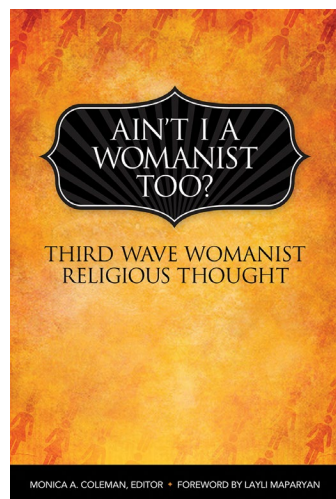




Book Reviews

January 2017

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben



Ain't I a Womanist Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought. Edited by Monica A. Coleman. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8006-9876-8. vii & 229 pages. Paper. \$24.00.

As the title suggests, *Ain't I a Womanist Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought* showcases a variety of

voices which represent the “third wave” of womanist religious thought. As a continuation and expansion of the first and second waves of womanist religious thought, the third wave affirms its predecessors while further questioning and probing for truth in the present time. The volume offers fourteen short essays arranged within four major categories: Religious Pluralism, Popular Culture, Gender and Sexuality, and Politics.

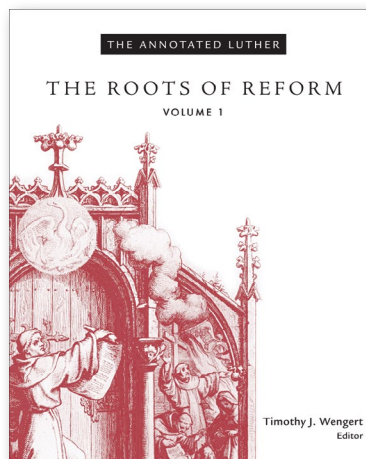
To say that these essays cover a broad topic base would be an understatement. Delving into topics such as a womanist reading of Chinese spirituality, embodying womanism in the classroom, as well as a discussion of the politics of a post-Obama creative embodiment allows this volume to offer something for everyone. Each essay is fairly short and written in a clear and accessible style that will easily connect to the lived experience of those in ministry and/or teaching roles.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this volume lies in the broad topic base that its authors cover with their diverse voices. While at first it makes the text feel a bit unconnected, this approach actually allows a genuine understanding and view of third wave womanist religious thought to emerge. By featuring diverse voices within this project, editor Monica A. Coleman truly shows the reader the depth of intersectionality and acceptance within womanist religious thought and answers the question “Ain't I a womanist too?”

This book would be an exceptional teaching and ministry tool for the classroom, Bible study, or for personal or academic reading.

K. M. Deaver

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



The Annotated Luther. Volume 1: The Roots of Reform. By Timothy J. Wengert, ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4514-6269-2. xi & 574 pages. Cloth. \$39.00.

As we approach the 500th anniversary of the publication of Martin

Luther's *95 Theses*, the scholarly and ecclesiastical community is marking the event with a resurgence of publications related to Luther studies and early modern history in Germany. Perhaps the most ambitious project is the publication of a six-volume set of texts titled *The Annotated Luther*, edited by heavyweight Lutheran scholars, with Timothy Wengert at the helm.

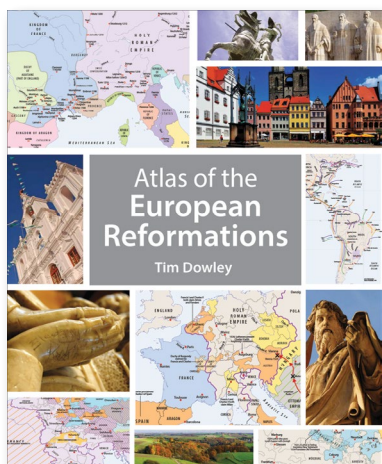
According to Wengert, the purpose of such a project is to meet the needs of the “global reader...in the *lingua franca* of our times...” The rationale for new editions of Luther's works in English is to provide the contemporary reader with a more concise series because “the sheer number of his works presents a challenge” (vii). Furthermore, “these volumes are not always easy to use and are hardly portable.” In addition, research innovations and the evolution in knowledge of the languages of the original texts necessitates a reappraisal of many of Luther's fundamental writings (viii).

The reader is immediately struck by the lengthy articles that accompany each of Luther's texts. The articles are a welcome addition and allow the reader to have a much more nuanced understanding of the content and context of each treatise. However, the most exciting addition are critical notations included throughout the texts that help the reader understand the specific issues addressed by Luther. For example, in addition to the primary text, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Improvement of the Christian Estate,” the editor and translator, James Estes, provides a wealth of additional notes that are essential for the reader to understand the specific reforms that Luther is advocating. As I reflect on the years I spent studying and writing about this particular treatise, I wish I would have had access to these notes and the additional resources provided.

My hope is that the same high quality will be present in the future volumes of *The Annotated Luther*. I will certainly utilize the available volumes in my undergraduate courses on Luther and the Reformation. These volumes will also become essential to seminarians, pastors, and graduate students who wish to explore Luther on a deep and critical level.

Nathan Montover

Augustana College, Rock Island, IL
Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA



Atlas of the European Reformations.

By Tim Dowley.

Minneapolis:

Fortress, 2015.

ISBN: 978-1-4514-

9969-8. 160 pages.

\$24.00.

Students of Reformation history will appreciate this new historical atlas. It successfully

blends visual and textual elements to teach themes of church renewal that took place in the late Middle Ages and the early modern era.

The book's format is quite user-friendly. Most entries receive a page or two of text, a corresponding map, and another relevant image. For instance, the entry for the Swiss Reformation and the spread of Calvinism neatly summarizes the work of reformers such as Zwingli and Calvin, provides a map of Switzerland that shows which areas embraced Reformation ideas, and adds a picture of the famous "Reformation Wall" statues in Geneva.

Other valuable entries use maps to show the location of European universities (with their founding dates), to identify cities that had printing presses before the year 1500, and to show the many English monasteries dissolved when King Henry VIII nationalized church properties. Sections on the Swiss and English Reformations are particularly strong. The book also provides solid coverage of the Catholic/Counter-Reformation, including sections on the Jesuits and European colonial projects in the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

At the same time, the book contains too many simple mistakes for it to be commended uncritically. Two maps locate Wittenberg near the Weser River instead of on the Elbe River. Many maps are undated, which renders "historical atlas" features nearly useless. One map of "Lutheran Germany" helpfully provides dates when various territories embraced the Reformation, yet makes the impossible claim that the city of Wittenberg became Lutheran in 1517. Two paragraphs of text about the Schmalkaldic War (1546-1547) and its aftermath describe nearly everything incorrectly: for instance, the text mistakes John of Saxony (who died in 1532) for his son John Frederick and confuses the Augsburg Interim (1548) with the Peace of Augsburg (1555).

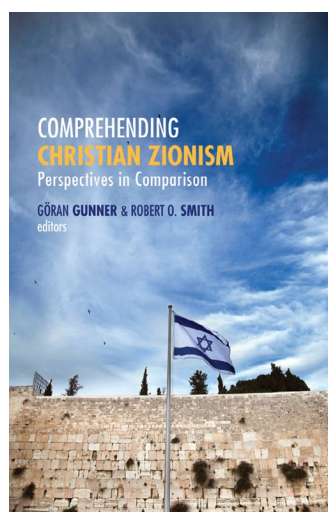
In another section, King Henry VIII is described as having "remained a Catholic." While Henry certainly retained many traditional elements amid his vacillating religious policies, one suspects that Rome would hardly have agreed with this assessment. Overall, these kinds of factual errors, instances of mislabeling, typos, and omission of dates from several maps undermine the book's general reliability.

A further critique comes in the over-simplification of many of the maps. Sixteenth-century Europe—especially within the Holy Roman Empire—was a messy mosaic of secular territories, church domains, and city-states. This historical atlas, however, gives the impression of more religious and political homogeneity than actually existed. Presenting at least a few maps that problematized uniformity and highlighted the real complexities of the period would have corrected that tendency.

In conclusion, with its simple narrative and many helpful illustrations, this book offers much that is beneficial to students of Reformation history. Even so, its shortcomings reveal where another historical atlas might improve upon this worthy project.

Martin Lohrmann

Wartburg Theological Seminary



Comprehending Christian Zionism: Perspectives in Comparison.

Edited by Göran Gunnar and Robert O.

Smith. Minneapolis:

Fortress, 2014. ISBN:

978-1-4514-7226-4.

ix & 347 pages. Paper.

\$39.00.

The reader who knows all there is to know about Christian Zionism—espe-

cially that all Christian Zionists are united in a dispensationalist drive to force God to bring about the second coming—has no need of this collection of essays. The result of an American Academy of Religion seminar, the book has every potential of rearranging commonly held views of Christian Zionists.

The seminar operated with this definition: "Christian Zionism—in its contemporary forms, [is] faith-based Christian political support for the State of Israel" (2.) The definition by design does not include any one way of understanding eschatology nor does it limit Christian Zionism to Britain or North America. Illuminating studies include attention to Honduras, Finland, Germany, and European pietism.

Certain themes run through many of the chapters, despite their varying methodologies and topics.

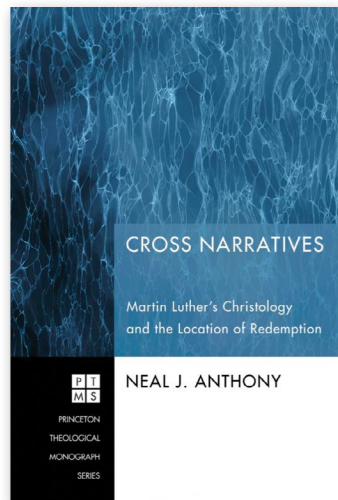
We are introduced, for example, to the identification Christian Zionists have with figures such as Esther. She has become a model for political action on behalf of Israel. Related is the theme that Christians are "to place Israel at the center of their hearts because it is at the center of God's" (105). That heart knowledge fits with the view that biblical Israelites are the same as modern Israelis. The rebirth of Israel they find predicted in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, a vision that encourages Zionists to sup-



port Jewish settlements.

There is much more to be learned from this book: the variety of ways Christian Zionists visualize the timing of the second coming, the significance of their presence in Israel, the influence of the prosperity gospel, Christian Zionist pilgrimage, shifting Western attitudes toward Israel, and the crucial role of Anglo-American imperialism in the birth of Christian Zionism. The book is not always an easy read, but it is a fruitful one.

Walter F. Taylor Jr.
Trinity Lutheran Seminary



Cross Narratives: Martin Luther's Christology and the Location of Redemption. By Neal J. Anthony. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-6060-8654-4. xxi & 299 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

Never more so than in recent decades have scholars engaged in research and writing on the theology

of the cross. One wonders at what forces are at work in the temper of our times to generate such fascination with God's suffering? Among the most important titles on this theme is this fine historical and theological treatment by Neal Anthony. What sets this work apart is both its close reading of Luther's own texts and the power of its theological argument.

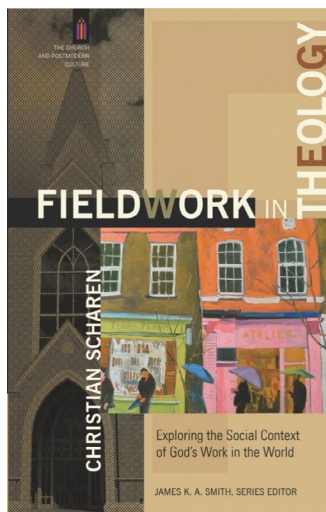
Among the author's chief interlocutors are Karl Barth and Alan E. Lewis (*Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*, Eerdmans, 2001), both of whom from the Reformed tradition resist the extremes of Luther's *communicatio idiomatum* in favor of preserving an *extra calvinisticum*, that is, the efficacy of Christ's work ultimately only through divine intervention in this world from beyond this world. Anthony rightly criticizes such theology for failing to grasp the radicality, and thereby genius, of Luther's theology of the cross, which insists on the total hiddenness of God *sub contraria specie*, the utter concealment of God within this world through the scandal of crucifixion.

The author employs the lead term, "within-redemption," to characterize his own position based on Luther's thought. What is at stake in this argument is the sufficiency of fallen creation as means of grace for working God's redemption. Only the excessiveness of the cross in hiding God entirely from our eyes leads us to the wonder of God's absolute humiliation in Jesus Christ by assuming our abject human condition. This is an appeal to and defense of Luther's "third mode of Christ's presence": "... not a speculative, *a priori* category of the theologian of glory, but

an *a posteriori* confession of the theologian of the cross—justified by faith—who has discerned God's *modus operandi* through the cross where God has definitively chosen to reveal [God]self" (147–148).

Anthony has put his finger on the very pulse of Luther's theology of the cross, rarely apprehended with such theological acumen, the question "whether or not the grave is the location of the presence of the Creator's first and final Word of 'within-redemption'" (273). Nothing less than this absence can finally deliver us. A book worthy of serious study.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World. By Christian Scharen. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8010-4930-9. xviii & 117 pages. Paper. \$19.99.

This is a fascinating and constructive interdisciplinary guide for creatively integrating theological reflection with qualitative method in sociology. At first the discrete elements of the book may appear disparate: exploration of meaning through contemporary songs, theological reflections on contemporary culture, and exploration of the theological value of recent trends in sociology, especially the school of Pierre Bourdieu. Yet the juxtaposition of these elements by Christian Scharen constructs a captivating matrix for enriching theology through deep participation in a sociologically informed, embodied practice of engaging particular human communities.

The specific references to contemporary songs at the beginning of chapters not only establish specific thematic lines of inquiry, but also suggest a posture of appreciative inquiry for correlating cultural artifacts with theological reflection. Scharen employs carefully selected references to the work of contemporary theologians, particularly drawing on the insights of Rowan Williams (e.g., the meaning of being sent into mission as a "dis-possession," of sin as the occasion for self-critique, of theology as a practice "in the middle of things," or of worship, particularly Eucharist, as the means for forming community in service to others according to the way of Jesus), to provide theological mediation for his entire project.

The most noteworthy achievement of this book is the accessible, yet substantial introduction to the qualitative socio-

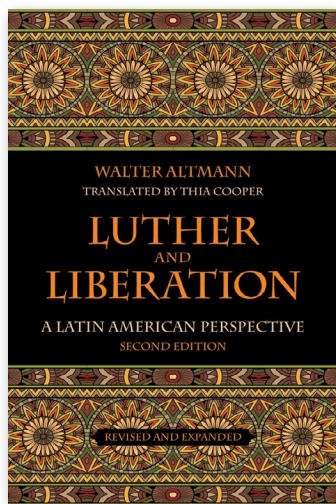


logical methods of Bourdieu, alongside the thought of other significantly related figures, who assist in explicating and appreciating Bourdieu's contributions—Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and Wacquant, among others. Scharen writes: “Here we see Bourdieu building a mode of scientific work grounded in fieldwork. Precisely, because of the problems he confronts in the field, he must therefore overcome antinomies such as objective-subjective and social-mental. His core concepts... of *habitus* and field, along with others, emerge at just this juncture” (73).

Most stunning about this brief monograph are the implications drawn at the book's conclusion for the promise of incorporating fieldwork, practiced thusly, into theological method, especially in relation to the study of congregations: “a posture of love leaning over toward the other and seeking to listen, hear, and understand the experience of the other” (109). In an exquisite, although brief, Epilogue the author names such effort at understanding others as a “spiritual exercise” that incorporates these key elements: “listening well; crafting careful, open-ended questions; offering assurances of care and confidentiality; and putting people at ease in every possible way” (113). Such constitutes a *habitus* not only worthy for the *embodied* practice of ethnographers but perhaps all the more for the enrichment of theological teaching and learning through the formation of theological practitioners skilled for engaging in such fieldwork.

Craig L. Nesson

Wartburg Theological Seminary



Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective. Second Edition.

By Walter Altmann. Translated by Thia Cooper. Foreword by Leonardo Boff. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4514-8268-3. xxii & 440 pages. Paper. \$39.00.

This book, introduced by Leonardo Boff and excellently translated by Thia Cooper, is a greatly expanded and entirely revised version of an indispensable text for understanding the interface between Luther and liberation theology. The first edition (published in 1992) has served as a key text for the critical appropriation of Luther's theology in relation to Latin American liberation theology for more than two decades. This edition, really a new book rather than a revision (more than twice as long!), offers a wealth of insights to explore the liberating possibilities and limits of Luther's theology, especially for addressing the reality of poverty, which first led to the emergence of Latin

American liberation theology in the 1960s.

Walter Altmann is professor of systematic theology at Escola Superior de Teologia at Sao Paulo and former president of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil. He has worked in many key leadership positions in the global church and is a contributing scholar to the current Radicalizing Reformation project (<www.radicalizingreformation.org>). The appearance of this book at the 500th anniversary of the Reformation poignantly reminds us that the economic challenges analyzed by those who first articulated liberation theology have not been resolved. Instead these problems have become even more complex, given the relationship of poverty to the ecological crisis, human rights abuses, and escalating violence in our contemporary world.

The book is divided into four parts: 1) Overview of Luther's Theology and Work, 2) Theology with a New Interpretive Key, 3) Exercises on Luther's Ethical Positioning, and 4) Luther's Legacy and Liberation Theology. Basic to the methodology is an initial presentation of a particular theme from Luther's thought, the juxtaposition of that theme with contemporary challenges, and an evaluation of Luther's thought on that theme. Altmann is both an insightful interpreter of Luther's theology, especially in its ethical implications, and a skillful evaluator of how Luther's thought can contribute (or not!) to present praxis.

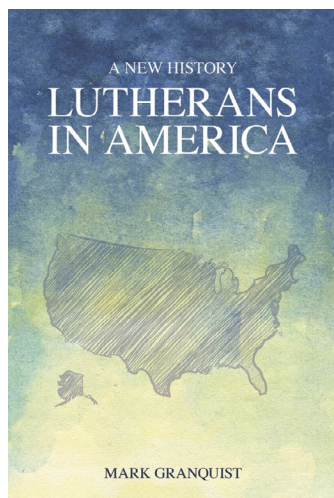
The most prominent theme lifted up is that of Christian freedom, based especially on Luther's treatise by this name. Altmann insists on holding together Luther's two dimensions of freedom: “divine action (‘grace’) and human action (‘effective faith’; certainly better: ‘love’) in concrete reality do not necessarily follow each other in a chronological way but in a continuous dynamic process” (401–402). Closely related to this theme is that of the universal priesthood, which undergirds an understanding of vocation in service to neighbors. These are located within a dialectical reinterpretation of Luther's two kingdoms, about which the author is one of the foremost interpreters for reclaiming its vitality in contemporary theology. Chapter 8 provides keen analysis of false directions in relating church and state in contrast to Altmann's constructive reappropriation of the two kingdoms in the struggle for justice.

The book takes up a wide range of other themes grounded in Luther: idolatry, the cross, justification-liberation, Scripture, ecclesiology, and sacraments. Altmann does not avoid difficult problems in Luther's theology, for example, his writings against the Jews and against the peasants. Chapters are devoted to the political calling of the church, education, the economy, war, and resistance and violence, each with the author's own assessment of Luther's contribution or fallacy in relation to today's questions. The book concludes with a detailed survey of how Luther's legacy has been received, criticized, and appropriated by various Latin American liberation theologians. Together with the book by Victor Westhelle, *Transfiguring Luther: The Planetary Promise of Luther's Theology* (Cascade, 2016), we now have in English two of the most important books ever written from Latin America on



Luther's theology. The global impact of Luther's legacy continues to evolve.

Craig L. Nessian
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Lutherans in America: A New History. By Mark Granquist. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-4514-7228-8. x & 388 pages. Paper. \$60.00.

Already in the previous generation, the standard work on Lutheranism in North America, edited by E. Clifford Nelson, was a multi-authored volume. The quantity

of material to research, sift, and synthesize for such a project is so enormous that a text by a single author becomes almost unimaginable. All the more to the credit of Mark Granquist to demonstrate such mastery of the sources and interpretation of complex sub-narratives in crafting this book, destined to become the next standard work.

Granquist does a particularly stellar job of telling the Lutheran story in the United States from the beginning of European settlement to the developments of the twentieth century. The chapters are well delineated, for example: Early Colonial Developments, 1720–1748; Establishment of Eastern Lutheranism, 1748–1781; Lutherans in a New Nation, 1781–1820; Expansion and Conflict, 1820–1855; Mass Immigration, 1855–1888; and Structuring of American Lutheranism, 1888–1918. The author demonstrates historical acumen in crafting the overall storyline. The text is enhanced by the inclusion of excursions after each chapter, giving sketches of particular historical topics in more detail, for example: Colonial Lutheran Pastoral Care, “Praise the Lord”: Lutherans and American Revivalism, Lutherans and the Lodge, American Lutheran Aid to Refugees, and Hispanic Lutheranism.

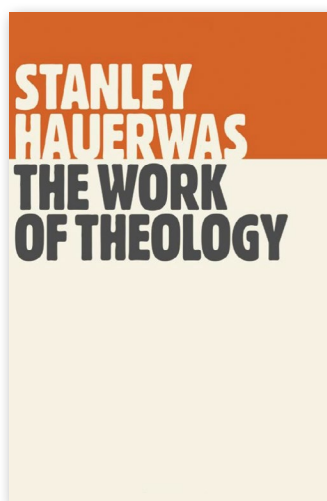
One slice of this history depicts the influence of Wilhelm Loehe on both the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Iowa Synod. This history is told carefully, noting especially Loehe's influence on the founding of these synods, the development of their institutions (n.b.: the teachers' college was founded at Saginaw in 1852, the seminary at Dubuque in 1854, and the Wartburg name was first given to the college-seminary in 1857 at St. Sebald), worship materials, and mission to Native Americans. “Loehe was a strong supporter of the new Iowa Synod, and directed his missionary pastors to the new organization. Although the Iowa Synod under the theological leadership of Sigmund

and Gottfried Fritschel remained firmly a confessional Lutheran body, the synod believed that some areas of organization practice and belief were ‘open questions,’ that is, topics on which Lutherans could disagree and still maintain church fellowship” (162–163). Such succinctness is characteristic of the whole.

Granquist decided to extend this history to very recent times. The final chapter is titled, “Uncertain Present, Uneasy Future, 1988–2013.” Acknowledging the difficulty of interpreting history so near to the present, the account of these years will likely draw the most criticism. For example, only time will tell whether “Called to Common Mission,” the full communion agreement with the Episcopal Church, becomes a historic landmark for creatively bringing the ELCA into the historic episcopacy and thereby opening future ecumenical possibilities with those church bodies for which this sign is indispensable. As the author notes, it does make a difference whether one views this development as a violation of the *satis est* in Augsburg Confession 7 or as an exercise in Christian freedom (an “open question”) for the sake of the greater unity of the church. The Epilogue, titled “Hope,” rightly highlights the vital role congregations will play in writing the future of Lutheranism in North America.

Theological educators have long needed such a book and we can be grateful to Granquist for providing this comprehensive account in a text of manageable length and great erudition.

Craig L. Nessian
Wartburg Theological Seminary



The Work of Theology. By Stanley Hauerwas. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7190-9. xi & 293 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

This book serves not only as a retrospective on the author's career, but engages in creative rethinking of themes core to the Hauerwas corpus. Each chapter begins “How to...” This stresses the “performative character” of what the author aims to accomplish through this book: “...the difference Christian convictions can make for how the world is understood, as well as how we live in the world...” (4). This aim is resonant with the entire Hauerwas trajectory.

Chapter Four, “How to Be an Agent: Why Character Matters” is particularly generative. Here, following the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre, Hauerwas reflects anew on his previous focus that character constitutes human agency especially by formation through immersion in distinctive narratives. Examining

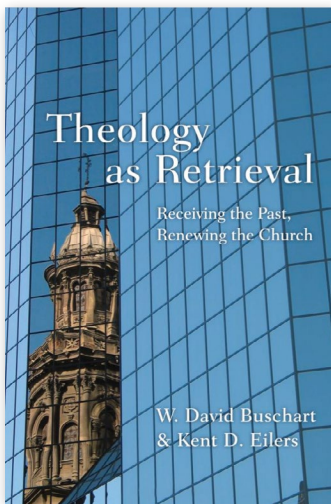


ing the case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he traces how Bonhoeffer's Christian journey etched his character: his discovery of the poor, pacifism, piety, gift for friendship, courageous intelligence, and political astuteness. "...Bonhoeffer believed that we only acquire a true narrative of the self through incorporation into the body of Christ" (87). This means that our own character also is formed only through communal Christian practices, starting with worship, that serve to shape us into conformity to Christ.

This book introduces readers to a wealth of theological literature worth knowing: Stephen Pickard's *Seeking the Church*, Eugene Rogers' *After the Spirit*, Rowan Williams' *Faith in the Public Square*, Bruce Longenecker's *Remember the Poor*, and Gary Anderson's *Charity*, among many other references older and new. Hauerwas thereby acts as a constructive guide to recent theological scholarship. The book concludes with a Postscript in which the author interacts with a recent critique of his work by Nicolaus Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*. Hauerwas concedes that Healy is correct about one criticism: "...that I conflate the logic of belief and the logic of living out our beliefs" (278). In fact, that may be in a nutshell his principal theological point.

Hauerwas writes about the title of the book: "Theology is work, but it is good work. Good work is work that is so consuming you forget you are tired. Good work is work that attracts others to join you in doing the work" (9). May theology and ministry be for the readers of these pages such "good work!" [Afterword: In deference to the chapter on "How to Be Theologically Funny," the chapter on "How to Write a Theological Sentence" might have been better titled "How Not to Proofread a Theological Chapter."]

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church. By W. David Buschart and Kent D. Eilers. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2467-0. 316 pages. Paper. \$19.32.

This book surveys six examples of retrieval theology as it relates to 1) scripture studies, 2) spirituality, 3) liturgy,

4) mission, and 5) cosmos. The authors are convinced that retrieval theology is making an important contribution to the church, because it offers valuable assistance in the "reception and transmission of the deposit of faith," which they see as a central task in the Church's life and mission (15).

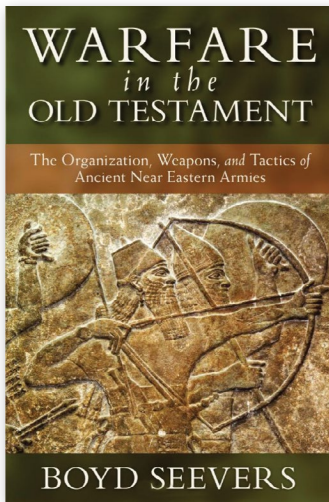
A major theme in the book is the relationship between past and present, change and continuity, freedom and constraint in the life and mission of the church. Buschart and Eilers view this relationship as highly dialectical. They recognize that we cannot return to the past and emphasize that retrieval theology does not seek to retrench or reprintinate it. But the authors also reject modernity's view of the past as "a hindrance to overcome rather than a resource from which to draw" (23). They see wisdom in the past and applaud retrieval theology's efforts to recover and adapt that wisdom to serve the church today and in the future. But they also warn that "retrieval is not always...inherently conservative" (111). On the contrary, retrieval sometimes requires change.

To illustrate this dialectical relationship between present and past, change and continuity, the authors employ an analogy: improvisation in jazz. Retrieval theology is like jazz improvisation. It "necessarily includes reception *and* transformation, constraint *and* freedom" (240) and this transformation can sometimes be so profound that traditions and practices of the past become quite new.

A couple critical points about the book need mention. In their discussion of the new monasticism (chapter five), the authors fail to include important examples, such as the Taizé community or various Anglican and Lutheran communities, even though these communities offered inspiration for some of the communities discussed in the book. A second point relates to chapter one on retrieval theology and scripture. The authors here use arcane ideas and terms from disciplines such as linguistics and speech-act theory without explanation and apart from context, which makes this chapter quite abstract and difficult to understand.

In spite of these weaknesses, *Theology as Retrieval* is a valuable resource especially for the parish pastor. Retrieval theology offers an alternative to the superficial and gimmicky practices, often more entertainment than theologically oriented, that are widely marketed as effective evangelistic tools today. As J. Todd Billings states in a recent review, *Theology as Retrieval* is the only broad survey and critique of retrieval theology as it relates to the life and mission of the church today.

Jerry Folk
Madison, Wisconsin



Warfare in the Old Testament: The Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Ancient Near Eastern Armies.

By Boyd Seevers. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8254-3655-0. 328 pages. Cloth. \$35.00.

In a mostly descriptive book, Seevers suggests that readers can better understand the Bible by learning about ancient

Near Eastern culture, including the role that armies and warfare played. After a chapter on the military structure of ancient Israel, Seevers describes the military organization of Egypt, Philistia, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. For each kingdom, the explanation follows the same organization, beginning with a piece of historical fiction about a soldier's life and his participation in a key military campaign. (This highly creative contribution also serves to orient the reader to the historical, social, and cultural setting under investigation.) These stories are followed by major sections on the historical setting and biblical connections, military organization, weapons, and tactics. Subheadings in the margins help navigate the reader through the chapters. Readers of *Currents* might take special note of the sections about the roles God or the gods played in ancient military undertakings.

Among the strengths of the book are the abundant references to primary literary sources beyond the Bible, including ancient Near Eastern texts (such as royal annals) and, for the Persian army and its activities, the Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon; archaeology; and the careful analysis of reliefs from Egypt and Assyria. (The line drawings throughout are a welcome addition to the text, though these images need better reference to their sources). The Bible remains a main source for informa-

tion about armies, and "maximalist" readers of the Bible will find little to object to here. Others may wish that Seevers had given more attention to some of the historical issues that he mentions but does not fully engage (the ancestors, the date of the exodus, Goliath, the book of Daniel, etc.). Still, none of these matters is central to his descriptive purpose.

Though based on the author's doctoral dissertation, the book does not set out to argue a particular thesis about warfare in the ancient Near East. Seevers' goal is to "describe ancient military practices" (21) for an interested public, and he has accomplished that. This introduction to warfare in the Bible and in the ancient Near East, grounded in primary texts from antiquity and illustrated with many line drawings of images from ancient reliefs and other sources, is highly readable and accessible, complete with maps and other images, and would be a good addition to many church libraries.

*Mark W. Bartusch
Valparaiso University*

BRIEFLY NOTED:

In *Envisioning the Congregation Practicing the Gospel* (Eerdmans, \$20), John W. Stewart states "the premier vocation of any contemporary Christian congregation is to make [the] gospel clear and believable—first to all members and, through them, to all persons in their host societies." Having "neglected [our] first love as stewards of the gospel" because of "intrusive, potent cultural values of contemporary America," Stewart argues that the way forward is in being intentional about naming those side-tracking forces and then using five foundational faith practices to counter them.

*Dwight L. DuBois (M.Div., STM)
Des Moines, Iowa*