



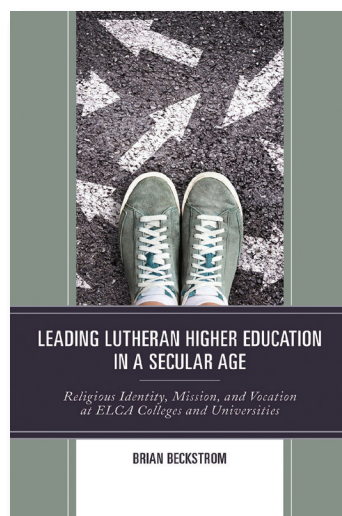
Book Reviews

July 2022

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

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Leading Lutheran Higher Education in a Secular Age: Religious Identity, Mission, and Vocation at ELCA Colleges and Universities.

By Brian Beckstrom.
Lanham, Maryland:
Lexington/Fortress
Academic, 2020. ISBN:
978-1-9787-0603-
3. xviii & 193 pages.
Cloth. \$95.00.

In *Leading Lutheran Higher Education in a Secular Age*, Brian Beckstrom lays out challenges facing Lutheran colleges and universities, backed by rich research and the work of theologians whose voices make his arguments even more compelling. Beckstrom uncovers a troubling disconnect between the espoused religious identity of our institutions and the religious identity perceived by many who live and work there (54-56).

Beckstrom's research (using qualitative coding) examines mission and identity statements of the five ELCA schools he studied. His findings are striking. All five institutions, while claiming Lutheran identity, tended to downplay it in favor of more secular descriptors such as "service, inclusion, and discovering one's purpose in life." Several, in naming of their Lutheran identity, add a disclaimer: "being Lutheran is really about freedom and openness" (93). While this may be accurate, there is little eagerness to talk about the importance of religious conviction, even as this rootedness is the very thing that inspires our openness.

The author argues that our institutions are described, whether in print or by members of the communities, using "a rather vague and ambiguous sort of humanism that seems intentionally designed to avoid any mention of God or the transcendent" (112). Institutions and their leaders are very comfortable espousing the virtues of "service, justice, and vocation," which are valued in both the sacred and secular spheres. It is much

harder to name or describe God's action in any of this.

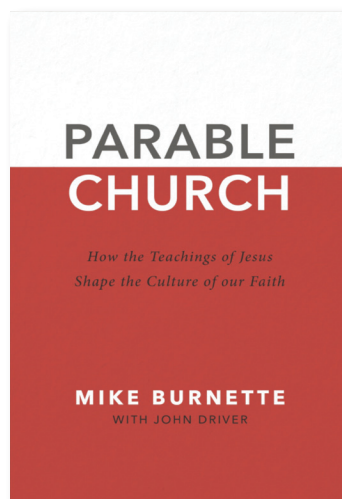
Beckstrom astutely notes that another factor is how religious faith and the work of interpreting the Christian mission of the university has become siloed to a select few, typically the campus pastor and sometimes the religion faculty. They are seen as the primary custodians of faith on our campuses. Few leaders in other parts of the institution have any theological training, and many even lack significant religious life experiences. Additionally, an increasingly pluralistic society makes it difficult for Lutheran colleges and universities to know how to talk about Christian convictions without alienating those who do not share their beliefs.

Beckstrom proposes a more faithful and authentic way forward for our ELCA schools: Trinitarian Missiological Ecclesiology (5). He calls our institutions to examine who they are through the lens of God's mission. While Lutheran colleges and universities have mission statements, they ought to be grounded, first and foremost, in the mission of God. Lutheran colleges and universities are a part of God's mission, just as congregations are. This is a mission to share the Gospel and to bring forth the kingdom of God. Though our schools do this in a particular way, distinct from congregations, they are no less integral to God's mission.

How do Lutheran colleges and universities make their way amid significant threats to both higher education and religiously affiliated institutions, finding greater congruence between espoused and perceived Lutheran Christian identity? Beckstrom offers several suggestions beginning with talking more about God. Institutional leaders, faculty, staff, and students should be encouraged to name God as an active participant in all that is happening at our schools. We ought to talk about God explicitly at faculty meetings, cabinet meetings, board meetings, and in student government. This is not just the responsibility of the college chaplain, or even the president. All can work to become more fluent in the language of faith.

Beckstrom is convinced that the religious identities of our schools are not sustained simply through occasional offerings, chapel services, and spiritual care for those who want to engage in them. Embracing the call and mission of God at colleges and universities of the church is "critical to [our] future" (133). Adaptive leadership, an innovative spirit, courage, and tenacity are not enough. "Engaging the community in theological reflection is a necessity," thus Beckstrom urges institutional leaders (not only ordained clergy) to be theologically trained and minded (126). This may seem like a tall order. Perhaps it is the least we can do to give Lutheran higher education every advantage in this difficult climate.

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Parable Church: How the Teachings of Jesus Shape the Culture of our Faith, by Mike Burnette and John Driver, et al. Zondervan Reflective, 2021. Paperback, 209 pp., \$18.99.

Author Mike Burnette—lead pastor since 2010 of LifePoint Church in Clarksville, Tennessee,

a congregation that has grown from 85 worshippers to over 5000 under his leadership—argues that Jesus’ parables show us “how to *be* his church” and reflect “the culture of the kingdom of heaven” (4). Burnette selects three stories—the Parable of the Two Sons, the Parable of the Sower, and the Parable of the Talents—and spends three chapters on each one. He argues that the “culture of the Kingdom” revealed in these parables is positive, not negative. On page 13 he has a long list of contrasting adjectives, including “generous, not stingy,” “merciful, not judgmental,” “restorative, not destructive,” “hopeful, not heavy,” and an environment “always open to second chances.” By these frameworks, Burnette strives to combat a view of the church as moralistic, harsh, and hypocritical.

In Part 1, the author devotes three chapters to the longest parable attributed to Jesus, which he purposely names “The Parable of the Two Sons” (Luke 15:11–32). Burnette understands that this parable describes “two *lost* sons” and addresses “older brothers.” Luke’s literary frame for this chapter containing three “lost and found” stories describes the religious elites’ “murmuring” at Jesus’ table fellowship with “tax collectors and sinners” (15:1–2). Burnette’s chapter titles disclose major themes of his journey with this parable. Chapter 2, focusing on the younger son (Luke 15:11–24), is titled “Lost Things Matter: The Heart of the Father – Turning toward the Missing.” Chapters 3 and 4, concentrating on the older brother, are titled “The Father’s Economy: The Grace (Not Shame) of the Loving Father” and “Throw a Party: The Father Throws Parties; Older Brothers Throw Fits.” For Burnette, this story discloses a culture of seemingly reckless and undeserved generosity and grace, not our culture of earning merit, judging, and shaming others who do not measure up. Mike Burnette likes to tell his people at LifePoint, “Anyone is welcome to come and be part of LifePoint Church and have their lives wrecked—turned upside down and transformed by Jesus, not wrecked by *Jesus’ people*” (27). Throughout these chapters, Burnette makes abundantly clear that both brothers were “lost” and both experienced a father who reached out and embraced them where they were. Only the “older brother” seemed not to be open to transformation. Burnette writes, “As church leaders

and members, we must become intentional in authentically leading our churches away from the older brother attitude” (70). This ongoing process transforms a congregation’s culture to be like that of the Father’s heart.

In Parts 2 and 3, Burnette turns to the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3–9, [10–17,] 18–23 and the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–30 to discuss church growth. As lead pastor of LifePoint Church, one of the fastest growing churches in America, it is perhaps understandable why Burnette chose to do so. He uses the Parable of the Sower, or more precisely its interpretation in Matthew 13:18–23, to argue that the job of pastors “is not to make a church grow” (91) but to preach the revolutionary gospel described in Luke 15. Most of this part of the book focuses on the four types of soil described in the allegorizing interpretation of the parable (Matt 13:3–9). Burnette writes, “We believe that every person who walks into our gatherings is one of four soil types. Every one of us has a prophetic responsibility to discern what sort of heart they have and turn the dirt, remove the rocks, pull the weeds, water the ground, and do whatever it takes to get their hearts ready to hear, receive, and allow the implanting of the seeds of the work of the kingdom into turned-over, good soil of their hearts” (144). I worry that this invitation to categorize visitors into these four soil types might be too neat, particularly since the parable itself (13:3–9) might have been originally told to early hearers who despaired regarding how little success Jesus’ proclamation of the coming kingdom of God appeared to be having: three-fourths of the scattered seeds were not fruitful. The seeds that landed on good soil, however, produced amazing yields—an encouraging message for early followers of Jesus.

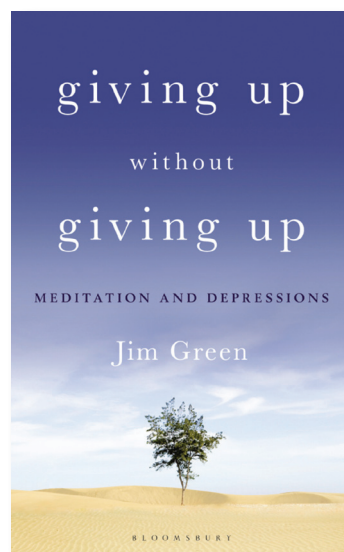
In his treatment of the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14–30), Burnette similarly discusses church growth, now focusing on pastors and their proclivity to compare churches regarding their size. The three servants in the story are each entrusted with a huge amount of money, “according to each’s ability.” The message is one of stewardship and what each does with what is entrusted to them. Stewardship has to do with faithfulness, not fruitfulness. Again, the interpretative danger is to fashion a message easily applicable to contemporary church, while neglecting the eschatological context in Matthew and the story’s pattern of three that puts the spotlight on the final servant. In the last chapter, Burnette deals with the third servant whose fear prevents him from investing his talent, but the author does not acknowledge that in the Matthean context the parable alludes to the Return of Jesus when there will be an accounting and exclusion.

Burnette’s engagement with the Parable of the Two Sons is enlightening and rich. He writes as a pastor who senses deeply the reality of people’s lives, recognizing himself and his experience in the story. He trusts the kingdom vision of Jesus as one who knows “the heart of the Father.” His engagement with the other two parables is less satisfying. He reads the stories carefully but seems less aware of the literary contexts and the



nuanced communal and layered character of the Gospels. Finally, Burnette's interpretations of these three parables focus explicitly on the church and its growth rather than its grace and justice mission in the neighborhood and larger world.

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Giving Up Without Giving Up: Meditation and Depressions. By Jim Green. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-4729-5745-0. 222 pages. Paper. \$18.00.

As the subtitle suggests, this is an effort to link the two subjects in a way that hopes to show how the practice of meditation might be of assistance to those suffer-

ing from depression. The intention is not to put forth meditation as a panacea for depression but to indicate how meditation, rightly understood as a broad, interfaith practice, might help one live with depression and even use it to grow in both self-understanding and faith. The central insight explicit in the book's title is crucial, what "giving up without giving up" might mean as the karmic truth related to Jesus' teaching in the Gospels about letting go of one's life in order to gain it.

The author, an English mental health worker, long-time meditation practitioner, and trainer active in the thirty-year-old "World Community for Christian Meditation," finds as his chief companion and authority Thomas Merton, the widely published American Trappist monk who died in 1968. While considering himself a Christian of Anglican background, Green is well-schooled in the desert fathers/mothers and subsequent monastic traditions and, like Merton before him, keenly interested in Eastern non-Christian meditative traditions and practices.

As a mental health practitioner, however, Green is equally committed here to exploring and explaining the wide-ranging phenomena of "depression" and vividly describes his own history of struggling with its symptoms. In undertaking this book, he also sent out an online invitation for personal stories of those who live with depression while practicing meditation as one response and reports briefly on some illuminating examples. The book also includes invitations to meditate, beginning with a saying of Jesus and ending with a poem.

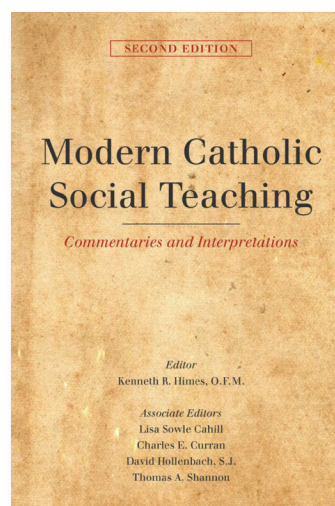
I appreciate the plainspoken, non-therapeutic language

Green employs and his open-mindedness to various approaches to treating depression, including psychotropic medication. He admits he himself has not used medication for his depression but understands why many do and may benefit, while still thinking that drugs may be too widely prescribed. Particularly intriguing is his insistence that depression, while certainly unwelcome and often debilitating, nonetheless can open the sufferer to new possibilities for discovering depths of self-understanding and faith, and, aided by meditation, a deepening of one's prayer life.

Among the author's insights: "The purpose of our lives is quite simply to avoid being full of ourselves" (141). "We need to try not to try so hard" (142). "It takes as long as it takes to realize that it takes no time at all" (194). "[P]atience—the ability to sit quietly, doing nothing while the grass grows by itself. This is what meditation teaches" (175).

Green concludes his book with a quotation from Merton, "Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance." The author adds, "The last sentence still strikes me as the best possible description of meditation" (197).

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Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretation. Second edition. Edited by Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-6261-6515-1. 660 pages. \$49.95.

The editor admits this is "a large book" containing 25 chapters of double-columned essays, each more than 20 pages long. More to the point, it is a substantial book aimed to serve as a "standard reference work for the major documents of Catholic social teaching" (1). This second edition includes two new commentaries, as well as updated essays that bring readers through the papacies of Benedict XVI and Francis. It is a resource that readers are not expected to read cover to cover but to consult for insight about specific aspects of the Church's social teaching. "Modern Catholic social teaching" encompasses the body of teachings that began with the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* promulgated by Leo XIII in 1891, which marks the onset of the church's positive engagement with the modern world in its social



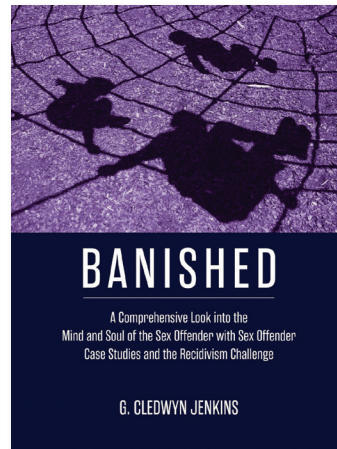
doctrine.

Several other “encyclicals” are the subjects of in-depth commentaries, paying close attention to their content, context, and reception by church and society. However, other official Catholic social teachings are also included, for example, *Gaudium et Spes* from Vatican II, known in English as the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965). A series of *Christmas Messages* published and broadcast on radio during World War II by Pius XII, who otherwise issued no encyclicals during his long papacy, is also incorporated. Seven chapters address issues pertaining to the topic of Catholic social teaching more broadly, for example, an illuminating essay by John R. Donahue, S.J., on “The Bible and Catholic Social Teaching.” This chapter demonstrates the deepening use and sophistication of Scripture references in teaching documents since Vatican II and the turn away from predominately natural law arguments.

The commentaries I found particularly engaging were by Daniel Finn, theologian and economist, who reflected on John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus* from 1991, the centennial of *Rerum Novarum*. John Paul II’s observations on the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet Union, and East European communist states (including his own native Poland) and the future of the capitalist/socialist challenge are of high interest. Finn also looks at the controversial statement on the economy that was developed by the U.S. Conference of Bishops during the mid-eighties and the rise of neo-conservative Catholic thinkers, who were inspired by John Paul II and opposed the Bishops’ statement on the economy. Another outstanding essay is by Christiana Zenner Peppard, who comments on *Laudato Si’ (On Care for Our Common Home)* from Pope Francis, which she sees as unique to the legacy of Catholic social teaching not only as the first to address environmental concerns but for being biblically and theologically sophisticated about these issues, drawing from other religious traditions and addressing a global readership.

Serving as capstone of this impressive collection is “The Future of Catholic Social Thought,” by John A. Coleman, S.J., in which he moves beyond the official teaching of the church to celebrate the myriad ways Catholic social thinking has deepened and diversified in recent years, thereby giving promise of new and challenging developments to come.

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Banished: A Comprehensive Look into the Mind and Soul of the Sex Offender with Sex Offender Case Studies and the Recidivism Challenge. By G. Cledwyn Jenkins. Irvine: Brown Walker Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5994-2602-0. xxi & 301 pages. Paper. \$52.95.

The recently published book, *Banished*, provides a look into the mind and soul of the child sex offender. The author unashamedly states he endeavored to instill the will of God’s compassion and forgiveness in his book. He begins the book by acknowledging that it reflects his commitment to faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He also states that he hopes that the book will assist humanity through scholarly practitioner work as a way to serve God. He adheres to the belief that a melding of secular and non-secular science, methodologies, and systems with the foundation of faith accomplishes service to God.

In Part I of *Banished*, the author creates an understanding of the etiology of child sex offenders. It is pointed out that by 2012, there were more than seven hundred thousand individuals registered as sex offenders in the United States. Next, the author takes readers into the works of Piaget and Freud to appreciate why child sex abuse can be devastating to victims. Finally, the Old Testament is used to demonstrate the influence of Judeo-Christian teachings on current child sex laws, especially the age of consent. In a ministry that reaches out to convicted child sex offenders, it is essential to understand the difference between pedophiles and child sex molesters. Pedophiles, voyeurs, exhibitionists, sexual sadists and masochists, and consumers of pornography argue that their behavior is normal. The author urges that these views not be taken lightly, pointing to the rapid change in attitudes about gay marriages that brought this once unheard-of concept into law.

The author takes his readers on a journey into the worlds of nepiophilia, hebephilia, pedohebephilia, pederasty, and related sexual deviancies. All of these things are impacted by the new world of internet pornography. For many readers, this journey will be an eye-opening experience as the author discusses sex offender typologies and subtypes and the process of grooming and luring victims. It is pointed out that the *Harvard Mental Health Letter* takes the position that pedophilia is not curable and that treatment only enables one to desist acting on sexual urges.

In Part II of *Banished*, readers are exposed to places on the internet that most people do not know exist. The internet

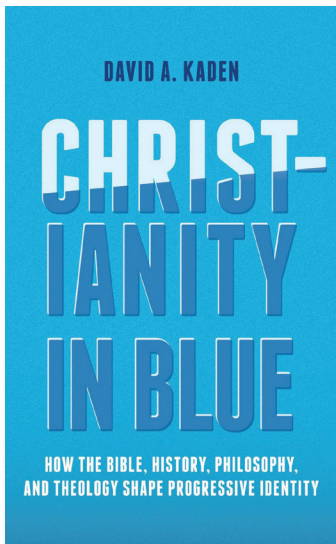


has ushered in a new age of sexual deviancy where every deviant display of sexual immorality can be found, from sadistic sex and rape fantasies, to incest, and child pornography. Under the umbrella of the decline of Judeo-Christian values in today's society, the easily accessed internet websites have become a source for deviant sexual appetites. Many of these websites seductively proclaim their legality.

As law enforcement takes down these criminal websites, new alternatives emerge showing children dressed in lingerie or cartoon figures depicting children in lewd sex acts. It is clear that internet pornography is having an impact on child sex offending. The number of registered sex offenders in the United States is nearly eight hundred thousand. Despite this high number, many in pastoral care have never had the opportunity to interview sex offenders about their sexual deviancy and crimes. Jenkins provides eight case studies astounding to scholarly minds and heartbreaking for those in pastoral care. This book is extraordinarily educational for those interested in reaching out to the banished and loathed population of convicted child sex offenders.

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Christianity in Blue: How the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Theology Shape Progressive Identity. By David A. Kaden. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-5064-7127-3. 187 pages. Paper. \$24.00.

David A. Kaden's *Christianity in Blue: How the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Theology Shape Progressive Identity* is a timely book

as progressive Christianity's voice is becoming more prominent in the ecclesial sphere as well as the public sphere. Progressive Christianity, according to Kaden, is rooted in the ancient tradition of the church and best describes Jesus' ministry through "utopian language" as it draws upon art and song and is rooted in the expansiveness of the kingdom of God (13). Kaden's short tract is written largely as a response to the dominant voices of the Religious Right.

Kaden grew up in conservative evangelical church circles, and like many of those scholars who have written similar books, has largely joined the progressive Christianity movement.

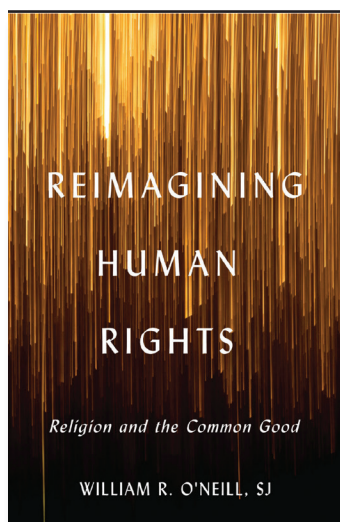
However, I would say that "joining the progressive Christianity movement" is a misnomer. Progressive Christians see the gospel as liberating and call for more social awareness for marginalized groups. Kaden's thesis, or overall purpose of the book, is advocating that progressive Christianity has its roots and is informed by philosophy, theology, and sound biblical exegesis. Kaden also argues that "what the Bible says" should not be treated as conversation enders but instead as conversation starters.

Kaden first focuses on what is progressive Christianity, and he spends the rest of the book building off this theme using mainly the Bible as support for progressive Christianity. He concentrates on exploring God, especially how God is portrayed in the Bible, and how sometimes humanity's view of God differs upon circumstance. Kaden then transitions to discussions on Jesus and Paul—Christology and Pauline theology—where Kaden begins to stretch his case. Kaden relies heavily on a postmodern approach to both Jesus and Paul. Kaden is correct in critiquing that what both Paul and Jesus have said has been subject to reader-response interpretation, and that their contexts are missed. However, Kaden goes too far in oversimplifying the historical Jesus by arguing that the gospel narratives of Jesus are merely retrojections by the gospel authors. While Kaden is correct in acknowledging the distinction with the authors themselves, he oversimplifies the case to paint a picture of a progressive Jesus. Jesus is beyond both the traditional and progressive titles, but what can be agreed upon is that Jesus reached out to the other, to those on the margins.

Kaden's treatment of Paul is very much like his approach to Jesus, which is firmly rooted in the postmodernist camp. However, with both approaches Kaden's treatment is heavily contextualized, which is a strength. Yet, the weaknesses are present when Kaden interprets Paul through a progressive lens. For example, Kaden argues that Paul may have had a universalist message, which does not match with the rest of Scripture.

Overall, this book is a starting point for pastors looking deeper into progressive Christianity. I would pair this book with *Paul the Progressive? The Compassionate Christian's Guide to Reclaiming Paul as an Ally* by Eric Smith.

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Reimagining Human Rights: Religion and the Common Good.

By William R. O'Neill, SJ. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2021. ISBN:978-1-6471-2035-1. 249 pages. Paper. \$44.95.

This is one difficult book. The topic is tough, the vocabulary often arcane, and the carefully crafted arguments are lengthy. The foot-

noting is extensive (46 pages), the bibliography comprehensive (28 pages), and the list of interrogators long and varied, including such prominent names as Rawls, Rorty, Nozick, Nussbaum, Sandel, Geertz, Habermas, Dworkin, Walzer, Gadamer, Said, MacIntyre, Arendt, Weil, and Volf. However, the author spices his arguments with an occasional reference to poetry (most often his fellow Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins) and grounds his central concern with finding a middle way between human rights (typified as a liberal and post-modern, secular concern) with “the common good,” (an older, communitarian and religion-based focus).

The author’s favorite authority is Bishop Desmond Tutu and the official South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work in the wake of Nelson Mandela’s release from prison and the subsequent dismantling of apartheid. This and other more recent contemporary events (for example, the Rwandan genocide and the International Court’s adjudication of issues in the Balkans) provide important context for his argument that human rights provide an essential rhetoric for victims of many kinds of abuse in our world and functions as a way of seeing and imagining evil. Human rights, in other words, are not “nonsense on stilts,” as the English pragmatist Jeremy Bentham once polemicized.

Especially impressive are the specific issues of human rights abuse based on the author’s personal experience ministering as a priest: race and mass incarceration in the U.S., migration and refugee policy on an international scale, and the implications of climate change for ecological policy on a global scale. Here O’Neill’s work as a women’s prison chaplain with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Kenya and other global speaking and teaching assignments provide him with ample stories of victims and human rights injustices.

This book seeks to articulate a middle way between human rights and the common good in pursuing God’s justice that is at the same time a public goal and a commitment by various faith communities. Although the language of the book is dense, we can be grateful for an author who, for the sake of better imagining human rights, takes on the deepest thinkers for

the sake of the gospel and shares his wisdom and experience on behalf of the world’s victims. O’Neill quotes his favorite poet:

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces.
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ (153)

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Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity. By Robert Chao Romero. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8308-5285-7. ix & 236 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

This book provides a comprehensive introduction to the history and theology of the movement

known as “Brown Church.” Romero specifies that “*Brown* is symbolic of the cultural and biological *mestizaje*, or mixture, in Latin America.” This encompasses both the struggles and achievements of Latina/o peoples in the Americas in the 500 years after the conquest of the indigenous population by Europeans.

Romero writes: “Brown Church is a multivalent category, encompassing ethnic, historical, theological, spiritual, and sociopolitical dimensions. In every instance of racial and social injustice in Latin America and the United States over the centuries, the Brown Church has arisen to challenge the religious, socioeconomic, and political status quo” (11). Brown Theology, has arisen, accordingly, as a resource that draws upon “the biblical value of justice and the social dimensions of Jesus’ redemption” to challenge “the genocide and dehumanization of native and African communities, and the presentation of a corrupt and distorted gospel...” (12).

Romero provides a significant survey of major events and figures contributing to the legacy of Brown Church usable for the cause of resistance and advocating justice today. The biblical grounding for this theology, like that of Latin American liberation theology, is rooted in the person, teaching, and ministry of the Jesus movement in Galilee (cf. Virgilio Elizondo). The kingdom of God was at the heart of this movement with its preferential message of “good news for the poor” and the call to discipleship. The cross was the consequence of Jesus’ “plan espiritual de Galilee” that opened the kingdom to all and by his resurrection



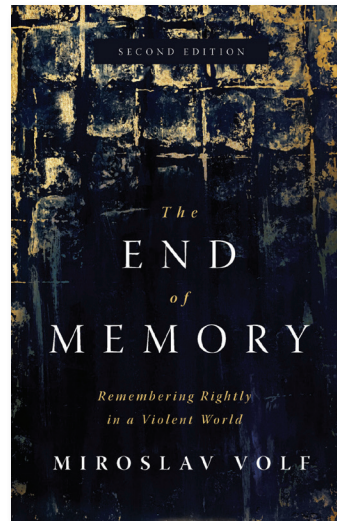
from the dead to inaugurate a new creation.

The central chapters of the book take the reader on a journey through the centuries with those who continued to manifest the Jesus movement in their time. At the origin of Brown Church as Beloved Community were the witnesses of Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The witness of Las Casas and appearance of Our Lady in indigenous form remain foundational.

Among the “multicultural voices of colonial resistance” Romero recounts the contributions of Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca, Guaman Poma, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. At the time of the U.S.-Mexico War, whose unjust conclusion with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hildago on February 2, 1848, marks the historical moment when Mexicans and U.S. Latinas/os “became Brown,” the “fierce challenge to the spiritual conquest of the Southwest” by Padre Antonio José Martínez made him “the father of the Brown Church in the United States” (118). From this time, Latinx people became trapped in “legal and racial liminality” through the seizure of their lands.

Chapters are devoted from more recent history to the spiritual praxis of César Chávez; social justice theologies of Latin America (liberation theology) and the holistic gospel of Misión Integral (Carlos René Padilla, J. Samuel Excobar Aguirre, Pedro Arana Quiroz); and the embodied liberation theology of Archbishop Oscar Romero. The book concludes with attention to representatives of more recent social justice theologies, including Latina/o theology, *mujerista* theology, Pentecostal Latina/o theology, and Latina/o practical theology. I recommend this book highly for the historical and substantive narrative that establishes the trajectory of Brown Church into the present, concluding with nine defining characteristics of Brown Christian identity (215-217). “Jesus is calling us to a new movement and new wineskins for the new work of *Espíritu Liberador* among us” (213).

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***The End of Memory:
Remembering Rightly
in a Violent World.***

Second Edition. By Miroslav Volf. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7867-0. 308 pages. Cloth. \$24.99.

This is a book that makes a relatively simple point: in order to accomplish final reconciliation with the wrongs and those who have

abused us, we may need to let them go after making certain we have remembered them justly. This second edition includes an appendix of the memories of perpetrators as well as victims, an epilogue titled “Fifteen Years Later,” and the published transcript of an interview conducted with the author.

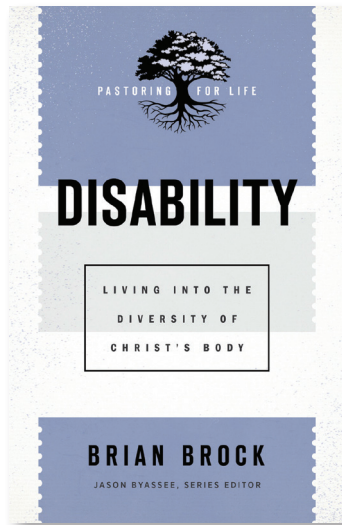
What holds the reader’s interest through the prolix writing is the author’s personal witness to the case he is making. Volf invokes his own experience while serving as a soldier in the Yugoslavian army in 1984, who was accused of acting traitorously as an American spy and informer not long before that socialist nation’s break-up into warring ethnic nationalities. The son of a Croatian Pentecostal pastor, Volf was himself a graduate student in theology married to an American (also a theologian), both of which fueled suspicions about his being a traitorous spy in an officially atheistic country rife with anti-Americanism. While the author attests that during his periodic interrogations he was never tortured, he does confess to the psychological toll they took on him, noting the delight the army captain took in his role as grand inquisitor. Volf’s reminiscences of these unsettling encounters constitute his own deep reservoir of mistreatment that he draws upon in probing incidences of abuse in people’s lives, the truthfulness of their remembering, and their willingness and ability to forgive and reconcile with the perpetrators. These are among the knotty ethical and theological issues that Volf has pursued in the wake of more well-known public events like the South African Peace and Reconciliation process, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews and other minorities.

Volf especially probes the character of memory and calls into question the proposal by the Nobel Prize-winning author of the Nazi-death camp experience, Elie Wiesel, that the memory of the Nazi Holocaust, as the memory of all atrocities, is our common human calling. While Volf in no way wants to question the truth or wisdom of Wiesel’s passionate plea to remember the horror, it is because of his own Balkan homeland’s bloody history of ethno-religious violence and the penchant for remembering age-old wrongs played out between Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, and other minorities that he is searching for an identifi-

ably Christian alternative. Volf is seeking to reconcile enemies in light of the promised kingdom of God as we ponder what it might mean to live together in the life to come. Here he hopes for an end to the memories that divide.

*John Rollefson
Retired ELCA Pastor
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In Brief



In *Disability*, (Baker Academic, \$21.99), Brian Brock, using accessible language, writes: “Our bodies are a gift from God.” “Ask how a person living with a disability wants to be called.” “Rethink what healing means.” Move beyond embarrassment to touch a disabled person. Don’t be afraid, “It might happen to me.” Don’t say to a parent of a disabled child, “God chose you because

He knew you could handle it.” Brock’s subtitle is important: “Living into the Diversity of Christ’s Body”.

Problems: Brock’s theology is detailed but thin. His interpretation of biblical “stories” lacks contextuality. He begins by explaining his badly cutting finger. Most troubling is his continual referral to “Christians/pastors” and “them” excluding readers, like myself, who are disabled.

This book could help congregations begin; however, the Lutheran congregation I served sixty years ago, was “we” not “them,” inclusive of all abilities and disabilities in worship, education, and community.

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2022 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 5 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](#).