

# Reviews



**BIBLICAL GREEK: A COMPACT GUIDE**, by William D. Mounce, 2nd edition, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 212 pages. \$22.99.

This book represents another entry in the universe of resources that Bill Mounce has developed for teaching and learning New Testament Greek. While its place in Mounce's catalog and its place in the development of a Greek course would be worthy of a review in and of itself, I will instead focus on its utility as a resource for the learner who has already completed some Greek instruction and is interested in continuing to use their Greek knowledge.

To begin, the "compact" in the subtitle refers more to the physical size of the book (4"x6") than to the breadth of its contents, which span 212 pages. In contrast to standard grammars (e.g., Funk's *Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature*), *Biblical Greek: A Compact Guide* aims to be a more comprehensive resource. In addition to a Greek grammar, it contains a section on morphology and a lexicon.

Starting at the end of the book, the lexicon contains all the words that occur more than ten times in the Greek New Testament. In keeping with the compact aspect of the guide, Mounce generally provides single-word glosses, except in cases where multiple words are necessary to cover the semantic range of a word. Each verb entry

contains all the principal parts as they appear in the New Testament. Mounce innovates here and adds the imperfect in parentheses to the principal-part list. The prevalence of imperfect verbs in the narrative sections of the New Testament will make this a useful innovation for the beginning reader.

The section on morphology is by far the longest section of the book, principally because, unlike the other two sections, it is intended to be comprehensive. For example, the section on the first declension contains not only the expected paradigms (feminine nouns in  $\alpha/\eta$ , masculine nouns in  $\alpha/\eta$ ), but also charts for unusual nouns such as  $\text{Ματασσις}$ , which only occurs three times in the New Testament—twice in the genealogy of Matthew and once in Revelation. The third declension continues this expansive trend, with twenty-four paradigms to illustrate the entire range of consonant stem possibilities. In addition to charts, the section on the verb contains several pages of useful reminders for the beginning Greek student. Among these are the rules for augmentation and reduplication, as well as an exceptions list that covers the most common oddities in verb formation (e.g., irregular augmentation, stems ending in stops). For the student interested in self-study, the "Master Lists" provide an overview of forms worth memorizing for easier access to the text; this is especially true for the chart

on participles, wherein Mounce includes a column for “six memory forms” that clue the reader in to the tense and mood of individual participles. The verb paradigms are standard fare, though with an eye toward comprehensiveness. The morphology section ends with a discussion of different categories of verbs according to the formation of their principal parts. Once again, this will prove helpful to the student who is looking to move beyond simply memorizing principal parts and wishes to understand the processes of word formation in the Greek of the New Testament period.

The grammar section of *Biblical Greek: A Compact Guide* is the section with the most potential utility for students looking to refresh and extend their knowledge of Greek. Mounce balances technical terminology (“deictic article,” “benefactive middle”) with clear definitions that illustrate the importance of these terms for reading Greek. The upshot for the beginning student is that Mounce provides a concise discussion of general grammar that may have been forgotten, as well as in-depth explorations of the nuances of grammar that may not have been covered in an introductory course. As Greek courses continue to shrink in size without shrinking in scope, a resource that can explain concepts such as conditional sentences or Greek sentence structure is an invaluable tool for instructors to send their students out with.

All in all, even though *Biblical Greek: A Compact Guide* is designed to fit within the realm of Mounce’s other resources, it is highly recommended as a stand-alone book for the Greek student. The combination of a grammar, morphology, and lexicon makes it a one-stop resource for reading Greek. As exposure to large amounts of Greek text is the most important factor in continuing to grow as a

Greek reader, having only one resource necessary to facilitate this reading is invaluable.

Interested students should be aware of a few minor issues that hinder the book’s usability: (1) Though it is expected that Mounce would refer to his other works, the overabundance of references to his *Morphology of Biblical Greek* is both unexpected and at times a barrier to the usability of the book. It is unexpected because first-year students would most likely be exposed to his *Basics of Biblical Greek*. It is a hindrance because instead of giving succinct explanations or providing explanatory titles in the morphology section, Mounce refers the reader back to *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*. This may at times hinder the ability of beginning students to use this resource. (2) As with his other material, Mounce restricts himself to what he terms “biblical Greek.” While students may be most interested in reading biblical texts, Mounce’s restriction limits the utility of this book for reading both texts contemporary to the New Testament and texts antecedent to it (e.g., the Septuagint). (3) While his discussions are usually clear and jargon free, there are some instances where Mounce uses terminology in ways that differ from established scholarship—for example, his use of “ablaut” in the “Eight Noun Rules” to refer to vowel change caused by contraction or compensatory lengthening.

None of these three objections, however, distracts from the value of this book. It is highly recommended both for instructors who are looking for a manageable and jargon-free grammar, as well as for students who wish to continue or renew their Greek knowledge.

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**JOSHUA**, by Carolyn J. Sharp, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary, Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2019. 426 pages. \$62.00.

Carolyn J. Sharp's commentary on Joshua is an essential resource for any pastor who preaches, or would like to preach, on the book of Joshua. Sharp's commentary is also an essential resource for pastors who think they would *never* like to preach on the book of Joshua—or for any readers who have deliberately avoided the book because of its violence. In this volume, Sharp not only attends to the textual, historical, and literary questions that are key to a fuller understanding of the book of Joshua, but also acknowledges that reading and interpreting the Bible are—and have always been—consequential acts affecting real human bodies through history. She does not allow her readers to wiggle out of their discomfort with the book, but instead invites them to accompany her as she faces the text's ethical difficulties head-on.

The book of Joshua describes the Israelites' entrance into and settlement of the land of Canaan following their exodus from Egypt and forty years wandering in the wilderness. In the biblical narrative, the entrance into Canaan involves a series of brutal and decisive military victories against the peoples who already dwell in that land. In other words, Joshua depicts the violent colonization of Canaan by the ancient Israelites, who, as the text tells it, are supported in this endeavor by their God. While the historicity of the conquest is disputed, its violent rhetoric remains. Early in the commentary, Sharp makes it clear that the violence of Joshua is not something to be explained away or ignored. She names as one of the goals

of the volume “to make visible a posture of godly dissent from the genocidal ideology promoted in parts of Joshua” (6). She acknowledges the ways that Joshua's rhetoric of colonization is replicated in programs of colonialism through history, and she shapes the commentary so as to attempt to resist such violence.

As part of the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series, *Joshua* is specifically directed toward Christian readers who read the Bible as Scripture. A hallmark of the series is the presence of many sidebars that supplement the text, addressing linguistic and philological issues, contextual details, or particular angles on a text's interpretation. These sidebars are especially fruitful in Sharp's hands, as they are part of the way she shapes the commentary to resist colonizing rhetoric. One sidebar series, “A Canaanite Voice,” juxtaposes passages from ancient Canaanite literature with texts in Joshua that call for the Canaanites' extermination, with the goal of “help[ing] the reader resist the implied cultural erasure that the book of Joshua seeks to perform in its narrative” (61). Another sidebar series, “Indigeneity under Threat,” adds the voices of indigenous peoples from what is now the United States, as well as insights from the field of Native studies. By interspersing Native voices with the biblical text, the commentary continues to center the real-world implications of Joshua's colonizing rhetoric.

In addition to drawing the reader's attention to what the text of Joshua does, Sharp attends to what Christian readers should, in turn, do with it. Though the commentary rejects Joshua's genocidal rhetoric, it does not reject the book as a source of theological insight. Another of the goals Sharp names early on is “to show that Joshua is a rich resource for contemporary theology, though the

theological work is hard” (6). Again, this goal is achieved not only through the body of the commentary, but also through its sidebars. The sidebar series “For the Preacher,” for instance, includes quotations from many of today’s most well-regarded homiletics, sometimes addressing the book of Joshua directly, but often attending to related themes or topics that Sharp deftly connects to the texts at hand.

Sharp is also to be commended for the breadth of poetry she engages in those interpretive sidebars. Poems from the seventeenth-century English poet John Milton and the nineteenth-century Muskege poet Alexander Posey, no fewer than five poems from Emily Dickinson, and several hymns and gospel songs are among the wide variety of poetry featured in the commentary. The poems provide useful, illustrative connections for a preacher, to be sure, but they also open up space for creative interactions with the biblical text, underscoring that interpretation is an art more than a science, and that interpretation and imagination go hand in hand.

While the primary audience for this series is Christian readers in faith-based contexts, *Joshua* is nonetheless a commentary that should not be missed by biblical scholars working in academia. By necessity it does not delve into, for example, the finer points of redaction criticism of the Deuteronomistic History, though that work certainly informs Sharp’s reading. Indeed, the range of scholarship the commentary reflects with care and concision is remarkable. But the multivocal nature of the commentary also provides a persistent reminder that biblical scholarship does not happen only at our desks or in our heads. We interpret in a matrix of contexts and power structures, and we are

never truly disinterested observers. The Smyth & Helwys *Joshua* commentary models one particularly effective way of reckoning with that profound contextualization.

The book is bundled together with a CD-ROM, which is billed as bringing to the project “powerful searching and research tools.” However, as I was working at home during the COVID-19 shutdown, I was unable to locate a computer with a CD-ROM drive in order to test out the commentary’s digital features. This circumstance is in itself a comment on those features. Their content is no doubt top notch, and navigating the sidebars would be especially smooth with hyperlinks in a digital format, but the technology that houses those features for the series is quickly becoming obsolete. Regardless, the book alone is a treasure, full of erudition, hermeneutical sophistication, and homiletical promise, and it belongs on the shelves of preachers and scholars alike.

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**HEARING JOHN’S VOICE: INSIGHTS FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING**, by M. Eugene Boring, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. 240 pages. \$29.99.

It is unusual to gain in the same volume a resource on both the book of Revelation and the Gospel of John. For that reason alone, M. Eugene Boring’s *Hearing John’s Voice: Insights for Teaching and Preaching* is well worth the price of purchase. The value of the book is not limited to the scope of its content, however.

Boring's prose is sharp, his passion for the subject is clear, and his abiding care for God's church sings out from every page.

Most importantly, the book lives up to its title. Boring presents complex theology always with an eye toward its homiletic or pedagogical use in the church. When discussing John's unique portrayal of Jesus as the Lamb of God, Boring transforms an obscure, academic distinction into a preaching point in the matter of a few sentences. He writes, "Jesus's death as the Lamb of God does indeed represent God's saving act that takes away the sin of the world (1:29, 36), but this is interpreted primarily in terms of the Passover lamb of Exodus, not the sacrificial sin offerings of Leviticus. The Passover celebrated the deliverance of the people of God by overcoming the enslaving evil power of Egypt, not by making possible the forgiveness of sins

for believing, repentant Israelites" (280). Close attention to such biblical details turns good sermons great, and great sermons extraordinary.

The book is dense at times. Yet as with any class from a seasoned professor, the reader gleans as much fruit from what grows along the side trails as from that which sprouts on the main paths. Boring integrates popular literature, culture, and modern history into his discussion. While the examples Boring chooses are precise and relevant, one could have hoped for a greater diversity of sources. Elie Wiesel (255), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (161), and C. S. Lewis (194) are familiar watering holes for modern preachers, who may be seeking untapped resources. Despite this lack, precious seeds for preaching and teaching are strewn throughout the book, as with the proverbial sower of good seed. (Forgive the use



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of an image that is not found in the Gospel of John.) In discussing how the terrifying imagery of God's wrath is upended in Revelation, Boring writes, "The imagery of the lion is still used, but the Lion-Messiah turns out to be the slain Lamb. As in mathematics, when one changes the valence of the sign outside the parentheses, the formulae within the parentheses are retained, but all their values are reversed. In Revelation and the New Testament, the same imagery is used, but every minus is marked out and transformed into a plus. *Crossed out*" (119).

Perhaps also akin to the story of the sower of good seed, the structure of the book is in places haphazard. The larger structure itself is ingenious. Boring begins with two chapters on Revelation, dips quickly into the Johannine epistles, and finishes with a massive section on the Gospel of John. (Boring's best work is without a doubt the first and last chapters, with the middle chapters functioning more as an aside.) This structure compels the reader to take seriously the witness, challenge, and fruits of Revelation before moving into the Gospel. The reader arrives at the Gospel of John better equipped to hear the strains of the apocalyptic and Old Testament symphonies that inspired its writer. And the reading of the evangelist is all the better for it.

The organization within the chapters, however, is difficult to navigate. Boring's analysis loosely follows biblical chapters, but emphasizes themes and motifs over chapter and verse. This layout offers a more holistic understanding of the biblical book than is often possible in an exegetical treatment. But the reader is required to hold in mind where in the biblical book these themes arise. Throughout long discussions, Boring does not offer many guideposts to aid one's memory. The themes are not

always clearly linked to biblical chapters in headings or subheadings. The subheadings are differentiated through fonts and sizes, but not in an intuitive way to help the reader remember how they relate to each other. Thankfully, a fulsome index of scriptural references will aid those seeking Boring's opinion on a certain biblical text for preaching.

The book's structure does lend itself well to teaching purposes. One could imagine this text functioning as the resource for a multi-week adult Bible study on Revelation or the book of John (perhaps, for those who follow the Revised Common Lectionary, during those weeks of the interminable "I Am" statements at the end of summer). The longer that readers can engage with Boring's work, the more they will glean from it. Perhaps here it would be good to switch to a more innately Johannine image. Boring's book does not merely produce good soil for seeds to take root; it changes the reader's eyes so that, when approaching the Johannine literature, they see it—and Jesus—more clearly. To pull from the author himself, "Come and see," as Jesus says it . . . is both command and promise, "Come and you *will see*" (223).

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**GRATEFUL: THE SUBVERSIVE PRACTICE OF GIVING THANKS,** by Diana Butler Bass, New York: HarperOne, 2018. xxxi and 224 pages. \$16.99 (paper).

We are living in times that leave many cynical and depressed about the future. Not only the challenges you may face in

your personal circumstances but also the temper of the times exacts an exhausting toll. This book offers an effective antidote to despair. What makes the book especially efficacious is its two-pronged approach, addressing gratitude as both a personal and a communal practice.

I appreciated the vulnerability of the author in describing her own struggles with giving thanks. The first part of the book explores the value of gratitude as an emotion and an ethic informing personal existence. Being grateful is both a feeling that can be cultivated and an ethic by which to approach life in response to the manifold gifts daily received. The book is punctuated by many stories and quotations that provide food for the soul, all of which helped reorient me on my own journey to live gratefully.

The second part of the book moves beyond the individual to make a significant argument for reclaiming gratitude as a public virtue and practice. Being grateful needs to be understood as a shared emotion that builds up the common good and provides the foundation for a communal ethic to reconstitute social responsibility in civic life. Bass contrasts what might be called the patronage system, which prevails wherever the public good is reduced to self-serving transactions between power brokers, and a society grounded on gratefulness that issues forth in generosity to others according to need. While the primary reference is to ancient Rome (144–45), she also cites instances from our own recent political history that we have come to know very well. The larger argument, however, demonstrates how a shared ethos of thankfulness can heal and strengthen the social fabric, binding us together beyond the fractures caused by the machinations of identity politics.

The book concludes by locating our lives within ever-expanding circles of gratitude. The grateful self contributes in turn to transforming life together with family and friends, in local communities, and for global citizenship. “Gratitude gives us a new story. It opens our eyes to see that every life is, in unique and dignified ways, graced: the lives of the poor, the castoffs, the sick, the jailed, the exiles, the abused, the forgotten, as well as those in more comfortable circumstances” (186). Being grateful can change the world. We begin with our own lives in our local places. We do not have to wait.

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**PARTICIPATING IN GOD’S MISSION: A THEOLOGICAL MISSIOLOGY FOR THE CHURCH IN AMERICA**, by Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018. 332 pages. \$35.00 (paper).

Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile offer a seminal volume on missiology for the United States of America. During my doctoral studies, looking for a missiology for North America similar to the exceptional volumes on missiology in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Sydney Ahlstrom’s *A Religious History of the American People* became a helpful historical and ecclesial companion, yet not a missiological one. It has been difficult to find comprehensive texts that move beyond historical and church-focused discussions and toward the interplay of society, ecclesiology, and the outworking of the Spirit. *Participating in*



*God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* is such a volume and seeks to locate the US as a mission field by rereading its national story through the lens of missiology. The book seeks to join the missional conversation and explore Lesslie Newbigin's question "What is an encounter of the gospel with Western culture?" This type of contextual theological work has been held as a question in missiological debates. We now have a significant contribution in the field of missiology for the church in the United States.

Van Gelder and Zscheile clarify how missiology is a theological endeavor, or as Martin Kahler argued, "Mission is the mother of theology." They propose, "Mission is the generative, creative, and redemptive sending by which the cosmos first came into being and continues to be healed and reconciled in the midst

of brokenness" (36). Missiology is then the critical study of "God's creative and renewing work of forming communities of love, reconciliation, and hope in Christ through the power of the Spirit" (58). This volume discloses the complexity of participating in healing and reconciliation with God in the particular context of North America.

The book is organized into three parts. Part 1 articulates the crisis and current unraveling of the church in the US. Van Gelder and Zscheile critically, yet succinctly, detail the Euro-tribal churches' love affair with American exceptionalism and functional rationalism. This culminates in a clarifying, yet unsettling, narration of the church as bureaucratic denominationalism. It ends with a missiological framework for both reading the history and discerning how to live forward as the people of God.

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Part 2 is a detailed mission history of the American church over five distinct periods. This historical narration is a critical witness that names and unmask the powers of the Euro-tribal and colonial movements of Christianity in the US. The structures of each historical-epoch section are well organized and follow a pattern: introduction to the period; key themes, events, and population shifts (with focus on African American, Native American, and White American populations, in that order); evolution of congregational systems; developments in denominational and church organizations; developments in missiology; and the forming of leaders and theological education. Each section provides a wealth of resources in the footnotes.

Finally, part 3 deepens the analysis of the unraveling and provides a prophetic perspective on how churches might evolve given the current realities. Part 3 seeks to be helpful, yet not prescriptive. The authors demonstrate a way of doing biblical and theological imagination in dialogue with other fields of inquiry. They offer a map for how Scripture and theology interact with the current discussions in innovation, education, networks, and organizational science. This work provides new mental models for engaging the questions of mission.

The authors provide multiple levels for understanding the field of missiology in the United States, yet the volume provides three particular benefits to the study of missiology: (1) the power of mission in marginalized and minority US communities, (2) naming and unmasking the clericalism and hubris of Euro-tribal ecclesial systems, and (3) providing inter-disciplinary perspectives on living in union with the Holy Spirit in the age to come.

I remember reading Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* in college and wondering, "Why didn't I learn this in history class?" In a similar way, this present volume is useful for White and privileged readers to (re)discover a history often ignored. Van Gelder and Zscheile attempt to offer a thick description of a contested history. They locate racial-ethnic minority communities as central agents in the mission of God. This stands critically against the narratives of American exceptionalism and the Euro-tribal and colonial histories of mission. I am impressed that two white men are able to detail a history that challenges their own social location and echoes what James Cone asserted fifty years ago: "Whites today cannot separate themselves from the culture that lynched blacks, unless they confront their history and expose the sin of white supremacy."

The volume also names and unmask the clericalism and hubris of denominations that are coming apart at the seams in light of current population and demographic trends in the US. The tracing of Euro-tribal Reformation traditions unmask the false sense of supremacy that these traditions and their clergy-leaders have enjoyed for almost four hundred years. Yet clergy in these traditions are now at a loss as their communities face both decline and demise. Van Gelder and Zscheile reflect on this story and echo Andrew Walls's prophetic claim that Euro-tribal traditions are primarily the "clan history" of Europe. It is clearly documented elsewhere that leaders are at a loss, and the existing mental models are insufficient for understanding the story of God differently. This book serves to help discover new ways of seeing and believing.

This leads to the third contribution—an interdisciplinary approach to union with God in the ages to come. Throughout the volume, the authors draw not only from history and theology but also from the social sciences and organizational sciences to consider new mental models for engaging mission in the US. This work presents an understanding of the Spirit through a Trinitarian perspective, and it demonstrates mission in participatory, democratic, decentralized, and network possibilities for the church. Though the priesthood of believers is not a central theological claim in this volume, the authors are painting God’s mission with, for, and from the oft-forgotten Reformation doctrine.

This is a volume of great research and contour. It is not to be digested in one or two sittings. In thinking through how to use this book with church leaders, I wonder if the volume is a curriculum for local ministry leaders. The core of the book is the context of the US church and its relationship to broader social movements. Local church leaders, especially ecumenical ministerial groups, would benefit from slowly reading chapter 2, and then placing their questions within the missiological framework of part 3.

Even more, a collective reading of part 2 invites leaders to wonder: How does each era of mission history find itself at home in my current ministry system? How have we participated in the false exceptionalism and the colonial history? What are the underlying assumptions in the ministry that we ignore or take for granted? What is the ongoing work of the Spirit that is awakening us here and now? The authors provide an honest history, and there are layers of the US story that beg for lament, confession, and forgiveness; yet

there are also narratives that beg for remembrance and renewal. For example, the story of the British developing “praying towns” for Native Americans is an early example of sanctuary cities. Obviously, this memory, among others, is not without its nuances and limitations, yet each epoch invites the possibility of discovering a “usable past.”

Readers may want to keep close to the summary of the mission history (page 61) and to the chart, “Public Missiologies of the US Church over Time” (256–57). Also, Van Gelder and Zscheile use section headings well, and readers can actually engage a one-to-three-page section on its own in order to wonder how this American story is particularized in their communities. In the end, leaders will wrestle with how to be missiological as we read and ask, What are the theological questions and what are the missiological invitations for us to “join God in the creating and renewing work of forming communities of love, reconciliation, and hope in Christ through the power of the Spirit?” (58). Or to borrow from Willie Jennings and a doctrine of creation, “Do you know the land from which you benefit?” Van Gelder and Zscheile invite the analysis to remain local.

If you are leading a church and either you or your leaders seem to be saying, “I don’t even know the questions to ask,” then this book is for you. It does not answer all of the questions but raises them within the field of missiology. And the questions that are answered are not done so with technical fixes or default strategies; participation in God’s mission will come through innovation and experimentation at the local level.

This volume is much needed in the church today. It invites readers—pastors, laity, denominational leaders,

and seminary professors—to deeper missiological investigation for ministry in the US. This book is a participation with others who are writing at the intersection of the gospel and US society, including Benjamin Conner on disability and ministry, Chanequa Walker-Barnes on race and gender, Monica Coleman on mental health, Michelle Alexander and Dominique Gilliard on mass incarceration, and Randy Woodley on Native spirituality and creation care, among many others. The contours of religion and mission in the US are significant, and this volume points to a host of necessary questions and prophetic possibilities for leading the church in mission today.

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**BEATING GUNS: HOPE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE WEARY OF VIOLENCE**, by Shane Claiborne and Michael Martin, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019. 288 pages. \$19.99.

Progressive activist and author Shane Claiborne and activist Michael Martin have written an impassioned and well-researched plea for a Christian response to ongoing gun violence—and indeed, the prevalence of gun culture—in the United States. Martin and Claiborne have both been involved in a movement called RAWTools that collects guns and publicly re-forges/“beats” them into farming implements and other tools, so their book can be understood as a multifaceted attempt to re-forge the spiritual basis upon which US Christians in particular approach guns.

Gun culture—which this reviewer would define as the cultural imagination whereby gun ownership and use move from being, at best, a necessary evil to being positively celebrated and made integral to identity—in the United States is a multifaceted issue, and the book’s greatest strength is its well-researched approach to the variegated strands that make up the collective picture by which the US far surpasses other developed nations in episodes of gun violence. The vexed history of gun control and race, the growing problem of suicide by gun, intersections of capitalism and masculinity, militarism, and aesthetic and moral formation of youth in violence all coalesce within Claiborne and Martin’s discussion. For a book clearly written with non-specialist accessibility in mind, the research represented in the footnotes is both impressive and reassuring when it comes to the authors’ own credibility. Moreover, the book has a kind of liturgical rhythm in that, throughout the discussion, various sidebars punctuate the grim statistics: both “memorials” to victims of gun violence and testimonies about inspiring episodes of peacemaking.

Above all, the authors see America’s addiction to guns and gun violence as a fundamentally theological problem that stems from a lack of the peacemaking imagination provided by Jesus’s example and teachings. They call for an “exorcism” whereby the idolatry by which American Christians trust guns to provide security and identity can be replaced by the vulnerability that comes, not from passivity in the face of violence, but rather from active peacemaking. The collective cultural imagination by which America defines freedom and self-determination by the capacity to inflict violence rather than

to foster peace and vulnerability is one in which theology and spiritual formation play a key role. Readers of Martin Luther will recognize in the background the basic assertion that one's God is that in which one places trust; by that measure, for many Christians, guns and the false freedom they represent truly do seem to have taken on an idolatrously divine status.

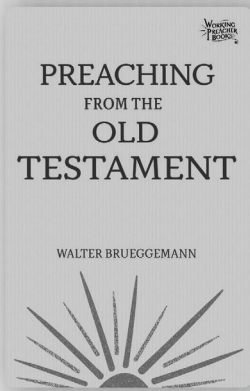
While Claiborne and Martin do touch briefly on Christian complicity (particularly white evangelicalism), one area that their book does not explore in-depth (perhaps due to the progressive evangelical orientation of its authors) is the long tradition of Christian cooperation with militarism and government deployment of violence. The hard truth is that, from Constantine onward, pacifism within the church has been a minority (and largely sectarian) view. While the authors point to strong tendencies within biblical and early church witness toward Christian pacifism, their case

would be strengthened if they reckoned with the advent of such things as "just war" tradition, "two swords" theory, and other specifically theological justifications for Christian support of violence.

Likewise, from a theological perspective there are several background questions about God and God's character that are implicit within any Christian discussion of violence, such as: Is the Christian eschatological vision of Christ's coming again one of violence whereby sinners/evildoers are vanquished and condemned, or is the fundamental eschatological vision one of reconciliation and peace, including between God and God's enemies?

Even with these further questions to be explored, Claiborne and Martin's book stands as a valuable contribution and, with its accessible and inviting tone, will be particularly helpful for adult discussion groups and community discussions in churches. The book ends with a call for a series of what most might (or


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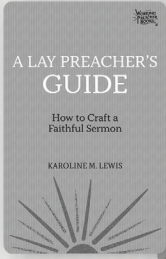
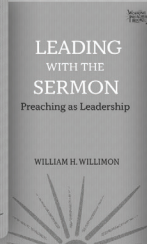
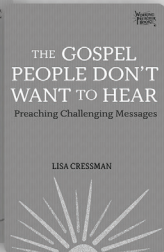
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at least should) consider common-sense gun reforms, including universal background checks, closing loopholes around weapons purchased at gun shows, banning of semiautomatic assault weapons for private ownership, and better tracking of guns used in crimes. That these practical suggestions are, in this book, couched in such a bold reclamation of a Christian peacemaking imagination and bolstered by numerous anecdotal,

yet powerful, instances of peacemaking in action makes this volume a helpful intervention in a national conversation in which Christians who do not wholeheartedly support the marriage of God and guns need to continue to develop this sort of faithful voice.

Robert Saler  
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