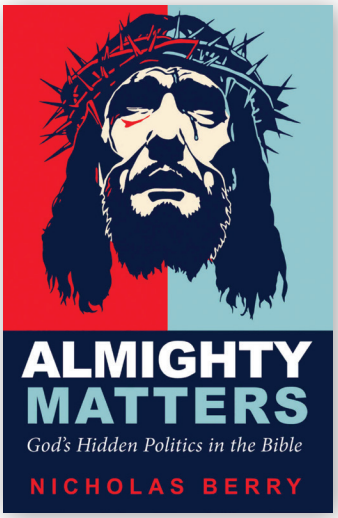
Book Reviews

April 2021

Section Editors: Craig Nessan, 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.**



Almighty Matters: God's Hidden Politics in the Bible. By Nicholas Berry. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4982-3421-4. 135 pages. Paper. $21.00.

Intrigued by the idea that a retired professor of politics and author in the field of international relations would bring his expertise to bear on the hidden politics of God in the Bible, I finished the book with the sense that this boundary-crossing scholar would have done better to stay at home. I cannot think of anything new I learned from this thin volume, well intended but narrowly sourced and footnoted.

The author, an admitted church-goer, confesses to stints as a Presbyterian and Lutheran layperson before settling into his present Episcopal membership, even as he acknowledges being a dedicated activist in the Democratic Party, who served terms as mayor of a small, Iowa town as well as chairman of his party in the Virginia and Maryland cities where he has lived. His general outlook is moderate liberal, tolerant, and generous of America's historic diversity, including its interfaith complexities. He brings his middling knowledge of the OT to bear on the history of the Jewish people and is a fervent defender of the modern state of Israel as a realistic response to the horror of the holocaust, yet recognizes the claim to a national homeland owed displaced and oppressed Palestinians. Berry does not appear to have either a religious or political axe to grind and is rather commodious in his highly impressionistic theologizing and unsystematic exegesis of texts.

The text falls into two divisions. The first is titled "The Hebrew Bible," which begins with God's power expressed in creation, offers reflections on human nature as evidenced in the story of Adam and Eve, discusses "God as Realtor," in which he addresses God's role in choosing Israel and "preferring" it over other peoples, imagines Moses as "template for political leadership" and, finally, concludes how Israel/Judah are failed states amid the contested geography of the ancient empires of the ancient world. While acknowledging the scattering of Israel by its enemies as constituting history's most successful surviving religious-cultural minority, the chosen people's utter political failure, except for brief moments of glory, testify to the Jews failure to live up to God's demands and promises.

Part Two, titled "The Christian Bible," connects the New Testament to the foregoing history of God with the Jewish people and their scriptures, centers on the son of the David, whom Berry does not hesitate to call "an anointed politician" and whom God sets on a "campaign" (82) to achieve what Israel was never able to accomplish. The author audaciously claims how Jesus "engineering his (own) trial and crucifixion" (88), setting out to build "a new movement that would eventually be politically official when it merges with the Roman Empire" (87). Berry goes so far as to claim the Nicene Creed as the "proper frame for analyzing Jesus the politician" (86). Contrary to much contemporary historiography, Berry counts this outcome as the church's eventual, successful subverting of the empire to the way of Jesus. What the church may lose or betray of Jesus' gospel as the lowly shepherd takes on the imperial robes of the Pantocrator is never considered.

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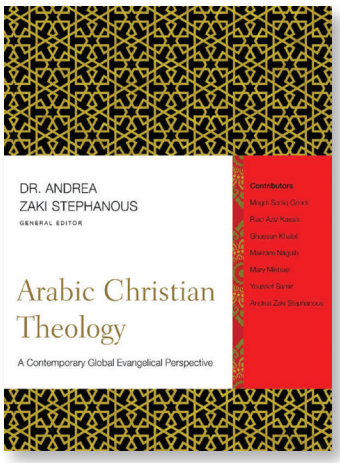
(Rollefson is author of the trilogy Postils for Preaching: Commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary, Years A, B and C.)



Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective. Edited by Andrea Zaki Stephanous. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. ISBN:978-0-3103-2026-5. Cloth. 493 pages. $34.99.

This book provides fascinating and little-known perspectives on contemporary theology. The authors all are identified as "evangelical" in the sense of the nineteenth and twentieth century use of the term in North America in contrast to the Reformation usage in Lutheran traditions. The editor serves as president of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, president of the Protestant Churches of Egypt, and president of the Fellowship of Middle

East Evangelical Churches, to offer an example of the ecumenical breadth of the volume. The authors of each of the seven chapters hold comparable resumes that expand our horizons on global theological scholarship.

The chapter titles disclose the decidedly evangelical interests of the volume: Arab Christians and the Old Testament; The Concept of Covenant in Evangelical Thought and Its Impact on the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Ethical Study; Jesus and Judaism: His Identity and Relationship to Judaism; Religion and Politics: Ancient Prophecies and Contemporary Policies; The Christian Woman; The Cross and the Power Issue: A Middle Eastern View; and Culture and Identity. The extensive 12-page Scripture index reflects the primary source of authority for these authors.

Since the book is not a sustained argument but the collection from seven different writers, it may be intriguing to note some representative conclusions. Magdi Sadiq Gendi (PhD, Luther Seminary) on the topic "God and War" concludes: "The Lord is a warrior, but not a warrior who kills, steals, and occupies. Rather, he is a warrior who brings peace, vindicates the oppressed, and releases captives—which is exactly what Jesus Christ has done" (35). Riad Aziz Kassis on the concept of covenant writes: "How much we in the Middle East and North Africa, surrounded by suffering, oppression, and danger, need to cling to the promises of God that will be completely fulfilled and to wait in hope for the time when God will make everything new!" (88).

Ghassan Khalaf, in the longest chapter on Jesus and Judaism, reflects a key evangelical conviction: "So the point at issue is not whether Christians believe in the Jewishness of Jesus, because that is a fact. The more important issue is for Jews to believe in the 'Christian' Jesus!" (210). More unexpectedly, Mary Mikhael in the chapter on The Christian Woman proposes: "Like all other ministries, pastoral ministry in the church is a gift and calling of the Holy Spirit. So, if God calls a woman for this service, who dares to prevent her fulfilling this calling?" (372). Yousssef Samir, on the topic of the cross and power, contends: "Here we confirm again that there is a vast uncrossable gap between the sacrifice within that exploitative logic, which seeks to secure power, impose control, and hold the reins of matters, and that of Christ, a sacrifice of love and self-denial, looking out for the other, for his good and for his salvation" (420).

The theological perspectives gathered in this volume demonstrate deep biblical faith expressed within contexts of suffering and oppression as formulated by those in a Christian minority. As Stephanous, the general editor and author of the final chapter, expresses at book's conclusion on the topic of culture and identity: "Commitment to a theological frame of reference and relating to a cultural context are important if we are to raise the level of contemporary Arab theology. Though Christians have made great contributions to the advancement of Arab theology, most of our theology, especially that of evangelicals, is still based on Western models" (466). This book is a solid contribution to addressing this deficit.

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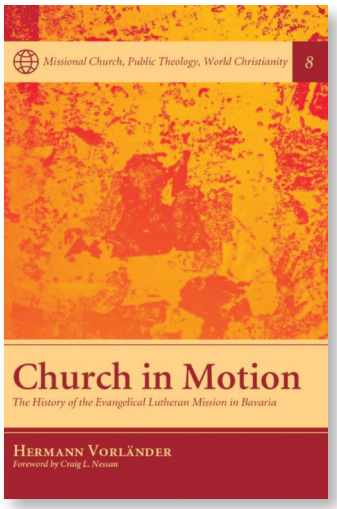

Church in Motion: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Bavaria. By Hermann Vorländer. Translation of *Kirche in Bewegung: Die Geschichte der evangelischen Mission in Bayern*, by Vorländer. Foreword by Craig L. Nessan. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-5326-1431-6. 278 pages. Paper. $33.00.

Telling stories of the mission work that started in Neuendettelsau under the leadership of Wilhelm Loehe, this book provides both in-depth study of various points of mission history and overviews of various international missions, especially as they relate to the Bavarian mission.

One of this book's strengths is its attention to the early mission efforts in Australia and Papua New Guinea in the later 1800s and early 1900s. Here readers will learn about the effective and inspiring ministry of people such as Johann Flierl and Christian Keysser. The social and political complications of German mission work in these lands during the World Wars are also thoroughly discussed. It is striking and disturbing to see the close connection between German nationalism and Lutheran mission work, making the resistance and eventual martyrdom of Neuendettelsau missionary Adolf Wagner all the more remarkable.

Indeed, study of the involvement of Bavarian church leaders and missionaries in the Nazi Party during the 1930s and 1940s is another important contribution of this book. Many leaders of the Bavarian missions resonated with the Nazi's complaints against Jews and communists; they were also distrustful of the liberal theology of ecumenical leaders and peace activists such as Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom. In Neuendettelsau in 1933, missionary students were encouraged to "join the Hitler Youth and the Storm Troopers (SA) and participate in their events" (50). One missionary leader of the time "called missionaries 'the SA men of the church'" (56). After the war, this pastor said he had only joined the Nazi Party to advance the church's mission, an *ex post facto* denunciation of Nazism typical of many at the time. While a more fulsome analysis of the relationship between nationalism and missionary work might be desired, Vorländer concludes the section by stating that a true spirit of

repentance was absent from those in mission leadership who had worked with the Third Reich.

Later sections of the book do not receive the same kind of detailed treatment as those mentioned above. Such chapters are primarily summaries of the relationships and interactions between the Bavarian missions and Lutherans in other parts of the world. Common themes of these later sections include the growing autonomy of churches that were started by Western missionaries and evolving approaches to religions other than Christianity.

Readers might be disappointed that there are no footnotes in this edition. Such guides for further research and reading would be very helpful and instructive. Those with access to the original German text—*Kirche in Bewegung* (Erlanger Verlag, 2014)—will be glad to know that footnotes appear in that volume.

In conclusion, this book makes a worthy contribution to the field of mission history, especially those missionary traditions with roots in Neuendettelsau and the Loehe tradition.

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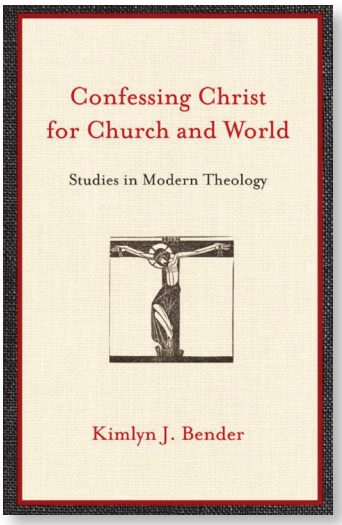

Confessing Christ for Church and World: Studies in Modern Theology. By Kimlyn J. Bender. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8308-4059-5. 391 pages. Paper. $42.00.

Kimlyn Bender is Professor of Christian Theology at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary whose published works (for example, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology*, 2005) largely center on the prominent twentieth century theologian—a focus which continues in this volume.

Bender provides a variety of essays which reflect on the broad theme: "what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord in our day" (11). He notes three commitments which undergird his exploration: (1) "the scandal of the gospel" (13); (2) attention to the pluriform North American church; and (3) the need to speak to a broad spectrum of churches not merely the ones within "a particular confessional tradition" (15).

The book is divided into three parts, each addressing a different aspect of the broader question. The first explores questions surrounding ecclesiology. Here, Bender offers essays which explore, for example, Barth's mature ecclesiology in conversation with critics and the relationship of Barth's ecclesiology to that of Roman Catholicism. The second and longest part "focuses on questions of Scripture, biblical authority and tradition" (12). The reader discovers chapters on such diverse topics as Barth's exchange with Harnack, Barth's answer to atheism, and the connection between Barth and "low church" Baptists. The third part consists of three chapters which are more loosely connected than chapters in the previous sections. Here, Schleiermacher features more prominently as Bender discusses Christology and the nature of theology.

The author is deeply entrenched in the theology of Barth, as conversant with the early Barth of *Der Römerbrief* as with the mature Barth of the *Church Dogmatics.* Because of his breadth of knowledge, he can discuss Barth's theology in relation to a wide panorama of topics with clarity, while offering the penetrating analysis one would expect from a seasoned Barth scholar. In sum, Barth is the primary theologian Bender discusses in this book, who even lurks in the background of those chapters that are not directly concerned with him (chapters 4 and 7).

Given this, it is accurate to describe this volume as a retrieval of Barth, with Bender extending his thought and reapplying it to new topics; that is to say, Bender is thinking after Barth. One significant insight is that Bender sufficiently and powerfully establishes Barth as a theologian who was concerned with the well-being of the church. However, this book also displays Bender as a theologian in his own right as he interacts with Roman Catholic teaching, New Testament scholar Barth Ehrman, and church historian Mark A. Knoll.

The focus on Barth (and secondarily Schleiermacher) is both the greatest strength and weakness of the book. Bender provides a fresh, engaging reading of Barth, which also reflects the author's own concerns. Yet even though Barth's theology is substantial and worthy of engagement, one wonders whether Bender has sufficiently moved beyond Barth in these essays. Put differently, while one hears the author's voice, it often feels as if Bender is the backup singer to Barth as the lead vocalist. Those sympathetic to Barth's project will find much food for thought, but those more critical will ponder whether Bender has truly offered something constructive, moving beyond Barth, the theological giant.

Because of Bender's grasp and explication of Barth, this volume is indispensable for those interested in Barth's project. For the reader that is Barth-adverse, yet a lover of Christ and his church, there remains much to be gained from reading Bender's studies, since he treats topics of perennial interest, such as ecclesiology, Scripture, and Christology, with remarkable clarity and insight. Highly recommended.

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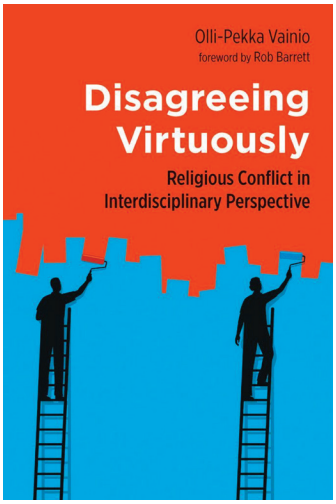

Disagreeing Virtuously: Religious Conflict in Interdisciplinary Perspective. By Olli–Pekka Vainio and Rob Barrett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN 978-0-8028-7504-4. 207 pages. Paper. $30.00.

Here is a well–written study on a significant issue in our conflicted world that simply gives the reader a superfluity of detail that is more than one needs to know. Competent forty-page chapters on the history of philosophy ("We Have Been There Before"), the history of psychology, and more recent neuro–science ("Programmed to Disagree?")," finally lead to the author's fourth and final chapter which offers insight into how learning to "disagree virtuously" might aid our world to live more harmoniously.

The author, a Finnish systematic theologian teaching in Helsinki, introduces his readers to the rudiments of "virtue theory" and suggests three such virtues: "open–mindedness," "epistemic humility," and "intellectual courage" as excellences to pursue, however difficult learning such virtuous behaviors might prove. These virtues are on open display in Vainio's own quest to better our ability to disagree over religious matters in wiser ways than is our wont. As someone who has undergone considerable church conflict mediation training and a recent nasty intra-congregational squabble, I found few fresh insights or practical suggestions.

Most illuminating were the pastoral insights offered near the book's conclusion. The first was from Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, who has reason to know about remediating church conflict: "If I conclude that my Christian brother or sister is deeply and damagingly mistaken in their decision, I accept for myself the brokenness in the Body that this entails" (184).

Vaino also quotes Nigel Biggar, who in his *Behaving in Public* claims: "The way churches conduct their own internal controversies is a vital test of their own integrity, a vital part of their own witness to the rest of the world, and a vital part of their contribution to its wellbeing." He concludes that church controversies thus become "major opportunities for the Christian churches to become what they should be, to embody what they believe, to bear theological witness in the manner of their being, and to offer a salutary and hopeful example to the rest of the world" (185). My judgment is that it would have been virtuous to have gotten us to this conclusion without so many authorial detours.

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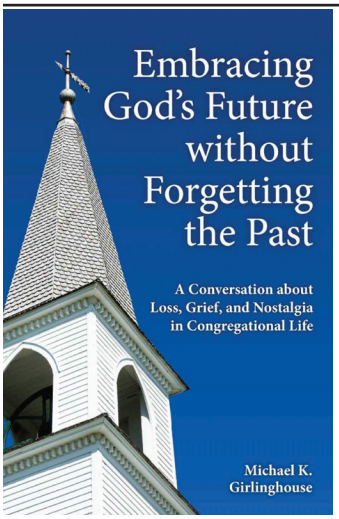

Embracing God's Future without Forgetting the Past: A Conversation about Loss, Grief, and Nostalgia in Congregational Life. By Michael K. Girlinghouse. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5064-5888-5. xxii and 272 pages. Paper. $16.99.

This book could not be a more timely and constructive contribution for accompanying congregational leaders in reimagining and implementing revitalization of church life. The value of the book has become even more clear as we face the formidable challenges of reconstituting mission while enduring and recovering from the effects of pandemic.

Girlinghouse draws upon a wealth of knowledge based on his long engagement with research into loss and grief literature to inform how congregations themselves can become captive to grief over who they once were. Naming the reality of how congregations become stuck in their grief can lend new insight for understanding congregational dynamics.

Over the course of several decades, local communities, specifically those in small town and rural communities, have experienced a world of losses: population decline, consolidation of school districts, loss of job opportunities, small farms consolidated into corporate enterprise, young people moving away, aging, and the list could be expanded. The reasons for grief are real and deep. It is urgent to name this grief for what it is.

The book is written in an accessible, pastoral style and designed as a study guide for group use as well as for personal reflection. One of the most insightful contributions is the author's discussion of how nostalgia functions in congregational life, either as an obstacle to or as a resource for creative change. Nostalgia about the past can be reimagined and redirected to serve as a resource for the future when it funds creative energy about new possibilities. The future is always built from the fragments of the past and the book describes how nostalgia about the past can be leveraged as a gift.

The book is framed in leadership approaches based on adaptive change and appreciative inquiry. Those grounded in such practices will understand the inevitability of resistance and not be surprised by it. Leaders need to be spiritually grounded personally and connected to a network of supportive colleagues to persevere when the going gets tough. Wisely, Girlinghouse reminds us that our best efforts at leading fruitful change depend entirely on the work of the Holy Spirit to bring forth the fruit.

The time has come for church and congregations to move

beyond grief to embrace the possibilities of the new thing God is seeking to accomplish among us. As we "remember forward," trusting in God's faithfulness over time, we can learn to embrace God's future. The author writes: "But I am convinced, absolutely convinced, that God is not done with God's church. Not yet. God will continue to empower God's church to continue the mission of the gospel, even if that's in unexpected and seemingly unorthodox ways" (253-254). Such words could not be timelier for the challenges we now face.

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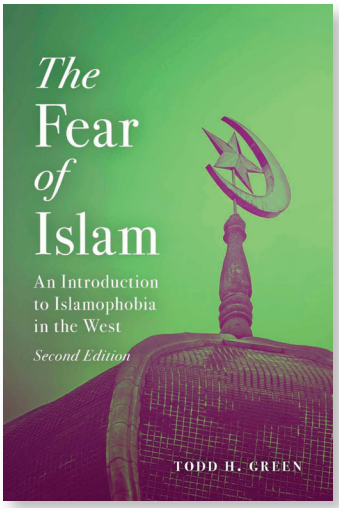

Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West. By Todd Green. Second edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5064-5044-5. vii & 363 pages. Paper. $26.00.

Todd Green's *Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* is very timely, especially as we, as a nation, have stepped into another wake-up call recently by the death of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The connection, as Green argues, is Islamophobia, which is driven by racism as Muslims and Islam are racialized with "cultural racism." This has become one of the most acceptable forms of bigotry in the West today. The book clearly shows how 9/11 is only a part of a greater picture created over several ages. There is an old history of creating fear against Islam. Green reviews this history from the Middle Ages to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into Europe, which turned Muslims from "pagans" and "Christian heretics," to violent military and political threats. He quotes from pre-modern religious leaders such as Martin Luther ("The Turks rule by the sword…Islam is a religion of violence and brutality…") to illustrate how pre-modern political fights have left their mark on European views of Muslims.

Green's examination of the earlier version of Islamophobia critically serves to recognize how struggle for power and territory was, and still is, the actual motive for the purposeful perpetuation of such racial fears. With the rise of European power and the colonization of the Middle East, this fear transformed into a justifying discourse for bringing enlightenment to the uncivilized Orient. Fear is perpetuated on purpose and systemically; it has been even more so since the Soviet Union collapsed. Al-Qaeda, once a U.S. ally against the Soviet Union, got transformed from "a moral equivalent of America's founding fathers," as Reagan once exalted its fighters, to violent terrorists as they started attacking American targets. Here Green emphasizes that the target of the exceedingly rich Islamophobia industry, with almost $206 million in revenue, is not the perverted Islamic ideology of al-Qaeda and the like-minded. Although they claim to fight with extremists, in fact they see the problem within Islam itself. One of the examples Green brings is the manifesto from France to alter the Qur'an for its "violent verses," signed by former President Nicolas Sarkozy and former Prime Minister Manuel Valls in 2018.

Green notes that the intellectual fathers of the Islamophobia industry are appealed for advice regularly, such as Bernard Lewis, or receive appointments, such as Daniel Pipes, from the U.S. presidency. Pipes' overtly xenophobic description of Muslim immigrants as "brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and not exactly maintaining Germanic standards of hygiene," is very telling, especially at this time as we, as a country, are at another crucial moment fighting against racism.

Among those who owe their career to professional Islamophobia, the most remarkable examples are native informants such as Ayan Hirsi Ali and Irshad Manji; both having received several awards and recognitions from institutions such as the American Jewish Committee, Time Magazine, Oprah Winfrey's magazine, and New York University for their "moral courage" and "commitment to women's rights." Green argues that their journey from the "bondage of Islam to liberation of the West," especially on the treatment of women, only echoes the Clash of Civilizations theory supported by Lewis and Samuel Huntington, that Islam and the West are innately different. Green notes that Hirsi Ali, while reducing all Muslim women to victims of violence and abuse, currently enjoys serving as a fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Remembering that "liberating women" constitutes a big portion of Bush's war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan, the role played by Hirsi Ali and Manji is unquestionably to be celebrated by the professional Islamophobia industry.

Green's interview with Muslim intellectual and public figures on how to combat Islamophobia adds a significant asset to the book. If Islamophobia wins, due to the lack of personal relationships among Muslims and non-Muslims, personal interactions are vital to dismantle it. It is not a single ignorance when it comes to Islam, says Ingrid Mattson, it is a "complex ignorance": non-Muslims have an "assumed knowledge," which does not allow correct information about Islam to enter the mind. This assumed knowledge needs to be unlearned, in order to open the way for correct information to come forward. Muslims should not isolate themselves at this time, as Eboo Patel echoes Mattson. For Tariq Ramadan, the integration should be a past issue for Muslims as they should contribute to society with civic engagements, form more ties, and get out of an immigrant or guest psychology.

For any instructor teaching about Islam or the Middle East in the U.S. and Europe, Islamophobia is a topic to tackle. Green's

comprehensive survey of Islamophobia is not only accessible in its language, but rich with real examples. This great survey of Euro-American visions of Islam and the Middle East serves to be a great introduction to anyone interested in learning more.

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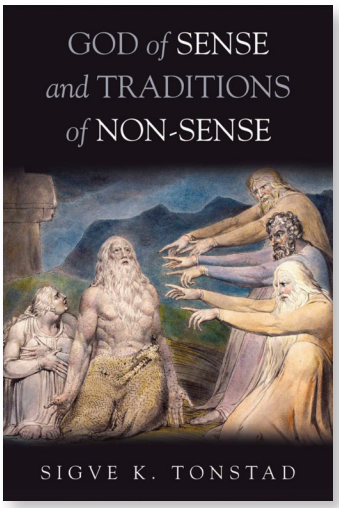

God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense. By Sigve K. Tonstad. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2016. ISBN 978-1-4982-3313-2. Paper. 453 pages. $25.00.

The rather unusual title represents a massive and largely successful effort to plumb the depths of the age-old theological quest to defend the justice of God's ways in the face of age-old questions about God's goodness. Particularly appalling, to our author's way of thinking, is what he identifies as the church's orthodox "fall back" position in its defense of God in matters of "theodicy" that simply claim, as Isaiah 55 puts it, that "God's ways are higher than our ways." One should not presume to judge God according to the light of human reason, or "sense" as he prefers to name our ordinary human way of judging right and wrong. This has led to a storied series of mis-readings of scripture and historical human events in what the author collectively calls the church's amassing of "traditions of non-sense," going as far back as Augustine and continuing from the medieval church through Reformation heroes, such as Luther, Calvin, Karl Barth, and others in modern times (254) that have sought to defend God from human inquisition.

In relation to "inquisition," Tonstad shows a lively and imaginative interest in the witness of non-biblical literature, considering at length Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and its notorious "Grand Inquisitor" chapter. In this classic work, Ivan paints for his younger brother, Alyosha, a telling imaginary portrait of Jesus before the bar of the Spanish Inquisition for daring to introduce the specter of freedom into the moral life (for example, 22-35). While revealing a deep familiarity with the literature and theology of the Jewish holocaust, the bulk of the book consists of a close reading of biblical texts, including the temptation of Adam and Eve, Cain's slaying of Abel, Abraham and the binding of Isaac, and on to Moses, Elijah, Job, Jesus, Paul and Revelation. Tonstad selects hard-case passages, and "painstakingly" offers well-footnoted and linguistically sophisticated alternative readings to build his case that it is never justifiable to throw up one's hands and defer to God's deeper wisdom which "passes understanding."

One quibble with the author is that he never takes up the story of Joseph and his brothers, where Joseph, confronted after his father's death with the perfidy of his brothers, utters the words that seem to me the closest thing we have to theodicy in the OT: "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good… (Gen 50:19-20). Readers will benefit from being confronted with these well-known texts and the church's "traditions of non-sense" that have made it too easy to assume that faith has nothing to do with making sense of what God is up to!

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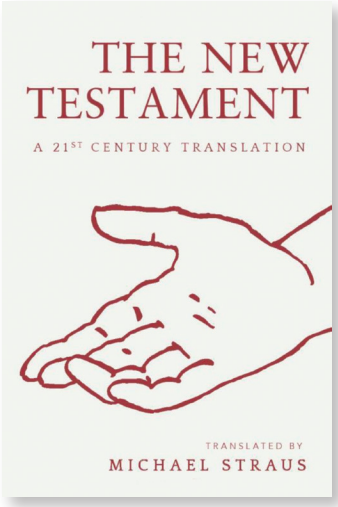

The New Testament: A 21st Century Translation. Translated by Michael Straus. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5326-4876-2. xvii & 564 pages. Paper. $24.00.

In an age where copious amounts of new Bible translations are increasingly accessible, one might be tempted to consider another translation superfluous. However, because readers are accustomed to the language and style of most modern translations, readers do not always notice the interpretive choices that affect one's reading. Michael Straus's *The New Testament: A 21st Century Translation* presents more than a user-friendly translation – he offers a thought-provoking, enlivening experience of reading the Bible as literature. Straus holds degrees in history, philosophy, classical languages, and law, and his translation clearly displays his range of expertise.

As Straus explains, he does not intend to supplant previous translations, rather he endeavors to bring "fresh turns of phrase" and "enhance the rhythm and force of style" (vii). One quickly notices the effect of even minor stylistic decisions such as names or verse numbers. With the absence of verse numbers or section titles, Straus seemingly strips away the mechanical approach to the Bible and effectively slows the reader down to appreciate and engage the text. Straus often jars the reader's attention by either using ancient languages or anachronistic terms and idioms. For instance, Gabriel's greeting to the virgin Mary is in Latin. By using Latin, like Mary, the reader is "perplexed by words, not understanding what kind of greeting that might be" (119). Instead of calling Zacchaeus a "tax collector," he is a "local hedge fund manager" (169).

One of the most noticeable features of Straus's translation is the unique characteristics of each author. His decisions display a

sensitivity to the cultural orientation, the form and characteristics of genre, and the effect of literary styles. In Matthew, for instance, which has a decidedly Hebrew orientation, Straus opts for Yeshua instead of Jesus. The opening of John's Gospel reads like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, appropriately adding a timeless appearance to a thematically timeless passage. Paul's letters appear more personal, using modern colloquialisms and a more pronounced first-person perspective. Remarkably, Straus's translation of Revelation maintains an apocalyptic character by utilizing many languages, both ancient and modern. Albeit disorienting, Straus's work manages to truly respect the nuances of genre and reveal the effects of style on readability and understanding.

While his decisions on certain terms or usage of unknown languages can be confusing, one can appreciate the point Straus is making – in the translation of the New Testament is the confluence of many centuries, languages, literary forms and styles, and manners of speaking. Straus shows that translation is not so much a science as it is an art. To some extent, this translation reflects *Straus's* own artistry in exercising his own poetic license. For pastors or lay people seeking a more technical, literal, or even functional translation, this is not that sort of translation. Instead, Straus offers an experience of reading the New Testament that is poetic, lively, contemporary, and captivating—and enhanced by the simplistic illustrations of the artist Anna Pipes. Altogether, Straus has provided a bold and innovative translation that makes one reencounter a text that is too often numbingly perused.

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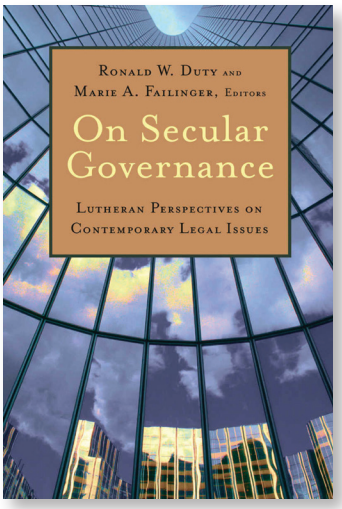

On Secular Governance: Lutheran Perspective on Contemporary Legal Issues. Edited by Ronald W. Duty and Marie A Failinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7228-9. iv & 336 pages. Paper. $45.00.

The intent of this book, as the editors state on the first page of the Introduction, is to "bring more Lutheran voices to pressing legal issues..." The work mostly features separate articles by theologians and a few legal voices. Despite the title, it does not include those who actually serve in elected or appointed secular governance (even though far more Lutherans do so today.) Nor is there interaction between the authors (except for Gaebler with Duty); the others remain set-apart articles.

Yes, two "realms" where God is acting have long been characterized as a Lutheran ethical framework, both in helpful and unhelpful ways. It has *not* been what has predominated in the U.S. Is this the main emphasis that Lutherans can bring to the public realm, or is it even that relevant or helpful today, especially for challenging racial, sexual, and climate injustices that persist? Emphasizing "neighbor love" and "vocation" is a helpful addition. Lutherans on all levels, together with others, have become more active in advocating what neighbors need. Increasingly and crucially, this is being done ecumenically, in interfaith partnerships, and in collaboration with other non-profit organizations and movements.

The Reformation Luther initiated was systemic or structural from the beginning. As the Radicalizing Reformation books of the past decade insist, if justification remains confined to a personal dimension apart from the wider societal, creation-wide implications, then injustices will continue to have free reign, distorting our most basic relationships: with God, ourselves, one another, and the rest of creation.

Luther often spoke out on matters related to the "secular governance" of his day, especially on injustices they perpetuated, as does the Nigerian theologian Ibrahim Bitrus in this volume.

John Stumme presents historical background and perspectives for how in our day "secular or non-religious discourse has marginalized or banned theological discourse" and how "this threatens *religious* freedom in the long-term." Lutheran views of how God acts in the two "realms" can be helpful here.

In addressing the continuing sin of racism, Richard Perry sees similarities between King and Luther on the distinction between just and unjust laws or governance.

Mary Gaebler highlights Luther's sense that ours is a God-infused world – the finite *and* the infinite, a both/and approach that is much needed today. God identifies with the created world; all are independent, so that right relationship between self and neighbor is crucial. In contrast, property law in the U.S. sets individual benefit against the common good; it pulls apart what is inseparable. It makes nature vulnerable to human greed. Ronald Duty exemplifies this through the struggle for water rights in the southwest U.S. Criteria of sustainability, participation, solidarity, and equity are key.

Kirsi Stjerna points to the importance of laws to end child sex-trafficking. Wanda Diefelt discusses human trafficking in general, and calls for advocacy, solidary and empowerment. Leopoldo Sanchez illustrates the different positions that Lutherans may come to regarding laws on immigration reform because of the tension between neighbor love and obedience to temporal law.

Focus on the distinctive Danish legal situation of Lutheran churches, the amazingly effective organizing work in Rwanda, and how Luther's critical public theology could address the governance dilemmas in Nigeria makes this book somewhat global.

Nevertheless, why are the "normative" articles at the beginning and end with those focusing on the issues facing those most vulnerable as well as global contexts and contexts other than the

U.S. in the middle of the book?

As we realized some years ago in the Lutheran World Federation, these other contexts, where churches are growing, present the real theological/ethical challenges that need to be addressed, especially where traditional understandings may no longer be normative. Some urgent ethical issues are discussed in this book, such as racism and trafficking, but they mostly appear like separate articles that are not in dialogue with or challenging what has been traditionally seen as the "normative" core. But that may be another book, after 2020.

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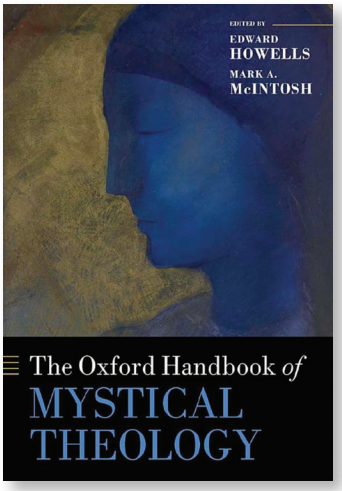

The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology. Edited by Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-1987-2238-0. xiv & 704 pages. Cloth. $150.00.

Oxford handbooks are magisterial treatments that serve as contemporary reference works and become points of reference for the state of research and knowledge at a given moment long into the future. This volume is no exception. The editors have assembled a remarkable set of scholars well known in the field of spirituality, including those already well known, such as Bernard McGinn, Andrew Louth, Jean-Luc Marion, David Tracy, and Rowan Williams together with those who are current authorities on the subjects about which they write. Cumulatively, the 33 chapters (each about 20 pages long) contribute to a treasure trove for exploring mystical traditions across the sweep of history.

The book is divided into four major parts: 1) Understanding Mystical Theology, 2) Sources, Contexts, and Practices, 3) Key Patterns of Mystical Thought, and 4) Mysticism and Theology. Each part consists of major entries on related topics. Part 1 has five foundational chapters discussing mystical theology in relation to Christian self-understanding, the heart of theology, human experience, mystical traditions, and contemporary perspectives.

Of interest to Protestant readers is McGinn's brief discussion of "Protestant Mysticism" in his review of "Early Modern Genealogies." He notes the recovery of mystical theology in Reformation studies in recent decades. While Luther was "not a mystical theologian in any traditional sense" (79), McGinn notes he was influenced by mystical strains from Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard. The recent work of Volker Leppin, among others, has strengthened the argument for an even greater impact by mysticism on Luther than acknowledged here. Johannes Tauler (ca. 1300-1361) and the author of the *Theologia Deutsch* (late fourteenth century) were among those who exercised significant influence on Luther's Christ-centered faith. The Radical Reformation and German Pietism took Protestant mysticism in new directions, for example in the work, *True Christianity*, by Johann Arndt (1555-1621).

The chapters on "Living the Word" by Keven L. Hughes and "The Liturgical Mystery" by Andrew Louth are of special interest for contrasting with Lutheran interpretations of Word and sacrament. The selection of noteworthy "patterns" in mystical thought establishes the basis for trajectories of meaning across various representatives and writings: image and likeness of God; itineraries; depth, ground, and abyss; erotic and nuptial imagery; cataphasis, visualization, and mystical space; apophasis; trinitarian indwelling; and mystical union. The relation of mysticism to major loci in theology are taken up in the final part of the book: Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, creation and revelation, anthropology, ecclesiology, sociality, and eschatology. The contributions of Tracy and Marion explore philosophical dimensions of the mystical, while Michael Barnes, necessarily for our time, discusses connections with interreligious dialogue.

This book deserves the attention of readers seeking to investigate the history and significance of mysticism for Christian thought. Finally, mysticism insists we pay attention to human experience in relation to manifestations of God's presence in the world.

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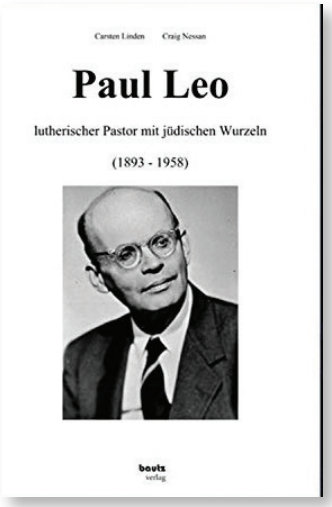

Paul Leo: Lutherischer Pastor mit jüdischen Wurzeln (1893 – 1958). By Carsten Linden and Craig Nessan. Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz GmbH, 2019. ISBN: 978-3-9594-8453-4. 86 pages. Paper/Ebook. $10.02.

Even with the passage of time, the letter is chilling in its matter-of-fact blandness. Dated August 17, 1935, it informs the German Lutheran pastor Paul Leo that since his ancestry is non-Aryan, his employment is terminated with immediate effect (22). For hundreds of thousands of people such letters meant the end of a way of life as they knew it and the prospects of a terrifying and uncer-

tain future under the fanatical and ruthless Nazi regime, well documented in numerous publications such as Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford, 2010). Where were the Christians in all this? Wasn't baptism supposed to "erase" past identities and belongings since a baptized person was a new creation in Christ? Not those whom the Nazis considered to have been tainted with Jewish ancestry. The new book by Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), unambiguously points out in a chapter titled "The Nazis and the Acceleration of Caste" that racist American laws regarding segregation and miscegenation formed the basis for the enshrining of anti-Jewish laws in Nazi Germany (and that some of these laws were even too harsh for as brutal a regime as that of the Nazis).

Given that several prominent Christian theologians were willing to offer their expertise in the service of the Nazi ideology (see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* [Princeton, 2008]), and given that the Confessing Church was scrambling to survive in the midst of all the fears, it's hardly surprising that people such as Paul Leo and very many others like him, in the same or similar predicament, felt totally isolated and betrayed.

While the further journeys of many such people and their families ended in violent tragedy, the book under review documents the convoluted path that led Pastor Leo to the United States and to Wartburg Theological Seminary. It is to the credit of the writers that they provide a compact yet thoroughly documented narration (with photographs) of the life, witness, legacy, and impact of Paul Leo, from his birth in Göttingen, through his studies and pastoral ministry in Germany, his incarceration in the notorious Buchenwald concentration camp, and his almost miraculous pathway to the United States, where he taught at the Western Theological Seminary, served as a pastor in Texas, became a U.S. citizen, and spent the last eight years of his life as a respected and valued Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages at Wartburg Theological Seminary.

The book offers all this and more, including a list of his publications, which certainly deserve to be revisited, and reminds us that even where one experiences the horror of abandonment, one could still testify to the sustaining hope embodied in the crucified and abandoned Lord.

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