

Reviews



CREATION UNTAMED: THE BIBLE, GOD, AND NATURAL DISASTERS, by Terence E. Fretheim. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. Pp. 160. \$19.99 (paper).

The book's topic splashes vividly onto the cover with its title's two-word assertion (creation untamed) and its three players (the Bible, God, natural disasters) perched over a photograph of Hurricane Katrina's catastrophe: jumbled houses with structural innards exposed, a battered pick-up, no visible human. Two prefaces introduce the scope of the book and situate its originating contexts, followed by an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, and a biblical citation index.

The introduction reviews readers' recent awareness of outsized disasters, questioning how we appraise the causality factor: Do humans cause disasters? Does God? Is it some agency blend, such as God punishing us? Or do cosmic events happen resultant upon mere chance? How can we identify and understand biblical assertions about the created moral order? Fretheim places God neither easily on nor off the hook. A key question emerges: "How shall we speak of God's relation to natural disasters and the suffering and death related thereto, both then and now?" (8).

Chapter 1 unpacks Fretheim's sense that the world appears interrelational, good but not perfect. Exploring Genesis creation accounts, he redraws for us a dynamic we may have missed: God commands without coercing, moves collaboratively to engage existing mate-

rial for new creative possibilities, delegates creative responsibility to others, and surely engages humans to assist with creation. Creation, Fretheim suggests, is inevitably more open and messy than we may think. God does not necessarily override helpers' efforts. Implications: Biblical creation is interdependent, relational, and communal, thanks to God's choices. Words like "neat" and "orderly" bear only part of the story. How the world comes to work, disasters included, must be seen in the context of such teamwork.

The second chapter draws again from Genesis, the flood story providing a salient example of divine and human hands mutually involved. Is God's creation less good than described in Gen 1? As human sinfulness emerges within the narratives, how now do we talk about disasters that are natural or human—or a blend of both? After some basic exegesis and careful reading, Fretheim challenges hasty inferences about God: effects are not inevitably to be construed as punishment; biblical characterization of God's role is quite diverse, even almost contradictory; yes, human sinfulness and yes, divine response—but patterns vary. Ten points are offered, including the reminder that the God-human process is richly relational with agency shared; God is characterized by a range of emotions, not simply anger.

In chapter 3 Fretheim turns his attention to biblical Job, initially affected by disasters, some "natural." Job's dialogue with his friends and his words hurled at God seem pitched to tease out the causality nexus, but again deserve

fresh scrutiny. Bringing forward the character of creation as collaborative, ongoing, and messy, Fretheim helps us re-see the Joban “dramatic fiction” in all its provocative detail. Reading afresh is key: though moral evil is a reality, the book of Job shows God presiding over a non-anthropomorphic creation, visited by suffering we can call natural. The world—complex and diverse—is not so tightly tied to human doings as we may be prone to suppose, even while complaining of it. Job is shown to understand little and his friends less. The book is not concerned, fundamentally, with whether Job’s suffering is deserved, leaving dangling the matter of why such a world exists. Questions are more prominent than answers!

In a fourth, very practical, chapter, Fretheim moves us to familiar questions —“Why has God... How can God...” —offering seven claims that are typically made (e.g., God sends suffering for a purpose), providing biblical conversation points when people query such things. In numerous biblical passages God is questioned about such matters, and good responses may be gleaned. Noting that the matter of suffering lies between explanation and mystery, Fretheim brings forward various points useful for insight, potentially valuable for people we all know.

The last chapter examines how humans (biblical and other) meet adversity: by faith and prayer. Fretheim explores reasons why people pray when in trouble, lining up biblical texts demonstrating possibilities. He opines that U.S. Christians may pray pragmatically with an eye on short-term gains, urging that other strategies be developed. He also addresses the challenge of and for Christians who no longer feel at home in their native faith stance, without yet having evolved an understanding of prayer comfortable for them. How we image God is revealed in the ways we pray, Fretheim urges us, with the psalms being good examples of that. A brief conclusion sums up the book’s argument.

The topic is an urgent one for people of faith who want to live within their biblical tradition. Fretheim is a published veteran on this matter, a skilled and knowledgeable guide. His biblical insights are fresh and useful, and the implications offered are invigorating. The book reads well without requiring extensive background knowledge. It is obviously written for people with these questions and their conversation partners.

My single regret is Fretheim’s failure to distinguish more analytically how “creation” overlaps the natural world and what it means to live in both realms. “Creation” implies a framework of belief and may construct a world where disasters need an explanation not necessary outside it. Fretheim’s concern is biblical (Judaic and Christian) tradition, though he might have noted in passing that other traditions deal very differently with suffering. The whole mystery of how humans seek to and can claim to know who God is and what God does is also the pushing-off point for this study, needing reference, perhaps.

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THE PEOPLE’S JESUS: TRAJECTORIES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY, by Robin Scroggs; Marshall D. Johnson, editor. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 241. \$29.00 (cloth).

Christianity is blessed with a vast collection of extant literature presenting contrasting yet coexisting views of Jesus, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection. Few early Christians, however, would have had the ability to compose the writings we now recognize as the New Testament. Early Christian literature was written by the educated people in society. But what did the common people believe? This is

the focus of Robin Scroggs's *The People's Jesus*. His stated goal is "to seek out the major linguistic centers around which the early church focused its faith and to trace their trajectories" (7). Scroggs pursues this goal by examining the texts closely for excerpts of oral traditions that predate the writings. By focusing on the earliest pieces of discernible tradition, Scroggs identifies three specific Christologies, trajectories demonstrated by use in NT writings, but part of popular faith prior to the dates of composition. At the same time, Scroggs admits that there is much speculation to his research, and many of his questions have no confirmable answers.

By isolating early liturgical fragments and ideas, Scroggs identifies a christological trajectory of Jesus as Cosmocrator. The resurrected Jesus has been exalted and enthroned as ruler of the world (11). Effectively, Jesus replaces Yahweh as the Cosmocrator—he doesn't usurp the role from Yahweh, he simply assumes the throne (17). The typical title of this trajectory is "Lord Jesus Christ." The Cosmocrator trajectory was most evident among Hellenistic Christian communities.

Working backwards, Scroggs reveals the next trajectory as one that likely developed earlier in the life of the church: Jesus as Son of Man. This Christology is apparent among Aramaic believers, Palestinian Christian communities prior to the writing of the Synoptic Gospels (24). Scroggs suggests that Jesus is considered the prophet of the coming Son of Man, but Jesus himself is not the Son of Man (28–32). That identification is a result of later theological interpretation, perhaps introduced by NT authors. According to this trajectory, "there is no resurrection....What lies ahead is the coming of the Son of Man, just as Jesus proclaimed before his death" (36).

The third trajectory is the earliest, that of Jesus as *Christos*. Scroggs identifies this title with Palestinian churches, which used the name as a title for Jesus, their Messiah. By the time NT authors were writing, *Christos* had lost

its titular significance, but Scroggs posits that the name was based on a previous titular usage in Palestinian communities (48). Since Jesus did not fulfill the role of political Messiah, Scroggs suggests that the title of *Christos* in Palestinian Christianity is based on Jesus' miracles (64).

After presenting these trajectories, Scroggs relates them to the apparent evidence in the texts. Ironically, he uses the earliest NT writings (Paul's letters) to trace the latest trajectory (Cosmocrator) and vice versa. Scroggs then gives a close examination of several NT books to provide examples of how the early trajectories developed into more complex theology in the later life of the church. For example, he examines Paul's writings to see how he incorporates the Cosmocrator trajectory into his particular theology. Scroggs remains firm on the idea that Paul did not create the Christology of Jesus as Cosmocrator, but rather incorporated earlier traditions and even adapted some of the earlier beliefs to fit his purposes. Scroggs dedicates a chapter each to the trajectories found in the Synoptic Gospels, Paul, Colossians and Ephesians, Hebrews, Acts and Revelation, and the Gospel and First Epistle of John.

Several presuppositions were evident throughout *The People's Jesus*, most notably Scroggs's suggested dating of the Gospels and other NT writings. Dating a Gospel later than other scholars, for example, gives Scroggs a much wider window in which to place the development of his trajectories. The dates of composition were not the primary issue in his book, but I did find them distracting when I was not familiar with his reasoning. For a first read of this author's material, I felt rather unprepared to follow his complex line of thought that was clearly based on a lifetime of scholarship. Indeed, this book could be considered the capstone of a successful career, as it was the last work completed by Scroggs before his death. Yet taken out of the context of the rest of his

writings, at times the arguments can be difficult to follow.

For the average reader, Scroggs's vocabulary is quite advanced. He makes ample use of words such as denouement, fulsome, paraenetic, tautologous, and thaumaturgic—just to name a few. Add to this to the abundant use of Greek throughout the book, and Scroggs's writing is very sophisticated. Even the reader educated in basic theological terminology could find this book challenging at times. Additionally, Scroggs has a tendency to present multiple counterarguments to his point before drawing any conclusions. A reader focusing less than complete attention on the book may find his writing style difficult to follow. For these reasons, I would recommend use of this book in academic settings. Given the complex vocabulary and the presentation of so many counterarguments, many readers will find his views to be most useful when presented as excerpts, rather than trying to consume the entire book all at once.

The focus of *The People's Jesus* is highly speculative, focused around the theories of the author, but with scant evidence to support them. The written word has unified Christianity for nearly two thousand years. Proposed beliefs held by Christians in the latter half of the first century can certainly provide the reader with food for thought, but they are not likely to change the longstanding traditions of Christian practice. The most lasting impact of Scroggs's proposed christological trajectories will be in the beliefs of individual readers. Without straying from orthodox Christian thought, Scroggs presents earlier viewpoints that can still inform the faith of Christians today, and this book would be a useful tool for someone looking to expand their viewpoints on Jesus and his work.

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JESUS AND THE POWERS: CONFLICT, COVENANT, AND THE HOPE OF THE POOR, by Richard A. Horsley. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 248. \$29.00 (paper).

Do we interpret Jesus and the powers present in the first century through first-century or twenty-first-century eyes? This seems to be the underlying question motivating Richard Horsley's new work, *Jesus and the Powers*. Horsley seeks to expose the anachronistically flawed methodology of many interpreters of the Bible and illuminate a better way, namely, reading the Bible in light of its "historical context." *Jesus and the Powers* focuses on the dominant "powers" in the first-century setting of the Gospels, in particular the Roman Empire, and how Jesus' actions and teachings should be properly understood in light of this cultural, political, and religious environment.

The first three chapters of *Jesus and the Powers* describe the various "powers" that would have impacted a first-century audience. Horsley begins by considering the most prominent power, in his eyes—the Roman Empire. His reconstruction attempts to provide a broader, albeit negative, portrayal of the Roman Empire's influence of power in the first century than is typically understood to be the case. Power in the first-century Greco-Roman sense, especially through avenues of taxation and conquest, meant degradation of the poor or outcast and an enriching and empowering of the wealthy or socially "included."

He then looks at Israel's covenantal foundation, most clearly seen in the relationship established between Yahweh and Israel at Mt. Sinai. Horsley's emphasis here is on the oppressive, "imperialistic" rule of Egypt over the people of Israel, and how Egypt's rule created economic, social, and political problems for Israel. The solution for this oppression was God's liberation through the exodus, a solution recalled through the covenant renewal focus in Jesus' actions and teachings. In the

third chapter, Horsley describes visionary texts in Second Temple Judaism as well as prophetic and messianic movements through the first century that prepared the people of Israel for Jesus and his movement against the Roman power structures.

The final five chapters illuminate the interaction between these powers and the response of Jesus and the nascent community of his followers. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, for Horsley, seems to be the primary message of hope against the imperial powers oppressing the renewed community of God (101). In the fifth chapter, Horsley addresses one of the great power "struggles" in the NT, namely the exorcism of spirits or demons. Demon possession was not only traumatic on a personal and community level, but it was also representative of the political oppression present for the Judeans in the first century. As he says: "In the exorcisms Jesus expels the possessing powers of Roman imperial rule and heals its effects. The 'acts of power' he performs empower the people in a restoration of their lives under the direct rule (kingdom) of God" (123). Horsley then seeks to redefine our understanding of the concept of covenant in the NT, opposing the idea that Jesus' teaching inaugurates a new covenant and instead seeing Jesus as bringing covenant renewal to Israel. In light of the economic pressures imposed on the people through taxation and the disintegration of the community that resulted, Jesus' "covenant renewal speech" in Luke's Sermon on the Plain is to be seen as incorporating a strategy of resistance against the Roman Empire through renewal of the covenant and a call to community unity, power, and liberation (cf. 140).

Horsley ends the book by engaging with actions and teachings that (directly or otherwise) result in confrontation with the Roman Empire. In particular, Jesus "spoke truth to power," especially through his teaching on the temple and condemnation of the high priests, in order to proclaim political opposition to the dominant, imperialistic power(s) present in

Jerusalem. Horsley argues that the final event in the passion narratives, Jesus' crucifixion, was both a demonstration of Roman imperial power and the key moment for the establishment of the community of his followers. It was not the resurrection but the crucifixion that "gave impetus for the expansion of the Jesus movement(s)" and transformed "the power that was intended to intimidate and dominate into the power that inspired commitment and solidarity in forming an alternative social order" (199).

While *Jesus and the Powers* is helpful on certain levels, it has numerous shortcomings. To begin with, this book is not for the faint of heart. Horsley's style and the knowledge and terminology he assumes the reader already has mastered (e.g., his very brief explanation and yet detailed use of Q, or his frequent references to Second Temple Jewish literature) would make the book a challenging read even for fairly well read pastors. It is also unclear against *whom* he is arguing in this book. His occasional references to John Dominic Crossan and the Jesus Seminar may reflect his desire to critique liberal historical-Jesus scholars rather than contemporary NT scholarship in general.

From a pastoral perspective, Horsley's anti-imperial hermeneutic is often overbearing and overstated, and it actually distracts at times from some of the helpful points he makes in the book (particularly when he compares the Roman empire with contemporary American foreign policy). His attempt to help introduce readers of the Bible to its historical context simultaneously fails to explain *how* this background should be applied to NT study. Followers of Jesus in today's world need to be reminded that they cannot simply bring their own perspectives to bear on the biblical text. Context, of which history is a part, is vital for an understanding of the Bible. However, Horsley goes too far in an attempt to drive home his point. Ultimately, his inability to see Jesus and the "powers" of the first century in

any other way than through his anti-imperial lens creates more problems than it solves.

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THE MAKING OF PAUL: CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE APOSTLE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY, by Richard I. Pervo. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. Pp 376. \$32.00 (paper).

The Apostle Paul has always provoked strong reactions from admirers and detractors alike. He may, for example, be a preacher of righteousness by faith alone, a prime oppressor of women, an aggressive missionary who hijacked the Jesus movement, or the teacher of God's righteousness for Jew and Gentile alike. Richard Pervo shows that such diversity of understanding is hardly new. *The Making of Paul*, a meticulously researched study that both ranges widely and dives deeply, explores how Paul's person and writings were presented and used in the first centuries of Christianity. It surveys both canonical and noncanonical writings, as well as interpreters eventually judged heretical and those accepted into the emerging catholic trajectory. Through the use of textual and literary analysis, he unfolds a story of how these divergent traditions embraced, rejected, and rewrote the words and the life of Paul to answer the questions they saw before them.

The author presses the reader to see that we "have" Paul only as those who came after him wanted him to be remembered. This is not done to debunk the apostle or marginalize canonical material deemed pseudepigraphal or ahistorical. Instead, Pervo proposes contexts in which these representations were made and explores how they illuminate the actual historical task of wrestling with the Pauline gospel in real-life circumstances. Even the simple act of collecting and circulating epistles is a creative response to the demands of faith communi-

ties: "what has survived or been invented or modified is the result of choices related to perceived current needs" (23). These choices reveal the exercise of theological and pastoral judgment. Thus, what the collectors of Paul's letters or the appropriators of his authority did centuries ago mirrors, to some extent, what preachers and church leaders do today. Whenever we interpret Paul, we appropriate a conversation from which we are quite distant. In *The Making of Paul*, Pervo seeks to bring us more deeply into those conversations, to see more clearly what it means to receive, to pass on, and thus to reformulate Paul's legacy.

While engagingly written, this book is likely too technical to be used as a primary resource for teaching in the parish. Its audience is more in the academy. Furthermore, the author's probing analysis can stray into distracting overstatement. Blunt assertions that Colossians portrays Paul as a watching and evaluating "Santa Claus" figure (17–18), or that the strong narrative parallels between Jesus and Paul in Luke-Acts elevate Paul beyond "just a bearer of the saving message," and into a "savior figure" who "bring[s] redemption to others" (154–155) would serve the author's argument better if they were made as observations about interpretive trajectories rather than as indisputable facts. While the audience is not the pew, there are moments when Pervo makes it more challenging than necessary to employ his insights in service to the pulpit.

As a historical study, this book does not speak directly to current questions such as the "New Perspective" on Paul or debates about New Testament sexual ethics; the issues it addresses are more those of the scholarly guild than of the church. However, in surveying how the earliest transmitters of Paul used his witness, Pervo gives us helpful models for considering how the church today amplifies, downplays, or modifies elements of Paul's message. With some work and imagination, pastors could use these precedents to help illuminate just which aspects of Paul's legacy their

ministries embody. Pervo highlights, for example, how easily the dynamic power of grace can devolve into mere morality; he also shows how surprisingly susceptible Paul's writings are to being stripped out of their Old Testament moorings. Pauline authority can be used in many ways, whether as an appeal to "cultured despisers" of Christianity (such as the supposed letters of Paul and Seneca), or a more defensive presentation of the church as a nonthreatening, strongly led model community (as found in the Pastoral Epistles), or an attempt to unify believers (such as the book of Acts). The analysis found in *The Making of Paul* prompts consideration of how churches invoke, apply, or avoid Paul today. While the book leaves the work of contemporary application to the reader, it does provide a tremendous amount of data to inform such reflection. Preachers can find here helpful critical observations that will clarify the distinctiveness of the deutero-Pauline epistles when they come up in the lectionary. Pastors will find rich insight into what was gained and lost when the practical, particular letters of Paul were made, by his followers, into general pronouncements intended to be universally applicable (25).

This work deals with history, and often with the uncertain reconstruction of texts and events of long ago. Pervo's tremendous attention to volumes of detail may feel like it adds another layer of complexity. But for the one who brings theological and pastoral discernment to this scholarly work, the effort will be rewarded. Not all of the author's judgments will convince every reader, but even then, he does not fail to inform. Pervo notes that Paul "continually urged his converts to think, to work out their own issues in accordance with the grace they had received" (236). *The Making of Paul* equips the student of the New Testament to receive Paul's legacy and do just this.

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CHRIST THE KEY, by Kathryn Tanner. London: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. 322. \$29.99 (paper).

Kathryn Tanner, who recently moved from the University of Chicago to Yale, has offered one of the most important theological books of the last decade in *Christ the Key*. The book is the promised scholarly, updated, and deepened version of her moving and creative lectures published as *Jesus, Humanity and Trinity*. When one thinks of "scholarly, updated, and deepened" one could easily imagine a tome of a book filled with copious footnotes and long, esoteric prose, used best as a paperweight and a tonic for insomnia. But *Christ the Key* is none of this; rather, this text is the best of theology in both its scholarly depth and its readability. A slim volume, it nevertheless packs a punch. The overall pursuit of the project is to reexamine the significance of Jesus Christ, providing a Christology that opens the Trinity to humanity and humanity to the Trinity.

Chapter one, entitled "Human Nature," explores anthropology through a rich dialogue with Augustine, Genesis, and the church fathers. Tanner makes a strong case for a relational understanding of human beings and shows how the human is open to otherness. This openness makes the human a transformational creature, a creature desiring and able to be transformed by that which is other than it—most fully, God. The human being then is plastic, that is, molded in relation to others and the environment.

Chapters two and three wear the same title, "Grace." Over these two chapters the author provides a rich discussion that focuses mainly on the shape of Jesus' union with the Trinity that, through his humanity, we too are invited into. Tanner in these two chapters develops a beautiful picture of the mystical exchange that happens between our humanity and Christ's own. And this articulation sings because of her robust mobilization of the Spirit. Another

strength of these two chapters is a rich discussion of justification and sanctification.

The Trinity is the focus of chapter four. Tanner begins with a discussion on the incarnate Word, articulating further how the humanity of Jesus is bound to the Word—that where Jesus is found so is the Word, and where the Word is, so too is Jesus. This then moves her into a discussion of the relational life of the Trinity, showing wonderfully how the Father is the Father as the Son is the Son only through relationship one to the other. From here she goes into a discussion of soteriology, where she strings together beautiful paragraph after paragraph on how all three persons of Trinity actively participate in the work of salvation. Keeping this from the systematically obscure, Tanner, with great precision, shows the three persons' action in the Gospels. But, what is not to be missed in this very lengthy chapter is the emphasis on the work of the Spirit, and how the Spirit is about joining—joining Father to Son, Son to Father, Word to the humanity of Jesus, and Jesus' humanity to our own. The articulation of the work of Spirit here is what really sets Tanner's offerings on the Trinity apart from other relational focuses on the Trinity such as those of Barth, Moltmann, and Volf (these last two become central in the next chapter).

"Politics," chapter five, to this reviewer is worth every penny of the book's price. Here Tanner takes on the recent popular ecclesiological and missional move of applying the Trinity and its relational core (which Tanner herself has articulated in earlier chapters) to the relational life of the church. Tanner calls this a political move, pointing to Moltmann and Volf as two of the major voices of this move picked up by so many more popular authors and church consultants. Yet, throughout this hard-hitting chapter, Tanner shows that this theological move has significant problems, explaining that when we so easily apply the relationality of the Trinity to human relationships we lose the distinctive otherness of

the Trinity, we forget that the community of the Trinity escapes the human knower, that there is an asymmetry between the Trinity and human community. Her arguments here are quite convincing. Tanner then concludes that it is a better approach to turn toward the relational connection between Jesus' humanity and our own, toward a more incarnational perspective as it relates to human relationships and the church. She makes this case elegantly, opening up significant space for deeper thought on what this means for pastors and practical theologians.

The book ends with two shorter chapters on atonement and the working of the Spirit. There is significance in these chapters as well. For instance, Tanner deals with feminist and womanist perspectives on the atonement and its sacrificial nature. But it must be stated that, at least to this reviewer, these two chapters had a hard time living up to splendor of Tanner's chapter on "Politics." They are significant and should be read, but next to the brilliance of her critique of Moltmann and Volf they lack the same electric sizzle.

Christ the Key is a shining light in systematic theology. Not only is it a creative offering that avoids the ruts of the countless systematic texts that simply tell us what other theologians think, but it actually offers a distinctive and rich perspective of its own. This is a book that theologians will return to often and that all pastors should take the time to delve into. It will not disappoint.

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LIBERATING LUTHERAN THEOLOGY: FREEDOM FOR JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT, by Paul Chung, Ulrich Duchrow, and Craig L. Nesson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 292. \$33.00 (cloth).

What does the theology of Martin Luther have to say to the formidable challenge of global capitalism and the injustices that result for the world's most vulnerable? While Luther's legacy of standing against the spiritual tyranny of his day is well established, the issue of whether he colluded with or worked against the political and economic tyrannies of his time has long been a matter of debate. In *Liberating Lutheran Theology*, theologians Paul Chung, Ulrich Duchrow, and Craig Nesson join a growing list of contemporary Lutheran theologians who see in Luther's theology resources for a liberationist theological approach to today's global challenges.

Craig Nesson, a theologian from Wartburg Theological Seminary, sets the wider context for the book by beginning with Latin American liberation theology and the critiques that has leveled against Luther, particularly his two-kingdoms teachings. Taking his cue from Brazilian Lutheran theologian Walter Altmann, Nesson works to reframe Luther's work on the two kingdoms to liberationist ends. Nesson insists that if Luther is understood from the perspective of his own context, it becomes clear that his "two kingdoms teaching is not about two separate and unrelated realms but about two different types of divine activity" (49), which is why Nesson talks instead about God's two strategies in dealing with the world. God's right-hand strategy involves the proclamation of the gospel, while God's left-hand strategy deals with temporal institutions. Thus, God's two strategies are distinct but complementary, and if we "reintegrate what tragically has been separated" (52), the temporal realm becomes a place where Chris-

tian service takes the form of political engagement on behalf of the neighbor.

In part two of the book, Paul Chung, trained and ordained in both Korea and the USA and now teaching Mission and World Christianity at Luther Seminary, creatively commingles Lutheran insights with Asian theological perspectives to productive ends. Chung begins with critical appraisals of the current conditions of empire, colonialism, and economic injustice, turning then to Luther's thought as a potent resource for facing these challenges. He fleshes out Luther's prophetic legacy for the economic realm, emphasizing that Luther linked his understanding of mammon as "the most common idol on earth" with what Chung calls his "sacramental understanding of social discipleship" (86). Chung then shows how this union in Luther's thought translates into a vocation of choosing God over mammon in social contexts, which, if followed today, leads to more just economic structures than current global capitalist structures.

Chung then traces Luther's legacy to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance, which he believes is open to "prophetic dialogue with the wisdom of the world religions" (97). Chung then identifies the lines of connection between Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance and Korean *minjung* views of suffering, resistance, and liberation. From there, Chung offers his constructive proposal for doing "irregular theology," theology done by second-generation *minjung* theologians, which engages the inter- and trans-cultural realities of Asian contexts. Chung then uses Buddhist understandings of inter-being and Confucian resistance to unjust rulers to "enrich and transform" Lutheran theology to speak to current instances of "global tyranny and the fetishism of capital expansion and accumulation for pursuing profit" (145).

Part three of the book is written by Ulrich Duchrow, former director of Lutheran World Federation's Commission on Studies and currently professor at the University of Heidel-

berg. He presents Luther's critique of early capitalism and demonstrates how Luther understands the church as an alternative to the capitalist order. Just as with Chung, Duchrow understands the global context as a necessarily multireligious one, and he explores how Luther's views of the intersections of religion and politics compare to those of Mahatma Gandhi. Duchrow sees that Gandhian views offer some corrective to Lutheran thought, particularly around issues of violence. Duchrow concludes his section by attending to recent ecumenical work and the consistent resistance to neoliberal capitalism found there. The book draws to a close with a sense of urgency about marshaling all possible theological resources to address the death-dealing effects of global capitalism.

While there is much to praise in this volume, the text at times struggles with cohesion. The first three sections of the book are each written individually, with little engagement with the other sections. This lack of integration leads to several instances of repetition that can become a distraction for the reader.

The lack of conversation within the book's first three sections is also a missed opportunity to explore more deeply where we think Luther got it right and where we need to offer correctives. Take, for example, the divergent assessments by Nesson and Duchrow of Luther's role in the Peasants' Revolt. Nesson defends Luther's stance vis-à-vis the peasants, arguing that "[I]t was the peasants and not the princes who obscured the true gospel during the peasants' uprising" (44). Nesson concludes his assessment with the claim that Luther's stance against the peasants is consistent with his defense of the freedom to proclaim the gospel. Duchrow, on the other hand, states that Luther comes to "tragically false conclusions during the Peasants' War" (189) and "in light of today's exegesis of Paul, one would need to rethink Luther's clash over the Radical Reformation" (194). This is not simply one small point of disagreement; rather, it is a point that affects

how one "liberates Lutheran theology" in relationship to his two-kingdoms teaching, his conception of Christian freedom, the ability of Christians to work for reform in the political sphere, and the list goes on.

Finally, while one book on the "global context" cannot possibly be comprehensive, two other limitations deserve mention. The first has to do with the way in which female and feminist scholars make only scant appearances in the text. From the history of liberation theology told with barely a reference to work by women scholars or *mujerista* theologians, to the analysis of liberation theology's impact on systematic theologians in North America and Europe that ignores scholarship done by women, to the discussions of empire and colonialism that fail to engage recent scholarship done by women: if readers do not know better, they will think that women play almost no role in "liberating Lutheran theology," which simply is not the case.

The second major limitation has to do with the relative silence about the African context. Both Chung and Duchrow attend briefly to Africa, and Duchrow aligns himself with the Dar Salaam statement (2007) when it calls for "the end of trivializing the voices of African people" as they seek to expose the deleterious effect of global capitalism (228). While this is an important statement to make, the fact that there are only a handful of references to African voices in the text threatens to leave them trivialized once again.

Overall, though, all of us who work to liberate Lutheran theology will find in this book many insights to broaden the understanding of how Luther can be a resource for proclaiming God's good news to the world while working against the injustices of our day.

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THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO MARTIN LUTHER, by Denis R. Janz. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010. Pp. 147. \$30.00 (paper).

Denis Janz is well known to Luther scholars in North America. He published a fine study of Luther's relationship to late medieval Thomism early in his career. He is also the editor of a *People's History of Christianity*, a multivolume work that focuses on the lives, practices, and institutions of the "common" folk. In this work, Martin Luther is again the object of his attention. As the title word "handbook" implies, Janz has chosen fifty-eight theological terms from Luther's works and provided extensive definitions of each. The text begins with "*Anfechtung*" and eventually winds its way to "Worship." In between are stops at topics such as "Descent into Hell," "Grace," "Law," and "Trinity."

Janz acknowledges in his introduction that there is hardly a need for another book on Luther's theology. But he wants to argue that a "handbook" approach can provide depth and substance along with accessibility. And he seems to have pulled it off. I found myself moving from one topic to the next when I began to read this book. Of course, this means it lacks the coherence of more systematic treatments of Luther. For that one should consult the work of Robert Kolb, Oswald Bayer, or Bernhard Lohse. But Janz's volume does pull the reader deeper into Luther's thinking. The article on "Baptism" leads to the one on "Penance," which leads to the one on "Sin" and so forth. Perhaps its unsystematic method is the most authentic way to study one of the church's most unsystematic theologians!

Another strength of Janz's book is his willingness to let Luther speak for himself. While there is a bibliography at the end of the book (more about that in a moment), there is a real concern to have Luther's own words shape how a word or concept is understood. For example, the article on "Justification" has over

forty quotations from a wide variety of the reformer's treatises and commentaries. But Janz is careful not to just string together phrases from Luther's writings. He organizes them in a way that pays attention to the context and Luther's own theological development. He understands the danger of simply quoting Luther without providing the setting and occasion for his remarks. Overall, this focus on original sources gives the *Handbook* an authentic feel. It also means that it should remain relevant for years to come.

There are some items in Janz's text that might be questioned. The bibliography seemed overly concerned with the Finnish scholarship on Luther. While this deserves mention, it seems a little one-sided. For example, to mention five Finnish texts while ignoring the important work of Gerhard Forde is a little puzzling. Also, there is a distinct emphasis on Luther's link with the Roman Catholic tradition. Again, this is understandable given Janz's own teaching position at a Jesuit university (Loyola in New Orleans). Topics on "Ordination," "Papacy," and "Penance" certainly belong in any guide to Luther's theology. But the Anabaptists should be there as well. And so should preaching. But these are not game breakers. Students and scholars of Luther should be grateful for the *Handbook*. It provides the reader with not only a "highlights" tour of Luther's theology but it also takes them inside the Reformer's thought.

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DEFENDING CONSTANTINE: THE TWILIGHT OF AN EMPIRE AND THE DAWN OF CHRISTENDOM, by Peter Leithart. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010. Pp. 373. \$27.00 (paper).

Peter Leithart is that rare and wonderful kind of theologian so engaged with the theological tradition of the church catholic that he

lives and breathes it—and trusts it matters—yet is intellectually curious and skeptical enough not to accept inaccurate and prejudiced historical caricatures at face value. He believes that the “historical stories we tell contribute a great deal to our theology and practice as Christians, so a distorted view of Constantine and the civilization that followed him is bound to produce distortions elsewhere” (Author Q&A).

Leithart believes many if not most theologians in the present era do indeed have a distorted view of Constantine, and although this applies to much of the constructive and historical work done in the field (and so also preached from our pulpits) it is especially instantiated in the work of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder and Duke ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. Given the growing and substantial influence of these two theologians, and especially given their constant references to Constantinianism as the bogeyman, clear thinking about Constantine and his influence is essential.

For the sake of full disclosure, readers of reviews in *Word & World* may know that I have written positive reviews of two very Yoderian and Hauerwasian books by Craig Carter in these pages. Leithart takes issue with both books because they develop their arguments based on the historical inaccuracies that undergird the theology of Yoder and his epigones. Unlike Leithart, I have simply taken the received wisdom concerning Constantine’s (supposedly negative) influence on Christendom at face value. I am chastened and challenged by the scholarship of Leithart.

Here are some of the questions Leithart raises: What if a majority of the received wisdom concerning Constantine and his legacy is wrong? What if the concept—Constantinianism—is premised on inaccurate interpretations of the historical record? And the most troubling question of all—What if some of the most enduring and influential constructive theologies of the last century, including

those of such luminaries as Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, have been constructed on this damnably false edifice? What if, in the end, all of these problems come down to a misunderstanding of baptism?

It is not surprising that Leithart, a strong proponent of infant baptism, would take issue with Yoder, a Mennonite, on the topic of baptism. What is surprising is that the paedobaptist/Anabaptist debate pertains to discussions concerning Constantine. And yet it does.

In the end it all comes round to baptism, specifically to infant baptism. . . . Christian Rome was in its infancy, but that was hardly surprising. All baptisms are infant baptisms. . . . Yoder failed. . . . to give due weight to “the interim, the interval between the remission of sins which takes place in baptism, and the permanently established sinless state in the kingdom that is to come, this middle time of prayer, while [we] pray, ‘Forgive us our sins.’” He failed to acknowledge that all—Constantine, Rome, and ourselves—stand in medial time, and yet are no less Christian for that. (341–342)

Leithart considers Constantine a Christian—fallen, immature in faith in his early years, paradoxical—but a Christian nonetheless. Out of that operative assumption, he finds Constantine and his reign generative for a whole theology as a social science (11).

I have found that, far from representing a fall for the church, Constantine provides in many respects a model for Christian political practice. At the very least, his reign provides rich material for reflection on a whole series of perennial political-theological questions: about religious toleration and coercion, about the legitimacy of Christian involvement in political life, about a Christian ruler’s relationship to the church, about how Christianity influences civil law, about the propriety of violent coercion, about the legitimacy of empire. (11)

This book is full of surprises. For example, I had not expected to have my thinking about the relationship between the theology of baptism and political theology reinvigorated. But even more stunning, whereas most Christian theology considers the end of sacrifice accomplished by Christ and effected through the practices of early synagogues in Babylonian captivity in absence of a temple, Leithart draws attention to Constantine as perhaps the greatest figure (after Christ) who brought about the end of sacrifice.

First, Leithart notes that “Romans sacrifice Christians to protect Rome by fending off the unthinkable prospect of the end of sacrifice” (27). Leithart understands the phenomenon of martyrdom under Roman rule to be the logical corollary of Rome’s sacrificial practices, as well as its defense mechanism for the same. “Constantine’s victory marked the end of the entire system of the Tetrarchy and the beginning of a new political theology. The change showed itself almost immediately. The rules of the triumph required Constantine to enter the Capitolium and offer sacrifice to Jupiter; Constantine refused. Diocletian’s empire was built on sacrifice, his persecutions inspired by a failed sacrifice. As soon as he defeated Maxentius, Constantine made it clear that a new political theology was coming to be, a political theology without sacrifice. It was a signal of the ‘opposition to sacrifice’ that he would hold to ‘consistently for the rest of his life’” (66–67). Furthermore, his future legislation created an atmosphere where sacrifice, as it were, faded away (129). As they say, “I did not know that!” We learn from Leithart that the U.S. Senate does not begin its sessions by slaughtering a goat, perhaps primarily because Constantine brought an end to such practices. So thank you, Constantine.

John Howard Yoder is widely recognized as one of the greatest apologists for radical Christian pacifism. Leithart’s most significant theological contribution in this book is to vitiate

Yoder’s historical claims and the force of those claims for his apology.

Yoder claims that the church slid or fell into Constantinianism from an earlier renunciation of violence and war. In fact, things are more messy and complicated, and therefore Yoder is wrong....[I]n short, the story of the church and war is ambiguity before Constantine, ambiguity after, ambiguity right to the present. Constantine is in this respect a far lesser figure than Yoder wants to make him (278).

Leithart achieves the goal he sets for himself of writing a book of Christian political thought that attends to the “gritty realities of history” (29). Really, this book should be required reading for anyone who has read anything by John Howard Yoder or Stanley Hauerwas, anyone who has tossed the concept of Constantinianism into the fray in a theological conversation, or anyone who would like to think clearly about what a robust and baptized political theology might look like in a new era of empire.

It also helps that Leithart is polemical, authentic, and at times witty. Consider this sentence, “Yoder’s Augustine is so far from the real Augustine that it is difficult to find a response beyond pointing to a copy of *City of God* with the exhortation *Tolle lege*” (287). Or this one, tossed into the middle of the book: “Constantine was not just a Christian; he was a *missional* Christian!” (88). I imagine Leithart may be able to claim to be the first person to write a book on missional Constantinianism. Maybe they should have thrown “missional” into the subtitle to sell more copies!

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PATHS NOT TAKEN: FATES OF THEOLOGY FROM LUTHER THROUGH LEIBNIZ, by Paul R. Hinlicky. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. Pp. 385. \$50.00 (paper).

In this aptly titled volume, Paul Hinlicky both addresses what he sees as the wrong direction taken by Lutheran theology in the modern era and offers his own unique alternative road forward for a postmodern Lutheran theology. In embarking upon this journey, in the postmodern era Hinlicky seeks to go forward in theology, away from modernism, by going back to something pre-modern. In particular, he wants to go forward into a postmodern Lutheran theology by escaping the dualistic, anthropologically centered, and “noncognitive” approach to theology grounded in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, by approaching theology through the “theological philosophy” of Philip Melanchthon and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (4–5).

In undertaking this enterprise, Hinlicky identifies from the outset that he is both embodying something and rejecting something in “postmodernism.” Hinlicky identifies his project as postmodern in the sense that in undertaking it, he rejects some assumptions present in modernistic approaches to theology. In particular, Hinlicky rejects the Kantian dualism between the existential or noncognitive and the essential or rational as well as the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation (4–6). Yet, Hinlicky’s project is not postmodern, in that he rejects the propensity towards relativism and pluralism.

Hinlicky understands the modern Kantian trajectory in Protestant and Lutheran thought, beginning with Schleiermacher and including to some extent the theology of Karl Barth, and the reaction to it in “radical Lutheranism,” to have departed from what was basically a Cyrillian, Augustinian, and Trinitarian essentialist and rational theology in the thought of Luther to a subject-centered existential ap-

proach to theology (10–12). Hinlicky states that he is not rejecting the existential approach but arguing for its belonging together with the essential approach (6–8). For Hinlicky, that these two belong together is seen particularly in Luther’s understanding of justification expressed in terms of the happy exchange between Christ and the sinner, which Hinlicky identifies as a participatory approach to justification in which the Holy Spirit actually makes the sinner righteous (145–148).

Hinlicky identifies the breaking point between the essential and the existential in the history of Protestant thought as occurring within the theology of Melanchthon. Hinlicky draws a distinction between the earlier Melanchthon—and his idea that to know Christ is to know him in his benefits—with the later and more Aristotelian Melanchthon. Hinlicky identifies with this more Aristotelian, rational Melanchthon and even seeks to show the harmony between this approach to Lutheran theology and the metaphysical theology of Thomas Aquinas (7). While the former side of Melanchthon appears in the Reformer’s doctrine of justification expressed merely in forensic terms, the latter side of Melanchthon may be seen in his concern for the human as the *imago Dei* (24–27). This latter side of Melanchthon represents a path not taken in Lutheran theology that might have avoided the Kantian error of dualism and the subsequent “disappearance of the Holy Spirit” from Lutheran theology. Instead of abandoning the essential for the existential, the real for the forensic, and the Holy Spirit for a “theological binarism,” in which salvation is a transaction between the Father and the Son for the sake of the humans sinner as well as a new subjective impulse, Protestantism and the Lutheran tradition might have saved themselves from its modern enslavement to Kantian subjectivism if they had followed the alternative route of the later Melanchthon (10–12, 175–177).

Yet, says Hinlicky, in the person of Leibniz

Lutheranism has one example of a thinker who exemplifies this kind of Melancthonianism. Hinlicky understands Leibniz, like Melancthon, to be a moderating figure who serves as an alternative to the Pelagianism of the Kantian turn towards the subject on the one hand, and a depiction of God's work as something that rules out human choice on the other. Human willing and divine willing are not incompatible, because God forms the context for human willing, which takes place as part of the *imago Dei* (24, 26–27). In this way, Hinlicky understands Leibniz, like Melancthon, as a theologian exuding a certain compatibilism between the willing of God and the willing of the human being. Such compatibilism parallels the understanding of justification as being participatory in nature. Furthermore, he understands Leibniz to present a certain general pneumatology evident in Leibniz's monadology and theodicy in which the world is understood as the creation, which

God made and sustains, and in which the human finds her identity as a creature of God in this best of all possible worlds (13, 30). Such pneumatological metaphysics work out in creation through what Hinlicky describes as God's working good through what appears to be evil, in theodicy both in the thought of Leibniz and in the theology of Luther through the reformer's discussion of the theology of the cross and the hiddenness of God (279).

In something of a paradox, Hinlicky does not think that the not-taken path of Melancthon and Leibniz is altogether not taken, after all. Instead, he understands the later, Trinitarian theology of Karl Barth in this light. Moreover, Hinlicky finds conversation partners for this view in Barth's Trinitarian successors Wolfhart Pannenberg, Eberhard Jüngel, and Robert Jensen (3, 251–252, 292–293), and urges his readers to take this path themselves, furthering the work he has begun and pioneering new aspects to it by addressing related



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questions he himself has not undertaken (283).

This book provides a metaphysical and natural theology of creation as the work of God and the human as the *imago Dei* as an interesting alternative to Kantian dualism. There are, however, also several drawbacks. One such drawback is Hinlicky's categorization of radical Lutherans, such as Gerhard Forde, as Kantians, without sufficient qualification or explanation, especially considering the charge of Pelagianism, which he levels at the Kantian approach to theology (155–156). The idea that radical Lutheranism has neglected the theology of creation is by now a common theme, but to associate it wholesale with Kantianism is perhaps going too far. Moreover, although he does not hide them from the reader, Hinlicky could be more forthright about his own evangelical Catholic theological presuppositions and leanings, especially when he is to some extent claiming to convey and interpret the theological legacy of Luther via the Finnish school's interpretation of justification, and purporting to show the compatibility of "Lutheran existentialism" and "Catholic essentialism" (283). Failing to acknowledge his own perspectives up front, he causes the reader to wonder if they prejudice his reading of Luther and move away from a theology of human passivity to one of human participation in the divine work.

Furthermore, on a practical note, there is hardly any convergence between Hinlicky's proposed metaphysical, and Christian ministry. The "theology" of Hinlicky as expressed here is certainly of an "academic" and philosophical nature rather than one oriented towards proclamation and divine service. Nevertheless, this work of Hinlicky's stands out as an original approach to the issue of how to do Lutheran theology in today's post-modern environment. Readers may find in this volume an interesting way of addressing this issue, and may indeed further Hinlicky's thought by addressing questions concerning

anthropology raised by Hinlicky but not addressed by him.

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DISRUPTING HOMELESSNESS: ALTERNATIVE CHRISTIAN APPROACHES, by Laura A. Stivers. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 160. \$18.00 (paper).

Laura A. Stivers has given the church an amazing gift in *Disrupting Homelessness: Alternative Christian Approaches*. This book gives clergy and lay leaders the tools needed to faithfully engage our congregations in ministry that can disrupt the patterns of homelessness with which we live. Her writing helps us reset our perspective and function out of a position of informed compassion. Stivers sets up an extremely accessible format for leaders to use with ministry groups, as her book demystifies the systems, policies, and current practices around homelessness. She walks us through a study of the history, our own common misunderstandings and ideologies, and on into the most effective and faithful actions for ministry. In her book, Stivers pulls together the most relevant work done in this field and shares it with us in user-friendly language. She ends each chapter with a straightforward conclusion as well as providing helpful study questions. The book is constructed for use in group settings as she leaves us with great opportunity for dynamic group and contextual interpretation.

Stivers states, "The primary task of Christian faith communities is 'truth work,' that is, embodying the ways of Jesus and speaking truth against death-dealing realities" (19), and goes on to say, "As Christians, we ought to be outraged that anyone is homeless or lives in substandard housing when we consider the call from Isaiah and other prophets to God's justice of housing the homeless" (21).

Stick with it through the front end of her argument—the challenges of homelessness can seem daunting and beyond us as we look it squarely in the face. Stivers takes the bull by the horns right out of the gate and fully engages in this “truth work,” as she names all of the issues we are up against when we claim a willingness to engage in this ministry. She comes back to each of these challenges, however, in the rest of her work with great courage and hope. She helps us to comprehend why some of our common practices and ideas are not working well as we seek to reach out to those who are experiencing poverty and homelessness in our society. Stivers untangles the realities of racism and “inequalities of power” that exist for all of us, helping us to see clearly where each of us have voice and power to make a difference for others. She inspires the “outrage” that she claims for us with usable strategies and accessible processes.

Stivers address the specific American problem we live in as she argues that “attention to structural causes of homelessness is crucially important” (53). We are then given a process and attainable common language to use in our attending. She delivers the information needed to achieve a communal wisdom via faith conversation as well as simple terminology and truth telling about systemic mysteries we keep hidden behind our versions of the “American Dream” (43). Stivers holds up a mirror for us and gently allows us to face the deified “American Dream” that has unknowingly directed so much of our emotion, thinking, and behavior around housing issues. She faces our idolatry (my term) with us as she tells the truth through narrative, using the voices of others to tell our common story.

Her return to agency throughout her work is hopeful in that it reminds us of the God-given strength each of us is granted. She helps us to step back from our tendencies to rescue or blame and leads us toward more productive communal thinking that includes those we seek to “help” with our ministry energy. She

helps us define the subgroups and differing needs within the homeless community as she assesses current practices and programs. In this assessment, we see how some ministry approaches are effective for some but not all those in need.

In chapter 6, Stivers teaches us to “prophetically disrupt” and become a “More Compassionate Society” as she lifts up advocacy as the key element of what she describes as a necessary “social movement” (105). She shows us the power of what it means to be God’s people when she states:

While money has considerable influence in our political system, we are still a democracy, and large coalitions can have political clout... Christians and church communities are called... to be in solidarity with the most exploited and marginalized by participating in a movement for social and economic justice... It is always easier to deny complicity in oppressive systems if we have done individual good deeds and have not been overtly exclusionary. God, through the example of Jesus Christ, calls us to more, however. Jesus did not revel in his own purity at the expense of injustice but instead challenged unjust systems, whether it was his society’s unjust treatment of lepers (Matt. 8:3; Mark 1:40–45; Luke 17:11–19) or the highly usurious money-lending system at the temple (Mark 11:15–19; 13:1–8). (121)

Stivers ends her book with a set of accessible tools to live out this vision and become congregations that effectively engage in compassionate ministry for those who are living in poverty and homelessness. She allows space for a wide range of theologies within this movement and activity as well as the grace to enhance and embrace our current work.

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