

Reviews



QOHELETH: THE IRONIC WORK, by James L. Crenshaw. Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2013. 176 pp. \$44.95 (cloth).

Professor Crenshaw introduces this book by supplying something of a map tracing the progress of its eight chapters. His literary journey begins by asking why the author chose to write behind the mask of a king (son of David) and what he meant with the name Qoheleth (“Authorial Deceit”). A second chapter (“Veiled Truth?”) concludes that the author clothes his insights in the form of contradictory statements in order to illustrate the utter futility or *hebel* of existence itself (31). Chapter Three (“Elusive Essence”) investigates the word *hebel*, concluding that the word carries the senses of brevity, sickness, and insubstantiality. Also included in this chapter is a “close reading” of Psalm 39 and the light it sheds on Qoheleth.

The concern of Chapter Four, “Ocular Deception,” is Qoheleth’s historical situation. He assumes a flourishing intellectual community and a robust religious community asking questions about life and death. The economy appears to be booming. A multilayered political bureaucracy is in operation and family matters seem of great importance. These data drawn from Qoheleth’s observations offer little help in dating Qoheleth precisely and may in fact be deceiving. As for date, linguistic evidence suggests a time of composition around 250 B.C.E.

Chapter Five exposes the power of tradition in Qoheleth’s thinking. He has certain assumptions regarding humans (sinful) and also concerning God (Creator and Judge; Redeemer?). Qoheleth builds upon these traditional views. For example, “Of one thing Qoheleth was cer-

tain: Elohim controls the duration of human life” (“Surreptitious Givens,” 69). A sixth chapter focuses on the concept of time, which “was central to Qoheleth’s thinking. For him everything had its own place in the calendar of events within the structure of the universe” (“Victorious Time,” 81). Chapter Seven (“Tasty Nectar”) gets down to practical matters. Crenshaw asks, “In the brief span of existence under the sun, what should one do?” Q’s answer: “Enjoy yourself if you have the ability to do so.” Here the author discusses the seven “enjoy” passages in Q with something of a surprising conclusion. Says Crenshaw, “Qoheleth’s observations about enjoyment end abruptly, leaving a dark cloud hanging over everything” (“Tasty Nectar,” 92).

But what if there are people who are not able to share in Qoheleth’s advice to enjoy life, for whatever reason? An eighth chapter entitled “Flawed Genius” examines the two epilogues in 12:9–11 and 12–14. Crenshaw asks: Do these epilogues simply cut off discussion of important issues (“End of the matter; all has been heard,” 12:13, 96). Or has Qoheleth “demonstrated wisdom’s resiliency, its openness to alternative views?” (99).

A concluding section spells out one of the dilemmas for the reader of Qoheleth. Do his teachings expose the weakness of intellectual pursuit? Or do they mark the finest hour of such pursuits? In view of the human inability to know and the inevitability of random events, Crenshaw (following Qoheleth!) advises, “Accept the limits imposed on the intellect and enjoy the sweetness of sunshine” (111).

Professor James Crenshaw is one of the most prolific writers and one of the wisest of guides to any study of this “strange book” in

the Bible. His slim but tightly written volume includes 50 pages of bibliography, notes and indexes and will be a welcome addition to any collection of literature on Qoheleth. In addition to cataloging modern scholarship, Crenshaw leads the reader into a good number of noncanonical and apocryphal writings in connection with Ecclesiastes. Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (especially), 2 Maccabees, 1 and 2 Esdras, 1 Enoch, and *Pirke Aboth*, all appear in the index. In addition, there are references to literature ranging alphabetically from Abaddon and Ansheshonky to Utnapishtim and Zabdeateh. Enough to say that this book will take the reader into interesting and exotic literary lands.

For discussion: In a few places I prefer the NRSV to Crenshaw's translation. For example NRSV's "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" is better than "And remember your wife..." (77; despite his discussion on 66). And NRSV's "Just as you do not know how

the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb..." seems both more accurate and more elegant than his rendering of 11:5, "As you do not know the way of the wind—like a fetus in the womb of a pregnant woman—" (108).

Finally, a few comments on teaching and preaching the book in both church and academic contexts: Years of teaching Ecclesiastes at the college and seminary levels, as well as preaching in a variety of conferences and churches (including an entire Lenten series) have taught me how this book can relate to individuals from skeptical college students to busy businessmen at an early breakfast! Much can be learned by observing how Qoheleth functions as the assigned reading for the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Rabbi Harold Kushner's beautifully written, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* (New York: Summit, 1986) is a good place to start. Reading Qoheleth with Jewish friends in a home-built

Terence E. and Faith L. Fretheim Lecture in Biblical Theology

Join us as we consider efforts in the church to deny the Old Testament and explore what is at stake for the church.



SE1002-14a

Why the Old Testament Must not Go Away

Sept. 22 + 7 p.m.

Dr. Walter Brueggemann

*Professor Emeritus of
Old Testament, Columbia
Theological Seminary*



www.luthersem.edu/lectures

Olson Campus Center + 1490 Fulham St., St. Paul, Minn.

backyard sukkah, as my wife and I have done, is a way to get into the book in an unforgettable manner. These and other suggestions, including references to Luther's commentary, Bonhoeffer's letters, and Peggy Lee's Grammy-winning "Is that all there is?" all testify to the impact of Qoheleth over an amazing span of times and places. For more on these topics, see my *Encountering Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans, 2006) and EntertheBible.org.

James Limburg
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

GENESIS, EVOLUTION, AND THE SEARCH FOR A REASONED FAITH, by Mary Katherine Birge et al. Winona, Minnesota: Anselm Academic, 2011. Pp. 133. \$26.95 (paper).

I commend this book to pastors and teachers seeking a resource to nurture a conversation on its theme, which remains important and contested in schools, congregations, and even legislative assemblies despite the many years since Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and the infamous Scopes trial of 1925. I used the book as one text in my recent undergraduate course on Genesis at Augsburg College, and it was received well by students from a great variety of faith backgrounds (including none at all).

Despite its serious topic, the book is fully accessible to readers new to the discussion (like some of my students), while in no way watering down the important subject matter. The authors, fully qualified in their various fields, draw in those new readers while satisfying those more fully versed. The book, in fact, grew out of such conversations among faculty and students at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

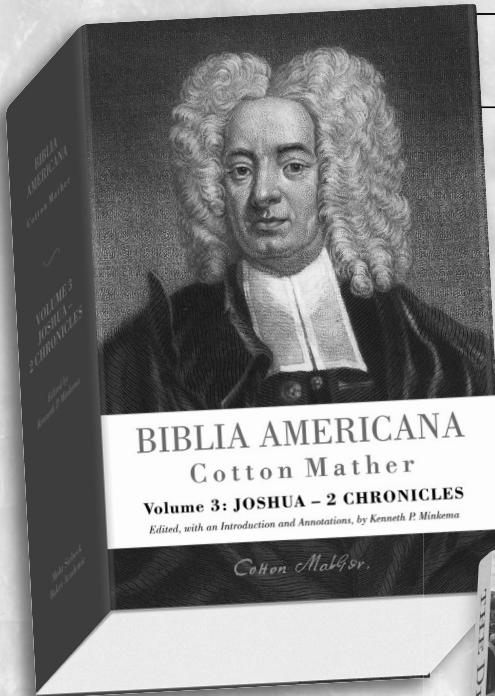
In the first chapter, "Genesis," Mary Katherine Birge, a biblical scholar, provides a helpful introduction to reading the Bible in general

and Genesis in particular. She includes sections, for example, on "Why Read the Bible in the First Place?" and "Biblical Inspiration," before going on to give the needed historical and literary background for the texts in question (Genesis 1 and 2). She follows this with a very helpful discussion of the creation texts themselves. While little or nothing here is new to the established scholar or seminary-educated pastor, the refresher course is valuable to them, and provides the information needed for a discussion with students and parishioners. Birge's "Discover for Yourself" boxes are inviting, and her "Discussion Questions," "Glossary," and "Resources for Further Study" (common to all the chapters) further the discussion nicely. My students wrote brief papers on some of the discussion questions throughout the book, and all of us, I think, found that exercise useful.

Chapter 2, "Scientific Knowledge and Evolutionary Biology," by evolutionary biologist Ryan Taylor, offers a brief introduction to the nature of science in general and the study of evolution in particular. The conversation that the book seeks to stimulate would be impossible without this information. It, too, is accessible to the nonspecialist. Very helpfully, it takes seriously (while disagreeing with) "Common Arguments against Evolution from Creationism and Intelligent Design."

In the third chapter, "From Exception to Exemplification: Understanding the Debate over Darwin," philosopher Brian G. Henning helps us understand the "ancient pedigree" of the debate over evolution, which, he notes, reaches back to ancient Greece 2,400 years ago. He then moves on to "The Rise of Modern Science" and a fuller discussion of contemporary views on evolution. Like the rest of the book, this is serious subject matter, but presented in readable fashion. By asking "But Why Aren't We Zombies?" Henning challenges neo-Darwinism's purely mechanistic understanding of the universe and of human

NEW from BAKER ACADEMIC



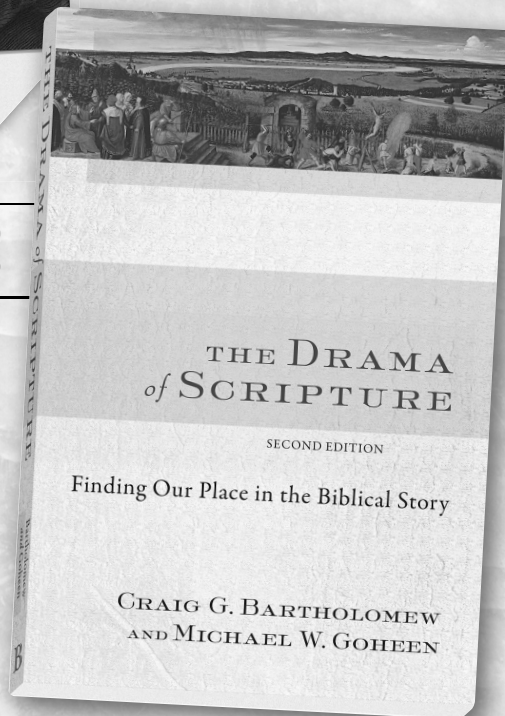
978-0-8010-3999-7
912 pp. • \$225.00c

"Cotton Mather has long been a figure for caricature as the prototype of Puritan neurosis. Specialists have known differently, but the simplistic image still hangs on. With the publication of . . . *Biblia Americana*, a much truer picture is possible of a major Puritan leader who . . . was a polymath in his learning, an omnivore in his reading, and a discerning critic in his biblical study."—**Mark A. Noll**, University of Notre Dame

978-0-8010-4956-9
272 pp. • \$22.99p

Praise for the First Edition

"This brief yet penetrating and riveting overview of the Bible's dramatic message of creation, fall, and redemption—from Genesis to Revelation—will become a must not merely for students beginning theological studies but for all who wish to see the biblical forest rather than merely its trees."—**Max Turner**, London School of Theology



B Baker Academic

Available in bookstores or by calling 800.877.2665 | Visit our blog: blog.bakeracademic.com
Subscribe to *E-Notes*, our newsletter, at bakeracademic.com



beings, and furthers the books interest in finding a “reasoned faith.”

Systematic theologian Rodica M. M. Stoicoiu contributes the final chapter, “Theology in the Context of Evolution.” In it, she “explores the relationship between evolutionary science and faith in a good and loving God” (99), in the process discussing and refuting topics like creationism, intelligent design, scientific materialism, and a “God of the gaps.” She takes seriously the problems presented to faith and theodicy by the terrible reality of suffering, and turns to a clear christological and incarnational response.

In his conclusion, Brian Henning uses the example of very different but equally valid responses to a reading of Harry Potter to argue that “both science and religion can be successful ways of getting at the true nature of reality” (122). True, one can misread reality just as one can misread a book, but the truth of one valid reading (in this case, science) does not negate the truth of another (religion). Thus, as the authors say in their introduction, “we need not choose between religion or science, faith or reason, Genesis or evolution. Evolution is not a threat to faith, but rather an enrichment of faith. A thorough faith seeking understanding brings together Genesis *and* evolution” (xiii).

As a onetime pharmaceutical chemist, now turned Old Testament theologian, I have always been in favor of a “reasoned faith” and I welcome this volume’s fine contribution to the quest I have attempted to share with students. Of fundamental importance—garnered from my own experience—is the observation that this book “works.” Teachers and pastors seeking to further study and conversation in the ongoing debate about the relationship between science and faith will not easily find a better tool than the one offered here.

Frederick J. Gaiser
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

THE CHRIST OF THE MIRACLE STORIES: PORTRAIT THROUGH ENCOUNTER, by Wendy J. Cotter, CSJ. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. Pp. 293. \$30.00 (paper).

The miracle stories of Jesus in the Gospels often contain features that are difficult to comprehend in our contemporary world. Scholarly focus has often concentrated on one of the more difficult aspects, the nature and possibility of miracles themselves. Wendy Cotter’s recent book *The Christ of the Miracle Stories: Portrait through Encounter*, however, takes a somewhat different approach. Cotter argues that the narrator of the miracle stories seeks to expose the heart and attitude of both the petitioner and Jesus while at the same time maintaining the centrality of the divine power of Jesus. These encounters “were not only meant to reveal the remembered face of Jesus but also to inspire his followers in their own responses” (9). The narrators of the Gospels, according to Cotter, were equally concerned with displaying the significance of the encounter in light of first-century social and relational dynamics. That is to say, the miracle stories are not only about the miracles as powerful divine events but also the way in which Jesus and the petitioners interact with one another as a model for Jesus’ followers.

The Christ of the Miracle Stories looks almost exclusively at encounters found in the Gospel of Mark. After the introduction, Cotter divides the book into four parts, with each part tackling two encounters. Each chapter begins by attempting to confirm the pre-Markan material in each anecdote before turning to an analysis of the petitioner’s request and Jesus’ response. Part I (chaps. 1–2) examines Jesus and the Leper (Mark 1:40–45) and Jesus and Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52) as petitioners who must ask for themselves. Part II (chaps. 3–4) discusses petitioners who ask on behalf of others, in this case the friends of the paralytic (Mark 2:1–12) and the centurion (Q [Luke]

7:1, 3, 6b–9). Part III focuses on petitioners who ask on behalf of their child, such as the Syrophoenician mother (Mark 7:24–30) and the father of a demonized boy (Mark 9:14–29). Finally, Part IV explores petitioners who are Jesus’ disciples in Mark 4:35–41 and 6:45–52.

Cotter’s excellent survey of these miraculous encounters is primarily due to her impressive knowledge of both Second Temple Jewish and Greco-Roman texts and concepts. She expertly illuminates the various characteristics of the petitioners and Jesus, calling attention to the narrator’s portrayal of the social dynamics present within the texts. Cotter clarifies the obnoxious, degrading, and socially unacceptable behavior or conditions of the petitioners as they would have been seen, understood, and felt in the first-century world. She details the reality of physical maladies such as blindness, leprosy, demons, and paralysis; social and economic abnormalities such as begging, taking off one’s cloak, public exposure of

the sick, and entering through the roof of a house; and, finally, unusual relational dynamics such as Jesus’ engagement with a centurion and a Syrophoenician woman. These character portraits and descriptions are often presented as being in stark contrast with the responses of Jesus to their petitions. For Jesus, these encounters serve to highlight and exalt his virtuous behavior, in particular the virtues of *philanthropia* (compassion, kindness, or generosity) and *praos* (gentleness or inner restraint).

Cotter’s book is adept at making first-century attitudes, expectations, and emotions present within these miracle stories accessible to the contemporary pastor and teacher. Rare today is the sermon or teaching on the miracles of Jesus that focuses on anything other than Jesus’ display of miraculous power. While this demonstration of power is crucially important to these texts, Cotter’s book allows the interpreter to engage in a much deeper reading and



Celebration of Biblical Preaching

Speakers:

Anna Carter Florence
Grace Imathiu
Clay Schmidt
Frank Thomas
Ralph Winter

Registration
opens May 1

Preaching as Divine and Human Drama

Oct. 6-8
Luther Seminary | St. Paul, Minn.

www.luthersem.edu/celebration

LL1003-14a

preaching of the miracle stories. She argues that these stories also “presume an audience keen on observing Jesus’ manner of receiving these petitioners, who are imperfect, poor, rude, rough, and objectionable to polite society” (254). Cotter’s exegesis demonstrates how contemporary readers of these miracle stories can relate to the various relational and social dynamics present in these encounters. Jesus’ responses to the unusual social interactions with the petitioners call the reader to react and respond to the needy and outcast with compassion, grace, and gentleness in the face of contemporary society’s criticism and rejection.

Cotter’s book, however, is not without some drawbacks. *The Christ and the Miracle Stories* is a very technical book, especially in its use of original languages. Greek, Hebrew, and French quotations are found throughout the book, making it potentially cumbersome for those within the church who are without knowledge of these languages. Additionally, I found Cotter’s (rather lengthy, at times) redaction criticism at the beginning of each chapter largely unhelpful and, more importantly, distracting from the very helpful analysis of the first-century contexts of the miracle stories. The overwhelming strength of the book is its engagement with the primary sources of the first century so that the social and relational frameworks of these encounters might be fully understood. The large amount of attention given to redaction criticism within the book adds little to this end.

Overall, Cotter’s book is extremely helpful and insightful. I highly recommend it as a great resource for pastors and teachers who seek new and informative ways to understand and teach the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ miraculous encounters.

David K. Bryan
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois

HISTORY OF THE WORLD CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT. VOLUME II: MODERN CHRISTIANITY FROM 1454–1800, by Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sundquist. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012. xv + 503 pages. \$40.00 (paper).

This book is the long-awaited companion to the first volume in the series, which appeared in 2001 and covered the period of time from the origins of Christianity until just before the Protestant Reformation. The title of this volume is a clear sign of its intentions, wanting to give a history of Christianity as a movement (that is, more than just institutional history) and to give equal weight to Christianity outside of Europe and North America. This book accomplishes both of these goals quite admirably, providing its readers with a rich description of the amazing dissemination and growth of Christianity that corresponded to the great wave of European Christians into the world during and after the Reformation. But even though the Europeans were a great catalyst for this expansion, the book does not center around the events in Europe itself, giving equal weight to local developments among Christians in the Middle East and Africa, and on how local people in the Americas and Asia encountered and appropriated Christianity when it was introduced to them.

The story of the expansion and growth of Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is certain a dramatic one, especially with the efforts of the Roman Catholic missionaries like Francis Xavier and Matteo Ricci. This period saw the expansion of Christianity into the whole of Latin America, along with the establishment or revitalization of Christianity in Africa and Asia. The eighteenth century saw the beginnings of mission work by the Protestants, especially the Moravians and the continental Pietists, and the establishment of Protestantism in North America. Equally, the authors do not shy away from the downsides of

July 23-25

RETHINKING FAITH FORMATION

Christian Identity and Practice in a Pluralistic World

Get inspired and equipped to cultivate in your people a vibrant, distinctive and compelling Christian identity that proves useful in navigating the challenges of everyday life in a world of many faiths, cultures and stories.

July 28-30

RETHINKING STEWARDSHIP

Exploring Year-Round Stewardship

This conference will encourage participants to consider how they might incorporate stewardship into the life of their congregation beyond just the fall campaign. Together, we will imagine new ways to celebrate God's abundance and all that God has entrusted into our care. Whether you are just beginning a stewardship ministry or already have a year-round stewardship plan in place, you will receive stimulating ideas and practical suggestions.

www.luthersem.edu/rethinking

LL1041-13a



these movements, either, and are clear about the instances of colonialism and Eurocentrism that clouded this expansion. On the whole it seems a good and judicious reading of the history.

This book has almost the feeling of an encyclopedia to it, especially when it comes to events outside of the North Atlantic corridor, and this is perhaps an element that makes its narrative flow somewhat less effective overall. Certainly there is much great information in this volume, material that is both new and useful to the reader. The greatest asset of the book is that it distills and encapsulates much of the modern research and historical writings about Christianity in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Bibliographies at the end of each chapter and a good index make it very valuable to someone wanting to know about particular subjects, regions, or individuals. But these same elements make it a slow read in places; it is at 500 pages for a span of about 350 years, whereas the first volume is at less than 500 pages for a span of 1500 years.

In an ironic twist, even at this length the sections on European Christianity seem inadequate in length and depth, perhaps due to the need to balance them out with the rest of the book. So, for example, in the part of the book that covers the seventeenth century, European Christianity is given the same amount of space as Christianity in East and South Asia. Certainly the events in Asia are important, but there were dramatically more Christians in Europe than in Asia at the time; the issue is one of balance. This is one of the major challenges that faces those who would write broad narratives about the history of modern Christianity; the topic is so wide that it seems almost impossible to do it justice.

My suggestion to this: By all means get this book and read it. The book will open your mind to aspects and areas of Christianity that you scarcely knew to exist, and should. The events of these 350 years are crucial as a background for the even more dramatic develop-

ments of Christianity as a global religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Understand as you read that there are still elements of these developments that linger into our present time, such as the historical roots and shaping of Christianity in Latin America, for example. Your reading of this book may at times feel a bit uneven in terms of balance, but this should not dissuade you from reading and benefitting from the overall narrative of these crucial years.

Mark Granquist
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

THE STORY OF THE HOLY LAND: A VISUAL HISTORY, by Peter Walker. Oxford: Lion Books, 2013. Pp. 176. \$19.95 (cloth).

In the days of my youth the technology for learning about the Bible was flannelgraph. Painted scenes of the Holy Land were decorated with flannel-backed cutouts of biblical characters, thus conveying the dramatic action of the mighty acts of God. Many books, computer displays, travelogues, and even air travel have now added much more color and depth to the learning process. If I were teaching (or in) Bible School today, I would recommend Peter Walker's *The Story of the Holy Land*, an impressive compendium of pictures and text that tells the story of the Bible from the era of the patriarchs to the present day.

The photographs in this visual history make one want to linger and look at the barren landscape near the Dead Sea or at a rare view of Bethlehem in snow. Nonetheless, this book is neither a travelogue nor a collection of pretty pictures so much as it is a journey of the imagination. Walker extends an invitation to the reader to "imagine what it might have been like—4,000 years ago—for Abraham, walking into the land of Canaan" (3). These words appear over the hazy distance of a 16.5x10.5-inch lush, atmospheric panorama of the Canaanite

landscape as it appears today. One's eye roams from the scrub brush in the foreground, across the hilly expanse mid-picture, into the gauzy, hilly background.

Many other aerial photographs also capture the eye and the imagination: the living quarters of the Herodium near Bethlehem (76); a view of the Mount of Beatitudes commemorating Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (80); two imposing views of the massif of Masada (73 and 91). Sometimes a picture with text suggests a new point of view. For example, a picture of the fields below Bethlehem shows shepherds keeping watch over their flocks (28), probably *in green August*, not in snowy December. Further, a small picture shows a natural cave (79) where animals were kept; Jesus was born in such a cave according to one tradition.

Because I had the good fortune to travel to the Holy Land some years ago with Carl Volz, professor (now deceased) of church history at Luther Seminary, I found myself consulting the book he wrote with Charles Page II, *The Land and the Book* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1993). For me, Volz's commentary added depth to Walker's compressed but insightful text.

One instance, of many, comes to mind. Walker's picture and discussion of the fresh-water springs of Banias (63) evoked a strong memory of Volz standing at the threshold of a yawning cave above the spring. The place, he said, had a long tradition as the passageway to Hades. There, according to Matthew's gospel, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus, standing at the mouth of that gaping gash, near where we stood, declared that Peter's confession would endure, and the gates of Hades would not stand against it. Whereupon Jesus set his face to Jerusalem, there to suffer on the cross. Walker's picture may be worth a thousand words, but it can also trigger countless memories.

Not all the pictures in Walker's book are so successful. Some appear to be fuzzy and possi-

bly over-manipulated. Quite a few are panoramic views of the countryside; but the places they depict are not identified.

Furthermore, Walker's text, while tight and informative, sometimes slips from the past tense (when things happened) to the "historical" progressive present (where things *are* happening). Moreover, Walker includes two impressive photographs of Masada (73 and 91), yet, unlike Volz, he gives no account of what happened (or is happening) there.

Further, at one point Walker declares that there were three individuals who shaped the "Crucial Century: 40 BC–AD 70": Herod the Great, Jesus of Nazareth, and Titus. The first two of these individuals each receives a complete chapter with pictures that limn their times and illustrate their places. But little is said of Titus except that by A.D. 70 "the brutal might of Rome, under Titus, had triumphed" (90). Perhaps to make up for the paucity of narrative material, Walker includes a huge, dramatic, apocalyptic painting: *The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under the Command of Titus, A.D. 70* by David Roberts.

Certainly the most impressive parts of the book for biblical study are the first five chapters on the time between Abraham, about 1950 B.C. [sic], and the period of the Romans, about A.D. 70. Walker makes the stories and landscape of the Bible during this long stretch of time come alive in vivid color and lively text. These are the scenes and stories we remember from Sunday School or Bible Camp. A less familiar era (for many) begins with the "Constantinian Century (AD 310–410)," when "everything changed. Jerusalem had a dramatic face-lift, brought about by the arrival in the East of a new emperor—Constantine" (100).

From this point on the Holy Land was shaped, conquered, settled, fought over, and pacified by Byzantium, Islam, Crusaders, Mongols, Ottomans, tourists, the British, Jews, Christians, and Arabs. The history of the Holy

Land in these chapters is a patchwork of peace and, more often, warfare. The many lush pictures of the earlier chapters are replaced by black and white photos of more contemporary events. These images and the text that accompanies them are interesting and informative; but, biblically speaking, they are less compelling than the earlier part of the book.

Walker says that his narrative of the Holy Land is not a travelogue, nor is it an age-long, comprehensive history of the area. His purpose in writing and illustrating is much simpler: The aim of the book “is to give an accessible, but brief, account of the *age-long* history of the Holy Land. . . it can serve as a useful springboard of shared history, allowing us to come to terms with the demands of the present complex situation” (173). For me, the wonderful stories of the Bible, initially told via flannelgraph, continue to grow in a richly textured book like this one. I hope that Walker’s book will inspire younger generations to marvel at and embrace the world of the Bible, the Holy Land that perdures even in the midst of the present ongoing and complex situation.

Robert Brusic
Luther Seminary
Saint Paul, Minnesota

FAITH IN THE FACE OF EMPIRE: THE BIBLE THROUGH PALESTINIAN EYES, by Mitri Raheb. New York: Orbis Books, 2014. Pp. 166. \$20.00 (paper).

Confession: Somewhere just beneath the surface of my thankfulness for this book lurks a doubt, *Can there really be anything new to say about the Bible through a specific liberationist lens?* Rationally, I know this doubt is unfounded, because many of the most important hermeneutical insights of the last century came as a result of trusting the experience (and struggle) born of oppression, of occupation by empire.

This lurking doubt puzzles me. I do not have the same reaction when a new work of

Christology is penned by a scholar I respect. In this sense, the critique of Western assumptions Raheb offers in the introduction is valid. I am (conditioned by my culture and context) insular and obsessed with fixed and rigid Eurocentric questions (6). For this reason, I need to read, and keep reading, the voices from the margins, voices that are, in the end, not the margins at all, but are marginalized only by my failure of imagination to realize that voices, and preeminently among them the Palestinian voice, are central rather than marginal, even if they are simultaneously silenced and ignored by Western theologians.

This book is Mitri Raheb’s *tour de force*. In six tight chapters Raheb offers a postcolonial Palestinian liberationist hermeneutic that questions the prevailing evangelical and liberal Christian narratives (and to a certain degree Jewish and subjugated Palestinian narratives) that overlook the native people of the land—the Canaanites and the Palestinians—and then making “the natives of the land . . . strangers in order to make room for an invented people to occupy the land” (38). This is not an anti-Semitic argument *per se*, although staunch Zionists will likely hear it as such. Instead, it is a geopolitical rereading of the place of Palestine, and the role of the people of that land, in biblical and world history.

In a way quite comparable to James Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (which I reviewed in a recent issue of *Word & World*), Raheb notes the complicit silence of liberal theologians in the oppression of a people. Raheb notices that the very theologians who should be the most sensitive to Palestinian concerns are blind to the Palestinian plight precisely because the role of the modern state of Israel plays a part in the hermeneutics of liberalism, which is itself influenced by its Orientalism (a term coined by the Palestinian Protestant Christian Edward Said).

Raheb sees promise in some recent developments in both Jewish and Christian theology which have begun to attend to the Palestinian



“What it means to preach biblically is taken seriously and imaginatively so as to strengthen pastors in their preaching and to nurture communities of proclamation. Supported by their peers, students from all over the country and a variety of denominations grow in skill and a sense of renewed commitment. To accompany them is a joy.”

—*Karoline M. Lewis*
Alvin N. Rogness Chair
of Homiletics



Good preaching transforms lives

Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Preaching or
Congregational Mission and Leadership

651-641-3521 | www.luthersem.edu/dmin

situation (for those who hope to read further, the chief Jewish voice is Marc Ellis; chief Palestinian Christian voices include Yohanna Katanach and Munther Isaac; and the prominent U.S. Christian voice is Walter Brueggemann).

After middle chapters on geopolitics, Palestine, and empire (chapters four and five), Raheb proceeds to roll out generative exegetical insights into the biblical texts informed by the Palestinian experience of exile in their own land. Here his concept of the *longue durée* takes center stage. It is not just that Palestine is occupied *now*, it is that Palestine has, almost in uninterrupted fashion, *always* been occupied. In the context of occupation, one prayer to God is lifted over and over, “Where are you, God?” This is the “three-thousand-year-old lament that the inhabitants of Palestine have passed from one generation to the next” (68).

Those occupied by empire inevitably ask themselves: What is the best way to obtain liberation? (74). Raheb catalogs five traditional ways occupied peoples have responded to oppression and sought liberation: fighting back, observing the law (like the Pharisees), accommodation (the Sadducees), collaboration, and retrieval (Qumran). Having outlined these five quests for liberation, Raheb then offers a modest Trinitarian theology, with chapters on God, Jesus, and the Spirit.

God is who we turn to in the face of omnipotent empire. In Raheb’s analysis of Palestinian liberation theology, “it wasn’t the notion that there is a God that was revelatory, but the response to that existential question, ‘Where are you, God?’ The people of Palestine were able to discover a unique answer to this question, and the answer made history” (86). The answer, in short, is that the oppressed Palestinians learned to spot God where others could not see God. God accompanies them into exile in Babylon, in the destruction of the temple, and so on. “The salient feature of this God was that he didn’t run away when his people faced their destiny but remained with them, show-

ing solidarity and choosing to share their destiny” (87).

Jesus lives this solidarity also, and reveals this God on the cross. In the chapter on Jesus, Raheb offers a fascinating interpretation of Matthew 5:5, the meek shall inherit the earth. The meek inherit, according to Raheb, by staying in place. Empires come and go, but the meek people of the land remain. Jesus understood this geopolitics, and deeply identified with these people, the people of villages and of the countryside. He did not aim for Rome, and mostly avoided Jerusalem. He was a man of the land.

Finally, the Spirit is at work as the presence of this God in ways that quietly offer creative resistance and foster cultures of life. The Spirit calls the people to lives of hope, “living the reality and yet investing in a different one” (130).

These final chapters only begin to hint at a systematic theology, and exegete wonderfully brief passages of scripture. Given Raheb’s busy life (president of Dar al-Kalima University College in Bethlehem as well as president of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, Palestine), it is a wonder he has produced this book at all, and yet if I wished for anything as I finished reading it, it is that it would be, perhaps in a second edition or future volume, a more expansive systematics or work of biblical theology that fleshes out the hermeneutic so wonderfully on display out of the Palestinian perspective.

Clint Schneklath
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Fayetteville, Arkansas