

# Reviews



**JESUS HAVE I LOVED, BUT PAUL? A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF PAULINE CHRISTIANITY**, by J. R. Daniel Kirk. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. Pp. 214. \$21.99 (paper).

In this book, J. R. Daniel Kirk, professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, undertakes a task at which many congregations, pastors, and academics alike might balk at first sight: he seeks to reunite Jesus and Paul as conversation partners. Pointing at the places in which contemporary society interprets these foundational characters of Christianity as mutually exclusive, such as the role of women, slavery, and homosexuality, Kirk seeks to indicate that they are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually complementary, conversation partners. At the heart of his argument is the belief that the Pauline narrative sees itself as part of the larger narrative, enveloping Israel, Jesus, and the entire cosmos. Whereas this argument is not new, this book seeks to place this argument in broader conversation in society at large, questioning held assumptions about both Jesus, Paul, and what they said. Kirk's straightforward language enables the reader to explore these concepts unencumbered by the weight of technical jargon.

Given the myriad contexts in which Paul lived and wrote and the relatively narrow context in which Jesus lived and spoke, placing Jesus and Paul into conversation is a laudable goal. For Kirk, Paul and the Gospel writers are

seen as having the same concern: forming a cohesive narrative between the God of the Old Testament and Jesus. Though this may be the case, Kirk is quick to harmonize Jesus and Paul, seeming to evade the wrestling match one might expect to be before them. The case may be made, however, that erring on the side of reconciling the men too swiftly effectively communicates that the difficulties between Jesus and Paul are not Jesus' and Paul's challenges, but rather ours.

Arguing that Paul has a "narrative theology," Kirk suggests that Paul not only sees the Gentile communities to whom he writes as the continuation of Israel's history; he writes them into it. Meanwhile, it is simultaneously acknowledged that this does not collapse the Gentile identity into the Jewish identity nor vice-versa. What has happened in the event of Jesus, rather, is that the in-breaking new creation has transformed and, in many cases, subverted the old. Kirk indicates that "both Jesus and Paul declare a coming future that breaks in on every aspect of life in the present, and both envision the communities formed by their messages to be continuing agents of the coming new creation that is the dominion of God" (51).

The place in which this new creation is embodied for Paul is in community. Here, Kirk chides the Reformers, seeing their interpretation of Paul as leading to the individualism prevalent in many (Western) Christian communities today. At the same time, he credits postmodern culture for having helped Christians learn to reread in Paul his understanding

that this new creation happens only in community. Having established the Pauline concern for community, Kirk goes on to discuss the ethical shape this community takes. The shape of this community's ethics is cruciform, grounded in Christ's death. It understands humans as created in God's image (Gen 1:27) yet not receiving that image as something to be grasped or exploited (Phil 2:5–11). The shape these ethics take, argues Kirk, is not a once-and-for-all indication of moral law; rather, it seeks to live into the transformation that occurs as a result of the cross.

After reintroducing Jesus and Paul as conversation partners, Kirk engages the interpretations of Paul that have justified practices regarding women, slavery, and homosexuality. He suggests that the existence of female coworkers both with Jesus and with Paul serves to indicate that neither believed women unable to participate in the ministry of the church. It is noted, however, that for those

who seek either an indication of egalitarianism or an argument for the subjugation of women both Jesus and Paul will be found wanting. Though perhaps unsatisfactory, this refuses us the luxury of placing upon Jesus and Paul concerns that were not necessarily theirs.

With respect to slavery, Kirk's interpretation of Paul will be familiar to many readers, nodding toward the cultural milieu in which Paul wrote. Setting Paul's so-called argument for slavery against his argument for freedom, it is understood that Paul cannot simultaneously hold both positions. Instead, Paul focuses on the freedom of the new creation in Christ in light of his present realities. With respect to today, Kirk argues that enslaving another is a negation of God's narrative. Any such negation of God's narrative presupposes a separation from God.

What, then, might we make of Paul and the current discussions of homosexuality? Kirk points to what he sees as the Bible's clarity on

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this issue. He then places into conversation the Bible's clarity on this issue along with the call to care for our neighbors, regardless of their sexuality. For Kirk, we can no more separate ourselves from the biblical narrative than we can separate ourselves from that to which it obligates us.

Throughout the book, the Reformers are frequently cited as the impetus for the individualistic "me and Jesus" attitude prevalent in some circles of (Western) Christianity today. However true this may be, as Kirk argues for a sympathetic reading of Paul, he offers a far less sympathetic reading of Reformed theology. Could not we encompass both, offering as much historical sympathy to one as to the other? Irrespective of his treatment of Reformation theology, Kirk successfully opens the conversation between not only Jesus and Paul but between the reader and these two as well, opening the door for readers to reencounter Paul as a conversation partner in our lives of faith.

Mandy Brobst-Renaud  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**THE FOUR GOSPELS ON SUNDAY:  
THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE  
REFORM OF CHRISTIAN WOR-  
SHIP**, by Gordon W. Lathrop. Minneapolis:  
Fortress, 2012. Pp. 219. \$49.00 (cloth).

Gordon W. Lathrop engages us in a truly cross-disciplinary work, juxtaposing Bible and liturgy, having them each speak to the other, yielding imaginative, rich, stimulating, even godly meaning for every Christian assembly. Citing the need for the renewal and continuation of this dialogue between liturgical theologian and biblical scholar, Lathrop demonstrates how the Gospels have an attention to the assembly, how Scripture comes alive beyond the desks of commentary writers, personal devotional booklets, or online preaching

resources and speaks as a living, reforming voice. At the same time, he challenges liturgical scholarship to take up the New Testament texts with more than a naive or uncritical use.

*The Four Gospels on Sunday* begins with the intriguing and ancient (dating back to Irenaeus of Lyon) association of the Four Gospels with the four beasts: Mark like a lion, Luke like an ox, Matthew the one with a face like a human face, and John like a flying eagle (xviii). The four beasts come from Ezekiel but most notably Revelation 4 and 5, where these living creatures worship the Lamb seated on the throne. One meaning is made clear from the outset with these four symbols: there is not one symbol, there is not one text, there is not just one word (as Lathrop would also insist in his public teaching) that can speak Jesus, crucified and risen. Another meaning becomes equally clear throughout the pages of this provocative book: each of these words, each of these beasts, each of these gospel texts has its own character, flavor, dynamic, issues, questions, proposals for reform, and structure for proclamation. A third significant factor also arises as one dives deeper into the imagery Lathrop evokes: this book is a symbolic interpretation of Scripture. It proposes a (perhaps) new genre of engaging the biblical text, one that every pastor, preacher, and theologian will find challenging, creative, and vital.

Lathrop begins by exploring what the word "gospel" really is in Scripture, tracing its usage not to the Four Gospels but back to Paul's proclamation and his twisting, distorting, reconfiguring of an expression common in the ancient world for the good news of a Roman emperor to a very specific, singular, usage to announce another type of lordship—that of Jesus Christ, God reclaiming the world. Lathrop then proceeds to analyze in three chapters the Four Gospels (Matthew and Luke though dealt with separately are treated in one chapter as two synoptic expressions). These three chapters are worth their weight in gold. The specific character of each Gospel is high-

lighted, in particular how it addresses each and every local assembly for the sake of reforming the practice of that assembly. This is the critical point: the Gospels are not just stories about Jesus. They are not just narratives. They are living speech making Jesus, crucified and risen, the Jesus, crucified and risen in this moment, in and for this assembly gathered in worship. The focus of the reform that the Gospels engage is always based on book and meal, on word and sacrament. The reading of the book, the reading of the Gospel, is the moment, the place of encounter with the living Christ. And the meal, which is of primary concern in each one of the Four Gospels, each with varying concerns and emphases, is the enacted book.

The final chapters deal with current issues of reform and how the four beasts still speak to us today, asking: How are our assemblies places of word and sacrament, places living the gospel for the neighbor? And then, what does this imply for preaching, eucharistic celebration, and baptism? Another chapter addresses the matter of leadership, especially the critique of leadership and its reversal (as witnessed in the Gospels themselves), and finally a call to retrieve the deep connection between biblical scholarship and liturgical theology, between Scripture and worship.

This final point is perhaps an underlying concern of the entire book. In a culture of worship that looks to and uses Scripture variably as a source of rules for living or simply as a narrative, as a source of information about God and the Christian story, or sometimes as a pedagogical tool (something that is not to be belittled, particularly in a post-Christendom society), Lathrop proposes a truly doxological approach to Scripture. He gets at the heart of what lectionary usage is all about. The lectionary (in this case, the Revised Common Lectionary) is not just three long readings that an assembly needs to sit through and then suffer a sermon that addresses only one point from, perhaps, the Gospel text (if it even does that!). Scripture—the Bible—in the worship-

ing assembly is a juxtaposition of stories, of images, of symbols that call out to one another, critique one another, correct one another and incite within the assembly praise for the one in the center, on the throne, the Lamb of God. Lathrop's fine analysis of the four Gospels (his doctorate, as he points out in the preface, is in New Testament studies—he studied Scripture with Bas van Iersel and hermeneutics with Edward Schillebeeckx) will be an invaluable resource to anyone planning worship and preparing to preach and preside, for it places the words, the images, the symbols of Scripture—those symbols that the Four Gospels used to reform worship and practice in the nascent Christian assemblies—next to the ritual actions every assembly hopefully enacts from week to week and invites into a sustained movement of renewal and reform.

Dirk G. Lange  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**FEMINIST MYSTICISM AND IMAGES OF GOD**, by Jennie S. Knight. New York: Chalice, 2011. Pp. 144. \$24.99 (paper).

*Feminist Mysticism and Images of God* is not just a book for a select audience of women. It allows the reader to think about the dynamics of imaginative power in constructing subjective human and God images. It provides a larger context for understanding the interplay of religion and spirituality in the United States. Practical theologian Jennie S. Knight addresses congregations and the significance of their worship and education practices as she unpacks the complex interaction of conceptual theologies, cultural images, and personal internalized images of the divine. What is noteworthy is her deepened attention to gender and race in this conversation.

Knight focuses on the relationship of concept and image, and makes clear why what

pastors say (or not) matters, as she delves into the experiences of women who have left traditional worship settings for participation in retreat centers of the feminist spirituality movement in their need to explore and connect emotionally with female images of the divine. While this primary focus on women and female images of God may be a distraction to some readers, it need not be so.


The book is structured in a way that invites people to think about the construction of their self-identity and images of God. Stories of four women whose personal exploration of the divine led them to participation in a retreat center of feminist spirituality are interspersed among theoretical chapters. Knight first draws upon object relations theory to describe briefly the relational and emotional dynamics of image construction of the self, divine, and others. The function of images is made even more complex by layering sociohistorical understandings of race and gender construction

atop the functional uses of self, other, and God images. Knight then describes the Christian feminist spirituality movement generally and in particular the nonprofit Center for Feminist Theological Study and Spirituality in Atlanta, from which she gleaned her research participants.

The Christian feminist spirituality movement, hearkening back to the 1960s with the powerful writing of theologian Nelle Morton, is the primary inner logic that highlights the conceptual/image dialectic and thus dictates Knight's conversation partners, ranging from the mystic Pseudo-Dionysius to black, feminist, and womanist theologians. The analyses of previous chapters lead to a case study of the Black Madonna's function in diverse contemporary contexts before Knight concludes with a short chapter on how the congregation can engage issues of spiritual formation primarily through education and worship, similar to the

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processes she engaged in with the participants in her research.

The heart of Knight's argument is the experiential power of image to critique theology's reliance upon rational concept and metaphor, neither of which allow for the necessary movement of growth that is characteristic of the women's experience in her ethnographic research. Dynamic movement through images to an immanent experience of the divine grounds a common experiential understanding of God among her research participants and in the writings of feminist and womanist theologians. The downward iconic process of old image breaking upon new image is interior and more fluid than the classical mystical journey of linear ascent to union with the divine.

This movement of images is important, yet Knight emphasizes only human creation of new images from within the personal experience of God. At issue is the authorship and space of new creation. Do humans create the freedom in which we live and move and have our being? Or is there a divine-human relatedness from which images emerge spontaneously as gift beyond the self? Knight speaks only of human authorship and nothing of God's agency in creation of images. This focus on human action without regard to divine action is characteristic of her analysis, and prevents a more robust understanding of the dynamism of images that leads to encounter with the transcendent living God beyond all images.

On the one hand, Knight remains true to her focus on mystical union with God, whereby the divine presence is interior and immanent in the body of woman and in the body of creation from which divine symbols are drawn. On the other hand, there is no description or interpretation of transcendent transformative action from the outside that meets and then leads beyond the inner contained experience of women to the larger purpose of new creation, which is to say, transformed cultural,

racial, and gendered images of God, self, and other.

Tradition's normative biblical narrative of just such divine-spirited action is needed for opening up subjective God-images constrained by race and gender to the larger reality of the living God who transforms people and their perceptions of one another from the inside out. Without the grounding of an eschatological telos, the transcendent God experienced in, among, and for people isn't differentiated from divine inward presence. Without the biblical vision of new creation from and to which people live, there is little need for understanding the dynamic movement of God through the paradox of divine immanence and transcendence. In Knight's model, divine presence seemingly substitutes for divine agency, with the result that there is no spirited movement of God, only human psychic movement. Both transcendent and immanent experiences of God need to be affirmed if the fullness of human experience of the divine is also to be affirmed.

Knight's opening chapter on psychology and divine images provides a foundation that isn't strong enough to carry the loaded significance of race and gendered construction of images. The number of pages devoted to the historical presentation of race and gender construction testifies to its importance for Knight, seemingly at the expense of a more thorough presentation of object formation. Her psychological presentation of image formation needs to go beyond the importance of immanent images that indwell people's perception of self, God, and other to the transcendent images that come to us from afar and beyond our own reckoning and hard work.

Finally, Knight eschews words and concepts because she views them as secondary to the formation of images. However, we need words and concepts to keep on playing with and learning from the images we are given, whether it be from culture, self, others, or even God. The descriptive, interpretive, and norma-

tive use of words and concepts construct a generous space in which we can play with biblical images that speak about the trinitarian presence and activity of God. It is through such play, educationally and liturgically, that we can speak back to images, recognizing their provisional contingency as companions along the path of human life, trusting and leaning more fully into our dependence upon the God beyond all imagining so that we can see ourselves, and others, more clearly.

Karin A. Craven  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**A CONTEMPORARY IN DISSENT:  
JOHAN GEORG HAMANN AS A  
RADICAL ENLIGHTENER**, by Oswald  
Bayer. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. Pp.  
234. \$25.00 (paper).

Most people, if asked to name prominent or influential Lutherans from the past, would probably come up with a short list. That list would include Martin Luther, of course, and perhaps Philipp Melancthon, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg—and possibly even Johann Sebastian Bach. It is unlikely, however, that people (even theological students and pastors) would mention Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788). Yet Hamann, as Oswald Bayer’s book demonstrates, was a man who made considerable contributions to theological and philosophical thought in his own day, and has relevance and significance for theology today.

Although Hamann was a prominent Lutheran thinker, he neither taught at a university nor was he ordained as a pastor. Rather, he considered himself a man of letters, a journalist, and a philologist (a lover of the word, particularly a lover of the Book, the Bible).

While relatively obscure today, Hamann was, as Bayer tells us, in a class of thinkers with Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who considered Hamann “the brightest intellect of his time”

(2). Hamann was a close friend of Immanuel Kant, the great Enlightenment thinker. At one point, when Hamann experienced a conversion to Christianity, Kant sought to convert Hamann back to the Enlightenment. Later, while still retaining his close relationship with Kant, Hamann gave a sharp rejoinder to Kant’s thinking about the Enlightenment; he was, in short, a contemporary in dissent. “Hamann’s controversy with Kant belongs to those lessons of history in which a special form of language results in the interpretation of political and existential, philosophical and theological dimensions in such a paradigmatic way that they dare not be forgotten, are able to penetrate the present and alter attitudes in feeling, thinking, and acting” (119).

Not only does this description summarize a particular situation, it also demonstrates something of the writing style in this book. As translated by Roy A. Harrisville and Mark C. Mattes, Bayer’s text contains many lengthy Germanic sentences that require concentrated thought on the part of the reader. As well, recourse to a good dictionary is sometimes necessary in order to understand such words as *exinanition*, *archontic*, and *aporia*.

Besides describing Hamann’s relationship with his contemporaries, Bayer also records other biographical events. For example, when he was working as a translator at a French customs office (a post he obtained with Kant’s help) Hamann offered a sharp critique of the political policies of Frederick the Great, the man for whom he worked. “But Sire!” Hamann wrote, “You have made yourself of no reputation, even making Yourself in the likeness of this King of the Jews, who is the King of Kings, and who nonetheless was numbered among the transgressors, the bandits, the rogues.” Unfortunately Bayer does not tell us what, if anything, was the outcome of this jeremiad. Nor does he offer any commentary on the difference between Hamann’s elevated views on marriage (chapter 11) and his “marriage of

conscience" (that is, one not blessed by church or state) with Anna Regina Schumacher.

Though we learn a great deal about Hamann's life, Bayer's book is not a conventional biography. Rather, the book concentrates on a detailed account of Hamann's thought and writing in the context of the social, political, and intellectual climate of his time. A whole chapter is devoted to an analysis of the disagreement between him and his friend Johann Gottfried Herder. Attention is given at one point to Hamann's interaction with C. F. W. Hegel and, at another, with Moses Mendelssohn. Because these accounts are rather dense and compact, it is well for the reader to have some familiarity with these figures and their writings.

The greatest influence on Hamann's thought was Martin Luther, who is cited many times throughout the text. One gets the impression that Hamann is not only influenced by Luther but is compared to him. Drawing on such themes as sin, justification, freedom, the cross, and especially *The Small Catechism*, Bayer acknowledges that Hamann "can only speak with Luther of the justifying God and of the human being as a justified sinner" (63).

Hamann was not a systematic theologian, and he did not write any extensive work. Rather, as a man of letters, he considered himself a "journalist" who distributed "crumbs" with a clenched fist in the form of "flying leaves," that is, pamphlets and leaflets. Perhaps the lack of major works is one reason he is not widely known. Nonetheless, the content of those flying leaves was sufficient to make a profound influence on such later theologians and thinkers as Søren Kierkegaard, F. D. E. Schleiermacher, and even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all of whom are duly noted by Bayer.

Bayer makes it clear that Hamann was a broad thinker, offering views on marriage, language, social life, and the Bible. He saw humor in the book of Jonah (34); and in some ways he was at the fountainhead of the Romantic mo-

ment with its *Sturm und Drang* (26). His discussion of creation and criticism of Enlightenment optimism anticipates current concerns about ecological crises and the use and misuse of reason.

Though there is no subject index, a very helpful *Translators' Epilogue* by Harrisville and Mattes gives a brief sketch of Hamann's life and his controversies (especially those with Kant). Attention is given to the seminal significance of the Bible as the key to nature and history. And the translators take note of Hamann's relevance for theology today. Their concluding thoughts explain the book's title: *A Contemporary in Dissent*. That is, Hamann was clearly a dissenter among his contemporaries; and his apposite views make him a contemporary in many conversations and concerns in our day.

Although Hamann's broad and complex metacriticism makes this book difficult to read, he offers words and thought for our own time when words are cheap and thought is scant. "Without language," Bayer observes, "we would have no reason, without reason no religion, and without these three essential components of our nature we would have neither spirit nor social bond" (17).

Robert Brusic  
Luther Seminary  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

**THE ANTICIPATORY CORPSE: MEDICINE, POWER, AND THE CARE OF THE DYING**, by Jeffrey Bishop. University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. Pp. 440. \$35.00 (paper).

Tracing a line from the forehead to the navel, then shoulder to opposite shoulder, many Christians mark themselves with a cruciform sign as a reminder that their bodies are promised life beyond mortal death, in communion with Jesus Christ and the community of the faithful, the church. This liturgical act recalls



St. Paul's words, which declare "we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:4–5, NRSV). Clergy and communities of the faithful recall the baptismal promise especially when death draws near, remembering that the body of death is, by God's grace, a body also destined for life.

Modern care of the body in physical matters of life and death, however, is rarely considered a task for clergy. Rather, such care is commended to the hands of medical professionals, who deploy technology and technique to master the body in form and function. Philosopher, physician, and theologian Jeffrey Bishop's *The Anticipatory Corpse*—in the Notre Dame Studies in Medical Ethics series—is a tour de force laying out philosophical thought, history, and modern medical practice to present how medicine today teaches practitioners to trace liturgical lines of death over living bodies. Bishop claims that "medicine has pulled the dead body out of community, stripped it of its communal significance, and found the ground of its knowledge in the dead, decontextualized, and ahistorical body" (27). Medicine shapes personhood and culture with the notion that people are merely temporarily animated matter, providing care in anticipation of the stilled corpse.

The first chapters open with a review of French philosopher Michel Foucault's historical analysis in *The Birth of the Clinic*, in which "Foucault addresses the political space in which patient (object) and doctor (subject) encounter one another and the ways in which different spaces shape both the doctor and what the doctor sees" (38). Foucault notes that medicine moved from disease as the primary object for mastery, to the form of autopsy. Doctors evaluate bodies, "with autopsy lines drawn over that body on which the doctor

gazes" (55) because the corpse is finally a body capable of mastery. With this image in hand, Bishop argues that medicine is dominated by the conceptual notion that the body is merely animation of dead matter, a body of efficient causation, quantified and qualified by matter and motion. Life is simply "the physiological definition of all functions that resist death" (166). Bishop bears forward his concern that for medicine, life is formed but void. The seat of medical care for the dying and bioethical discourse has exorcised the corpus from considerations of meaning and purpose (Aristotle's formal and final causes), leaving a vigorous conversation on power wielded to maintain matter in motion or to allow matter to rest in death. Taking up Foucault's observation that a characteristic privilege of sovereign power was marked by his privilege to exercise dominion over life and death, Bishop argues that in contemporary culture the sovereign has abdicated. What has emerged in the vacuum is a squabble between the modern state and the sovereign self, both which understand the meaning of death as "buried in decision—in the possibility of choice" (199).

Bishop proceeds with an analysis of the pro-euthanasia and pro-life movements. While these two might seem to be at odds with one another, he persuasively argues that they have more in common than they like to admit. Analyzed through the lens of efficient causation, both ethical conversations appear to be battles over matter and motion, not meaning or purpose. "For social conservatives, bare life is deserving of the good life; for social liberals, the possibility of the good life is deserving of bare life" (206). In other words, only the sovereign self may decide the meaning and purpose of the self's matter and motion. If the sovereign self is incapable of determining how to purpose matter (as pro-life advocates argue), then the state must be motivated to enter with force to sustain the matter at all costs. The morality of living and dying is finally a sovereign decision over the perceived purpose of organic

material: the body. Death, as a result of choice, becomes part of an efficient social apparatus in which the state takes a utilitarian approach to the human body, as Bishop describes in his treatment of organ transplantation.

But if medicine simply tends to matter and motion, form and function, could such cold rationality can be balanced with the humanitarian efforts of social work, psychology, and chaplaincy? Enter palliative care. As a reform movement within medicine in the 1970s, Bishop traces the genealogy of what is known as biopsychosociospiritual medicine, finally not as an antidote to cold, mechanized care of the dying, but as an accessory to it. The hospice movement that integrated psychological, social, and spiritual care for the dying was born from sincere concern for the whole patient, but it was quickly distorted in order to manage dying efficiently through what is now known as “palliative care.” Dying in this new model is the art of mechanized, measurable “coping” to cloak the inability of medicine to consistently manage a clean, metered end to matter and motion. Spiritual care, for example, becomes part of the palliative care team and populated by those who have been properly trained in programs such as Clinical Pastoral Education. The spiritual leader from the community of the dying is negligible to the industrialized medical care package. Dying is thus managed to its conclusion, and even beyond, by the penetrating, ritualized, even violent force of palliative care. Bishop summarizes, “A good death can only be known as good if it can be assessed by those who know death, who have measured it, and who have seen it deep within the dead body—and within the living body” (284). Without scientific tools to measure the bene-

fits of a patient’s own clergy, medicine prefers the homogenized standard of hospital chaplains. Bishop shows that in this way, religion is not permitted to define itself through its own practices of care rooted in community, narrative, ritual, and faith. Rather, it has been emptied and violated, becoming merely a humanizing tool of medicine.

*The Anticipatory Corpse* concludes with a tantalizing question, perhaps particularly for clergy: “Might it be that only theology can save medicine?” Notice Bishop does not ask, “Might it be that only the [institutional church, prescribed daily prayer, worship in a community of 150 people or more, regular confession] can save medicine?” He does not seek to prescribe a measurable system of spiritual care. That, of course, would only mirror the problem he diagnoses in medicine. Instead, Bishop offers an oblique challenge to Christian communities (dare we say, the church?): he challenges us to reclaim our practice of tracing the cross of life onto the bodies entrusted to our care. To do so proclaims that meaning and purpose are not post hoc additions to the biological machine, but the very bread of life that nourishes both the living and the dying, bound in communities moved by faith and love, rooted in a common narrative that motivates total care, and not the totalizing care of the medical machine. Is today’s church, hobbled by its own systems of numbers, records, and fear of early institutional death up to the task?

Natalie Gessert  
Bethany Lutheran Church  
Bethel Park, Pennsylvania