



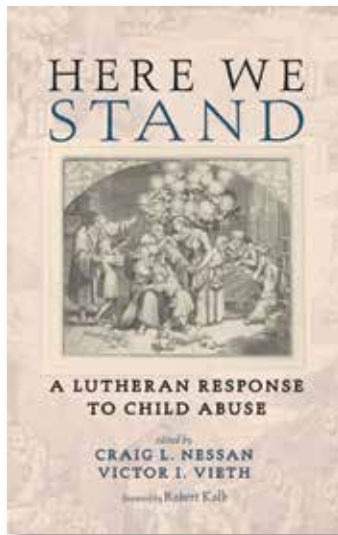
Book Reviews

October 2026

Section Editors: Craig L. Nesson, Cheryl Peterson,
Troy M. 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@lsc.edu.**



Here We Stand: A Lutheran Response to Child Abuse. Edited by Craig L. Nesson and Victor I. Vieth.

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2025. ISBN: 979-8-3852-0574-5. xxxvi & 435 pages. Paper. \$58.00.

It is increasingly clear that theological engagement with the topic of abuse is a critical tool for prevention and, when prevention is not possible, for addressing the

spiritual impact of child maltreatment. This is the premise of *Here We Stand*, a three-part treatment on the topic of child maltreatment, weaving Lutheran theological teaching, interpretation, and practical application from theologians, scholars, and child protection experts. Grounded in biblical calling and commands, Part 1 approaches child protection as a core Lutheran theological commitment and sacred responsibility. Part 2 boldly and pointedly wrestles with interpretations of challenging scriptural texts and their interpretation. Part 3 explores some of the challenging pastoral realities of navigating the sin of child abuse, including work with adult sex offenders, and offers a trauma-informed call to care for those who have been wounded. Edited by Craig L. Nesson and Victor I. Vieth, *Here We Stand* emphasizes that the spiritual welfare of all is at risk when we do not prioritize the voices and the protection of children.

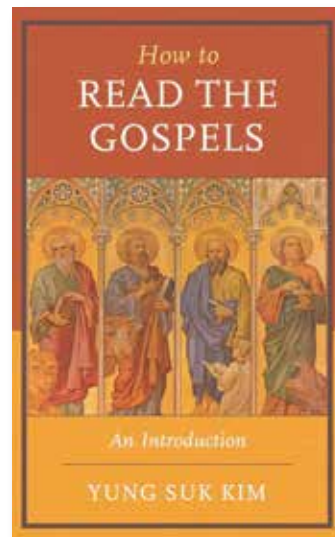
The editors of *Here We Stand* share a uniting hope that, despite other theological differences, those in the global Lutheran tradition will center their faith on all that “Jesus and Luther tell us about our obligations to children” (xxi). Each author brings their own expertise to bear on the topic, offering theological clarity, depth, and wisdom. Whether you find yourself at an introductory point with these topics or hope for a deeper theological and practical exploration, there is something here to meet your

moment. The bibliography alone is a rich trove of resources.

Here We Stand strikes me as a critical declaration and contribution to the Lutheran tradition as it responds to the broader Christian imperative: the protection of children and ministry to those who have been harmed by abuse. I finished reading the book with this hope:

1. that it will serve as an accessible and faithful companion to those in ministry, strengthening each shepherd’s resolve to care well for their congregation;
2. that other theological traditions will look to this resource as an example of how theological engagement grounds our commitment to child protection in the way of Jesus; and,
3. that all who are wounded by abuse and maltreatment will see Jesus in the words on these pages and know that, as image-bearers worthy of dignity and respect, the heart of God is for them.

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How to Read the Gospels: An Introduction.

By Yung Suk Kim.

Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-5381-8608-4. x & 281 pages. Paper. \$24.49.

In this introduction to the Gospels, Yung Suk Kim provides an overview of the Gospels, including their contents and current research trends. The purpose of this book is to give the reader an introduction to a variety of

ways of reading the Gospels. He states in his conclusion, “One of the primary goals of this book is to encourage readers/students to read the Gospels closely and diversely” (239). He achieves this goal by calling attention to various themes and interpretive problems and by introducing a variety of reading perspectives.

The book is split into two sections. Part One presents a “bird’s-eye view” of the gospels. Each chapter in this section includes an overview of the Gospel’s characterization of Jesus, theological themes, parables, interpretive issues, and a close reading of the book. In the chapter on John, however, the parables section is replaced by a section on the “I am” sayings.

Part Two introduces the reader to a variety of perspectives from which one can read the Gospels. These perspectives include author-centered historical approaches (i.e., historical-critical method), text-centered literary approaches (i.e., textual and nar-



rative criticism), and reader-centered comprehensive approaches (i.e., womanist interpretation, disability studies, queer criticism, etc.). After introducing the various approaches, Kim shows how they interact with each Gospel over the next four chapters.

Introducing the variety of interpretive approaches in Part Two is a daunting task that could easily have increased this book's page count by three or four times. I say the following knowing that Kim had limitations on what could have been feasibly accomplished in an introductory book. Kim's engagement with each interpretive method is brief, often focusing on a single scholar. I felt there were several other authors he could have highlighted, and it often left me unsatisfied. However, what will be exceptionally helpful for the reader are the recommendations for further reading at the end of each section. Through this structure, Kim gives his readers a taste of each interpretive method and allows them to choose what path to take next.

This book is useful to anyone who wishes to deepen their understanding of the nature of the Gospels and expand their views on how to read them. Part Two is what makes this introductory book stand out against the rest. Though the treatment of each perspective is not comprehensive, readers are exposed to a variety of interpretive styles. Kim's work is an excellent starting point for further exploration using his recommended readings.

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Evangelism: Learning from the Past. By Michael Green.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-8343-8. 177 pages. Paper. \$22.99.

Michael Green has written a concise and readable survey of the history of evangelism in western Europe and North America. The Good News of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection and our need for relationship with God through

Christ is an evangelistic message for all ages (6-7). Green, whose book has been published posthumously, believes that the unchanging message of the gospel needs to be dressed in new clothes. This is a theme that ties all twelve chapters together. While the modern internet can be challenging, the need for community, forgiveness, and hope tie all periods of history together (167-169).

Unlike Greek philosophers, every Christian lay person was a preacher who embodied the gospel message in daily living in

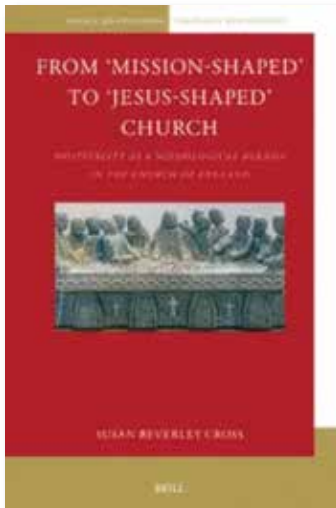
the second and third centuries. This was the mark of Christian witness. The dark ages in Western Europe had few authentic messengers of the gospel except in monastic communities and among pre-reformation leaders such as Peter Waldo, Jon Hus, and John Wycliff. They opposed the church practice of selling indulgences to free deceased loved ones from purgatory and complete building projects, such as St. Peter's in Rome.

Printing press technology enabled the Reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, to spread their teachings throughout Europe. Both supported efforts to translate the Bible into the common language of the people. Reformation ideas that embody evangelism principles for all times include biblical authority, the use of emerging technologies, justification by grace through faith as the core message, the priesthood of all believers, and an awareness that social circumstances continue to change. Yet the good news of Christ remains the same! These themes enabled the message of the reformers to transform Europe and eventually spread to America (82).

Green highlights revival movements, such as in the eighteenth century with John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, who promoted holy living and going into the countryside to preach. Later the Welsh revivals took place in remote areas with emotionally charged revival meetings that lasted many days (111). Support for social reform opposed slavery and unfair childhood labor practices (100-101).

The final section is about "Crusade Evangelism," which began with D. L. Moody and continued with other evangelical giants such as Billy Graham. Evangelistic meetings today are pre-planned, using business practices, advance advertising, and inviting local clergy to send church members to the revival meetings. Most importantly, there are talented musicians who perform Christian music to warm up the gathering for the message of the preacher. Personal testimony (similar to early church practices), music, and sharing the gospel message are the ingredients of a successful evangelistic meeting. This book can be useful to congregations desiring to organize evangelism outreach into the community.

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From 'Mission-Shaped' to 'Jesus-Shaped' Church: Hospitality as a Missiological Agenda in the Church of England, Anglican-Episcopal Theology and History, Vol. 12.

By Susan Beverly Cross.

Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2025. ISBN: 978-9-0047-1084-9. xi & 367 pages. Paper. \$65.00.

Susan Beverly Cross's comprehensive volume was written for a particular audience—those familiar with, or who have prior knowledge of, the Church of England and its positions and perspectives on hospitality. She provides a substantial critique of these systems in conversation with other authors who have made contributions to the topic of hospitality.

However, individuals and communities outside of those particular circles may also find value in opening the book, not just to learn from a church that one is unfamiliar with, but to enter more deeply theologically into one's own assumptions, practices, language, and context around hospitality and what those perspectives say implicitly and explicitly about who God is in that place.

Cross states her intentions at the beginning, "This book will look therefore at the retrieval of hospitality in Christian life and mission and consider whether this rediscovery has been manifested adequately by a 'mission-shaped' Church of England," (7) ... "there is a difference between hospitality deployed in the service of 'church growth' and that which shares in the overflow of the life of God," (9). The heart of the book is six comprehensive chapters on specific subcategories of hospitality, including engagement and critique with authors, programs, and official statements of the Church of England.

Chapters 1 and 2 begin with the Old and New Testaments. Chapter 1 draws on texts that speak to hosting, hosts, and hospitality. In chapter 2, she covers themes of eschatology, communal rituals and practices, and covenants. As she states, "...my discussion moved from the journeying of the fatherless stranger, and the outsider, and between the spaces and places of eating...[to] that outside wherever those who are hungry are found," (96).

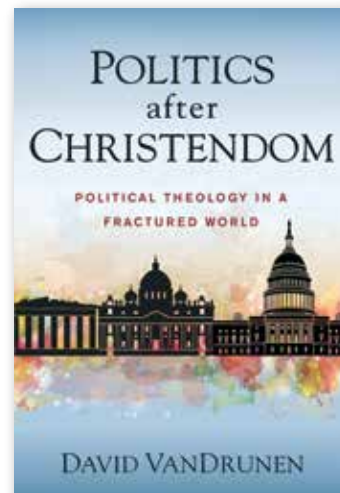
Chapter 3 looks at the relationship between hospitality and inclusion/exclusion in the church today. "The challenge," Cross states, "is how we all can learn from one another in ways that take the inherent diversity of the Body of Jesus seriously, not as metaphor but as lived reality," (126). Chapter 4 expands on that theme, delving into accessibility and mutuality, including the role of storytelling and food.

Cross explores the relationship between hospitality and

mission in chapter 5, asking "...whether the Church of England historically, and currently is hospitable," (161). In chapter 6, she draws on the popular *Alpha Course* and *Messy Church* to critique the relationships between evangelism and discipleship. How context shapes hospitality is the topic for the final chapter, by looking through the lens of "food, hunger, and poverty; the place of humility; online and offline church and the effects of post-COVID retrenchment," (7). Cross covers a lot of territory in these chapters, sometimes a bit too much.

The true gift of this book, however, for me as an outsider to the Church of England, is (in addition to its extensive bibliography on hospitality), its reframing of hospitality. Hospitality is not some act we do individually or collectively as communities of believers, to make others or ourselves feel comfortable, but what God is doing as guest and host, and through us as guest and host. Hospitality then becomes the place we encounter God in a way that changes how we see and experience one another not as strangers, but creatures created by God. This gift, argues Cross, doesn't shape our actions, it informs our very identity as the Body of Christ.

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Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World. By David VanDrunen.

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-3101-0884-9. 400 pages. Paperback. \$19.00.

David VanDrunen's original political theology rooted in the "Noahic covenant" is well worth pondering—as much for what it can

illuminate about a reader's own implicit political theology as for its tempering vision about how Christians ought to invest in a world characterized by pluralism and contested views of justice. A Reformed theologian who describes himself as a "conservative liberal" (370-375), he distinguishes between God's soteriological covenant with the church and God's universal covenant with the world. Drawing on both natural law and an exegesis of a universal covenant in Genesis 1 (human creation in God's image with a command to co-rule) and Genesis 9 (God's post-flood, sin-sensitive covenant with Noah), VanDrunen sketches the "contours of a Christian political theology" that regards governments as "legitimate, but provisional, common, but accountable" (25).

Part 1 fleshes out this political theology, making a case



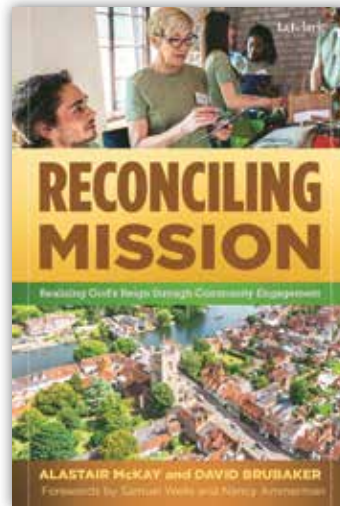
that both testaments (including their wisdom literature) largely confirm “Christians’ public life under two covenants,” requiring our double-consciousness as “responsible citizens” yet “patient sojourners” who await divine judgment and restoration (150). Part 2 sketches a political ethics in relation to the Noahic covenant’s command to establish families, commerce, and a judicial system. VanDrunen argues that a Noahic framework suggests a limited form of state government that protects from violence yet is pluralistic, with voluntary associations the places to work out religious and moral convictions, as well as many needs provisions. This implies “legal polycentrism”: that justice is rooted in natural law that is reflected and tested in the “customary legal order” that generates, exceeds, and holds accountable state laws—sometimes through resistance.

Unlike progressivism and nationalism, which VanDrunen finds defined today around competing group identities, a Noahic covenant provides a framework for a shared but modest sense of the common good: “The political theology of this volume suggests that a prime goal of political community...is to find ways for people to flourish within their families and voluntary associations without setting their own groups in conflict with others” (378). While this might sound quietist, VanDrunen seems engaged in crisis intervention: he blows a whistle in the middle of religiously inflected, politically polarized competition and calls Christians to another way of understanding the rules of the game. To some: stop assuming that state government can be a theocratic covenant built around chosen ones inheriting a promised land. To others: stop assuming that the biblical prophets provide a clarion prescription for how to pursue justice for the marginalized.

VanDrunen calls for a Noahic post-disaster piety in the public square. Yet I wonder: how possible *is* it to disentangle Christian eschatological imagination for the new creation in an ecclesial context from a deeply held vision of justice and flourishing for the common good in a finite, fallen world? Need all Christians regard as *normative* VanDrunen’s distinction between a political theology based on a Noahic covenant and an ecclesiology based on baptism into the new creation? Perhaps more crucial is finding *some* way to recognize the provisional nature of all earthly efforts at securing a more just, flourishing world. VanDrunen might cast this as a mix of “conservative” passed-on wisdom interacting with “liberal” attention to new findings of reason. But even if, unlike VanDrunen, we envision our civic-political commitments to actually *participate* in the prophetic and the new creation opened up by Christ and the Spirit, we can still remember to resist the temptation to idolize a particular view of justice, or a specific collective movement for social change.

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Reconciling Mission: Realizing God's Reign through Community Engagement. By Alastair McKay and David Brubaker.

New York: T&T Clark, 2026.
ISBN: 978-1-5381-9050-0. 182 pages. Paper. \$24.95.

A chaplain once shared with me his practice of entering a patient’s room by asking who had already visited. He would name the

likely guests — fear, guilt, uncertainty — not as a diagnosis, but to open a door. Whatever the patient confirmed or corrected, a conversation had already begun. He arrived like a tracker reading the ground, curious about what had been happening before he got there, ready to follow rather than lead. Which, in an ironic way, was exactly what made him useful.

That same posture—arriving curious, ready to receive as much as to give—is what David Brubaker and Alastair McKay are asking congregations to practice in their neighborhoods. Brubaker is professor emeritus of organizational studies at Eastern Mennonite University and a longtime congregational consultant. McKay is an Anglican priest and founder of Reconciliation Initiatives, a nonprofit resourcing churches for community engagement. Together they argue that the most faithful thing a congregation can do might be to shed the privilege its position gives and learn to show up as a guest rather than a host.

Brubaker’s own story shows what that shedding looks like. As executive director of Seeds of Hope in Casa Grande, Arizona, he moved his family into the Cabana neighborhood, a place locals called “the projects.” His decision to live where he worked opened doors that no program could have unlocked. Neighbors, a local school, a housing manager, and the police department eventually worked together to transform the neighborhood from the inside.

McKay takes the reader across the Atlantic to rural England, where a congregation decided to set up a stall at Hay Pride, the first Pride festival in their nearest town. They arrived with trepidation. The organizers were surprised that a church wanted to be there at all. People streamed to their stall, saying they had never expected to see a church show up. Conversations opened that had been closed for years. The congregation had not hosted the event. But they showed up as guests at someone else’s table.

The book’s authenticity rests on the authors’ decision to let practitioners tell their own stories. Readers hear about community engagement in the voices of people living it. Each chapter closes with questions that invite readers to imagine what this might look like in their own context—a feature that makes the



book well-suited for a leadership team or a congregation council retreat.

Brubaker's research found that congregations focused outwardly are less prone to internal conflict than those turned inward. McKay arrived at the same conviction through two decades of conflict transformation work. That convergence gives the book a kind of double credibility—empirical and pastoral, transatlantic and ecumenical.

The church has always known how to serve. Hospitals, nursing homes, shelters, and care centers are monuments to that impulse. What Brubaker and McKay are recovering is older than any of those institutions—a patient, Spirit-led way of belonging to a place, learning about the people, and letting relationships give programs their meaning.

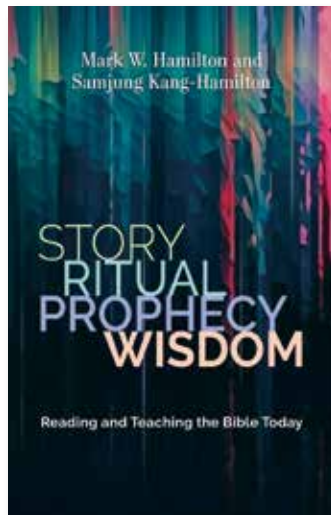
This is evangelism. Not the kind that arrives with answers, but what D.T. Niles had in mind when he described evangelism as one beggar telling another where to find food.

For pastors wondering whether there is still a path forward for a congregation that is shrinking toward the margins, this book is an honest and hopeful companion. Study this book with church leaders, then walk out the door together and see where God is already at work in your neighborhood.

Peter Soli, Pastor

Dialog Works

Albert Lea, Minnesota



Story, Ritual, Prophecy, Wisdom: Reading and Teaching the Bible Today. By Mark W. Hamilton and Samjung Kang-Hamilton.

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024.

ISBN: 978-0-8028-8318-6. x & 182 pages. Paper. \$24.99.

In their book, *Story, Ritual, Prophecy, Wisdom: Reading and Teaching the Bible Today*, Mark Hamilton and Samjung Kang-Hamilton seek to offer

a roadmap for thinking about how the Bible might be read and taught in contemporary church contexts. They are writing in the context of declining religiosity and church membership and rising Christian nationalism. The Hamiltons describe their purpose in writing this book as such, “neither praising an ideal past nor groaning over a fallen present or threatening future will help us. Conversely, times of challenge often awaken creativity. Now is the time to reflect on the state of teaching and learning in the church, particularly with respect to the Bible. Now is the time to learn and unlearn” (3).

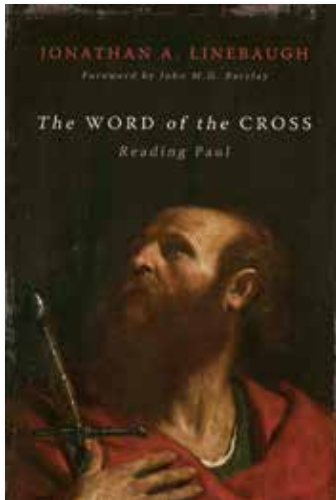
The first chapter lays out the contemporary context in which the Hamiltons wrote this book. The second chapter then attends to the diversity of biblical canons, disagreements about which books should be included, and the status of the Bible as divinely inspired. These first two chapters are short, and the Hamiltons freely admit that they have left many stones unturned. This is an intentional strategy, since their goal is not to provide a definitive program of biblical education which claims to solve all the problems presently vexing the church. Instead, this book seeks to generate thoughtful dialogue among readers with the hope that they will find methods suitable to their own contexts. In this way *Story, Ritual, Prophecy, Wisdom* seeks to be generative rather than descriptive and programmatic.

The last four chapters of the book attend to each of the modalities in the title and seek to understand how thinking about the Bible as each of these things can be useful in the context of Christian ministry. Each chapter focuses on a few selections of biblical text as an example of the relevant modality. This is where the book truly shines. The selections of biblical text are well-chosen and meaningful. Furthermore, the Hamiltons are willing to engage with the fact that a significant number of biblical texts are skeptical, if not outright critical, in their attitude toward the type of privilege and power that Christianity possesses in the American context. For example, in Chapter 5, which discusses the prophets, the Hamiltons write: “If ritual texts seem slightly alien to some modern western Christians, especially those who have learned from the Protestant Reformation to be suspicious of ritual, then even more alien are those texts that come under the label ‘prophetic.’... [The prophetic texts] ask radical, unsettling questions about how human society should function; and their answers do not look much like bourgeois Christian viewpoints” (85). This is an important tension for the American church to grapple with, since the church often venerates texts written by and for marginalized groups, but it is not itself marginalized in the contemporary context. Forcing the church to engage this tension is the most significant contribution the Hamiltons make with this book.

Story, Ritual, Prophecy, Wisdom is ideal for pastors or other Christian educators who want to develop biblical education programs which are religiously and spiritually authentic while also engaging with both the world as it exists today and the insights which critical scholarship regarding the Bible has developed over the last century.

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***The Word of the Cross:
Reading Paul.* By
Jonathan A. Linebaugh.**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022.
ISBN: 978-0-8028-8167-0. 292
pages. Cloth. \$38.25.

Jonathan Linebaugh's book is a collection of twelve theological essays on Paul's letters, especially Galatians 2 and portions of Romans. These in-depth exegetical essays are comparative readings of Paul in conversation

with ancient Jewish texts and Reformation theologians. *The Word of the Cross* is a substantive engagement with Pauline theology and its ongoing relevance for today. The book is divided into three major divisions.

"Reading Paul" is the first major section of essays, which make for a good refresher course on some deeper nuances of Pauline theology. God justifying the ungodly is a recurring theme. Another emphasis is the faith of Abraham, who though imperfect had faith in God (50). A major focus of Linebaugh's throughout the volume is Paul's theology of redemption, including themes such as no one is righteous, all are deserving of God's wrath, Jesus' death on the cross is the unveiling or revealing of God's grace, and Jesus' death declares sinners righteous even though they were dead—Romans 3:21–24 (8, 11).

"Reading Paul in Context and Conversation" is the second section, where Linebaugh reads Paul in conversation with Jewish texts, making for a "relational hermeneutics" and "comparison as conversation" (77). Aspects such as the Pauline understanding of unmerited grace are juxtaposed with comparable themes in Jewish literature, such as a retributive justice for idolatry seen in the Wisdom of Solomon. The author carries on similar conversations with the epistle of Enoch and Pseudo-Solomon, ultimately clarifying Paul's notion of justice as seen in Galatians 2 (143).

The third section ("Reading Paul with Readers of Paul") is a conversation with reformers such as Thomas Cranmer and Martin Luther. God's work flows from faith in Jesus' death on the cross, which makes alive the dead and continues to work through Christians' responses by doing good to others (195–196). Linebaugh traces Martin Luther's spiritual journey from viewing both Moses and Christ as sources of law (i.e., instruction) to Luther recognizing faith is the passive reception of God's grace (204). Christ is not a second lawgiver, but a dispenser of grace (221). The law was a temporary keeper of sorts until the previous promises were fulfilled in the crucified Christ. Whereas the law discovers and diagnoses sin, the gospel speaks a new word of life and creates faith through the word of the cross (219–220).

Linebaugh cites and engages numerous credible biblical scholars, primarily in footnotes. The book is pitched toward an audience familiar with basic Greek and theological terms. Practically, the book is pitched well for clergy and adult classes who wish to dig deeper into how Pauline thought and how it might comfort and give hope in a post-pandemic reality (xii–xiii). Linebaugh shows how the word of the cross of Christ is a gift to deliver anxious people from existential distress and the imprisonments of the present age (230).

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