.

Childs concludes the book by addressing the New Testament framing of the Pauline corpus. He contends that, as Acts bridges the Gospels and the Epistles, it provides canonical

legitimization for them as “truthful apostolic witness” to the gospel heard in the Gospels (254). Hebrews, on the other end, provides an answer to the theological problem raised by Paul’s apocalyptic vision of newness in Christ by emphasizing the revelatory continuity between old and new covenants (251). In a final chapter, Childs enumerates theological implications of his analysis for canonical interpretation.

I recommend this book to ministry practitioners for a number of reasons. First, Childs proposes boldly and carefully a way of reading Paul canonically, something not often attempted by scholars who focus all—or at least most—of their attention on particular Pauline letters or a reconstruction of the historical Paul. Yet, for those regularly teaching or preaching in the church, there is no escaping the interpretive question of the canonical Paul. Parishioners will raise questions and make assumptions about Pauline theology and ethics that require clear and hermeneutically savvy formulations.

Childs provides one way of framing these issues by suggesting a dialectical tension between a reconstruction of the historical Paul (focused in particularity) and a construal of the canonical Paul (which involves attention to commonalities). Attention to this dialectic seems a fruitful rubric for canonical interpretation, although it may prove difficult to maintain in practice. I had the sense while reading Childs that he at times moves away from particularity in his efforts to expound the canonical Paul. For example, in his discussion of the “weak” and the “strong” in canonical Paul, Childs proposes a Pauline way of understanding these categories that, in my estimation, results in the downplaying of some of the historical contingencies of both the Corinthian and Roman contexts (175–178). Nevertheless, Childs frequently returns to the theme of dialectic throughout the book, providing a helpful reminder to readers that we would do well to

live in this interpretive tension between historical particularity and canonical connection.

Childs’s review of the work of past and contemporary Pauline scholars is breathtaking and erudite at many turns. It provides those in the trenches with a sense of the history and directions of Pauline scholarship (noting German contributions particularly well). Extended discussions and evaluations of key scholars and their work in Paul occur throughout the book. Finally, Childs provides careful exegetical work in selected Pauline texts, with a number of helpful summaries of larger swaths of Paul. Readers may question Childs’s perception of Paul’s meaning at any particular juncture. Yet, his interpretive discussions, with their frequent reference to secondary sources, are themselves a resource to pastors and teachers.

While the particular canonical construal provided by Childs will not fully satisfy every reader, I am thankful to have someone of his caliber doing this work at this stage of his career as an offering to the church.

Jeannine K. Brown
Bethel Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

LYDIA: PAUL’S COSMOPOLITAN HOST, by Richard S. Ascough. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009. Pp. 144. \$11.95 (paper).

Richard Ascough has written a terrific study of Lydia (Acts 16:11–15, 40). It is succinct, readable, and short. Some of you may be wondering, Why would I want to read even 100 pages on Lydia? She gets only six verses in the Acts of the Apostles! What’s the point? Do not be misled. This book is short, but not small. Lydia offers the person and occasion for a deeper and broader probe into first-century life in general, and into the lives of women and of early adopters of Paul’s message in particular. The book, published in the series Paul’s So-

cial Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith, was edited by Bruce J. Malina. As Malina says in his preface, concerning those about whom Ascough and others write, “While each of them is worth knowing by themselves, it is largely because of their standing within that web of social relations woven about and around Paul that they are of lasting interest” (x).

With Lydia as focal point, Ascough begins his study at the “fundamental” level of Lydia’s self-understanding, a topic to which he gives considerable attention for two reasons. First, ancient collective self-understanding was quite different from the individualistic way in which contemporary Westerners understand themselves. Second, because self-understanding was collective, we can come to a much richer understanding of other persons in Paul’s social network than the scanty evidence about Lydia alone would allow. Ascough makes use of “social scientific modeling as well as classical historical exegesis of the passage and no small part of my own historical imagination” (99). His historical imagination is highly informed by his own previous research and his familiarity with much recent study of the first-century world.

Drawing on the wealth of recent research on the first century, Ascough helps us to imagine more clearly and fully how Paul’s message about Jesus was perceived as good news for a variety of Gentiles in the first century. Increased insight about collective understanding may help us appreciate how the Bible is read and appreciated in cultures other than our own, where the collective remains definitive. Ascough’s chart on pages 10–12 is worth serious attention.

After laying out a brief list of what is said about Lydia in Acts 16, Ascough provides a more detailed examination of her life in five chapters dealing with five spheres in which she would have been active: *kolonia*, household, marketplace, workplace, and ritual space. Each of these chapters tells us a great deal about Lydia’s world, all of it pertinent to our

gaining greater comprehension of the New Testament in general.

In the chapter dealing with Lydia’s civic world, that of Thyatira and Philippi, Ascough discusses a range of topics, from the apparent immigration from countryside to city in the first century to the relationship of Philippi to Rome as a colony and the distribution of Greeks, Romans, and slaves in the population of Philippi. Ascough weaves this information into the emphases that he makes in later chapters as well, suggesting at each step how such information may help us move more deeply into the first-century world of Paul’s letters.

His chapter on the household is worth the cost of the book. Not only does Ascough use a wide variety of excellent primary sources, including New Testament materials, but he opens up for us how a woman might be head of a household and what this would have meant in terms of her daily life, how she was perceived outside the household, and her role in the household’s religious practices. Given that early believers in Jesus as Messiah came into communities that met in households, and that they came as adults with social roles determined primarily by their place in a household, this chapter is very revealing. Paul’s use of household metaphors is more clearly understood the more we know how terms, including “household” itself, were likely to have been heard by those who received his letters. Ascough works on a number of very important topics within the chapter on household life: patronage, hospitality, and marriage among them.

In chapter 3, “Lydia in the Marketplace,” Ascough focuses on public life with an astute and comprehensible introduction to honor-shame dynamics as the heart of ancient social relationships. How the public attribution of honor created the expectations and possibilities for public behavior was important to everyone in the ancient world. Ascough goes beyond the usual information with a specific

look at women's lives in public. Again with careful use of primary sources, he reminds us that in the post-Augustinian period opportunities for women to function publicly had grown more numerous and more typical. This fact is of some importance in the spread of faith in Christ among Gentiles, as Luke and Paul show us. Chapter 4 examines women in the workplace even more richly. Prepare for a little attitude adjustment of your own preconceptions.

Ascough finishes with a chapter on "Lydia in Ritual Space." Relying in part on the excellent work of Valerie Abrahamson on the religious lives and leadership of women in Philippi, he briefly lays out the complex connections between Jews and non-Jews in ancient urban life in such a way that we cannot make theological or social assumptions about the use of words like "God-fearer" or "God-worshiper."

Women being leaders in a number of Greco-Roman worship groups makes Lydia's role as leader in a house church less exceptional than we might have thought.

Ascough concludes with a terse description of Lydia, based on the previous work. The book ends with endnotes; a restrained, diverse, and useful bibliography; and a listing of the primary resources engaged in the text. It would have been useful to have an index of topics, as well as more work on slavery. The lack of index is a small complaint regarding so short a book. As for work on slavery, Lydia's story does not drive toward an examination of slavery as, perhaps, Onesimus's may. So we may look forward eagerly to additional books in this series.

Sarah S. Henrich
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

THE THEOLOGY OF FACTS VERSUS THE THEOLOGY OF RHETORIC: CONFESSION AND DEFENSE, by August Friedrich Christian Vilmar, translated by Roy Harrisville with introduction by Walter Sundberg. Fort Wayne: Lutheran Legacy, 2008. Pp. 132. \$14.95 (paper).

Ulrich Asendorf noted in his 1967 book on the theology of August Friedrich Christian Vilmar—titled *Die Europäische Krise und das Amt der Kirche*—that it seemed unlikely that A. F. C. Vilmar would ever step out of the shadows of being a theological outsider (13). Nevertheless, Roy Harrisville’s recent translation of *The Theology of Facts versus the Theology of Rhetoric* brings Vilmar and his theology to the light of day for English-speaking pastors and teachers. This 2008 translation of a text originally written in 1856 is coupled with an introduction by Walter Sundberg that acquaints readers with Vilmar’s life, work, and the controversies that swirled about him.

In his work, Vilmar focused on the chasm between “the theology of facts,” which obeys the church, and “the theology of rhetoric,” which incorporates scientific approaches into theology as studied in the university (9). Vilmar intended his theology of facts for “the pastor entrusted with shepherding a congregation toward salvation” (25). In his introduction, Vilmar shared how his own theological education at the university left him disillusioned and in doubt of his own faith. When, later in life, his vocational path returned him to the university—indeed, the same university he had attended years earlier—Vilmar asked himself the difficult question, “Are you in position to teach a theology of undoubted divine certainty, for the care of souls and for the food of eternal life, food given to those who hear, so that they can bring the same certainty, the same bread of life to the souls one day to be entrusted to them?” (29). Vilmar answered yes, proposing his “theology of fact” as an alterna-

tive to “the theology of rhetoric” that he had experienced at the university.

In his first four chapters Vilmar targeted his critique at theological faculties. Specifically, in the first chapter, “Theology, Its Masters and Disciples,” Vilmar explicated his theology of fact in opposition to the theology of rhetoric as follows: “The knowledge of God which calls itself theology [of fact] is at the same time a speaking from God. And speaking from God goes forth into the world, into human life” (31). Vilmar shared examples of poor theological teaching, while simultaneously putting forward suggestions for “shepherding” those who would themselves be shepherds of congregations someday. He noted that if a teacher of theology did not give exclusive attention to educating pastors, then that person was not a teacher of theology (32).

Vilmar voiced his sharpest critique against the theology of rhetoric in the second and fourth chapters, “Science” and “Systematic Theology.” The task of theology is not to find or discover anything new, but rather “to preserve the benefits of salvation laid down in Holy Scripture and accepted by the Church, and so to hand it on to future servants of the Church” (41). In chapter 3, “Literature and Exegesis of Holy Scripture,” Vilmar stressed the need for students of theology to thoroughly immerse themselves in Scripture, the whole of Scripture, with as much emphasis on the Old Testament as the New.

In chapters 5 through 7, Vilmar shifted his focus to the church and the role of confession for the church. Church union would not lead to a universal church, but would instead weaken church consciousness (74). Overemphasis on the invisible church would diminish the fact of the Holy Spirit working in word and sacrament in the visible church (75).

In his final four chapters, Vilmar admonished pastors to embrace his “theology of fact.” First, pastors should be diligent in matters of church discipline (97–98). Next, for the vision of the Reformation to continue, the office of

ministry must be both taught and exercised. Here Vilmar asserted that the power of the office came not from the call of the congregation, but directly from Christ. "Were this office not directly the Lord Christ's, his express mandate, his command, the office would oppress the bearer or the bearer would cast it off" (106). Additionally, sermons should not be rhetorical masterpieces for the head, but rather preaching for the heart (117). For Vilmar, pastoral theology must be understood as discipleship, rather than rhetorical mastery of material in books (123–124).

Vilmar is at his best when he offers his vision for pastoral education. His vision could do much to shape seminary curriculum even today. Of particular value are his stress on immersing the students in Scripture; his emphasis on the reality of the work of the Spirit in both word and sacrament; and his admonition to preach to the heart, not the head, and to shepherd the congregation to salvation with care. But, interspersed throughout the work, this reader was buffeted by Vilmar's polemical assaults on the theologians of rhetoric, including Strauss, Schleiermacher, and many others. I concede that sharp words have their place, even—perhaps especially—in debates on theology. As Sundberg noted in his introduction, "In such definitions Vilmar is grinding his polemical axe against 'scientific' theology. But his theology of facts is more than polemics" (13). This book is worthy of a careful reading, specifically in order to understand how Vilmar's theology of facts can provide shape and vision for both teachers of pastors and pastors themselves.

Nevertheless, Vilmar will undoubtedly continue to be relatively unknown. As Asendorf noted, the nineteenth-century German Lutheran has stayed in the shadows as a theological outsider. As Sundberg says, "Vilmar's conception of ordained ministry is despotic and dictatorial" (22). In gleaning Vilmar for the positive vision in his theology of facts, consider the cost of his method of delivery

for the office of the ministry, the church, and congregations.

Suzanne Hequet
College of St. Benedict/St. John's
University
Collegeville, Minnesota

CHRIST AND THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD: THE LIMITS OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION IN NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT, by Stephen H. Travis. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009. Pp. 448. \$24.95 (paper).

In this update of his 1986 book, Stephen H. Travis advances his thesis that the New Testament God does not "deal with human beings according to the principle of retribution" (3) by fine-tuning his previous arguments and adding three new chapters ("Christ as Bearer of Divine Judgement in Paul's Thought about the Atonement," plus two chapters on Revelation). After defining his terms and assessing the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish literature for signs of divine retribution, Travis exegetes evidence from Paul's letters, the Gospels, and Revelation. He argues that the New Testament writers present divine judgement as relational rather than retributive. God does not impose an equivalent reward or punishment for each deed, in this life or at the final judgement. Rather, as in life each one turns toward or away from God, eternity will be experienced with or without God. Judgement brings "an intensification of the relationship with God" (325) that was present in life.

Travis does for the New Testament God what Klaus Koch did for the image of God in the Hebrew Bible. In his 1955 article "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?" Koch denied a retribution doctrine in the whole of the Hebrew Bible. Basing his conclusion on the observation that several Hebrew words can refer to both an action and its outcome, and citing multiple examples of the

“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it...” (Prov 26:27) type, Koch contended that in the Hebrew Bible actions carry their own consequences. God does not inflict an external reward or punishment but merely ensures that the just deserts inherent in the deed itself are carried to completion. To Koch, God is not a judge, but more a midwife attending a birth or a catalyst in a chemical reaction.

Koch’s denials of a retributive God “overstate the case” (15) according to Travis, who cites scholars and texts to acknowledge active divine retribution in the Hebrew Bible. Yet his own analysis has parallels with Koch’s. For both Travis and Koch, the criteria for a reward or punishment to be retributive require equivalence between deed and consequence (tit for tat) and external imposition. À la Koch, Travis uses “intrinsic” (175), “self-imposed” (209), “organically connected” (166), and similar expressions to speak of the deed-consequence connection. Both rely heavily on the “reap what you sow” Scripture texts. “[T]hey condemn themselves by repudiating the grace of God which alone can save them” (158).

Does Travis, like Koch, present God as merely a midwife of inherent consequences? While he does not label God’s role, Travis insists that God is in charge. God “allows” (62), “guarantees” (176), and “ordains” (199) the “divinely controlled” (81) deed-consequence link. God “has the last word” (62; 211). To Travis, God remains the sovereign judge because God, after all, designed this world of intrinsic consequences. However, both he and Koch effectively relegate God to the periphery. This aspect is the weakest element of Travis’s thesis.

Travis admits that the New Testament contains retributive language and apparent examples of God punishing the wicked/unbelievers and rewarding the righteous/believers, but he denies that these instances are divine retribution. According to his interpretation, the retributive language was inherited from the

writers’ Jewish background, and is used to exhort people to turn to God in faith. The seeming cases of retribution are disqualified because they do not fit his definition of retribution. That is, the deed and the punishment are not equivalent, or God does not impose the punishment; instead, the punishment (exclusion from God’s presence) is self-chosen. Much hinges on his definition of retribution.

Nevertheless, Travis’s case for the relational nature of divine judgement is compelling and carefully reasoned. Examining multiple texts, such as 2 Thess 1:9 and 1 Thess 4:17, he argues that heaven and hell are merely names given to an afterlife with or without God, self-selected by people’s acceptance or rejection of God. The sheep and goats of Matt 25 are not assigned to eternal life or eternal punishment, but choose their own hereafter by whether or not they followed the shepherd in this life (226). Their acts of love for others or lack thereof reveal a relationship with Christ that will lead, respectively, to inclusion in or exclusion from God’s kingdom. The “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the “outer darkness” (Matt 25:30) are due to God’s absence. Deeds are judged. Sins matter. But it is the totality of deeds in life that testify to belief or unbelief in God. Deeds are the “fruit and evidence of the relationship” (257). However, believers who fall away from God and unbelievers who turn to God can change their destinies.

To Travis, Christ’s death on the cross, the ultimate example of divine retribution according to some theories, was not punishment, as such, for humanity’s sin. Instead, Christ “entered into and bore on our behalf the destructive consequences of sin” (199). The consequence was God’s absence.

The subject of divine retribution should be of interest to every Christian, but this scholarly book is not for the casual theologian. Scholars will be able to assess Travis’s exegesis and conclusions. The chapter endnotes and summaries, the bibliography, and the indices make the book accessible for research. Pastors and

Christian counselors can translate Travis's arguments for a relational rather than a retributive God to those who fear God's wrath. Even God's wrath is transformed. It becomes equal to God's allowing the "deed" of rejecting God to lead to the inevitable consequence of rejection by God. Travis makes a powerful case for a "kinder, gentler" God.

Elaine Rietz
Augustana College
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

MARTIN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY: A CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION, by Oswald Bayer, translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. Pp. 374. \$32.00 (paper).

What was Martin Luther's theology? How should the Lutheran theologian and pastor "do theology" today? The content of *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* provides answers to these questions. In this book—now available to the English-speaking world because of the work of translator Thomas Trapp—Oswald Bayer tackles the herculean task of elucidating and interpreting the Reformer's theology for the church today by approaching all of Luther's theology through its core teaching of justification by faith alone. Based on Bayer's lectures to his students at the University of Tübingen, this work presents academic theologians and pastors alike with a valuable resource for doing theology, both in the lecture hall and in the pulpit.

Bayer's book is divided into two sections. The first section addresses how Luther does theology, and the second discusses particular topics within his theology. Of these two sections, the first is the most valuable for pastors and academic theologians seeking to do theology from a Reformational standpoint. In this section, Bayer demonstrates how, in Luther's thought, theology is deeply anchored in the concrete experience of life and centered on

God's justifying work in Jesus Christ. Bayer relates that, for Luther, the proper subject and parameter of theology is God's work of justifying the sinner by faith in the work of Jesus Christ (37–38). The truth of justification by faith in Christ is communicated to humans by means of God's performative speech act, the divine word of promise in the gospel of Jesus Christ that accomplishes what it promises—forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and assurance of salvation (50–52). Because of this center, says Bayer, Luther's (and Lutheran) theology is not allowed to take wing into flights of speculative fancy, but is grounded firmly in the promise of God, which enacts salvation and is handed out in preaching and sacrament by the ministers of the church (52–53). Bayer also demonstrates how Luther undertakes the theological task from the concrete experience of the believer in prayer, meditation, and agonizing struggle, making theology a very existential and very personal discipline that anchors the subject matter of theology in real life and precludes flights of rationalistic and mystical speculation (30–37).

In the second section of the book, Bayer discusses important individual themes in Luther's theology, such as the creation of the world and its ordering into the three estates (family, state, and church), the human being as the image of God and as sinner, God's hiddenness in wrath and evil, the atonement, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the word and sacraments in the church, faith and good works, the two realms, eschatology, and prayer. This section makes Bayer's book a valuable commentary on particular doctrines and themes in Luther's theology, both for the inquisitive novice and for the academic Luther scholar. In this way, Bayer's work stands alongside other great volumes on Luther's theology, such as those compiled by Paul Althaus, Bernhard Lohse, and Theodosius von Harnack. While providing serious and thorough discussion of these themes in Luther's theology, in the rich tradition of Luther scholarship, in this section

Bayer also addresses these issues—as does Luther—as they emerge from the life of the believer, the life lived under the all-encompassing promise of God in justification. Bayer here shows how, for Luther, these theological themes are not simply academic loci that are taken up by the detached scholar, one at a time, as doctrines that stand on their own apart from the overarching theme of the promise. Instead, Bayer relates that these themes emerge from the real-life experience of the believer, who has received the promise of justification.

The down-to-earth approach to theology that Bayer describes and prescribes in this book provides both the professor and the pastor with a valuable resource for reflecting on Luther's theology and what it means to be a Lutheran theologian, as well as for engaging in everyday theology through preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. Bayer presents Luther's theology as it really is, anchored solidly in the promise of God in justification by faith in Jesus Christ. The first section of Bayer's book provides the academic theologian and the pastoral theologian with a solid basis for doing theology as a Lutheran and, even more importantly, for the pastoral ministry of actually distributing the promise of God in Christ through preaching and the sacraments. The second section of this volume gives those doing theology in the academy and in the parish a tool both for understanding Luther's theology and for approaching specific topics in theology as they are related to the overarching theme of God's promise in Christ and as they emerge from the practical questions and situations of believers. Not merely another commentary on Luther's theology, this work of Bayer's also stands as a valuable and useful resource for doing theology as a Lutheran in the community of believers in Christ.

Joshua C. Miller
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

WOMANIST ETHICS AND THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF EVIL, by

Emilie M. Townes. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp. 220. \$26.95 (paper).

Emilie Townes's most recent work, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, is sure to (and should) become a standard for reading in theology and ethics and, hopefully, pastoral care. Townes, recent president of the American Academy of Religion and current Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School, engages the problem of evil from a fresh and challenging angle—a womanist perspective engaging evil's material and cultural dimensions. Her work aims, with the lenses of justice and hope, to practice the everyday processes of examining material culture and to uncover how human imagination often functions in oppressive ways in a global, commercial society.

Townes sets the context for the book itself by borrowing terminology from the writer Toni Morrison, that of the womanist “dancing mind,” a mind that dances and engages the worlds and peoples it meets, in a plethora of contexts and communities. She opens by situating her theological knowledge, writing that, epistemologically, “the womanist dancing mind is one that comes from a particular community of communities yearning for a common fire banked by the billows of justice and hope” (2). Townes appreciates the complexity of particular experience as a source for doing theology, ethics, and engaging the problems of theodicy, thus focusing on these issues by “exploring the *depths* of African American life—male and female” (2). The theo-ethical view from this particular perspective opens to her rich resources for ethical thought on the problem of evil, from literature to music, ethics, theology, dance, and poetry—concrete expressions of cultural experience.

Townes meditates on her method: “Given my Niebuhrian roots [H. Richard], I realized

that I would be bound in untenable and unproductive ways if I approached a study of theology solely through the realms of concepts and theories” (5). Indeed, in surveying the classical, theoretical literature on the problems of evil and suffering, she observes a gap in the material, literally. As she asserts, “the deep interior material life of evil and its manifestations were missing” (5). In order to address human experience in a commodified age of markets, images, logos, commercials, and videos, Townes directly attempts to engage the production of material structures of evil.

The first and second chapters spell out the complexity of her “dancing” methodology and locate the cultural production of evil in what she calls the “fantastic hegemonic imagination.” She writes: “Combining Michel Foucault’s understanding of the imagination and Antonio Gramsci’s use of hegemony, I develop how the imagination—the fantastic hegemonic imagination—‘plays’ with history and memory to spawn caricatures and stereotypes” (7). The “fantastic hegemonic imagination” is a rich concept—too rich, in fact, for it to be possible to do the concept justice in the space of a book review. What Townes develops, however, is a construction that describes what happens when human imagination works with history to create structural oppression and material forms of hegemony, “the set of ideas that dominant groups employ in a society to secure the consent of subordinates to abide by their rule” (20).

Townes’s response to the fantastic hegemonic imagination is the work of counter-memory. “Counter-memory can open up subversive spaces within dominant discourses that expand our sense of who we are and, possibly, create a more whole and just society in defiance of structural evil” (22). She retells and reconstitutes the history of caricatures in ways that dismantle and subvert oppressive images. Chapters 3 through 7 take on this work directly, looking at five caricatures of black women in material culture—Aunt Jemima,

Sapphire, the Welfare Queen, the Tragic Mulatta, and Topsy—and using these images to construct counter-memory. When used as counter-memory, these images “unsettle and disrupt notions of identity as property, uninterrogated coloredness, reparations and empire, religious values in public policymaking, and solidarity” (27). Each chapter is a remarkable blend of rediscovering the history and political economy of these images with the problems and possibilities for newness in each.

The book discloses a tremendous charge for those in ministry. For pastors, preachers, and teaching theologians who use stories and images of people in their daily theological work, the book is a call to reexamine the characters and methods we use in our public storytelling and preaching. One wonders about the myriad material manifestations of evil and caricature that exist about other communities—immigrants and refugees, Latinas and Latinos, gays and lesbians, those in poverty, etc. Pastors and theologians would do well to unmask some of those caricatures and think about what deconstructing some of those cultural productions of evil would look like.

A word of caution before one tackles this book, however: the book’s size is deceptive. At around 200 pages, the book isn’t difficult to travel with, but each sentence is packed with rich ideas and complex discourse. The last couple of chapters often shift writing style into whirling, lyrical poetry. It’s a dense yet beautiful book, and remarkably worth the effort of the reader. In fact, similar effort should be put towards the book’s constructive possibilities: an interesting issue that Townes doesn’t treat is historical Christianity’s continued wrestling with the aesthetic dimension of theology, particularly the theological issues of “image” and iconoclasm. Furthermore, how might our christological images of Jesus be challenged by Townes’s paradigm of the fantastic hegemonic imagination? Finally, how might the paradigm of imagination that

Townes develops link with the concept of human beings created in the *imago dei*, the image of God?

In a consumer society where images, commercials, and brand labels often make the difference in what we buy on a daily basis, where caricatures of identity are produced and sold in the global market, the book is a call to critical and hopeful living—a call to be constantly aware of our everyday ethical decisions and visions. Townes’s work is one of the most important books on evil and evil’s everyday consequences to date. One of the gems of this book

is the final chapter, “Everydayness,” where Townes beautifully meditates on the challenge and hope of dismantling evil. To dismantle that evil, she observes, “We begin with ourselves. Each of us must answer the question: What will we do with the fullness and incompleteness of who we are as we stare down the interior material life of the cultural production of evil?” (159).

Jacob J. Erickson
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey