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Book Reviews

***A Commentary on the Psalms: Vol. 1 (1–41).* By Allen Ross. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011. 887 pages. Softcover. \$44.99.**

The author states, “My purpose in writing this commentary was to focus on the chief aim of exegesis, the exposition of the text” (11). He correctly points out that this is a neglected use of the Psalms. While we use the Psalms for worship, liturgy, prayer, music and devotions, the use of the Psalter in preaching has become rare. Thus, the author’s goal is to provide a useful commentary on the Psalms that will encourage their preaching.

As this is the first of several intended volumes, the author begins by providing helpful information concerning the Psalms in the opening chapters. Before individual Psalms are engaged, there are chapters on the 1) Value of the Psalms, 2) Text and Ancient Versions of the Psalms, 3) Titles and Headings of the Psalms, 4) History of the Interpretation of the Psalms, 5) Interpreting Biblical Poetry, 6) Literary Forms and Functions in the Psalms, 7) Psalms in Worship, 8) Theology of the Psalms, 9) and Exposition of the Psalms. This provides helpful information in a more concise manner than is the norm.

As a whole, this is an excellent work for the pastor who wants to engage the Psalms for the purpose of preaching. Ross does betray his theological roots when he states that the central theme of the Psalter is the sovereign rule of the Lord God over his creation, not just Israel, but the entire world. He is correct that the Psalter must have a consistent theology and message, but he does not consider that theology and message to be Christology. This is not to say that he does not see Christ in the Psalter. He acknowledges his presence in Messianic Psalms and the like, but for him the central theme is one of the sovereignty of the Lord God. In all fairness, this does not stand in the way of this volume’s usefulness.

The author accomplishes his stated goal and provides an excellent primer for preaching the Psalms, while at the same time walking the reader through the preacher’s task of sermon preparation very clearly and in detail.

Jeffrey H. Pulse

***Fichte: Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation.* By Garrett Green and Allan Wood. New York: NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 158 pages. Hardback \$80.00, Softcover \$27.99.**

When *Versuch einer Critic aller Offenbarung* was published anonymously in 1792, some believed that Immanuel Kant to be the author. Appearing only a few years after his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 2nd edition, 1787) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), it appeared that Kant was applying his critical work into the religious sphere. Kant, however, denied the speculations and named naming the real author as Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). Once this truth was confirmed, Fichte was appointed as chair of philosophy at the University in Jena in 1794 (cf. Introduction, ix).

Fichte observes that every culture has some sort of revelation, more or less developed (7). Thus, “for a thorough philosophy it seems more fitting to trace its origin, to investigate its presumptions and warrants, and to pronounce judgment on it according to these discoveries than to relegate it directly and unexamined either to the fabrication of swindlers or to the land of dreams” (7). Fichte does not examine the concrete critical methods of revelation, such as text criticism, historical research, or other methods of investigation. He notes, “This investigation will also abstract completely from anything particular that might be possible in a given revelation; indeed, it will even ignore the question of whether any revelation is given, in order generally to establish principles valid for every revelation” (15). Revelation is to be tested on a higher level in order to establish its claims or cast them aside. He wants to get behind the Scriptures by dealing with the anthropological problem. He avoids the revelatory claims of other religious traditions.

Fichte’s most famous section in this work is his theory of the will. Revelation as a source of knowledge was a problem that needed working out according to the newly-arranged epistemology. Passive sense data is arranged with an active faculty of understanding according to the categories of the mind. How revealed religion could have an effect on the will of the individual is the question Fichte tries to answer. Fichte defends a free will to act in accord with moral law in man (22). He emphasizes the moral law in God (38). Reason is *a priori* the source of the concept of God (39). This common theme of the Enlightenment is perhaps better than the relativism of our day. When one has an emphasis on natural law, it is possible for Christians to confess biblical theology with non-Christians, starting from a common moral understanding and observation of lowering moral standards in culture. On this point, Fichte would be a useful ally.

Still, Fichte's strict emphasis on the moral law within makes legalistic enthusiasts with no need for the external word of God with its Spirit-inspired, life-giving words. Fichte's free will is a cold, dead will with no need for Christ, his atonement, or the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. There is no distinction of the strength of the human will over "things subject to reason" and not over "spiritual righteousness" before God (cf. AC XVIII).

Fichte's essay is labor-intensive, background reading, and therefore is not a high priority for pastors to read. However, if one reads Fichte in light of Kant's friend, Johann George Hamann (1730–1788), then Fichte is a great foil. Fichte is the excited student pushing his teacher's new ideas. Hamann wrote the first critique of Kant's first *Critique: The Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*. "Reason is language," Hamann provocatively defended (cf. Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 155). His theological insight into revelation, reason, and the nature of language slowed the Kantian project before it could begin.

Cambridge is to be commended for this volume. It has a broad biographical introduction to Fichte's life and work. Two minor errors stuck out: 1) the book mentions "today's Eastern Germany" (xxix), and 2) there is a Greek error in the footnote. It should read "κατ' ἀνθρώπον" (23).

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***Sacra Pagina: Colossians, Ephesians*. By Margaret Y. MacDonald. Edited by Daniel Harrington. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000. 394 pages. Softcover. \$30.00.**

Ephesians and Colossians have become more widely examined and quoted in recent years, no doubt because the topics and themes taken up therein are increasingly on the minds of Christians in our context. In this volume of the *Sacra Pagina* series, Margaret MacDonald conducts a historical-grammatical study that also employs social-scientific insights to elucidate the meaning and likely religious/cultural situations surrounding the origins of these epistles.

As suggested by the title, MacDonald argues that Colossians is chronologically prior to Ephesians, though both were likely written around the time of Paul's imprisonment and/or departure toward the end

of his life. These epistles address churches that were being established in the face of ongoing external and internal challenges, and soon were to lose their charismatic apostle. Accordingly, both are recognized as having a pervasive baptismal theme throughout. MacDonald discerns Colossians to be especially addressing temptations to worldly identity and syncretism with both Jewish and Gentile beliefs. Ephesians is more general.

While MacDonald's exposition of the literal meaning of the text itself is very much in agreement with Lutheran doctrine, the spiritual meaning and applications are usually not her primary concern. Her interest is more in discerning the chronological events and sociological and ecclesial structural concerns of the congregations in these settings. One notable exception to her normal pattern is where, after interpreting the literal meaning of the later verses of Ephesians 5 to reveal a rather traditional, orthodox Christian understanding of husbands and wives in marriage, she states this understanding cannot apply to today. She does not, however, offer much on what from this passage does apply.

Like more critical scholars, though by no means radically critical, the consistency of doctrine with the whole of Scripture does not appear to be MacDonald's belief or assumption. Such also leads her to deduce a deutero-Pauline authorship of these Epistles. Especially with regard to Ephesians, her arguments are hardly convincing, in this reviewer's opinion. She fails to use the same criteria she uses elsewhere for establishing facts and making assumptions.

MacDonald overall does provide a clear, readable, historical-grammatical interpretation of the text itself. This, together with her fair and generally well-reasoned assessments of others' scholarship, make this commentary valuable in itself. Its peculiar benefit for pastors and scholars alike, though, is its fusing of these with modern sociological insights, social/historical studies of the Biblical settings (e.g., Malina and Neyrey), and Kittel-esque information.

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***Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship.* Edited by C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012. 242 Pages. Softcover. \$19.99.**

Most of the essays in this collection call for a renewed use of the Psalms in worship. The general criticism of the essays is that, while Christian worship may draw from a large repertoire of hymns and songs, in comparison to the use in the church historically, especially among Reformation churches, the Psalms today are relatively neglected. More specifically, each essay focuses on one or a few benefits that may be regained by the church through a more regular and intentional use of the Psalms. Thus, the book does not call for the singing and praying of Psalms for their own sake, but because of the unique role and benefits of the Psalms.

The quality of the essays varies considerably. Several simply affirm the truisms that the Psalms are models of prayer, are formative through their repeated use, were sung in corporate worship by the Israelites, and were used extensively in the early church (chap. 2–4, 6, 8, 11). A number of essays are not groundbreaking, but offer occasional interesting insight or practical advice on the use of the Psalms. Witvliet's "Words to Grow Into: The Psalms as Formative Speech," not only speaks of the formative nature of the Psalms, but examines the difference between the expressive and formative nature of worship. The Psalms both give voice to our petitions and teach us the kind of petitions that are pleasing to God, even if they do not seem to be pleasing on their face (9–16). Bond's "Biblical Poetry in a Postbiblical, Postpoetry World" points out the need to pray and study the Psalms in order to restore a poetic sensibility to American Christians, for poetry is universal and inclusive in expression (67–71).

Perhaps the gem of the volume is Leland Ryken's contribution, "Reclaiming the Psalms for Private Worship," where he focuses on the lyrical character of the psalms. He opposes the current trend of imposing a narrative character on all literature. Rather than seeing the psalms as telling a developed story, they should be seen as the psychological expression of the author. To read and understand the psalms means first to dwell on and appreciate their reflective and affective imagery. "Poetry is comprised of imagery, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and other figures of speech. As a result, a prime hermeneutical principle is that we should not leapfrog over the poetic texture of a psalm—the images and figures of speech—in order to get to its ideas. The ideas do not exist independently of the poetic texture" (132). In other words, interpreting the psalms calls first for appreciating the pastoral imagery of Psalm 23, or the battle imagery of Psalm 144. Any attempt to extract the ideas of the Psalms without dealing

extensively with the imagery does not do justice to the Psalms. Because of the lyric, reflective character of the Psalms, the Psalms are universal expressions of prayer, made fruitful for those who meditatively read them with attention to their basic imagery.

Other stimulating chapters include Calvin Seerveld's "Why We Need to Learn to Cry in Church," and Wells's "The Cry of the Heart and the Cure of the Souls: Interpreting the Psalms for Pastoral Care." Seerveld calls for the singing of versified lament Psalms set to strong, often minor-key tunes, in order to offer the opportunity for lamentation in corporate worship. He reminds us that when churches sing mostly upbeat or happy songs, not only is little room made for the tempted, troubled, and grieving, but temptations and troubles are ignored or suppressed rather than confessed and forgiven. Wells suggests that the Psalms be interpreted phenomenologically and psychologically to aid in pastoral care. He is not calling for an imposition of a particular theory of psychology onto the Psalms. Rather, he suggests that the Psalms themselves be understood in part as righteous expressions of the psyche that may help those who are psychologically distressed to articulate their troubles and thus be aided in the cure of their souls.

Several essays encourage the singing of Psalms in metrical form in order to aid congregational familiarity and memorization. Although the Reformed leaning of the editors and contributors is especially apparent in the versions and tunes suggested, the idea is worth considering. Luther himself versified several Psalms. James F. Lambert's *Luther's Hymns* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1917) is one source for further information on Luther's hymns, including his Psalm hymns. Some pastors, hymn writers, and musicians may bless the church in our day by providing fresh metrical versions of the Psalms and appropriate tunes to match.

Forgotten Songs is accessible to laymen. It would be of interest to laymen and pastors who are interested in the topics highlighted in this review. However, other established works, such as Athanasius's "Letter to Marcellinus," Oswald Bayer's "Toward a Theology of Lament," Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, C. S. Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms*, Luther's "Preface to the Psalter" (AE 35:253-57), and Patrick Reardon's *Christ in the Psalms* address many of these topics in a richer way. There is probably little of value in *Forgotten Songs* for scholars of the Psalms.

Gifford A. Grobien

***The Lord's Supper: Five Views.* Edited by Gordon T. Smith. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008. 159 pages. Softcover. \$18.00.**

If you like roundtable or panel discussions, you'll probably enjoy this volume. If on the other hand you don't care for "he said, she said" banter, you should look elsewhere. Five seminary professors are each given sixteen to nineteen pages to focus on the Lord's Supper. After each essay the other four writers are given two pages to respond. The editor provides a six-page introduction and a four-pages to conclusion. At the outset Smith writes, "a concise summary of distinctive perspectives" is offered here. Lastly, each author is given a page to supply an annotated list of suggested readings. One annotation admits that a typical Pentecostal exposition "reflects the lack of interest among many Pentecostals in sacramentology"(153).

One half-page of Bible references makes up the Scripture index. Three listings are erroneous. Of the fifty-nine references, thirty are supplied by the Lutheran essayist. The Roman Catholic author can claim eleven. The Reformed essayist cites Scripture only in a quotation from Zwingli. The Reformed essay in the main engages in comparative symbolics of Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin. Of the five, only the Roman Catholic and Pentecostal authors employ a number of topical divisions throughout their material. The divisions help in both organization and mental digestion of the content.

From Zondervan one may find similar volumes devoted to Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In those works Lutherans Robert Kolb and David Scaer were invited to contribute. In this IVP volume, John Stephenson speaks for the Lutherans. There are no real surprises in this text (except for the Protestants' dearth of exegesis). The editor reflects: "we have some quite strong differences of opinion" (7). If you're looking for a vigorous defense of the Lutheran position, you'll find it scattered throughout. The Baptist responder, resembling a number of online reviewers, does not find this vigor appealing to his theological palate. The Baptist writer calls Stephenson's essay "bewildering . . . even most Lutherans cannot stomach it" (64). He is joined by the Pentecostal in wondering how another "brand of Lutheranism" might be worth hearing (66).

The specific intent of this work is to have authors approach the Eucharist with three defining criteria in mind: the person/work of Christ; the nature/mission of the church; the Christian life and the work of the Spirit. As a touchstone for this approach, the editor references the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document from the World Council of Churches

(1982), also suggested as prerequisite reading. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Pentecostal participants make intentional reference to the so-called Lima Document. The Roman Catholic writer also draws from a broad array of internal documents on doctrine and ecumenicity.

Stephenson abides by the request to begin with Christology. A high Christology anticipates and challenges his critics right at the outset. He warns against imposing "restraints" on Jesus (41). He exposes one's inability to perceive the Supper as "a real irruption of heaven onto earth" (42, 58). The vertical aspect of the Sacrament thus precedes the horizontal aspect. The former actualizes the latter.

The Baptist responder cannot do anything but fall under Stephenson's predicted censure. His protest reveals the classic inability to accept sacraments. Though he remains puzzled "as to why different understandings of the Supper should divide Christians," a more attentive read of Stephenson would have supplied insight (48, 55-56). The same is true for his concern for "the necessity of faith." Asked and answered by Stephenson (53-55), who calls out the three Protestant descendants of Zwingli united in denying the real presence (112, 138).

In his turn, the Baptist takes seven healthy paragraphs to set up his launch into the Lord's Supper treatment. The bulk of his ink is spilled on the more influential Baptist statements of faith regarding the Lord's Supper. One wonders why a Baptist would be the choice for a communion discussion when among Baptists "little real consensus exists about what it is" (93). Perhaps they consider it to be a secondary non-fundamental doctrine. Whatever the case, "Baptist diversity is wild" (92). To us it can be more helpful that they reveal such things themselves than for us to insist to our Lutheran people what the Baptist situation is. The last fourteen lines of the essay are left to capsule the Baptist understanding of the church.

The Pentecostal includes an interesting subsection that addresses the Supper as a healing event, to wit, "there is healing at the table" (127). One may inquire how this can be real healing when the real presence is not real. Another telling admission: "It is questionable whether Pentecostals have a distinctive ecclesiology at all" (130). And "oddly enough" for Pentecostal theologians, the connection between Holy Spirit and Holy Communion has only been discussed in passing (133). The author indicates that more theological clarification and construction are both needed and underway within his camp.

While acknowledging the cleavage between Lutherans on the eucharistic teaching, Stephenson aligns himself with the “genuine Lutherans” who are faithful to the words of Christ and St. Paul, the Book of Concord, Luther, and the testimony of the ancient church (47). Though there is a personal presence of Christ in the sacramental action, there is, further, his corporeal presence (48). Stephenson’s approach is akin to the Augustana, irenic towards Rome yet galvanizing against “the wide world of Protestantism” (50). Still, he is ecumenically scrupulous when identifying conflicts between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, viz., offering Christ to the Father (53, 33). One may wish to line up for comparison Stephenson’s gentle remarks on transubstantiation (51–52) alongside the Smalcald Articles. For benefits in the Christian life, he draws from the Large Catechism.

When one throws a stick into a pack of dogs, you know which dog got hit by the yelp that you hear. Stephenson is throwing the right stick, and more than one (simply referencing God’s Word in copious amounts has a way of doing that). In this volume, the Lutheran approach is not presented in the vogue ecumenical fashion that holds all confessions to be relative expressions of the truth. Rather the reader observes: the one truth of the one gospel is given for the one church.

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The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany. By Ronald K. Rittgers. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Hardcover. 482 pages. \$74.00.

The Lutheran Reformation had far reaching results not only for doctrinal structures but for every aspect of life in sixteenth-century Germany. Not the least among the shifts initiated by the Reformation was the way that human suffering was experienced and understood. Long-standing patterns of piety, which provided mechanisms for locating meaning in suffering and death were deconstructed with the appearance of the evangelical preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ. Ronald K. Rittgers is a masterful guide to the changes that took place in both pastoral care and lay piety in the face of suffering as the message of the Reformation worked its way into the fabric of ordinary life, creating a “Lutheran confessional culture” (7). Rittgers demonstrates how “in many ways, suffering

was the most important battlefield for the reformers and their movement" (184) as pastors were challenged to strip their congregants of all recourse to magic, reliance on relics and saints, and penitential mechanisms so that their reliance would be in the promises of Christ alone proclaimed in Word and Sacrament.

After a survey of attitudes toward suffering in the late medieval period, especially its penitential character, Rittgers turns to Luther and traces his movement away from this paradigm beginning with his early lectures on the Psalms (1513–1515) to his articulation of the *theologia crucis* in 1518. "This rejection of suffering as penance signaled a crucial break with late medieval penitential theology and much of the Latin Christian tradition" (108). Understanding God's work to be both alien and proper, killing and making alive, Luther comes to understand suffering as neither a work of penance nor a prerequisite for a mystical union with Christ, but as a means that God uses to accomplish the salvation of human beings. God reveals his fatherly heart in Christ crucified, demonstrating that he is not against sinners but for them in grace and mercy, so that in their tribulations and afflictions they might rest on the consolation of God's promises. Luther and the evangelical Christians who followed him "did not believe that they were dealing with sheer power in their tribulations; they thought they were dealing with their Almighty Father" (244).

Rittgers does not stop with Luther but tracks how fundamental themes in the reformer were reflected in the consolatory literature that was produced by those within the "Wittenberg Circle." Medieval *ars moriendi* (art of dying) manuals were replaced by a new genre of evangelically-based handbooks of consolation, exemplified in Johannes Spangenberg (1484–1550) with his works *On the Christian Knight* and *The Booklet of Comfort for the Sick*.

The Reformation of Suffering is carefully researched and documented, drawing on the most recent research in Reformation studies in German and English; it is also eloquently crafted and accessible. Contemporary pastors who console the sick and the dying will find much in this volume which will undergird their ministry. It is highly recommended for Reformation scholars, as well as for pastors who engage in the care of souls in the tradition of Luther.

John T. Pless

Luther's Aesop (*Early Modern Studies*, 8). By Carl P. E. Springer. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2011. xiv + 249 pages. Softcover. \$39.95.

A dog once waded through a stream with a piece of meat in his mouth. In the middle of the stream, he looked down, saw the meat reflected on the surface of the water, and, thinking to add to his meal, opened his mouth to snap up the reflection. The meat fell out of his mouth and was swept downstream, and so the dog lost both meat and reflection.

This fable, one of the fourteen included in Springer's *Luther's Aesop* (124), not only illustrates Luther's great appreciation for Aesop, but also his bearing toward the classical heritage (8, 11, 13, *et passim*). While Luther is best known as an *ad fontes* theological Reformer, that Renaissance impulse moved also his thinking on the classics. Luther's moral to the fable of the dog and the meat is, "Many lose what is certain for what is uncertain" (124, 128). In Luther's mind, and despite his considerable venom toward the misuse of "the Stagirite," the Roman and Greek pagans had supplied the world with a wealth of wisdom pertinent to "the kingdom of the left hand of God" (36). Although this wisdom was sometimes in need of correction, "Luther was no more interested in rejecting out of hand . . . the classical tradition than he was in simply overthrowing the traditional liturgy connected with the Mass" (33).

Luther's Aesop thus uses the manuscript for an edition of Aesop Luther planned at the Coburg in the heady weeks before and during the Diet at Augsburg in 1530 in order to examine Luther's reception of the classical tradition. Chapter 1, "Wittenberg and Athens," offers a corrective to one-dimensional representations of Luther as nothing more than what amounts to a Bible college teacher, and examines his considerable use and critical reception of the Greek and Roman pagans. Springer demonstrates that Luther's interaction with the pagans required more than a passing acquaintance with such authors and, indeed, depends upon him being thoughtfully well-versed. Even, and especially, the mistakes in Luther's citations of the classical pagans demonstrate how profoundly at home Luther was in this source material. Chapter 2, "'Best after the Bible,'" mines the Luther corpus for references to Aesop and his fables. Springer gives a total of eighty-six such known references, quantitative evidence of Luther's judgment that "the moral value of the fables of Aesop is second only to the Bible" (36). "Luther the Editor," chapter 3, investigates Luther as historical and textual critic and appraises his aesthetic sensibilities and consideration of the moral aims of his Aesop. "A Lutheran Fable Book" anchors this volume. For the first time in English, Springer here gives the

full text of Luther's Aesop edition (which Luther himself left incomplete and was, therefore, never able to publish). The chapter includes translations of both Luther's first draft and fair copy, where they exist. Footnotes give Luther's German. Springer also offers both summary and often word-by-word commentary on each fable. The comments are charmingly arbitrary, filled with observations that range from notices on Brer Rabbit and Pinocchio (152), to divergences from Luther's exemplar, Steinhöwel's edition (116–117), notices on the German text (121), references to Ovid and Euripides (131), Luther's theological hermeneutics (142), and much more. The reader who uses chapter 4 as a technical philological and literary commentary will be disappointed and frustrated; the reader seeking an appreciative romp will find great pleasure. The final chapter, "Luther as Aesop," examines Luther's intrigue with the multiple characterizations of the figure of Aesop and the characters and audience of his fables—for example, Luther as "wise fool" (154–161) and the reader as "man between God and the animals" (162–171). Appendixes A–C give useful primary texts cited in the body of the work. The bibliography witnesses to the evident learnedness of Springer's work and provides resources for further study, and a small but efficient index aids the reader in hunting down what cannot be readily found using the structure of the volume.

Luther's Aesop challenges its readers to take a critical, second look at one-dimensional representations of Luther the reformer and to see him instead as a figure with broader interests that extend to the pagan classics. But there is a moral to this story, too. Luther's appreciation for the classics in general, and Aesop in particular, is like that piece of meat in the dog's mouth. Lutherans today can either snap after reflections or enjoy the meat in their mouth. The use of classical authors and classical modes of education in Lutheran schools and homes offers, from the very intellectual bowels of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, a wonderful way to form habits of mind and character. Springer's volume helps us to think about how to do that in the twenty-first century.

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1–3 John. By Bruce Schuchard. *Concordia Commentary Series*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012. 752 pages. Hardcover. \$49.99.

This addition to the Concordia Commentary Series continues its long run as an excellent resource for Lutheran, incarnational, and sacramental commentaries on the Holy Scriptures. Weighing in at 752 pages of

commentary on the three slight epistles of John, Dr. Schuchard has produced an exhaustive treatment of these texts. 1–3 John can easily be overlooked in Lutheran circles, where attention to the Pauline corpus sometimes trumps all other epistles. Schuchard argues for the importance of the Johannine corpus in the early church and in particular the importance of these letters as a reliable historical witness to the theological thought and legacy of the elder and apostle whose name was John.

Among many valuable insights, Schuchard points to the insistence of John's epistles that believers distinguish between orthodoxy and heresy. This need to "wrestle with the issue of who is right and who is wrong" (57) is much more than an academic or philosophical concern for John. Rather, as Schuchard makes clear, it is a concern that gets to the heart of a faith that a "has as its focus the right object—that is Jesus Christ in the flesh." (57). Thus, a concern for true doctrine leads directly to a concern for the Incarnation, that Jesus has truly taken on our flesh. To confess that Christ has come in the flesh is to confess "the substance of the Gospel" and it is to say that God has cleansed us from all our sin (422–423). Schuchard thus does a fine job of tying together John's polemical, anti-Gnostic concerns with his creedal and soteriological ones. Schuchard also follows John's train of thought to "love" as that which characterizes God himself, his Son, and that household of those who are born of God (444).

The commentary spends a large amount of time analyzing the deceptively simple Greek text of John's letters. The grammatical work forces the casual reader to discover what countless students of John have found to be true: his simple style delivers profound, almost endless, theological depth. Schuchard is at home with a variety of commentaries and resources, from recent scholarship, Luther, patristic sources as well as a welcome heavy use of liturgical and particularly hymnic material. He has produced a commentary well worth a deep investment of time and study by anyone interested in the New Testament.

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***A Reader's Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers.* Edited by Daniel B. Wallace
Brittany C. Burnette, and Terri Darby Moore. Grand Rapids: Kregel
Publications, 2013. 250 pages. Hardcover. \$34.99.**

The influence of the Apostolic Fathers for the Christian Church today cannot be overstated. Despite this fact, the average reader may never en-

counter the AF in the original Greek, leaving this work to the more serious scholars. *A Reader's Lexicon of the Apostolic Fathers* makes the AF much more accessible to the average pastor, seminarian, or serious layman by briefly defining all the words used in the AF which appear less than thirty times in the New Testament. This lexicon is organized by book, chapter, and verse so that the reader need not tediously look up every unfamiliar word in a larger lexicon. This is a perfect tool for making the AF more accessible to a wider audience so that the serious scholars are no longer the only ones who get to enjoy the rich wisdom of the AF in their original language.

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Colossians and Philemon, 2nd edition. *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (EGGNT)*. By Murray J. Harris. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010. xxvii + 272 pages. Softcover. \$27.99.

I turned repeatedly to the 1991 first edition of Harris's *Colossians and Philemon* for help with parsing and establishing the original text while writing *Philemon* for the Concordia Commentary Series, and I was not disappointed. The first volume of the *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (EGGNT)* series aims to close the gap between morphological analysis of a given text of the Greek New Testament and the exegetical treatment of the same. Rich exegetical notes comprise the bulk of the volume. Covering the text paragraph by paragraph, the *Guide* provides the following: (1) structural analysis of the Greek text; (2) discussion of each Greek phrase in turn, treating significant textual variants and vocabulary, grammatical analysis (including parsing), disputed points of exegesis, and a terse exegetical summation from such reference works as BDAG, *TDNT*, New Testament grammars, specialized studies, and nine standard commentaries on Colossians and Philemon; (3) a list of exegetical and bibliographical topics arising in the text, as well as suggestions "For Further Study," with a detailed bibliography provided for each topic; (4) rough homiletical outlines that move the preacher from the Greek text toward sermon application; and (5) a more-or-less literal translation of each biblical book, followed by an expanded paraphrase of the same.

At the end of the book stands a very helpful glossary of grammatical and rhetorical terms (251-72) that figure in Colossians and Philemon, so that readers can understand discussions in the exegetical treatment on

such items as The Canon of Apollonius (255), Granville Sharp's Rule (262), or paronomasia (267).

However, this is the *second* edition (2010) of a book that appeared originally in 1991. A side-by-side comparison of the two editions reveals that Harris has updated the original volume substantially, incorporating scholarship that has been published since 1991 and excising older works that to him seemed dated. For unknown reasons, no *EGGNT* volumes have appeared since 1991 (nearly twenty years!), even though Harris's *Colossians and Philemon* was to be only the first of a projected twenty volumes. Thus, publication of the *second* edition of Harris's *Colossians and Philemon* would seem to indicate that the series has not been abandoned, and a Google search reveals that B&H Academic has now published volumes on *James* (in the *EGGNT* series) and 1 Peter.

John G. Nordling

***Paul among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time.* By Sarah Ruden. New York: Image Books, 2010. xix + 214 pages. Softcover. \$25.00.**

The last thing Sarah Ruden expected was for her Greek and Latin to be of any use in understanding Paul. She is a Christian (Quaker), but, like many nowadays, kept Paul "in a pen out back with the louder and more sexist Old Testament prophets" (3). Jesus was her teacher and Paul an embarrassment. Then one day she was at Bible class where a fellow student objected to the stricture against "sorcery" (*pharmakeia*, Gal 5:20) in one of the Pauline catalogues. Ruden tried to be sympathetic ("Ah, well, Paul *was* kind of a brute, wasn't he?") but she could not shake what sorcery meant in a Greco-Roman context: the Roman poet Horace describes a young boy buried up to his neck to starve whilst staring at food set out before him, so that his liver and bone marrow—which now must be imbued with his frenzied hunger—could serve as a love charm for some upper-crust Roman. Likely Paul had never read Horace, but the poem shows the type of reputation "sorcery" possessed among those Romans who read Paul's letters.

And so Ruden proceeds from there. Her goal is to research the origins of "our bad impressions of Paul" (4). After a brief preface ("Who was Paul?"), she sets out the following chapters on Paul and... 1) Carousing (cf. *kōmoi*, Gal 5:21); 2) Pleasure; 3) Homosexuality; 4) Women; 5) the State; 6) Slavery; and 7) Love. Most of the problematic areas are covered in this

purview. Ruden spent seven years at Harvard, earning a Ph.D. in Classics, so she is an outstanding translator of Greek and Roman texts and has even supported herself financially by publishing original poetry and fresh translations of the *Aeneid*, *Homeric Hymns*, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and Petronius' *Satyricon*. She reads Paul with ease—in the original Greek—and expresses his thinking with exceptional clarity and dash. I just love reading her prose! Here is what she says about crucifixion, for example, which should be of interest to a Christian:

Crucifixion was the nadir of torture. It was never careless or whimsical, but was always a punishment, and a punishment for a crime that threatened the system, such as property crime in the case of the two thieves crucified with Jesus, and such as the slave revolt led by Spartacus, which ended in the crucifixion of thousands. This was the punishment for those who, like Jesus, stepped far out of line.

For maximum humiliation, and maximum edification of others, crucifixion was public. Crosses with their victims on them might stand beside roadsides or on hills. The crucified were totally naked, without loincloths. Anyone could point and comment, and Greeks and Romans, with their intense interest in the phallus, no doubt did. Was it too large (a not unknown complaint)? Not dainty and shapely (as they preferred)? Was it—grotesque!—circumcised? (42)

See what I mean? Her writing—all of it in this book—is graphic, informed, and *interesting*. Her superior English reveals her command of Greek and Latin. And this is precisely why *pastors* should master Greek and Hebrew too, and allow these languages to affect their diction in the pulpit. Learning to preach well to modern Americans requires learning Greek (at least) rather well (see my “Teaching Greek at the Seminary,” *Logia* 21.2 [Eastertide 2012], 69–75).

There is not space to explore every problematic area Ruden addresses. At the top of the list is homosexuality. A sanctioned role of slave boys was anal sex with free adults, but Paul's background was Judaism, which regarded all homosexual acts—whether passive (*eromenos* = beloved) or active (*erastes* = lover)—an abomination (Lev 18:22; 20:13). Such “scholarship” as Boswell's does not contribute to peace and clarity among Christians (let alone others), but, rather, furthers conflict. Anyone cognizant of the ancient situation realizes that Platonic homoerotic sublimity is “total hokey” (59) and mainly “fantasy,” with scant reality behind it (62). There were no gay households at all in antiquity, nor was there any “gay culture” in the modern sense. Instead, homosexuality was a great blot on society—though it existed everywhere, and in the public gaze.

Brutish men with large *phalloi* lorded it over the weak, young, and defenseless. No wonder parents guarded their boys doggedly. The pedagogue or “child leader” (cf. Gal 3:24, “the law is our *paidagogos* unto Christ”) guarded the young boy’s chastity, which was important for preserving the family line. There was no tolerance of sodomy, so any young boy who had been violated in this manner was ruined for life. Paul’s “rebellious against parents” (Rom 1:30, *goneusin apeitheis*) reveals what would have been a parent’s worst nightmare: losing control of a son (the future of the family) and seeing him lost to decent society forever. Other words in the catalogue of Romans 1—“wickedness,” “God-haters”—show that homosexuality really represents a contempt for God himself, an insult to divinity, which was roused to avenge the helpless. Hence, homosexuality represented to the ancient mind—pagan as well as Christian—an affront to justice, and the arrogant and power-hungry were going to be sorry.

The concept did not change over the next six hundred years. Paul’s Roman audience knew what justice was, if only through missing it. They would have been surprised to hear that justice applied to homosexuality, of all things. But many of them—slaves, freedmen, the poor, the young—would have understood in the next instant. Christ, the only Son of God, gave his body to save mankind. What greater contrast could there be to the tradition of using a weaker body for selfish pleasure or a power trip? Among Christians, there would have been no quibbling about what to do: no one could have imagined homosexuality’s being different than it was; it would have to go. And tolerance for it did disappear from the church (71).

Far from being a bigot, then, Paul cared deeply for humanity and was the channel for God’s love to sinners in Christ Jesus. This is the type of conclusion Ruden eventually reaches at the end of each chapter dealing with the problematic areas. My biggest critique of the book is that she does not provide precise references for her many extra-biblical quotations, thus making it difficult to use this resource to buttress one’s own research. Ruden, however, did not write the book to produce a piece of academic scholarship, of which there is far too much already; rather, she writes at a popular level for those who have difficulty comprehending Paul in our post-Christian day and age. Another problem: the book is weak in comment upon Paul’s obvious connection to Judaism and the Old Testament (a point which she admits, 189–190). Nevertheless, Jews of Paul’s day lived and thought like Greeks and Romans most of the time, and their Old Testament Scripture mainly came by way of the splendid Greek translation (Septuagint); so when Paul used metaphors for the

athletic games, for example, he was writing of something known everywhere—"even as Pacific islanders today know about [snow] skiing through American media" (190). Ruden would support the notion, then, that Christians have a lot to learn about the biblical, Christ-centered gospel by reading the (pagan) classics. I concur.

The book seems especially well-suited to the laity who, by Ruden's superior writing, are now enabled to come to terms with the Pauline thinking and reasoning which is so at odds with modernism. A pastor and Bible class could profitably spend an hour of Sunday morning study on each one of the seven chapters.

John G. Nordling

Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries. Edited by Rik Van Nieuwenhove, Robert Faesen, SJ, and Helen Rolfson. Classics of Western Spirituality Series. New York: Paulist Press, 2008. 416 pages. Paperback, \$29.95.

"Mystical," tracing to the Greek word *muein*, to close, means simply that which is hidden or unseen. The early use of "mystical" referred to truths of the Christian faith that were hidden, but of which insight could be gained through the meditative study of Scripture and participation in the liturgy. Early monastic mystical theology was of this scriptural and liturgical kind, and was coupled with some degree of separation from secular distractions. Scripture and the liturgy point beyond the physical and sensible facets of creation to the presence and activity of God in all of creation.

The centuries-long development emphasizing inner experience and internal states in mystical theology led to an emphasis on spiritual union with God, including a partaking of divine wisdom or fellowship it is understood broadly as that life process of growing closer to God, it need not be seen as separate from mainstream Christianity. Nevertheless, through the late Middle Ages, and certainly by the 17th century, a divide had opened between mainstream Christianity and this emphasis on inner experience and union. Such an emphasis suggests a moving beyond the Scripture and the liturgy to focus on the direct encounter with the divine presence. The term "mysticism" comes from the recognition of this divide.

One aspect of mysticism that is perennially criticized is the inability to verify a person's mystical experience. Because mysticism includes the stripping away of natural and sensory experience, there is no empirical

confirmation for those outside of the experience. Verification is thus limited to the change in the mystic's life, such as in his wisdom or virtue.

Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries is a collection of writings of Flemish mystics of the late Middle Ages. Their mystical themes heavily emphasized the desire for union with God and the resting in his presence, a return to one's "true being, which has been timelessly in the triune God from all eternity," and that the love of God that draws the mystic is infinite and can never be "mastered." Flemish mystics emphasized such a strong union with God that they were sometimes criticized for eliminating any distinction between the mystic and God. They were also anti-quietist, promoting an active mystical life of prayer, contemplation, and devotional exercises.

This volume is oriented toward specialists, and there is little of the medieval mystical tradition that appears to resonate with evangelical theology. Martin Luther, however, did cultivate an interest in mystical theology early in his career (as seen, for example in his early Psalms lectures), and for the discerning reader, some sections may stimulate fruitful reflection. For example, the opening selection, "The Kiss of Mouth," presents a path of ascent to union with God through an allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs. The steps in the path are the "loving gaze," "loving conversing," friendly action, and finally the "kiss of mouth" (3). The kiss represents the union of the soul with God, a union that is deepened through active love, the form of God. Thus the substances of the soul and of God remain distinct, but their form becomes one, as the soul acts in love. Loving acts open the soul to greater love and acts of love (30–31). One could compare and contrast this to Luther's understanding of union with Christ through faith, which he refers to in his *Lectures on Galatians* (i.e., AE 26:133, 168).

There are two texts dedicated to the meditation of the suffering of Christ: "A Ladder of Eight Rungs" and "The Nine Little Flowers of the Passion." The former describes the eight rungs a person takes in order to ascend into the sufferings of Christ. Each rung is a meditation on Christ's sufferings that leads eventually to union with God, the final rung. This notion of union as the culmination of an extended exercise in ascending meditation contrasts with an understanding of union accomplished by incarnation, crucifixion, and Christ's continuous descent in the means of grace. Luther's theology of the cross does not encourage meditation on the suffering of Christ so much as it calls the Christian to see God at work in one's experiences of suffering. Perhaps these themes are complementary:

meditation on Christ's sufferings is a way of interpreting and understanding one's worldly suffering.

The centerpiece of the collection is the third part of *The Evangelical Pearl*, which takes up 117 pages of the book. This mystical treatise elaborates the devotion and contemplation that leads to the highest union with God, the "superessential life of contemplation" (216). Sections include descriptions of the soul's conversation with God, ascending the ladder through Christ and his passion to union, the prayers and daily exercises of the devotee, and how God imparts himself to the mystic. Underlying the text is a promotion of the active mystical life, that is, a soul that actively calls out to God and directs one's thoughts toward God and his commandments (316). *The Evangelical Pearl* drew from notable Flemish mystic Jan van Ruusbroec, as well as from German mystics Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler. It was translated into Latin, French, and German, solidifying the lasting legacy of Flemish mysticism as the mystical school of *devotio moderna* rose in influence.

Late Medieval Mysticism is recommended for specialists and for those with an interest in Flemish mysticism. *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* was consulted in preparing this review, and readers are encouraged to consult essays and entries there for an introduction to Christian medieval mysticism. Bernard McGinn's works also are excellent resources, while Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* is a classic primary text. For Luther's relationship to the mystics, see Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics* (Augsburg, 1976).

Gifford A. Grobien

***Onesimus Our Brother: Reading Religion, Race, and Culture in Philemon.* Edited by Matthew V. Johnson, James A. Noel, and Demetrius K. Williams. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012. 176 pages. Hardcover. \$39.00.**

Onesimus Our Brother is comprised of three editors, seven chapters, an introduction, conclusion, endnotes, and one page author index (175) at the end. Each editor authors a chapter in his own right; four other contributors round out the volume. The best chapter in my opinion is that by Mitzi Smith (47–58), but here she constantly alludes to one of her earlier pieces ("Roman Slavery in Antiquity," in *Holy Bible: African American Jubilee Edition* [New York: American Bible Society, 1999], 156–185) and so never really breaks new ground in the book under investigation. Nor does she ever opine whether Onesimus actually ran away from his master or was

manumitted—matters the other contributors dispute given their largely ahistorical approach.

What does unite the book thematically is the contributors' contention that Onesimus, the third member of the Paul-Philemon-Onesimus triad, should be given a "voice." He has been silent all these years because he was "only" a slave, and everyone knows that slaves had "no power, no agency" (1). Naturally, the experience of African slaves in the antebellum American South is key to interpret all Scripture, let alone this shortest of Paul's letters. Postmodernism allows readers to appreciate biblical texts apart from "Eurocentric interpretive limitations and interests," so that now "nonwhite, nonmale, nonheterosexual" and "disordered" interpretations are welcome (4). "White male" interpretations are most *unwelcome*, for oppressors have used the texts to exploit marginalized persons for centuries. The contributors go out of their way, therefore, to avoid historical-critical methodology (historical objectivity is a myth of the enfranchised to dominate others, and 2) use "newer" approaches that avoid "racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and so on" (4).

My "quite erudite and learned" commentary on Philemon (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004) is cited once (43) by Williams for presenting the historical-critical paradigm. There I maintained that Christians ought not reinterpret ancient evidence to suit certain mentalities of today (an "American" view, e.g.), but rather allow the New Testament and ancient texts to speak for themselves regarding any topic, including slavery. That is to say, there is a *theology* connected to biblical slavery (the institution simply cannot be dismissed as so much "sin," as several contributors assume), but the one true faith virtually requires Christians to see themselves *as slaves* "in service" to God the Father (e.g., Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30) and to one's fellow man in the context of daily vocation (Gal 5:13; Eph 6:7; Col 3:24; cf. Nordling, *Philemon*, 116–128, 137–139). In the opinion of Williams, however, my "plain-sense hermeneutic" "mutes" the voices of those who have actually experienced slavery (44). Well perhaps, given the African-American hermeneutic. Nevertheless, moderns should understand that in the ancient world more white-skinned persons were enslaved to master classes than black Africans (see Nordling, *Philemon*, 70), and so-called "racial prejudice" existed along completely different lines than that pervasively assumed today. Civilized persons in antiquity feared barbarian *whites*, not blacks.

The real failure of this book, however, is in its overlooking the redemptive theology of Philemon centered in verses 18–19a: "and if he

[Onesimus] wronged you in any way or owes you anything, credit this to my account. I Paul write with my own hand: 'I shall repay it'" (on which see Nordling, *Philemon*, xvi, 272–75, 325–326). While occasionally mentioning "the Christ event" or Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, the contributors virtually redefine the gospel as liberation (e.g., 4, 35, 38) or equality (88, 99, 118)—not that place where Paul, in the stead of Christ, paid all Onesimus's debts, just as Christ our Lord paid for the sins of all humanity on the cross. Luther's Christological insights pave the way for the latter approach:

What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does also for Onesimus with Philemon. For Christ emptied himself of his rights [Phil. 2:7] and overcame the Father with love and humility, so that the Father had to put away his wrath and rights, and receive us into favor for the sake of Christ, who so earnestly advocates our cause and so heartily takes our part. For we are all his Onesimus's if we believe (AE 35:390).

John G. Nordling

Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament. Edited by Herbert Donner, Rudolf Meyer, Udo Rüterswörden and Johannes Renz. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 2013. 1672 pages. Hardcover. \$109.00.

In September 2013, after nearly thirty years of preparation, the 18th edition of Wilhelm Gesenius's *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* was finally printed. How significant this is, is not adequately depicted with the reference to three decades of preparation. The 17th edition, which the publication replaces, was originally published in 1915, and has been constantly reprinted since then. It was the standard German-language Old Testament lexicon for ninety-eight years. This may seem of little consequence to the English-speaking Hebrew student or scholar, but it is not. The work many of us have on our shelves, *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, is even older, published in 1906. And further: the 1906 BDB, though structured differently than Gesenius and thus more than simply a translation, is nevertheless based on the scholarship documented in the 11th (1890), 12th (1895), and 13th (1899) editions of the German. The completed volumes of what would be BDB were themselves published over a period of seventeen years, from 1891 to 1906. Assuming continued research in the study of Old Testament Hebrew and Aramaic, the need for the 18th edition of Gesenius should be quite clear.

The chief editor, Prof. Dr. Herbert Donner (Kiel, Germany), notes six principles of the Gesenius lexicon that are preserved in the 18th edition: 1) The inclusion of all the forms of a word that appear in the Hebrew Old Testament (as the text is printed in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*); 2) the inclusion of the context in which words appear, so that Hebrew constructions of multiple words are made clear; 3) reservation in the discussion of historic and stylistic questions; 4) some inclusion of or reference to text-critical questions; 5) the inclusion of all proper names, both of persons and of locations; and 6) the taking into account of information available on Near-Eastern history. Finally, it is of note that the editors refrained almost entirely from including words from outside of the Old Testament in the lexicon.

Gesenius 18 is structured differently than BDB. The words are not grouped alphabetically according to their root word, but rather arranged strictly alphabetically. In comparison with BDB or Gesenius 17, the new volume is more comfortable to use, as obvious progress in book publishing shows itself over a near one-hundred year gap. The different sections within an individual entry are much easier to identify, and the text is generally easier to scan searching for forms, something the user tends to do, since Gesenius lists most (now: all) forms of a word that appear in the Old Testament.

Obviously, Gesenius will be of limited use for the English speaker. One can still scan for Hebrew forms to see, for example, to which stem a particular appearance of a verb belongs. The focused scholar is also presented with a wealth of lexicographic and etymological information which represents, if not the most recent research, nevertheless a far more up-to-date position than in any other one-volume lexicon. For these reasons, it seems a necessary purchase for every institutional theological library. But given the hefty price, it will probably rise to the top of few pastors' wish lists.

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