



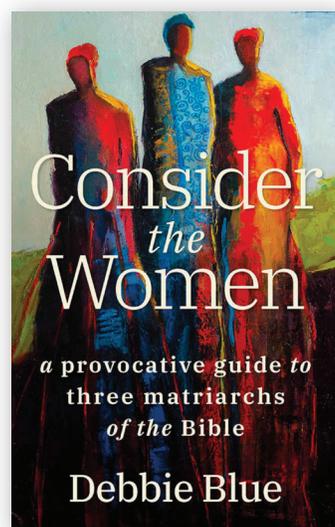
# Book Reviews

## January 2021

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

### Review a book!

*Currents in Theology and Mission* is seeking to expand its number of regular book reviewers. If you have interest, please send name, contact information, and areas of primary interest to [currents@lstc.edu](mailto:currents@lstc.edu).



***Consider the Women: A Provocative Guide to Three Matriarchs of the Bible.*** By Debbie Blue. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7429-0. vi & 225 pages. Paper. \$18.00.

The title of this book by Debbie Blue suggests the book is about three biblical women. It is about Hagar, Esther, and Mary, a

triumvirate that Blue calls “a sort of transfaith trinity: the (M) other, the Vamp, and the Shape-Shifting Queen” (9). Even more than that, this book is about their ongoing stories in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. *Consider the Women* yearns to be read in groups. While one can profitably read it individually, Blue’s emphasis on stories calls for story sharing. An interfaith group or a group ready to take a step in exploring the shared traditions of the Abrahamic faiths would be excellent contexts for such sharing.

Story sharing is what Blue does within the book—she interprets biblical stories, searches out stories from other sources, including the Quran, the Hadith, and Midrash, and then sets out to discover how the stories of three biblical matriarchs continue to live through the stories of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian women. Two interpretive lenses guide Blue’s work. First, Blue understands the arc of the biblical narrative as calling its readers to question systems of power that are in place and to attend to those on the edges of those systems. Perhaps this is why she spends less time discussing her own Christian tradition than what she learns about Muslim and Jewish traditions. Secondly, and not unrelatedly, the work is unapologetically feminist. Blue rejoices in the ways that these three women subvert the “overwhelming maleness” of the Bible and the God described therein (25).

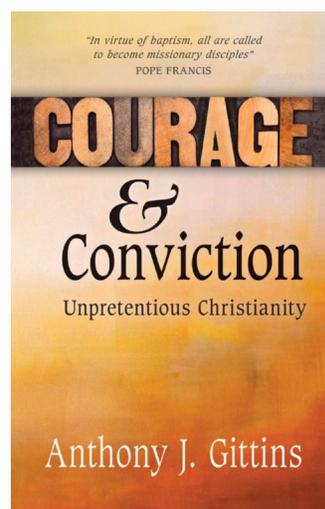
With these lenses firmly in place, Blue sets about collecting stories. When exploring Hagar’s legacy, Blue converses with Somali women while receiving a henna tattoo and with a feminist Islamic scholar and bookstore owner. She visits an art gallery and an Iftar celebration. Through these experiences Blue learns not just about Hagar but about the long feminist traditions within Islam and the various ways such traditions find contemporary voice.

To better understand Esther, Blue visits Jewish Purim festivals where Esther’s story—in all its theatrical farce—is retold and reenacted. In a more serious chapter, Blue addresses the threat of genocide in the book of Esther and transitions to a quick but poignant look at some of the darker moments in Christian-Jewish relations, spanning from the apostle Paul to the twentieth-century Shoah.

Finally, in the shortest section of the book, Blue searches out the legacy of Mary, mother of Jesus. Even here, within her own Christian tradition, Blue foregrounds stories from beyond her own culture, focusing on the Virgin of Guadalupe and the many different ethnicities and forms that Mary takes in artwork around the world.

Blue subtitles her book *A Provocative Guide*, and it indeed provokes as it stirs up emotions, perhaps incites to action, and certainly moves readers to join their stories with those of the matriarchs.

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***Courage & Conviction: Unpretentious Christianity.*** By Anthony J. Gittins. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8146-4476-8. 240 pages. Paper. \$24.95.

There is much to like about this spirited effort to delineate “unpretentious Christianity.” The author is a widely published priest/theologian trained in social anthropology, who served for a decade as a missionary in Sierra Leone.

While intended for an ecumenical audience, the chapters largely consist of addresses delivered to gatherings of priests and religious. While this contributes to the book’s evident lack of a thematic structure, it does convey the author’s passion that readers discover and exercise their own role as disciples, baptized and confirmed into God’s mission in the world through the church.

Gittins employs numerous stories from the Gospels to

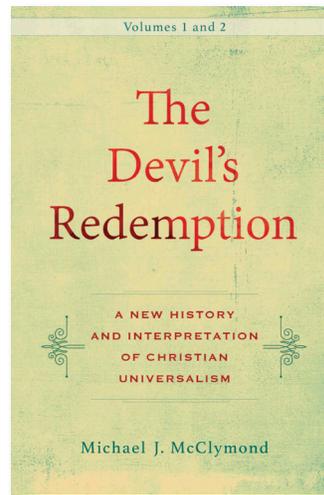


describe the often-halting mission of Jesus' first disciples, which by the power of the Pentecostal Spirit became the church's mission from its earliest days. As St. Paul bluntly wrote to the Corinthians, this mission seemed to stand in clear "apostolic succession" with those first disciples in their wrangling and fissiparousness. While generously quoting pastoral letters from recent popes, the author is unsparingly—while lovingly—critical of his own Roman Catholic Church and unusually candid in naming the clergy sexual abuse crisis as evidence of his Church's debilitating malady. Gittins diagnoses this as a matter of allowing matters of the "*magisterium*" (which he translates as "big stuff") to preoccupy church decision-making rather than "*ministerium*" ("little stuff" or "unnoticed but essential works of service"), which are the heart of the Church's mission (48).

The Church's treatment of women, especially the widespread opposition among the hierarchy to discuss ordination of women, is another issue raised as a sign of failure of nerve by the Church's leadership. The author quotes a moving poem by Frances Croake Frank in which Mary, both at Jesus' birth and death, is found holding her son in her arms and crying: "This is my body; this is my blood." The poem concludes: "Well that she said it to him then/ for dry old men, brocaded robes belying barrenness/ordain that she shall not say it for him now" (232). Gittins is clearly an outspoken advocate of Pope Francis and what he sees as the reforming aims of his papacy.

For all its biblical literacy, progressive theological outlook, passion for social justice, and self-critique of the institutional church, my enthusiasm for this book suffers from what I identify as an Arminian theological flaw. I lost count of how many times at a crucial stage in his argument Gittins, like many preachers, falls back on phrases like "we must try" and "we must strive" (193), while also alluding to God's (prevenient) grace in relying on our "best" human effort. For all the breadth of theological learning and pastoral experience, our author does not reference the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) or appear to have struggled with its implications for the church's mission.

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***The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism.***

By Michael J. McClymond. 2 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8010-4856-2. Cloth. \$90.00.

In recent times, multiple monographs have been published that from one perspective or another argue that every person without exception will be saved also known as universalism (shorthand for universal salvation). Michael J. McClymond, who is Professor of Modern Christianity at Saint Louis University and is most well-known for his work on Jonathan Edwards, enters into this discussion with his massive two-volume work.

He distinguishes universalism from inclusivism, arguing that since the former offers a "much stronger theological claim," (2) it is worth the energy he has devoted to it. For McClymond, a historical investigation of universalism "may shed a new and clarifying light on" what is, he argues, a "restitution" by contemporary proponents of universalism "of points made many centuries ago ... but that are little known today" (1). But his concern is not only historical. He asserts that "Christian universalism is not like traditional Christian theology with salvation for all superadded" (17). Rather, comparing theology to a game of chess, he argues that universalism may have the end result of "undoing other doctrines" that are considered essential.

In the introductory chapter, he argues that there are two basic strands of universalism in Christian theology. The existence of universalism "prior to around 1700," he writes, "consisted in a series of footnotes to Origen" (7). The second strand, from arguably 1700 onward, finds its origin with the "lesser known ... Jakob Böhme." As the reader might expect, McClymond devotes the remainder of the first volume of his work to exploring these two strands.

However, before doing so, he provides a brief survey of modern expressions of universalism found in mainline Protestantism, Catholicism, evangelicalism, and eastern orthodoxy in the first chapter, which prepares the reader for his more exhaustive treatment of the same in the second volume. The second chapter focuses on the Jewish Kabbalah and Gnosticism, arguing that these are the roots of Christian universalism.

Chapters three and four devote over 200 pages to Origen's theology and its subsequent reception. Here, McClymond is concerned to show that aspects of Origen's theology, including his universalism, were condemned by the early church and even rejected by such later figures as Maximus the Confessor and



Thomas Aquinas. The fifth chapter gives near comprehensive treatment of Böhme and his subsequent reception, which then prepares the reader for McClymond's discussion of German (e.g., Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher) and Russian (Solovyov, Bulgakov) thinkers in chapters seven and eight respectively. Chapter six is a discussion of the rise and fall of Anglo-American universalists. Chapters nine through eleven discuss theologians with universalistic tendencies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and David Congdon.

Whereas with the majority of his work, McClymond is presenting a historical argument, namely, that universalism is a minority report in the Christian tradition and in fact has roots in and is influenced by anti-Christian theologies such as the Kabbalah, Gnosticism, and, more broadly, esoterism, in the concluding chapter he presents a theological case against universalism, arguing that it redefines who God is, what grace is, and fails to address the problem of evil satisfactorily. This is then followed by twelve appendices which provide additional documentation of his argument, appearances of universalism in Islam and Mormonism, and other supplemental material.

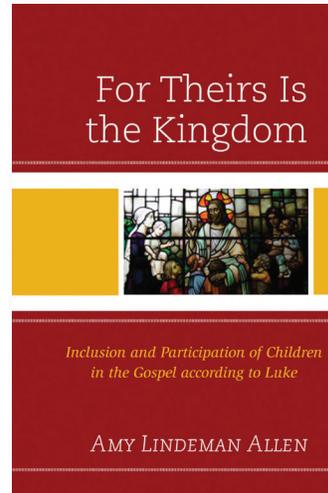
It is clear that McClymond has offered what is likely his magnum opus. It truly approximates something like an encyclopedia of universalism arranged chronologically. His ability to interact with such diverse areas of church history as Origen, Russian Orthodoxy and Anglo-American Universalism, never mind the less trodden paths of Böhme and Christian Cabala, speaks to his competency as a historian. The breadth of learning he displays in this work must have taken a lifetime to acquire. Even if one were to disagree with some of his conclusions regarding the roots of universalism, this will not be a work that can be neglected by those who wish to enlist the Christian tradition in support of universalism. Another strength of McClymond's work are his valiant attempts to make clear the rather obscure thoughts of some of the thinkers in view. Moreover, due to the subject matter, this work has the added, and likely unintentional, benefit of providing a fresh perspective of Christian history in general.

A few weaknesses do present themselves though. First, his connection of post-1700s universalism to Böhme will seem to some readers forced and an overreaching of the evidence at points, although at times the link is clear. Second, one wonders if he is less than charitable in his interpretation of Barth. Third, while perhaps an unavoidable hazard of historical writing, this is a rather grim work to read through, filled with idiosyncratic theologies/philosophies, puzzling esoteric figures and the like. It is comparable to a dark, mystery novel with fantasy undertones. Given this description, furthering editing of the first two chapters, which are largely repeated elsewhere in the work, would have been of service to the reader.

In sum, this work is an extraordinary achievement that would benefit the student or scholar of church history. In addition, the fresh, if at times grim, perspective of this same history could disclose further areas of historical theology to be

explored. This work is essential reading for anyone desiring to read a comprehensive account of Christian universalism.

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***For Theirs Is the Kingdom: Inclusion and Participation of Children in the Gospel According to Luke.*** By Amy Lindeman Allen. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-9787-0321-6. xxiii & 255 pages. Cloth. \$95.00.

Books about children in the Bible have been proliferating in recent years. Amy Lindeman Allen's contribution hones in on children in the Gospel of Luke. Allen's aim is clear: to show that children were included and participated in the *literary* portrayal of Luke's gospel and, in turn, that we can imagine them in the *historical* ministry of Jesus, too. Her book is thorough and technical by the standards of biblical studies scholarship, while also maintaining a pastoral focus. The conclusion, in particular, names children in congregations as one of the primary beneficiaries of an approach such as hers.

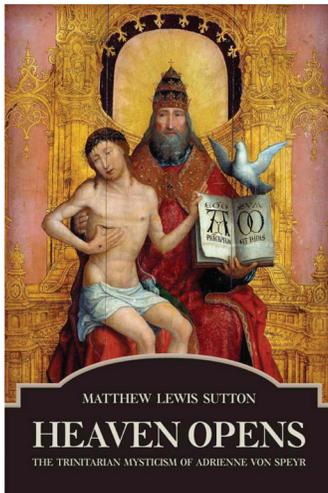
After an introductory chapter that names the relevant issues (in particular, related to the new field of childist studies), Allen's chapters focus on the following topics. First, she introduces the troublesome category of childhood: how do you know who qualifies as a "child" in the ancient world? To answer that question, Allen looks to various sources of evidence for a child's identity, emphasizing the complexity of this social concept. In the second chapter, she focuses in on the ways that children were included in early Christian households. To do so, she discusses the ways that children were included in ancient Greco-Roman households (including Jewish households, which she sees as comparable to the larger Greco-Roman world, with some key distinctions). This chapter is the first that looks at sections of Luke's gospel in detail; here, she considers passages where Jesus tells his disciples to welcome children, the presence of children in the infancy narrative, and the "invisible presence" (46) of children throughout Jesus' adult ministry. The third chapter builds on this as it investigates the overt presence of children in Jesus' ministry. Throughout, Allen emphasizes the inclusion and restoration that these children experience from Jesus. Chapters 4–5 focus on children as companions of Jesus in his ministry, using the



criteria that Luke gives for discipleship: “accompaniment, hearing, and doing the word of God” (125). Using these criteria, she argues that even though children are obscured in ancient texts, we should assume the presence of children alongside Jesus and his adult disciples. In these chapters, she proposes reading, for example, James, John, and Mary (sister of Martha) as non-adult child disciples. These chapters are the most innovative and deserve careful consideration. The final chapter looks ahead to the ways that child audiences may receive these interpretations, as they are “remembered” into Luke’s gospel. Here, her pastoral focus is clear and compelling.

Because her work emphasizes the inclusion and participation of children in a biblical book, it translates well to a focus on the inclusion and participation of children in contemporary churches. Allen’s experience in congregations is evident when she reflects on the ways that children are marginalized and ignored in many U.S. churches. Rather than relegating children to a separate room during worship or focusing on the ways that young people contribute once they are on their way out the door, Allen’s work encourages us to think about the roles that children can play now in churches and, indeed, in all spaces.

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### *Heaven Opens: The Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne Von Speyr.*

By Matthew Lewis Sutton. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-4514-7301-8. 269 pages. Paper. \$59.99.

**L**ast summer my wife and I attended the annual summer conference hosted by the Institute for Ecumenical

Research of the Lutheran World Federation in Strasbourg. The topic of the weeklong gathering was the age-old question in Christian circles, “Doctrine Divides, Spirituality Unites?” As a seasoned veteran of ecumenical theological dialogue and practical ecumenical cooperation, I have been convinced both that theology and spirituality cannot exist apart from one another and that neither pole is more divisive or unitive than the other. Both need to be affirmed in their living interconnections.

Matthew Lewis Sutton agrees and argues that twenty-first-century theology needs to remain in dialogue with mysticism as a neglected source of revelation. In his concluding chapter he asks the probing question: “Are not paintings, statues, icons, liturgies, ecclesial, and mystical writings functional as theological

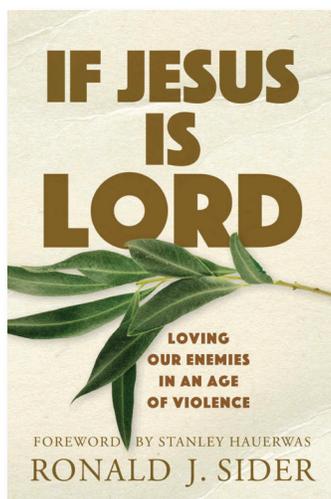
and exegetical texts?” (239). His grappling with the theology of the twentieth-century Swiss mystic Adrienne von Speyr clearly makes the case.

Most of those who know of von Speyr may be aware of the close connection in Basel with her contemporary Swiss compatriot, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jesuit theologian and prolific author. He is well known for his book, *Mysterium Paschale*, and as interlocutor with fellow resident of Basel, Karl Barth. Von Balthasar, in fact, was not only deeply influenced by von Speyr’s mystical experiences and theology when they first met in 1940 but served thereafter as her chief confessor and theological interpreter, who accompanied her along her mystical journey. While curiosity may desire to know more about their interactions over many years, Sutton provides an all-too-brief biography of von Speyr (who died in 1967 and was buried on her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday) and refers to von Balthasar’s reflections on her work. Significantly, the two were co-founders in 1945 of the secular institute called the Johannes Gemeinschaft (Community of St. John), for which they wrote an “order” for its members.

The author offers an appreciation of the deeply trinitarian and orthodox character of von Speyr’s mystical theology. While one may find this redundant—not unlike the Gospel of John’s circular repetitiveness (von Speyr’s favorite Gospel)—one is impressed by the deeply scriptural character of her theology. Chapter 7 is the most revealing distillation of von Speyr’s theological vision of Jesus’ passion and death, descent to hell, and resurrection. Sutton provides snippets of von Speyr’s own narrated mystical experience. Especially compelling is her experience of Jesus’ dying on the cross, mediated by his “seven last words” as the centerpiece of the passion story.

Whatever one’s view of von Speyr’s mysticism (as the Trinity’s “opening of heaven” and incorporation of humanity into the life of the Trinity), Sutton demands attention in his closing claim that “Christians will receive the vision of the Trinity either in the eternal life as the beatific vision or in this life as the mystical vision” (236). Mysticism here becomes the preview of coming attractions for those so gifted.

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Postils for Preaching: Commentaries on the  
Revised Common Lectionary, Years A, B & C.*



*If Jesus Is Lord: Loving Our Enemies in an Age of Violence.* By Ronald J. Sider. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8010-3628-6. 256 pages. Paper. \$24.99.

Forty-two years ago this author published the book for which he is probably best known, *Rich Christians*

*in an Age of Hunger*. The same year his edited volume on Karlstad, *Battle With Luther: Documents in a Liberal-Radical Debate*, received less acclaim, even though he was described as “internationally known for his research on Karlstadt and the Reformation period.” Sider is the author of more than thirty other books, founder and president emeritus of Evangelicals for Social Action, and longtime professor of theology at Palmer (formerly Eastern Baptist) Theological Seminary. Here he addresses an issue that has held central focus in his work as a scholar and activist in the tradition of America’s “peace churches,” what he understands as the Gospel’s call to be practitioners of nonviolent pacifism both in our personal and public lives as Christian believers.

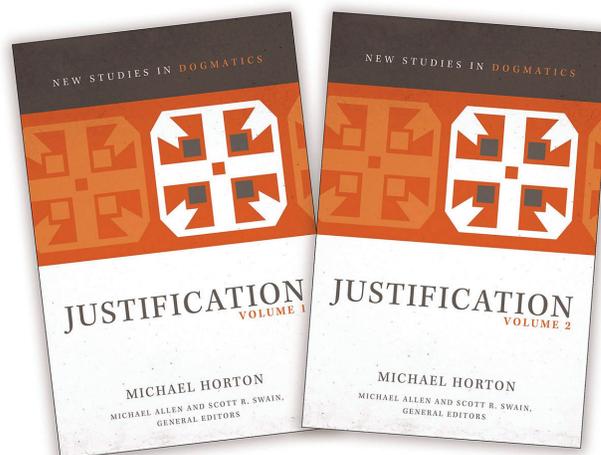
The book lays out a strong biblical case for Christian pacifism as a direct implication of Jesus’ actions and way of being in the world. Sider devotes chapters to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, focusing on his command to “love your enemies,” other teachings of Jesus, and peace in the rest of the New Testament. He also includes a chapter on “But What About...?” that addresses texts that are sometimes invoked to question Jesus’ nonviolent teaching and behavior (for example, Jesus’ prediction of “wars and rumors of wars,” his over-turning the tables of the money changers, his advising his disciples to buy a sword, or the violent imagery in the book of Revelation).

Sider offers a careful and judicious exegetical and interpretive approach to texts, using the best of biblical scholarship while giving voice to opposing views. His most oft-noted biblical exegeses include John Howard Yoder, Richard Hays, Walter Wink, N.T. Wright, and John R. W. Stott. He takes special care to acknowledge the deep influence of Yoder, the Mennonite scholar, on his overall perspective, while acknowledging his own deep lament at his “terrible sexual power abuse” against a number of women over many years even as he preached nonviolence (xiv).

Sider takes up what he calls “foundational theological issues,” followed by “problems with pacifism” before helpfully addressing “problems with just war thinking.” Since the days of Ambrose, Augustine, and the Constantinian settlement, the mainline position of the church has defended “just war.” This is followed by the author’s grappling with the issue of how we

are to understand Jesus in solidarity with the God of the Old Testament scriptures, particularly in view of many passages that depict Yahweh ordering the death of Israel’s enemies. Sider concludes by addressing the practical issue of what it would mean for many more Christians to become pacifists in the midst of the world we inhabit and addresses the neuralgic issue of nonviolence in relation to Jesus’ bloody and violent death on the cross as “atonement.” I am grateful for Sider’s honest and sobering engagement with an issue that the church would do well to put front and center in its own call to discipleship in the way of Jesus.

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*Justification.* By Michael Horton. New Studies in Dogmatics. 2 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-2104-9160-6; ISBN: 978-0-3105-7838-3. Paper. \$39.99 each.

Michael Horton is J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in California. He is a prolific author who, while writing from a Reformed perspective, takes pains to engage with theologians from a variety of traditions outside of his own throughout his corpus. His two-volume work on the significant doctrine of justification is no exception in this regard.

In the first chapter of volume one, Horton sets the stage by providing some reasons for his in-depth exposition of justification. First, he asserts that despite voices to the contrary, justification is still relevant because people continue to have a sense of guilt, even if they are unaware of its source. Second, justification is still a doctrinal article that divides the church. Third, the Reformational understanding of justification is contested from diverse quarters within the contemporary theological landscape such as (to name only two) the new perspective on Paul and the new Finnish interpretation of Luther.

Given the challenges standing against justification from practical, theological, and historical perspectives, Horton is



concerned to clear away the historical webs in the first volume and offer an exegetical and theological defense of the doctrine in the second volume. Thus, the first volume is more than anything a work in historical theology. Chapters two and three describe how justification was viewed by the ancient church. He discusses the motif of the great exchange between Christ and the sinner found throughout the church fathers, arguing that this motif prepared the way for justification's fuller development in the Reformation era.

Chapters four and five give attention to the medieval period. With the former, Horton helpfully demonstrates that while Aquinas does not affirm justification as later understood, he did teach that salvation was completely rooted in grace, establishing a "firewall ... against Pelagian interpretations of merit" (129). Yet, subsequent accretions of medieval thought expressed by John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Gabriel Biel worked against the insights of Aquinas, so Horton argues, bringing to the fore semi-Pelagianism. The remaining chapters in the first volume, with the exception of chapter eleven, describe in detail the teaching of the Reformers on justification as well as theological loci that attend to it such as the sacraments and sanctification. Here, Martin Luther features the most prominently in Horton's discussion, eclipsing even John Calvin, despite Horton's Reformed persuasion.

The eleventh chapter takes a fascinating detour whereby Horton responds to the argument that Luther and those who followed after him were guilty of the error of nominalism in their understanding of justification. Horton argues that, to the contrary, it is the Council of Trent, rather than the Reformation, which shares the strongest continuity with nominalism as taught by Gabriel Biel whom Horton describes as "the consummate nominalist" (340).

The second volume, which is the larger of the two, signals a move from the historical theology of the first volume to a defense and exposition of Reformational doctrine of justification by faith. The introductory chapter surveys contemporary challenges to the doctrine such as the new perspective on Paul, the apocalyptic turn in New Testament studies and Radical Orthodoxy, among others. Following this, he writes, "My interest in this [second] volume is ... to encounter [the] remarkable [biblical] passages in conversation with the provocative proposals [e.g., new perspective on Paul] that... have brought the doctrine of justification ... to the forefront of contemporary debate" (53).

He then divides this second volume into four parts. The first part looks at two significant biblical-theological categories: (1) the relationship between Adam and Christ, and (2) Paul's teaching regarding "the works of the law." The second part discusses what justification in fact accomplishes. Here, he explores God's moral qualities (love, righteousness) and how Christ's work as seen in his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection inform justification. The third part burrows down further, asking what exactly justification means, and how we are to understand imputation and the relation of justification to a

judgment according to works. And, finally, in the fourth part he discusses how we receive the gift of justification, specifically, what it means to be justified by faith alone and how justification relates to union with Christ.

As to an evaluation of this work, there are a number of strengths to Horton's treatment of the doctrine of justification. First, he is fully conversant with relevant primary and secondary sources. This is especially displayed in his discussion of Luther and Aquinas. Yet, not only does his depth of knowledge of historical texts and contemporary discussion stand out, but also the breadth of his coverage of literature surrounding the justification in such diverse areas of study as biblical theology, NT testament studies, and modern theology. Second, he describes the positions of his interlocutors fairly and graciously, which is a significant accomplishment given the amount of vitriol that often accompanies discussions of justification. Third, he avoids flat-footed readings of primary sources, refusing to force the voices of past theologians to conform to his own convictions.

It must be stated that his is a vigorous defense of a Reformational understanding of justification by faith alone; hence, he is not offering a rapprochement between Reformed and, say, Catholic understandings of justification. Yet, it is important to add that this does not mean that he is unconcerned with ecumenicism. Lutheran readers might find it interesting that he makes great effort to show that in the area of justification Calvin really added nothing new to Luther's teaching and, in fact, the former relied heavily on the latter's grasp of the doctrine. Moreover, Horton is constantly concerned to defend Luther against false caricatures of his theology and to commend him as a theologian of the church. In addition, by grounding justification in the broader motif of "the grand exchange," Horton reflects a concern for the catholicity of the doctrine.

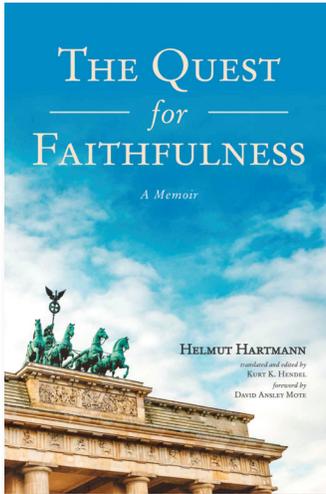
Two weaknesses need to be mentioned. First, there is a substantial amount of repetition found throughout Horton's discussion. It would have served the busy reader well if the presentation was tightened somewhat to avoid making an already full discussion unnecessarily lengthy and in turn too cumbersome. Second, the comprehensive nature of this work will be a hindrance to the reader who is not somewhat familiar with the various areas of study explored. In light of this, it would have been helpful if a detailed outline of the book had been provided as an appendix to aid the reader less conversant in scholarly trends. In other words, while this level of scholarship is a strength it is also a weakness as it may prove too daunting for the average church leader or lay reader to tackle.

To conclude, this is a substantial work on the doctrine of justification. Given the many strengths of this work, it will likely become a standard comprehensive exposition of the doctrine. There is no question that Horton has contributed to scholarship regarding this doctrine, therefore his treatment is essential reading for both opponents and proponents of the Reformational articulation of justification by faith. It is highly recommended for the scholar and also for the reader who has some grasp of



the issues surrounding justification, and it will have significant payoff for the less experienced reader who is willingly to work through it.

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***The Quest for Faithfulness: A Memoir.***

By Helmut Hartmann.  
Translated and edited  
by Kurt K. Hendel.  
Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and  
Stock, 2019. ISBN: 978-  
1-5326-5808-2. 186  
pages. Paper. \$25.00.

This is a simple and straightforward memoir of a German pastor's life

(1932-2016) lived out in the region surrounding Luther's birth—and death—town of Eisleben (where the author himself was pastor for some years), extending from the inauguration of Hitler's Third Reich, through WWII and Eastern Germany's Russian occupation culminating in the subsequent forty-year rule of the GDR, ending with the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of the two German states after 1989. The homey style of the memoir consists of 2- or 3-page chapters chronicling a particular event, happening, or person relating to the given year, most of a decidedly quotidian character.

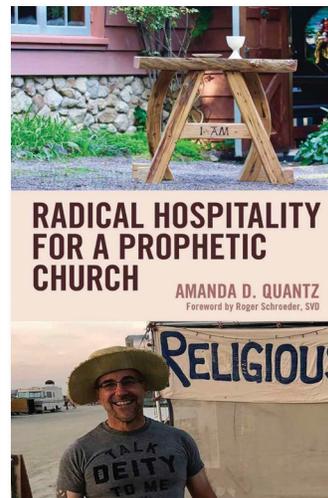
Early on it becomes clear here is a person and pastor-in-the-making (also son of a pastor) with an unusually keen social conscience, particularly attuned to the needs of the working class factory workers and miners of his region, who were largely alienated from the church.

Hartmann's decision as a young seminarian to interrupt his studies in 1957 to work as a miner in one of the region's largest industrial complexes signals his lifelong struggle to bring the church into grass-roots relationships with laboring people and the underclasses. This, as well as his passion for reaching out to youth and young adults (he testifies to the importance of campus ministry in his life as a student while at Halle), would mark his ministry as a pastor, church superintendent, and city mission worker.

One wonders at the paucity of his comments regarding daily life in the GDR under its oppressive state security system, although he does mention particular recurring frustrations in his constant efforts to make local political officials aware of the church's social justice agenda. But this is suddenly illuminated as Hartmann describes his discomfort and fear of being recognized

one evening while sitting in a local church for Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. His anxiety, he reveals almost as an afterthought, has to do with the fact that in this same church he "had often engaged in observation and made reports . . . at the directions of the State Security Services until the fall of 1989." He confesses his "shame about my activity as an informer" (172) which had become known after the opening of the files following the *Wende* (the "turn" or "change" as Germans call the period following the fall of the Berlin Wall). But the full point of Hartmann's sharing of his shame (near the memoir's close) is to recount how on the way out of the church he was encountered by a physician on whom he had informed who greeted him heartily with the words, "I was glad to see you in our church once again" (173) and then invited him for a cup of tea. This was a true act of God, Hartmann believes, and the reader cannot help but agree. Let would-be memoirists agree that even the most ordinary lives have important if dangerous truths to tell!

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***Radical Hospitality for a Prophetic Church.***

By Amanda D. Quantz.  
Lanham, Maryland:  
Lexington Books, 2020.  
ISBN: 978-1-9787-  
0267-7. 159 pages.  
Cloth. \$85.50.

This is a frustrating book to read and difficult to review, thin in volume and quality. It is intended as a report from the trenches by

a theologian and practicing Christian, who teaches theology and provides pastoral ministry to Millennial undergrads and graduate students in a Roman Catholic college. It deals with their largely unrewarding experiences in the church of today. It also reports the author's own research, including personal interviews and reactions as a participant/observer, to a handful of what are considered cutting-edge efforts at "radical hospitality." These initiatives are intended to move the church in a more "prophetic" direction toward "interspirituality." Among the "ecclesial communities" described and advocated are the largely California-based Christian camp at Burning Man, the Guibio Project, the Sisters of Mercy Nuns and Nones experiment, and the New Skellig Christian Community.

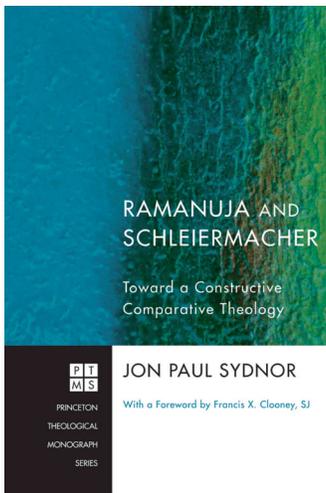
The problem is not with the stirring examples but with the extraordinarily thin introduction to the whole topic of Christian hospitality as a topic for theological and practical reflection. While displaying wide-ranging interest in the etymologies of contemporary jargon for various spiritualities, never is the



NT Greek word “*philoxenia*” (meaning literally “love for the stranger”) mentioned (nor is the antonym, all too familiar to us today, “*xenophobia*”). Nor is attention paid to Jesus’ own central practice of extending table fellowship to strangers (also in the Hebrew Bible). This was well discussed years ago in John Koenig’s influential *New Testament Hospitality* (never referenced in notes or bibliography).

Two other matters. First, the book is riddled with typographical errors, which leads the reader to think that lack of attention in production may mirror the writer’s own casualness in the logic and argument, as, for example, this observation regarding Millennials: “Catholics and Lutherans have been engaged in formal dialogue and the cloning of some mammals has been possible since the oldest members of this group were in first grade” (66). Second, the closing anecdote regarding the long-delayed death of the author’s elderly cat and the “healing dream” that followed is simply both maudlin and inappropriate, calling into question the author’s judgment.

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***Ramanuja and  
Schleiermacher:  
Toward a Constructive  
Comparative Theology.***

By Jon Paul Sydnor.

Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick,  
2011. ISBN: 978-1-  
6089-9308-6. Paper. xii  
& 226 pages. \$28.00.

**J**on Paul Sydnor undertakes  
a comparative theological  
reflection on Sri Ramanuja  
(1017-1137) of the

Srivaisnava Hindu tradition and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) of the Reformed Christian tradition. The author focuses on the common topic of absolute dependence between the two great thinkers and theologians. Sydnor begins with textual juxtaposition to develop textual conversation and analysis in terms of similar patterns, differentials, and constructions for a symbiotic relationship. He is concerned to engender “critical insights, new perspectives, deeper analyses, and revised interpretations” (204) through inclusive textual reading that averts syncretic permutation and distortion regarding the two thinkers.

Hegel dismissed his colleague Schleiermacher at the University of Berlin, because he critiqued his key idea of utter dependence or feeling in terms of ‘dog’ feeling. However, Hegel mischaracterizes Schleiermacher’s feeling, because it is piety bound to faith. Similarly, Sankara argued against the devotional

theology of Ramanuja, because Sankara dismissed an ignorant, devout man as an animal to the gods. Nonetheless, Sankara’s theory of superimposition in the removal of ignorance tolerated devotion to the personal Lord (Isvara) or else.

More than mere textual juxtaposition, Sydnor introduces a typology in crediting to Ramanuja an ontology or metaphysics, while ascribing Schleiermacher to a camp of phenomenology. Sydnor’s contribution can be seen in his rigorous exegetical comparison and elaborating the constructive side of comparative theology. As Francis Clooney writes in the Foreword, this work is “a fine example of comparative theology in action,” while remaining in the Calvinist tradition (x).

Given this, I have several questions on Sydnor’s comparative theology. In his discussion of creation or projection, he is aware that there is incommensurability between Ramanuja’s monosubstantial, co-eternal position and Schleiermacher’s monotheistic notion of *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continua* (preservation). He is seeking to reinterpret Ramanuja’s metaphysics within an emanationist doctrine of creation. For this detour he appeals to the Thomist mode of emanation within the confines of *creatio ex nihilo* (77). In so doing, Sydnor argues: “we may infer that Schleiermacher acknowledges the possibility of feeling absolutely dependent within an emanationist framework, such that offered by Ramanuja” (79). That being the case, can a Thomist interpretation of Ramanuja be a constructive mediator in revising Schleiermacher’s theological integrity imbued with Christian monotheism, or does such a framework cause distortion?

Against this approach, Schleiermacher wrote in his *Christian Faith*: § 23: A system of doctrine drawn up at the present time within the Western Church cannot be indifferent to the antithesis between Roman Catholic and Protestant, but must adhere to one or the other.” Also in § 27, Schleiermacher argues: “All propositions which claim a place in an epitome of Evangelical (Protestant) doctrine must approve themselves both by appeal to Evangelical confessional documents, or in default of these, to the New Testament Scriptures, and by exhibition of their homogeneity with other propositions already recognized.”

What I observe as a problem in this textual comparative theology is a lack of conceptual clarity in dealing with Schleiermacher’s theology in historical development in regard to Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Barth, and finally H. Richard Niebuhr. Through critical exegesis of the historical contexts, theological arguments, debates, and semantic retrieval, a comparative theologian may return to textual juxtaposition for fruitful argument, conversation, and reconstruction. Religious texts do not fall from heaven, but they are all historically conditioned and socially located. Such conviction remains an undercurrent in Schleiermacher’s dogmatic theology in a hermeneutical frame of reference, in which he emphasizes the dialectical character of dogmatic and scientific language in terms of correction and communication.

Schleiermacher can be appreciated as the modern pioneer of



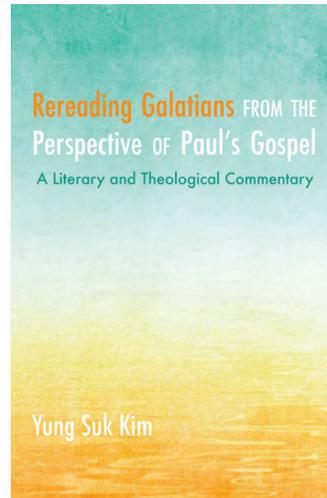
hermeneutics: grammatical, psychological, and language centered. Edmund Husserl has critical engagement with the psychogism of Dilthey, a pupil of Schleiermacher. Without engaging in this theological and philosophical exegetical stream, a description of Schleiermacher as a phenomenologist would make vulnerable his theological and philosophical integrity. In effect, Schleiermacher's notion of dependent feeling is an immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) as by Dilthey; it has little to do with Husserl's phenomenological suspension. A phenomenological attitude has a radical and constructive character, because it problematizes what is taken for granted, whether it concerns Ramanuja's ontological metaphysics or Schleiermacher's immediate dependent feeling.

An exegetical study of semantic retrieval is required within the historical and theological context, in order to facilitate comparative theology in textual juxtaposition and to analyze the differential, undertaking the synthesis in terms of adumbration and critical distance beyond sedimentation of prejudices and obscurities. Finally, it translates the ideal meaning of the two different horizons between Ramanuja and Schleiermacher for a critical and constructive synthesis.

This is not an easy task, but Sydnor's comparative theology is a promising contribution in constructive theology. How would comparative theology draw attention to religious discourse in its elective affinity with the material interests and power relations that underly religious construction of social reality (for instance, the caste system)? This refers to the sociological inquiry of Hinduism and Christianity in dealing with the disgrace effect of religious discourse (as in colonialism, holocaust studies, or Orientalism) as well as for human rights, solidarity, and emancipation. The textual comparative theology is not situated to avoid textual ideas and the religious construction of reality.

Despite my several questions, Sydnor's book is well written, entails rigorous exegetical work, and marks an achievement in the field. This book paves a new way for the constructive side of comparative theology. It is recommended for faculty in the area of comparative study of religion, seminarians, church leaders, and all those who are concerned with interreligious exchange and collaborating with people of other faiths for human rights, justice, and emancipation.

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***Rereading Galatians from the Perspective of Paul's Gospel: A Literary and Theological***

***Commentary.*** Yung Suk Kim. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-5326-9112-6. vii & 100 pages. Paper. \$16.00.

Yung Suk Kim is Associate Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. He is a prolific author of over a dozen books related to New Testament interpretation and theology. Like Kim's *Rereading Romans* (2019), this book is a concise, theologically reflective interpretation of Galatians that bears in mind Paul's message throughout his writings and places the faithfulness of Jesus at the center of Paul's gospel.

In the Introduction, Kim argues for Romans as a key dialogue partner for interpreting Galatians. Although both letters have been traditionally associated with forensic notions of salvation that characterize faith as individualistic acceptance, Kim argues for a reading that emphasizes ongoing participation: "Christian faith is not merely to accept Jesus or his salvific death as such, but to participate in his faithfulness" (8). In Kim's understanding, God is the source of the gospel, Jesus is its proclaimer and exemplifier, and believers are its participants.

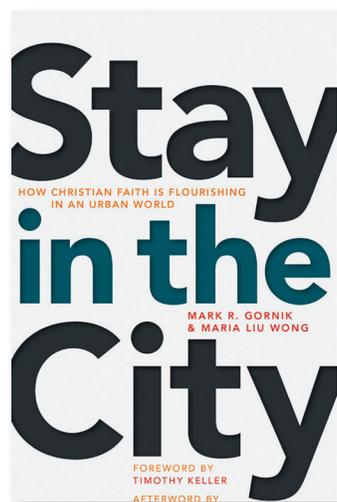
The substance of *Rereading Galatians* carefully interprets the letter by section, paying attention to exegetical nuances, contextual realities, and theological ramifications. Some distinctives to Kim's interpretation are as follows: Paul learned his gospel through a revelation *about* (not of or from) Christ (Gal 1:12); the phrase *pistis christou* in Galatians 2:16 and 3:22 is best rendered "Christ's faithfulness" (not "faith in Christ," 6–9, 44–47); Paul's conflict with Peter (Gal 2:11–15) is due to the cowardice of Peter, who had not yet known a "thorough transformation" (39–40); Paul's words about the Law (Gal 3:22–25) do not signify it is useless, temporary, or outdated, but simply limited in capacity (68–69). In general, Kim emphasizes that a faithful response to the gospel entails a transformed life. Occasional sidebars appear throughout, either to explain major concepts or to "consider and discuss" questions posed by the interpretation. A very brief bibliography concludes the book.

Geared well for theological students and careful exegetes, *Rereading Galatians* is an insightful, concise, and informed introduction to Galatians. Kim is a perceptive and theologically reflective interpreter who guides readers to study the letter with care, reverence, and appreciation. At points, I find Kim's emphases on participation (vs. acceptance), faithfulness (vs.



belief), and transformation (vs. freedom) a bit strong. I like the way he calls Paul's gospel "strings-free" (9), but the tone with which Kim characterizes faith, freedom, and the fruit of the Spirit is sometimes in tension (84–90). Nonetheless, Kim nicely draws attention to the ways Paul's gospel calls believers beyond a shallow, cultural acceptance to a transformative participation in relationship to Christ. In this, Kim stands in solidarity with an emerging emphasis among recent Pauline interpreters. Kim offers a concise reading that situates Galatians within Paul's larger epistolary legacy and shows the letter's vital role therein.

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***Stay in the City: How Christian Faith Is Flourishing in An Urban World.*** By Mark R. Gornik & Maria Liu Wong. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7404-7. 83 pages. Paper. \$12.00.

This is a very thin book with six brief chapters (excluding the Foreword, Prologue,

Introduction, Epilogue, Afterword, Acknowledgements, Notes, and questions concluding each chapter) amounting to fifty pages. Its title says it all: an unrelenting and heartfelt call to heed the command of the ascending Jesus in Luke to “stay here in the city” (Luke 24:49) and the prophet Jeremiah’s call to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you” (Jer 29:7). As a long-time urban pastor (whose first published book review appeared forty-five years ago on Gaylord Noyce’s *Survival & Mission for the City Church*), it is a message with which I heartily concur.

Remarkably the book is not an argument to “Stay in the City, Dig In, Love Your City, Keep at It, Wait for the Spirit” (9), as the authors themselves put it, but is rather a lively testimony to the vigor and resourcefulness they discover among urban Christians and their church gatherings in the richest diversity of forms. Particularly encouraging is the clear mission imperative that urban ministry begins not with a study of demographics, the diagnosis and prioritizing of pressing urban problems and strategic action planning. Instead:

the vocation of urban Christians begins with presence. It is a calling to be present with and open to God in the local context, attending to what is in front of us with all our senses (6).

The “common assumption” is that staying in the city is “first of all what we do: an action or strategy we take, a program we lead, a church we start, a particular word we have to share, or a special place of need to which we must go.” To the contrary, the authors assert that it is a matter of “waiting on the Spirit, being ready to notice what God is already doing, and then finding ways to join in with our unique gifts and callings. “Staying in the city” is about “being continually aware of and alert to what God is doing in our midst, to having our assumptions turned upside down and our questions changed, and to the possibility of the unexpected” (7).

This beginning assumption authorizes the book to serve as a series of snapshots offering compelling stories of individuals, couples, families, and groups of Christians doing unexpected things, chiefly around the far-flung reaches of New York City and with reports from a few other urban areas. The intent is a positive effort to assure the reader that “You are not alone” and “There is more going on than you know about” (21). A companion book, to be titled *Sense the City*, is promised, which will offer “a more in-depth guide to practices that shape the way we do ministry and find our way in the world” (12).

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