



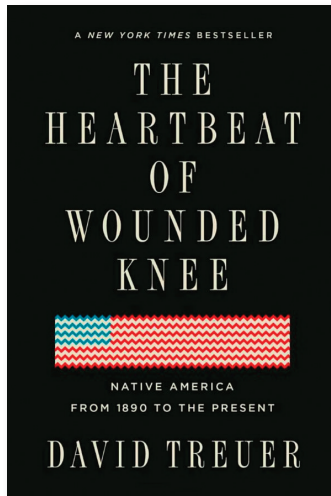
Book Reviews

January 2020

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

Currents in Theology and Mission is seeking to expand its number of regular book reviewers. If you have interest, please send name, contact information, and areas of primary interest to currents@lstc.edu.



The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present. By David Treuer. New York: Riverhead Books, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5946-3315-7. 512 pages. Cloth. \$28.00.

David Treuer—Ojibwe from Minnesota, author of four novels, and instructor at the University of Southern California—aims to dismantle the narrative that would foreclose the history of American Indians at Wounded Knee in 1890. Instead, he constructs the ongoing story of the resistance and resilience of indigenous people that demonstrates how their hearts are still beating. While the first chapter rehearses the genocidal history against Native Americans by describing what took place in various geographical regions of North America from 10,000 BCE to Wounded Knee, Treuer does not do so to echo the trope of authors like Dee Brown (*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*), whose work ends in lament. Rather, Treuer provides this rehearsal as prelude to reframing the history of what has transpired after Wounded Knee to document how Indians continue to overcome.

The second chapter titled “Purgatory” describes the trials endured by Indians under the policies of the U.S. government from 1891–1934. These include the trauma of boarding schools, the attack on reservations and sovereignty through allotments, and the imposition of punishment through enforcement of “law and order” to disrupt Indian culture, family, and ceremonial life. Yet Indians resisted! The stories of Chief Joseph, Standing Bear, and children like Maggie Stands-Looking prepare the way for later and ongoing tribal resistance. The third chapter provides a moving array of Indian contributions to the “fighting life” from 1914–1945, including not only exemplary military service of soldiers serving in both World Wars but many other ways they have

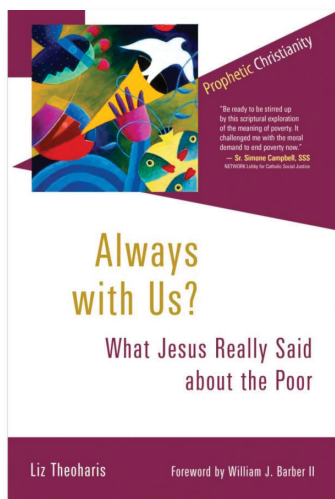
fought for their lives, for example, in mixed martial arts. Treuer is a masterful storyteller who has listened carefully, in order to paint in colorful detail the experiences of others. This was a period when the policies of the New Deal and Indian migration, especially to cities, expanded possibilities and horizons.

The fourth chapter deals with the themes of “termination and relocation” from 1945–1970. Federal policies were implemented to relegate Indian policy to the states and to terminate tribal sovereignty, weakening the political position of Indian people. Nevertheless, tribes (e.g., the Menominee) reinvented themselves and Indian people reasserted themselves (e.g., by participating in urban life). The fifth chapter on “Becoming Indian” from 1970–1990 describes the ingenuity of Indians to survive, especially through a vivid and critical examination of the Red Power movement as epitomized by the American Indian Movement (AIM). Treuer’s analysis of the activities and provocations by AIM leaders recounts their ambiguous legacy. This period, however, also led to significant gains through the Indian Education Act (1972) and the Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978). These legislative initiatives reopened paths for reclaiming Indian traditions and ways of life that continue to manifest themselves into the present.

The sixth chapter on “Tribal Capitalism” examines how the influx of capital through tribal gaming, sale of fireworks, and other enterprises are, when managed for the common good, establishing new economic possibilities. These gains have been further secured through litigation that has strengthened the economic position of Indians. At the same time, the shadow of measuring “blood quantum” and disenrollment have led to controversy and disequilibrium. Treuer advocates that while “blood matters,” culture “isn’t carried in the blood” but through “kinship, geography, language, religion, lifeways, habits, and even gestures” (382). Much of the remainder of the book is testimony to how the recentering of Indian life in the contemporary period has been fostered by reclaiming authentic and healthy ways of being Indian. The seventh chapter on “digital Indians” from 1990–2018 depicts the deconstruction of the Columbus quincentenary and, through carefully crafted stories, the emergence of new forms of activism, education, enterprise, ceremonial life, lifestyle, and involvement in electoral politics. The Dakota Access Pipeline protest provided an occasion for taking responsibility for one’s own destiny in coalition with others of good will.

This is a book that can help provoke a paradigm shift in the self-understanding of Indians and how others interpret their significant contributions to American history. Treuer argues that the “net effect of all this diversity is a sense that we are surging” and “using modernity in the best possible way: to work together and to heal what was broken” (443). I highly recommend this book for its formulation of a new narrative about Indian struggle and accomplishment, one that is “much greater and grander, than a catalog of pain” (453).

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Always with Us? What Jesus Really Said about the Poor. By Liz Theoharis. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7502-0. xxii & 185 pages. Paper. \$25.00.

The first-century Mediterranean world was a context of disparity. For the

vast majority of people in Jesus' day—Theoharis argues upwards of *ninety-nine* percent—life was a constant struggle for survival (83–84). The *pax romana* (Roman peace) was achieved and maintained on the backs of these ordinary, impoverished people. In this context, Jesus' words "For you will always have the poor with you" (Matt 26:11a) may not seem surprising. This assessment has struck many as realistic or even obvious. It has served as the backbone for many interpretations, variously citing the inevitability of poverty or brushing past it as a prelude to the passion. In contrast, Liz Theoharis offers a hope-filled and action-centered alternative, boldly declaring that it is possible to end poverty and that God *commands it*.

In equal parts biblical exegesis and political theology, Theoharis makes a compelling case that Jesus' rejection of the disciples' bid for charity (Matt 26:8–9) represents a turning point in the narrative, putting "poverty and economic justice at the center" (146). Building her case in three parts, Theoharis first rejects previous readings of Matt 26:11 (chapter 1), then engages the process of contextual Bible study alongside other grassroots organizers (chapter 2), which finally informs the narrative and socio-historical exegesis she employs to unpack her thesis in the remaining chapters.

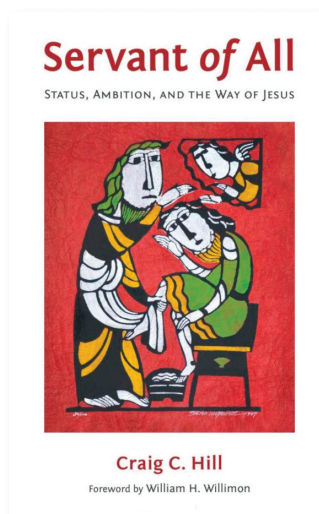
Although the majority of the book is not spent directly engaging the contextual Bible study Theoharis calls "Reading the Bible with the Poor," it informs the entirety of her work. In this sense, she succeeds in her stated goal to engage "in an exegetical and political project that centers on biblical interpretations by the poor today" (30). At the same time, it is important to note the limits Theoharis herself outlines.

Writing as a community organizer, Theoharis intentionally draws "not just on ideas from the poor, but on ideas from the organized poor" (148). She does not engage the unorganized poor because many have fallen into the dominant cultural narrative that poverty is inevitable, which she intends to resist. From this starting point, it is not surprising that the picture of Jesus that Theoharis paints is thus not just as a poor man, but as an organized leader in the fight against poverty, not unlike herself

(chapter 4). This is a common trap in reconstructing Jesus, illustrating that no reading is without bias.

Nevertheless, from an ethical perspective, Theoharis' reading offers a necessary corrective to traditional readings that often lead to resignation and failure to engage the biblical call to love for the neighbor. For this reason, I find Theoharis' intertextual argument her most compelling chapter. In chapter 3, she connects Matt 26:11 with Deut 15:1–11, offering hope that by following God's law an end to poverty is possible. While maintaining realism that the work of ending poverty is complex and difficult, Theoharis thus strikes a note of hope for our own context of growing economic disparity today.

Amy Lindeman Allen
Christian Theological Seminary



Servant of All: Status, Ambition, and the Way of Jesus. By Craig C. Hill. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7362-0. Xiv & 203 pages. Paper. \$18.00.

Craig Hill is Dean and Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University) in Dallas, Texas. He brings

both New Testament expertise and ministry experiences to the table in this book, a biblically grounded study of Jesus' countercultural approach to leadership, status, and ambition. Like Hill's earlier book *In God's Time* (2002), *Servant of All* is at once informed yet informal, exegetical yet filled with stories, and substantive yet to-the-point. It reads like a constructive lecture on a relevant topic, from one who has thought long and hard about the challenges of living out Christ's call to servanthood.

After a foreword from William Willimon and a Preface from the author—both delightful contributions on their own—the book is comprised of ten chapters. Chapter 1 states its aim: "to consider how New Testament authors used theology to form and sustain community—or, more basic still, to equip and encourage believers to get along with each other, especially where differing social status creates an impediment to fellowship" (4). Hill calls status and ambition prime culprits behind church disunity and unethical leadership, in antiquity and today. Chapter 2 uses modern sociological studies to challenge the idea that ambition is "only natural." Chapters 3 and 4 explore Jesus' example and teachings on servanthood, showing how he proclaimed and embodied a reign that flipped conventional sources of signifi-

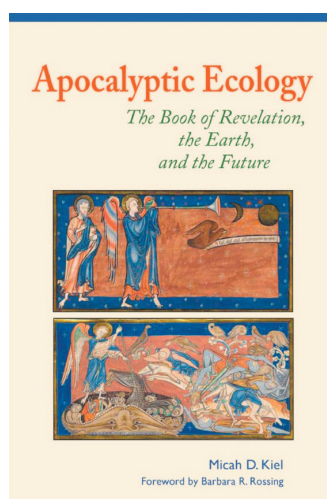


cance on their head. Chapters 5–7 eye successes and failures of New Testament communities and people in aspiring to live out these ideals: the disciples, the church at Corinth, and communities named elsewhere (in Philippians, Galatians, James, 1 Peter, and 1 John). Chapters 8 and 9 consider ambition and hierarchy, respectively, with ample reflections and examples from church ministry leadership today. These chapters propose neither ambition nor hierarchy is evil, though both are very easily misused. Chapter 10 issues a call to collective, countercultural resistance, patterned after the vision of New Testament authors for communities where “existing social distinctions would not only be overcome; they would become irrelevant, made obsolete by the knowledge of God’s perfect love” (182).

Servant of All is an informed and nuanced study of New Testament leadership aimed at addressing ministry leaders today. It is empathetic toward church leaders, discerning about individual ambition, candid about existing hierarchies, and remarkably perceptive of social dynamics around leadership in ministry. Given a non-academic audience, Hill includes frequent humorous asides (“Thirty Jell-O salads doth not a potluck make,” 90) and references to modern media (e.g., The Who, *Keeping Up Appearances*), and at points even appears dismissive of scholars (20–21). At the same time, he surveys the gamut of New Testament writings (albeit briefly), cites scholarly works of note, and addresses historical topics effectively (e.g., social honor). His chapter on hierarchy, for example, nicely emphasizes diverse patterns across early New Testament churches, and closes with ten takeaway lessons for pondering today. To the book’s credit, it values questions more than answers, since “There is of course no simple, single answer” to the issues discussed (175). A study guide or chapter questions would be welcome additions.

Servant of All is a timely word for church leaders who want a biblical vision of leadership amid cultural forces that encourage competition, ambition, and self-promotion. In a world that worships the strong, dynamic, charming, and charismatic, Hill’s book reminds followers of Jesus that we are called to a radically countercultural view of significance and status.

Troy M. Troftgruben
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Apocalyptic Ecology: The Book of Revelation, the Earth, and the Future. By Micah D. Kiel. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8146-8782-6. xxvii & 188 pages. Paper. \$24.95.

In a biblical book that portends so much eschatological destruction, whose title has become synonymous in popular culture with annihilation of cosmic proportions, one might not first expect a prescription for ecological awareness and responsiveness. Micah Kiel argues that Revelation does just this by providing a “rich environmental point of view” from which to reimagine a hopeful ecological future. As such, Kiel joins a growing list of scholars (e.g., David Hawkin, Jonathan Moo, Stephen Moore, and Barbara Rossing) who offer ways for Christians to think and act both *eco*-centrically and *theo*-centrically.

After a concise overview of several widely accepted tenets of the book of Revelation (contents, dating, authorship, apocalyptic framework, etc.), Kiel presents his thesis: The Apocalypse foretells both annihilation *and* renewal of the earth, and humans play a decisive role in the latter. Insofar as Revelation envisions the absolute transformation of the earth and its environment, it invites readers to imagine a radical departure from the status quo in ecological terms (1–27).

The *Book of Watchers* (1 Enoch 6–36) offers an interpretive context for Kiel’s reading of Revelation. In an ecological milieu in which the wars of the *Diodochi* left the natural world and its inhabitants devastated, which is reflected in the depiction of the “Giants” who wreak havoc upon God’s ordered creation, the “ecological alternative” offered in the *Book of Watchers* is a rejection of these destructive powers on earth and an imaginative return to pristine creation under God’s sovereign control (29–55).

According to Kiel, the outlook in Revelation is analogous to that of the *Book of Watchers* in two important ways: (1) Roman imperial systems—operative during the time of the composition of the Apocalypse—were distressing the natural world through mining, animal spectacles, and its domination of the sea (63–73); and (2) John of Patmos envisions a corrective to this devastation: the reign of God, which will abolish those entities responsible for destroying the earth (Rev 11:18). Paradoxically, however, the depiction of the coming reign of God and the Lamb seems to entail rampant destruction of various elements of the natural world. Kiel’s solution to this paradox requires thoughtful interpretation of the text. The destruction of the world envisaged



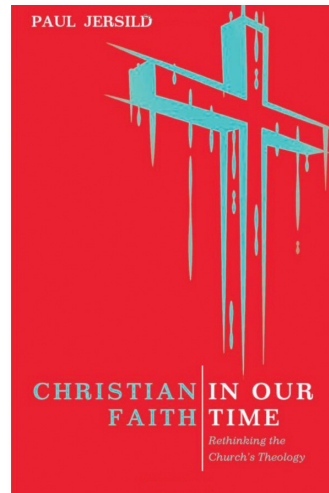
by John is *primarily* a rejection of those (Roman imperial) forces responsible for (among other things) destroying the earth. Thus, a modern interpreter must acknowledge her own complicity with similarly destructive forces in our own day and align with God who ultimately “subverts the domination, exploitation, and violence” of such forces upon the environment (87).

Kiel proceeds to engage the ways that Revelation’s symbolic imagery has been explored through illuminated manuscripts whose lowest common denominator is an interest in contemplating the natural world and humans’ “entanglements” with it (89–110). Finally, Kiel outlines some of the ways Christians might set a course for “proper environmental action” (111–132). Whatever specific actions this might entail, he argues, such a course must be grounded in a rejection of “the dominant paradigms of empire,” which are rooted in a lust for consumption and include: (1) habitat-destroying urbanization; (2) attachments to technology that detach us from the natural world; and (3) disregard for economic systems that disproportionately affect the more vulnerable among us. By turning instead to God and the “goodness of creation,” we may begin to adopt a “cosmic sense of the common good” (122).

Kiel offers an unabashedly optimistic reading of Revelation. To be sure, there are less sanguine assessments of the ecological and theological outlook(s) of the Apocalypse, and Kiel might have gone further to present these perspectives, highlighting their differences with his own reading. For example, his (correct) assessment that the theocentric perspective of Revelation puts God in absolute control of past, present, and future, is precisely what leads some readers to minimize their own role—positive or negative—in the past, present, and future of the created world. I would have appreciated more nuanced discussion of the problems generated by this perspective. Secondly, while Kiel attempts to ground a positive ecological perspective in the eschatological future imagined in the text, he does not account fully for the harsher realities of this imagined future (e.g., the fact that many are *left out* of the New Creation in Rev 21–22). In short, he might have foregrounded more clearly data from the text that present challenges to his analyses.

Nevertheless, Kiel has done a great service by offering innovative and worthwhile ways of positing a positive ecological perspective of a text that, at first glance, appears not to provide one at all. His reading of Revelation provides pastors, parishioners, and students fresh ways of reading a difficult text.

Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler
Wartburg College



Christian Faith in Our Time: Rethinking the Church's Theology.

By Paul Jersild. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4982-9586-4. 137 pages. Paper. \$21.00.

Imagine writing a book titled *Invitation to Faith: Christian Belief Today* in 1978 and then returning to the same topic nearly four decades

later in a study titled *Christian Faith in Our Time: Rethinking the Church's Theology*. How daunting to mark the forty-year interval by focusing readers on what the author perceives as the seismic shift in basic Christian perspectives and teaching from a “modern” to a “post-modern” sensibility! Jersild provides the clearest and most succinct description and explanation of the “paradigm shift” in worldview over these years that I have encountered. It is devoid of extraneous philosophical and theological jargon and makes a strong case for the need to welcome the new challenges for articulating faith in Jesus. The book addresses what our post-modern age both demands and promises.

Jersild insists that he is providing “modest” theological proposals, marked by a humility of perspective that, in good post-modern fashion, shies from claiming too much for modernism’s faith in rationality, metaphysical speculation, scientism and, for that matter, orthodox theism. Imagination, metaphor, intuition, experience, and wonder are welcome elements in the post-modern treasury of spiritual gifts. Jesus, the incarnation of God in human form as Emmanuel (God-with-us), is the center of this revelation in flesh and blood, who perfectly embodied these elements in his own life, death, and resurrection. Jersild mentions how the Scottish theologian, Donald Baillie, author of *God Was in Christ* (1948), articulated his favorite view of the atonement. Although Baillie operated in modernist times, his view is capacious enough to accommodate post-modern perspectives. I heartily agree, adding the importance of Baillie’s *Theology of the Sacraments* (1957).

Jersild offers a primer in the faith, taking just enough time to touch on most “loci” of the church’s traditional dogmatic topics, while also suggesting what an initial post-modern take on particular traditional teachings might look like. Surprisingly, I found myself in agreement with nearly all the author’s revisions, which constitute a kind of Lutheran version of “generous orthodoxy” for our day as endorsed by mainline proponents of the “emergent church.” Ecumenism, interfaith dialogue/cooperation, “glocal” faith communities with permeable and radically inclusive “memberships,” and active social justice commitments



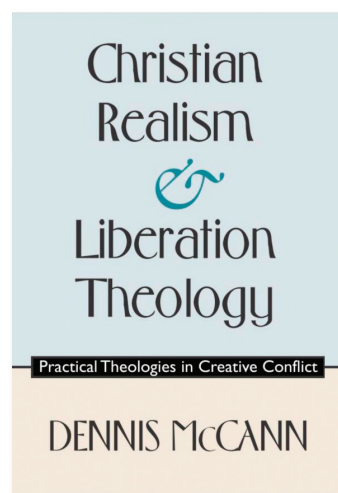
are all marks of post-modern church assemblies. While the author regrets the consumer mentality that has laid hold of a sector of post-moderns, who prefer to be thought of as “spiritual” but not “religious,” he expects that the experience of Christian community with its worship and spiritual practices will serve to connect those who are seeking with new forms of churchly *koinonia*.

I am astounded at what this veteran theologian has managed to compact in a mere 129 pages, how lucidly and winningly he is able to write, and with what hope and passion for the church in our day he does this “modest” work.

John Rollefson

San Luis Obispo, California

(Retired pastor and author of *Postils for Preaching: Commentaries on the RCL, Years A, B and C*)



Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict.

By Dennis McCann.

Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, rep. 2001. ISBN: 978-1-5791-0739-0. Paper. vi & 250 pages. \$31.00.

Dennis McCann makes a concerted effort to compare Reinhold Niebuhr's

Christian realism with liberation theology in Latin America. His comparative methodology is informed by Weber's theory of elective affinity to identify religious ideas with material interests in a meaningful correlation in the historical course of development. Liberation theologians such as Rubem A. Alves may find Niebuhr's work, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, to be congenial to liberation theology, granted that his harsh critique of Niebuhr's political realism refers to Niebuhr's ideological drift in his later period upon falling into the American ideology of the Establishment.

There is a parallel to be drawn between Christian realism and liberation theology, such that the former would be a supporter of the latter. However, it is difficult to avert great dissimilarity between the two theological entities when dealing with, for example, the legacy of modernity, the problem of violence, reform versus revolution, political liberation compared to biblical salvation, theological epistemology, and eschatology. As McCann aptly formulates, Christian realism entails “a hermeneutics based on a philosophy of religion” (“mythical method”), while liberation theology drives “a hermeneutic based on praxis” (177).

Interestingly, McCann notices some influences of Ernst Troeltsch upon Niebuhr and Segundo. However, what remains crucial in the difference between Christian realism and liberation theology is built upon “an irreducible plurality of Christian religious visions” (236), in which McCann's concern is to reinterpret two different models for practical theology. His conclusion is formulated in the following manner: Christian realism is a consistent reflection of authentic Christian spirituality within the paradoxical vision, while liberation theology is only an ambiguous reflection through synthesis of the religious perspective with the dialectical vision. Conscientization politicizes and empties the essential religious meaning of Christianity, undercutting its promising alternative (236).

It is difficult to concur with a such hasty conclusion. The weakness of Christian realism can be renewed and deepened in a creative interpretation of Augustinian political realism with its model of the human being—the leavening agent engaged in the comingling between God's polis and secular polis. Niebuhr provides a keen analysis of historical materialism through Engel's theory of reciprocity in which ideological spheres, even religious belief systems, would make an impact on the economic foundation of society.

Indeed, Marx himself was aware of Weber's thesis in advance, thus he made a positive appraisal of Luther's critique of the Christian character of capital accumulation. Commodity fetishism does not take place merely in the productive forces, but it is built upon the rational organization of relation of production in terms of social distribution, specialization, and technological innovation. This reality of reification plagues and penetrates into commercializing the social consciousness of the human being in political systems, economic rationalization, and the structure of communication through the mass media. Liberation theology is keenly aware of this structure of institutionalized violence and colonization with which Niebuhr would concur.

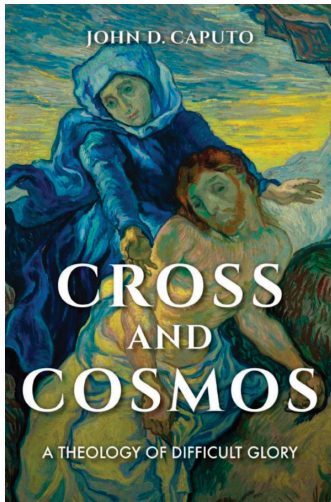
Together with Niebuhr, Tillich's *Socialist Decision* and Barth's theological, ethical analysis of historical materialism and capitalist revolution may be retrieved for a constructive dialogue with liberation theology. Liberation theology is defined as critical reflection on Christian and human praxis in light of the word of God. Thus, it is understood as an ethic of discipleship in commitment to Jesus as partisan in a preferential option for the poor. Faith seeks practical understanding of God, the poor, and the world in light of the living, liberating word of God.

If Niebuhr and liberation theology find it significant to utilize Marxist method as a scientific theory of society, Marx's historical materialist inquiry must be revised and renewed in accordance with social sciences with respect to the empirical reality of the world economy. Liberation theology can be enriched and supplemented from the prophetic theological tradition in the Global South, as it maintains prophetic vitality for church and theology in the West beset by impersonal forces of late capitalism and its pathologies. McCann's study of Christian realism



and liberation theology provides one of the most important contributions in clarifying the similarity-in-difference. It remains an asset for furthering the dialogue with liberation theology, which poses a serious challenge and question to the “domesticated” Gospel in the West.

*Paul S. Chung, Th.D.
Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church
Orinda, California*



Cross and Cosmos: A Theology of Difficult Glory. By John D. Caputo. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-2530-4312-2. xv & 287 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

John Caputo and Catherine Keller are two of the most generative and provocative

theologians of our time. While their books are demanding, the persevering reader will be initiated into thought experiments that totally reframe conventional wisdom. Here Caputo builds on the arguments set forth in three previous volumes: *The Weakness of God* (2006), *The Insistence of God* (2013), and *The Folly of God* (2015). Since redirecting his focus from philosophy, especially the deconstruction of Derrida, Caputo has been formulating what theology dares to claim through the lens of radical hermeneutics.

Having abandoned metaphysical concepts about a God who exists, Caputo retrieves Bultmann regarding the need for a thoroughgoing demythologizing of the New Testament and Tillich on God as “ground of being” and “ultimate concern” on the way to a dramatic recasting of Luther’s theology of the cross. Part commentary on the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation, Caputo takes Luther’s argument for the God hidden in the cross (*deus absconditus*) to extremes. Luther was misguided to allow for an interpretation of the hidden God within transcendent categories. Rather God must become entirely embedded within suffering and death on the cross.

The Christology that abides is utterly from below. Yeshua must be interpreted through a narrative that maintains strict continuity between the things he said and did with his execution on the cross for those very reasons. “[The cross] is the scene of Yeshua’s unconditional witness (*martyros*) to the kingdom, of Yeshua’s expression of kingdomlike *forgiveness*, and of the *solidarity* of God with Yeshua, with the unjustly persecuted and innocent man who proclaimed the kingdom of peace and was made

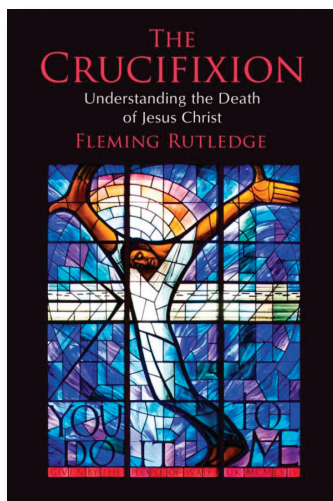
to pay for it by imperial Rome (prophetic). Yeshua does not pay off anything—but he is made to pay for preaching peace, which is an old story” (98). Every notion of (substitutionary) atonement as a transaction involving divine calculation is dismantled. Caputo makes creative reference to black theologians, James H. Cone and Delores Williams, for this constructive project.

We are left with a theology that intensifies, even depends upon, human ethical responsibility. God is a “perhaps” or a “call” that awaits human response to be verified, if at all: “That is what I am analyzing under the notion of an event of which we should make ourselves worthy, of a call to which we should be the response, of an insistence for which we should supply the existence” (102). The “fierce urgency of now” (Martin Luther King Jr.) is, yes, about our responding to the needs of crucified neighbors but involves, all the same, the veracity of God.

The most original argument presented in this book interacts with the work of Keller on cosmic entanglement and confronting the reality that we are living not only in a world but in a cosmos that ultimately will perish. Caputo here has exchanged metaphysics for the theories of physics where entropy and a big crunch belie all other eschatological schemes. The meaning of resurrection becomes “theo-poetics” that urges us forward toward ethical responsibility and love in spite of final extinguishment, not only of all things human but of all things period.

At this point I find myself wondering whether we have stumbled into the realm of stoicism as those who for this life only have hoped in Christ, and therefore are “of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19). A theologian of Caputo’s stature remains challenged to articulate not only a theology of the cross—as breathtaking as this account may be—but also the cross/resurrection event in a way that does not collapse into stoic resolve. Perhaps it is the emergence of faith as a dimension of the human that provides a clue that the divine encompasses, without being reduced to, the unfolding cosmic and evolutionary process?

*Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary*



***The Crucifixion:
Understanding the
Death of Jesus Christ.***

By Fleming Rutledge.
Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 2015.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-
4732-4. 695 pages.
Cloth. \$45.00.

Known widely as a preacher, lecturer, and author, Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge has produced the

magnum opus of her distinguished career, a work in progress for over twenty years. This tome of nearly 700 pages, replete with an extensive bibliography and list of recommended biblical commentaries, is a committed personal effort to overhaul the church's understanding of the crucifixion of Jesus and the manifold atonement motifs or themes (she abjures the term "theory" as too abstract) that have arisen throughout church history to explain the why and wherefore of the peculiar manner of Jesus' dying.

While reading *The Crucifixion* requires patience and discipline, I can testify that the laborious exercise was rewarding, especially when keeping in mind the author's goal of writing for "busy pastors who are burdened with duties yet serious about preaching the gospel and seeking help for their sermons (5)." Her expressed hope is that the book might serve as a "bridge" between academic scholarship and local congregations through a "series of theological reflections on Scripture and tradition that I hope add up to a coherent account of the death of Jesus Christ for the church (xvii)."

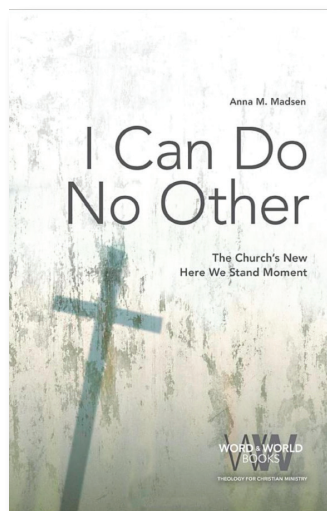
Rutledge's concern for this topic issues from a passion that suffuses the entire work: to counter what she detects as a "devaluation of the preaching of the cross" in our day that she fears derives from a widespread misunderstanding of the centrality of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for faith. Her own Anglican communion, for example, is taken to task for its characteristic embrace of the doctrine of the incarnation as its signature loyalty, while downplaying the particularity of the incarnate One's death on a cross. She emphasizes strongly how it is that the specific manner of Jesus' execution as an accused political subversive and religious blasphemer needs to be emphasized.

Rutledge stresses the overwhelmingly shameful and irreligious, as well as torturous and cruel, character of his killing by the religious and political authorities. She goes so far as to claim the utter originality of Christianity among all the great faith traditions in claiming a crucified man as the central figure of its faith, holding that nothing in religious history can approach "*crucifixion for crudeness* (490)." She argues that the resurrection of Jesus is, of course, essential to the church's faith but that it needs to be seen as the Triune God's vindication of the crucified Jesus which

is at the heart of the matter. The apostle Paul is the biblical writer who sees this most clearly and holds Christ crucified most central to the new faith that laid hold of him as a result of his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road. Rutledge tirelessly pores through all of scripture, Old and New Testaments alike, in her quest to convince the reader of the absolute centrality of the crucifixion to the faith, ransacking the church "fathers" as well as the doctrinal tradition of the church to underscore her point, arguing for the necessity of a multi-motifed appreciation of the church's understanding of atonement as necessary for our day.

I am indebted to this fellow preacher for bequeathing to the church this passionate and profound gift, the reminder of how we all claim faith in Christ and him crucified.

*John Rollefson
San Luis Obispo, California*



***I Can Do No Other:
The Church's New Here
We Stand Movement.***

By Anna M. Madsen.
Minneapolis: Fortress
Press, 2019. ISBN:
978-1-5064-2737-9.
xxi & 202 pages. Paper.
\$18.99.

This manifesto is written for our historical moment. As the author of a very significant study on Luther's theology of the cross, Anna Madsen calls the church to action in response to the theological and ethical crises of our time. As Luther responded to the corruption of late medieval theology and church practice with the bold declaration of "Here I stand," she challenges her readers to recognize the fierce urgency of now (MLK Jr.) by speaking and acting with comparable courage: "Here we stand!"

The issues we face are numerous and complex, including climate change, fake news and distrust of science, poverty and wealth disparity, women's rights, sexuality and gender, immigration, racism, religious bigotry, nationalism and Christian nationalism, polarization among Christians, gun violence, and apathy (Chapter 5). Although we find ourselves daunted by the climate of fear, as followers of the Crucified we are summoned to call things what they are: "Dictators and demagogues like unengaged citizens. They thrive when people are not paying attention to what is going on when they aren't looking" (151).

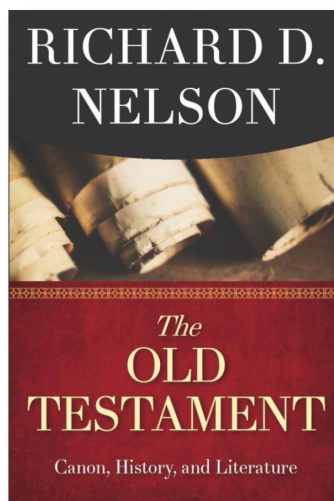
The argument for such engagement is explicitly rooted in Luther's Reformation theology. The Gospel of Jesus Christ remains the ultimate commitment of Christian faith. This Gospel centers us in our identity as those set free in Christ to turn



toward penultimate issues with savvy and chutzpah. Madsen acknowledges her theological mentor, Walter Bouman, who assisted her to interpret Luther in context, retaining the Christological center as enduring commitment, even while exercising criticism of Luther's serious ethical misjudgments, such as against the Peasants and against the Jews. Justification and justice belong together in an inseparable nexus: "the gospel includes the declaration of justification, but it extends its essence to the summons to justice, for where there is injustice, then health, healing, and wholeness—*life*—are all threatened" (73).

I found the author's appeal to the exercise of theological imagination (164–166) and the concluding invocation of the way of shalom (185, as quoted from a sermon by her father) to be especially poignant. The book is written with freshness and clarity, making it accessible to a wide spectrum of readers, even as it delivers theological punch. Discussion questions at the end of the chapters invite use for book discussions and educational forums. A cry for this *kairos*!

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



The Old Testament: Canon, History, and Literature. By Richard D. Nelson. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-4267-5923-9. xxi & 326 pages. Paper. \$42.99.

Nelson, a widely published scholar, *emeritus* from Perkins School of Theology and a long-time professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, provides students and pastors with a clearly written and mainstream introduction to the Old Testament.

The book begins with a sixteen-page Table of Contents that provides ready access to whatever pericope the reader is looking for in the canonical text or in the Apocrypha. Nelson hopes that this arrangement will lead students to read the biblical text in addition to this introduction. His discussion follows the order in the Hebrew Bible, with two exceptions: the Minor Prophets are treated in their probable chronological order, and Daniel appears at the end of the Writings section. Nelson often provides comparison of translations between the NRSV and the Common English Bible (CEB), and he is the translator of 1 and 2 Kings in CEB. Excursuses are set off by marginal vertical lines. There are no footnotes—the advantage here is that whatever the reader wants to explore is incorporated into the text, and not

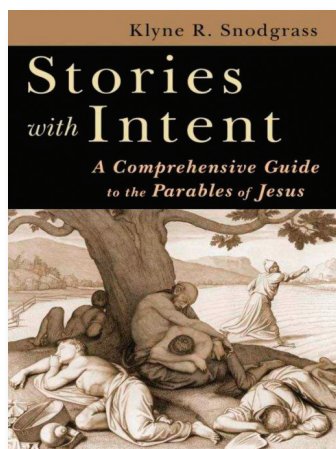
parked in endnotes. Eight pages of "Vocabulary" might fit well under the caption Glossary. Nelson offers very brief suggestions at the end of sections for further reading. Sometimes this refers to commentaries, but not always, and these suggestions are not as mainstream as I would like (e.g., Auld on 1 and 2 Samuel; Faley at the end of the discussion of Abraham and his descendants).

On the Pentateuch he follows the Documentary Hypothesis, but pays little attention to more recent hypotheses from Europe. I felt he hit his stride with his introduction to Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings (Nelson has published full-length scholarly commentaries on Deuteronomy, Joshua, and 1 and 2 Kings although those excellent publications are not listed in the sections for further reading). Nelson barely mentions the Deuteronomistic History even though from his dissertation on, he has published many essays arguing, in support of Frank Moore Cross, that this history had both pre-exilic and exilic editions. Contemporary scholarship tends to downplay the historicity of the conquest of Canaan and its genocidal violence, and Nelson follows this trend.

He discusses Isaianic passages like Isa 9:1–7 and 11:1–9, that describe an ideal Davidic king, but does not label them messianic. Jere 23:5–6 and 33:14–26, which also talk about ideal or messianic Davidic descendants go unmentioned, as does the new covenant passage in Jer 31:31–34. He notes that Dan 12:2–3 stands out in Old Testament texts as promising resurrection, a notion that is widespread in the New Testament, with the exception of the Sadducees.

I wish long life to this introduction which is a joy to read!

Ralph W. Klein
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus.

Second Edition. By Klyne Snodgrass. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7569-3. xx & 892 pages. Cloth. \$58.00.

Some use tin or aluminum to celebrate tenth anniversaries. Publishers usually prefer paper—more paper. Such is the case with Klyne Snodgrass’s magnum opus, whose tenth-anniversary edition weighs even more than the first.

The extra heft comes from a single new chapter called “Recent Contributions to Parable Interpretation” (36 pages) and a brief preface to the second edition. It appears nothing else has changed, except for a few fresh entries in the bibliography to reflect the additional chapter’s subject matter. This is not, then, a revision or update of the original publication, but a restatement of the author’s positions, supplemented by concise reviews of over twenty books that have appeared since the first edition.

Not that there’s anything wrong with that. The 2008 edition made significant contributions to parable interpretation and continues to be a useful resource for those who engage Jesus’ parables in classrooms and pulpits. Two elements have made this book stand out as a valuable exegetical resource: its lists of narrative dynamics and interpretive issues that deserve attention from anyone interpreting a given parable, and the book’s references to ancient literature that might help us see a parable in new light. Each treatment of thirty-two parables includes citations and quotations of “helpful primary source material” that might situate a parable and its symbolism within a wider cultural, historical, and literary setting. That aspect of the book makes it especially useful for readers who can determine which of those sources could have relevance for illuminating a specific parable’s analogical rhetoric.

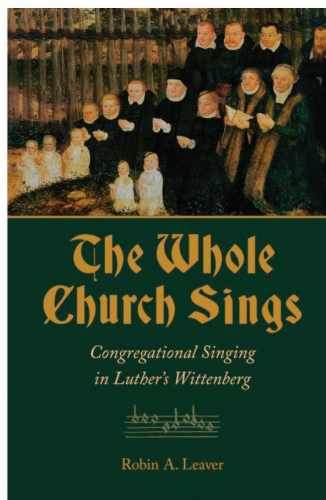
The first edition also distinguished itself with its hermeneutical convictions concerning the Gospels in general and Jesus’ parables in particular. Snodgrass contends that the parables are where the Gospels provide the most direct access to Jesus’ teachings. The point of interpreting a parable is to capture and amplify Jesus’ original intent as he preached about God’s kingdom to first-century audiences. The basic purpose of Jesus’ parables—to explain the character of God and God’s reign, particularly when done in a confrontational manner—shows us the influence of the Prophets on Jesus and the prophetic tenor of his ministry. The trust Snodgrass places in his preferred methods for identifying Jesus’ intent—and the criticism he directs toward other interpretive approaches that he thinks are steered by misguided “ideological” agendas—leads him generally to ignore certain literary and social-scientific analyses.

Some of those hermeneutical claims were and remain controversial. For instance, I am unconvinced by the assertion that interpreters can uncover Jesus’ or the Evangelists’ “intent” in some unprejudiced way, and it appears that an overly limited conception of God’s in-breaking kingdom leads Snodgrass to dismiss scholars who bring other interpretive methods to the parables. Many in Snodgrass’s theological circles have been more appreciative, however.

Highlighting the hermeneutical controversies is appropriate, since the second edition’s chief purpose appears to be to reaffirm Snodgrass’s positions. The meatiest parts of his new chapter attempt to set limits on what it means to say that Jesus’ parables have multiple meanings. The chapter also elaborates Snodgrass’s continuing dissatisfaction with social-scientific approaches.

Snodgrass’s deep fondness for the parables and the challenges of interpreting them is palpable throughout his work. He recognizes the appeal of these stories as well as their complexity (although he declares that the majority of them are not enigmatic). Even readers with misgivings about his underlying theological hermeneutics will find him a helpful guide into the nuances of individual parables.

Matthew L. Skinner
Luther Seminary



The Whole Church Sings: Congregational Singing in Luther's Wittenberg.

By Robin A. Leaver. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7375-0. xiv & 206 pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Among the spate of publications during the 500th anniversary of the appearance of Luther’s 95 theses in 1517

is this worthy, detailed study of congregational singing under the impact of Luther’s early reforms of the church and its liturgy in the years between 1524 and 1530. Since much of the evidence has to do with the publication of collections of hymns and liturgical music that Luther himself fostered over these years, another recently published book titled *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2016) by Andrew Pettegree would be a helpful companion volume.

The author, professor emeritus at Westminster Choir College, argues that the earliest published Lutheran hymns were “the vehicles by which the Reformation was to a large degree defined, expressed, promoted, and taken to heart” and therefore “it can be argued that only after 1523, when the hymns first



began to appear, did it really begin to take hold” (7). Further, Leaver demonstrates how evangelical hymnody was not simply a natural outgrowth of the reform movement but relied for its impetus on Luther himself, who wrote or translated many of the initial hymns but also pled publicly for “poets” to step forward “who would compose pious and spiritual songs” for the church (68). Luther himself commissioned many of his co-reformers to try their hand at composing hymns even going so far as to assign them particular psalm texts. The irony is that by 1529 in the preface to the Wittenberg hymnal, which he published that year, he could already be found complaining that the proliferation of hymnody he had urged was producing inferior songs which he lightly dismissed as “mouse-droppings in the pepper” (166). Be careful what you ask for!

While heavy on details of the publication history of the earliest Lutheran hymns and hymnals, the author also addresses what sorts of congregational singing had preceded these original Lutheran hymns and where they came from. Late medieval Latin hymns were, of course, one source which needed both to be translated into German but also made doctrinally evangelical. Marian hymns of praise, for example, needed to be made suitably Trinitarian in their doxology (such hymns were called *contrafacta*). Another source were folk songs whose tunes were well known by the people, some of which long had been sung for popular religious purposes, but usually outside of formal worship itself.

Luther’s concern, as the title of the book quotes Luther’s own phrase, is that “the whole church sings.” What this meant practically—as endowed choir schools and paid choirs lost their patronage from endowed masses and noble benefactions, and where new musical leadership in congregations could be found—is briefly addressed but only to whet one’s appetite to know more.

John Rollefson
San Luis Obispo, California



2019 Ad Pricing and Specifications

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is now accepting advertisements in our quarterly journal. Please see full details in the ad rate sheet at the end of the Introduction (page 4 of this issue).

Publication Dates and Deadlines

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is published four times per year: January, April, July, and October. Ad deadlines for each issue are one month prior to publication (December 1, March 1, June 1, September 1). Late submissions may be published in the next issue. Issue-specific themes are available from the co-editors: [Craig Nesson](#) and [Kadi Billman](#).

Size and Placement Options

Full page ads are placed at the end of articles. Fractional page ads are placed within articles. You may specify an author, the Introduction article, or any of our sections: Book Reviews, Preaching Helps, Listening to Immigrant Voices, Currents Focus. For specific article or section content per issue, please contact the co-editors: [Craig Nesson](#) and [Kadi Billman](#).

Premium placements are: at the end of the Introduction article, within Book Reviews, within Preaching Helps. These are our most popular sections.

FORMAT AND SIZE

	PLACEMENT	
	PREMIUM	REGULAR
• Full Page: 7.125" wide x 10" high	\$ 450	\$ 380
• One Column (vert.): 3.5" wide x 10" high	\$ 250	\$ 200
• Half Column: 3.5" wide x 4.75" high	\$ 135	\$ 115
• Half Page (horiz.): 7.125" wide x 4.75" high	\$ 250	\$ 200

25% discount for 4 consecutive placements from the same advertiser (content may change).

Billing

New advertisers must include payment with order.

Returning Advertisers: Bills are sent after publication.