

Reviews



A THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: CULTURAL MEMORY, COMMUNICATION, AND BEING HUMAN, by John W. Rogerson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. Pp. 214. \$29.00 (paper).

John W. Rogerson's theology of the Old Testament is a careful, striking work steeped in traditional biblical scholarship but primarily interested in the contemporary world and the human condition therein. Putting traditional scholarship in conversation with modern communicative social theory, Rogerson takes elegant and substantive steps toward a biblical theology that explores what the Bible has to say about the nature of God that challenges humans to "understand themselves and today's world(s) in new ways" (12). In so doing, he is also seeking to bring the Old Testament closer to the heart of the church's life and faith. He succeeds, but he does not make the task uncomplicated for his readers.

Rogerson begins by revisiting and revising a question posed by Rudolf Bultmann that has haunted him for years: If the Bible is a document of history in any way, then reading and interpreting it requires historical investigation—is the interpretation (of texts), then, in service to the (historical) investigation or is this investigation in service to the interpretation? Putting historical investigation in service to the textual interpretation assumes something marvelous to Rogerson, namely, that these texts have something to say to people living in a time other than the one in which they were written. He argues throughout that if our concern is how/what the Bible speaks to us today, we must take the latter stance.

The approach he advocates uses the history of contemporary social theory to refresh our

reading of the Bible. To that end, he assembles quite an eclectic group at his table. The index of names is a virtual *Cliffs Notes* to modern social theory as well as biblical theology (from Habermas, Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer to Westermann, Gunkel, and von Rad). He gleans insights from this wide variety of thinkers, who were not necessarily biblical scholars, but who are, all the same, concerned with the fundamental questions of human existence and relationships.

The most prominent example of this approach is his appropriation of Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of "hot" and "cold" societies, which first appeared in the social anthropologist's 1966 work *La Pensée Sauvage* (*The Savage Mind*):

Cold societies were those in which mechanisms were developed for neutralizing the effects of economic or social upheavals...[by contrast] a "hot" society is one that internalized the historical process in order to make it the moving power of its development. On this analogy a "hot" history is a way of describing events in such a way that readers/hearers (if there are any!) are challenged to look critically at their situation with a view to changing and improving it. (25)

Rogerson applies this distinction to various historical accounts in the Bible, beckoning the readers deeper into the biblical narrative as well as into their own, and these "hot" and "cold" histories become the *leitmotif* of the book. The reader anticipates their appearance and they are a helpful, clearly articulated thematization of complicated issues.

It is not always an easy read. The vast majority of Rogerson's sources are untranslated German works, making further reading diffi-

cult for many. He puts a charming (though perhaps overzealous) emphasis on the work of his mentor, W. M. L. de Wette, a name not likely familiar to the majority of his readers. The introduction is dry and lengthy, as is the first half of most chapters, in which Rogerson takes a great deal of time exploring biblical texts and the modern theories that he will employ to broaden our readings of them. However, when he does weave the two together his results are imaginative, moving, and well worth the tedium that the reading often entails.

For the congregational teacher/preacher, this book is a useful exploration of how biblical scholarship can be deeply concerned with the human condition. Although it may be an inspiring read, it is not necessarily the kind of book to which the pastor/preacher would return again and again. Because it is organized around very broad themes, “not drawn directly from the Old Testament, but from the author’s intellectual predilections and his reflections on the plight of humanity” (11), smaller insights that would lend themselves well to a sermon or teaching series get lost in the crowd (“Where did he say that again?” “What book was he referencing?”). It is very much a scholarly work and, at just over two hundred pages, a deceptively time-consuming read. Because of its sheer density of content and Rogerson’s heavy reliance on external secular (especially humanist) scholarship, one should not read it expecting to find preaching or teaching points without a considerable investment of time or an intended audience that is sincerely at ease with academic contributions to the reading of Scripture.

Still, it is undeniable that the reader (especially the rostered/lay leader) *will* be enriched by what they find in its pages—a deeper, textured, and clearly articulated theology of the Old Testament awaits. Rogerson’s textual work is careful and illuminating and his theological assertions are trustworthy. It is a clear testament to the life of a dedicated scholar

and faithful teacher as well as a worthwhile, beautiful contribution to contemporary Old Testament theology.

Anna Marsh Grunner
Jewish Theological Seminary
New York, New York

HEALING IN THE BIBLE: THEOLOGICAL INSIGHT FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY, by Frederick J. Gaiser. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010. Pp. ix + 250. \$24.99 (paper); \$14.99 (Kindle).

Long before a public debate on health care, prior to any focus on “spirituality and coping” in social science research, and predating the current popularity of congregational healing services, people have raised questions about the relationship between healing and faith. It would be wonderful to imagine that Christians could quickly turn to Scripture for guidance, but reading a biblical healing narrative often creates greater confusion. In what ways are we responsible for our own healing? Does God cause human sickness? What is the relationship between Jesus’ divine healing and medical healers today? Is it appropriate to pray for healing, and, if we are not cured, what does that imply? In the face of these and other equally troubling queries, it is tempting to fall into one of two ditches—a biblical literalism that ignores two thousand years of changed cultural perspective, or a cynicism that dismisses biblical stories as quaint examples of ancient thought.

Healing in the Bible consistently resists both, perhaps because the author is at once a person of mature faith and a courageous thinker, comfortable with nuance, paradox, and mystery. Reflections by Gerhard von Rad on doing theology, cited early in this book (19), stand as a kind of benchmark, calling for humility as we attempt to bear in mind both biblical and contemporary worldviews. Like his early teacher in Heidelberg, Gaiser resists fu-

tile attempts to escape the shadows and terrors of doing biblical theology post-Enlightenment. Rather, his deep knowledge of Scripture (particularly of the Psalms and healing narratives); his professional experiences as pastor, teacher, writer, and editor; his early years as a pharmacist; his time in Zimbabwe; and his decidedly narrative approach to human experience here combine to provide the confidence needed to ask tough questions—historical, pastoral, and theological. Gaiser raises questions honestly, setting them within the context of the messy human experience of being sick, in body or soul. His decidedly Lutheran emphasis on the primacy of divine grace is consistently juxtaposed to the earthiness of human story, such that healing too is brought under the theology of the cross (242). As he looks at how sickness comes to us both randomly and through our own, and others', most grievous fault, Gaiser writes of the Bible's testimony that divine strength and compassion permeate, and have always permeated, the harshest of human realities.

Gaiser's balancing act is reflected in the book's structure as well—each chapter (three of which are previously published articles) begins with both a biblical quote and a summarizing title, and each is then structured around often provocative subtitles (e.g., "The Serpent Is the Solution," "Exorcism and Therapy"). The book's clear organization provides a road map for readers who are not themselves biblical scholars, and helpful markers for those who are. The footnotes are themselves an education, and both subject and scriptural indexes are helpful in tracking down particular themes or biblical references.

Like many Old Testament scholars, Gaiser is a student of words, and he plays (in the best sense) with both hermeneutical allusion and structural complexity. His fascination with language pushes him beyond facile explanations and drives his writing beyond the solely personal into communal emphases. We may, for example, evaluate contemporary healing

therapies as we read of the complexities of *touch* (see chapter 13), or find ourselves increasingly distressed about the impersonal nature of our health care delivery system as we wonder about the interplay of *receiving healing* and *being healed* (see chapter 16). Throughout the text, the author makes useful distinctions, as between cure and healing, and at times he makes grammatical points crucial for our discernment, as between what is done *for* the one who believes rather than done *by* the one who believes (chapter 11). Similarly, we are provided with textual links between particular verbs (e.g., one who *sees*) and powerful implications of these words (e.g., the breaking in of a new world, 183).

As a pastoral theologian, I particularly appreciated Gaiser's emphasis on lament, which appears and reappears throughout. Because of his extensive knowledge of the Psalms, their structures and uses (e.g., in ritual), he was able to trace a subtle but important interplay between lament and confidence (e.g., in Ps 38), giving me a fresh view of how the hard work of lamenting and Christian formation might move back and forth, back and forth, precisely during times of trouble. I was also delighted to see a separate chapter on forgiveness, although I would have appreciated even more on the relationship of forgiveness and truth telling.

Gaiser's writing is not only readable but frequently poetic. I found myself underlining far too many passages, and then realizing a need to go through the book once and then return for a slower reading on particular texts. I see no reason why this book could not be either read as a whole or used, chapter by chapter, in personal or group Bible study. The author has been, of course, a conversation partner within the world of biblical scholarship for many years and is well aware of ongoing arguments that persons from another discipline will discover here for the first time. For this reader, that increased the book's depth.

Yet this text is more than a work of scholar-

ship—it offers precisely the insight for Christian ministry suggested by its subtitle. Recently I co-facilitated a daylong Lenten text study for pastors and found myself grateful for Gaiser’s insights on the healing story in John 9:6–12. Similarly, pastors making decisions about the appropriate place and timing of healing services may find the author’s exploration of that topic helpful.

Although it is impossible to highlight all that is found in a book that discusses a range of subjects from human saliva to divine justice, it is perhaps most important to note how refreshing it is to discover a scholarly book that consistently reflects both trust in God’s promises *and* respect for scientific inquiry. Perhaps the book’s best summary is the author’s own words. “Faith and religious experience, as human phenomena, can be present or absent, incipient or developed, more or less productive of well-being, but healing ‘in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth’ comes as gift. It is grace” (211).

Janet L. Ramsey
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

LYRICS OF LAMENT: FROM TRAGEDY TO TRANSFORMATION, by Nancy C. Lee. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. Pp. 256. \$26.00 (paper).

Nancy C. Lee, professor of religious studies at Elmhurst College, has produced an excellent book that exhibits both scholarly insight into numerous Abrahamic sacred texts and deep reflection on ancient and modern cultural literature. Lee is clearly aware of a multicultural and interreligious audience and also deliberate in engaging her audience as she offers the reader an “interactive” experience in this volume, which includes personal anecdotes, relevant stories, historical events, diverse poems, pastoral exhortations, and, of course,

scholarly research—and she does so in a readable fashion.

Lee sets the tone for her book in the introduction, as she wastes no time getting to the very heart of the matter: “In modern western cultures, religious and secular realms are pushed apart from each other, and Christian communities often no longer sing laments for the dead and do not regularly sing lament prayers or songs” (11). And with clear concern for those in the parish she then asks, “Do dominant praise and hymns override all worship, thus preventing congregations from honestly facing the hardships that people are really dealing with in their lives?” (13). It is very clear that these remarks, and indeed the entire book, rest on the assumption that suffering is universal—an assumption she supports with the motley collection of poems throughout the book, particularly in the first chapter. Lee responds to this all-pervasive experience of suffering with the admonition to lament. “A vital key,” she writes, “is in our lyrics,” because of the power of music to move and to inspire, to cause to writhe and to uplift (15). Yet the “most vital link,” Lee claims, is the “*process of creating* laments,” wherein each individual becomes able to take the risk of expressing his or her own particular suffering within the context of a supportive community (15). All of this supports and confirms her primary goal of encouraging the reader, and all people, to take up the call to lament—for ourselves and for those who go unheard—in order to transform tragedy into something positive and good.

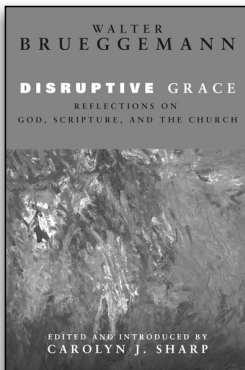
Lee’s book is separated into three parts: (1) Lament: Ancient and Contemporary Voices; (2) Lament in the Abrahamic Sacred Texts and Contemporary Cultures; and (3) Lament for Our Time. The first part begins with the universality of the experience of suffering, and discusses traditional features of the categories of “lament prayer” and the “dirge,” such as “*call-and-response* performance style,” “*direct address of the dead*,” “mourning over the *incomprehensibility* of the event,” and more (52).

The second part involves Lee's work on the subject of lament in sacred texts, first with the Hebrew Bible and then with the New Testament and the Qur'an, and how it functions in the context of unacceptable circumstances (to put it mildly) and passionate appeals for divine attention and intervention. This section is perhaps where Lee's careful handling of sacred texts is most obvious. She analyzes the genre and structure of typical laments and engages deep theological themes held in sacred texts. Lee begins the transition to the modern application of lament in the second section, as she thoughtfully connects lament passages in these sacred texts to the prophetic vision for social justice, first in the ancient world and then in the modern. The third part then appropriately concludes the book with Lee's discussion of not only the modern necessity for lament, but the forms that it must take. Although this final section is brief and not quite as developed as the other two, there is much to be gleaned from it. Lee challenges the lament

tradition that involves a "call for vengeance" in a way that seeks to keep and cherish such laments, but subject to careful and appropriate use in a community that rejects the exacerbation of suffering through violence. She concludes the book with various poems and songs from a number of movements and historical events that reflect her call: "Let us join our voices for a worldwide movement for constructive change" (195).

Any reader will almost certainly find something of great value in Lee's volume. Her work is indeed scholarly even as it is obviously a useful resource for those in the parish. I believe the value of Lee's book would be most effectively utilized in a group. It is less a book one should simply pick up and read casually or alone (which has made writing this review somewhat odd) than it is a resource that should be read carefully and with others, because suffering and lament should never be solitary matters. Congregants and pastors who read this may wish to act on Lee's pastoral exhortations

Walter Brueggemann • Reflections, Sermons, Prayers



Disruptive Grace

Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church
WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

In recent addresses and essays never published before, Brueggemann turns his critical attention to the practices of prophecy, lament, prayer, faithful imagination, and a holy economics. These alone may usher in a humane and peaceful future in defiance of the most ruthless aspects of capitalism, militarism, and the national security state.

9780800697945 320 pp hc \$35.00

Also available

Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth • Now in Paperback!

Prayers of Walter Brueggemann

9780800634605 192 pp pbk \$17.00

Inscribing the Text
Sermons and Prayers of Walter Brueggemann

9780800698270 240 pp pbk \$23.00

 **FORTRESS PRESS**
THE POWER OF SCHOLARSHIP

At bookstores or call
1-800-328-4648 • fortresspress.com

to take up the work of lament and include it somehow during worship service and on other occasions. The book should at least serve to help a congregation or group bring its concerns and sufferings to the foreground and facilitate whole healing and interrelational support. However readers wish to go about reading this book and reappropriating the indispensable work of lament, they must keep in mind what lament is: “Lament is not mere wailing; it is heartfelt, reasoned, poignant artistry, an important expression for questioning and for human healing and wholeness” (152).

With this book Nancy C. Lee adds a great resource to her growing work surrounding the subject of lament, as she combines careful scholarly reflection with biblical texts and powerful poetry from every conceivable time and place—from ancient Sumerian prayers to modern U2 songs. She offers not only a discussion of lament, but also valuable insights into the call for the “innovation” and “expansion” of it in today’s context (193).

Cody M. Eklov
Hebrew Union College
Cincinnati, Ohio

EMBODIED FAITH: REFLECTIONS ON A MATERIALIST SPIRITUALITY, by Ola Tjørhom. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. Pp. 208. \$30.00 (paper).

The subtitle “reflections” is a very appropriate designation for the book, as it parses out the author’s own spiritual journey from Lutheran pietism to the Roman Catholic Church. Yes, the book is theological in its content—exploring the triune nature of God’s revelation through the things of the earth, in the created order—but it is also a spiritual reflection and justification for a “conversion.”

The basic and intriguing premise that is consistently and thoroughly explored throughout the book contends that “without a proper relationship to the world, there is no true spiri-

tuality” (3) and that “our life in Christ is attached to outward signs and elementary sensation” (15). God is revealed through material things, through daily events and tasks, and we are called to find a spirituality that takes this perspective into account. Why? Because in our world today—as the author notes for himself—life is marked “by buckets of stress, toil, and unrest,” leaving little room for specific, customized spiritual exercises (14). If human beings were just to open eyes and ears, they would see a spirituality that is offered through daily things and tasks. This materialist spirituality is accessible to all, straightforward and simple (God comes to us through elementary earthly things like water, wine, and bread), earthbound, lived out in fellowship, and grounded in the liturgy of the church (20–21). Tjørhom develops each of these characteristics in the following chapters, first establishing the Trinitarian relationship to material things, then demonstrating the ways in which church, sacraments, and liturgy communicate through earthly things, and concluding with ethical implications of such a spirituality (the importance of the world as an arena of activity). In the concluding reflections, he outlines, among other issues, an ecumenically based spirituality. It is in his ecumenical reflections that he offers the only real critique of the Roman Catholic Church: no “body” is the whole church. “True church diversity is thus construed as growing towards greater unity. We grow together towards the fullness in Christ” (170).

Despite his attempts at presenting an ecumenical approach to a materialist spirituality, Tjørhom’s materialist perspective is firmly rooted in a Catholic tradition. That there can be different perspectives on what “materialist” might mean is not addressed. In fact, one fears that the perspective presented is less materialist than the tradition (Lutheran) that Tjørhom left behind. He does state—and rightly so—that contemporary Lutheranism “has departed significantly

from the original message of the Reformers” (16). However, if he wishes to experience that original message, it will not be in a Catholic sacramental life. In fact, the materialist spirituality that Tjørhom develops throughout the book is paradoxically antimaterialist. It views the material world and earthly things as instruments or tools towards perfection and God. Yes, God and God’s grace are found in and through earthly things, but creation itself is perfected by that grace (Thomas Aquinas, see discussion pages 134–135). The material is raised by grace to some higher level of perfection. Grace, from a Lutheran perspective, saves nature (the material), not by transforming it into some perfect spiritual entity, but simply by letting it be what it truly is—material—God’s creation, in all goodness.

This spiritualizing tendency is particularly noted in the discussion on the sacraments. Admitting that the Eucharist is first and foremost a meal and the elements are food to be consumed, and that these carry the presence of Christ (99), Tjørhom does not then take the logical step to suggest that the rite itself should embody more explicitly the reality of real, material food. As the old joke goes, it is far easier to believe that the wafer is the body of Christ than to believe that it is bread! Instead, he argues for the elements as focal points of prayer, devotion, and meditation (in other words, food that is to be stared at rather than eaten). This seems to contradict the very material nature of those elements. What is finally obvious is that the material, in this approach, is directing the participant not to a deeper appreciation of the horizontal dimensions of life (the created order), but rather to the vertical dimension (a transcendent God) that merely spiritualizes the material.

Another surprising characteristic of the book is the incessant critique of popular culture. Though Tjørhom does apologize occasionally for this critique, he nonetheless continually engages in it. This is a surprising

approach for a materialist spirituality, because there is truly nothing more material than the expressions of a market ideology. Rather than simply offering a critique, a material spirituality would, I think, be attuned to the cry, the plea for help that is embedded in market fundamentalism, in a Disney-world of religious commodities. Tjørhom is, I believe, offering precisely a response to that cry, but for the response to be heard the cry needs to be respected. Perhaps, finally, the author has not completely left his former spiritual neo-pietistic landscape, a landscape that he himself describes as adopting “a fierce culture-critical view that had seclusionist and sectarian ‘unworldliness’ as its chief outcome” (142). I’m not suggesting at all that this book is seclusionist and sectarian, but that the culture critique it engages pushes the author into spiritualizing the earthly symbols that the church has been given, and in this way turns our eyes away from the material rather than towards it.

Dirk G. Lange
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

POLITICAL THEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION, by Michael Kirwan. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. Pp. 221. \$22.00 (paper).

We may look back on the first decade of this millennium as schizophrenic when it comes to public religion. On the one hand, the events of 9/11 turned many against religion as such. Dissidents such as the so-called New Atheists understood armed men crying *Allahu Akbar* to reveal the heart of religion as intrinsically resistant to enlightened reason and morality and so worthy of eradication in the name of peace. More moderates sought to oust religion only from political platforms. They insisted that God was not a Republican or a Democrat (typi-

cally in that order)—especially when politicians used God’s name to underwrite calls for war. On the other hand, no decade in recent history has experienced so dramatic a revival in public religion or in scholarly attention to it. Secularism, understood as the gradual displacement of religion by liberal democracy and critical reason, was reconfigured from fact-of-history to thesis-proved-wrong almost overnight. Public institutes exploring how religious traditions can and should help shape “post-secular” democracies currently vie for office space in Washington.

Christian leaders should study these recent cultural-political-ecclesial shifts directly. There are many books to help them—I recommend Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* for anyone with a sturdy bedside table. But just as important is the work of setting the present discussion in wider context, both thematically and historically. Michael Kirwan’s latest book does that, and does it well. He surveys various coordinations between theological and political realms, reminding us of events as seismic as 9/11 for the role of Christianity in the public sphere: the Shoah (Holocaust), the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), the sack of Rome (410), and the conversion of Constantine (312)—not to mention the Passover of 30 C.E. By situating current debates among wider themes and within a broad history, Kirwan seeks to provide “a straightforward, largely unpolemical introduction to this fascinating and sometimes bewildering area of theology” (xiii).

Kirwan’s first challenge is to define this area of theology. The book’s title suggests a focus on the professed “political theology” emerging in Germany a generation ago and represented by Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, and Dorothy Soelle. He deals with these figures substantially in the latter half of the book, focusing on their engagement with critical theorists, innocent suffering, and the primacy of eschatology. But Christians confronted political powers long before the desig-

nation of a school of thought. One of Kirwan’s gifts is to show how the delicate problem of maintaining the political purchase of Christianity without wholly christening particular political configurations—a problem made urgent by the Holocaust—was intrinsic to Christianity from its inception. The “doctrine of the two,” as he calls Christianity’s critical and provisional ordination of political realities, includes vastly different sorts of accommodations and confrontations. Kirwan emphasizes the differences and reminds us that they matter:

A famous formulation by Pope Gelasius in the fifth century declares: “two there are, by which this world is governed.” Yes, but two *what*? Two Cities (Augustine)? Two Swords (medieval political theology)? The King’s “Two Bodies” (ditto)? Two Kingdoms (Luther)? Church and State? Jesus or Satan (Blake)? Christ or Caesar—or Hitler, for that matter? (ix-x)

Part One of the book sets out the conceptual boundaries for political theology. Responding here to the recent critique of political theology by Mark Lilla, as well as to Hannah Arendt’s wider charge that Christianity is inherently apolitical, Kirwan argues for the importance of political theology. Because he relies heavily on editors’ introductions to other collections, these chapters sometimes feel tertiary—a summary of work already condensed by others. This may be necessary to introduce a vast and amorphous body of literature. Still, I long for Kirwan’s own assessments earlier and more cogently than he gives them.

Part Two provides a historical overview of the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and modern roots of political theology. “Augustine of Hippo looms large,” Kirwan tells us (55)—and rightfully so. His summary portrays a gradual loss, and periodic renewal, of Augustine’s critical judgment of any slice of secular history in light of God’s eschatological kingdom. By Kirwan’s account, the Two Cities merge into a single Christendom

soon after Augustine, get detached again with Pope Gregory VII, merge once more within Luther's Two Kingdoms, and so forth.

Part Three, "The Crisis," begins by recounting how the Shoah introduced a sea change for Jewish theology, and how the German church's acquiescence to National Socialism should do the same for Christian political theology. It continues by tracing the influence that (mostly Jewish) critical theorists have had on the work of German Christian theology. Surprisingly, Kirwan's voice emerges most clearly while reckoning with these difficult theorists in interreligious context. He implores us to think through the death camps by situating them within history, rather than writing them off as an unthinkable irruption from hell. Otherwise, political theology itself "runs the risk of a disembodied wandering between Athens, Jerusalem and Auschwitz, without ever coming home to the city where all of us must, after all,

live our lives" (157). Part Four returns to Kirwan's broadest concerns—how the church might maintain political purchase without buying into any one political option. He quickly, but lucidly, points to Scripture as politically relevant and to the church as politically powerful.

Kirwan makes no apologies for not adding one more position to the large and nebulous literature on political theology. His task is to sift through those writings for his reader, which he does thoroughly, objectively, and with flashes of real conviction. Christians nervous about the privatization of their religion and excited by its critical and transformative potential should welcome this fine introduction.

Jason A. Mahn
Augustana College
Rock Island, Illinois



Created for today's working preachers

- FREE resource to inspire better preaching
- Timely, compelling and trustworthy content
- Deeply grounded, biblically and theologically

First-rate *(and Free!)*
Preaching Resource

www.workingpreacher.org

Brought to you by the Center for Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary



TEACHING REFLECTIVELY IN THEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS: PROMISES AND CONTRADICTIONS, edited by Mary E. Hess and Stephen D. Brookfield. Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2009. Pp. 308. \$48.25 (cloth).

Pastors and professors are well acquainted with challenges associated with developing and maintaining high-functioning adult study group, young adult classroom, and adult learning environments. Equipping and enabling a group of adult learners to engage substantively a particular theological, biblical, or ethical issue can sometimes be fraught with immense and seemingly insurmountable challenges. This book provides practical tools for busy pastors and faculty to help them think through how they might become more mindful of particular pedagogical issues when constructing scaffolding to support their classroom learning designs.

Insightful and reflective ideas about what promotes effective teaching to maximize student learning are sprinkled throughout the book. One takeaway that teachers may find helpful is the “Critical Incident Questionnaire” discussed in chapter one. The thought of receiving quick and substantial feedback about a particular teaching session is not new. However, this particular method can not only provide solid data about student learning for the professor; it can also serve as a means for enabling students to take ownership for their own learning and aid them in recognizing communal dimensions of learning in general.

In this book, eight authors contribute essays that explore educational goals for teachers and students. In the first four chapters, students are placed at the center as the primary learners in an educational environment. Teaching authentically in a dialogical classroom, making space for students to seek truth, inviting students into conversational learning environments, and teaching developmentally so as to meet students where they live com-

prise the main emphases of these initial chapters. The shifting role of teacher in academic environments is indicated throughout. The formerly dominant teaching model in academic contexts was the sage on the stage. It has been largely replaced by a teaching model that might be called coach on the sidelines or the experienced trail guide. This shift is not an anomaly, but seems to be ubiquitous across North American higher educational contexts and is increasingly becoming popular in public K-12 instruction, either alone or as a hybrid model blended with that of the sage-on-the-stage model. The advance of active learning methods such as Problem Based Learning, Service Learning, and Case Studies has replaced more passive methods like lecture and memorization in many educational contexts. There is across North America a large push by students of differing age groups for engaged learning opportunities. I suspect some of the momentum for this change in educational contexts is due in part to the rise of immediate information access made possible by the rise of the Internet over the last decade or so.

This book is neatly divided into three sections that lift up common issues in contemporary theological school classroom contexts. It isn't a great leap for pastors to consider how these issues might apply to adult learning communities in particular ecclesial contexts.

Stephen Brookfield's chapter, “How Do We Invite Students into Conversation? Teaching Dialogically,” would be an important read for faculty and pastors leading adult study groups. In academic or ecclesial contexts, the challenge for dialogically engaged classrooms is commonplace. Here Brookfield offers eight specific ways by which teachers might aid students toward meaningful conversations and enhanced learning. Mary Hess's chapter in this section focuses squarely on issues related to the student as knower and the role of teachers in unmasking their own pedagogical aims and assumptions about what contributes to stu-

dent learning. Utilizing the work of Kegan and Lahey, Hess adroitly lays out specific ways by which teachers and students might gain access to their own learning assumptions and developmental learning needs. She provides a means by which teachers and students can have more awareness about their own learning processes. These initial chapters provide significant scaffolding for the essays that follow.

The second set of essays clusters around identification of practical issues for classroom teaching. The chapters explore different frames of reference with regard to the learning space and how one might meaningfully engage it. Rolf Jacobson's chapter on knowing who you are as a teacher provides helpful ways for teachers to begin to unravel their own assumptions about what connotes good teaching. Faculty and pastors could benefit from reading this chapter as they seek to live more integrated and congruent lives. As Jacobson notes, "Whenever teachers enter a classroom, they enter fully themselves" (82). It is a plea for being genuine and congruent with the gifts that one has been given in any learning space. The challenge of building trust in a classroom so that tough and honest conversations may happen is rarely easy. Matthew Skinner's chapter helps teachers reflect on the presence of fear in student's minds as they approach difficult and sometimes threatening subjects. The chapter provides three ways by which trust—whether professional, personal, or spiritual—might be encouraged in any learning environment. Building on the foundation established by Skinner, Janet Ramsey discusses how team teaching can model trust in a classroom and thereby encourage students to dismantle their own barriers and openly risk fuller engagement with co-learners. Perhaps the most common and least discussed set of barriers in any classroom environment entails the array of diversities that exist within learning spaces: cultural, economic, social, etc. Frieder Ludwig rounds out this section of essays by tackling the difficult terrain of teaching across cultural

diversity. Questions of what comprises the canon for a given disciplinary area, the personal cultural identity of teachers and students, and the ongoing need to recognize diverse ways of learning and knowing are subtended in the essay's theme of teaching reflectively in culturally diverse classrooms.

In order to connect with the previous essays, the final collection of chapters gather around the broad title, "Realizing Promises and Confronting Contradictions." In this concluding section, a host of different issues are explored: racism in the classroom, engaging student worlds, assessment, and teaching with technology. Pastors and teachers know well that classrooms can be conflicted, chaotic, and contested spaces. There are also few educators who are strangers to the thorny tasks of assessing student knowing. Some teachers have claimed that teaching would be great if it weren't for the grading—I think the statement conveys both the difficulty and promise of assessment. It is difficult in that it bares openly the contours of what a student has learned over the course of a term or class; it is filled with promise as it shows how far a student has come from the beginning of a term and provisionally suggests next steps in a learning trajectory. The concluding essay on teaching with technology, by Mary Hess, provides teachers with a quick snapshot of how technology could open windows, doors, and vistas to ways of learning that have been historically reserved for only those with the wherewithal to go on site visits, handle primary source documents at archival locations, and so on.

Reflecting on personal assumptions about teaching and learning can often open up new worlds of knowing. Examination of what contributes to substantive learning by focusing squarely on the student as learner, and examination of the role of teacher as one who aids students in educational development comprise core strengths of this book. Throughout, the authors have provided means by which readers can begin to unravel snarled assump-

tions brought to learning tasks and educational environments. Becoming more critically reflective as a teacher may hold the promise of providing students with not only a means by which they too might become more critically reflective learners, but model for them a way of being in the world.

Paul O. Myhre
Wabash College
Crawfordsville, Indiana

HOW COFFEE SAVED MY LIFE: AND OTHER STORIES OF STUMBLING TO GRACE, by Ellie Roscher. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2009. Pp. 144. \$16.99 (paper).

“I decided to go to Uruguay because I wanted to be interesting” (2). Ellie Roscher’s first sentence is a candid admission and an introduction to her likeable honesty. She reveals her methodical discernment process that approved a year in Uruguay both as a logical ad-

dition to her vocational repertoire and as a wild way to enhance her loving awareness for the greater world.

Roscher describes herself as a “rich North American overachiever” (4). Most fluent in the fast-paced life of graduate school, extracurricular activities and athletic competition, she hopes the slower pace of life in Uruguay will challenge her identity as a successful and busy woman. She expects the new culture to shock her with a fresh perspective, unique relationships, and wisdom that will inform her vocation for years to come.

This shock was, perhaps, the only expectation met by Roscher’s year in Uruguay. With a masters degree in theology/urban ministry, Roscher finds herself in the rural town of Lascano far from the support of family, friends, and her fellow YAGM (Young Adults in Global Mission) missionaries. Her limited Spanish skills prove to further isolate her from the town’s apathy about her presence and its

*Help inspire people in your congregation
to rediscover the Bible*



2011 Book of Faith Jubilee:
Inspiring Everyday People to Read
the Bible

April 29-May 1

Help inspire people in your
congregation and community to
rediscover the Bible and its power
to change lives and speak to us
today.

www.luthersem.edu/jubilee

 LUTHER SEMINARY

2481 Como Ave + St. Paul Minn.
www.luthersem.edu

deepest needs for grace proclaimed. Once overextended and socially satisfied, Roscher finds herself working just two hours a day and drowning in loneliness.

Pensive quotations from a range of writers and excerpts from her own journal are sprinkled throughout the memoir, offering vivid descriptions of her desperation and dreams. Each entry is a story of death and resurrection, her identity and expectations transformed as new relationships are built, trust is gained, and inhibitions are lost. “After simply being a presence in Lascano for a month, I started to encounter a small sense of call there. It was not at all what I expected it would be” (45).

On the bad days Roscher sounds like a shadow of herself, her poise and gifts undiscovered by the people she longs to know. The fatty food and sedentary hours weigh her down until she embodies the grief she cannot yet translate. Roscher’s sense of vocation in Lascano is picked apart by the feelings of uselessness and not being welcomed until she finally learns the whole story of the tension that follows her around town.

The good days are highlighted by small victories; bus drivers on her running route begin to wave, acknowledging her presence. Children break barriers with hugs and affection, in awe of her light hair. She connects with her young house sister about the angst of true love far away. She drinks maté with people she knows nothing about, communing with strangers and sharing sacred space until they become friends. “I’d like to think that I appreciated the small victories in the United States, but I live for them here” (145). Away from the distractions and comforts of life back home, Roscher soaked up the little things.

Roscher explores the themes that recur throughout her journey, calling us into the ups and downs of life in the mission field and seasons of self-discovery. She exposes the frustrating and wonderful ways a call can change, commissioning something entirely new and necessary. Roscher invites us to consider the

way vulnerability can make room for accompaniment, the different forms of hospitality when we long to be welcomed, and the grace that grows gradually from brokenness.

Several months into her confusing and challenging journey, Roscher has made the very most of an unwise placement, finding beautiful ways to share her whole self with the town of Lascano. Her body, once lethargic with isolation and doubt, comes alive with dance and yoga and affection, the sharing of her most innate gifts. “By the end of the year, I was working in the preschool, grade school, high school, church, and gymnasium—as well as private homes. I knew almost every child in town by name. My English and athletic ability were most often tapped. The days became crazy, exhausting, and full. I saw it as a ministry of bodily play and laughter for the spirit” (134).

Roscher’s journey is an endearing tale of discipleship and global friendship in the twenty-first century. Her loneliness is palpable, but so is her joy when she begins to believe that she has stumbled into the greater body of Christ. Her story is for those who have lived abroad and have learned to laugh at themselves. It is for those who cherish the simple celebrations and find a way to share them with the world. It is for those who believe in the power of the good news embodied in relationships, tea, and bread. “I do not only hold these people in my heart. Because we dared to love each other, I also carry them in my body. Discipleship carries physical consequences” (34).

Roscher went to Uruguay because she wanted to be interesting, but also because she longed for fresh perspective, unique relationships, and wisdom that would inform her vocation for years to come. You will be glad for what she brings home and for what she is brave enough to share.

Meta Herrick Carlson
St. John’s Lutheran Church
Minneapolis, Minnesota

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGIES:

A FORTRESS INTRODUCTION, by Don Schweitzer. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. Pp. 188. \$24.00 (paper).

The question of who Jesus is has baffled his followers for millennia. Since the very beginning, Mary pondered in her heart what Jesus' birth could possibly mean (Luke 2:19). During his ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). The question of Christology has been the defining feature of Christianity since its inception.

Christologies usually center around one of two foci: the person of Jesus and the work of Jesus. "Christologies tend to develop in relation to external factors like the social location of a church, the stability of surrounding society, and socially dominant ideals, assumptions, and practices" (2). As societies and faith communities evolve, understandings of Jesus change along with them.

Recent historical events have greatly influenced Christologies around the world. In *Contemporary Christologies*, Don Schweitzer examines the viewpoints of fifteen post-World War II theologians. Schweitzer organizes the book into five chapters, each discussing the views of three contemporary authors on particular Christologies, plus a concluding chapter. There are poignant cultural references and connections to traditional theologians, giving the Christologies a broader framework for interpretation. As with other *Fortress Introduction* books, each chapter includes a list of resources for further reading and discussion questions for a classroom or book group setting.

First, Schweitzer explores "Jesus as Revealer" (7). In response to Western societies' postmodern experience of God being absent or eclipsed, three theologians here see Jesus as the source of a deeper understanding of the divine. "Though God is always present, Jesus gives people a new consciousness of this

through the disclosive power of his person" (9). Karl Rahner, Dorothee Soelle, and Roger Haight offer very different Christologies, yet all recognize Jesus primarily as revealer of the divine.

Chapter two examines "Jesus as Moral Exemplar" (33), following Peter Abelard. "The beauty of Jesus' life and death moves people to actualize more fully their own potential to love.... Here Jesus saves by his moral influence on people" (33). Schweitzer illustrates this through the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Carter Heyward, and Mark Lewis Taylor. Jesus' moral example brings salvation by focusing people's attention on justice and love of neighbor.

Next the reader is introduced to "Jesus as Source of Ultimate Hope" (55). Under this Christology, "Jesus' saving significance lies in the victory God achieves over [sin] in Jesus' death and resurrection" (55). James Cone, Jon Sobrino, and Elizabeth Johnson offer christological viewpoints springing from the image of Christ as victor over sin. These authors concretely relate Jesus to the world and see the need for his influence to create a just society.

Anselm's Christology centered on the salvific nature of Jesus' suffering and death. Schweitzer explores contemporary takes on this Christology in chapter four, "Jesus as the Suffering Christ" (73). Jürgen Moltmann, Douglas John Hall, and Marilyn McCord Adams understand "Jesus' agony on the cross as an expression of God's love, an event in which Jesus accomplished something of decisive saving significance" (75).

"Jesus as Source of 'Bounded Openness'" (99) is the fifth christological theme. The dilemma of how the truth claims of Christianity relate to those of other religions is a matter of increasing relevance as Christians find themselves living in a world defined by globalization and pluralism. Raimon Panikkar, John B. Cobb Jr., and Jacques Dupuis each "reject the claim that salvation can be found only through faith in Christ, but they affirm that Jesus is the

Christ” (100). This theme is complex, but Schweitzer clearly explains the nuances of each position.

In the final summary chapter, Schweitzer acknowledges that these fifteen Christologies bring up new questions and leave some old ones unresolved. He identifies both traditional and contemporary issues, noting many areas for further exploration. Though Schweitzer leaves the reader wondering what his own christological viewpoints are, the book is not intended to be a personal tome, but a presentation of various current viewpoints on Christology.

One note of caution is in order prior to recommending this book for use in a classroom, whether at the congregational, college, or seminary level. An introduction to traditional Christology would be helpful to most readers before opening this book. Some Christologies presented here challenge core Christian beliefs (e.g., the resurrection) or commonly held assumptions (e.g., Christianity as the only route to salvation). A review of the creeds and of some biblical views on Christology could provide a helpful framework in which to interpret the Christologies presented here. Additionally, though the book’s glossary is helpful, occa-

sionally Schweitzer uses difficult words that are not defined in the glossary (such as “ontological” or “Christus Victor”). For these reasons, the book might best be used as a resource for deeper study, rather than a first-time introduction to the topic.

Overall, Schweitzer’s study provides an unbiased summary of fifteen contemporary Christologies. He writes in understandable language for the most part, reaching the core of each theologian’s viewpoint without unnecessary divergences from the christological focus. Schweitzer does not claim to offer a comprehensive look at Christology today, only a balanced one. He achieves this goal by including male and female theologians who have experienced Christianity on four continents. The concluding sentence to the book notes, “the tradition of reflection on Jesus Christ continues, deepened by these contemporary Christologies and yet still moving on.” For Christians today, this book offers a useful potpourri of conceptions of Jesus that are relevant to the issues of the twenty-first century.

Katya Ouchakof
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Madison, Wisconsin