

## Book Reviews

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**Mae Elise Cannon, *Beyond Hashtag Activism: Comprehensive Justice in a Complicated Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 304 pages, \$22**

What is comprehensive justice? How should the Church respond to the needs of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized? Have Christians participated adequately in social justice issues? In this monograph, Mae Elise Cannon answers these questions by drawing our attention to the limits of the internet and social media, particularly hashtags, in effecting change. Her pursuit of comprehensive methodologies for social justice lead her to examine various systems of oppression, demonstrating how issues such as poverty, race, and gender intersect within an unjust system. More important, such comprehensive methodologies point Cannon to a vision of “holistic prophetic advocacy,” a form of advocacy that includes the “social, legal, spiritual, political, and economic” (2-3). Through such prophetic advocacy, Cannon believes that we are transformed as individuals and as a community into God’s image of compassion and justice,

which then leads to systemic transformation.

Cannon's work engages a wide spectrum of issues plaguing the American church, particularly evangelical communities, and places them in conversation with one another to highlight how we can effectively bring about change for the oppressed. This book is divided into five parts. In part one, Cannon first lays the biblical foundation for social justice: "Comprehensive biblical justice is the scriptural mandate to manifest the kingdom of God on earth by making God's blessings available to all humankind" (9-10). With this scriptural foundation, Cannon grounds our perspective not in politics, but in faith, and calls us to unity through living out Christ's message. She then focuses on the intersection of politics and faith, asking how evangelical politics can shift to address injustice. For example, Cannon argues that evangelical politics must abandon "fear and pursuit of power," and examine the role of politics in relation to various forms of oppression, including "theological imperialism, genocide of indigenous communities, [and] the commodification of black bodies in the hundreds of years of slavery" (40). Part two examines how poverty is manifested both domestically and globally. Part three focuses on race in the United States and abroad. Cannon dedicates the first two chapters to racism in the US, while the latter two address issues of immigration and ethnic violence around the world in countries such as Myanmar, Syria, and Yemen. Part four addresses gender oppression and women's fight for freedom. Finally, part five examines issues that have long divided the church, including marriage and sexuality and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The last chapter of the book examines religious freedom in the US and around the world. In each of these chapters, Cannon stays true to the "holistic prophetic advocacy" goal she introduces at the start by encouraging churches and Christians to become agents of positive change by educating themselves on these matters, volunteering, and donating.

Cannon does not stop there. She directs the reader to various organizations that work for social justice, such as World Vision, Compassion International, GRACE, CCIR, and others. She leaves no room for the Christian reader to be passive or disengaged. Cannon's call for activism beyond social media hashtags is thought-provoking and compelling. At a time when Christians are divided and many are content with passive engagement with social justice issues, Cannon skillfully presents Christians with an alternative approach, one that is grounded in the gospel's commandment to participate in God's kingdom on earth by fighting to end oppression. Cannon does not simply preach this message but prac-

tices her recommended approach in her work at Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP).

While the book mentions systemic transformation, further analysis on what such transformation looks like in each context would have given the reader a greater visual of how one's individual actions can lead to important changes. Still, *Beyond Hashtag Activism* remains a noteworthy contribution to the study of activism and social justice in the US and around the world. Each chapter concludes with a set of questions meant to provoke further discussion. As such, this book should be read by churches, pastors, and individuals who are interested in learning more about social justice issues and how to be a source of peace and justice in the world. While "the world [is not] the way God intended for it to be" (9), Cannon encourages us that by working for justice we become a source of positive change in the world. Let us, then, heed Cannon's call and work to be churches and Christians who love their neighbors, maintain hope, and "trust in the good news that God is just, and one day he will come again" (258).

TALA RAHEB

**Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), 368 pages, \$35**

In *The Beatitudes through the Ages*, Covenant scholar Rebekah Eklund offers a reception history of the Beatitudes from Matthew and Luke's gospels (Mt 5:3–12; Lk 6:20–26). Why read a reception history? There are a few reasons, but perhaps most poignantly, a reception history explores what a text does; its impact on individuals, communities, and societies; and how they, in turn, impact one another. In other words, a reception history aligns with the way Covenanters read Scripture: we read it to be transformed, and thereby to become better equipped in reading it again (and again) so as to hear the call of the living God upon our lives anew.

In chapters one and two, Eklund considers some orienting questions on the Beatitudes: Who are they for? What is the role of grace? Are the Beatitudes impossible ideals, or are they actions achievable through the power of the Holy Spirit? Her reception history of the Beatitudes is laid out in chapters three to ten. Eklund begins each chapter with a compelling story about the way faithful women and men have embodied

specific Beatitudes across history and geographical places. Regarding the Beatitudes' interpreters, Eklund introduces us to a delightfully wide array of readers. Pietists such as P.P. Waldenström appear alongside the likes of Cappadocian theologian Gregory of Nyssa, medieval figure Dhouda of Septimania, and contemporary Jesuit biblical scholar Yiu Sing Lúcas Chan.

Giving the book additional theological depth, Eklund stakes out a distinct angle to each Beatitude. A few teasers: In chapter five, she recovers a largely lost understanding of meekness (Matt. 5:5). Contrary to its association with passivity and unassertiveness, for ancient readers meekness meant a disciplined sense of discernment, knowing how (and when) to resist evil and yield to the good. In chapter six, which discusses the blessing on hungering for justice (Matt. 5:6) and those who are simply hungry (Luke 6:21), Eklund leads us to ask: What is the church's responsibility when many Christians possess abundant wealth while the gap between rich and poor continues to grow? In chapter eight, Eklund demonstrates how different renderings of purity of heart (Matt. 5:8)—cleansing of sin, single-minded devotion, and integrity—coalesce to engender a way of pursuing holiness less prone to hypocrisy and self-justifying spirituality. Eklund also offers important cautionary observations on how this Beatitude has been historically interpreted, especially in relation to matters of chastity and sexual purity, in a way that places a disproportionate amount of responsibility on women—and, lamentably, still does.

One of the most instructive features of this book lies in the way Eklund utilizes a breadth of voices to help us see the depth of Scripture's meaning and applicability more clearly. To be sure, as Eklund notes, important factors guide us and sometimes serve as a check in our pursuit of the meaning and application of Scripture, such as historical context, authorial intent, and Augustine's famous question: Does this interpretation further the love of God and neighbor? At the same time, there's also promise in the multiplicity of meanings in Scripture itself. For as many premodern readers of Scripture knew full well, multiplicity of meanings, and even the potential tensions that arise between them, are "generative rather than troublesome, a signal of the inexhaustible riches of Scripture and its ability to speak anew into new situations" (10).

For pastors, teachers, and really, all interested readers of Scripture, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* is quite simply a gift. In it we find a treasury of perspectives and dialogue partners on the meaning and application of the Beatitudes that can help us to better understand and respond to

the challenging, but ultimately life-giving, invitation of the Beatitudes today. Put differently, I commend this book because it reminds us of a simple but profound point: this reception history is not over. In engaging with past readers of the Beatitudes, we, too, hear Christ's words anew and must ask: How shall we, in our time and place, receive the living words of Jesus and faithfully put them into practice?

SCOTT P. RICE

**Jonathan Teram, *Illuminating Counsel: How the Least Holy Books of the Hebrew Bible Explore Life's Most Important Issues* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 329 pages, \$39**

But you're actually approaching the book as though it offers reliable theological conclusions!" Those were the words once spoken to me in response to a project on the book of Psalms. Whether because of its poetic, petitionary, or variably imprecatory nature, the Hebrew Bible's beloved repository of prayer is sometimes looked at with side-eye glares, betraying a suspicion of the doctrinal applicability of the material therein. Couple that with the fact that the *Ketuvim*<sup>1</sup> contains the three most canonically contested books of the Hebrew Bible (Esther, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes) and you have before you a collection dubbed the "least holy books."

Jonathan Teram presents a compelling case against such an accusation. The two main purposes of his book are to display (1) that the books of the *Ketuvim* deal with life's most critical concerns and (2) that these books must be read together in order to dig fully into their life-changing lessons. After a brief introduction on the nature of the collection and Hebrew poetry, Teram sets out to explore each individual book and to gradually weave a web evidencing the literary brilliance of their organization.

He finds several key themes throughout his analysis, suffering being the most prominent. As he progresses in his survey, he highlights the painful adversity embedded within the biblical pages, and the response

<sup>1</sup> The *Ketuvim* is one section of the Tanakh, the Jewish ordering of the books of the Hebrew Bible. The *Ketuvim* contains the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and the combined book of 1st and 2nd Chronicles.

to such pain on the part of the biblical figures. He picks up on other, secondary themes as well, noting the feminine nature of many of the books. Hence, the *Ketuvim* contains a personification of Jerusalem as a woman (Lamentations) and the only book in the Hebrew Bible that centers around two main female characters (Ruth).

Teram commends the logical order and chronological nature of the collation of the Hebrew Bible, and contends that necessary ideas are birthed when observing the essence of the thematic organization of the *Tanakh*. He picks up on two recurring ways in which the books of the *Ketuvim* are inextricably linked. First, subversion occurs between the key themes of the books, such that the retribution principle, for instance, infused within Proverbs is softened by the inquisition of Job. Second, the recurring motif of the “court Jew” allows for the juxtaposition of key figures and the varying ways they respond to their circumstances. Hence, the books of the *Ketuvim* offer instruction in wisdom; life lived out in discernment and nuance.

Teram’s work endeavors to fill a gap in the current literature. Not only are monographs on the *Ketuvim* in short supply, but his approach is particularly accessible, leaving space for all to learn from the “illuminating counsel” of this collection. He states at the outset that he wants the pages he has set forth to be available to the Jew, Christian, and the invested non-religious reader alike. He prudently defines and describes what a less careful writer might take for granted. Furthermore, Teram avoids getting distracted by long debates regarding the date and authorship of the various books, and only incorporates the more academic discussions of Hebrew translation and historical background when it is most pertinent to the exploration of the literature.

While finding suffering as a key theme in every book may seem overdrawn from a literary standpoint, Teram’s emphasis on this theme reveals a keen pastoral awareness. The mere mention of abuse in Song of Songs is not enough to highlight suffering as a central concern of the book, but Teram understands the impact that even those few words can hold for anyone who has been through such trauma. Thus, wisdom is offered through the text. By expanding the definition of suffering, such as to include an existential crisis, he reveals that various forms of anguish are important throughout many of the books.

Teram’s book is important for the pastor, not only for the unique insight to be gained on the text, but also for the particularly pastoral bent to the work. Very few seminaries require a whole class on the *Ketuvim*.

Much is offered here for the eager pastor-theologian who seeks to understand the specifically Jewish underpinnings of the Hebrew Bible. This, I believe, is both a necessary and worthwhile endeavor. However, even more so, Teram presents this information in an already “pastorally packaged” manner, providing insight that is relatable to real-life application and the discipleship process. As a final note, the importance he places on the inter-interpretive nature of the books offers a ready warning against proof-texting, one which I hope will stay with me in my own pursuit of allowing the biblical text to shape my thinking first and foremost, rather than vice versa.

ANNA BETH VOLLEMA