Reviews

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS: A COMMENTARY, by Arland Hultgren. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. Pp. 804. $60.00 (cloth).

A young Karl Barth may have broken on the scene with a commentary on Romans, but for most mortals the task of writing on this most foundational work of Christian theology is better reserved for one's maturity. Such is certainly the case here: Arland Hultgren, Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, draws on four decades of teaching, preaching, and writing on Paul in producing a major new commentary on his most influential epistle.

It is, on the whole, a commentary for the preacher or teacher who feels the need for some guidance in interpreting Romans, and perhaps desires some sense of the state of scholarship on related issues, but is not inclined to invest time or money on half a dozen commentaries. The number of pages (804) may appear daunting, but a general bibliography and indices make up the last hundred pages, and eight appendices take up the preceding hundred, so that the commentary proper occupies roughly six hundred pages: this is surely adequate for tackling the issues in a more than cursory way without getting bogged down in exhaustive discussion of every interpretive possibility. While well informed on the latest literature on Paul, Hultgren resists the temptation to be "trendy": most notably, the wisdom of Lutheran approaches to the epistle finds nuanced presentation here (e.g., 203–204, on the importance of justification in Paul's thought; 261–265, on the reality of sin in the life of the believer), but is not dismissed because out of fashion with many. Occasional reference is made to what Origen, or Augustine, or Luther said about a particular verse, but this is not a history-of-interpretation commentary. Hultgren is a modern, "historical-critical" scholar of the Bible, and so for the most part are his interlocutors. Only very occasionally does he comment on contemporary questions and what the text of Romans may, or may *not,* say about them (the latter, in Hultgren's view, is true of Rom 1:26–27 and homosexuality, as understood today; but see 224–225, on the relation between sin and death). The author largely confines his task to interpreting what Paul was saying in *his* context, attending in particular to theological aspects of the text.

In a twenty-seven page introduction, Hultgren concedes that Paul had no single purpose in writing the letter, but suggests his motivations included the desire to garner support for a planned mission to Spain, particularly in light of the possibility that his apostleship and theology as well as the collection he was about to take up to Jerusalem might be rejected in that city. The commentary proper is divided into ten sections (1:1–17; 1:18–3:20; 3:21–4:25; 5:1–8:39; 9:1–11:36; 12:1–21; 13:1–14; 14:1–15:13; 15:14–33; 16:1–27). Each main section is given brief discussion before being divided into subsections: for these, Hultgren provides his own translation, a few notes on the text and translation, a (usually short) "general comment," followed by detailed comments and (extensive and valuable) bibliographies. Compared with other commentaries, the amount of

attention given to the concluding chapters 12–16 is striking (435–604). In contrast to much modern literature, Hultgren repeatedly shows a healthy skepticism about our ability to reconstruct what was going on in the house churches in Rome; he doubts, moreover, that Paul was attempting to solve problems there, and deems it more likely that his admonitions were meant to reassure the Roman believers that his thinking was in line with their own. As noted earlier, the commentary concludes with eight appendices: of particular note are those dealing with the "righteousness of God" in Paul (605–615; the phrase usually refers to God's own saving work, setting right the relationship between humanity and himself; but in places [i.e., 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9; cf. Rom 5:17] it may mean the righteousness that God bestows on believers); the *pistis Christou* formulas (623–661; "faith in or of Christ"; however theologically attractive the latter reading may be, the former is overwhelmingly supported by Pauline usage); and the identity of the "I" in Rom 7 (681–691; "here Paul speaks of what it means to live under the law in order to be righteous, taking insights from his own life experience in the past under the law as paradigmatic, and seeing all from the perspective of one who is now 'in Christ'" [685]).

Hultgren's take on a few other debated passages and issues may be noted. In Rom 2, Paul is not "put[ting] forth his views concerning the Gentiles in the final judgment," but making clear that "there is no partiality with God" (117). In 2:13–14 he is rhetorically creating "a level playing field among Jews and Gentiles." In 3:25, Paul speaks of Christ as "the mercy seat that God has put forth publicly for an atoning purpose. The crucified Christ is the place at which atonement is made for all of humanity" (157, cf. 662–675). When Paul rejects "the works of the law" as a basis for justification (3:28), he does not have in mind merely the "boundary-markers" that separated Jews from Gentiles (circumcision, food laws, and the like); his point was rather that Torah observance as such could not be the way to righteousness, though it was evidently so regarded, at least by the Jewish community he knew (170–172). The apparent universalism of Rom 5:18–19 is in some tension with other passages in Paul that speak of "eschatological peril for some persons"; but Paul may not always have been consistent on the issue, and Rom 5 may represent a "charismatic breakthrough" on his part (232–234). While Torah in all its details is no longer the way of life for those who are in Christ, Paul can draw on it—as he can even on Hellenistic moral teaching—when its guidance is "in accord with the new life in Christ" (384–385, 481).

No particular thesis or agenda is apparent throughout the commentary—other than the exegete's concern to illumine the text. Nor is more required of a useful commentary. This one fills the bill.

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LOVE'S AVAILING POWER: IMAGING GOD, IMAGINING THE WORLD, by Paul R. Sponheim. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 192. $49.00 (cloth).

In my first course at Luther Seminary in the 1990s, "Reading the Audiences," Paul Sponheim taught me how to hold the Christian message in creative tension with the wider world, whether that "world" be the needs of an aging church or the latest findings of quantum physics. Through a long career of teaching and seven books of theology, Sponheim continues to model the best of contextual theology.

Loves Availing Power probes themes and figures that Sponheim has explored before, but nowhere more succinctly or gracefully. Whereas *Speaking of God*, his last publication, summarized the span of what Christians know

of God and why it matters, this welcomed encore seeks to "pare things down in order to lift up 'the one thing needful'" (ix). So, Sponheim here writes of love: specifically, of God's risky love in creating others free in order then to become timely, relational, and freely committed creatures.

Sponheim also here returns to his favored interlocutors: Kierkegaard and Whitehead. Relatively new is the way he utilizes not only their unlikely convergences (both, on his reading, have a relational understanding of God, self, and world), but also their stark differences. Kierkegaard will underscore the qualitative differences between God and humanity and between humanity and the rest of the corporeal world. He thus needs Whitehead to remind him just how deep the connections go and how bodily they remain. Whitehead will offer a cosmological sketch of every emerging event, but risks overlooking the particular adventure between human selves and a wholly other God. He thus needs Kierkegaard to remind him that new opportunities and risks come with a self that can relate to itself and to the God who creates out of nothing.

Chapter 1 uses Kierkegaard to explore the human before God, where free commitment is decisive for both. Chapter 2 joins Whitehead in considering the human with God and with nonhuman others, where connections are internal and intimate. Chapters 3 and 4 explore reasons for belief in God, given human finitude and ambiguous evidence, and then summon the reader to be with and for others while fully facing moral evil. His conversation partners here widen: in one short section, "A Timely Faith," Sponheim moves from Kierkegaard and Whitehead to astrophysics and evolutionary biology, to the memoirs of Barack Obama and Bill Gates, to the stories of Native Americans and the sonnets of Shakespeare. Chapter 5 returns to our condition of finitude and sin but also points toward the social transformation possible when we reflect God's image by creatively (re)imagining the world.

If the one needful theme of love gets somewhat lost throughout these latter chapters, it resurfaces clearly in the conclusion. The power of love is never unilateral—it does not negate the other, but builds her up and sets her free. And yet love *is* powerful. Sponheim images God and imagines the world as powerful to the extent that each is unreservedly for others, without recourse to power's bastard substitute—the "power" to remain unmoved or to disparage or destroy.

Sponheim is clearly a "both/and" thinker. He brings together the propositional faith that is believed with the passionate trust by which we believe (107). He combines Kierkegaard's emphasis on the decisiveness of commitment with Whitehead's accent on the intimacy of connection (127). He writes for insiders and outsiders of the faith, and links the God revealed in Christ to a creation discernible through "any accurate sketch of how the world works" (32).

In my opinion, Sponheim's most important recombination is between a relational/process worldview and classical accounts of God's creation. Most other "relational" theologians have critiqued the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* for epitomizing unilateral power. For them, to create out of *nihil* manifests the same power as to an*nihil*ate. By contrast, Sponheim queries whether God might really create (from scratch!) something so radically other and free—free even to go against God—that God becomes bound to love and work with that other with all its limits and lapses (15–17). In Kierkegaard's paradoxical language, *God is not free to go back on* God's eternal commitment to be with us. Divine love is just that omnipotent. I find that other relational theologies, by comparison, subtly continue to pit power against love when they limit God metaphysically—as if God's desire were not enough. To deny that God really can limit God's self in being wholly for the other amounts to denying the extent of love's availing power.

But one wonders whether Sponheim dilutes the power of this image of empowering love when he finds it not only disclosed through Christian revelation but also written throughout the cosmos and so knowable through "any accurate sketch of how the world works" (32). In other words, I fear that the love that Sponheim discerns loses some of its distinctiveness and radicality when he moves from Kierkegaard to Whitehead and from Christian story to the more encompassing sweep of cosmology. Whatever categories confirm the truth of the gospel (including the good news of creation) risk becoming more determinative than the gospel itself. This goes for even the most helpful ones: "relational power," "freedom in relationship," "the power of love," and so forth.

Perhaps Sponheim and I are simply "reading the audience" differently here, as he first taught me to do. I find that our culture's perpetual glorification of power-over, coupled with its sentimentalizing of weak love, requires the shock of a language that comes from elsewhere and a story that remains powerful precisely because it does not fit with our "normal" ways of seeing. Sponheim writes for a church in danger of turning in on itself, of forgetting that God's empowering love really does bind God, self, and the real world together, and so can be recognized—indeed is best recognized—when we look at the world through different perspectives, and together. Christians need a broad "sketch of the way things are" (33) and many conversation partners in order to gather the extent of love's availing power.

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LUTHERAN THEOLOGY, by Steven D. Paulson. London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2011. Pp. 293. $24.95 (paper).

Former and current students of Steven Paulson as well as readers of his book *Luther for Armchair Theologians* will immediately recognize both the depth and wit of the author in this volume of T & T Clark's Doing Theology series. Where else can one find a biblical and scholarly work that explicates the Reformational teaching of justification by faith in Christ alone, addresses five centuries of Lutheran interpretation of this Reformational doctrine, and relates how Luther compared the preaching of salvation in Jesus Christ to the medieval use of rhubarb as a laxative (87–89)? Using the form of a teaching commentary, Paulson here offers to seminary students and pastors a basic introduction to Lutheran theology. Through his exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Paulson illustrates a Lutheran concern that theology should serve the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paulson structures this work roughly according to the sixteen chapters of the book of Romans and explicates what he identifies as a twofold task of Lutheran theology: first, tearing down a human self-confidence in works and "free will," and second, preaching the gospel of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone (1–2). Several other themes identified by Paulson in the introduction also run throughout the book. The first of these is "the legal scheme" of salvation. Paulson identifies this as a false approach to being found righteous before God (i.e., being justified) that is based on the works of the law fulfilled by the "free will" of the human being (2–5). The second of these themes is how Luther has been historically misunderstood as something other than a theologian and a preacher of the gospel of justification by faith (5–11). The third theme is Paulson's description of the historical Lutheran approaches to salvation in terms of four epochs, which correspond to the four stages of

the medieval hermeneutical method. The literal epoch is represented by Luther himself, entailing the teaching of justification by faith in God's promise in the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. The allegorical is comprised of Lutheran orthodoxy's focus on the eternal law of God governing the universe and on the "order of salvation." The topological consists of Enlightenment moralism, while the anagogical entails the turn to apocalyptic in the late nineteenth century (11–12). Throughout his commentary, Paulson addresses the meaning of Paul's teachings on sin and grace with an eye to critiquing the legal scheme of salvation, the misinterpretation of Luther, and the misguided episodes in Lutheran theology.

Despite such critique, however, Paulson does not merely advocate returning to Luther, offering his own work as a pure rendition of the Reformer's teaching. On the contrary, although he does seek to foster a certain Reformational approach to doing theology for the sake of preaching and sees this in the works of both Luther and Melanchthon, Paulson engages with Lutheran biblical scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Albert Schweitzer, Günter Bornkamm, Rudolf Bultmann, and Ernst Käsemann. Paulson seeks to utilize some of the apocalyptic approach to Paul's epistle, especially the focus on the theme of new creation, from these figures, even if he also voices criticisms of their methods and conclusions at points.

The main figures from whom Paulson draws, though, are Luther and Melanchthon. He mines their commentaries on Romans, as well as other works by them, and reconstructs a Lutheran theology of the condemning law of God and the freely justifying gospel of God revealed in Jesus Christ through the righteousness of faith. From these two reformational figures, Paulson builds a framework of preaching as both the content and the end result of doing theology. The theme of the preacher, as the means through which God brings both judgment and salvation to human beings, serves as a thread of continuity throughout this work. The theme of the preacher also serves as both the center and the structure of the theology presented here by Paulson, and the themes of law and gospel, the doctrine of sin, the righteousness of God revealed in Christ, predestination, union with Christ, and baptism all fit within and relate back to the theme of the preacher.

Though the preacher also brings God's judgment through the proclamation of the law, according to Paulson the proper work of the preacher is the proclamation and handing out of the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ (89). Paulson clarifies that the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God that faith in Christ brings is not a payment or sacrifice made for bad morality, contrary to the thought of the legal scheme of justification (91–94). Instead, the righteousness of Christ's death and its reception by faith completely nullifies the law, doing away with the legal scheme altogether (91). In addition, the righteousness of God that comes by faith in Christ also brings the human recipient of its preaching freedom from sin (157), death (194–199), and the wrath of God (138–140, 150–152). The preacher, as God's messenger, is the one who actually gets Christ, and the freedom that he brings with him through his benefits, to people (25–32). Though Paulson also addresses the ethical themes of good works and temporal authority, like Paul does in Romans, he does so only secondarily to and in conjunction with the justification through faith in Jesus Christ brought by the preacher.

For Paulson, Lutheran theology is a theology of and for preaching. Any Lutheran pastor or soon-to-be pastor will find both comfort and challenge in Paulson's book, which demonstrates not only the essence of Lutheran theology centered on justification but also describes the important theological vocation of the preacher. Additionally, this work may be helpful for Lutheran laypeople or Christians of

other confessions seeking to understand better what makes Lutheran theology distinctly Lutheran. Finally, Paulson's book presents its reader with the judgment that all humans are guilty of sin before God, and the good news that they are forgiven and set free by the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, who truly is the rhubarb for what ails sinners (87).

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INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY, by Kathleen A. Cahalan. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010. Pp. 181. $19.95 (paper).

Catholic practical theologian Kathleen Cahalan has written an outstanding book on ministry. It is a rare thing to find a book on ministry that is both theologically rich and broadly accessible. More rare still is a book that could be of value to one in the throes of discerning a call to ministry as well as to the wise pastor many years into ministry. Her intentional choice to use the terms "ministry" and "minister" signal that while she is a Roman Catholic theologian she by no means intends this book only for her own tribe. Centered on a definition of ministry rooted in doing, God's and ours, she can both critique theologies of ministry too focused on the "identity" of the pastor and reground ministry in God's mission, the baptismal life of discipleship, and the calling and gifts of the Holy Spirit as the foundation for vocations in daily life, including the vocation of ministry.

The trinitarian, missional, and vocational frame of her argument make this a very welcome book for Lutherans and other mainline Protestants, and her deep focus on the Spirit's gifts suggests a fruitful opening to a broad array of other Protestant churches. In fact, remarkable as this may seem, her book may both attract and challenge every variety of Christian, a good sign that she has stayed very close to Scripture and Jesus Christ whom it reveals.

My aim in this review is to offer a brief overview of the structure of the book, highlight just a few of its many provocative and compelling moments, and add a brief concluding comment of what more might need doing in research on ministry. The first chapter begins from a trinitarian conception of mission and Jesus' work as embodying and inviting disciples to a renewed relationship with God. The life of discipleship has a shape Cahalan portrays through describing practices—forgiving, worshiping, witnessing, and others—that together characterize the life in Christ. The second chapter moves to the sacrament of baptism and the gifts of the spirit, which via charisms undergird the developing sense of vocation each finds as they make their way in the world.

A vocation to ministry, a particular kind of charism not all receive, is the focus in chapter three. Here, however, she maintains focus on doing by suggesting that a vocation to ministry is discerned primarily through communal recognition of one's gifts for the practices of ministry. Chapter four unpacks the practices of ministry within the life of Jesus and the Spirit, and chapter five takes care to describe what it might mean to root ministry in communal practices. Cahalan moves slowly here, unpacking theologically what she means by practice, to set up chapter six, which describes how learning ministry—learning, that is, the wisdom to shape a community's practices of discipleship—is not done once for all or in a formal education process but rather takes shape in practice over a lifetime. The stretch of living into wisdom through the practice of ministry then is grounded in the wisdom of God as Trinity as the book concludes in chapter seven.

One might fruitfully begin with this last chapter on God as Trinity, because in it we find a beautiful and profound description of the

wisdom of God, a theme that recurs throughout the volume. Reserving discussion on the Trinity till last, however, presents the book as an unfolding series of invitations to go deeper into an understanding of the mystery and love of God that calls and sends disciples and ministers for the sake of God's mission of reconciliation, mercy, and love.

Chapter two offers an especially rich and compelling discussion of charisms, gifts of the spirit, as they emerge from the sacrament of baptism and connect with vocation. I was especially grateful for Cahalan's discussion of how vocation emerges in adulthood, as persons in community discern their gifts and grow into understandings of how these can be best used for the sake of the neighbor. She carefully distinguishes between the universal gifts of grace that take form in faith, hope, and love, that all receive, from the special or unique gifts that constitute what she calls charisms (from the Greek *charismata*—e.g., Romans 12:2–8). These are, in an effective summary phrase, "the pneumatological foundation of vocation and mission" (34). She discusses the ways one might consider talent in relation to charism, seeing both as gifts of the spirit which nonetheless are capacities we may develop through practice over time.

Chapter six takes up what it might mean to learn to practice ministry, by which Cahalan means personal integration (knowing, doing, and being) in relation to charism and vocation. For those called to ministry this means discerning gifts that fit the practices of ministry outlined in chapter five as vitally present in the life and ministry of Jesus—teaching, preaching, care, prayer, justice, and leadership. But more than this, it means growing into a special way of knowing, not just knowledge in relation to skills (classic kinds of knowing in the professions) but "the minister's discernment of the most fitting response in each situation" (123). This claim—a claim about practical wisdom that comes through long years of learning in practice—takes her both into a very fruitful engagement with literature on professional learning in practice as well as a remarkable retrieval of Aquinas's understanding of prudence—*phronesis*, or practical wisdom. A minister who exhibits what Craig Dykstra has called "pastoral imagination" has, according to Cahalan, "a gift born of the Spirit to build up the body of Christ through practice" (146).

What we are lacking, here and elsewhere, is carefully told stories of a wide variety of pastors in the midst of this process of receiving God's call and gifts and practicing ministry as they grow in wisdom. Cahalan offers brief vignettes of ministers in practice along the way, pointing towards the sort of full narratives deeper understanding of pastoral imagination requires.

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FATAL EMBRACE: CHRISTIANS, JEWS, AND THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN THE HOLY LAND, by Mark Braverman. Austin: Synergy, 2010. Pp. 379. $16.95 (paper).

Mark Braverman, an American Jew, has written a powerful analysis of the struggle and tragedy of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Braverman is the grandson of a fifth-generation Palestinian Jew, whose grandfather was a direct descendant of one of the great Hasidic rabbis of Europe. As with most American-born Jews, he was raised in a religion that was a mixture of political Zionism and rabbinic Judaism. He believed all of the myths and stories about Israel's origins and was sometimes critical of Israel's policies but supportive of the Zionist vision. Then, as he writes, "I went to the West Bank" (31). After that visit in 2006, he states, "My defenses against the reality of Israel's crimes crumbled…words like apartheid

and ethnic cleansing sprang to my mind" (31). He writes "I charted my 'conversion' from a Jew critical of some of Israel's policies but supportive of the Zionist vision to one who now questioned Israel's good faith in wanting to make peace with the Palestinians and who was now willing to cast fundamental doubt on the Zionist project as a whole." He sees the fatal flaw in the Zionist dream as built on a foundation of denial. He became aware of the "myths, falsehoods, and denials that have been presented to the world at large" regarding Israel's founding and policies (17).

The "fatal embrace" is that of two powerful forces: the Jewish search for safety and empowerment that supports Israeli policies, and Christians attempting to atone for past sins of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. This has resulted in a colonial project of dispossession and control that has continued for more than sixty years, financially and politically supported by the United States.

Both Jews and Christians share the blame. Braverman states that Jews like to see themselves as universalist and humanitarian, in possession of a religious faith that is based on a deep respect for human rights and a fundamental, defining commitment to universal justice, while at the same time supporting the policies of the Israel government. In trying to atone for the past guilt over anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, Christians feel they have no right to be critical of Israel's policies. He notes two strains within Christianity that contribute to the problem: one conservative (Christian Zionism) and one liberal/progressive (interfaith reconciliation). Both produce a tendency to support both the concept and reality of the Jewish state. Both act powerfully to stifle or avoid any criticism of Israel.

Braverman argues that the trajectory in the Old Testament moves from chosenness and exceptionalism to seeing God's love as universal and unconditional. Election was misunderstood as entitlement and privilege. Jews today must recover the prophetic voice that can break through the notion of Israeli innocence, empowerment, and entitlement. A growing number of Jewish scholars and leaders agree.

Any discussion of Israel's policies raises the issue of anti-Semitism. For many, to question Zionism is to be anti-Semitic. Braverman makes clear they are not synonymous. He distinguishes between Zionism as political ideology and Judaism as a religion. Israel must be held to the same standards of justice and human rights as any other nation of the world. Continuation of current policies of land confiscation and denial of human rights will only result in unending war.

Braverman states that the fatal embrace has hijacked Jewish-Christian conversation. The usual dynamic of such conversations is that both sides express appreciation for the other's religion, becoming a mutual admiration society, seeking to explore common values and ideas, but steering clear of topics or issues that might produce conflict. At the risk of damage to years of congenial Jewish-Christian conversation, he calls on both groups to unite together to focus on activities that will bring an end to the injustice that is the root cause of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Christians must break out of the guilt trap; Jews must look in the mirror. Justice is the issue.

"Taking sides does not mean choosing the 'side of Israel' or the 'side of Palestine.' Rather, it is to commit to justice, which alone will bring peace to those suffering from the conflict: Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim, Jew, Christian" (275). "This is not a struggle between good guys and bad guys, with the Jews as villains and the Palestinians as blameless victims, any more than it is the opposite. The issue is justice" (10). Accordingly, Appendix A contains a helpful list of various organizations that are actively working for justice.

This is a powerful book. It is significant that the author is Jewish, and an honest and reputa-

ble scholar. It contains a powerful message for both Jews and Christians who are seriously concerned about this tragic conflict. The book will challenge, disturb, enlighten, surprise, anger, and encourage you. You will agree with parts, disagree with others. Either way, you will be changed. If you care about this struggle, this book must be read and discussed.

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