

Reviews



THE LORD'S PRAYER, by Nijay K. Gupta. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2017. Pp. 171. \$40.00 (cloth)

In the Northwestern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we designated 2018 as the Year of Prayer. Prayer has been our year-long focus as we seek to strengthen the prayer lives of our leaders (pastors, deacons, church staff, and Church Council leaders) and strengthen the ministry of prayer in our parishes. As I have traveled throughout the synod, I have asked pastors, deacons, lay leaders, Sunday-school classes, and prayer groups two key questions: (1) Who taught you to pray? (2) Is there a prayer you learned as a child that you continue to pray as an adult? The answer to question 1 is almost always “my mother.” The answer to question 2 is almost always “The Lord’s Prayer” (the traditional version).

We pray the Lord’s Prayer a lot. This is the last prayer I pray at the end of my morning devotions. Every morning of every day. This is the prayer we pray corporately at every worship service, every week. I cannot remember not knowing or praying this prayer. And I’ll admit, there are times that I’m not praying it but just saying it. I promise to be more mindful of those times. This recently published theological commentary, *The Lord’s Prayer*, has helped me to become more mindful when I pray the beautiful prayer that Jesus taught.

The Lord’s Prayer is a 2017 publication written by Professor Nijay K. Gupta, associate professor of New Testament at Portland Seminary of George Fox University. In the author’s preface, Gupta writes, “It has been my dream for many years to study the Lord’s Prayer in depth and write a theological commentary” (xvii). He adds, “More than any other project I have worked on, this one has been spiritually edifying as the church’s reflection on the Lord’s Prayer throughout the years encouraged me and challenged me in so many ways” (xvii). In *The Lord’s Prayer*, Gupta has written a fine work that will prove spiritually edifying and useful to pastors, deacons, lay leaders, and students of Scripture.

This volume is a part of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series. The intended audience of this series is lifelong students of Scripture. “The primary goal of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is to make available serious, credible biblical scholarship in an accessible and less intimidating format” (xix). In *The Lord’s Prayer*, the publishers meet and exceed their primary goal. This commentary will be a welcome addition to the library of all students of Scripture.

In this volume, Gupta writes a theological and biblical commentary, so the theological and exegetical work is carefully researched and crafted. This book is also a practical commentary written to help with preaching and teaching.

One feature that I really like about Gupta's commentary is his use of multimedia elements. His work is peppered with snippets of literature, theatre, church history, and the visual arts. Included in the back sleeve of the commentary is a CD that includes a PDF version of the entire book. Readers can use the CD to access the artwork, photos, and many hyperlinks that will take them directly to key websites. The CD makes searching and research almost effortless. Multimedia is a real strength of this work and worth the full price of the book.

After an extensive and well-written introduction, Gupta arranges his work by devoting a chapter to each of the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer. For Lutheran catechism enthusiasts, Gupta combines the second and the third petitions (Your

kingdom come. Your will be done.) and the sixth and seventh petitions (Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil). Gupta then expounds upon each prayer petition (chapter) with a deep look at the ancient texts: the Old Testament, Second Temple literature, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Gospel of Luke.

At the end of each chapter is a section called "Connections." This is my favorite section. Here, Gupta connects each petition of the Lord's Prayer with Christian life, thought, and art. In the chapter entitled, "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread," Gupta embeds a painting from Russian artist Ilya Mashkov entitled *The Bread of Moscow*, followed by a poem by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda called "An Ode to Bread," followed by the German hymn "We Plough the Fields and Scatter." This brilliant use of multimedia



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Another part of Gupta's book that I appreciated is found in the chapter entitled, "Let Your Kingdom Come, Let Your Will Be Done on Earth as in Heaven." Here Gupta argues that when Jesus prayed "Your kingdom come," he was envisioning "a peaceful, humble kingdom with a generous and hospitable king" (80). Gupta has a way of helping us see a vision of Jesus that is expansive and full of life. Like Jesus, he helps us to see not simply what is but what the world might become when we pray "Our Father, who art in heaven . . ."

Go out and pick up a copy of *The Lord's Prayer* by Nijay K. Gupta.

Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin
Northwestern Ohio Synod ELCA

THE SOLDIER WHO KILLED A KING, by David Kitz. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017. Pp. 288. \$14.99 (paper).

Movies and television series sometimes inform the viewing public that "the film you are about to see is a true story based on actual historical facts." Whatever follows, however, is often an engaging fictionalized account of those facts. A similar caveat should be attached to *The Soldier Who Killed a King: A True Retelling of the Passion*. No matter how captivating the narrative may be, it is essentially biblical fiction of the same category as Dorothy Sayers's *The Man Born to Be King* and similar works.

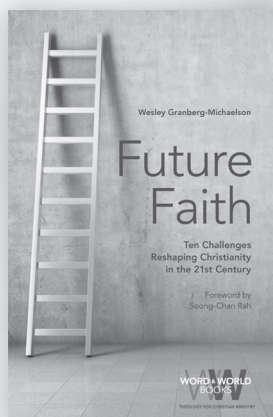
The fog of fiction descends early when the soldier of the title (Marcus Longinus) catches sight of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey nearly half a mile away. Their eyes meet, and much to Longinus's

surprise, over the din of the noisy crowd he hears the prophet's voice quite clearly saying, "I have a future for you." There is much to endure before that future comes to pass.

This distant meeting of eyes is stamped with a date and time (a literary device that opens every subsequent chapter): *Four in the afternoon, Sunday, April 2, AD 30*. What follows is an hour-by-hour account of Christ's passion and resurrection as told by the eponymous soldier, ending (spoiler alert) with the first encounter between that chastened soldier and the risen Christ: *Nine at night, Sunday, April 9*. For reasons that are not explained, the author ignores the biblical witness of the early morning visitation of the women to the empty tomb as well as the momentous conversation between Mary Magdalene and the risen Jesus as told in John's gospel.

Dramatic effect seems to be a key element in this retelling of the brutal passion narrative from the point of view of the conscience-driven Roman soldier. In this soldier's first-person account, we learn of his military and personal background as well as his shameful role in leading Jesus through the horrible hours and days of trial and crucifixion. He admits to helping nail Jesus to the cross, a piece of the story that emphasizes the gruesome. Each of the twenty-four hammer blows is embellished with commentary, including some of the victims' screams.

This part of the story, as well as the obscene trials before Pilate and Caiaphas, will require a strong stomach on the part of the reader. The trial before Pilate is told in something like twenty-eight verses in John's Gospel, but it takes well over fifteen grueling pages in the book. Much of this narrative, as noted above, is designed for dramatic effect.



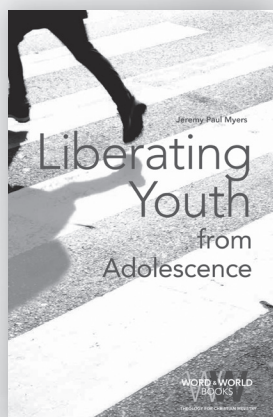
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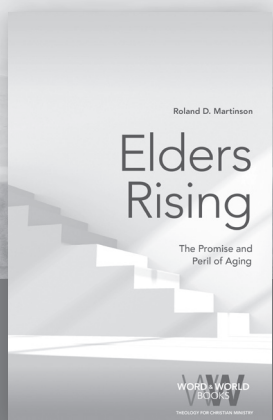
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The events of Holy Week are disturbing enough in the four canonical Gospels; they are certainly not pleasant reading in this unsanitary conflation of the four Gospels narrated by a haunted military minion of the state.

The story obviously contains historical characters like Pilate, Caiaphas, and of course Jesus. But there is also a fictional supporting cast of characters that include Renaldo, a faithful fellow centurion, and Zelda, Marcus's wife, who comforts him with some discreetly reported intimacy and the promise of pregnancy. The austere story line contains some humorous moments for dramatic effect: "In a few short minutes, Benjamin of Alexandria was on the streets of Jerusalem outfitted in flowing robes and phylacteries. He appeared at ease, in his element, like a devout fish enjoying a swim in a bowl of holy water" (22).

Such light moments are nonetheless rare in this retelling of the passion. All of that retelling belongs to Marcus Longinus, who is in every scene. Many of his words tell of his doubts, discomfort, and guilt at what his violent duty calls him to do. In this sense, this book might resonate with readers whose piety might permit them to experience the passion from Marcus's tortured perspective.

It is unlikely that readers of serious theological journals will seek this book out. To a large extent it is gritty faux history. It is possible, though, that people in

the congregations that theological leaders serve may find this story engaging—flaws and grim and dramatic effects notwithstanding. Some groups may find it suitable for reading and pondering during Lent.

Sadly, it is also possible that this interpretation of Holy Week might cause some mischief, especially since the biblical story is misrepresented. Omitting Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb and replacing her with the long-suffering but redeemable centurion is simply inaccurate and misleading. Some readers might be uneasy with the grim dramatic liberties taken with the story of the passion. On the other hand, the history of art often roughs up reality for dramatic effect. Consider the disquieting works of such artists as Hieronymus Bosch or of such sanguinary filmmakers as Mel Gibson in *The Passion of the Christ*. And for some readers of a certain age, the title of this book may recall the crusty image of John Wayne in the 1965 film *The Greatest Story Ever Told* as he stands in full armor at the foot of the cross and avers, like Marcus Longinus in Kitz's book:

"Truly, this man was (the) Son of God."

The Soldier Who Killed a King is, in its way, a true story based on biblical facts—and other facts as well.

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