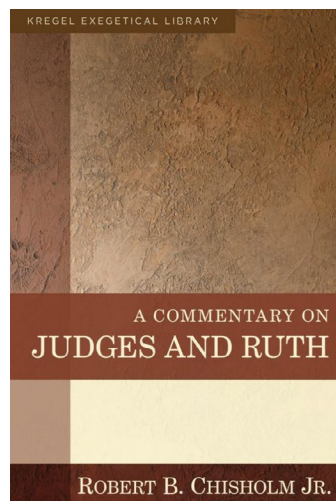




# Book Reviews

October 2016

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben



***A Commentary on Judges and Ruth.*** Kregel Exegetical Library. By Robert B. Chisholm Jr. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8254-2556-1. 697 pages. Cloth. \$40.00.

Christian preachers and teachers are the intended audience for this substantial

commentary on Judges and Ruth. Those who have a working knowledge of biblical Hebrew will reap the most benefits from Chisholm's own translation, exposition, and careful analysis of the narrative structure of the original text of the books of Judges and Ruth. An indispensable explanation of the categories used for the analysis of the narrative structure of the text (mainline clauses and disjunctive clauses) appears in the introduction to Judges.

Chisholm's method for reading Judges and Ruth is "literary-theological," sensitive to the biblical authors' literary techniques and theological goals. He insists on interpreting the canonical form of the text especially against those who would read more diachronically, and concludes that efforts to reconstruct the literary history of the book of Judges have been misplaced. Not everyone will agree. Chisholm argues that although much of the narrative preserves the record of actual events (he reviews several proposals for fitting the period of the judges into the chronological framework suggested by 1 Kings 6 [some judges likely overlapped]), and some stories may go back to an early pre-Davidic date, other material may date to the period of the divided monarchy. The final form of the text, in its larger literary context, dates to the exilic period.

Chisholm explores whether there is a *political agenda* in the book (pro-monarchy), the *role* of the judges (military leaders and teachers), and the *role female characters* play in the book (women appear strategically in the narrative where their roles point to the steady disintegration of ancient Israelite society). According to Chisholm, the purpose of the book is captured in three prominent themes: to critique Israel's covenant infidelity, defend God's reputation, and show the need for "godly" (royal) leadership, linked, as the book is in the Hebrew Bible, with the rise of

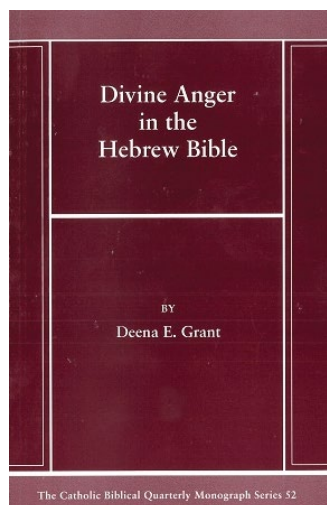
kingship in 1 Samuel.

For Chisholm the book of Ruth is mostly an accurate record of the events it describes; the book is "an historical short story" (551) from the monarchic period (though based on older oral traditions), updated after the exile. The purpose of the book of Ruth is to inspire readers by highlighting God's care for the poor and needy through the works of others, who are rewarded by God.

After an introduction to each biblical book, the commentary begins with the author's translation, followed by an Outline of the passage; remarks on its Literary Structure; Exposition; and a final section, Message and Application, where Chisholm highlights thematic emphases, theological principles, and homiletical trajectories. The author's interest in the proclamation of these Old Testament books in the life of the church is further reflected in suggested sermon series for Judges (10 sermons) and Ruth (4 sermons).

Excellent footnotes appear throughout and full bibliographies appear at the end of each book's commentary.

Mark W. Bartusch  
Valparaiso University



***Divine Anger in the Hebrew Bible CBQMS 52.*** By Deena E. Grant. Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014. ISBN-10: 0-915170-51-5. x and 200 pages. Paper. \$15.00.

The center of this revised NYU dissertation is Grant's premise that divine anger in the Hebrew Bible can be better understood against the backdrop of human anger: To what extent is divine anger analogous to human anger, and to what extent is it fundamentally different? At the end of an introductory chapter in which the author reviews prior research on the question, identifies the limits of the study (only representative texts that explicitly use one of nine "anger roots" are included), and offers a definition of biblical anger as a response to disregarded authority, Grant articulates her thesis: "Ultimately, by endowing God with human pathos the biblical authors present a relatable deity, but by distinguishing God's anger from human anger they exalt him above and beyond humanity as well." (17)

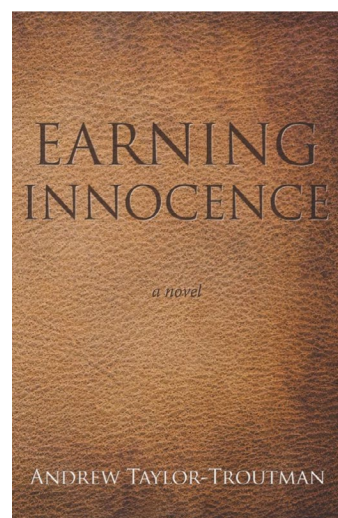
Chapter 1 introduces the relevant Hebrew roots for anger that set the parameters for Grant's study, in order of frequency in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter 2 examines human expressions



of anger by those who possess power and status in the family and society—notably, kings in the Hebrew Bible (cf. God as king)—resulting from insubordination. Anger results in predictable consequences that may be lethal (against outsiders) or benign (against kin, on account of self-interest and affection). The remainder of the book examines the “Aim and Expressions of Divine Anger” across large sections of the Hebrew Bible under the headings “Old Poetry,” the “Classical Prophets,” and “Deuteronomy and the Historical Books.” The evidence suggests that human anger holds up well as a model with which divine anger can be compared: numerous texts reflecting similarities between them appear in the Bible, as well as texts that disclose contrasts between human and divine anger. For example, oftentimes God’s anger at Israel is rhetorical, its goal to persuade the people to repent rather than to punish. The closing chapter reviews the preceding argument and summarizes Grant’s conclusions. A Bibliography and indices of biblical passages and authors round out the book.

Two closing remarks: 1) While limiting the study to texts in which certain Hebrew roots occur makes for a manageable manuscript (dissertation), perhaps a more comprehensive effort to consider texts that might intimate divine anger without using one of the nine “anger roots,” and that moves beyond a selective reading of the Hebrew Bible, would better fulfill the claim of the book’s title. Overlooking, for example, forms of *ḥ* for divine anger in the Psalms, is problematic. 2) Further clarification is needed on the relationship between Israel’s repentance, on the one hand, and the temperance of God’s anger, on the other hand. A more persuasive and slightly better nuanced case needs to be made for seeing the former as “prerequisite” but not the reason for God turning back divine anger (chapters 6-7).

Mark W. Bartusch  
Valparaiso University



***Earning Innocence: A Novel.*** By Andrew Taylor-Troutman. Eugene, Ore.: Resource, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4982-3153-4. x and 109 pages. Paper. \$15.00.

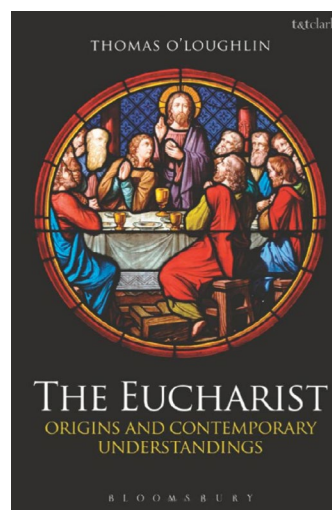
At first glance, *Earning Innocence* offers an enjoyable glance into the fictitious life of Moravian Rev. James Wheeler. Yet, in this depiction

of a typically atypical week of a pastor, Andrew Taylor-Troutman creates a space for all readers to reflect on the meaning of faith in the mundane, morose, and magnificent stuff of life.

Organized as Rev. Wheeler’s personal diary, a sense of realism immediately emerges. The demands of some days leave time for almost no entries, and the occurrences of others demand reflection, no matter the time. The vignettes of each day introduce the realities of parish life, from choir practice to ICU visits to the gossip train at the local diner. Wheeler appears not just as a pastor, but as a person, deeply in love with his wife, anxious and joyful in the life of his children, and involved with friends, hobbies, and the other substance that composes the chorus of human life.

Readers of Richard Lischer’s memoirs and Marilynne Robinson’s novels will recognize their influence and find an appeal in Taylor-Troutman’s prose. Those who know the difficulty of coming out as a member of the LGBTQ community, the grief of a miscarriage, or the loneliness of addiction will find resonance in these pages. While an initially uneven pace sometimes requires the reader to bear down through a paragraph or two, *Earning Innocence* quickly finds a rhythm that delivers a compelling read in theology, narrative, and pastoral care. Read for an entertaining, emotional, and faithful conversation partner in the ongoing pursuit of a well-lived life of faith.

Rev. Andrew Tucker  
Christ Lutheran Church  
New River Community College



***The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings.*** By Thomas O’Loughlin. London: Bloomsbury, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-5673-8459-1. xvii and 229 pages. Paper. \$34.95.

The growing ecumenical interest in intercommunion and the ongoing questions regarding the open table, including whether one should “wade through the water in order to come to the table,” have led to a spurt of publications on the implications of the Thursday night supper. Fifty years ago, the English translation of the work by Joachim Jeremias was published as *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1966). In this work, which included detailed philological analysis, Jeremias offered the almost-mystical conclusion: “To put it quite simply: table fellowship with Jesus is an anticipatory gift of the final consummation. Even now God’s lost children may come home and sit at their Father’s table” (262).

Since this work was published, the worldwide ecumenical movement has continued to wrestle with questions of consensus and reception, most profoundly represented by the influential

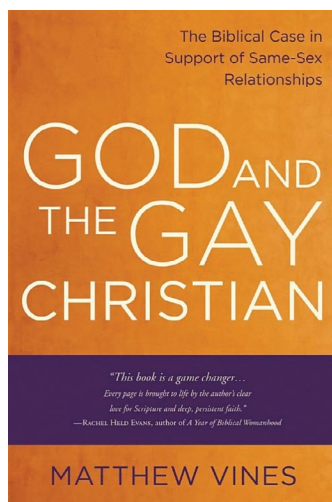


document adopted by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (a body that included the Roman Catholics), the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document in 1982. This spawned a huge number of follow-up actions: the publication of resource materials for congregations, detailed analysis in prestigious academic journals, analyses of the responses of member churches, liturgical innovations, and consolidating the gains of this valuable agreement.

In this book, O'Loughlin does not try to recreate some kind of "original" setting but sets out to examine how Christians then and now have practiced the remembrance of the meal within particular historical settings. He recognizes that celebrating the Eucharist and the theological underpinnings of this celebration are tied to particular settings in place and time, settings that need to be recognized for what they are with the attendant limitations of how humans structure their activities, especially those that give them a sense of shared group identity. A lot of ground is covered in the process: looking at shared meals and joyous thanksgiving, how one appreciates and valorizes the God-factor in and through repetitive and meaning-creating rituals, the role of memory and recollection in the shaping of an engaged Christian imagination, the opening up of seemingly closed enclaves to the possibility of doing good beyond a narrow circle, and a recognition that the meal is not an end in itself but an invitation to a wider *koinonia* that includes ecological responsibility.

Much food for thought (here the cliché is apt!) is offered in this book, together with the reminder that as basic a human activity as the sharing of food and fellowship can function to remind us about Jesus, a reminder for which we should be truly thankful.

*J. Jayakiran Sebastian*  
*Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia*



***God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships.*** By Matthew Vines. New York: Convergent, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-6014-2518-8. Paper. ix and 213 pages. \$14.99.

Matthew Vines is the founder of the Reformation Project—an organization for reforming church teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity—and a young, self-identifying gay man. This first book of his consolidates four years of research, biblical and theological reflection,

conversations with others, and his personal journey into a compelling argument for same-gender relationships as a biblically supportable notion.

Vines writes “not to break new ground” but to “bring credible, often-overlooked insights to light” in “clear and accessible ways for a broad audience” (3). To that end, the book uses accessible language to engage modern questions and experiences even as it considers biblical and ancient literature. Chapter 1 observes that Christianity has historically embraced experience as a consideration in biblical interpretation, and suggests that current conversations (about same-gender relationships) should be no exception. Chapter 2 shows how foreign sexual “orientation” was to the ancients, making for a cultural gap between then and now. Chapter 3 observes that historic Christianity has normally deemed celibacy a distinctive calling—not a requirement—which for Vines problematizes requiring it of all non-heterosexual Christians. Chapters 4–7 focus on passages in the Bible that are often deemed obstacles to affirming same-gender relations today (Gen 19:1–29; Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10; 1 Tim 1:10). Vines highlights how unclear it is that the “sin of Sodom” was same-sex relations per se (ch 4), and how peculiar it is for Christians to uphold the Leviticus passages while readily dismissing other condemnations of usury, eating pork, and working on the Sabbath (ch 5). In Chapter 6, Vines argues that Romans 1:26–27 does not fundamentally condemn same-sex relations but more precisely unbridled and debased passion. He also notes that “natural” sexual relations in antiquity were identified more by *roles* (active and passive partners) than anatomical complementarity. Chapter 7 argues that the language of 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy (*malakoi, arsenokoitai*) condemns no sexual orientations but rather chosen acts of exploitation (e.g., pederasty).

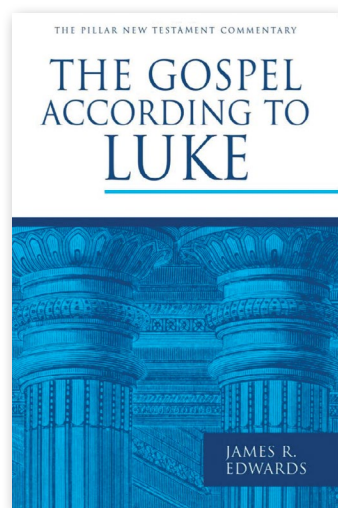
In Chapters 8 and 9, Vines makes his case for a biblical vision of same-sex marriage, based on the ideas that marriage is primarily a binding covenant of love (vs. a procreative team) and that LGBT people reflect God’s image just as they are. By branding LGBT people as “broken, we are wrongly rejecting a good part of God’s creation. And with awful consequences” (161). Finally, in Chapter 10, Vines offers concluding stories of hope and suggestions as to how readers might respond.

The book’s greatest virtues are its accessibility to wide audiences, informative personal stories, and extensive research. The book also features the author’s journey throughout in ways that foster empathy with his and others’ experiences. At the same time, his engagement with ancient literature and biblical scholarship gives the work a gravitas that is distinctive and refreshingly welcome. (More than 15 per cent of its content is endnotes, and several New Testament scholars gave input on his drafts.) A potential drawback that may frustrate academic readers is that it reads more like a popular trade book than an argued proposal (no clear outline, occasionally repetitive, endnotes vs. footnotes, ancient authors cited through modern translations). Also, the author’s personal investment in the topic will very likely be viewed



by some readers as an enhancement, and by others as an impediment. The book is certainly well-poised to address readers of all stripes who find the Bible incompatible with same-sex relationships, especially Reformed and Evangelical readers (it uses “covenant” language often). The author’s blend of personal experiences with substantial research make this book an excellent and distinctive re-evaluation of the traditional biblical interpretation of same-gender relationships for all believers today to consider.

Troy M. Troftgruben  
Wartburg Theological Seminary



***The Gospel according to Luke.*** By James R. Edwards. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-3735-6. xxviii and 831 pages. Hardcover. \$65.00.

James Edwards is Bruner-Welch Professor of Theology at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, and

author of several books including *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (2009) and the Mark volume of the Pillar NT Commentary series (2002). A skilled NT scholar with particular proficiency in patristic writings, Edwards demonstrates in this volume close textual analysis, judicious conclusions, and careful consideration of both ancient and modern voices. Designed “for church, academy, and personal reading” (xii), *The Gospel according to Luke* is a commentary that is thoughtful, exegetically thorough, well-researched, and reflective of a high esteem for the biblical text.

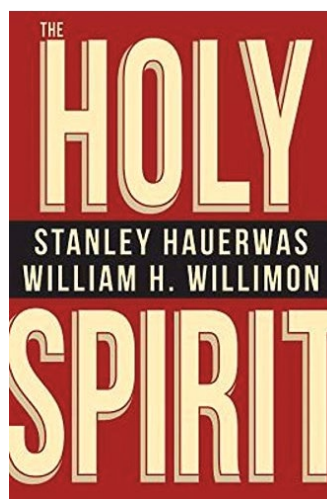
Given the commentary’s size, the introduction is brief (1-22) but sufficient. Emphasizing the testimony of ancient tradition, Edwards proposes traditional authorship (Paul’s traveling companion), moderately early dating (late ’70s), and Antioch as possible place of origin for Luke’s Gospel. Edwards also suggests that Luke may have been Jewish, and more provocatively that he relied heavily on a Hebrew source. Building on his book *Hebrew Gospel*, Edwards questions the existence of Q and argues instead “that Luke relied on a Hebrew source for the composition of his Gospel in addition to the Gospel of Mark, and that this Hebrew text is the chief source for the majority of material in the Gospel that is not dependent on Mark” (16). A minority view among Lukan scholars, Edwards’s theory is nonetheless an original contribution that casts a distinctively Jewish light on the Third Gospel.

As with most commentaries, the volume is organized under major NT textual sections, with occasional excursuses and concluding indexes. Throughout the book, Edwards charts a fine course between detailed analysis (using Greek frequently) and interpretive significance—he neither loses the forest for the trees nor vice versa. A critically reflective and moderately conservative interpreter, Edwards characterizes the Gospel as authentically historical (27), the temptation story as a historical occurrence (131), and Zacchaeus as a repentant sinner (533). Though aware of and informed by more critical interpretive readings, the commentary gives conclusions that are more theologically orthodox than critically deconstructive.

The virtues of this commentary are its careful reading, close textual analysis, thorough research, reasonable conclusions, readable prose, and original thinking. Distinctive to Edwards as an interpreter, the commentary characterizes Luke’s Gospel as Jewish, reflects profound awareness of patristic sources, and blends scholarly research with pastoral sensitivity. A potential drawback is its limited emphasis on the socio-political angles of Jesus’ ministry: it characterizes Luke’s Gospel as apologetic (vs. political, 14) and Jesus’ liberating aims as chiefly grace, forgiveness, and usefulness in the world (80, 137). Liberation theologians will not be enthused. Still, at each and every point Edwards gives logical reasoning for exegetically sound conclusions that all readers of scripture can learn from.

Altogether, Edwards’s commentary brings together insights that come from a significant career of scholarly work in NT and service as teaching elder for the Presbyterian church. *The Gospel according to Luke* is an informed work of careful exegesis that scholars, pastors, and students will find beneficial for many years to come—myself included.

Troy M. Troftgruben  
Wartburg Theological Seminary



***The Holy Spirit.*** By Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon. Nashville: Abingdon, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4267-7863-6. xi and 100 pages. Paper. \$13.99.

This slim volume packs a punch. Hauerwas and Willimon team up again to address one of the most neglected themes in theology, certainly the least discussed person of the Trinity. Following the argument of the exceptional study of the Holy Spirit by Eugene

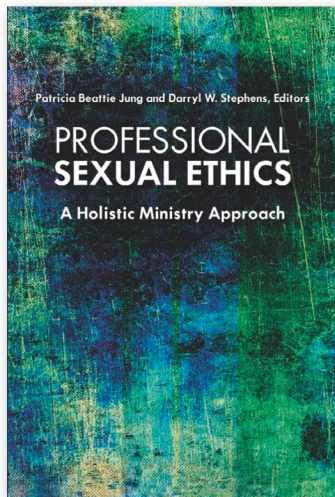


Rogers (*After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West*, Eerdmans, 2005), the authors write that “the Spirit did not call attention to herself because the Spirit’s work is first and foremost to point to Jesus as the Son of God” (12). The prayer of the Spirit to the Father while resting upon the body of Jesus has the power to draw us into participation in the very life of the Trinity.

The body upon which the Spirit comes to rest is also the church as the body of Christ. Pentecost creates church as multilinguistic, nonviolent community, called in word and deed to point to Jesus. “Through the Spirit the church becomes for the world Christ’s body, the way the world is given continuing, bodily assurance that Jesus Christ is Lord” (39). In a fascinating discussion, the authors propose not only that Christology but also ecclesiology lives between Docetism and Ebionitism, thus too between Pelagianism and Manicheism. If Docetism gives the church an “inflated understanding,” Ebionitism takes the church simply as “another institution.” If Manicheism would have the church “detached” and “spiritualized,” Pelagianism would turn the church “frenetic” in accommodating to the surrounding culture. This discussion alone (40-46) makes worth reading the whole.

The holiness of the Spirit relates today especially to ethics, as does sanctification to spirituality. “To be holy is to be commanded by God to perform a divine assignment” (70). Spirituality, to be the work of the Holy Spirit, entails “growth in virtue, and in particular growth in the active love of neighbor” (78). The book concludes with a chapter on eschatology, hope for God’s final culmination of history in love, peace, and worship. Toward that end we are invited to pray, “Come, Holy Spirit!”

Craig L. Nesson  
Wartburg Theological Seminary



***Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach.*** Edited by Patricia Beattie Jung and Darryl W. Stephens. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9943-7. x and 244 pages. Paper. \$24.00.

This book provides an in-depth resource of the entire field of sexual ethics for church leaders and theological

educators. Twenty authors—including Stanley Hauerwas, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Bonnie Miller-McLemore—address topics related to the four main sections of the volume: Ethical Landscape of Ministry, Sources of Wisdom, Practices of Min-

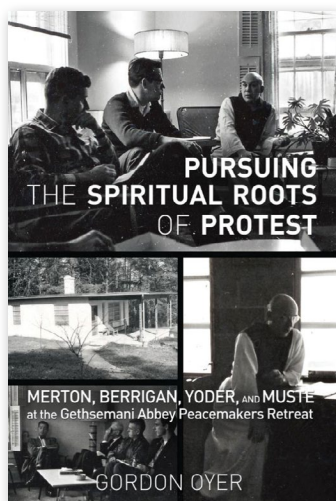
istry, and Pastoral Leadership. Although the book may be read with profit according to the particular themes of its discrete chapters, the editors have organized the project into a cohesive whole, including extensive reference to case material throughout the book and discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

Jung and Stephens write: “Professional ethics in ministry pertains to the role of the ministerial leader. When one’s call to leadership is publicly affirmed, one is given authority within the community of faith. This authority (whatever the specific role) conveys certain responsibilities. Professional ethics is the intentional practice of reflecting on, deliberating about, and acting on the right use of this power and authority” (2). While ministers today are usually obligated by judicatories to attend sexual boundary training on a periodic basis, the breadth and depth of human sexuality pertaining to church leadership is seldom explored. This book locates the imperative of professional sexual ethics in historical perspective and makes the reader conversant with the most urgent issues in sexual ethics available through current research.

The initial chapters by Kate M. Ott on “Sexuality, Health, and Integrity” and by Darryl W. Stephens on “Fiduciary Duty and Sacred Trust” establish criteria for the sexual health necessary for effective ministry by placing strong emphasis on integrity, as well as by highlighting warning signs and safeguards in ethical practice. Chapters on “orthoeros,” (Miguel A. De La Torre), “ministry with adolescents” (Robert C. Dykstra), and “teaching sexual ethics in faith communities” (Boyung Lee) present fascinating arguments that would launch rich discussion of these themes for congregational study. Chapters on “preaching sexual ethics” (John S. McClure) and “Public Worship and Human Sexuality” (Don E. Saliers) provide thoughtful guidance especially for Word and Sacrament ministers. The closing section discusses other key issues facing pastoral leaders today, such as “pastor/parishioner relationships” (Jeanne Hoefl) and “pornography and abuse of social media” (Joyce Ann Mercer).

I highly recommend this volume to all those responsible for maintaining high standards of practice among church leaders, especially denominational leaders, judicatory officials, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders. More than most other professions, church leaders are responsible to hold one another accountable for best practices in ministry. This book sets the standard for foundational theory and best practices in the field of sexual ethics.

Craig L. Nesson  
Wartburg Theological Seminary



*Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat.* By Gordon Oyer. Foreword by Jim Forest. Afterword by John Dear. Eugene: Cascade, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-6203-2377-9. xxii and 275 pages. Paper. \$33.00.

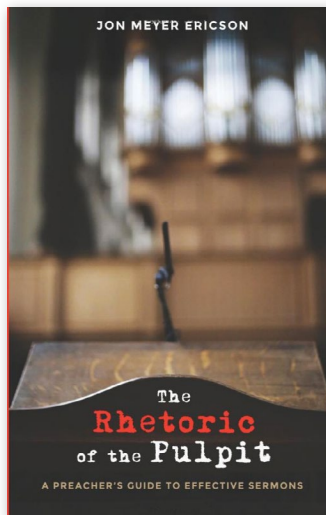
Thirteen men gathered November 18–20, 1964, at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, the home of the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, for a retreat on “the spiritual roots of protest.” It is a retreat that might never have happened, except for the workings of providence. The temper of the times was shaped by the Cold War, the civil rights movement, and the onset of the war in Vietnam. Yet the planners decided not to focus directly on strategic action, instead on the foundational question (98): “*By what right* do we assume that we are called to protest, to judge, and to witness?” By exploring together the “spiritual roots” of peacemaking, they might become more deeply centered as individuals and build a community of solidarity that would sustain them in the struggles to come.

Merton’s own preparation for the retreat included study of *Technological Society* by Jacques Ellul (recommended to him by Ping Ferry, another retreat participant) and the writings of Louis Massignon, influenced by Sufi Muslim mysticism. The dangers of modern technology and the monastic roots of peacemaking thereby entered prominently into the discussions at the retreat. The four main sessions were led by Merton, Daniel Berrigan, John Howard Yoder, and A.J. Muste, each of whose contributions are examined in detail. There was also much fruitful informal discussion that helped to forge lasting bonds of friendship and support. Eucharist led by Daniel Berrigan evolved into open communion by all participants, including the Protestants, even more radical than than now (129–133).

Oyer has meticulously reconstructed the planning, order of events, character of the conversation, and lasting influence of this retreat from manuscripts, notes, and interviews. The details allow the reader to participate vicariously in the explorations of these “few strong people with a passion for peace,” who helped to lead an entire generation to search for “the things that make for peace” (Luke 19:42). The book won the 2015 International Thomas Merton Society’s Thomas Merton Award as a publication that “has brought provocative insight and fresh direction to Merton Studies.” Fifty years later we still need to learn and

imagine from these forbearers the cost of peacemaking in our own times.

Craig L. Nesson  
Wartburg Theological Seminary



*The Rhetoric of the Pulpit: A Preacher’s Guide to Effective Sermons.* By Jon Meyer Ericson. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4982-3520-4, xviii and 120 pages. Paper. \$17.00.

Upon first reading this book, which aims to help us preach more effectively, I couldn’t help but think of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s so-called “Divinity School Address” given before the senior class of Harvard Divinity School in 1838. This was some six years after he resigned from the Unitarian pulpit of Second Church in Boston to take up the broader calling of writing and lecturing. Subsequently, his essays became the best-known secular sermons of the young nation’s civil religion. The most memorable passages of Emerson’s advice to these preachers-to-be was that they be “real.” His way of putting it was to remember how once he had attended a service when “a snow storm was falling all around us. The snow storm was real; the preacher merely spectral; and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him, and then out of the window behind him, into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience, had he yet imported into his doctrine” (in *Theology in America*, ed. by Sydney Ahlstrom, [Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1967] 307–308).

Preaching, of course, has changed over the years, and many would claim with justice that American preachers have learned Emerson’s lesson all too well and are often all too full of themselves these days. Formalism isn’t so much the problem as egoism. But Emerson’s words still ring true—that preachers in order to be effective must be real. Or as Jon Ericson puts it, “truthful.” Reminding us of Socrates’ words in Plato’s *Phaedrus* dialogue, Ericson wants us to know at the outset that “the first rule of good speaking is to know and speak the truth.” So too for preachers of the Gospel mere “truthiness,” as Stephen Colbert has taught us to call the mere “seeming” to speak the truth, is not adequate,

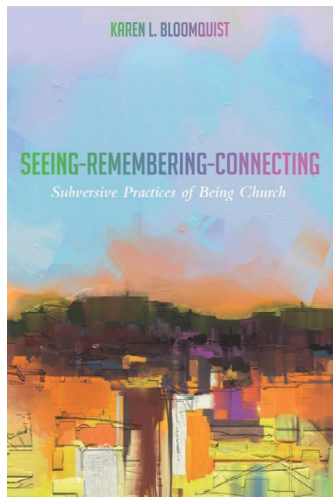


however dressed up in fancy words. “Rhetoric is always a *means*, always subordinate to the truth it serves,” Ericson argues (xii)—not putting lipstick on the inauthentic but proclaiming the truth as effectively as we are able.

Ericson, a retired dean of liberal arts at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, is most importantly a regular, pew-sitting lay person with the exceptional “ears to hear” of a lifelong teacher of rhetoric, which he simply defines as “the art of effective discourse” (xi). His passion for good preaching has led him to write a sort of manual full of “practical suggestions grounded in classical rhetorical theory as well as contemporary theories of communication” (xiii). Chapters follow detailing the five parts of Quintillian’s (CE 75) steps in rhetorically effective speaking: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery as they apply to preparing for preaching.

Pastors will at first be aghast to learn that Ericson recommends between fifty-eight and sixty-two hours a week (!) spent per sermon but will breathe more easily to learn that he means by this six to twelve hours in daytime preparation and forty to forty-eight in “nocturnal” preparation letting the subconscious do its crucial work, all of which is, of course, Spirit-aided. Ericson closes his little book with several “sample sermons,” which he uses to illustrate his points, as well as several useful appendices and a helpful index.

*John Rollefson*  
Retired ELCA pastor  
San Luis Obispo, Calif.



***Seeing-Remembering-Connecting: Subversive Practices of Being Church.*** By Karen

L. Bloomquist. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4982-8197-3. xvi and 108 pages. Paper. \$17.00.

In her brief and engaging treatise *Seeing-Remembering-Connecting: Subversive Practices of Being Church*, socially engaged and ecumenical Lutheran ethicist Karen Bloomquist outlines what it might mean to be a “subversive” church in today’s global world. Since the publication of her first book *The Dream Betrayed* in 1990, Bloomquist has consistently argued that the church’s role in the world is to challenge the economic and cultural status quo that favors rich and powerful at the expense of the weak and the vulnerable. In this book, Bloomquist calls the church to struggle against the powers that be in the world by

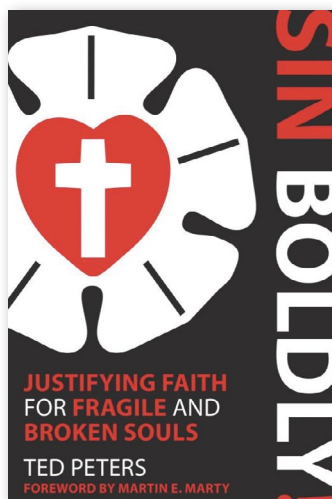
envisioning a socially conscious and a politically engaged Gospel that speaks to and for those at the margins of economic globalism and political empire.

*Seeing-Remembering-Connecting* unfolds in nine chapters a potent attempt to redefine the meaning of “church in society” in today’s contemporary world. Bloomquist’s redefinition of what it means to be the church in society hinges on the subversive power of the church vis-à-vis the hegemonic powers that be that so pervasively condition the world.

In the opening chapters of the book, Bloomquist grounds this subversive power of the church in Luther’s own *theologia crucis* (chapter two) and Luther’s own advocacy for the poor and marginalized in his day (chapter three). As Luther understood that God reveals God’s self in the periphery of political and economic power, so must the church stand up for those who do not have a voice in today’s world. Bloomquist substantiates this subversive vision of the church in three chapters: “Subversive Seeing” (chapter six), “Subversive Remembering” (chapter seven), and “Subversive Connecting” (chapter eight). More than simply elucidating the meaning of a subversive church, these chapters invite its readers into deeper engagement with the world by calling attention to ways of being subversive.

Because of the way that political and economic systems include mechanisms that hide the oppression they entail to those who are most vulnerable in our society, we need new ways of being in the world that will interrupt and destabilize the perverse status quo. Bloomquist offers crucial suggestions in *Seeing-Remembering-Connecting*.

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***Sin Boldly! Justifying Faith for Fragile and Broken Souls.*** By Ted Peters. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4514-8768-8. xix and 477 pages. Paper. \$44.00.

Writing in a straightforward, though pastorally sensitive way, Peters offers a substantive, contemporary retrieval of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. To that end, he distinguishes between the “fragile soul,” which “attempts to form itself—to justify itself—according to the structure of eternal justice, and, thereby, inherit eternal life” (87) from the



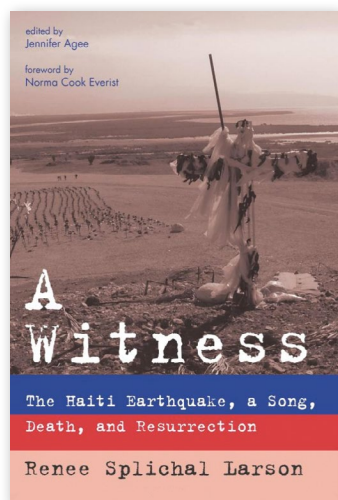
“broken soul,” which, due to trauma, experiences its “moral universe” as broken. Peters notes that “self-justification is our human default position” (233). The “fragile soul” tends to align God on its side, and has no compunction about scapegoating the “other,” while the “broken soul” experiences a dissolving of the self that in worst cases eventuates in suicide (365). For Peters, the answer is found in the indwelling Jesus Christ who obviates the human quest for self-justification (366) and so allows humans a “cleaner” thinking that liberates “openness” to genuine self-love and love for others (xxvi).

Throughout the book Peters engages the “new atheists” (Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, etc.) and those who are “Spiritual But Not Religious” (SBNR). Without any transcendent boundary to honor others’ dignity, atheism as “organized religion” is quite capable of fanaticism. SBNR-ers are often turned off by religious judgmentalism; Peters offers a view of faith corrosive of such legalism.

We “sin boldly” when we seek to establish justice in this world even though it has already been provided for us by grace. Peters’ book will be helpful to any preacher in the task of assessing how to administer God’s grace through preaching, visitation, and evangelistic work.

As a brief criticism, I believe that Luther’s view of God’s hiddenness could also provide a way to help the “broken soul” come to grips with its pain and so help it through the gospel to apprehend Christ, the revealed God, as God’s fullness in the midst of brokenness.

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***A Witness: The Haiti Earthquake, a Song, Death, and Resurrection.*** By Renee Splichal Larson, Jennifer Agee, ed. Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications, 2016. 264 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4982-2606-6. Paperback. \$32.00.

Probably most of us remember the terrible earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010. We saw the images on the news, read of the devastation, and mourned the terrible loss of life. Most of us, however, did all this from a safe distance. Renee Splichal Larson, by contrast, was there. Her experiences of suffering, grief, and loss were not from a distance but from an intimacy almost too close to bear, including the loss of her husband, Ben, who died together with thousands of the Haitian people. Married just over two years, both were preparing

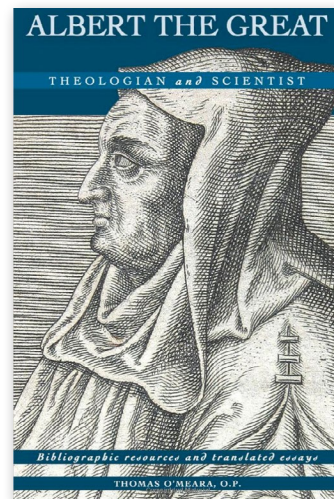
to graduate from Wartburg Theological Seminary that very year. The two of them, along with Ben’s close cousin, Jon, were in Pétienville, Haiti, when the earthquake hit. Jon and Renee made it out of the building alive, but Ben did not.

This book is a very personal, poignant tale of love, faith, loss, and courage, interspersed with songs and poems. Splichal Larson narrates the story of three interwoven lives, and how the two of them, supported by their faith in Jesus Christ and surrounded by the love of many, picked up the pieces in the aftermath of tragedy. Deep theological reflection and extended consideration of Haiti and the Haitian people add to the interest and complexity of the story. The author truly desires that this be a story about the losses of all the Haitian people, as she ponders the meaning of theology of the cross in the face of this magnitude of loss and death. As witnesses to the mysterious workings of God, Renee and Jon joined their lives in marriage and have a child, Gabriel David, a sign that resurrection does follow death.

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## Briefly Noted

In *Albert the Great: Theologian and Scientist* (Chicago: New Priory Press, \$12.95) Dominican theologian Thomas O’Meara has collected and translated a number of essays on the medieval scholar Albert of Lauingen, aka, Albert the Great (1200–1280). An explicit goal of this collection is to show that while Albert is still perhaps best-known as Thomas Aquinas’ teacher, he continues to merit careful attention in his own right. These essays bring readers up to speed with some of the latest scholarship surrounding this important thinker and church leader of the thirteenth century. Beyond influencing Aquinas, for instance, Albert also made lasting contributions to the natural sciences, philosophy, and mystical theology. The book begins with a helpful introduction to the field by O’Meara and a biographical essay by Alain de Libera. As a collection of essays by different authors, the succeeding chapters seemed uneven in their quality of argumentation, though that effect is quite normal for a work like this. Such an observation aside, this book provides a valuable addition to any library’s collection of medieval theology and offers a reliable starting point for those looking to learn more about Albertus Magnus.

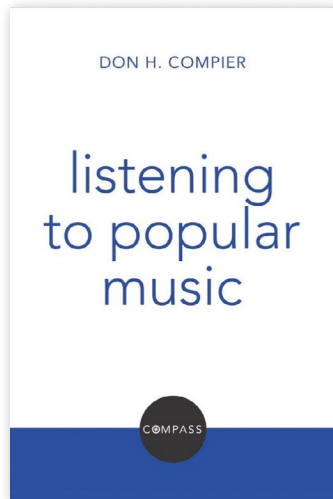


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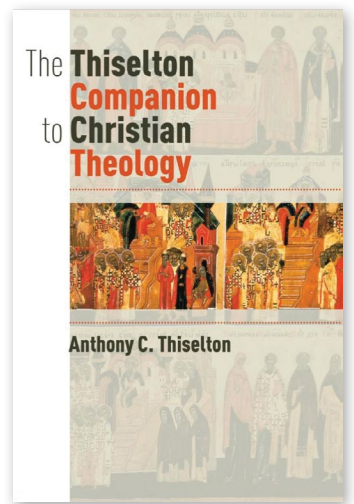


**L**istening to Popular Music: Christian Explorations of Daily Living (Minneapolis: Fortress, \$15.00) offers a great entrée into conversations about faith and pop music. Don H. Compier combines personal reminiscences about pop/rock artists such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Bruce Springsteen with reflections about the role of music and pop culture in the Christian life. Theologians such as Augustine, John Calvin, John and Charles Wesley, and Martin Luther enter the conversation in chapter two. In an essential move, Compier also names and critiques the racism, sexism and consumerism that pervade much of pop and rock music. A challenge of the book is its fairly narrow attention to a few major artists (e.g., the Beatles). While the Beatles and Rolling Stones provide a fairly common base from which to discuss pop music, many other interesting (and more recent) bands, musicians, and genres exist who would also add fascinating layers to the topic. Nevertheless, as it stands, this little volume could provide a church small group with a great starting place for conversation about the relationship between Christian faith and the pop sensibilities that so deeply shape the cultures we live in.



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**I**n *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, \$55.00), Anthony C. Thiselton, professor emeritus at the University of Nottingham, and well-known scholar in hermeneutics, provides an A-Z theological dictionary suitable for scholars, students, and pastors. He presents entries dealing with classical Christian doctrines, the contributions of theologians throughout history, and contemporary trends and methods in theology. Most entries are short but those dealing with the doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the atonement are considerably longer, providing an objective, substantive overview. This volume is a handy go-to reference for anyone who wants an accurate, precise overview of virtually any theological topic. It is remarkable that this book is the accomplishment of one person.



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