



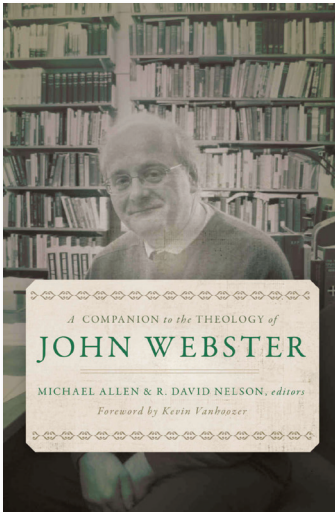
# Book Reviews

April 2023

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, 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).



*A Companion to the Theology of John Webster*. Edited by Michael Allen and R. David Nelson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7674-4. xxi & 344 pages. Cloth. \$50.00.

David Tracy describes two different kinds of theological journeys in *The*

*Analogical Imagination*: journeys of comparison and intensification. On a journey of comparison, the theologian seeks to bring the Christian message into conversation with some other discourse. For those engaged in interreligious dialogues, theology and science, contextual and liberation theologies, facilitating conversation between partners is the purpose of theology. On a journey of intensification, the theologian takes a deep dive in particular doctrines and practices themselves, seeking to describe the internal logic, grammar, history, and webs of beliefs and practices internal to a tradition, regardless of the consequences for other religions.

The late Anglican theologian John Webster (1955-2016) pursued a journey of intensification. His critique of modern theology was that much of it was not theological enough. Under the pressures of modern skepticism, theology was pursued in an apologetic mode seeking to correlate questions from the wider culture with theological responses. Many theologians conceded to other disciplines control over the agenda, methods, subject matter, and aims of theology to pay the price of admission for inclusion in modern universities. For Webster, modern Christian theology has lost its astounding message and bargained away its heritage for a peripheral place at the table. He set an agenda of recovering a “culture of theology” where Christian convictions and intellectual life might become a distinctive critical voice

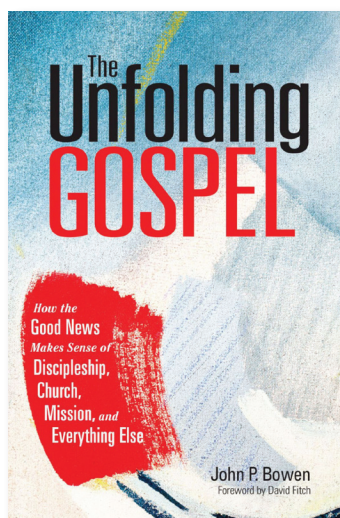
amid the pluralism of late modern life. From this *Companion*, one may conclude that Webster was successful in inspiring a new generation to take up their own journeys of intensification to recover the sources of classical theology as resources for discipleship and community today.

One key concept that appears in several of the chapters is God’s aseity (from Latin *a se*, “of itself”). Classically conceived, the triune God is utterly self-reliant, not beholden to any other deity or reality for the fullness of divine life. Therefore, in a real sense God does not need us or nature to be fulfilled. The fact that the cosmos exists at all is the gift of grace. By not needing us to achieve divine life, God is free to love us gratuitously and include us in God’s purposes that lead to our freedom and fulfillment.

Divine aseity became one model for how Webster argued that theology should proceed to order its doctrines. Too much theology has allowed the divine economy of salvation to order its contents as if the external works of God (in creation, reconciliation, and consummation) were its final subject matter. Webster taught that the perfection of God’s triune life figured by the eternal processions of the divine Persons are the ground of the missions of the Persons in time. Thus, divine perfection ontologically grounds the economy of salvation in history. That means the eternal generation of the Word as God’s Son is the ground of the incarnation with the purpose of drawing sinners into saving fellowship with the Creator through Christ. Webster argued that by tracing the ground of the divine economy back into the fullness of God’s triune life, theology is truer to its authoritative sources and gives more profound witness to the astounding claims of the Gospel.

This may give the impression that Webster’s project was an exercise in speculative theology. We should not overlook his contributions to theological ethics. Considering his understanding of theology proper (figuring the divine life of the Trinity) and the divine economy (in creation, covenant, reconciliation, and consummation), Webster proposed a moral ontology of human nature and action. Postmodern philosophy called into question the grand narratives that set the stage for life and action and tried to substitute forms of playfulness. Webster argued that playfulness as a guide to life is easily coopted by the economy of consumerism. Theology proposes accounts of our situation in creation and redemption in which we can understand our nature (as created, fallen, and in process of redemption) and our purpose (called to the love of God and neighbor). Within this moral ontology, we can find new purpose in our lives in community and in our vocations. In such a moral ontology, the vocabulary of the virtues helps make sense of our lives and deeds—with the caveat that Christians remain sinful pilgrims on the way to our true homeland, traveling in a good company full of hope.

Robert Cathey  
McCormick Theological Seminary  
Chicago, Illinois



***The Unfolding Gospel: How the Good News Makes Sense of Discipleship, Church, Mission, and Everything Else.*** By John Bowen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-5064-7167-9. Paper. \$21.99.

**T**he *Unfolding Gospel* by John Bowen is a timely book for the church as it navigates its lost status as a credible

moral authority and reconstructs its image. Bowen begins by acknowledging that many other books have examined “gospel, mission, discipleship, church, evangelism, leadership” at a deeper level, hence he has opted to write a book that shallowly covers the topics (1-2). Bowen opens his book with his background, solidifying his qualifications, and states the purpose of the book is to serve as an introduction to those new to the concept of the missional church or first-year seminarians (2-6). Bowen organizes his book around how the gospel engages these topics alongside how the gospel engages the culture.

Bowen’s definition of the gospel has multiple layers. In chapter 1, he engages the definition of the gospel. He starts with gospel according to the neighbor, turning to John 3:16 (12-13). Bowen then references selections from Paul (Rom 1:1-4 and 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Gal. 3:8 13-14). Next, he outlines the subjective view of the gospel; some of his examples include “being saved;” “not the person I once was;” “I am a child of God” (15). Lastly, he speaks of the gospel according to Jesus, drawing upon the Gospel of Mark, and specifically Jesus’s first public proclamation: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15, 17). Bowen explores and expands upon the dictionary definitions of “repent” and “believe” as he analyzes the calling of Andrew, Peter, James, and John to examine the meaning of discipleship (32-40).

Bowen’s definition of the gospel is not constrained by the work and message of Jesus, rather the gospel is grounded in the past, present, and future. His overall definition of the gospel transcends history and exists on the macro scale. Bowen frames the gospel through the lens of the kingdom, which he states is the “gospel in a single word” (17). Bowen’s missiology is intricately connected with the role of the church, as he describes the gospel as “planting the seeds which yield the fruit of the church” (39).

Bowen’s view of the gospel at the forefront of mission avoids the accommodationist position that has overtaken many mainline churches, while avoiding the opposite extreme of the uniqueness of the church, as this latter position advocates a certain isolationist perspective (118-122). Instead, he argues that

the church should engage with a delicate balance or ballet with the culture.

Bowen’s work draws heavily on Reformed theology, yet he does not advocate a transformationist stance that can be found in many Reformed works. Bowen invites deeper conversation about mission in a post-Christian world.

*Thomas Johnston, Master of Divinity Candidate  
Trinity Lutheran Seminary  
Columbus, Ohio*



***Faithful Economics: 25 Short Insights.***

By Daniel Finn. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-5064-7279-9. 203 pages. Paper. \$19.99.

**D**aniel Finn has written many works on the relationship between Christianity and economics, publishing numerous books and articles. Finn’s work, couched within Catholic Social Teach-

ing, draws primarily on the papal encyclicals as well as previous articles he has written. While the book has 25 chapters, each chapter draws upon his previous work, which he references in the footnotes. Finn’s primary purpose for writing this book is twofold: 1) to provide an alternative to the socialist and capitalist dichotomy that has permeated North American discourse and 2) to highlight the traps that neo-conservative Catholics adopted concerning economic policy (6). Finn’s critique of the libertarian position comes most notably in his chapter “9 Libertarian Heresies That Tempt Neoconservative Catholics to Stray from Catholic Social Thought” (63-71).

Finn couches his argument under the “moral ecology of the market” and this framework shapes the larger work. He outlines the four marks of the moral ecology: “legal structures of the market, provision of essential goods and services, morality of individuals and groups, and the role of civil society” (6-10). He notes that “the lack of voluntary association” impedes the effectiveness and function of a moral market system (10).

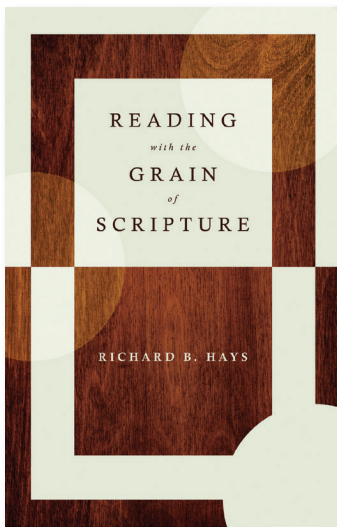
Finn challenges the status quo doctrine of the market in the United States as articulated by right-leaning libertarian groups, yet he also challenges the progressive notion of over-regulation against the libertarian dogma of deregulation. Finn draws upon and critiques the work of two prominent libertarian philosophers and economists: F.A. Hayek and Robert Nozick. He challenges Nozick’s understanding of the state when he argues for the social



structure of sin, countering Nozick's notion of a state that is minimal (8). Finn challenges Hayek in that systems (markets) require some aspect of morality, insofar as Hayek argues that markets do not need morality, making the question of justice in a market system largely irrelevant (74-78).

Three primary critiques come to mind with Finn's work. While this book can serve as a good introduction to the theology underlying Catholic Social Teaching, the book is primarily directed toward those who are familiar with libertarian or free market understanding of economics and it is less accessible to those unfamiliar with economics in general. The book assumes a baseline understanding of economic thought. Second, given the background of the author who teaches at a Roman Catholic institution, the theology of the book will be challenging for those unfamiliar with Catholic Social Thought. Third, this book is written with the academy in mind. Finn attempts to make his work accessible but overall fails. I recommend this book for those who want an introductory glimpse.

*Thomas Johnston, Master of Divinity Candidate  
Trinity Lutheran Seminary  
Columbus, Ohio*



***Reading with the Grain of Scripture.*** By Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7845-8. xi & 467 pages. Cloth. \$55.00.

In many of our contexts a great deal of skepticism and suspicion surrounds the Bible; such a posture has often been fueled by scholarship. Into this tension steps Richard Hays, a scholar with

a deep love for the Bible and the church. His lengthy academic career has been one of insistence that reading with the grain of Scripture, rather than against it, is what we are called to do. In his own words: "All these essays illustrate, in one way or another, how I have sought to carry out scholarly work as an aspect of discipleship—as a process of faith seeking exegetical clarity" (2).

Since 1989, with the publication of his well-known book *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Hays has been an influential voice in New Testament scholarship. The current volume is a collection of more than twenty essays written over twenty-five years, though most since 2008. All but one has been previously published. The book is divided into four parts: Interpretation, Historical Jesus, Paul, and New Testament Theology. The essays vary a bit in genre and level because of the diversity of audiences

for whom they were written; as the New Testament books share that characteristic, such a range seems fitting for a New Testament scholar.

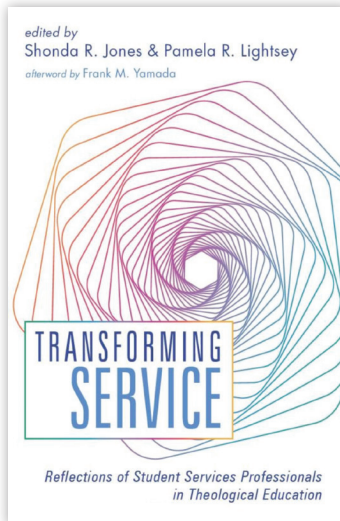
While there is diversity, Hays identifies the following six themes that bring coherence to the collection:

1. The importance of narrative as the "glue" that holds the Bible together.
2. The retrospectively discerned figural coherence between the Old Testament and the New.
3. The centrality of the resurrection of Jesus.
4. The hope for new creation and God's eschatological transformation of the world.
5. The importance of standing in trusting humility before the text.
6. The importance of reading Scripture within and for the community of faith (3).

One of my own specialty areas is the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, and I have been deeply shaped by Hays' promotion of a figural reading, what he also calls "reading backward," with Jesus' resurrection as the reason and frame. But even more, I have been formed by his insistence on a hermeneutic of trust and even a hermeneutic of resurrection when reading Scripture, rather than one of suspicion.

Those familiar with and appreciative of Hays' work may find that reading this volume offers a kind of reunion, full of the delight of visiting an old friend. Those new to Hays—and welcome to the party, if you have just arrived—will find much to ponder. Much of what is stated here has been argued by others in different ways, but Hays' lyrical style and poetic heart transform such argumentation into a different genre altogether: one both academic and devotional, one both challenging and invitational.

*Holly Beers  
Westmont College  
Santa Barbara, California*



***Transforming Service: Reflections of Student Services Professionals in Theological Education.*** Edited by Shonda R. Jones and Pamela R. Lightsey. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-5326-9425-7. 274 pages. Paper. \$33.00.

The field of student services in higher education, and in particular theological education has slowly been shifting through the years. Gone are the days when students select a seminary based on denomination or geography. Relocating for school is less common with the proliferation of remote access to the classroom. Discernment by students can take decades, bringing students from diverse locations in their lives—professionally, personally, economically, and spiritually. Accompanying these students from the early stages of discernment to post-graduation continues to be more and more complex, shifting from the monitoring of student behaviors to focusing on the “growth and development of students” (xiii). *Transforming Service*, with support from ATS (Association of Theological Schools) and their work through SPAN (Student Services Personnel Network) was created to serve as a thought partner for those called to accompany students amid this changing landscape. As one of those called to serve as a student services professional, I found it to be a thought-provoking resource.

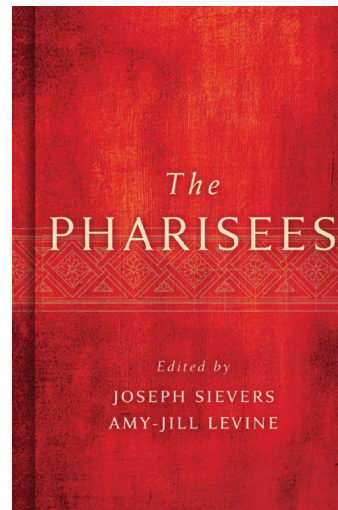
*Transforming Service: Reflections of Student Services Professionals in Theological Education* addresses the complexity (breadth and depth) of student services. Edited by Shonda R. Jones and Pamela R. Lightsey, it offers sixteen chapters from professionals and researchers across the student services spectrum that help us think differently about what accompaniment looks like in today’s world. Topics include but are not limited to admissions, advising, financial aid, care and support, and the work of the registrar. The chapters are grouped into three sections: Theoretical Frameworks, which lays the groundwork for student affairs professions (xiv), Called or Captive, which offers “space for practitioners to think deeply and theologically on their vocational tasks, the rhythms of work, and the institutional and environmental conditions emerging” (xv), and Building Institutional Capacity, providing insights into ways “administrative leadership can be transformative within the context of theological education” (xvi). The chapters are written in different styles, including “original and scholarly research, conceptual papers, and reflective essays” (xiv). Whether read as a whole volume or specific chapters that pertain to your area of interest, *Transforming Service*

has something for everyone, at least anyone passionate about the formation of ministry leaders.

However, this book is not just for those identifying as student service professionals and educators. The diversity of voices and variety of experiences of the chapters’ authors is what makes this text particularly helpful as the church continues to identify, call, and accompany candidates throughout their formation as ministry leaders. There are pieces of wisdom for pastors, mentors, and congregational members as well in their role as sojourners in the broader community that accompanies students today. There is no typical student, with no typical path forward. We are all called to both lead and learn as we accompany students in their formation. This book provides concrete ways to do just that.

*Kristine Stache*

*Wartburg Theological Seminary  
Dubuque, Iowa*



***The Pharisees.*** Amy-Jill Levine and Joseph Sievers, eds. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7929-5. 506 pages. Cloth. \$54.99.

In a highly anticipated volume, editors Amy-Jill Levine and Joseph Sievers compile a vast collection of insights into the Jewish group known as Pharisees.

The twenty-five contributors gathered for a conference at Rome’s Pontifical Biblical Institute in 2019. The presentations and then collected essays face the reality that two very different interpretations of the Pharisees arise from Christians and Jews. The largely negative assessment by Christians has often led to antisemitism. To address the problem, a group of scholars from many different disciplines convened to share discoveries about the history, textual depiction, and influence of the interpretation of Pharisees not only in the academy, but also in religious communities and culture at large. The result is a rich resource with broad appeal: anyone interested in Judaism or Christianity will find value in this book.

The first and most extensive section deals with “Historical Reconstruction.” The thirteen chapters, preceded by an essay wrestling with the title “Pharisee,” demonstrate how complicated the terrain is. They teach humble readers, urging them to eschew any easy confidences about this group, but at the same time, they do not leave the scholar without any footing. For example, the opening essay argues that the meaning of the name Pharisee is best established not through etymology but by “considering how



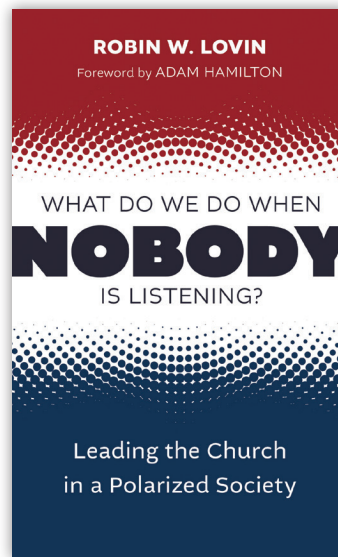
the name is used in particular texts and genres.” This leads to the confidence that this group was so named because they were “set apart for a particular mission” (18–19). Later essays assert that their specific origins are hazy, but they likely derived from a scribal and/or sociopolitical setting. Contrary to some assumptions, they do not appear to be more stringent on purity practices but in line with wide swaths of Judaism. Several of the essays in this section analyze mentions of the Pharisees in Second Temple literature, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, and various sections of the New Testament. Steve Mason’s essay “Josephus’s Pharisees” is particularly thorough and enjoyable to read, but each essay contributes to a nuanced view of this group, who are neither as villainous nor as heroic as some interpreters have assumed.

The second section, comprised of ten chapters, traces the reception history of the Pharisees in Christianity, Judaism, and broader culture. For example, Abraham Skorka’s essay, “The Perushim in the Understanding of the Medieval Jewish Sages” helpfully traces the positive views of the Pharisees with ample statements from famed Jewish interpreters like Maimonides. An incredibly intriguing essay in this section is a personal account of Christian Stückl who had played in and directed the Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria. He was instrumental in making the play more inclusive and less derogatory toward the Pharisees.

The final section considers the future. Amy-Jill Levine, in her quintessential arresting prose, gives very practical advice for preaching and teaching about the Pharisees. Given the predominance of anti-Jewish views connected to the Pharisees, she admonishes, powerfully, “For the homilist not to mention a corrective to those views and stereotypes can constitute a sin of omission” (406). Co-editor Joseph Sievers and Massimo Grilli chart a future for engagement with the Pharisees. They emphasize being conversant with the variety of ways the Pharisees are depicted in Second Temple Literature. Finally, the appendix is an address from Pope Francis delivered to the group on the last day of the conference.

Readers should be aware that several of the essays assume a critical position vis-à-vis the biblical text. Whatever might be one’s hermeneutic or discipline of approach, this volume provides multiple vistas for further research. The aim of dispelling negative stereotypes and their consequences is a laudable one, and, if read and followed, the essays will contribute to that vital goal.

Amy Peeler  
Wheaton College  
Wheaton, Illinois



*What Do We Do When Nobody is Listening? Leading the Church in a Polarized Society.* By Robin W. Lovin. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. ISBN: 978-0-8028-8232-5. 162 pages. Paper. \$19.99.

Recently the *New York Times* Arts Section published an extensive article titled “What’s So Funny About Faith?” The answer—

reflecting the spate of current TV shows, stage musicals, and films—was the utter triviality and pretentiousness in much of American religion. Consider the numerous plot escapades involving sexual and financial scandals, and the flagrant flaunting of irresponsible behavior on the part of the “faithful,” especially by the clergy. While a cynical glee could be detected in the tone of the reporting, the overall impression was that religion in American culture was well-deserving of such lampooning and incapable of mounting a public defense. Nor was there an attempt to explain how mainline Protestantism should be exempt from this treatment (perhaps it’s not sufficiently “funny”), while conservative white evangelicalism and elements of the black church were open season.

As a mainliner, I have awaited help in threading my way through the culture wars that divide American religion and in recent years polarized our entire political and social culture. As a longtime advocate and practitioner of “public theology,” I find astonishing the current state of polarization in our public and religious realm, even when not unprecedented. Lovin offers a way through our current stalemate by honing the church’s listening skills, first by “listening to the Word,” next by “listening to the world,” and finally, in a pastorally sensitive encomium, “listening to those who are not heard.”

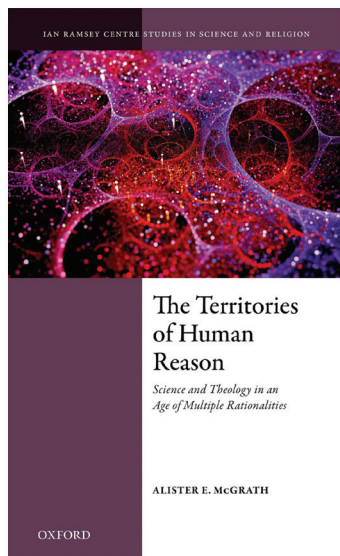
Listening more deeply and more intentionally is surely good advice. But what I miss in Lovin’s encouraging analysis and proposals was any sense that we are amid a struggle for the truth. Even now we struggle to know what constitutes truth—how to recognize it and articulate it convincingly in a polarized culture. It surely begins with listening, but can it end there?

Lovin makes great use of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s concept of the church needing to learn how to “take up space” among other “penultimate” seekers of the political “goods” that our secular world requires. He is also helpful to suggest that the present political polarization we experience is actually “a remarkably



stable way of organizing political life at a national level” (152), something that had never occurred to me. Lovin offers a good beginning on an urgent topic.

John Rollefson  
Retired ELCA Pastor  
San Luis Obispo, California



***The Territories of Human Reason: Science and Theology in an Age of Multiple Rationalities.*** By Alister E. McGrath. Ian Ramsey Centre Studies in Science and Religion. New York: Oxford, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-1928-4568-9. xi & 288 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

Alister McGrath is Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at

Oxford and author of multiple books on science and the relationship between science to theology, including *Re-imagining Nature: The Promise of a Christian Natural Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). The purpose of this book is “to establish the understandings of rationality as both theory and practice” (14) in both the professional scientific and religious communities. Given his double focus, McGrath states that his approach is “empirical” (14), i.e., he eschews a predetermined schema of rationality, considering instead how “rationality is understood and enacted” (14).

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, which explores the “notion of rationality,” consists of three chapters. The second part, which critically engages the shape that rationality takes in the natural sciences and Christian theology, consists of five chapters.

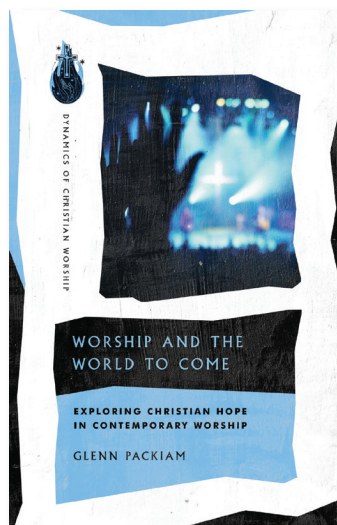
In the first chapter, he argues that, while one can speak of a singular reason, given the recognition that “human beings are both *physically embodied* and *culturally embedded*” (23, emphasis original), it is more accurate to speak of multiple rationalities. In the second chapter, McGrath argues that science and religion understand the complex phenomenon that is reality from different levels and perspectives. While science may accurately grasp some components of reality, it is not capable of exhaustively and exclusively understanding reality. Thus, a scientism which makes such absolute claims on knowledge for science both moves beyond the methods available to science and is reductionistic in its approach to the complexity that characterizes religion. The third chapter discusses how rationality is socially conditioned.

In the fourth chapter, McGrath discusses rational virtues

such as objectivity, simplicity, and predictability and their bearing on choosing a theory. He points out at this juncture that these virtues, however important, do not guarantee “explanatory success” but are merely “conducive to enquiry” (123). With the fifth and sixth chapter, he discusses “the process of explanation” (125) and the movement from observation to theory, respectively. The seventh chapter explores the limits of rationality, giving attention to the idea of mystery. In the final chapter, the author, after exploring some ways that science and religion can integrate with one another without conflation, suggests that a possible move toward integration would be “to develop a ‘meta-rationality’—a grand theory ... which is capable of accommodating such divergences disciplines, and allowing them to be seen within a greater whole” (224).

This is truly a remarkable book. McGrath is clearly conversant with both theology and science and brings his knowledge to bear on the topic at hand. While in some ways it is clear that he is pushing against an approach to science to exclude religious insight altogether, it is clear that his intention is constructive as he is seeking to move the distinct approaches of natural science and Christian theology closer together by removing obstacles that militate against their cooperation. Highly recommended for any serious student of the relationship between science and theology.

Thomas Haviland-Pabst  
Montreat College  
Asheville, North Carolina



***Worship and the World to Come: Exploring Christian Hope in Contemporary Worship.*** By Glenn Packiam. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8308-4931-4. i and 200 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

In *Worship and the World to Come*, Glenn Packiam synthesizes his doctoral research to aid worship leaders in understanding the role of hope in Christian life. The author enters this study through the mode of music. As a Lutheran, this was an area where I could connect—the importance of music in worship and interrogating the themes of music to understand what we are saying theologically. I agree with the author that the way churches talk about hope has much room for improvement.

One important challenge to the leaders of worshipping communities is understanding how we are talking about hope in our



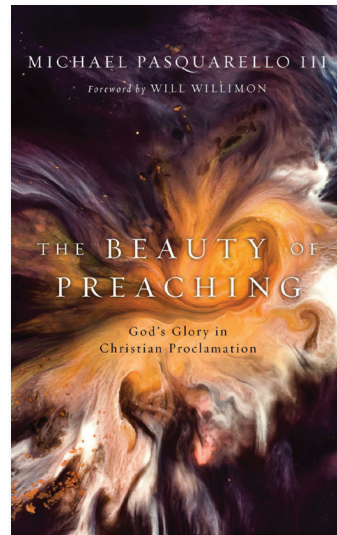
preaching and hymnody. Packiam addresses this through his study of two different congregations, including interviews with worship leaders, those who attend worship, and the hymns that people expressed bring them the most hope. How are people being formed and reformed when they gather for and are sent out from worship?

Conducting interviews with worshippers in small groups helped create conversation around how others experience hope in their lives and their world, as well as how they experience church. While the interviews would have received different results if conducted individually, the communal nature of the interviewing process highlights the importance of worship as a community-centered activity. It is not just a personal experience, but the experience of the gathered.

While this book focused on the sociological and theological understanding of hope, including a study of what Jürgen Moltmann and N.T. Wright have to say about eschatological hope, it still reads like a dissertation. The author acknowledged his biases as a writer of worship music; I want to acknowledge my biases as well, including my mixed relationship with contemporary worship music as an out, queer pastor. I have tended to stay as far away from this type of music as my ministry would allow. This book opened my eyes to a new perspective on contemporary worship music and helped me address some of my biases about this type of worship music and its theological substance.

Finally, the book only scratches the surface about eschatology. While it adds to the conversation that our congregations need to be having, it is just a beginning. There is need for additional studies and more conversation about how our theological understanding of eschatology is informed, consciously or unconsciously, by the larger social understanding of the end times. While this book is only the start of a much-needed larger conversation, it begins the process of pushing worship leaders to think more about what messages our preaching and hymnody are giving—or not giving—about a theologically grounded understanding of hope.

*Sara Funkhouser, Pastor  
Luther Memorial Lutheran Church  
Seattle, Washington*

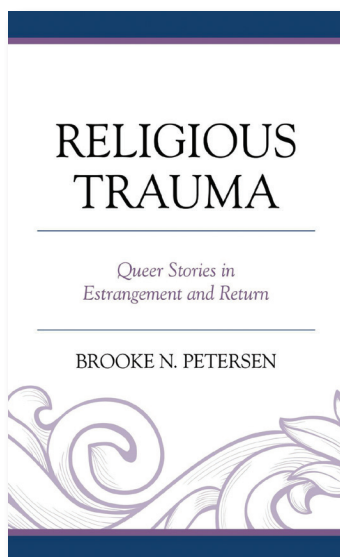


*The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation.* By Michael Pasquarello III. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-8028-2474-5. 254 Pages. Paper. \$26.99.

My goal, as a preacher and writer of exegetical aids, is not only to be true to the texts but to encourage the preacher to be imaginative and creative in the use of images and language, as with Scripture itself. A book promising to address the “beauty” of preaching and the aesthetics of the proclaimed Word raised high expectations. The reader would expect to find chapters on the preaching and biblical theology of Augustine, Luther, and Wesley with careful attention paid to their theological and homiletic aesthetics. I was disappointed, however, that the author failed to engage the aesthetics of preaching. The book identifies many Scripture passages containing the word “beauty” without significantly grappling with the classical, biblical, or modern connotations.

Conspicuously absent was any foundational approach to theological aesthetics. For example, on the chapter on Luther titled “A Strange Beauty,” Pasquarello takes up Luther’s commentaries on the Psalms as well as his Commentary on the Magnificat. The author commends the “moderation or temperance” of Mary’s praise (166) while remarking “how these words express the strong ardor and exuberant joy with which all her heart and life inwardly exalted in the Spirit.” Mary spoke of how “My life and my senses ... soar so that I can no longer control myself” (187). Luther indeed was drawn to Mary’s humility in the face of God’s overwhelming Word of promise. But surely the Magnificat’s beauty—and the derived beauty of preaching on its words—arises from God’s place in these words of revolutionary poetry, the topsy-turvy message of the scattering of the proud and the powerful and the lifting up of the lowly and filling of the hungry. Aesthetically, I like to think of the Magnificat as Mary’s incendiary “cradle song,” her lullaby sung to the baby Jesus that he took in with his mother’s milk and from which his gospel faith grew strong from the time of his infancy. One might add the visual aesthetic touch of the late medieval artist Sandro Botticelli’s striking circular painting of Madonna and Bambino with the infant Jesus sitting in his mother’s lap and guiding her hand as she pens before the words of Magnificat on the page. There is more this author could have done with this enticing topic.

*John Rollefson  
Retired ELCA Pastor, San Luis Obispo, California*



***Religious Trauma: Queer Stories in Estrangement and Return.*** By Brooke N. Petersen. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-7936-4114-4. xiii & 171 pages. Cloth. \$95.00.

The findings from this book should become widely known by leaders of congregations. It documents the religious trauma experienced by LGBTQIA+ people

in non-accepting congregations and a path toward their return to accepting congregations. The book employs the work of Heinz Kohut on selfobject relations as a theoretical framework. The strength of the research involves testimonies by LGBTQIA+ Christians about their journeys out of and back into the church. Three stages are patterned from ritual studies: 1) leaving church, 2) estrangement (liminality), and 3) return to an accepting church.

The study is based on qualitative research from interviews with eight subjects, each of whom grew up in non-accepting religious communities (defined by not having explicit statements of welcome for LGBTQIA+ people). Religious trauma can occur under six conditions: membership in a non-accepting religious community, intense focus on the sinfulness of homosexuality, belief in the reality of hell, a “decision” to integrate a queer identity, recognition of one’s place outside God’s love, and fragmentation resulting from loss and betrayal (89-90). These conditions affected each of those documented in the study. Petersen makes a compelling case for religious trauma as a framework to interpret their experiences.

The extensive quotations from the eight subjects provide ample evidence of the harm done, especially to young people, by practices that inflict religious trauma. Petersen helpfully discusses religious trauma within current literature and scholarly debates. She contends that these “stories expand our view of what trauma might be, and in doing so, point us to important visions for care and healing for other LGBTQIA+ people in our communities” (19). Listening to the stories from these eight people is transformational for the reader, hearing how “they have adapted, survived, stumbled and thrived in response to the experiences of their lives” (19).

It would seem unlikely for those who have suffered such religious trauma ever to return to church participation. In fact, Petersen makes clear that the church has been so harmful to LGBTQIA+ people that for the subjects of this study, tell-

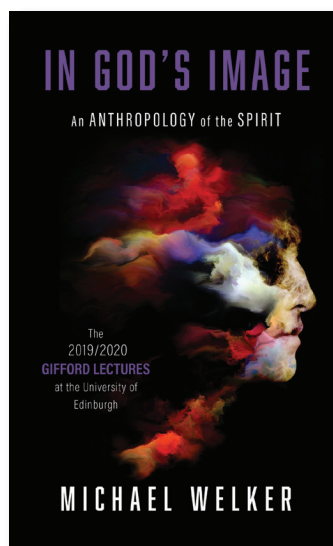
ing peers about their continued involvement in the church is a second kind of “coming out,” entailing risk of a new kind of nonacceptance.

Accepting churches in this study are defined as those having explicit statements of welcome to LGBTQIA+ people. The author makes clear how important it is for leaders to share “explicit messages of welcome every Sunday” (147). Other key practices for accepting congregations include commitment to doing ongoing work, including intentional “listening to the experiences of the traumatized” and “open dialogue about LGBTQIA+ concerns in the congregation” (148). Congregational rituals can be healing, including “testimony from the religiously traumatized” (148).

Petersen concludes: “To use our theology as a source of liberation and freedom for the oppressed, we must establish safe communities, allow for ritual participation and narrative re-imagination, and accompany LGBTQIA+ people in integrating religious identity” (148). I hope the cost of this book will not prevent church leaders from learning what it has to teach us.

Craig L. Nessan

Wartburg Theological Seminary  
Dubuque, Iowa



***In God’s Image: An Anthropology of the Spirit.*** By Michael Welker. Translated by Douglas W. Stott. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7874-8. xi & 155 pages. Paper. \$21.00.

This book is based on the author’s 2019/2020 Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh.

Michael Welker serves as professor at the University of Heidelberg and executive director for the Research Center for International and Interdisciplinary Theology. In this book he provides a systematic exploration of a theology of the spirit for addressing the crisis of human existence in the twenty-first century. This project conforms to the purpose of the Gifford Lectures “to promote, advance, teach, and diffuse the study of natural theology” (1). The interfaces with the sciences and social sciences accords well with this purpose.

The human predicament is acute, related to what Hannah Arendt described as “thoughtlessness” (12). Exercises of political power easily disintegrate into domination through violence. The extent to which children are exploited and impoverished makes





clear the urgency of the human crisis. The forces rationalizing the diminution of human worth contradict the theological affirmation of human beings created in God's image. Welker turns to the spirit as a "multimodal and multipolar power" to address the crisis.

Welker builds a fourfold argument that combines "a rule of law with an ethos of protecting the weak" (47). First, the call to justice makes protection of the weak its foundational commitment. He reflects on the limitations of natural law reasoning in favor of a multimodal spirit of justice as moral resource for "legal, political, medical, scholarly, and educational strategies for developing and enhancing an ethos of justice, equality, and freedom" (61). Second, the call to freedom must now negotiate "whether we will be moving into the future with *cultivated* or *uncultivated* (meaning tyrannical or chaotic) religiosity" (83). Religions must be evaluated by the extent to which they contribute to "the spirit of justice, freedom, truth, and peace" (87).

Third, the call to truth is pursued through a differentiated natural-theological anthropology. Welker affirms that being made in God's image entails evaluating the search for truth according

to the measures of "correctness, certitude, consensus, coherence, commensurability, and fertile and liberating knowledge" (111). Fourth, the call to peace requires checks on self-assertion in favor of what the author calls "free creative self-limitation and self-withdrawal on behalf of others" (122). This is the form of neighbor love needed for cross-disciplinary and public theology.

At the book's conclusion, Welker summarizes his claim for the value of a multimodal spirit of justice, freedom, truth, and peace. Thereby "every individual person and all humankind are elevated to the dignity that comprehends all humanity and are genuinely equipped with the powers necessary for living commensurate with this grand destiny: in the image of God" (131). This book provides a compelling interpretation of the implications of a Christian image of God anthropology in conversation with other disciplines. It is an exercise in public theology in dialogue with a diverse academic audience. Ministry practitioners will find the book foundational for their understanding but needing interpretation for use in the churches.

Craig L. Nesson  
Wartburg Theological Seminary  
Dubuque, Iowa



## 2023 Ad Pricing and Specifications

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is now accepting advertisements in our quarterly journal. Please see full details in the ad rate sheet at the end of the Introduction (page 5 of this issue).

### Publication Dates and Deadlines

The journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*, is published four times per year: January, April, July, and October. Ad deadlines for each issue are one month prior to publication (December 1, March 1, June 1, September 1). Late submissions may be published in the next issue. Issue-specific themes are available from the co-editors: Craig Nesson and Kadi Billman.