

Reviews



**THE STORY LUKE TELLS: LUKE'S
UNIQUE WITNESS TO THE GOS-
PEL**, by Justo L. González, Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. 129. \$14.00 (paper).

I first read the work of Justo L. González as a seminarian. I stumbled onto his book *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) in the bookshelves. Taken aback by the accented title and name, I remember being dazzled that someone from my own cultural background had a book in this prestigious library. In the case of González, it wasn't only one.

A renowned historian (see his widely read, two-volume introduction to church history *The Story of Christianity* [New York: Harper One, 2010]) and an innovator in Latina/o theology, González brings to his work honed theological sensibilities as well as a depth of exegetical study. This book is a helpful companion to his earlier and masterful commentary, *Luke* (Belief, A Theological Commentary on the Bible; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

Here, instead of a passage-by-passage commentary, González draws the outlines of Lukan theology. He does so in a lucid, engaging style that focuses on the theological and literary dimensions of Luke. The stuff of ministerial and theological reading of the Gospel is at the forefront in this text.

González begins by noting that Luke's theological influence on the New Testament has been overshadowed by the contributions of Paul and John. Luke, he contends, simply by his mere output demands more of our attention. More than productivity, however, it is Luke's distinctive theological voice, his narrative shaping of a theology of liberation,

reversal, and invitation that resonates with us still.

The book moves through eight thematic chapters, starting with an analysis of Luke's work as a historian. Here, González argues that in Luke's careful contextualization of the story of Jesus within the wider orbit of the Roman Empire and human history, he "presents us with a narrative that is connected with the entire history of humanity as its continuation and culmination, but is also a new beginning in that history" (10). Moreover, Luke the historian has not closed the book on this story he begins to weave; the narrative is open-ended, inviting its readers to continue "the story Luke tells," as the title indicates.

The core of the book turns to the theme of "the great reversal," which is first voiced by Mary the mother of Jesus. The world is being turned upside down according to Luke. The reverberations of this reversal are further explored as they relate to gender, salvation, and even the tables where food and drink are shared. Finally, the book closes with reflections on worship and the Holy Spirit, emphasizing especially how both draw people together in communities that serve God and one another.

What then is Luke's "unique witness to the gospel"? It certainly includes distinctive stories and perspectives on key theological themes. However, according to González, what really sets Luke apart is the way the Third Gospel leans into the Acts of the Apostles and how Acts thus leans into the lives of Luke's readers. Acts 28 is not the end of the story but an "RSVP," "...an invitation that awaits a response" (129). González's concise but deeply exegetical work in this brief book functions

similarly, inviting its reader to delve deeper into Luke's theological ambit and thus turn to the world in hope and expectation that we are stepping into God's future.

In my courses, I often exhort my students to preach and teach biblical texts in ways that resonate with the theological vision of the book's author. That is, our preaching and teaching might *focus* on a particular passage, but the vision, the horizons of our preaching and teaching should resemble the particular witness of the book containing that passage. Especially in lectionary preaching, the individual readings should help people link one text to the next. For instance, what does the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 have to do with the story of Pentecost in chapter 2? For ministers, resources that help with this kind of theological imagination can be rare. Lectionary-based resources on the web tend to focus on exegesis of a single text, occasionally, though not always, providing linkages to the previous and upcoming weeks. Traditional commentaries can be excellent resources too, but like a cookbook or encyclopedia, we don't tend to read them cover to cover. Instead, we use a table of contents or index or passage to determine where in the commentary to read a particular selection.

This book serves as an ideal synthesis of exegesis and theology, especially for the pastor and preacher. This is not a book to consult week-to-week as passages come into focus for next Sunday. Instead this book is formational prolegomena, a key preparation for tackling the Gospel of Luke. With González's expert exegesis and astute theological insights, a framing for the Gospel's theology comes into full relief.

The brevity of *The Story Luke Tells* is deceptive. Within its pages are a rich reading of Luke that can enliven not just the preaching of the good news but its daily living as well.

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THIS STRANGE AND SACRED SCRIPTURE: WRESTLING WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS ODDITIES, by Matthew Richard Schlimm. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015. xvi + 254 pp. \$22.99 (paper).

The Old Testament can be problematic for readers. It contains strange laws and customs. Its characters—people who proclaim faith in God—commit abhorrent sexual, moral, and violent acts. Its God, on the one hand, is caring, compassionate, loving, and, on the other, he is demanding, angry, and vengeful. Recognizing this strangeness of the Old Testament, Matthew Schlimm, assistant professor of Old Testament at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, addresses a variety of perplexing issues Christians encounter when reading the Old Testament.

In many ways, the book serves as a starting point for Christians to dialogue about their experiences related to the awkwardness and unfriendliness of the Old Testament. Schlimm, in his own words, captures this idea: "This book tries to find the Old Testament's beauty even while dealing with difficult issues. This book is written for Christians by a Christian" (xi).

The beauty Schlimm searches to illuminate, however, must be viewed alongside the "difficult issues" that have perplexed Christians for centuries. These issues are structured into twelve chapters and an appendix. In chapter 1, Schlimm asks the question: "Is the Old Testament an enemy, stranger, or friend to the Christian faith?" (1). Answering this question, Schlimm describes the Old Testament as "our friend in faith," meaning readers identify with and relate to its characters and stories (5–7). The Old Testament as our friend in faith becomes the controlling metaphor and interpretive lens throughout the study.

The remaining chapters tackle the oddities of the Old Testament. A brief overview will be given for each. Chapters 2–3 focus on the growing popularity of the symbolic interpreta-

tion of Gen 1:1–4:16, which accommodates a tenable relationship between science and religion (i.e., theistic evolution). Driving his symbolic interpretation is the question: “What type of literature, or genre, are we reading?” (12, 14). In chapter 4, Schlimm encourages readers to embrace the morally questionable plotlines (i.e., R-rated stories) of the Old Testament. With chapter 5, Schlimm examines the “flawed assumptions” for reconciling the violence and genocide depicted in the Old Testament. Gender and gender roles are the focal point of chapter 6, with emphasis given to an egalitarian approach to the issue. With chapter 7, Schlimm examines the strange laws and customs of the Old Testament by asking: “God commands us to do what?” The strange relationship between the Old Testament law and the New Testament believer is addressed in chapter 8.

With chapter 9, Schlimm asks, “Does the Bible contradict itself?” Schlimm answers this question by utilizing three helpful symbolic comparisons: conservation/sales pitch, work of art/math equation, and a tailor-made suit/one-size-fits-all hospital gown. Chapters 10 and 11 go hand in hand in many ways. In the former, Schlimm exposes the fraudulent idea that Christians cannot express their anger, grief, and disgust with God. Through a variety of psalms and the book of Lamentations, Schlimm reveals how the ancient Israelites dealt with burdensome situations, heartache, brokenness, and anger. In chapter 11, Schlimm examines the other side of the coin—God’s anger with humanity. Interpretively, the anger of God—though slow—can be understood as a reality. This reality is in “uneasy tension” with God’s divine love (195–196).

The final chapter concludes the study by answering the underlying question interwoven throughout: “How should we think of the Old Testament’s authority?” (198). Here Schlimm fleshes out more thoroughly his “Old Testament as a friend” metaphor. Schlimm appropriately suggests that Christians “need a

way of approaching Scripture that entails respect and honor, while still giving us room to admit that some texts make very little sense to us today” (204). An appendix containing his “literal translation of Gen 2:4b–4:16” concludes the book, where he substantiates his symbolic treatment of Gen 1:1–4:16 in chapters 2–3.

In sum, Schlimm should be commended for providing readers with an easy to understand yet learned approach to many of the perplexing issues within the Old Testament. For many within the halls of the academy, these issues are nonfactors and unimportant; however, within the church, these oddities and issues can elicit consternation, confusion, and despair for those reading the Old Testament. For this reason alone, Schlimm has provided readers with a valuable and important evangelical voice regarding difficulties related to reading/studying the Old Testament. For example, although I disagree with Schlimm’s symbolic approach to Gen 1:1–4:16, he presents sympathetic readers with both a sensible and a tenable interpretation. The conciseness of his interpretation allows curious readers a bird’s-eye view for reconciling science with Gen 1:1–4:16.

Additionally, his treatment of violence and genocide provides a judicial voice on a difficult subject. Personally, I think chapter 10 is quite possibly the most helpful for Christians. The issue of anger and distrust of God is something most Christians struggle with at some point in their faith journey; however, from a theological perspective, many believe expressing anger or distrust with God is passé. Schlimm’s approach and conclusion to this issue will be therapeutic in many ways: “The Old Testament never envisions a life free from grief, anger, or anguish. Instead, it thoroughly incorporates these emotions into the life of faith” (178). In short, Schlimm has not turned a blind eye to the oddities and problematic issues of the Old Testament. His treatment of the difficult issues will assist laity, clergy, and under-

graduate students who struggle with many of the same questions.

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FAITH AND REASON: THREE VIEWS,

ed. by Steve Wilkens. Downers Grove, IL:
InterVarsity Press, 2014. Pp. 185. \$25.00
(paper).

The complex question of the relation between faith and reason in theology is a long-standing one, harkening back at least to Greco-Roman philosophical reflection on spiritual, ethical, and metaphysical matters. The problem was taken up by the earliest theologians (e.g., Tertullian and Justin Martyr) and nuanced in a seemingly endless variety of ways throughout the history of theological reflection. This book introduces this complex history and the constellation of issues involved by presenting three perspectives on the question: (1) Faith and Philosophy in Tension (abbreviated to the “Tension position”); (2) Faith Seeking Understanding (abbreviated to the “FSU position”); and (3) the Thomistic Synthesis (abbreviated to the “TS position”).

The relation between faith and reason is a primary issue for theological method. What are we doing when we do theology? What role does philosophy—and/or “neutral,” objective, or nonreligiously biased rationality—play in theological reasoning? Can one acquire salvific knowledge of God solely through rational reflection, apart from the interruption of divine revelation? Or is reason a hindrance to religious, and salvific, knowledge? If we reject either extreme choice, and if we grant some interdependence or relation between faith and reason, then how ought we to conceptualize—and to practice—the relation? Does one take precedence over the other? Is it even possible to sort out the relation in the actual context of theological reflection?

These are the main questions the book’s three authors engage and they each do so admirably. Carl Raschke, proponent of the Tension position, argues for the impossibility of eliminating the tension, or the paradox, between faith and reason. He defines faith as an experience of trusting in God—an experience made possible by divine revelation and that makes possible religious knowledge. But Raschke, contrary to both Padgett and Boyd, insists that faith itself is not a kind of knowledge. Rational reflection might help us to realize where reason in fact fails, but faith must pick up where reason leaves off. Alan Padgett articulates the FSU position as one that assumes a positive, “collegial” relation between faith and reason, but that prioritizes faith over reason in terms of the acquisition of religious knowledge. Theology must *begin* with, or be grounded upon, faith (by which he means truth or religious knowledge revealed through a disposition of trust in Christ) rather than with philosophical or scientific rationality. Craig Boyd, representing the TS position, encourages the intentional use of reason as a means of theological knowledge. He argues that reason itself is created as a gift of God’s grace and that therefore all people are capable of “reasoning correctly about the various operations of the natural world and the basic elements of morality as found in the natural law” (159). Nonetheless, Boyd acknowledges that divine revelation is still necessary for salvation and sanctification.

Each of the primary positions are interesting, informative essays that bring the reader into the depths of the question and illumine the sets of issues involved from that particular framework. The “Tension position,” written by philosopher Raschke, uses Kierkegaard as his primary exemplar of the position. This is not an unsurprising choice, in that Kierkegaard has long been recognized as a critic of the Enlightenment’s optimism about reason. His corresponding insistence is that theological knowledge requires subjective involve-

ment—which is to say a kind of passion—and cannot be accessed by the methods of objectivity (i.e., neutral or dispassionate rationality). Nonetheless, one could easily argue that Kierkegaard might fit better—or just as well—under a “faith seeking understanding” position. This is because Kierkegaard did not reject all forms of reasoning and philosophy, but in fact used them to clarify the situation that theologians face—which is that religious truths are only truly known when they are subjectively appropriated and that therefore religious (and doctrinal) concepts cannot be replaced or supplanted by philosophical ones. The issue is complicated by Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms to represent various points of view in his authorship.

Both the richness and the complexity of the faith/reason problem is on full display in these essays—and in the responses. What, exactly, is meant by “faith”? The authors disagree (certainly Raschke disagrees with Padgett and Boyd). What is meant by “reason”? Is reason a synonym for philosophy or science—or both? Does reason simply mean critical thinking? The authors sometimes alternate between definitions and uses of key terms. At times “reason” is simply replaced by “philosophy,” such as in the title of one of the positions: “Faith and Philosophy in Tension.” Some of the difficulties for the reader might have been alleviated with a more extensive and more precise introduction, defining key terminology up front.

Nonetheless, the strengths of the individual essays and the conversational style will open up pathways of fresh insight, deepened understanding, and will stimulate continued dialogue on this important topic in classroom settings. I could see the text being used in introductory college and seminary theology courses to situate this complex dialogue. The instructor will need to provide additional clarity, I think, as to the distinction between—in particular—the Tension and FSU positions, and will further need to insist on the difficulty

of locating any particular theologian neatly within any of the proposed categories.

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RUDOLF BULTMANN: A BIOGRAPHY,
by Konrad Hammann. Trans. by Philip E.
Devenish. Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2013. Pp.
611. \$60.00 (cloth).

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) was the preeminent New Testament scholar of the twentieth century. His works will continue to be referenced by serious biblical and theological scholarship well into the future. His biographer, Konrad Hammann, Professor of Church History in the Protestant Faculty of the University of Münster, has provided us with a magnificent and monumental review of Bultmann’s life and work in a most fitting tribute to this creative, pathbreaking figure in the history of theology.

What strikes the reader is the gap of time between Bultmann’s influence in Europe and his impact in America. Certainly World War II, as many have observed, delayed his influence in this country and, of course, there is the language problem. His *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, first published in 1921, did not appear in English until 1963. His commentary on John’s Gospel, first published in fascicles from 1937 to 1941, did not see the light of English-speaking day until 1971. Other works of his fared better, as American scholars began to realize his significance: his *Theology of the New Testament*, first published in two parts, vol. 1 in 1948 (ET 1951) and vol. 2 in 1951 (ET 1955), and his 1949 work *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (ET 1956). But even his *Jesus* book, written in 1926 for a wider audience, was not translated into English until 1934, the translators lamenting that he was still “little known in the United States.”

To each of these major works Hammann devotes sections of his book, with detailed analyses not only of their contents but also of the theological and interdisciplinary contexts in which they arose. Taken into account also are the four volumes of Bultmann's essays, some of which remain untranslated, that relate to each major writing.

However, it is not only a matter of bridging language barriers that delayed Bultmann's influence on church and theology in this country. It was also a matter of intellectual history. Theology in Germany at the beginning of the last century was still engaged in the issues raised by post-Enlightenment philosophy and the history of religions scholarship. Such engagement was necessary for church theologians who were members of the European academy. In addition, the special relationship that the church had with its university theologians also demanded engagement with the pressures on church and society exerted by the government, especially during the history of the Third Reich. Hammann does a masterful job in relating the work of Bultmann in all these areas, especially outlining the contextual reasons for each book, article, and lecture in the prodigious output of the Marburg theologian.

This is a biography that is meticulously researched, not only with regard to Bultmann's scholarly works but also with copious references to Bultmann's private correspondence, which forms a significant part of his literary estate now housed in the university library in Tübingen. From childhood Bultmann was an avid letter writer, a feature that continued during his entire life. Several collections of his letters are now published, namely, his correspondence with colleagues such as Karl Barth, Friedrich Gogarten, Martin Heidegger, Gerhard Krüger, Günther Bornkamm, and (hopefully soon) Ernst Käsemann.

The book is structured according to the various stages in Bultmann's life. Born in Wiefelstede in the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg,

the son, grandson (on both sides), and maternal great-grandson of Lutheran pastors of pietistic-revivalist traditions, he attributed to his parents the awakening of imagination and the encouragement to read and to question. Educated at the Oldenburg Academy, he received a foundation in the humanities, in Greek, Latin, and the history of German literature, and developed an interest in art and music, while learning piano at home. As his father gradually opened himself to a more liberal Protestantism, Bultmann also developed his personal distance from religious indoctrination without alienation from the faith itself. His closest childhood friend was Leonhard Frank, a Jewish schoolmate through whom he became acquainted with the realities of anti-Semitism and whose friendship he enjoyed into adulthood. Into their university years the two friends engaged in conversation over religious and philosophical subjects, studied the Old Testament together, and exchanged copies of Adolf Harnack's *What Is Christianity?* with each other.

His theological studies took him to the universities in Tübingen, Berlin, and Marburg. In Tübingen he encountered the Ritschlians Johannes Gottschick, Theodor Haering, and Karl Müller; he was impressed with the dogmatics of Haering, and less so with the New Testament lectures of Adolf Schlatter. In Berlin he found dogmatics irritating and developed a critical attitude toward traditionalist systems, and, while impressed with Harnack as a lecturer and thinker, he spent most of his time focusing on Old Testament studies under Hermann Gunkel. In Marburg, while taking a course on logic by the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp, he concentrated on New Testament courses by Adolf Jülicher and Johannes Weiss, both of whom he highly respected. There he also studied under Wilhelm Hermann, and recalled Marburg as the happiest time of his student years.

With such a foundation Bultmann proceeded toward a university teaching career in

New Testament theology. Hammann charts his progress in detail, from his initial instructorship in Marburg, through his doctoral and teacher-qualifying dissertations, through his posts in Breslau and Giessen, to his return to Marburg as a full professor in 1921. From his early into his later years in academia Bultmann was occupied with the role of the church in society and with theological education as it affects the formation of clergy and the task of preaching. Throughout the book Hammann shows how Bultmann's immediate academic activity related to the practice of preaching, and includes reference to his many sermons that addressed both social and religious issues. Hammann attributes the upheaval of the First World War as implementing "a noticeable broadening of Bultmann's competence in political and social matters."

Throughout his life Bultmann remained a person of the church. The question remains continuously before him, both in his own practice and in that of others: "What is the task of pastor?" A more than frequent presenter at clergy conferences, he would insist that as long as the church has need for Scripture it also has need for the work that systematically understands Scripture, and for that it is precisely historical-biblical scholarship that is indispensable. The more attention given to that, the less the pastor will confuse the pulpit with the podium, and will concentrate on the one thing that will enable the congregation to distinguish what is central from what is peripheral.

Hammann emphasizes that for Bultmann Christian faith is not dependent on the results of historical research, mainly because the latter is a human enterprise. Christian preaching calls every person to a new self-understanding before God, by means of the message of Jesus' cross, which is a judgment on the world and its values. The cross is the eschatological deed of God, and Jesus Christ crucified and risen encounters a person in the word of preaching, and a new self-understanding occurs in those who believe in Christ present in the kerygma as

Lord over their existence. Thus it is the task of preaching to render the proclamation of the gospel understandable to modern hearers who are indelibly influenced by current philosophies, modern cosmologies, and political ideologies.

Every section of this book is riveting, but none more so than chapter five, "Time of Testing (1933–1945)." It is the period of the Third Reich, a period of struggle for the church and its integrity in the face of rampant anti-Semitism. Bultmann saw the seeds of the Third Reich already in the nationalism and desire for power in pre-imperial Germany. Bultmann had developed numerous friendships with Jews and with Christians of Jewish background, and long before 1933 had shown himself opposed to every form of anti-Semitism. He had sought out and maintained relationships with Jewish scholars such as Hermann Jacobson (linguistics), Erich Frank (philosophy), Karl Löwith (philosophy), Erich Auerbach (comparative literature), Paul Friedländer (classical philology), Erich Fraenkel (classical philology), and Ernst Hellinger (mathematics), and with students such as Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas. In protest to a 1933 student rally in Marburg where anti-Semitic slogans had been brandished, Bultmann spoke out against this "defamation of Jews" as "representing a demonic distortion inconsistent with the spirit of love," saying that "as a Christian I must deplore the injustice that is done in particular to the German Jews by such a defamation." He clashed with Gerhard Kittel over the latter's anti-Semitism, and Martin Buber made note of Bultmann's positive example of speaking up for Jews.

It is in this chapter that Hammann treats Bultmann's commentary on the Gospel of John. It was dedicated "to the old Marburg friends," whom Hammann identifies as colleagues expelled by the Nazi regime: Erich Frank, Paul Friedländer, and Friedrich Carl Sell. Bultmann flatly rejected Emanuel Hirsch's interpretation of the Gospel that al-

leged that the evangelist's guiding theme was an attack on "Jewish legalism." According to Bultmann, Hirsch had misunderstood the eschatological character of the evangelist's message. Eschatological existence realizes itself in faith, which is not an objectifiable possession. Faith transforms the person who hears the word of God's coming and opens him- or herself to eschatological existence. Thus "the Jews" in John's Gospel cannot represent an objectified racial entity as a whole, inasmuch as John the Baptist is a Jew, but a perspective shared by "the world" that is yet to receive eschatological existence as a gift, through faith.

Hammann's incisive and in-depth treatments of each of Bultmann's major works deserve a more complete review than is possible here. He has shown himself to be an eminent intellectual historian and interpreter of the Marburg theologian. His analysis of Bultmann's famous 1941 lecture *New Testament and Mythology* and its aftermath is compelling; he rues the word "demythologizing" but clearly shows Bultmann's intent along with the knee-jerk reactions of lesser lights who could not take the time and make the effort to understand it.

In all, Hammann proves that Bultmann was a theologian of and for the church. A member and leader, along with his close Marburg friend and colleague Hans von Soden, of the Confessing Church, he became a sought-after consultant in the post-World War II reconstruction of educational programs in Marburg. Hammann recounts his travels abroad after the war, especially in America, where unfortunately not one major Lutheran seminary invited him to lecture. In an essay on the occasion of Bultmann's ninetieth birthday, the Bishop of Hanover, Eduard Lohse, himself an eminent New Testament theologian, paid him tribute as a Lutheran theologian, a recognition Bultmann received "with great joy." Eight years after his death, on the hundredth anniversary of his birth, Lohse—now the Presiding

Officer of the Evangelical Church of Germany—recognized Rudolf Bultmann as having done all his scholarly work in the service of the church and the proclamation that is its task.

An ample amount of interesting illustrations occur throughout the book, originally published in German in 2009. We are indebted to Konrad Hammann for this truly impressive biography, one that should be read by everyone preparing for and engaging in theological and pastoral work.

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POPE FRANCIS AND THE NEW VATICAN, by Dave Yoder and Robert Draper.
Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2015. Pp. 255. \$40.00 (cloth).

At the very end of *Pope Francis and the New Vatican*, Robert Draper lists every pope from St. Peter (d. ca. 64) to Francis (elected 13 Mar, 2013), 266 popes in all. People of a certain age may perhaps have a memory of the last six pontiffs, beginning with St. John XXIII whose nearly five-year tenure began in 1958. Prior to that time the leadership of the Catholic Church seemed for many to be distant and disinterested, even disdainful of the rest of Christendom. But John XXIII opened some windows that subsequent popes have, with varying success, kept open: a significant church council, Lutheran-Roman Catholic and other ecumenical dialogues, and a number of provocative statements on such matters as justification, the preferential option for the poor, and others.

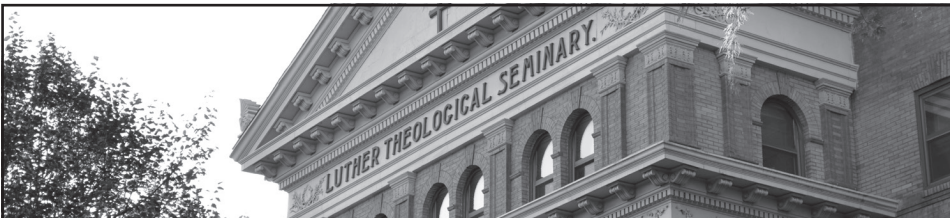
This book, a *National Geographic* production, seeks to demonstrate that the trajectory is still appreciably upward, all windows widely open. In four succinct essays and scores of eye-catching photographs Robert Draper, essayist, and Dave Yoder, photographer, illustrate how things have been changing in Rome. "[T]he story of the Vatican in the time of Pope

Francis is much more than a tale of a religious faith and its titular leader. It is, finally about the interaction between place and culture” (14).

The essays are intimate, almost chatty. But they weave history, biography, and piety. The account of Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Francis’s given name) is presented in broad strokes. In his younger years he was regarded as a reformer, a radical, a revolutionary, and a street priest. But at the same time, according to Draper, he was (and is) approachable, compassionate, and capable of genuine and surprising humility. For example, instead of living in the traditional papal apartments, Francis chose to live in a two-room, sixteen-square-foot residence. He insists on re-using napkins instead of changing them at each meal, as had been the custom. As pope he uses the Popemobile only when necessary, preferring instead to drive a 1984 Renault with 186,000 miles on it.

Everywhere he goes, Francis embraces (and is embraced by) the crowd, especially the poor. He regards the purpose of the Catholic Church to be for the poor, actively seeking them out. “We must restore hope to young people (he is reported to have said), help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace” (126). While he may sound almost too good to be true, polls indicate that his approval rate is 84%, a rating, one wag said, most politicians would kill for.

Many of the pictures in the book attest to the warm reception Francis invariably receives. His bright smile and warm movie-star demeanor make him look like everyone’s favorite uncle. Dave Yoder, the photographer, was given permission to poke his camera wherever it seemed appropriate. The results are spectacular, if sometimes redundant, photographs. It is easy to be moved by the picture of the ecstatic pope freeing a white dove (210);



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it is a picture that could well be framed and hung in many homes. His expression of wonder seems genuine; and the symbolic hope for peace appears to be more than a mere gesture.

Mixed with dozens of photos of Pope Francis warmly “pressing the flesh” are other stunning pictures of the Vatican. A picture of 80,000 people jammed into St. Peter’s Square (44) and a long exposure (160) of Mass in the crowded Basilica of St. Peter’s are breathtaking. The sinuous lines of fire created by candles moving along the main aisle are a marvel of Photoshop; the image might make an apt illustration for a discussion of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the church.

The picture on the book’s cover (and book jacket) shows the pope (or perhaps a stand-in) pausing quietly to survey the interior of the Sistine Chapel. The white-robed figure stands and gazes at Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment*. The chapel beyond the entrance portal is empty in a way that no tourist will ever see it. If one can’t afford a trip to visit the Vatican, contemplating this picture might be the next best thing to being there.

In addition to the informative essay on the pope in particular, there is an intriguing profile of the history of the papacy in general. In a few packed pages Draper hops, skips, and jumps over two thousand years of Vatican history and the popes who served or ruled there. The essay does not gloss over some of the seedy or embarrassing moments in papal history. In addition to acknowledging the powerful leadership of Gregory VII, Draper recounts the militaristic leadership of Urban II, who led troops into the bloody tragedy that became the first of nine crusades.

Of interest to Lutherans, perhaps, is that this essay contains only six words about the Protestant Reformation (149), while the only other reference to this event is a brief entry on a

timeline (in very small print): “Martin Luther is excommunicated by Pope Leo X for his failure to recant his 95 theses” (246). This is the sole reference in this book to the Reformer and the pope in need of reform.

Perhaps that’s as it should be, for this is a book about the Vatican in general and Pope Francis in particular. Even though the text and the photographs sometime border on hagiography, they give a visible account of the pope who, after all, has been in office for only a little over two years. It is apparent that he is beloved by millions; and the book illustrates that he makes his way humbly and (doubtlessly) shrewdly.

While he doesn’t stress doctrine as his predecessor did, Francis appears open to talking about and doing something about such difficult issues as gay marriage and Eucharist to divorced and remarried couples. He has met with and embraced Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. The pope brings faith into his vocation without being doctrinaire: “Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey” (50).

This colorful book informs and edifies our perception of a significant figure of our time. It is a lovely book to read and view. It might alter some opinions and even open some minds. It would be a good book to consider in light of Pope Francis’s projected visit to the United States this year. One wonders if such a lush and informative book will be produced for the upcoming anniversary of the monk who failed to recant his 95 theses. Conceivably that monk might have had a provocative, even productive, conversation with this pope.

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