

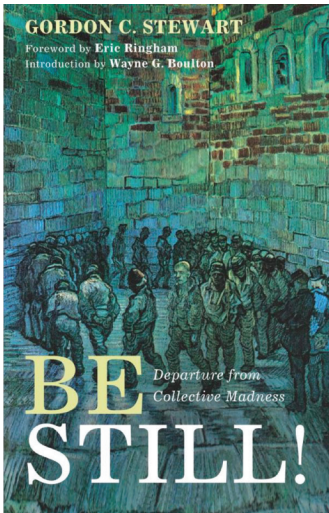


Book Reviews

January 2018

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

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Be Still: Departure from Collective Madness.

By Gordon C. Stewart.
Eugene Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-5326-0065-4. xviii & 165 pages. Paper. \$25.00.

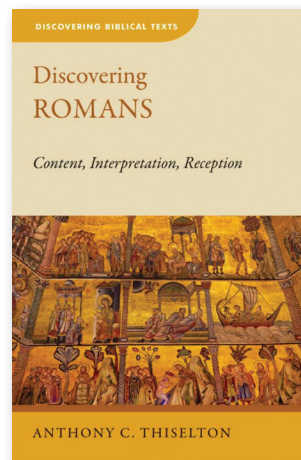
Picture Gordon Stewart in a hospital surgical waiting room, attentive for word about his friend, outcome unknown. Six Oromo individuals are there, presumably praying for a Muslim patient. Gordon asks them to include his friend—which they do, using the lovely Islamic prayer for well-being. Later, he encounters them, and they say they have done as he requested. The chorus of prayer is finished. The picture closes. You quietly draw your own conclusion. A Stewart vignette of coping, into which he has drawn you with economically beautiful words. These forty-eight essays, each two or three pages long, form *Be Still! Departure from Collective Madness*. Many were aired on Minnesota Public Radio or NPR or “All Things Considered”; one meets Gordon also through his blog “Views from the Edge,” written from retirement in Chaska, Minnesota, and frequently these days featuring “conversations” with very-young grandson Elijah—himself a profound question-asker.

Stewart is a Presbyterian (USA) clergyman, a person of deep conviction with the soul of a social activist, who has served a number of posts as ecumenical campus minister. Graduate of Maryville College and McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, he brings a questing mind to many locations in our “mad world.” His words take the reader to grave yards; visits “home” to South Paris, Maine; gun shops (the NRA cannot like Stewart); the “Occupy” movement; global warming; Nevada’s Wheeler Peak where a bristle-cone pine had been assassinated; directly into reflective human hearts. One meets many of the author’s intellectual kin: Wendell Berry, Martin Luther King, Elie Wiesel; his college and seminary mentors Willem Zuurdeeg

and Esther Swenson, William Stringfellow, Koski Koyama—and a host of biblical figures from the Genesis J writer to Jesus. Each essay grounds itself in a quotation from people whom the reader wants to know better, such as his late and lamented friend Steve Shoemaker, one of a group of seminary friends who helped to see the book into publication.

This is a gem to be read and reread in fits and starts. That such a collection should find its way onto bedside tables and into browsers is stimulating testimony that collective madness will invariably run into common sense and close observation. Psalm 46 will never speak the same way for Gordon Stewart’s reader.

Edward F. Campbell
Retired Old Testament Professor
McCormick Seminary, Chicago



Discovering Romans: Content, Interpretation, Reception. By Anthony C. Thiselton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7409-2. xii & 297 pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Weighty commentaries on Romans produced during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have affected contemporary understandings of Paul, his mission, and what he sought to achieve in writing the letter. In *Discovering Romans*, Thiselton has produced a volume that provides a quite thorough and insightful guide for anyone who wishes to come abreast of current scholarship.

Thiselton relies heavily, as he admits, on the works of major scholars who have written commentaries on Romans over the last decades (especially C. E. B. Cranfield, James D. G. Dunn, Joseph Fitzmyer, Robert Jewett, and N. T. Wright), as well as other works. The commentary that he provides consists of frequent quotations from these and other scholars. As such, the book engages the scholarship of others and, along the way, the author frequently adopts conclusions on disputed issues, providing the reader with a state of the art report on studies of Romans.

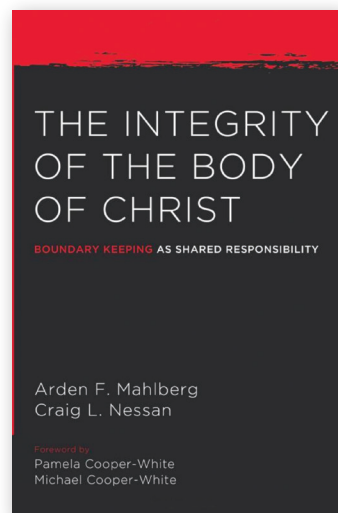
The book consists of twenty-five brief chapters. The first six have to do with the significance of Romans, strategies for interpreting it, its “reception history” (among patristic writers, medieval writers, the Reformers, and modern scholars such as F. C. Baur, Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders, and others), text critical issues, and a chapter on Paul’s life. The remaining nineteen chapters are a commentary on the letter. Among the issues taken up, those that have gained wide acceptance in recent scholarship include: that Junia (16:7) was a woman apostle; that in Romans 9–11 Paul envisions “two tracks” to salvation (faith in Christ for



Gentiles, irrevocable election for the Jewish people); that Phoebe (16:1) was the bearer of the letter to Rome; and that she would have read the letter to various house churches in Rome, of which there may have been five with anywhere between forty and 100 members altogether. Other positions adopted are more controversial. For example, on Romans 3:25 Thiselton accepts the older idea that the Greek term *hilastērion* connotes “propitiation,” which implies an appeasement of God by the death of Christ—although he makes allowance for “expiation.” Thiselton adopts the view of Jewett that Phoebe would actually lead (“spearhead”) Paul’s proposed mission to Spain. Thiselton endorses the “New Perspective” on Paul (Sanders, Dunn, Wright, and others), even though some of the specific proposals have come under serious criticism of late. And Thiselton interprets the Greek word *telos* in Romans 10:4 as “goal,” not “end,” so “Christ is the *goal* of the law,” not “the *end* of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Along the way, Thiselton cites interpreters on both sides of each issue.

By means of this book Thiselton has made scholarship on Romans accessible to a wide public. He provides basic, essential information for interpretation in general, and frequently alerts the reader to alternative interpretations of specific issues. As such, the book can be recommended for those who are willing to engage in the study of a complex biblical book, one of the most important documents in history

Arland J. Hultgren
Luther Seminary



The Integrity of the Body of Christ: Boundary-Keeping as Shared Responsibility. By

Arden F. Mahlberg and Craig L. Nessian. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4982-3536-5. xii & 223 pages. Paper. \$29.00.

These days there is a tendency to define boundary-keeping myopically. What is properly a broad subject central to the identity and mission of the church and a responsibility shared by all has been reduced to one of its subtopics: professional sexual ethics. However important the latter may be, Mahlberg and Nessian do the church a great service by resisting this distortive inclination. They relocate their analysis of this issue into a freewheeling and practical conversation about the necessity of establishing and maintaining boundaries in multiple arenas of church life. Theirs is a text rich with case scenarios and vivid il-

lustrations of best practices in this regard.

While boundary-keeping serves others, they note, it may well prove personally costly. It can jeopardize one’s own self-interest, occasionally increasing one’s loneliness for example. Thus, we must not trust our own judgment, biased as it is toward self-interest and blinded as it is by overconfidence in our own self-awareness and self-discipline. Instead, like responsible airline pilots, all those engaged in ministry should follow traditional best practices. Here are a few samples of the psychologically and theologically rich insights that fill this book.

Boundary-keeping mandates that we watch closely not only our words and deeds, but our thoughts as well. Studies suggest that lingering over temptations tend to make them stronger; thus, everyone needs to practice “custody of the eyes” and the “quick release of thoughts.”

In worship, we delineate and respect the ultimate boundary. Nothing in a church’s sanctuary should distract us from giving our full attention to God during worship: not sermon illustrations, photography, or applause, not even fellowship.

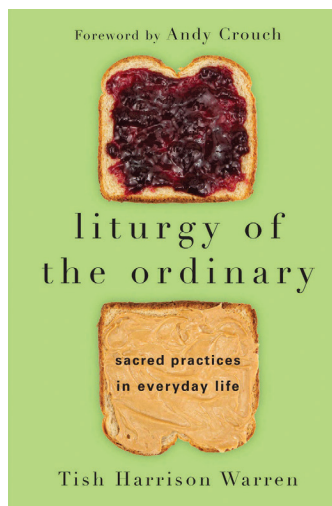
Neither should we trespass against the command to keep holy the Sabbath. All of us find deeply resting from work and allowing others to do likewise difficult, but this is particularly so for clergy. Too many, both ordained and laity, define the pastoral role as all-inclusive and mistakenly conflate clerical functions with a minister’s core identity as a child of God. This confusion prevents us from seeing the pastor’s need to set time limits on their church work and tend to their other “selves” as family members or citizens, etc.

All conversations should be respected as confidential, unless specified otherwise or unless the prevention of harm requires otherwise. Unless information is shared publicly, it still belongs to the person that shared it. Ownership over it has not been transferred. Only its care has been entrusted to another.

Viewpoints not our own may be valuable. When criticized, Mahlberg and Nessian recommend that church leaders sidestep “the attack,” adopt a mediating position, and actively listen to this potentially valid perspective. Only then should they consider sharing their own contrasting view.

All those who study church administration, as well as parish councils and leadership teams, if not entire congregations, should read and discuss this fine compilation of concrete rules for healthy boundary-keeping.

Patricia Beattie Jung
Saint Paul School of Theology



Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life. By Tish Harrison Warren. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8308-4623-8. 182 pages. Paper. \$16.00.

There is a movement underway to reclaim the activity of God in the ordinary realms of life as the primary

places we live out our faith in relationship with others. What is particularly splendid about this book are the explicit connections made between liturgical practices and how we participate through the lens of the liturgy in the most mundane activities of life, giving rapt attention to the humble stirrings of the Spirit. Worship instructs us, with reference to Stanley Hauerwas, to “act out the story of the gospel with and through our bodies” (46). All and each of the practices enacted in liturgy are reflective of life practices, for example, confession as truth telling, hymn singing as forming lives of praise, or intercessions as lending priority to how we order our days according to life-giving commitments. The author accompanies the reader in spiritual direction for carrying these liturgical practices into daily life: “The crucible of our formation is in the monotony of our daily routines” (34).

Among the routine experiences to which Warren gives reflection are waking, making the bed, brushing teeth, losing keys, eating leftovers, fighting with one’s spouse, checking email, sitting in traffic, calling a friend, drinking tea, and sleeping. The mindfulness to which this book summons us truly is invitation to discover the infinite in the finite. Among my favorite passages are those connecting passing of the peace and the washing of feet with serving God’s shalom in relationship to others throughout life. “God’s ministry of reconciliation works its way into all of life, even into these small moments of our day” (87). God’s kingdom really breaks in through liturgy but also through “our ‘scattered’ worship in our work each day” (92). Compare the insightful theology shared with the work of Dwight L. DuBois in *The Scattering: Imagining a Church that Connects Faith and Daily Life* (Wipf & Stock, 2015).

Finally, for those of you like me who devote countless hours to email: “My identity as one who is ‘blessed and sent’ must be embraced and enfolded, even in these hours of email as I seek to form better habits of responsibility and discipline” (94). This is a book that will touch every reader, leading us to develop the eyes to perceive and ears to detect God’s presence in every moment of life. A mysticism of the ordinary is the purest expression of faith.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Making Peace with the Earth: Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice. Edited by Grace Ji-Sun Kim. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016. ISBN: 978-2-8254-1668-8. xxiii & 274 pages. Paper. \$25.00.

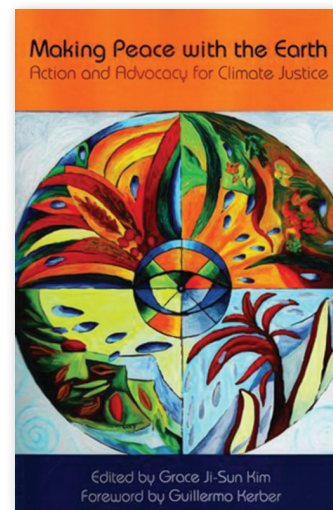
Climate change is increasingly recognized as an ethical issue. The disproportionate effect that climate change has on the poor makes combating it and its consequences an essential concern for all those who work for justice.

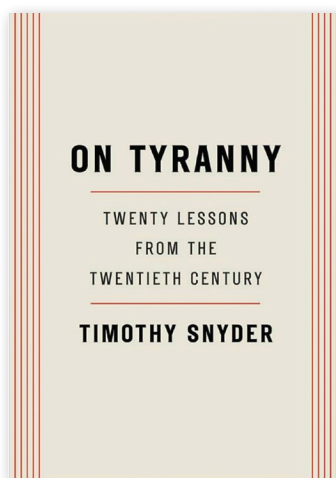
This collection is based on the premise that faith communities have the potential to drive the kind of societal transformation that is needed to address climate change. It aims to show through specific cases how churches and related organizations have been seeking to make peace with the earth through work for climate justice. It draws on authors from all over the world, most of them affiliated with the World Council of Churches’ Climate Change Working Group.

The chapters include reports on what denominations and faith-based organizations are doing to fight climate change, scientific accounts that explain why action is needed, descriptions of how climate change is affecting particular countries and regions, theological calls for work for climate justice, and one artistic reflection. The average reader will probably find it difficult to wade through some of the chapters, a number of which read more like reports than inspiring tales of how churches and church bodies have taken action. While it does address what individual church congregations can do, the collection will probably be appreciated more by denominational officials, academics, and leaders of nonprofits than by pastors or laypeople.

Although it aims to inspire action and describe the unique contributions churches can make to address climate change, in this regard it does not quite live up to its potential, as Ernst Conradie all but admits in his excellent epilogue. Its primary contribution may well be in documenting a remarkably diverse and global collection of faith-based advocacy and work for climate justice.

Jeffrey D. Meyers, PhD student
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago





On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century.

By Timothy Snyder.
New York: Tim Duggan,
2017. ISBN: 978-0-8041-9011-4. 126
pages. Paper. \$7.99.

This is a penetrating, pointed book, written for this moment in history by the Levin Professor of History

at Yale University. It is possible for democracies to become dizzy and distracted, and to degenerate complacently from within. Civilizations have come and gone before us, democracies as well. The author knows the sweep of history from ancient Greece and Rome to the Soviet Union and Germany in the twentieth century. He points out that “fascism and communism were responses to globalization: to the real and perceived inequalities it created, and the apparent helplessness of the democracies addressing them” (12). This is a cautionary tale that such things can happen here, if we lack political vigilance and activism.

The twenty lessons may appear simple, but the practice of these is challenging. “Defend institutions.” Cynicism about politicians is corrosive of the constitution and the government constructed upon it. It is a matter of holding politicians accountable to our institutions and what they represent. “Believe in truth.” A populace cannot surrender to the “endless repetition” of untruths that undermine public discourse (67). Likewise a populace cannot succumb to “magical thinking” that tyrants employ to promise simple and self-contradictory solutions to complex problems. It is a matter of resisting the slogans and deceit that undermine public discourse and thereby public institutions: “Post-truth is pre-fascism” (71). “Be a patriot.” Patriotism does not mean thoughtless obedience to the dictates of those in power. Patriotism means holding one’s country to its core ideals and being as courageous as one can in doing so. Patriotism entails active participation, more and more to my mind at the grassroots, to revivify what ails our democracy.

This book provides a needed civics lesson of a reasonable length, in direct language, and at an affordable price. It is informed by haunting historical lessons from the recent past. The appeal to activism among the young generations is especially poignant: “If young people do not begin to make history, politicians of eternity and inevitability will destroy it” (126). We are living in a vulnerable historical moment. I pray we can rally the forces of democracy to resist the destruction of the common good by advocating for the most vulnerable people among us.

*Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary*

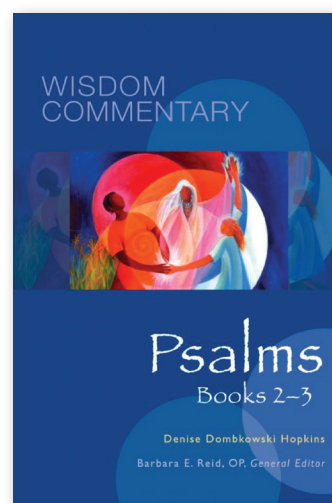
Psalms Books 2-3.

Wisdom Commentary.
By Denise Dombkowski
Hopkins. Collegeville,
Minnesota: Liturgical
Press, 2016. ISBN
978-0-8146-8120-6.
xlv & 411 pages. Cloth.
\$39.95; Paper \$19.99.

The Wisdom Commentary series aims to read all the books of the Bible, including the Apocrypha/deuterocanonical works, from a feminist perspective while not neglecting other exegetical questions that face twenty-first century readers. In many respects this marks the maturity, even the main-streaming of the feminist reproach. Most of the commentators in this series, but by no means all, are women. Dombkowski Hopkins teaches at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Books 2 and 3 contain Ps 42–89, and the commentary is based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), with some corrections. Ps 51 is linked by its superscription to David’s sin with Bathsheba. While the commentator recognizes that this superscription is secondary, she acknowledges that every interpretation is affected by this superscription, and she includes an excursus by Katherine Brown, which goes deeper into the issue. She refers to David’s “rape” of Bathsheba, but she does not explain that judgment—many scholars would in fact agree with her. Instead of referring to “a sinner when my mother conceived me,” she believes the word “conceive” really means to rut, to be in heat, giving the conception negative overtones. Instead of the NRSV’s “mercy,” she translates as “womb-love,” first suggested by Phyllis Trible.

In her interpretation of the moving complaint in Ps 77:1–3 she includes an excursus by Audrey Coretta Price on sex trafficking which could easily evoke such a complaint. “Let us demand of the sex trafficking pharaoh to let God’s people go.” Frequently the commentator recalls a biblical story to underscore the drama of the Psalm. The psalmist’s feeling of homelessness and suffering in Ps 84, for example, is linked to the unnamed Israelite serving girl in 2 Kings 5. But was this girl seeking revenge by sending Naaman back into Israelite territory? The difficult Ps 82 in her reading critiques God’s unfaithfulness in v. 8 (seems like a stretch to me). Though Esther does not even mention God’s name in the book named after her “we can imagine that she privately prayed Psalm 82 at the end of chapter 8” and “Esther boldly prays for a reversal of her situation in the words of Psalm 82.” Her intertexts between selected psalms and the biblical narrative get a lot more women into the Psalter.



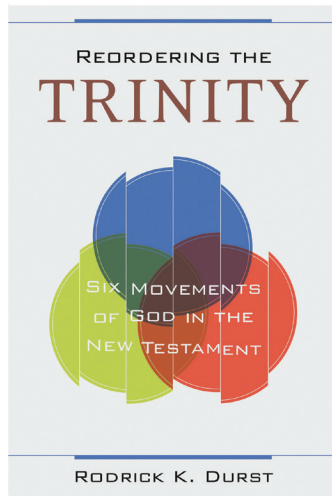


Feminism is not only interested in underscoring the role and dignity of women, but also in ancillary issues like peace: “The security Psalm 46 imagines is based on God’s stabilizing, nurturing presence rather than weaponry and war.” Instead of the implicit quietism of “Be still, and know that I am God,” our commentator suggests: “Desist, and know that I am God.”

Readers will not agree with every opinion in this commentary—or any other commentary!—but they will be constantly invited to see another point of view.

Ralph W. Klein

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



***Reordering the Trinity:
Six Movements of God
in the New Testament.***

By Rodrick K. Durst.
Grand Rapids: Kregel
Academic, 2015. ISBN:
978-0-8254-4378-
7. 369 pages. Paper.
\$22.99.

In *Reordering the Trinity*, Rodrick K. Durst examines seventy-five New Testament (NT) texts classified as “trinitarian.”

He organizes these texts into six separate “triadic” orders and assigns each order its own theological motif. The classic Father-Son-Spirit order is the missional triad since it has to do with sending or being sent, whereas the Son-Spirit-Father order is the saving triad for regeneration. The Son-Father-Spirit triad is the indwelling triad for christological witness, Spirit-Father-Son is the standing triad for sanctification, Father-Spirit-Son is the shaping triad for spiritual formation, and Spirit-Son-Father is the uniting triad for ecclesial order.

The book consists of three parts. In part one, Durst takes up four questions: 1) the status question of contemporary trends in trinitarian studies, 2) the data question on the NT’s presentation of the persons of the Trinity, 3) the antecedent question on whether a trinitarian consciousness existed in Hebrew thought, and 4) the historical question regarding nuanced theological doctrines on the Trinity throughout church history.

Part two consists of six chapters, each covering one of the six triadic orders with a table of corresponding Scripture passages. In part three, Durst offers resources and preaching points on the importance of paying attention to the distinct triadic orders in the NT for faith formation. Overall, Durst seeks to uncover deeper theological meanings that readers have missed in hopes that Christians will become “functional trinitarians” instead of “traditional Trinitarians” or “practical Unitarians.” It remains to

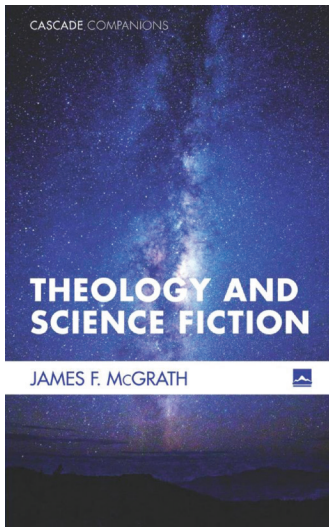
be seen whether it matters to Christians to vary the order of the three persons.

Durst’s efforts to expand the “biblical trinitarian consciousness” of Christians runs into problems. His method forces many texts to read differently than the way they were written. His method of assigning theological motifs to texts (e.g., mission, redemption, etc.) raises concerns of whether theological layers are being added that the writers did not intend. To make the passages fit into one of six schemas, Durst often must change how the text reads. He replaces “God” and “One” with “Father,” thereby attempting to strengthen the trinitarian “intentionality” he claims is there. He is forced to reframe the “Son of God” title by substituting “God” with “Father.” At other times, “God” is not just “Father” but all three persons. Durst is aware of his “seemingly proof-texted” ways of trying to put passages like Heb 3:1–7 into a tight triadic formula (212). To discern the trinitarian intentionality of each text, Durst uses a grading system of A, B, C, including plus or minus signs. For example, Durst assigns a C rating if the trinitarian language sprawls over several verses, as seen with 1 Pet 1:3–12 and Heb 3:1–7.

Pastors interested in the Trinity and Scripture may find Durst’s discussion questions and sermon starters at the close of each chapter useful, particularly when the three persons are ordered differently than the traditional order of Father-Son-Spirit. The charts, tables, and appendix listing the occurrences of the six triadic orders indicate where trinitarian thought may be occurring in the NT.

Rather than searching for theological significance in the *order* in which the trinitarian persons are named in a NT text (i.e., first, second, third), pastors may find it more fruitful to explore a brief but noteworthy point Durst makes relating to Jesus’ trinitarian consciousness, and exploring to what extent his disciples (and ultimately the NT writers) were influenced and shaped by his trinitarian awareness. This may be a more fruitful point of focus for spurring on the faith formation for which Durst is calling.

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Theology and Science Fiction. James F. McGrath. Eugene: Cascade, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4982-0451-4. viii & 113 pages. Paper. \$17.00.

This small treatise offers an overview of the relationship between theology and science fiction. The book speaks well to those of us whose nerdery extends from the realms of theology to the stretches of our technological

imaginings, but provides value even for those who do not appreciate science fiction as entertainment. Specifically, McGrath details how often science fiction and theology perform similar tasks for their consumers, and as such, suggests they perform better as partners than antagonists in the quest for meaningful living.

Most anyone with even a cursory knowledge of science fiction and theological parlance will find the content approachable. In seven brief chapters, *Theology and Science Fiction* explores

the nature of canon within both disciplines, evaluates how each genre contributes to the fields of philosophy and ethics, considers the positive and negative ways in which these traditions interact with and sometimes seek to supplant one another, and even offers three short stories as examples of how one may faithfully weave science fiction and theology together.

The text is not without its problems. While brevity remains a significant asset for introductory texts such as this, the quick pace may leave some readers searching for sometimes subtle, sometimes nonexistent connections. Further, while McGrath attempts to make references to science fiction accessible even to those with little experience in the genre, unexplained insider language and assumed knowledge of stories may prevent some readers from grasping the full extent of the references made.

Still, *Theology and Science Fiction* hits a timely chord in an era of entertainment that has once again embraced science fiction as a genre that presents questions of meaning, truth, ethics, and even spirituality. You need not be a science fiction fan for this book to benefit your work. People in our classrooms and congregations spend significant time and resources consuming science fiction on television, in theatres, and yes, even in books. McGrath provides a valuable primer that helps us to clarify connections between theology and science fiction.

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Lenoir-Rhyne University