Book Reviews

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Joel Edward Goza, *America's Unholy Ghosts: The Racist Roots of Our Faith and Politics* (Cascade Books, 2019), 232 pages, $22.40.

There are several specific things that the church can do. First, it should try to get to the ideational roots of race hate." This suggestion from Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Stride Toward Freedom* begins Joel Goza's *America's Unholy Ghosts* and serves as the organizing principle of Goza's work. Writing as a white pastor in Houston's nearly all-black Fifth Ward, Goza argues that the post-civil rights era narrative of racial evolutionary progress remains hollow; the roots of the racism-weed have never been pulled from American society or from the white church and have choked, or at least marred, attempts to grow toward racial equity. With this in mind, Goza seeks to trace the roots of the American system of racism through a close reading of three key philosophers: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith. Together these philosophers' ideas form much of America's racist root system, including three critical political lies and

three crucial religious lies that America and its church have bought into.

First, Thomas Hobbes *imagined* a racist world order built on rational thought. Out of the fear of war and poverty, Hobbes posited the goodness of rational, as opposed to religious, totalitarian power that protects its justifiably self-interested citizens. This led to the first political lie—that the purpose of government is not achieving the common good but protecting individuals' self-interest—as well as the first religious lie—that Christians can be in right relationship with God without being in right relationship with the poor. For Hobbes, religion consisted solely of knowledge of God and obedience to rulers.

While Hobbes's hope for a totalitarian power proved too crude for European elites, John Locke took many of his ideas for society and *institutionalized* an aristocratic world order. This involved selling Hobbes's belief that economics is necessarily a moral-free math and is unrelated to fostering equity. Locke also proposed the second religious lie: religion is only about saving souls and should in no way affect societal arrangements.

Finally, Adam Smith *ingrained* hard-hearted ideologies into modern society. Due to his Stoic philosophical commitments, Smith told the third political lie—justice is only contractual and retributive—and the third religious lie—indifference to injustice is no threat to one's relationship with God.

After covering how these ideas have impacted the United States and its churches, Goza concludes with lessons learned from the Prophetic Black Church on how to live in the face of racist systems, including the necessity for right Christian living of intimacy with the poor and the oppressed, the importance of treating every person with dignity as created in the image of God, and the call to persevere in self-sacrifice and to reject self-interest.

America's Unholy Ghosts has only two minor weaknesses. It occasionally makes assumptions about recent events and political figures that not every reader will agree with, and it does not seriously engage theologians or philosophers outside of King and the book's "unholy trinity" of philosophers, though the latter issue is more a gap than a weakness.

But the book's imperfections are miniscule in comparison to its strengths. *America's Unholy Ghosts* is unique; it consists of a close reading of three vitally important philosophers and an intimate look at contemporary racial injustice and how these philosophers helped form it. It is powerful; its explanatory scope in regard to our recent and current racial reality is at times staggering. It is beautiful; it is organized elegantly,

written with passion and wit, containing delightful turns of phrase, and it makes the ideas of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political philosophers engaging and relevant. Finally, it is wise; Goza identifies hidden problems and gleans from the best of the Prophetic Black Church tradition in response.

America's Unholy Ghosts is a book that is foundationally important for those seeking racial righteousness. In it, Goza compellingly exposes the roots of the American racist system and, more importantly, is able to point his readers in the right direction in response, namely, self-sacrificial intimacy and solidarity with the racially oppressed. The ideas here are original, the insights fresh, and the truths prophetic.

ANTHONY EMERSON

Ellen F. Davis with Austin McIver Dennis, *Preaching the Luminous Word: Biblical Sermons and Select Homiletical Essays* (Eerdmans, 2016), 332 pages, $33.

Ellen Davis is the Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School. She has been writing about preaching for some time, asking us to read great sermons of the past from Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne, and George Herbert. In this collection of her own sermons and essays we find not only another exemplar for preaching but biblical theology that nurtures. It is spiritual reading that speaks to the depths of our souls.

It is also a memoir of Davis's growth as a preacher. Five homiletical essays trace that growth, or six if you count her general introduction, "On Not Worrying about Sermon Illustrations." There Davis marks two encounters in 1983 that changed her approach to preaching. First, she found that Donne's sermons modeled biblical preaching with a focus on one text, references throughout the canon, and spare use of brief illustrations. "Here was a style of preaching that was theologically probing, emotionally engaged, eloquent, even entertaining—and entirely focused on the Bible" (p. xxii). Second, a comment Krister Stendahl made at lunch following his Yale Beecher Lectures confirmed what she was learning from Donne: "Be careful about using an example that is too good, too 'unforgettable.' If your preaching is doing what it should do, then people probably won't remember what you said, and it doesn't matter. Your goal should be that the next time they turn to that part of the Bible, *it* will say a little more to them" (p. xxiii).

This idea carries through the rest of Davis's essays, especially the first, "Witnessing to God in the Midst of Life." A comment from a student in an Old Testament survey course clarified the issue: the preachers she had heard set out an ideal from the New Testament and urged listeners to live into it. Given the earthy nature of the Old Testament, how could one do the same there? Davis came to see both Old and New Testaments as more realistic than idealistic and decided that she would preach from the lives of people who walked with God.

In a series of Davis's sermons that follow, Moses "sees" a burning bush and the suffering of the Hebrew people as God sees them, a worthy model. Yet he forfeits the royal palace when he kills the Egyptian and is not allowed to enter the promised land as Israel's leader—hardly an ideal story. Likewise, Moses is a model of humility when he returns from the mountain with shining face yet sits with the people to teach them Torah. He loses that humility when he asks, "Shall we bring forth water" (not "the Lord") and pays the price, but he does not stop leading or holding fast to God. Therefore, Davis concludes, humility is God-awareness, so Moses is rightly called the humblest of persons, second only to Jesus.

"Holy Preaching: Ethical Interpretation and the Practical Imagination" takes its cue from George Herbert's advice that country preachers should "stop trying to impress their people and move them to repentance and an all-involving commitment to the Christian life" (p. 89). Holiness requires imagination, new ways of thinking that enable one to read the text and live into what one finds there, because the two are intimately related. Davis's sermons on Psalms offer fear of the Lord as solace for the fears and heartbreaks we will encounter.

Two more essays explore genres by way of representative books. Biblical wisdom guides our explosion of knowledge; the Book of Proverbs "forces us to look at how our relationship with God is expressed through myriad daily social practices, including economic practices" (p. 152). The whole of Isaiah grounds vocation in a vision of God's holiness; lectionaries and sermons fall short when they celebrate "God with us" (Emmanuel) without remembering God's justice and righteousness. So, in a sermon celebrating a friend's ordination, she tells him to keep his own vision clear so he can lead the church in seeing God.

Davis's final essay on preaching New Testament texts is titled "Preaching in Witness to the Triune God." The central themes that run through the two Testaments should be sounded regularly, so while Davis asks for preaching from the "first 75 percent of the Bible" (p. 245), she advises

preachers to dive in anywhere and direct listeners' attention to the whole. An Easter sermon reflects on the resurrected Jesus's request for something to eat, remembering that "Whenever Jesus eats, revelation happens." Just ask Levi the tax collector and Simon the Pharisee (p. 272). But there is more here: the Lord who need not ask Israel for the flesh of bulls or blood of goats (Psalm 50:7–13) asks for food (Luke 24:41). He stands there, human and hungry, once again identified with those who go without.

The sermons were collected and introduced by a preaching pastor, Austin McIver Dennis. In an afterword, Dennis quotes a Duke student who had just heard Davis preach: "She never wastes a word" (p. 317). True as it is, readers could take her erudition, word craft, and plain common sense as the sources of her preaching power. As the book proves, Davis knows better.

PAUL KOPTAK

Mae Elise Cannon, ed., *A Land Full of God: Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land* (Cascade Books, 2017), 295 pages, $30.

For evangelicals who are unsure how a biblically informed Christian should approach the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, *A Land Full of God: Christian Perspectives on the Holy Land* offers a nondogmatic way to engage with multiple perspectives. This most recent book edited by Mae Elise Cannon, an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church and executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace, is a compendium of personal reflections on the conflict in the Holy Land. The volume features notable evangelical voices, including Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, Dale Hanson Bourke, and Lynne Hybels, as well as a few prominent Catholic and mainline Protestant leaders such as Pope Francis and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Each of the book's seven sections presents a diverse collection of essays organized around a distinct theme relating to Christian peacebuilding in the Holy Land. Sections one through four offer a compelling argument for why Christians should care about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, addressing pressing theological questions about the relationship between the church and the Jewish people, the historical role of Christian Zionism, and a political lens for understanding the conflict. The last three sections examine what a Christian vision of peace should look like, how Christians should build relationships with people who hold different perspectives, and how Christians can become advocates for Israelis and

Palestinians in the United States.

This is a much-needed book for an increasingly polarized age. Rather than simply adding one more beginner's guide to the history, politics, and human rights issues of the conflict, this book offers the reflections of those whose lives have been deeply moved by the human suffering they have witnessed in the Holy Land. These essays provide glimpses into the hearts and minds of authors with vastly different approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing space for conflicting views without appearing in any way disjointed. The editor's perspective is quite apparent throughout without being overbearing. The entire project is premised on the belief that it is possible for Christians to be pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and ultimately pro-peace.

A Land Full of God is a valuable resource for Christians who feel overwhelmed by the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land remains as popular today as it was centuries ago, and often Christians return home with a conflicting mix of emotions. This is just the book needed to help returning pilgrims grapple with what they have experienced and come to terms with what they can do to work for peace in the Holy Land.

ANDREW WICKERSHAM

Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand, eds., *Becoming a Pastor Theologian: New Possibilities for Church Leadership* (IVP Academic, 2016), 217 pages, $25.

Editors Todd Wilson and Gerald Hiestand are cofounders of the Center for Pastor Theologians (CPT), the goal of which is "to resurrect [the] ancient vision of the pastor as a theologian—not an end in itself, but for the renewal of theology and thus the renewal of the church in its ministry and mission to the Word" (p. 2). Their edited volume *Becoming a Pastor Theologian* offers papers from the first annual CPT conference, held in 2015, and follows their thought-provoking book *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision* (Zondervan, 2015). Their earlier text traced the bifurcation of academic theology from the life of the church, a development they named in this volume "a tragic division of labor that continues to bedevil the Christian ministry and the church" (p. 2). If their first volume argued persuasively that the pastor's identity as theologian must be reclaimed for the health of both church and academy, this second volume attempts to embody that vision.

Becoming a Pastor Theologian consists of a brief but helpful introduction, followed by fifteen essays organized into three sections: (1) The Identities of the Pastor Theologian, (2) The Pastor Theologian in Historical Perspective, and (3) The Pastor Theologian and the Bible.

The first section is outstanding. Several essays respond to critiques of Wilson and Hiestand's vision that the work of the theologian or the work of the pastor alone is too demanding to make expectations of effective pairing realistic. Hiestand, for example, in his own contribution to this section, "The Pastor Theologian as Ecclesial Theologian," notes that such critiques would be valid if pastor theologians did theology as the critiques envision it—yet this simply assumes the problematic theological framework that the CPT seeks to correct! Theology should not be synonymous with academia; pastors are uniquely positioned to make robust, ecclesially directed contributions to theology.

Peter Leithart's essay, "The Pastor Theologian as Biblical Theologian: From the Church for the Church," is excellent. Leithart describes theological work as an extension of the pastoral vocation, pursued within the worshiping community. His comments are particularly apropos for those who preach: "Ecclesial biblical theology must orient its hermeneutics toward homiletics" (p. 16), and "the pastor theologian's most important theological publication is the sermon delivered to the local congregation" (p. 19).

I did not find the second section on historical perspective, to be particularly helpful. This group of essays reads like biographical sketches from admirers rather than fleshing out how historical figures' contributions to ecclesial theology could inform contemporary pastor theologians.

The third and final section was fairly eclectic. One notable essay was Laurie L. Norris's, "The Female Ecclesial Theologian." Norris argues for the importance of women's voices in this discussion. Notably this essay was the only contribution by a woman in the entire volume. Given the repeated emphasis on the theological contributions pastors are uniquely positioned to make, it was sadly ironic that this "unique position" was so homogenous. The vision of the Center for Pastor Theologians and the ecclesial theology it seeks to produce would be better served by including more diverse voices.

Despite these flaws, this book is a helpful addition to the case for pastor theologians. The essays by Hiestand and Leithart alone make it worthwhile reading. Overall I recommend the entire volume as a helpful contribution to the compelling vision of what a pastor theologian

is and to inspire the reader to reclaim and advance this needed vision. Unfortunately the path being cleared has been neglected during modernity with the thick, untended weeds of a theologically anemic pastorate and a pastorally anemic academy. Although the term "pastor theologian" may seem an oxymoron to many, the contributors of this volume show the term should in fact be seen as redundant.

JESSE SLIMAK