Book Reviews

October 2022

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Review a book!

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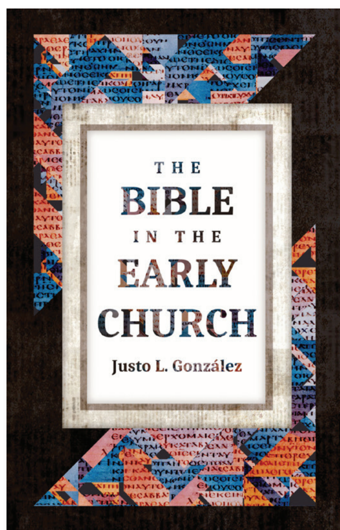

The Bible in the Early Church. By Justo L. González. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-8028-8174-8. x & 194 pages. Paper. $19.99.

In keeping with the style and substance of Justo González' previous works, *The Bible in the Early Church* is both engaging and accessible. González shares the best current scholarship about the Bible's development as a text and its use among early church communities in ways that will invite rich engagement among a variety of lay and professional audiences.

From the preface and introduction through the end of the book, González writes as a person who has been shaped by the Bible, been challenged by it, and treasured getting to know it better as a scholar and a lifelong Christian. This refreshing personal tone allows the author to discuss the hardest questions of biblical studies with grace and discernment. For instance, rather than lamenting the fact that the earliest extant copies of the New Testament come from the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ, González celebrates the diligent transmission of texts across the generations that allowed such fragile witnesses to the gospel to endure.

Even so, the author does not shy away from many challenging points of biblical studies. Chapter one discusses the uncertainties surrounding the Aramaic and Greek versions of the Hebrew Scriptures that might have been known and used in Jesus' time. Chapter two examines how people in the early church were aware of and dealt with the differences in the accounts of Christ's life.

González also describes how questions of canonicity were open in Judaism after the time of Jesus and among Christians well into the church's fourth century. His study of how various manuscripts developed includes the important observation that the "Western text" consistently shows an "antifeminist agenda" that omitted or minimized the contributions of women in New Testament passages (39). In such discussions, González has shown how the biblical texts never arrived untouched from heaven but rather were the product of real-life and morally imperfect communities of faith. In González's view, this awareness does not diminish the scriptural witness but invites us to enter it with humility and love.

Along with addressing major points of biblical composition, transmission, and interpretation, this book gives welcome attention to the technical history of bookmaking. It is fascinating to read about ancient writing surfaces, bookbinding processes, methods of making ink and paper, and the differences between tablets, scrolls, and codices. Many will enjoy learning about the development of the chapters and verses that contemporary readers take for granted, a story that takes us from the early church into the Middle Ages and the Reformation era. Issues of worship and catechesis keep the book grounded in the lived experience of faith communities over time.

Indeed, at several points, González reminds readers that the story of the Bible's transmission is hardly settled even now. Ancient differences in the Hebrew- and Greek-language versions of the scriptures have led to ongoing variations in how Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants organize these foundational texts. The physical appearance of the scriptures has also changed over time: from the letters, scrolls, and codices of early synagogues and churches to the handwritten books of the Middle Ages, the printed Bibles of the Reformation, and the digital versions of the Bible on our smartphones and laptops.

This book offers a valuable summary of many aspects of the history of biblical texts and their interpretation. It emphasizes that neither the Bible nor the communities that cherish it have ever been static. Instead, the Word of God continues to speak to us in worship, Bible study, and communal journeys of faith.

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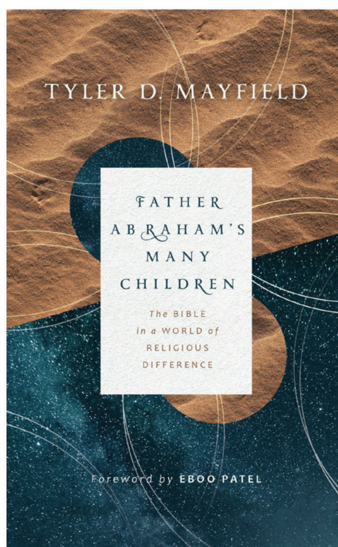

Father Abraham's Many Children. By Tyler D. Mayfield. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022, ISBN: 978-0-8028-7945-5. xii & 133 pages. Paper. $17.99.

In *Father Abraham's Many Children,* Tyler D. Mayfield endeavors to both provide a new perspective on some overlooked and despised figures of Genesis and to promote a pluralistic theological stance toward other religions. He searches for and discovers insights into harmonious living in a pluralistic world; ways in which Christians can go beyond mere tolerance for diversity to welcoming, engagement, and growth through deep encounters with those of other religious traditions.

Mayfield delves into three narratives from the book of Genesis, centered on three sets of brothers—Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob. In each, he looks for redeeming lessons from the older brother, the brother outside of the main line of promise and blessing, with whom Christians tend not to identify and even to ignore. In this short book, he strives to bring the ancient wisdom of Genesis into a contemporary society full of diverse religious commitments.

The theme of this work is broadness and expansion. Mayfield looks to expand our circles of inclusion to those traditionally seen as outsiders. He wants us to see religious diversity as "a promise to be engaged" rather than "a problem to be solved" (21). He goes about this task by telling anew the stories of some biblical figures from the margins. His approach to these stories includes rethinking the idea of chosenness and promoting an expansive and generous reading.

The reader will benefit from Mayfield's insights into each of these narratives. The grace of God is identified in the stories of each of the three elder brothers—Cain, Ishmael, and Esau—and although they accept or reject that grace in varying ways, there are lessons available for us in each. Pastors will find fresh insight into preaching on passages and figures in Genesis which are often neglected.

Some might find Mayfield's findings a persuasive demonstration of a biblical justification for a pluralistic soteriology. Others will stop short of such a conclusion, but still find the broad, expansive approach to the religious other to be attractive in promoting harmony among people of various religious commitments. Mayfield largely deals with the Old Testament. He does not ignore the New Testament's treatment of these characters, but sometimes proposes perspectives that seem to conflict with those of the New Testament. Some may find these conflicting views to be lacking in resolution. Nevertheless, there is wisdom to be gained from Mayfield's treatment. Written at a level accessible to laypeople and beneficial to both laypeople and clergy, it is a gift to our understandings of both the book of Genesis and to interreligious engagement.

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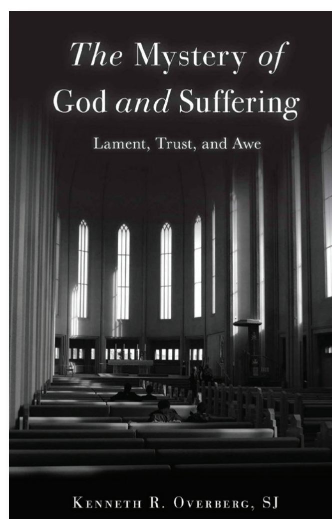

The Mystery of God and Suffering: Lament, Trust, and Awe. By Kenneth R. Overberg, SJ. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5064-4004-0. 102 pages. Paper. $24.00.

Countless texts stand to wrestle with the epic question of evil; however, few deal with evil in such a profound way as Kenneth Overberg does in this revised and updated version of his 2003 text, *Into the Abyss of Suffering*. Overberg writes with a pastor's heart, leaning toward love and compassion while maintaining academic research. As such, this text appeals to any pastor seeking to engage with the problem of evil who does not want to be bogged down by lengthy theological explications.

Overberg's thesis emphasizes dealing with suffering in the world rather than finding its origin. That, perhaps, is the weakness of this text to the academic mind. However, to charge Overberg with finding the origin of evil is an unfair task. Readers may be left thinking, "But what about Isaiah chapter 45?" Or other popular issues in theodicy. Regardless, he also makes sure to point out that suffering does not come from God as a punishment, but that God "… is forgiving, nonviolent, and compassionate" and that God "…wants healing and salvation, not suffering…"(69). Suffering does not come from God; instead, "God suffers with us, leads us as individuals and as communities in resisting evil, and brings us all to the fullness of life" (87). In Overberg's view, that is God, but humanity has a role too.

The greatest strength of Overberg's text, which can be the most useful to pastors, is his four elements of response to suffering. These four ideas do not serve to solve the problem of evil but act as humanity's response to that which simply exists. The first is to acknowledge the suffering. The second is to trust in God. In this section, Overberg points to the importance of the Eucharistic celebration as a way to value community and

life together as Christians. The third is to act. Overberg says, "suffering evokes our compassion" (81), or, at least, it ought to. The final step is to stand in awe. Stand in awe of life and suffering, of God and faith, and the "divine dance" (85).

Through these four steps, Overberg expertly faces the problem of evil through a pastoral lens. He speaks about resurrection, Easter, and God suffering with us. Finally, Overberg includes a section at the end of each chapter for reflection, prayer, and discussion, making this a text that can, and should, be read with others. This short book is filled with quotable material that will leave the reader with a sense of hope that can be shared with others.

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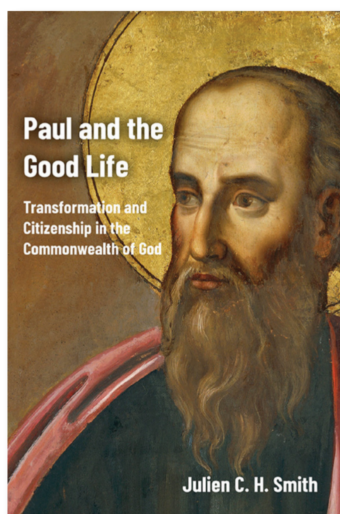

Paul and the Good Life: Transformation and Citizenship in the Commonwealth of God. By Julien C.H. Smith. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-4813-1310-0. xi & 312 pages. Paper. $44.99.

In *Paul and the Good Life*, Julien Smith paves an integrative pathway for reconsidering Paul's vision for the flourishing of individual citizens of Christ's kingdom and the necessarily political communities to which they belong. Smith argues that, contrary to visions of flourishing found in the political ethos and imperial propaganda of the day, Paul frames citizenship under Jesus as a life that embraces transformation through allegiance to Jesus, the *suffering* King. This allegiance manifests in a willingness to be renewed in the image of King Jesus through training in Jesus' kingly-divine virtues, producing endurance and hope amidst suffering that befits a people who eagerly await the eschatological renewal of creation under Jesus' unqualified reign.

Smith captures Paul's counter-cultural vision through four main theological emphases: (1) the virtue of Jesus' suffering (Philippians), (2) power through Christ's presence for renewal into the image of God (1 and 2 Corinthians), (3) communal worship as the enactment of transformative ritual (Ephesians and Colossians), and (4) the cultivation of endurance and hope rooted in expectation for the renewal, rather than the destruction, of the earth (Romans, especially chapters 5-8). Smith ends with an invitation to consider four corresponding points of practical application: (1) the choice to face suffering (rather than intentionally avoiding it) as a way of identifying with Jesus' ongoing work in the world, (2) the intentional pursuit of transformation into the image of Christ through spiritual disciplines, (3) embracing communal worship that promotes engagement with God's transformative purposes in the world, and (4) fostering endurance and hope for God's renewal of the earth through reconnecting with the physical cultivation of land (e.g., a home garden).

Paul and the Good Life contains much to commend itself. Smith employs a wide range of analogies to engage the reader and build bridges between contexts. To do so, Smith surveys a wide variety of sources and demonstrates an admirable ability to synthesize information from a variety of fields with thoughtful, poignant exegesis of relevant biblical texts. At its best, this creates a captivating, kaleidoscopic image that stimulates the theological imagination for identity-shaping allegiance to Christ. Smith's points for practical application have the capacity to offset a flat conception of faith for communities that take them to heart.

Although the breadth of surveyed materials and diversity of illustrations add texture to Smith's prose, at times this contributes to a complexity that may obscure the primary point of the illustration(s) and creates a circuitous connection to his exegetical arguments. Additionally, Smith's argument, as he acknowledges, depends quite heavily on a certain reconstruction of a prevailing cultural ideal intentionally employed by Paul and understood by his readers. Although Smith makes a compelling argument from Greco-Roman literary sources, his work might benefit from an acknowledgment of (1) the regional particularities of each community to which Paul wrote, (2) the reality that most literary sources were produced by members of elite societal strata, and (3) the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures on Paul's arguments (this is present in chapter 5).

Overall, however, Smith's work is a commendable example of thoughtful theology that issues a necessary and charitably delivered challenge to areas of complacency and complicity in the (Western) Christian theological landscape.

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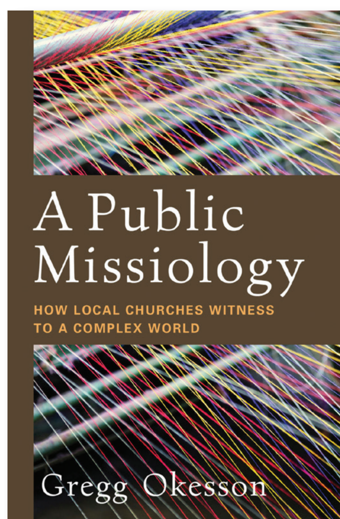

A Public Missiology: How Local Churches Witness to a Complex World. By Gregg Okesson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6270-6. vii & 276 pages. Paper. $19.00.

Utilizing Lesslie Newbigin as a launching point, Gregg Okesson, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, Asbury Theological Seminary, affirms local Christian congregations as "the hermeneutic of the gospel, and the basic unit of a new society" (157). While recognizing that God's mission is bigger than local congregations, he makes a decisive case that in them, "we find all the resources necessary for public witness" (9).

In part one, Okesson suggests that too often, pastors and Christians are not equipped to meaningfully minister to "thick" interpenetrating "publics," which he defines as "common spaces of togetherness where people participate with one another in life and form opinions through the circulation of different texts" (41). In his view, the church has grown satisfied with being a private, partitioned entity that has "exchanged ecclesiology for public change" and "jettisoned any commitment to 'witness' or 'evangelism' for more sanitized terminology of 'engagement'" (3-4). Yet, because the public realm is "thick," and people experience it as such, this "thin" witness often fails to penetrate. Okesson, therefore, demonstrates how congregational witness becomes "thick" through the continuous back and forth movements between congregation and publics that are anchored in the persons of the Trinity. "The greater the movements across the persons of the Trinity, the thicker the congregation's identity," and the "better positioned [it] is to witness in and for publics" (115).

In order to realize this "thick" witness, however, congregations must learn to exegete themselves and their surrounding publics. To this end, Okesson opens part two with a rich chapter on how to study congregations. With tools in hand, the remaining chapters shift from theology and theory to ethnography and empiricism. That is, Okesson allows the reader to observe what "thick" congregational witness looks like through the lens of three case studies. Specifically, he shows how an African Brotherhood congregation utilizes a "thick doxology" of witness through agricultural development in Kenya, how an Anglican congregation uses a "thickness of place" to witness in Montreal, and how a Bethel World Outreach congregation in Nashville witnesses through a "thick multicultural identity."

In the concluding chapter, Okesson pulls all the strands together and makes the case that, even if not presently utilized, "all congregations possess some kind of thickness" (245). Because the "public problems of this world are so great, and humans around the world feel them so thickly," he urges congregations to realize their potential and "thicken" their witness through movements rooted in the gospel "for the flourishing of all things under the reign of Christ!" (256).

A Public Missiology is highly accessible, yet those with an academic lean will value its multidisciplinary rigor and scholarship. Though not without an evangelical flavor, the text is clearly written for an ecumenical audience. Pastors, church leaders, seminary students, and engaged parishioners will benefit from it the most. Expect to be prodded and challenged but also energized with tools and a map for realizing "thick" congregational witness in your publics. In short, this award-winning book is a *must-read*.

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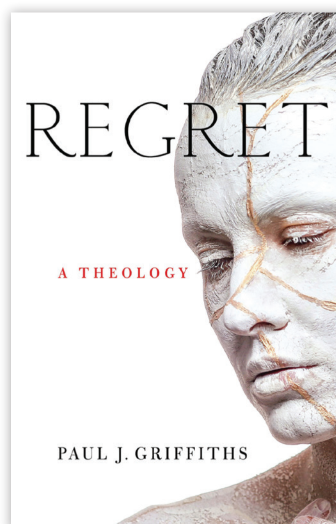

Regret: A Theology. By Paul J. Griffiths. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-2682-0026-8. xiii & 140 pages. Paper. $30.00.

This book is an extended meditation on the phenomenon of regret in theological perspective. Given the pervasiveness of human fallibility, this reflection addresses the longings of all those who look back on life with yearning and ache for what we wish had been otherwise. Griffiths writes with erudition and pathos. There are literary references that add depth to the discussion, for example, from Emily Dickinson, George Herbert, and Gerard Manley Hopkins.

The author begins with an exposition of God's own regrets, biblically grounded. Whether in the stories of Saul, Jonah, or Job, "The LORD's regrets entail turning away from a failed or damaged experiment and beginning a fresh one" (14-15). Not so humans. Chapter 2 is devoted to the reality of our faults. Regarding faults, while God "brings felicities out of all faults" and "heals all damage," there remain "particular faults from which no felicities flow" and "instances of damage that remain unhealed" (31).

For this reason, we deal with our faults in manifold ways. Chapters 3 through 8 discuss six facets of regret: time, lament, remorse, contrition, confession, and penance. The *kairos* of worship reimagines the finality of fault: "The liturgy, with the Mass at its heart, shows what space-time is like when healed" (40). The poetry of Robert Frost, Paul Celan, and Tomas Tranströmer explore the power of the arts "to have a real effect on what you regret and on what you wish otherwise" (52).

Lament, prominent in the Scriptures, is at the threshold for human responses to fault. One's lament either may become all-consuming, closing the door to the future, or may open a path toward repair. Remorse, too, may prove hazardous as an agonizing end in itself, whereas remorse proper prepares the soul for contrition, confession, and penance. Contrition turns "the gaze toward the damage done" (90). Confession, as modeled by Augustine and fallibly pursued by Wittgenstein, may find its fullest expression in bringing one's offenses before those harmed. Penance provides palpable evidence of the desire to make good on one's fault. Over time, these may allow fault to contemplate the possibility of felicity.

This book fulfills an important purpose in assisting us to understand elements belonging to forgiveness as a process: "The other-wise attitudes, with penance as their culmination, lament as their entry point, remorse as their deformed sibling, contrition as their heart, and avowal as the beginning of transfiguration of what's regretted, lie close to the heart of a Christian life" (128). Each of us has much to regret. This book is a map for moving into the future under the burden of what cannot be undone.

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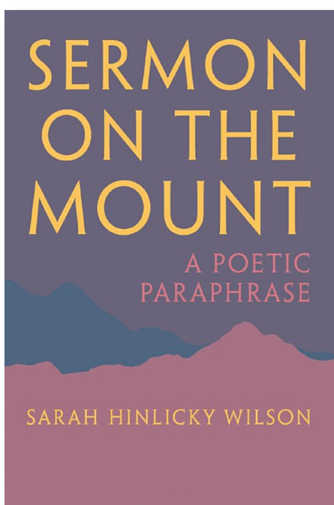

Sermon on the Mount: A Poetic Paraphrase, by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson. Thornbush Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-7352-3000-9. Paper. 44 pages. $8.00.

Over the years as a teacher of New Testament, I immersed myself in the Sermon on the Mount and engaged many groups in pondering and practicing these transformative words of Jesus (see my book, *Contrast Community: Practicing the Sermon on the Mount*). In this book, Sarah Hinlicky Wilson—Founder of Thornbush Press and Associate Pastor at Tokyo Lutheran Church in Tokyo—approaches these teachings of Jesus from a different angle, as a "poetic paraphrase." On the publishing house website (www.thornbushpress.com), she states how she has always heard Jesus' words as "one aphorism after another…one cliche after another, as overly familiar proverbs." She writes that this poetic paraphrase is "not a strict translation, but an attempt to render the familiar fresh through a variety of strategies…You'll find rhymes subtle and overt, rhythmic and stylistic patterns, parallels and chiasms. Some passages are expanded, others chopped down to the bare bones. Sometimes the underlying Greek shines through, sometimes colloquial English wins the day. The result is a Sermon on the Mount that you'll encounter as if for the first time."

Wilson is right. Her paraphrase offers a fresh and attention-grabbing engagement with these familiar words of Jesus. The purpose of a paraphrase is to give expression in a new context to the depth and richness of meaning of these words known in earlier settings and to enable the rhetorical impact experienced by first and later hearers. These words seek to change the hearers. They were designed to offer an alternative reality, to transform communities of faith, like the one addressed by the Gospel of Matthew.

I read aloud Wilson's entire paraphrase and listened to Jesus' words. This poetic paraphrase engaged and challenged me. Yet, as Wilson suggests, attempting to create a fresh paraphrase of a classic is challenging and risky. Every paraphrase involves "gains" but also "losses." In what follows, I share Pastor Wilson's paraphrase of Matthew 5:3–12—the Beatitudes followed by my evaluative comments regarding the faithfulness and effectiveness of this rendering.

Blessed: the forlorn and forsaken
the hurting and heartsick
the humane and restrained
the famished and parched
for righteousness.

Theirs: the kingdom of heaven
the solace and succor
the birthright and reign
the banquet and feast.

Blessed: the clement and kindly
the wholesome and spotless
the steady and peaceful
the tarnished and smeared
for righteousness.

Theirs: the kindness and clemency
the perceiving and seeing
the adoption and kinship
the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed: you.

Blessed: when they besmirch you
Blessed: when they browbeat you
due to
your alliance

with: me.

In that day,
hurray!
Rewards
for the reviled
abide in heaven.

For so they pursued
the prophets before you.

This paraphrase exhibits a number of positive features—such as how the layout of words on the page suggests the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, grouped in two stanzas of four blessings rendered in the third person plural followed by a switch to the second person plural for the final blessing. What is lost is the use of divine future passive in verses 4, 6, 7 (e.g., "Blessed are those who mourn, *for they will be comforted*"), which implies the future action of God, and the clarity that the first eight blessings are all bracketed by the promise of God's kingdom now hidden in these unlikely ones who are blessed. Also unclear is the Greek plural form of "you" in the ninth blessing, introducing the two mission metaphors of salt and light in Matt 5:13–16 that are also in the plural form. Rendering these pronouns "all of you" would make clear that these Beatitudes are addressed to a community.

The freshness of the paraphrase results from Wilson's careful selection of words, choosing two words, often alliterative, for the one Greek word ("the hurting and heartsick," for "those who mourn"). Particularly apt are the words "the famished and parched for righteousness" and "the tarnished and smeared for righteousness." Not always does the fresh rendition capture the meaning of the Greek (e.g., "the steady and peaceful" for "the peacemakers"), and some allusions to Old Testament texts are obscured (e.g., "the meek" alluding to Psalm 37).

Wilson's paraphrase, with its fresh and colloquial English, is worth purchasing and using, especially if used alongside the NRSV that is a more standard, word-for-word rendering of the Greek text. A dialogue between the two could sponsor a helpful conversation for any group that seeks to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously.

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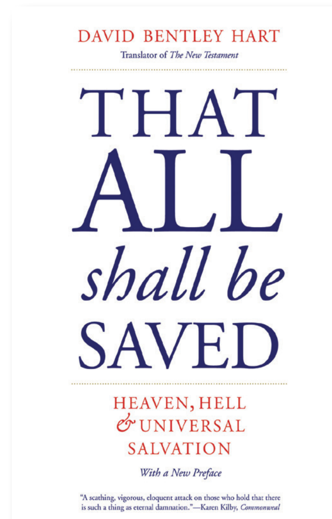

That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation. By David Bentley Hart. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-3002-4622-3. 222 pages. Paper. $26.00.

In his 2019 book, *That All Shall be Saved*, David Bentley Hart rises to the challenge of championing universal salvation. This text covers the problematic questions of soteriology, the morality of God, and the reality of heaven and hell. *That All Shall be Saved* is not a book for everyone; in fact, Bentley Hart writes that his work is unlikely to convince a non-universalist to change their mind. Instead, Bentley Hart seeks to iterate clearly and in one place his defense for universalism, including historical background, theological support, and philosophical arguments.

Bentley Hart breaks down this immense topic into two questions that shape the book. "…whether this defiant rejection of God for all of eternity is really logical for any rational being; and the primary question of whether the God who creates a reality in which the eternal suffering of any being is possible—even if it should be a self-induced suffering—can in fact be the infinitely good God of love that Christianity says he is" (17). His answer to both questions is a resounding no. He writes that it is illogical for a finite being to be able to make eternal choices, that God cannot be the "Good" Christians say God is if God allows eternal damnation. Finally, salvation is a free gift of Grace, and if even one is removed from God, none ought to be saved.

Two critiques of this book should be mentioned. To begin with, the author lacks consistent citations of quotes, ideas, and other authors' works. While he mentions names and book titles, typical foot or endnotes are missing, making it difficult to find precisely from where he draws his support. Secondly is the author's use of borderline polemic language throughout the text. For example, calling infernalists—his term for those who believe in an eternal hell—to be "morally indolent" (31). While such language might help emphasize the immense gravity of his beliefs, it also successfully turns away anyone with a different point of view from engaging with the text. Again, Bentley Hart clarifies that this book is not likely to sway somebody.

To say this book is not educational would be wrong. Major strengths of *That All Shall Be Saved* can be seen throughout. Including the iteration of the evolution of soteriological thought, the well-written defense of universalism, and the countless quotations from theologians and early church figures like Origen,

Tertullian, and Gregory of Nyssa to name a few. Bentley Hart's passion for universalism can be sensed. The matter of eternal life or suffering is no small thing.

In conclusion, despite the lofty academic language, lack of footnotes, and borderline polemic insults, David Bentley Hart presents an impressive tome for the academic and pastor alike to traverse the critical topic of heaven, hell, and universal salvation.

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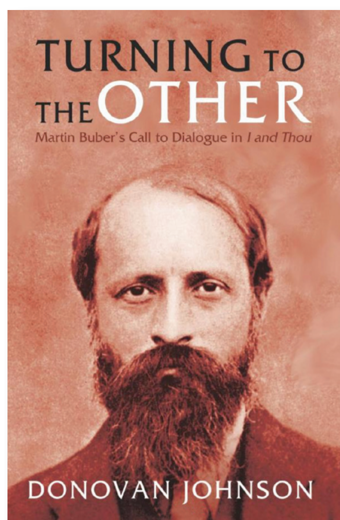

***Turning to the Other: Martin Buber's Call to Dialogue in* I and Thou.** By Donovan Johnson. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5326-9913-9. xxii & 325 pages. Paper. $39.00.

To live one's life "before the face of God," what does this mean? How does it look in practice? Who can show guidance? Ministry leaders, chaplains, and educators ask these questions, seeking to integrate personal spirituality and authentic community within institutional practice. Martin Buber's distinction between "I-It" and "I-Thou" addresses similar concerns, but many who remember these categories might stumble over illustrating them in any detail. Donovan Johnson aims to bring *I and Thou* alive for twenty-first century readers, setting the philosophy within a rich narrative context of Buber's life. Showing how Buber came into and lived his convictions allows the reader to both experience *I and Thou* in fresh perspective, and more easily imagine transferences from Buber's vocabulary and insights into personal practice.

Introductory chapters describe how experiences of grief and loss precipitated Martin Buber's intense study of Hasidic Judaism, which then set him on the path toward writing *I and Thou*. Within the effort to renew Jewish community amidst pressures of assimilation and threats from antisemitism, Buber emerged as an intellectual leader of his generation. When the raw political drive of a close associate in the Zionist movement clashed with Buber's idealism, the loss of that friendship shook Buber to the core of his identity and sense of purpose. Johnson narrates how from this disorientation, the young Buber turned to the Hasidic tradition of his grandfather, and found through the texts of the eighteenth-century Hasidic master the Baal-Shem-Tov a regenerative path: the way of *teshuvah* or becoming one in repentance, and the mysticism of hallowing the everyday in prayer.

Again, grief shaped Buber's journey, when violence at the end of World War I ended the life of Buber's closest friend Gustav Landauer and shaped what would become the vision of *I and Thou*. Landauer's death had even greater impact, as Johnson's chapters show, because this same confidant had written stunning private criticism that changed Buber's understanding of spirituality. Buber had published on the theme of the speculative and mystical meaning of the war, and Landauer wrote a personal letter in anger decrying how Buber could spiritualize what for so many was abject devastation. In response to both that criticism and then Landauer's death, Buber renounced any kind of mysticism that ignored or denied concrete relationships and responsibilities. Buber carried into his way of *teshuvah*, then, an urgency toward honest and authentic communication, against what he came to recognize were the objectifying and privatizing impulses of modern western society.

I devote such detail to these episodes in my review to show for a prospective reader what Johnson's work accomplishes, how his introductory chapters and commentary on *I and Thou* equip the reader for making connections. Beyond making the "I-It" and "I-Thou" distinction for which Buber is most famous, it is the ongoing way of repentance informed from sources in Hasidic Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Bible, which helps the reader unfold for their own life an integration between personal spirituality, vocational responsibility, and organizational practice.

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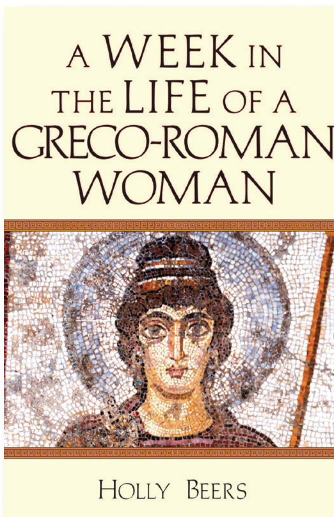

A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman. By Holly Beers. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2484-7. 172 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Holly Beers is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Author of *The Followers of Jesus as the Servant* (T&T Clark, 2015), she holds a PhD from the London School of Theology. This book is part of an IVP series of historical fiction

stories that spotlight a week of daily life in a first-century city (Rome, Corinth), during an event (The Fall of Jerusalem), or for a typical individual (a centurion, a slave). Beers's contribution is the only volume written as a female. I have used several books from this series as assigned textbooks in seminary classes and I find this volume the best one yet.

A Week in the Life strives to give a realistic glimpse into what first-century life would have been like for an Ephesian woman at the time Paul ministered there. The book draws from Acts 18–20 and 1 Corinthians 12–14, as well as a host of historical sources, to imagine how a typical Greco-Roman individual might have experienced the Way in first-century Ephesus. The story centers on Anthia, a woman of peasant (freedperson) status, with limited means, and married to a fishmonger. She and her friend Eutaxia navigate the unpredictable challenges of scarce resources, pregnancy complications, and capricious husbands in a patriarchal society. Over the course of the story, both women are exposed to Paul's teaching, sparked especially by the healing of Eutaxia's son by a handkerchief from Paul. Anthia experiences a gathered assembly of the Way, where she is overwhelmed by the community's hospitality—especially that of Claudia, an upper-class woman. Beers's story portrays the community as distinctively inviting, egalitarian, ethical, and joyful. Although Anthia is positively inclined to join the community, the book leaves off with her debating, influenced by the potential scorn of her husband and the social shame that may accompany such a change. Scattered throughout the narrative are historical sidebars that give background to socio-cultural realities like ancient medicine practices, slavery, and honor and shame. Distinctively, Beers's book offers a great deal about the dangers of labor and childbirth for women in antiquity.

As a work of historical fiction, Beers's narrative is informed, realistic, and perceptive about details of everyday life for first-century people. The book regularly reflects Anthia's interior dialogue in ways that help readers connect to her experience and appreciate her challenges. The story also portrays her concerns about joining the Way with nuance and appropriate irresolution. More than other volumes in the series, Beers's book realistically portrays the ugly effects of patriarchy and slavery for women, with instances of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and exposure of female babies that could be jarring to unprepared readers. If the book were longer, a more complicated portrayal of the early church community might be welcome. Since the series stipulates the timeframe of a week, a great deal happens in seven days, making the week more extraordinary than ordinary.

Among my senior seminarians who read the book, the overwhelming majority believed it a great companion to reading Acts (or other NT writings) for adult learners, albeit it an eye-opening one. The narrative is readable, concise, and informed yet unburdened by citations. Within the InterVarsity Press series *A Week in the Life,* I find it the most realistic, honest, and helpful yet.

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2022 Ad Pricing and Specifications

The journal, ***Currents in Theology and Mission,*** is now accepting advertisements in our quaterly 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.
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Late submissions may be published in the next issue.
Issue-specific themes are available from the co-editors:
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