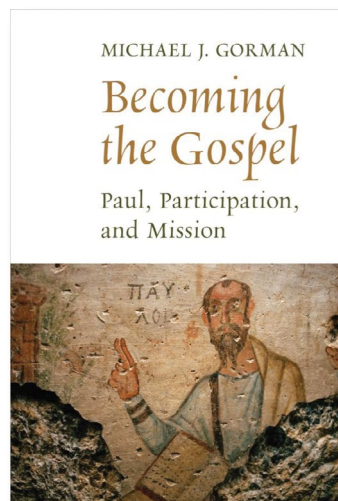




Book Reviews

April 2017

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben



Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission. By

Michael J. Gorman.

Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN:

978-0-8028-6884-8.

x & 341 pages. Paper.

\$28.00.

B*ecoming the Gospel* is the third in a trilogy by Michael Gorman, the Raymond E. Brown Chair in Biblical

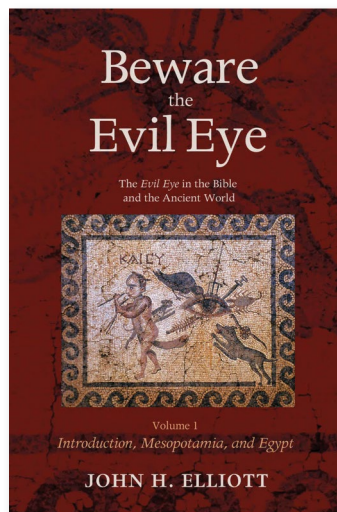
Studies and Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University. Though this volume stands alone, it builds on the arguments of *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (2001) and *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (2009). In *Becoming the Gospel*, Gorman combines missiology and hermeneutics in his quest to read Paul's letters missionally.

Critical to Gorman's thesis is that the church's existence in Christ necessitates involvement in God's ongoing mission. Gorman writes, "The central claim of this book . . . is that already in the first Christian century the apostle Paul wanted the communities he addressed not merely to *believe* the gospel but to *become* the gospel, and in so doing to participate in the very life and mission of God" (2). The book opens with an "Invitation" rather than a traditional "Introduction" to invite the reader to consider what might be learned from Paul about the *missio Dei* and the church's participation in it. Rather than attempt a comprehensive Pauline missional theology, the following chapters use this missional hermeneutic with select letters to demonstrate how Paul calls the church to participate in the *missio Dei* by highlighting characteristics that only life in the Spirit makes possible: faithfulness, hope, and love in 1 Thessalonians; the servanthood of Christ as a missional paradigm in Philippians; God's *shalom* as a call to peacemaking, especially in Ephesians; cruciform and restorative justice in 1 and 2 Corinthians; and righteousness and glory as "missional theosis" in Romans.

Though some readers today may object to the use of the term "theosis" to describe participation in Christ, Gorman presents the rewards of framing Paul's language of spiritual transformation within his theology of a God whose mission is to save the world and to bless that cosmos with *shalom*. In many

respects, this book draws out the "so what" implications of his earlier books. Gorman even offers brief sections at the end of each chapter to demonstrate how the church today embodies the (divine) characteristics of peace, justice, faithfulness, hope, and love. With this book, Gorman invites the church to take seriously the transformative power of God's salvation and to *become* the gospel in our world.

Carla Swafford Works
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, D.C.



Beware the Evil Eye. The Evil Eye in the Bible and the Ancient World. Volume 1.

Introduction, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.

By John H. Elliott.

Eugene, Oregon:

Cascade Books, 2015.

ISBN 978-1-6203-

2147-8. xxii & 209

pages. Paper. \$26.00

(web price \$20).

Belief in the Evil Eye holds that certain individuals possess an eye whose powerful gaze can harm or destroy any object, animate or inanimate, on which it falls. Elliott's study deals primarily with ancient materials, but a 2009 survey reports that about sixteen percent of Americans believe in the "evil eye"—that certain people can cast curses of spells with their eye.

Underlying Evil Eye belief and practice is an understanding of the eye as an active rather than a passive organ. This extramission theory of vision concludes that the eye projects ocular rays or particles of energy. Elliott's study, following anthropological standards, makes a distinction between "emic" and "etic" realms of discourse. "Emic" denotes discourse reflecting the viewpoint and explanations belonging to a particular culture, such as those who believe in the Evil Eye phenomenon, while "etic" denotes explanations and criteria used to analyze culture by those outside that culture.

After a lengthy introduction in this volume, Elliott examines the evidence for an evil eye in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Mesopotamian evidence goes back 5,000 years. Affliction from an Evil Eye was one of the presumed causes of sickness and death in Mesopotamia and Egypt, as throughout the ancient world. A second volume will treat the evidence of Evil Eye belief and practice in Greek and Roman cultures down through 600 C.E., including strategies for warding off the Evil Eye. These first two volumes set the stage for a contextual reading and interpretation of Evil Eye belief in the Bible and biblical communities in volumes 3 and 4.

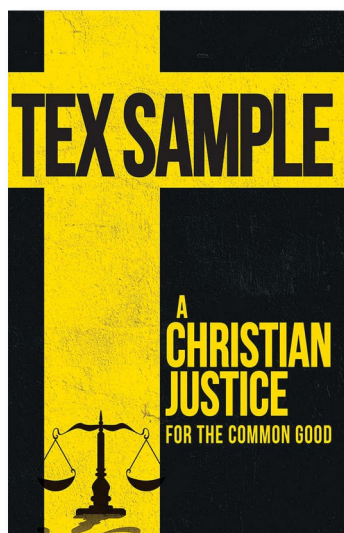


Volume 3 will discuss references to the Evil Eye in the Old Testament and related extra canonical works, and then will move on to evidence for the Evil Eye in the words of Jesus (Matt 6:22-23//Luke 11:33-35; Matt 20:15; Mark 7:22) and in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Similarities and differences from pagan thought and practice will be noted. Elliott is a highly published Lutheran New Testament scholar (e.g., the Anchor Bible commentary on 1 Peter), and it was the New Testament evidence that ignited his multi-year passion for the subject.

Volume 4 will trace Evil Eye belief and practice in postbiblical Israel and in postbiblical Christianity (second to seventh centuries). This volume will also offer reflections on the roles Evil Eye belief and practice played in the ancient world and on the roles such belief and practice have continued to play in everyday thinking, feeling, and conduct.

Ralph W. Klein

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



A Christian Justice for the Common Good. By Tex Sample. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-5018-1426-6. xii & 121 pages. Paper. \$17.99.

One of the stories in this book is about Jimmy Hope Smith, a Southerner like Sample. Smith has gone home to Alabama to visit his father, a Christian and an unrepentant racist. As father

and son are watching TV, Jesse Jackson comes on the screen. The father responds to the image of Jackson with disdain, "Somebody ought to go out and shoot the son of a b****." Jimmy Hope Smith tells his father that if he believes that, he ought to go to church and pray for someone to shoot Jesse Jackson. His father replies, "Boy, you know I can't do that. Jesus won't put up with that s****."

The stories in *A Christian Justice for the Common Good* are more than worth the price of admission; they will preach. They bring to life the experiences of flesh-and-blood people struggling with issues of justice and they embody the book's argument. Sample calls what Jimmy Hope Smith did "putting the world's story into God's story." The world's story looks very different when reframed in light of God's story: "Jesus won't put up with that s****."

Sample, longtime professor, author, pastor, and activist, draws on years of experience with broad based organizing (his own and that of others), the theology of St. Paul, and an impres-

The world's story looks very different when reframed in light of God's story: "Jesus won't put up with that s****."

sive array of contemporary thinkers (including Michel Foucault, Talal Asad, Bernard Loomer, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Milbank) to develop an embodied vision of Christian justice. This compelling work will provoke deep thought about our call to act for justice and how we can live out that call.

Sample derives his theology primarily from St. Paul and argues that "justification" ought to be rendered as "rectification." God in Christ has invaded the world, decisively defeated the powers and principalities, and rectified the whole cosmos to Godself. As part of the new creation we are called to live out God's righteousness (albeit in imperfect, limited ways). The righteousness of God manifest in Christ also defines Christian justice. Christian justice stands in stark contrast to narrow conceptions prevalent in society. Whereas society tends to see justice in terms of individual rights and getting what one deserves, God's justice creates good as it frees us and forms in us capacity to embody mercy and reconciliation. Christian justice embodies mercy—the early church taking in baby girls who otherwise would have been left to die. Christian justice is characterized by reconciliation—the hostile divisions of the world have been defeated. So Will Campbell, a white leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, befriends an imprisoned member of the Ku Klux Klan and overcomes hate with merciful justice.

From Bernard Loomer, Sample appropriates the distinction between unilateral and relational power and affirms that relational power in its mutuality—the give and take of life in community—is the appropriate way for Christians to exercise power. This means even in our dealings with those who are "other" we are to be open to learn from them and seek ways in which we can work together. Relational power lived out in community has the virtue that it enables us to grow in our capacities to live out justice.

Perhaps Sample's deepest challenge to our congregations is that we become intentional about formation of our sensibilities, dispositions, concentration, and skills for justice. The transformation St. Paul speaks of in Romans 12 requires that we give ourselves to concrete ways of seeing, hearing, and tasting our world, so that we talk the talk and walk the walk of Christian justice. This requires the kind of intentional training we see in the world of athletics and of music, but almost never in the church.

From Foucault, Sample draws an understanding of truth and power as co-constituted in particular settings. For Foucault, power is a complex strategic relation within societies and between individuals that is exercised, not possessed. It is important that we attend to the exercise of power at the "granular level," on the ground. Jimmy Hope Smith exercised a form of persuasive



power in relation to his daddy that fit his situation and existed at a most basic level.

Jimmy Hope Smith also spoke truth as understood by Foucault, that is, there was a certain intelligibility between what he said and a form of life. His words made sense and made a difference in his white, Southern, Christian family. In our society, power is not typically exercised as coercion but as we are constituted as people by the very particular cultural forces that bear down on us and socialize us. For Foucault the primary form of domination in our society is normalization. Subtle forms of domination related to class, race, gender, and different abilities are normalized; we fail to see them.

The problem is that, although the powers and principalities have been defeated, they live on and we fail to see them—particularly in the nation state and in the market economy that dominate our lives. An ideology of individualism, consumerism, domination, and violence is embedded in state and market. This ideology is reinforced by an understanding of justice solely in terms of “rights” and by the way religion has been privatized and subjectivized in the modern world. Typical understandings of justice and religion have been shorn of capacity to see and address the normalization of domination.

To counter the way that real people are ground down by the forces of normalcy, Sample draws on the work of broad-based organizing. Organizing manifests incarnational ministry—meeting folk where they are. It seeks to identify and respond to particular forms of domination through a process of engagement—listening and developing relationships with individuals in a particular context, and together building capacity to discern and act. Sample notes that organizing practices of holding one-on-one meetings, listening, sharing stories, and discerning where our passions lie have great value for all forms of ministry and congregational life. These practices build community and capacity to discern and act.

Sample sees Christian justice as oriented toward the common good. He grounds his appeal to the common good in Paul’s encouragement to his readers in his epistles to pursue the good of all. Most importantly, he claims that no one knows the common good at the beginning of an effort on its behalf. The common good in a particular context emerges by means of an intentional, open process of listening, building relationships, cultivating trust, and growing organizations of flesh and blood people.

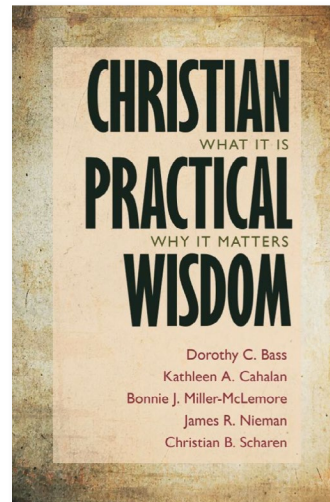
Sample promotes an unabashedly Christian vision here. His deepest conviction is that God has been decisively made known in Christ. Moreover, he stands under an imperative to be open to those who are “other.” He affirms this not because it is fashionable, but because that is what Jesus did—as the Gospel accounts indicate. Although Sample’s orientation can be described as left-wing he is dead set against a comfortable liberal enclave and its identity politics. We are called to cross boundaries and break barriers—even those that separate someone like Sample from rich, conservative, free-market capitalists. In this regard, one of the most compelling stories he tells is that of working with a “con-

servative, Republican, Mormon” on a common project and discovering a sense of communion in Christ around a concrete issue they had worked on together.

I highly recommend this book for its challenging vision of living out Christian justice in concrete ways; being formed to grow our capacities for sensing, understanding, and acting; and overcoming barriers to connect with those who are genuinely “other” (in Sample’s case and for many of us, including those who are religiously and politically conservative).

James M. Brandt

Saint Paul School of Theology



Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters. By Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6873-2. 352 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

This book prepares the way—not only back to the primal origins of Christian theology but a way forward beyond the bifurcation of thought and action typifying theology in modernity until this day. What the authors imagine, intimate, and articulate is a way toward embodying theology in the flesh and blood of human individuals and communities partaking in the reality of created stuff. We are talking about nothing less than an approach to theology that delves deeply into the significance of the Incarnation as pattern for what God is seeking to make of human lives in relation to the world.

This volume is not a multi-authored collection but a thoroughgoing collaborative synthesis, coherent in design and argument from beginning to end. It is the fruit of shared conversations over several years of communal labor. At first impression *Christian Practical Wisdom* is a contribution to the emerging and contested field of “practical theology.” The location of practical theology within academic theology is addressed directly in the chapter, “Disciplining: Academic Theology and Practical Knowledge.” But the reader should not be deceived into thinking that this work aims only at carving out a niche within the academy. Rather, the project as a whole re-orientates what we do when we are “doing” theology, more precisely, what we are being as we “become” theology. Here the authors acknowledge the debt of practical theology to the emergence of liberation theology (205-210) and its insistence on praxis as theology’s measure.



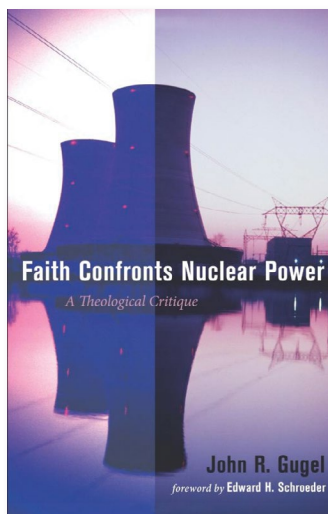
The origins of this undertaking are ancient, rooted in the classical notion of *phronesis*, meaning “practical wisdom” and closely related to the virtue of prudence. The initial chapter, “Framing: Engaging the Intelligence of Practice,” briefly traces the legacy of Christian practical wisdom from its origins to recent appropriations as with Charles Taylor’s *The Secular Age*. However, the purpose of the book is less to talk about the nature of *phronesis* and far more to demonstrate its character in Christian practice. To this end the authors create five enticing chapters painting how theology becomes incarnate in bodies, in praying, in everyday life, in congregations, and in popular culture. While these chapters are illustrative of something far more comprehensive, they are specific in detail to demonstrate to the discerning reader how theology is embedded in every fiber of life—personally, communally, and creationally. I recommend a close reading of these chapters to grasp how theology is not merely what we are thinking but what we are being.

A pivotal moment in the book was for me the exposition on the letters between Descartes, the philosopher most cited as the apotheosis of the turn to the thinking individual as the subject of critical intellectual endeavor, and the Bohemian Princess Elisabeth of the Palatinate. Through their extended correspondence, Descartes was compelled to concede the limits of his method of abstract thought and to acknowledge “that wise action does not always consist of *ignoring* circumstances but of *directly engaging them*” (159). She wrote that “those matters where I follow my own inclinations succeed better than those where I let myself be guided by the advice of those more sage than I” (161). With such insights Elisabeth attains concessions from the great philosopher about the value of practical wisdom (prudence) in navigating daily life, which entails “seeking the complex, situational good of the neighbor” (169). In the history of philosophy these are threads subsequently drawn upon by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty in returning attention to embodied experience in the world.

The two concluding chapters examine the way individuals are formed by imagining the world biblically and by spiritual practices. Imagination provides entree into the richness of biblical traditions, yet always with the proviso that there are also biblical images (for example, those celebrating violence) that malform the human psyche. The hermeneutical work of Paul Ricoeur, among others, guides to the conclusion that we become what we imagine. Interpreting the contours of Philippians 2:5-11, we discover what it means for us to put on the “mind of Christ.” Exploring the nuances of Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus, we rediscover our identities as little ones welcomed and transformed. Through spiritual practices we learn how to repel afflictive thoughts with the Word of God (so John Cassian) and practice discernment, humility, and unknowing. “Unknowing” comes to expression less cognitively than affectively as love: true charity (314). The wisdom of the spiritual masters is not in reading what they are writing about but discovered in actual spiritual practicing.

Taken as a whole, this work leads us toward what the Eastern Church describes as theosis or deification, what I prefer to name Christosis or Christification. Theology practiced becomes embodied in individuals and communities relating to each other and to the world Christianly. Christ’s incarnation becomes incarnated in us. We not only put on the mind of Christ but become body of Christ.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary



***Faith Confronts
Nuclear Power: A
Theological Critique.***

By John R. Gugel.
Eugene, Oregon:
Resource Publications,
an Imprint of Wipf &
Stock Publishers, 2015.
ISBN: 978-1-4982-
1870-2. 87 pages.
Paper. \$11.20.

John Gugel, a retired ELCA pastor, has written a compelling critique of nuclear power and its challenge to and from the Christian faith.

What was once an apparent breakthrough in cheap and safe power has turned out to be the opposite. We all know about the challenge of disposing of the nuclear fuel rods and their toxicity that lasts for hundreds of thousands of years, but the real and potential damage goes far beyond that. Even well-run plants emit “acceptable levels” of radiation. The meltdown and explosion of the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan in 2011 created a twelve-mile vacancy zone around the plant and emitted 365 times the acceptable amount of radiation at the site of the explosion. Gugel claims that the promotion of nuclear power plants is a criminal act since these plants are implicitly granted licenses to kill.

In order to extend the life of America’s remaining ninety-nine nuclear reactors, the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission voted to lower the safety standards on many of these reactors. Workers who mine the raw materials for nuclear power plants and weapons expose themselves to high risks of developing cancer. The incidence of childhood leukemia is several times higher than average in areas surrounding nuclear facilities. The costs of generating nuclear power are often hidden by the United States government. If a rogue state or terrorists were to target a nuclear power plant for its radioactive waste, there would be little to stop them. In short, nuclear power is a failed technology. The alternatives to nuclear power are solar, hydro, tidal, wind, geothermal, and the like. The present reliance on fossil fuels has created global



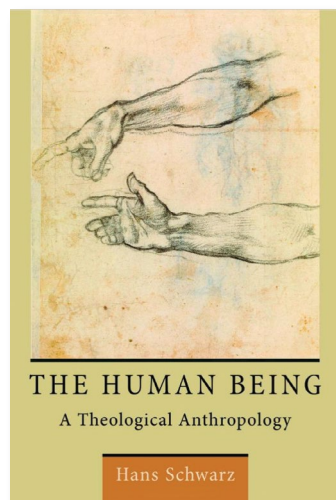
warming and other damage to ecology.

Faith for Gugel starts with the view of the vocation of humankind in the primeval history of Genesis, and Luther's understanding of the Christian's calling. In God's eyes, justice means upholding the powerless and holding the powerful accountable. According to the National Council of Churches, Christians must be guided by values based on the biblical witness to creation, redemption, stewardship, justice, and hope. Gugel calls for a sense of outrage at the risks placed on us by the nuclear power interest groups. Faith comes alive when it is mixed with acts of courage and love.

Congratulations are in order for my former student and one-time pastor, John Gugel.

Ralph W. Klein

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



***The Human Being:
A Theological***

Anthropology. By Hans Schwarz. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7088-9. xiv & 402 pages. Paper. \$35.00.

Hans Schwarz is Professor of Systematic Theology and Contemporary Theological Issues at the Uni-

versity of Regensburg, Germany. Schwarz notes that only humans develop something like philosophy, and only they have an awareness of something higher than themselves. Only humans, moreover, reflect on themselves, their origins and destiny, and the world and its origin.

Part one, covering humans' special place in the world, is comprised of three chapters. The first chapter covers the biblical testimony of human origins, chapter two covers the biological perspective of human origins, and the third chapter gives a philosophic-religious perspective of humanity in the world. Part two, addressing human freedom, is also composed of three chapters. Chapter four asserts that the neurosciences challenge the existence of human freedom, and the fifth chapter contends that the biblical command given to the first humans makes sense only if they were able to obey it, implying they had a certain freedom of volition. Chapter six investigates whether there is anything good left in humanity or if they are a totally corrupt entity; if the later, this would negatively impact human freedom, Schwarz notes.

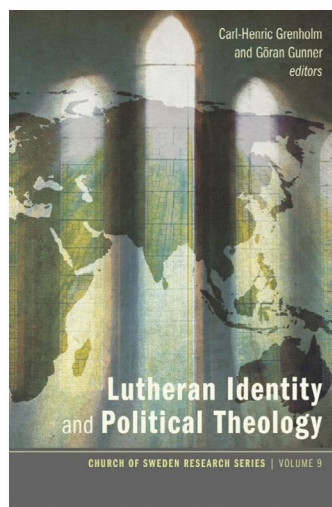
Part three is comprised of two chapters, covering humanity as a community of men and women. In chapter seven, Schwarz notes that there are several differences between men and women

in terms of gender role behavior, but these differences are not overwhelming. [Chapter eight focuses on humans' destiny, specifically as it relates to work and vocation.]

Four points become evident from a full perusal of this text that are instructive for pastors: humans are something special; freedom is an important aspect of the human condition; humans have an inherent tendency toward self-interest, but no one can live alone; and humans are acutely aware of their own finitude.

Bradford McCall

Holy Apostles College and Seminary



***Lutheran Identity and
Political Theology.***

Edited by Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-6256-4890-7. xi & 241 pages. Paper. \$31.00.

This collection of articles is one of two volumes born out of a 2013 confer-

ence hosted by the Church of Sweden that addressed "Lutheran Identity in Transition." The book provides a carefully detailed landscape of twenty-first century Lutheran theology, as each essay contextually considers Lutheran theology in relation to a particular theme for twenty-first century life. Readers will find a mosaic of Lutheran theologians who together highlight the beautiful complexity of Lutheran theology in global settings.

The book's three sections consider Lutheranism in conversation with the broad themes of globalism, gender, and politics. Within the globalism section, Michael Trice explores Lutheranism's response to living in, not just a postmodern, but a post-Christian world. Mary Elise Lowe offers one approach to gender when she proposes an embodied queer Christology grounded in Luther's theology. For a political discourse, Elisabeth Gerle considers how the imagery of marital relations in Luther's writings challenges traditional structures of relational and political power. Ten other authors explore Lutheran identity in global contexts. Readers will find challenges to Lutheran theology that signal the need for further developments, as well as opportunities to celebrate the legacy of Luther's theological movement.

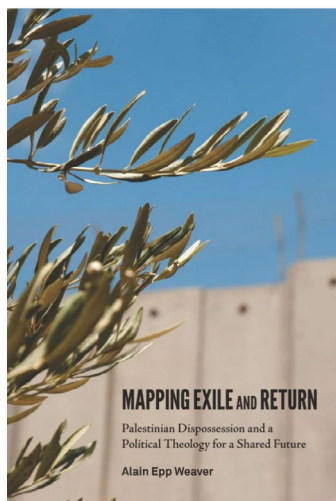
While the amount of international research reveals an intent to present a global scope, concern arises from the fact that all the contributors teach at institutions in Europe or the United States. Nor is it clear from the biographies whether any hail from the Global South. Thus while excellent academic research lifts up international considerations, academic perspectives from in-



digenous practitioners would more fully depict the contextual importance of Lutheranism.

Despite that critique, *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology* deserves your attention for interesting information on distinctive global themes within the tradition. Moreover, this text reveals the transcultural vitality of the Lutheran tradition, for within the transitional nature of our times these theologians articulate a number of trajectories that may benefit not just the church but the world.

Rev. Andrew Tucker
Christ Lutheran Church, Radford, Virginia
Lenoir-Rhyne University



Mapping Exile and Return: Palestine Dispossessionism and a Political Theology for a Shared Future.

By Alain Epp Weaver.
Minneapolis: Fortress,
2014. ISBN: 978-1-4514-7012-3. Paper. xv
& 176 pages. \$39.00.

The year 1948 saw the *nakba* (catastrophe) in Palestine that resulted in the

destruction of 500 Palestinian villages and the creation of refugees, a “deliberate displacement” of the Palestinians by Israel as a matter of policy (17). This policy has continued with land confiscation and the construction of physical and legal barriers separating Palestinians from Palestinians, making them “resident aliens.” This has been reflected in Israeli mapping practices. It is in this perspective that the *nakba* provides a counter memory to Israelite policies, an attempt to resist erasure of the communities that once were home to the now displaced.

Mapping Exile is a look at the Israeli attempt to remove cartographic (mapping) reminders of villages that once were present but have since been bulldozed by the Israeli army. It is also a look at the concept of exile, based on the writings of Palestinian Christians. Weaver acknowledges his own location as a descendant of European immigrants who settled on land held by Pawnee and Cheyenne nations.

Mapping is not only a process for visual depiction of particular territories but also a geography constructed through political speeches and autobiographical reflections (11). While our North American and European notions of exile are softened by seeing exile in theological perspective, for Palestinian refugees, exile “does not name a missionary vocation to be embraced but is rather a political condition of hardship and estrangement to be resisted and combated” (9).

One village destroyed by the Israeli army is Kafr Ber'im, home of Elias Chacour, Melkite priest and Archbishop of Galilee, bombed when he was a boy of six. For Chacour, it is trees that make for a new mapping exercise; their destruction changed the very designation of Palestinian landscape (“the map”); Israeli tree planting has played a key role in attempts to cover over former Palestinian habitations. Bir'im is one of over 120 destroyed Palestinian villages covered over by tourism and recreation sites (97). Trees form a central part of the remembered landscapes, which Chacour employs as a key theological metaphor for reconciliation between Palestine and Israeli Jews.

Another attempt at creating counter memories (and keeping reminders of original communities by maintaining signs of the Arab communities) is the Zochrot, an Israeli “organization dedicated to giving particular attention to its alternative mapping practices at the site of a depopulated village...anticipating a coming, binational future” (128).

This is a powerful book using traditional concepts of exile and land in the attempt to see how these can grow into possibilities of reconciliation among the sons and daughters of Abraham.

Vern Ratzlaff
Lutheran Theological Seminary
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



Our Bodies Are Selves. By Philip Hefner, Ann Milliken Pederson, and Susan Barreto. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015. 205 pages. ISBN: 978-1-6089-9843-2. Paper. \$25.00.

The title of the book sums up well the main point of the authors: human beings do not *have* bodies, we *are* bodies. They describe the key idea this way: “We call this the idea of *bodyself*. In its essence, *bodyself* asserts that my body is my very self and that myself is a body” (2). Each chapter seeks variously to explicate that idea from a different vantage point.

As might be imagined in a book with three co-authors, there is no rigid overarching structure that moves the book from start to finish. Instead, as the authors themselves claim in the Afterword, “...we have offered a series of *takes* on the body—from different angles, caught up in a variety of movements, simple and complex, straightforward and yet at the same time defying com-



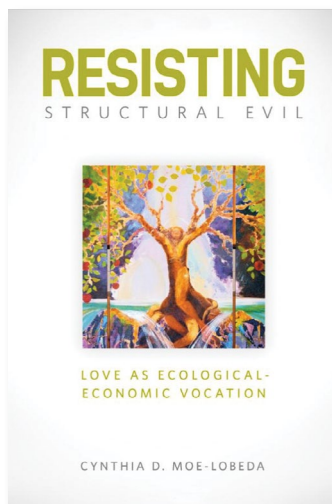
prehension. These takes need follow no particular order—you can dip in to the book at any chapter” (189). This gives the reader great freedom, and allows her to chart her own path through the book.

After an introductory chapter, the first three chapters are autobiographical descriptions by each of the authors, personal accountings of their own “bodyselves,” as it were. Phil Hefner’s chapter, which details his struggle with the physical effects of spina bifida, is particularly powerful and includes some examples of his own poetry. For example, “The Knitter” expands on the image of the divine knitter of Psalm 139, who somehow has “dropped a stitch” with a “flawed touch.”

Many important questions are raised in the book. No easy answers are offered. Issues include prenatal care and the ethics around medical intervention—or non-intervention—in the case of premature infants, societal norms around body image and our increasing dependence on technology, and an all-too-brief discussion of the patented “OncoMouse” (98ff.). In addition, there is a short but helpful chapter on the body in Martin Luther’s theology.

Overall, it is a very readable, interesting book that would engage undergraduates, seminary students, and anyone who is wrestling with questions about selfhood and bodies—perhaps particularly those living with disabilities and their families and friends. It invites conversation on many levels, from many perspectives.

Kristin Johnston Largen
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg



Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation.

By Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. ISBN 978-1-4514-9267-8. Paper. 309 pages. \$22.00.

Moe-Lobeda starts her book by pointing out the connection between the exploitation of sugar cane

workers in the Dominican Republic and the vast profits made by corporate owners of the sugar industry located in the United States. As a child, she believed that if we simply knew what was on the other end of our material wealth, our consumer patterns would change. But mere knowledge is not enough to enable social change. The chains of structural violence can, however, be resisted and dismantled. While structural evil may be beyond the power of individuals to counter, it is composed of power ar-

Her book does not seek to instill guilt in the over-consuming class but attempts to identify theological spiritual resources in our culture, resources that are to be found in all of earth’s great spiritual traditions

rangements that are humanly constructed and therefore may be dismantled by other human decisions. It is as if “What humans have joined, let humans also put asunder.”

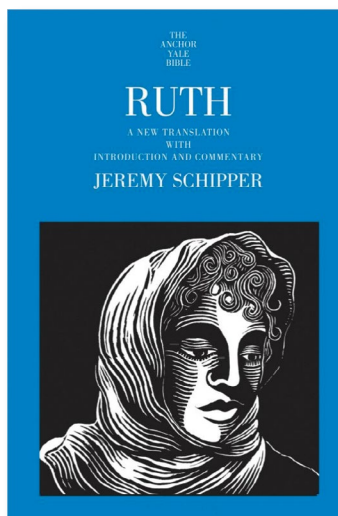
Everyday life entails consumption, production, and acquisitive patterns that threaten earth’s capacity to sustain life. Our ways of life and the economic policies that make them possible contribute to severe, even deadly, poverty and ecological degradation on massive scales (3). Her book does not seek to instill guilt in the over-consuming class but attempts to identify theological spiritual resources in our culture, resources that are to be found in all of earth’s great spiritual traditions: “religious grounds and religion are inherently at play in public morality” (89). Moe-Lobeda tells a story in each chapter, dealing with people’s linkages, for example, a community in India whose land base is being eroded by bauxite mining, with North Americans as the beneficiaries of the bauxite in the whole range of aluminum products. Why are India’s poor forced into the city by mines that provide the aluminum in our lives? What is our moral responsibility if we play a causal role in others’ impoverishment or benefit from it?

This is a powerful book both in terms of naming and analysis of our inequitable lifestyles and in its presentation and examination of alternative actions. Perhaps most relevant to Christian perspectives, and especially in a reformed perspective, is her outline of the centrality of love:

“God’s love is the foundation of human love for God, self, others and Earth” (167). The author continues by claiming that God’s love has “transformative power” (168); “neighbor love actively serves the well-being of whoever is loved” (169); love is a disposition, an ordering of alternative action; love is “more important for the wellbeing of the one who loves than for the beloved” (170); true love “weds other-love with self-love” (171).

This is a wonderful treatment of self, others, and world care, wedding moral vision with pragmatic steps for moral formation and responsible life-responses.

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Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Yale Bible 7D.

By Jeremy Schipper.
New Haven, Conn.:
Yale University Press,
2016. ISBN: 978-
0-3001-9215-5. xvii
& 221 pages. Cloth.
\$75.00.

While this new volume on Ruth succeeds

Campbell's 1975 commentary in the same series, it will not replace it. Less historical, theological, and archaeological in orientation than its predecessor, according to Schipper the emphasis of his more socio-literary commentary is "on the nature of relationships in Ruth," through which he focuses on such themes as "ability, asymmetrical authority, blessings and their absence, divine activity, ethnicity, exogamy, gender, *hesed*, household structures, human desires, impoverishment, labor, patriarchy, religious expression, responsibilities of the clan, sexuality, and status" (29).

Schipper concludes that none of the traditional arguments used to date the composition of the book is decisive (18-22); he identifies Ruth simply as a short story in which one finds a variety of literary forms, composed (tentatively) in the early Persian period. An important contribution of this volume is the writer's keen sensitivity to the Hebrew text, reflected in his consistent attention to such literary phenomena as wordplay, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, pun, gender mismatch (or gender neutralization—masculine plural suffixes or verb forms for feminine antecedents), and the biblical author's choice of vocabulary for literary effect rather than technical nuance. According to Schipper, the narrator's "Selective Representation" (minimal narration of interior motives, unexpressed background) and "Narrative Ambiguity" (*how* details are narrated) means that interpretations of certain episodes will differ depending on how readers fill in the gaps and understand the characters in the story.

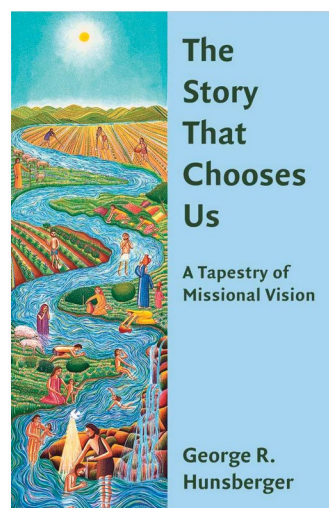
Ruth appears variously in different biblical canons, and Schipper argues that "reading Ruth within a particular canonical context reflects a commentator's interpretive preference rather than anything mandated by the text" (13). He chooses, instead, to read Ruth within the broader context of ancient Israelite literary traditions, with all the figures, idioms, customs (e.g., kindred redeemer, levirate marriage), and technical terminology appearing therein, though he is guarded about arguments for direct literary dependence of one text on another.

While not central to his interpretive method, Schipper does engage queer analysis with respect to Ruth and Naomi's relationship (36-38, 98, 105). Finally, Ruth's identity as a Moabite leads

the author into a useful study of "Exogamy and Ethnicity" in light of the book's ancient Israelite literary context (38-43).

Following the format of the series, this volume begins with an introduction and Schipper's fresh translation of the Hebrew text. For the commentary proper, Schipper divides Ruth into twelve sections that reflect changes in place. Notes on the Hebrew text address text-critical questions, as well as matters of (unusual) syntax and grammar, and discussion of certain literary effects and nuances of the book's language that influence the author's translation. Since many Notes are also interpretive in nature, readers without proficiency in biblical and cognate languages will nevertheless benefit from working—even quickly—through them. Schipper limits his bibliography to those sources he cites in his commentary, and emphasizes works published since 1975. Indices of subjects, modern authors, and ancient sources round out this volume that will become the new standard commentary on Ruth for scholars and teachers, and pastors who will also bring their own theological acumen to their twin tasks of interpretation and proclamation.

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The Story That Chooses Us: A Tapestry of Missional Vision. By George R. Hunsberger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7219-7. x & 166 pages. Paper. \$24.00.

This collection of essays presents three decades of the missional ecclesiology of George Hunsberger, predominantly through his work

as a part of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN). For those unfamiliar with Hunsberger's work, the field of missional, or GOCN, this serves as a welcome introduction.

In his curating of the essays, Hunsberger encourages the church to embrace a vocation within their home cultures. This paradigm shift calls us to see mission as more than an overseas project for a select few, but instead as a central vocation for all Christians in all communities. Each essay explores a different aspect of that development, such as reconsidering the church's operation as a vendor of religious goods. Perhaps most profoundly, Hunsberger calls Christians to see ourselves as evangelists shaped by our culture and compelled by the Gospel, such that our missional efforts arise as an engagement between the culture that reared us and the God who created and redeems us. This all flows from Hunsberger's engagement with Lesslie Newbigin's theology,

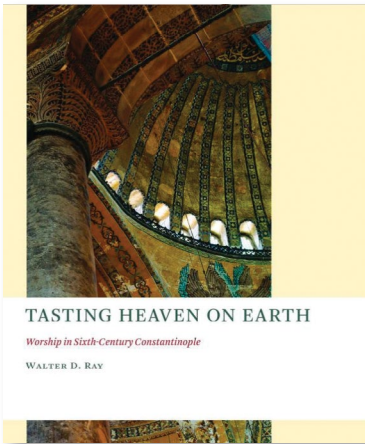


especially but not exclusively *Foolishness to the Greeks*.

While valuable, the nature of the collection makes reading difficult at times. Like any good author, Hunsberger rehashes central ideas to his theology for related articles written across nearly thirty years. Read in such close proximity to one another, this feels redundant at times. Even so, the content proves both informative and challenging. To most effectively appreciate this substance, readers may benefit from breaks between essays.

Though saturated with Reformed theology, this text provides a useful resource to all Christians who desire to reimagine the role of the church in postmodern culture. The clarity of purpose and admirably sharp writing style make *The Story That Chooses Us* an important resource for missional theology and ecclesiology.

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Tasting Heaven on Earth: Worship in Sixth-Century Constantinople. By Walter D. Ray. *The Church at Worship: Case Studies from Christian History.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6663-9. xi & 158 pages. Paper. \$28.00.

This book is the second in a series that is designed to be a user-friendly and easily-accessible approach to the liturgical history of particular worshipping communities. The preface notes that the books in this series are intended to “study ‘trees in the forest’” of liturgical history through the use of primary sources, such as liturgical texts, theological commentaries and sermons, and images (vii). In this particular volume, Orthodox liturgical scholar Walter Ray focuses on worship at Hagia Sophia, the great church of Constantinople. The book is divided into three parts: the first locates the worshipping community in time and space through an overview of history, the second explores the worshipping community through the various primary sources mentioned above, and the third provides tools for using this study of worship in today’s worshipping communities.

In the first part, Ray introduces the physical and chronological location of Hagia Sophia and highlights some themes to observe in the next part of the book. His general description of the location is written in a way that the reader can imagine being there. In this introduction he also provides the reader some background on the methodological difficulties of reconstructing the

case study, which is not only helpful for this particular book but for the study of liturgical history in general. Throughout the first two parts of the book, key terms are in bold and can be found in the glossary. In the second part of the book, in which the primary sources are provided, additional commentary by Ray appears in the margins to further add to the reader’s understanding. Ray includes photographs and diagrams, descriptions of worship from various sources, a reconstructed order of service, and theological interpretations by preachers and writers of that time period. These primary sources derive from the critical scholarship available, translated into readable English.

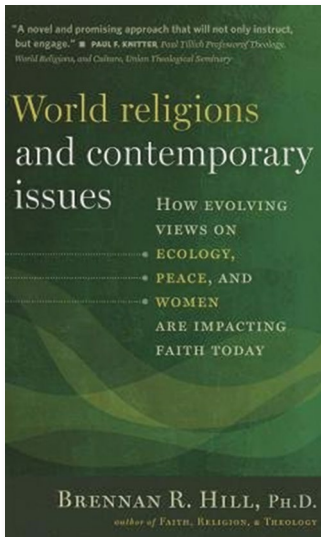
Although it is the shortest section of the book in terms of length, the third part on “Why Study Constantinople’s Worship?” details the importance of this case study for ministry in today’s congregations. Three lists of suggestions are provided, and each list corresponds to the various sections of the book. The first list suggests various devotional ways of using the case study. Using the text written by Maximus the Confessor as a model, Ray asks the reader to “spend some time reflecting on your own beliefs, life, and worship practices,” noting that a close relationship exists among the three and not privileging one over another (138). In this way, Ray does not fall into the trap of stating that beliefs originate from worship or vice versa, as has appeared in some of the literature over the last decade.

The second list of suggestions is for small-group discussion, in which Ray asks the reader to use the observations made throughout the book as a model for making observations in the reader’s own worshipping community. Through the questions, the reader can draw parallels between worship in Hagia Sophia and today’s churches. These questions are also invitations to deeper study, both of liturgical history/theology and one’s own congregation. I can see this exercise assisting a congregation in a self-study for strategic planning or calling a rostered leader.

In the third list, Ray connects the study of Constantinople’s worship with other theological disciplines, including spirituality and preaching. Each component of the list provides both a recap of the important learnings in the book and a series of general questions pertaining to the disciplines. His questions assume correctly that the worship of a congregation has both a particularity and a universality about it—it is universal in that it connects to a larger theological tradition, and it is particular because it is positioned in a concrete reality. Such an approach avoids the two extremes that have been debated in the so-called Worship Wars in the past decades, namely, that worship is anything that follows the four-fold *Ordo* or that worship need not connect to the historical practices of those who went before us.

Overall, *Tasting Heaven on Earth* (as well as the other books in the series) is worth our attention, both in the congregation as well as in the classroom. Its approach to liturgical history serves as a useful guide to discerning and interpreting current worship practices.

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World Religions and Contemporary Issues: How Evolving Views on Ecology, Peace, and Women Are Impacting Faith Today. By Brennan R. Hill. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-5859-5913-6. 367 pages. Paper. \$34.95.

As the title indicates, this is a basic introductory text to five major world religions with an emphasis on three issues of social justice: ecology, peace, and women's rights. Also included is a clear introduction, offering a general definition of religion, including some basic characteristics and an answer to the question, "Why Study Religions?" The entire book is geared toward beginnings. With that audience in mind, this section is a very helpful piece of the introduction, in that it offers some straightforward but compelling reasons why the study of religions continues to be an important part of one's education today. In particular, Hill lifts up the reality of the global, diverse society in which we live and the ongoing search for truth that still drives many individuals and communities. In addition, he suggests that religions have a central role to play in combatting injustice and oppression in the many places where they are found, particularly in the areas of eco-justice, peace movements, and the promotion of equality and dignity for women. The introduction sets the stage nicely for the remaining chapters.

The next five chapters are very basic introductions to Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These clearly are geared toward a Western reader who has very little familiarity with any or all of these traditions. For that reason, they are inviting and accessible. One of the signature aspects of the text are the repeated citations of mostly YouTube videos that invite the reader into a deeper experience. The web address is listed in the text, and also can be found online. Each chapter concludes with a short glossary, follow-up questions, and a list of suggested readings.

The text concludes with a final chapter on Interreligious Dialogue, offering some history and also making some specific arguments as to why dialogue is necessary and different ways of engaging in it. This, too, is a helpful chapter and a fitting conclusion to the book.

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Briefly Noted

With great anticipation I received *Martin Luther's Priesthood of All Believers: In an Age of Modern Myth* by Kristian Baudler (CreateSpace, 2016, \$15). I hoped it would be a usable resource for the Reformation anniversary year and especially for the emerging Life of Faith Initiative (<lifeoffaith.info>). Regrettably, this is a long polemical tract "to show how Luther's theology continues to be deconstructed in the ELCA and elsewhere through misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and mistranslation of the confessional record" (Author's Prologue). Only if that is your agenda do I recommend this book be consulted.

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