



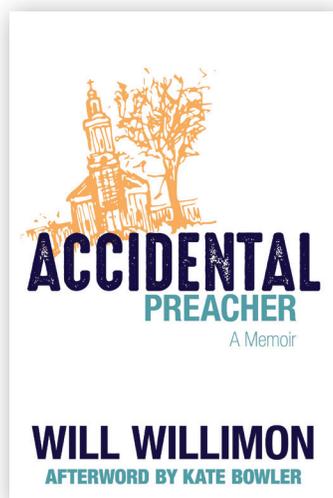
Book Reviews

October 2020

Section Editors: Craig Nesson, Ralph Klein, Troy Troftgruben

Review a book!

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



Accidental Preacher: A Memoir. By Will Willimon. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7644-7. 242 pages. Cloth. \$24.99.

The title's clever conceit goes back to the Aristotelian-derived distinction between "accidentia" and "essentia" in Aquinas. As the bread and wine are distin-

guished from the body of Christ in the Eucharist, God uses of the likes of humans (accidents) to become agents of the divine (essence). This serves as the unifying thread through this highly discursive memoir of God's life-long calling of the author, a southern boy who throughout his now 73-year-old life became one of America's best known preachers and religious writers (even spending a few years as a Methodist bishop in Alabama). This is despite his having penned (and learned to rue) a smart-alecky essay once published in *The Christian Century* titled "My Dog the Methodist" that poked fun at his denomination's evangelism program.

I have followed Willimon's career from afar for years, ever since we were fellow classmates in Yale Divinity School's M.Div. class of 1971. Well-known as the author of an astonishing eighty books, speaker at clergy conferences, and preacher in major pulpits, Duke University Chapel and Divinity School has been his chief harbor of return amid his itinerant ministry of preaching and teaching. Probably his best-known book is *Resident Aliens* (1989), co-authored with long-time friend and colleague at Duke, Stanley Hauerwas, where they argue for a peculiarly sectarian, "Christ-against-culture" view of the church in America, while criticizing much of the nascent "public theology" of the day.

Accidental Preacher is a joy to read, punctuated not only by

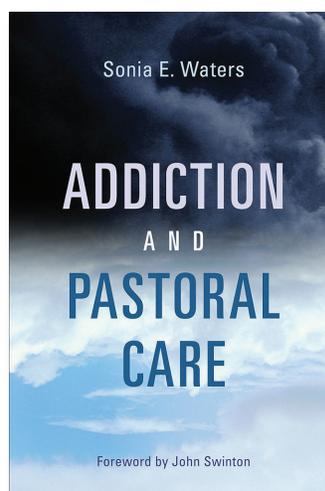
Willimon's characteristic wit and the self-deflating humor of a southern storyteller, but dotted with homely, hand-drawn illustrations sketched by the author. Unlike many memoirs, this one flits around through the preacher's life according to themes, word associations, and pertinent stories, much, I assume, as his preaching does, disdaining mere logical progression or the biological clock. Scripture texts are widespread throughout the memoir to cast the light of God's Word on narrated events, biographical and public, deepening both interest and relevance.

Among Willimon's deepest commitments is to the church as the body of Christ, the community of God's "accidents," within which the United Methodist denomination has not only his highest loyalty but rates his deepest criticism. His time as a bishop was, by his own account, difficult, as were his years as a parish pastor in smaller, contentious congregations. His comments to fellow pastors are often hilarious, critically on target and dismissive of much practical theology of our day. This includes dopey encomiums directed at feeling-sorry-for-themselves clergy and the debunking of their needing to get better at "self-care."

Karl Barth, of all people, seems the source of his most searching advice to clergy, which might be boiled down to the sign adorning London Underground tube stations: "Mind the Gap!"—the gap between us and God (95). Some may be put off by Willimon's rampant egoism but here is a memoir that takes God's choosing the likes of us preachers as both a sign of God's sense of humor and a recognition that the likes of us is all God has got to work with.

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San Luis Obispo, California*

(Rev. Rollefson is author of the trilogy Postils for Preaching: Commentaries on the Revised Common Lectionary, Years A, B and C.)



Addiction and Pastoral Care. By Sonia E. Waters. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7568-6. 226 pages. Cloth. \$25.00.

The thesis of this book is that addiction in its various manifestations is labeled by the author as a "soul sickness" that has an impact on the entirety of the individual's

physical, personal, social, and spiritual life. The author fleshes out this thesis by providing salient information with respect to the impact of this phenomenon on the brain and its subsequent manifestations in the entirety of the individual's physical, social, and spiritual life.

There follows an in-depth analysis of the medical, psycho-



logical, sociological, and theological explication of the salient factors that are operative in the person's life. There is no singular explanation of the etiology of addiction, as a multiplicity of factors can be identified that contribute to struggling with addiction in its multi-faceted manifestations, whether it be addiction to mood-altering substances or behavioral addictions. It is imperative to view, understand, and deal with this phenomenon in its varying forms, as death, incarceration, institutionalization, or recovery are the only options for those suffering from addiction.

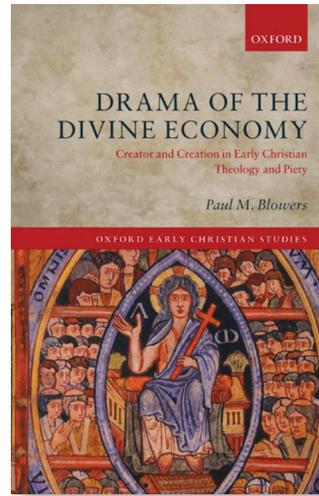
The pericope chosen to illustrate the issue of addiction is Mark 5:3-13, the story of the Gerasene demoniac. The biblical author, who did not have the understanding or language now used in addiction studies, utilizes this narrative to illustrate the impact of "demon possession" as resulting in social ostracism, personal alienation, and personal pain. This passage has likewise been utilized to address the issue of mental illness. That reality brings to the fore the issue of "co-occurring illnesses," to which the author refers later in the book.

A significant number of pages is devoted to the issue of recovery, utilizing the tenets of "motivational interviewing" to aid the caregiver in precipitating a "change" in lifestyle to recovery. This pattern is clearly articulated in terms of the caregiver's approach to personal suffering and the necessity of "change," including the various stages necessitated if recovery is to occur.

The author has written a magnificent volume that is well-substantiated not only through the research, but by her personal ministry in the field of addiction. The challenge in writing on this topic is that a variety of salient issues are not able to be fully addressed, such as the deleterious impact that addiction has on the basic social unit, the family or community of significant other people. It is critical to address the needs of the person who is afflicted "with" the disease, but also those adversely affected "by" the disease. The impact on children can be monumental. The author operates from her own religious tradition in assessing the theological and pastoral issues associated with addiction. The reader needs to utilize the salient insights from a theological perspective predicated on the reader's own theological tradition.

There is a wealth of information and suggested praxis packed into this well-written book that will be of great value in carrying out ministry in a congregation or alternative community. It is important for the people of God to know how they might respond in a helpful way to those afflicted and affected by addiction, insofar as a sense of disgrace or shame can hinder recovery, if the whole community is not informed about the pervasiveness and pernicious nature of this illness.

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Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety. By Paul M. Blowers. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0-1996-6041-4. xv & 424 pages. Cloth. \$160.00.

Paul Blowers demonstrates how early Christians articulated the interrelated theologies of creation and redemption. The "drama of the divine economy," according to Blowers, is a vision "of the world in the mirror of the eschatological drama unfolded in Scripture" (17). In Blowers's framework, early Christian thinkers considered the divine origination of creation as the initial act of an ongoing narrative whose end is contained in the beginning. The salvific work of Christ was situated amid the divine economy "of the Creator to sustain, reconcile, and deify an alienated creation" (5). Blowers claims that his objective is to "outline" some the dimensions of this early Christian vision, but his generous citation of texts allows the distinctive features of his sources to shine forth from this singular vision.

In the opening chapters, Blowers investigates Greco-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish cosmological inquiries, complicating constructed contrasts between Hebraic and Hellenistic worldviews. He develops primary themes in these chapters which resonate throughout the remainder of the book, namely, the Creator's continuing interaction with creation, the cosmos as an active player in the Creator's work, and a simultaneous and double creation.

Moving forward to apostolic Christian sources, Blowers asserts that a concern for a canonical narrative drove the earliest Christian writers. Pre-Nicene Christianity's discourse on creation was intertwined into "the broader drama, or *oikonomia*, of the Creator's purposes for the cosmos and its denizens" (97). The drive to explicate this narrative of faith gave "coherence to liturgy, sacraments, ascetical disciplines, pastoral care, and other practices," as well as articulation of the Rule of Faith (75). Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen honed doctrinal assertions, such as creation *ex nihilo*, in response to competing cosmological claims.

Blowers contrasts the contributions of Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Maximus, and Pseudo-Dionysius to "the problematic intersection of eternity and temporality in the beginning of creation" (184). Citing Greek, Latin, and Syriac authorities, Blowers examines the role of Christ and the Creator Spirit within the divine economy. He depicts the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ alongside the Creator Spirit's

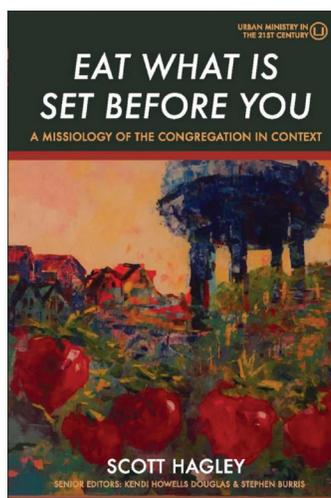


animating, sanctifying, beautifying, and perfecting activities. As co-Creators with the Father, Blowers highlights the “triune Creator’s ‘performances’ in enacting the new creation” (307).

In his final chapter, Blowers moves beyond the hermeneutical and theological analysis and considers how contemplation and praxis enabled early Christians to “ritualize and ‘perform’ their faith as *dramatis personae* in the theater of the divine economy” (315). Natural contemplation considered creation and scripture together as two scripts from which divine providence could be pondered. The performance of baptismal and eucharistic liturgies ritually embodied the dramatic recapitulation of all things, continually pointing toward the new creation within each individual as a player in the divine economy.

In conclusion, Blowers’s broad examination and meticulous scrutiny of sources opens new vistas for further consideration of the interrelation of the created cosmos within the Creator’s salvific activity. This monograph sets out on an ambitious journey and successfully carries its reader’s attention to its completion.

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Eat What is Set Before You: A Missiology of the Congregation in Context. By Scott Hagley. Skyforest, Calif.: Urban Loft Publishers, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-9496-2500-4. 280 pages. Paper. \$18.95.

In *Eat What is Set Before You*, author Scott Hagley, Professor of Missiology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, takes you on a journey of discovery and discernment. Guided by Luke 10 where Jesus sends out the seventy, Hagley calls congregational communities to “learn as guests in the contexts God has placed us” (27). While it provides a good summary of the literature in missional theology, the gift of this book is the way it integrates, in a very physical, practical way, the necessity of theological grounding and reflection for all congregations. Midtown Baptist Church, an urban congregation in a metropolitan city, serves as our lens throughout the chapters, as they seek to discern what it means to participate in God’s mission in and with their neighborhood.

Hagley lays a theological foundation in the first section of the book, starting with who God is and how God calls congregations to be a “perduring presence” in the neighborhood, faithful and enduring. Part two creates a vision for a how a community

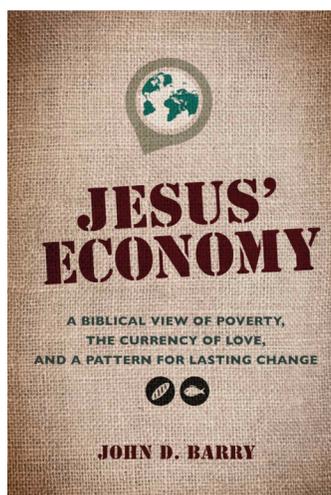
might engage in the neighborhood drawing on the Luke text. Eating what is set before you (Luke 10:8) serves not as strategy, “...but a journey of trust and faithfulness. We come to know God as we participate in *and suffer* God’s mission in God’s world” (85).

The third and final section looks at how a congregation might be this perduring presence in light of what Hagley calls a crisis of cultivation (with) and crisis of context (where). In these remaining chapters he focuses on cultivating the capacities needed for congregations in “attending to, dwelling among and solidarity with” the neighborhood (164). A bonus section at the end of the book provides practices and experiments for congregations to develop these capacities for participating in God’s mission in each one’s place and time. Continuing with the Luke 10 table thread, Hagley groups these practices around the rhythm of a meal: receive, pray, and eat.

Mutuality is at the heart of this kind of life together. Our calling to “...participate in the suffering-love of God” (96) comes from a place of dependence and vulnerability. “...because the *mission Dei* names a relational ecology, we also *receive* the gospel when we learn to be with those to who God sends us” (175). It is now time for Midtown, and all the congregations it represents, to “*depend* upon the gifts that God offers them through various neighborhood partners, to *discover and join* the people of peace in the neighborhood, and to *discern* the good news of the gospel within this relational ecosystem” (15).

Eat What is Set Before You is an important resource for deacons, pastors, ministry leaders, and congregations in all contexts to read and reflect upon together as they imagine and discern how God is calling them to live in, and in solidarity with, the neighborhoods in which they find themselves. But be forewarned, expect to be transformed, in unexpected ways, by what God may be calling you to do.

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***Jesus' Economy:
A Biblical View of
Poverty, the Currency
of Love, and a Pattern
for Lasting Change.***

By John D. Barry.
New Kensington, Pa.:
Whitaker House, 2019.
ISBN: 978-1-6412-
3175-6. 182 pages.
Paper. \$11.29.

In his compelling and in-
sightful book *Jesus' Economy*,

John D. Barry sets out to clarify the biblical causes of systemic poverty and to propose a theological and holistic response to the issue. As the CEO and founder of Jesus Economy, a nonprofit organization, which engages poverty internationally through creating jobs and churches, Barry clearly puts his heart to pen in an impassioned call to action. *Jesus' Economy* serves to fill a “gap in the theology of poverty alleviation” (2) and to provide practical advice for engaging poverty. In this book, Barry shows how caring for the poor is not simply a matter of relief or aid, but a pattern of loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

In the first half of the book, Barry bridges the physical and spiritual realities of poverty, recognizing that if any action toward poverty alleviation should be effective, it must go beyond a strictly economic view of poverty—a theological reflection is necessary. While job creation and microloans can have a positive impact on impoverished communities, relief and aid only provide a partial solution, and in some contexts financial assistance could do more harm than good. *Jesus' Economy* rightly centralizes the need for the transforming love of Christ in the context of poverty alleviation. Barry puts it well: “Jesus’ economy is based on self-sacrifice and His currency is love” (43).

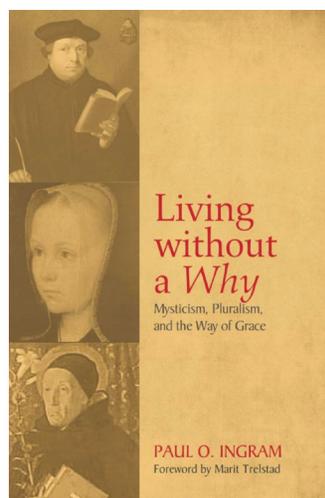
The central issue addressed in the book is rightly expanded to the reader’s world when Barry acknowledges “that we own the problems of the impoverished as much as they do” (43). Many of the conditions, whether it be corruption, unjust systems, generational poverty, exploitation, or other circumstances, find their roots in spiritual depravity and the inability of humans to love their neighbor. By exposing this reality, Barry places the question of poverty alleviation in the hands of the reader: how will one respond? More than a theology of poverty alleviation or statistical examination of the problem, *Jesus' Economy* is an invitation for action.

This book shines in its ability to coalesce theology with practical steps for engagement. Barry accomplishes this primarily in the second half of the book, which acts more as a handbook. In part three, he debunks myths of poverty alleviation, which are particularly helpful for dispelling the lies society believes about the poor as well as the beliefs the poor have of themselves. In part

four, he outlines practical ways for engaging poverty as a church or an individual. For instance, he illuminates many common mistakes people make when engaging others who are experiencing homelessness.

If a church is developing programs for engaging poverty in their community, *Jesus' Economy* is a must-read. Not only is the book theologically rich, it is helpful for informing and training pastors, leaders, and volunteers to engage poverty well. For an individual interested in poverty alleviation, this book is an invaluable resource. *Jesus' Economy* is a fast-moving, theologically refreshing, practically resourceful handbook for thoughtfully engaging poverty in any given context.

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***Living without a Why:
Mysticism, Pluralism,
and the Way of Grace.***

Paul O. Ingram. Cam-
bridge: James Clark &
Co., 2015. ISBN: 978-
1-6256-4707-8. 124
pages. Paper. \$17.00.

This is a wide-ranging
book that explores a
variety of religious avenues
in a highly personal, conver-
sational tone in order to pro-
mote a greater openness to the Sacred through a more mystical,
less doctrinal approach. As the title suggests, Ingram is partial to
one of the fundamental insights that can be found in a variety of
mystical traditions, which is that the practice is the point—it is
not a means to a different end, but it is the end in and of itself.
The title of the book points to that insight: “living the Jesus way
with no strings attached—at all” (116).

For Ingram, the mystical path is a fruitful means of explor-
ing one’s relationship with the Sacred that remains rooted in one
specific tradition, but also shares similarities with other mystical
paths, opening oneself to insights found in religious traditions
different from one’s own. So, for example, in one significant
and insightful chapter of the book, he uses the work of Mar-
guerite Porete and Zuanzi to explore the “apophatic discourse”
(61) they both used to describe their mystical experiences of the
transcendent. At the end of the chapter, he concludes, “...they
all (mystics) unconventionally engaged in the difficult path of
theological or philosophical reflection. Christian theologians
need to listen to and appropriate through dialogue these collec-
tive languages of unsaying” (74).

Another main point of the book is the emphasis on mov-
ing beyond right doctrine as the cornerstone of one’s faith. In

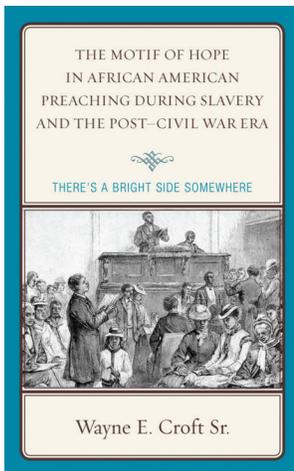


“What’s in a Name?”, Ingram argues that “God” is beyond the categories of theological reflection, and he uses concepts drawn from process theology to describe the Sacred with more openness and dynamism. This move from doctrine to experience also is reflected in his chapter on “The Jesus Way of Living without a Why,” where he makes the argument that Jesus was a “Galilean mystic,” who used intimate language for the God whose existence he knew of not by belief but by experience (94).

Finally, I appreciate in his discussions of pluralism the way he resists over-facile conclusions of “sameness”: for example, he is careful to emphasize that “What Zen Buddhists mean by *awakening* is not identical with what Luther meant by *redemption*” (54). In his discussion of pluralism, he seeks to promote an understanding of genuine religious differences that does not relativize them or absolutize them. Thus, he argues, “It is not reasonable to conclude that all are equally true, or that one Way is truer than all other Ways. No one possesses enough information to justify this sort of religious imperialism. We may affirm for example that a particular doctrine or practice of a religious Way is true *for us*. But we cannot do so for anyone else” (56). Theological humility is a must for those engaging in interreligious dialogue.

This is a readable book that offers much food for thought and fruitful suggestions for personal religious growth.

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The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching during Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era: There's a Bright Side Somewhere. By Wayne E. Croft Sr. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-4985-3649-3. 158 pages. Paper. \$36.99.

In *The Motif of Hope in African American Preaching during Slavery and the Post-Civil War Era*, Wayne E. Croft explores the use of hope as a motif in African American preaching during slavery (1803-1865) and the post-Civil War period (1865-1896). The central premise of the book as presented by Croft is that the motif of hope altered with the changing historical context and has been an important but neglected motif in African American preaching. Croft poses five questions as a methodological tool: (1) Is the motif of hope present? (2) How is the motif apparent via vocabulary and scriptural references? (3) Is the motif an expression of personal eschatology (known as *other-worldly* hope)

or social eschatology (known as *this-worldly* hope)? (4) Does the sermon contain explicit references to oppressive circumstances that hope addresses? And (5) Is there specific content given to expressions of hope?

This book is about the inextricable tie between hope and black preaching in the Civil War and post-Civil War periods. The book lifts up the scholars and scholarship of black preaching during these time periods and examines the ways those scholars have omitted in-depth analysis of the motif of hope. Using the example of nineteenth century preachers such as Daniel Alexander Payne and John Jasper, Croft argues that preachers in the time periods examined used the motif of hope in their sermons, even when invocations of the motif were implicit rather than explicit.

In chapter one, Croft reviews contemporary scholarship concerning hope in black preaching. He covers distinctive characteristics in black preaching, analyzing both *rhetorical* and *theological* characteristics. He describes as chief among the rhetorical characteristics of black preaching “rhythm and musical sound, call and response, poetic language and imagery and storytelling” (2). He identifies the “homiletical musicality” in black preaching, referencing Henry Mitchell, who wrote: “a few of the basis for engaging in sermonic singing would be determined by the preacher’s capabilities, the listener’s expectation, the urging of the congregation, and the preacher’s personal identification with the sermon” (2).

Croft discourses on poetic storytelling, writing that “part of what evokes emotional responses in Black congregations is the preacher’s use of poetic storytelling” (3). He discusses the importance of the oral tradition and the incarnational nature of black preaching, also addressing theological aspects of black preaching. Croft writes that black preaching displays characteristics of “a hermeneutic rooted in the sovereignty of God and a hermeneutic rooted in celebration” (5).

Furthermore, Croft examines scholarship concerning the homiletic of African American preaching, citing scholars such as William B. McClain, who claimed that “what is distinctive in African American preaching is no single rhetorical mode or theological theme but the confluence of [ten] different elements” (6). Other scholars reviewed include Cleophus LaRue, Henry H. Mitchell, Otis Moss III, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, and Luke A Powery.

The book presents *eschatological hope* as a central theme for the African American church with reference to the scholarship of W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, E. Franklin Frazier, Gayraud S. Wilmore, C. Eric Lincoln, and Lawrence H. Mamiya, each of whom contributed works instrumental to the scholarly examination of the black church and, by extension, black preaching. Diving deeper into the analysis of hope in Black theology, Croft critiques the works of James Cone, Major Jones, J. Deotis Roberts, Noel L. Erskine, James H. Evans Jr., A. Elaine Brown Crawford, and Gayraud S. Wilmore. Croft concludes that many scholars referenced hope but did not undertake extensive



study of hope as a specific motif in African American preaching.

In chapter two, Croft reviews preaching during the time of slave Christianity in the years 1800-1864. Croft presents historical background of slave Christianity in which he examines the three arenas in which “slaves would find their freedom to worship” (32). Croft argues that in these three areas—the invisible institution, praise houses, and eventually independent black churches—the “praying singing, preaching, shouting, and communal fellowship” that characterizes black worship came to be formed (33). Croft then discusses the motif of hope in the prayer tradition of slaves and Harold A. Carter’s identification of the three dimensions that kept the black church alive and relevant: preaching, singing, and prayer (36).

Croft also examines hope in the singing tradition of slaves, citing the scholarship of those such as DuBois, who examined spirituals or “Sorrow Songs,” as well as Cone who described spirituals as “historical songs,” which told stories about the lives of blacks (40). Finally, Croft examines the motif of hope in the preaching tradition of slaves, stating that slave preachers brought hope “through the creative use of oratory, scripture, imagery, unusual charisma, and rebellion against the slave system” (44). Croft spends considerable time describing the role of the slave preacher, including those who did not bring messages of hope, but rather acquiesced to the demands of watchful slaveowners who wanted messages that inspired control and order.

Through his examination of slave preaching, Croft identifies examples of both other-worldly and this-worldly hope and the ways in which slave preachers used deception to convey messages of hope despite the forces against them. He highlights how the exodus story came to be one passage of scripture that “invited slaves to identify with the Hebrew slaves and thus offered them hope for liberation in this-world” (54). Croft presents Christ as the unambiguous example for many slave preachers of the oppressed people, and thus a frequently referenced example.

Both Moses and Jesus provide frequent instances of hope in the sermons of slave preachers. Croft looks at the slave preachers Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vessey, and Nat Turner, providing biographical background for each and discussing the ways in which these slave preachers who turned rebellion leaders invoked the motif of hope. Croft concludes that with prophetic zeal these slave preachers (and the revolts they led) intended to proclaim both other-worldly and this-worldly hope.

Chapter three examines the motif of hope in African American preaching during the post-Civil War period, examining several sermons of Daniel Alexander Payne. Here Croft notes the context for each sermon and why hope would be invoked. He goes on to summarize the sermon, naming its central claim, and exploring how hope supports the claim. For each passage where hope is mentioned, either implicitly or explicitly, he describes how the motif functions in that passage.

As Croft turns to post-Civil War preaching, he first looks at the preaching of Bishop Payne (1811-1893). After a biographical survey, he details Payne’s passion for education and his eventual

membership in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Philadelphia. Croft identifies Payne as having “preached to encourage personal morality and education among Black ministers” (76). He identifies Payne as invoking this-worldly hope in his passion to free newly emancipated slaves from the spiritual slavery of sin. Croft analyzes Payne’s Semi-Centennial Sermon, his 1888 Quadrennial Sermon, as well as his 1888 sermon, “The Manhood of Jesus.” Croft concludes that Payne’s emphasis on liberation in the present world represented consistent proclamation of this-worldly hope.

In chapter four Croft examines the sermons of John Jasper (1812-1901), beginning with his biography and then a close look at several sermons. In “A Picture of Heaven,” a funeral sermon, Jasper focuses on other-worldly hope. He then studies “The Stone Cut Out of the Mountain” and finally Jasper’s most famous sermon, “The Sun Do Move.” Here Croft argues that Jasper believes that God offers both *this-worldly* and *other-worldly* hope. Jasper does this under the guise of a view of scripture as infallible. Finally, in “Where Sin Come From?” Croft concludes that while hope is not the focus of the sermon, “it is the climax” which is demonstrative of how this-worldly and other-worldly hope serves as the climactic point in many post-Civil War sermons.

Creative Aspects

Perhaps the most creative aspect of Croft’s book is its ability to discover implied hope in places many analysts would overlook it. Croft does this through his methodology and an expansive understanding of hope, both this-worldly hope, and other-worldly hope. Thereby, one is compelled to find hope in places that may otherwise be neglected. The reader is compelled to critically discern when a preacher is presenting a personal eschatology in contrast to a social eschatology.

The effectiveness of the book is enhanced by alerting the reader to the meaning of hope in the context of each sermon. With reference to the sermons of Payne and Jasper, Croft’s arguments are stronger due to his presentation of background on both the preachers and the sermons. The reader can better understand the circumstances surrounding the development of their sermons and better understand the analysis of hope as a motif in the sermon.

Critical Analysis

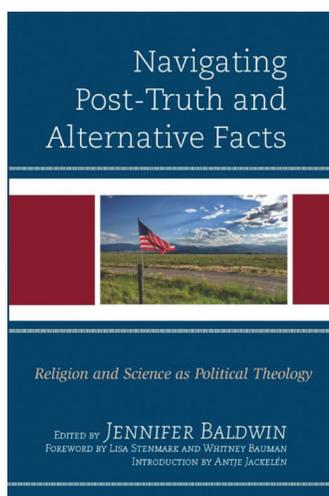
Croft has provided an in-depth look at the motif of hope across a critical time period for the formation of black preaching. He acknowledges the absence of women preachers, due to the lack of extant sermons from African American women during this period. His work is salient, given the overall limitations of African American preaching resources from this time. While he examines sermons for which there are records, one may reflect upon the accuracy of some of those records. To be specific, one wonders about the extent to which the accounts of sermons from preachers, such as John Jasper, really reflect the language of the speaker.

Croft’s methodology is strong, providing a clear and concise

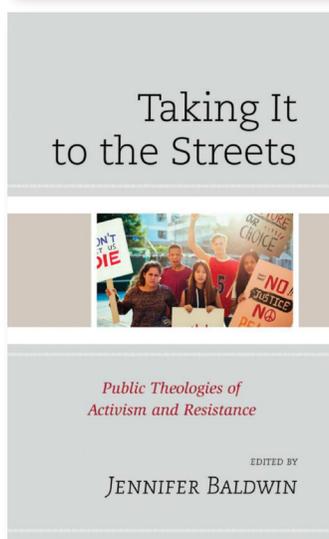


way for readers to identify the motif of hope both in the sermons presented and in other sermons that they may encounter. As its strongest point, Croft challenges previous scholarship on the motif of hope in African American preaching and accents the importance of continuing that scholarship. While the motif of hope in African American preaching during and after the Civil War is important, a similar analysis of sermons from the twentieth century would be significant.

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Navigating Post-Truth and Alternative Facts: Religion and Science as Political Theology. Edited by Jennifer Baldwin. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4985-8008-3. 168 pages. Cloth. \$90.00.



Taking It to the Streets: Public Theologies of Activism and Resistance. Edited by Jennifer Baldwin. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019. ISBN 978-1-4985-9010-5. 213 pages. Cloth. \$95.00.

These collections of essays, edited by Jennifer Baldwin, reflect theologically on current hot topics of political significance. They are companion volumes, of which the first explores “questions of epistemology, affect, and

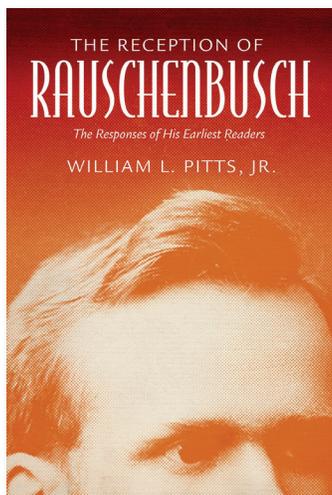
knowledge within our current and increasingly populist political context” (*Navigating Post-Truth*, x) while the second “explores the intersection of public theology, political theology, and communal practices of activism and political resistance” (*Taking It to the Streets*, x). Each volume contains at least ten short essays of widely varying character and quality, all of which display serious, thoughtful, and engaged perspectives on the most troubling current political preoccupations in the age of Trump.

The first volume explicitly employs the fruitful, ongoing

dialogue between science and religion as a lens through which to analyze and discuss the related phenomena in the public eye: “post-truth,” “alternative facts,” and “fake news.” The essay by Lisa Stenmark (full disclosure calls for the admission that Dr. Stenmark is my former seminary intern of thirty years ago!) is of particular interest in closely analyzing the worldwide “March on Science” that occurred on April 22, 2017. These public protests demonstrated against “an alarming trend toward discrediting scientific consensus and restricting scientific discovery” (*Navigating Post-Truth*, 3). This is an important aspect of the “post-truth” era deserving close analysis, since there is always a danger when science seeks to reclaim for itself a kind of absolutist authority, especially against religious viewpoints. This kind of nuanced and variegated perspective on our current political dilemmas and their fallout (moving beyond blanket condemnation and resistance) is much needed today.

If the first volume is designed to contribute to an enhanced epistemic appreciation for the nature of truth relevant to our post-modern politics, the second volume offers an even more diverse take on what appropriate acts of resistance and alternative politics might look like. While specific stories about the impact by the knitters of “pussy hats” for the worldwide Women’s Marches after Trump’s election, participation in resistance by demonstrating and leafleting at the annual “Chicago Air and Water Show” at the Lake Michigan waterfront, and moving tales of nonviolent action to resist acts of racism help open the imagination to what specific actions may look like, what seems lacking is an overall sense of what “resistance” means and what is being resisted. From an assumed theological perspective, I would have appreciated learning how the authors viewed acts of conscientious resistance to be rooted in and inspired by specific scriptures and traditions of the faithful throughout history. The clear sense that we in the U.S. are facing an exasperating and dangerous political reality in this age of Trump is much appreciated. However, we dare not neglect the historical analysis that sets this phenomenon in both its longer term and immediate historical-political contexts. It is reassuring to encounter serious theologians doing the task of political theology.

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The Reception of Rauschenbusch: The Responses of His Earliest Readers. By William L. Pitts Jr. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8814-6681-2. xv & 378 pages. Cloth. \$45.00.

This well-researched and expansive study on the career and theology of the classic interpreter of the Social Gospel movement, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), delivers even more than the title promises. Not only does the author explore and interpret the reception of Rauschenbusch through expansive study of archival documents and scholarly studies (17 pages of bibliography), but gives the reader deep insight into his biography, career, teaching, and writings. The book serves as an intellectual history of the trajectory of the Social Gospel movement beginning with Rauschenbusch and flowing to the present.

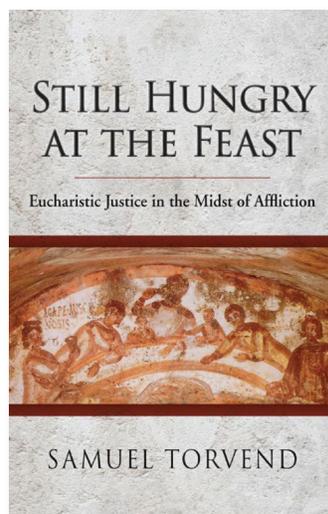
Rauschenbusch's accomplishments included an original formulation of the social character of Christianity, incorporation of an economic critique of capitalism as an element of theological method, prophetic judgment of the American economic system when assessed by Christian teaching, the aspiration that American democracy should deliver not only on political but economic justice, advocacy for the church to take an active role in the construction of a better society, defense of a social understanding of salvation that transcended the individual, and the claim that the reality of Jesus Christ entails that the church serve as an agent for the transformation of society. While Rauschenbusch can be criticized for an optimism that conflated Christianity and nation, we should also recall the power of such vision to drive social change, for example, as a source for the civil rights movement.

Gary Dorrien named the Social Gospel movement—alongside Christian realism (Reinhold Niebuhr) and liberation theologies—as the three most influential streams in American theology in the twentieth century (323). The influence of these three does much to elucidate the shape of liberal Protestant theology into the present, and to explain its travail in the encounter with other-worldly, premillennialist claims that have left behind the welfare of vulnerable neighbors and the endangered creation. Rauschenbusch was the foremost proponent of the centrality of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God at the heart of the Social Gospel. This focus of his work as an evangelical Baptist needs retrieval as a theological resource for evangelical Christianity today: “the old individualistic style of evangelism...offered only a half-gospel” (77).

This book also reveals a treasure within the Rauschenbusch

corpus, his beautiful and inspirational prayers, published as *For God and the People* in 1910. I encourage readers to take and read these prayers for their relevance in our contemporary setting. We need signs of theological and spiritual hope to stay the course with the raging of the principalities and powers. We need the witness of Rauschenbusch as a resource for correlating the needs of the world with the Jesus movement. Pitts has contributed a major study for retrieving the relevance of his legacy.

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Still Hungry at the Feast: Eucharistic Justice in the Midst of Affliction. By Samuel Torvend. Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8146-8468-9. xvi & 144 pages. Paper. \$19.95.

In recent years there has been a spurt in significant publications interpreting the Lord's Supper amid the challenges and vicissitudes of everyday life in our messy present. Some of these noteworthy publications include Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Fortress Press, 2007); George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Cláudio Carvalhaes, *Eucharist and Globalization: Redrawing the Borders of Eucharistic Hospitality* (Pickwick Publications, 2013); and J. Todd Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope: Rediscovering the Gospel at the Lord's Table* (Eerdmans, 2018). Forty years ago, we had Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Orbis, 1979), which powerfully addressed this issue and was met with angry recrimination from the Vatican bureaucracy, resulting in painful personal consequences.

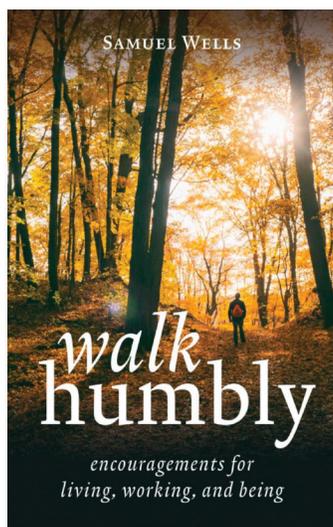
Given this, in a world of economic inequities, social stratification, rampant consumerism, and the pursuit of pleasure, what does the eucharistic table with its promise of openness and plenty mean to those living with the everyday reality of food insecurity, the vulnerable, the marginalized, the oppressed, those crushed by globalization, and those for whom the crumbs falling from the table are the only option for survival? The author directly states: “It is of scandalous interest to me and I hope it is to you that we live in the nation that has ... the highest rate of food waste in the world” (123). What does eating the “living bread” and sharing Christ's body and blood mean in such a context? It's fascinat-



ing that the quotation comes from the concluding section which contains three homilies that pick up the theme of the book and with pastoral sensitivity and biblical encapsulation give us food for thought (and in this case, the cliché “food for thought” is not something trite but something that forces us to think and act regarding food for the body, especially the afflicted bodies all around us). Hence in talking about Jesus as the prophet of God’s economy, offering an economy of grace, the writer points out that he is “the One who breaks through an economy of scarcity, controlled by a few and organizes his incredulous and apathetic disciples to distribute bread and fish, core elements in the ancient peasant diet, so that all might be nourished . . . thus, is this story [the feeding of the five thousand] not an implicit criticism of any economy, including ancient Rome’s, controlled by the few for the benefit of the few?” (81)

This is a book that is commended for its passion for justice; affirmation of the resilience of the afflicted; bold exegetical insights; and call to constructive and transformative action amid the chaotic realities that leave so many hungry at the feast.

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Walk Humbly: Encouragements for Living, Working, and Being.

By Samuel Wells. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7696-6. 99 pages. Cloth. \$16.00.

This little book by Samuel Wells, Vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London and formerly Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, is both a short and at the same

time “dense” book, which should not be read “too fast” (ix). It begins by distinguishing between two fundamental aspects of reality, “existence” and “essence,” which are the author’s way of introducing the finiteness of humanity and creation in relation to the infinity and eternity of God. Jesus, in these terms, is “essence become existence,” the Word become flesh, God’s way of reaching us and God’s invitation for us to become part of the very essence of things (50, 52).

Here I find myself lapsing into Wells’ peculiar habit of piling word upon word, phrase upon phrase, in hammering home a rhetorical point. In one egregious sentence, for example, he amasses fourteen such phrases in one sentence and in the very next sentence includes one colon, three semi-colons, and no less than 30 commas, an approach that overwhelms the reader with

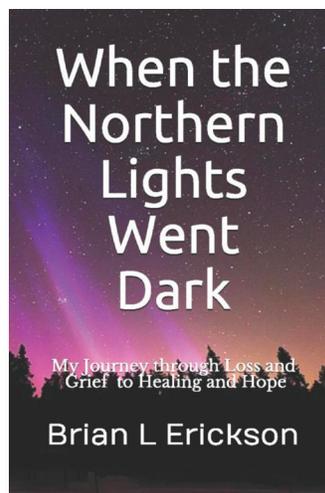
the amplitude of his breathless prodigality of words and images. At the very least, such prolixity in writing style might be judged at odds with the book’s title!

The book gains traction in chapters like “Be Your Own Size,” which takes on the shibboleth of “the much-lauded aspiration of ‘making a difference,’” which he judges “in the light of the breadth and longevity of the universe” to be either simply a matter of “hubris or narcissism” (28). Walking humbly, in other words, is not simply a matter of making God “too small,” as J. B. Phillips put it years ago, but of not letting our own egos become too large in the cosmic order of things.

The author hits stride in the concluding chapters where he advises the reader to “Be One Body” and “Be a Blessing,” his ways of commending the church “through which you participate in the life of God” (71). As a school of humility, the church as Christ’s body is where we learn to give up our “distinct identity,” yield “the final say on our own worth, purpose and flourishing,” and “discover and reencounter” our true “nature and destiny” “Worship is the name for the practice” in which we most fully participate in Christ’s body (71).

Wells concludes his devotional musings and spiritual advice-giving with a series of “wonderings” at the end of each of the chapters, which, as he explains, are not questions. Rather they invite story-telling or speculation on the part of the reader or study group, cleverly serving as a review of each of the chapters. Wonder provides a gentle way to conclude such an enquiry into what it means for us to “walk humbly.”

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When the Northern Lights Went Dark: My Journey through Loss and Grief to Healing and Hope.

By Brian L Erickson. Independently Published, 2019. ISBN: 978-1-0931-6687-3. 266 pages. Paper. \$14.00.

Parish ministry in small towns and rural settings revolves around relationships that often span generations of families. Ministry in rural settings involves everything that ministry in urban or other specialized settings includes, only magnified by the smaller setting and the more intimate knowledge that people have of one another. Brian Erickson experienced this smaller and more intimate setting first as a child growing up in a small, north-central North Dakota community.



The author experienced the strength of rural ministry when his father died when he was entering high school. His church and community surrounded him and his brother with support, encouragement, and the resurrecting love of Christ. Such support happened again for Brian when his mother died two years later in the spring of his junior year. Fellow church members and family friends took him and his brother into their home across the street. It was a poignant and pivotal period for this young man.

Erickson writes powerfully about the friends, neighbors, teachers, and especially hometown pastor who walked beside him when his parents died. This highlights the importance of the smallest acts of kindness and friendship. While remaining mindful of their vulnerability, befriending a grieving young person contributes to their security. The book highlights the importance of the practical serving and caring ministries of churches and communities, as well as of friends and neighbors, that extend beyond the first tough days after a death.

Erickson is a pastor (now retired), who knows the business. Erickson's reflections on his own sense of loss and disorientation are insightful. His memories of how his pastor ministered to him and maintained a strong relationship over the rest of his life is inspiring to those of us who engage in parish ministry. The relationship with his pastor anchored him in the growing process of teenage theological thought, magnified by grief, and reveals how the steadfast presence of this pastor shaped the person and pastor he became.

Erickson tells his own moving story with objectivity to allow the reader to learn important lessons about grief through his lens, for example, the importance of saying goodbye to those who are dying and the necessity of forgiving oneself when that goodbye does not happen. He appreciates the theology received in early life that allowed him to stretch and grow into faith as an adult, remaining in relationship with God through the many challenges of life. Erickson bridges his journey with that of the reader.

As a young adult, Erickson fell in love, married, went to seminary, and became an ordained Lutheran pastor. Brian and Pauline Erickson engaged life as a newly minted clergy and spouse. While this was a joyful chapter, Erickson's faith again was stretched when his wife, Pauline, died at the age of 32 years, ten years after their wedding. It is this journey that provides the book's deepest lessons. Erickson uses some of his late wife's journal entries to give insight into the perspective and faith of a young woman with a terminal disease. He openly shares his own emotional journey as he accompanied her. Their transparency with one another is remarkable. Pauline ministered to him and lent him hope and confidence, even as she received his strength and abiding love as she approached her death.

For those who have known deep loss and for those who love them, I recommend this book to open conversation about how the journey is going. Many people in grief do not want to share their deepest sorrow with anyone. It is either too painful or they worry that it will be a source of pain to others. At the

same time, many who love people in grief fear saying anything about their loss in order not to "make it worse." We thereby deny ourselves the holy succor of relationships that are lifegiving and hope-restoring. Erickson's book can help to bridge that gap with compassion, transparency, and a powerful story of faith renewed after devastating losses.

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Bishop Emerita, South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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