

Book Reviews

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Brian Brock and John Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Eerdmans, 2012), 564 pages, \$45.

Recent decades have seen notable theological engagement with disability. Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier offer two well-known examples. Absent has been a “serious or systematic effort to ask what Christians of other ages might bring to this inquiry” (p. 4). This reader represents the editors’ deliberate attempt to fill this gap. The readings compiled within this volume span Christian history, from the patristic era (e.g., Cappadocians), through the Middle Ages (e.g., Julian of Norwich) and Reformation (e.g., Luther and Calvin), to the present (e.g., Hauerwas).

Each historical text is prefaced with an introductory essay that seeks to contextualize the author's thought in order to prevent anachronistic evaluations. To this end, the editors asked contributors to undertake a "searching investigation of the sources to discover the conditions *they* [the historical authors] considered disabling" (p. 10, emphasis original). Seeking to enter the worldview of historical thinkers, each contributor addresses the following questions: What does each thinker directly say about disabling conditions? What is problematic about their accounts? What can we learn from such accounts? (p. 11). These introductory essays vary in quality, but most are quite helpful in contextualizing what might otherwise be strange to the contemporary reader.

One theme underlying this broad range of historical inquiry is the tension between challenging cultural assumptions about disability while also remaining bound to them. The patristic thinkers, for example, objected strongly to the common practice of exposing infants with disability. They advocated for more humane treatment of those with disabilities, as being equally divine image bearers (pp. 24–64). At the same time they could be paternalistic toward the disabled, clearly viewing them as objects of ministry rather than agents of ministry. This tension is highlighted throughout the writings and invites us to consider what assumptions limit our own ability to transcend contemporary views on disability.

This volume also suggests new avenues for Christian engagement with disability. One provocative example is Jana Bennett's contribution, "Women, Disabled." Bennett mines feminist theology for resources for a theology of disability. She highlights points of intersection between interpretations of disabling conditions and how women have been regarded throughout Christian history: women's bodies have been considered inferior deviations from normative male bodies; women have been more specifically linked to sin; women have been seen to possess an inferior capacity for reason—the essence of the *imago Dei* for much of Christian history. All of these judgments have been made of those with disabilities, yet feminist and disability theologies have rarely engaged one another.

However, the attempt to draw profitably from some of the thinkers struck me as a bit of a stretch. Martin Wendt himself admits that Hegel's perspective on those with cognitive impairments is not redemptive. Nevertheless Wendt suggests we "read Hegel against Hegel" (p. 251) by applying Hegel's development of Spirit to those he considers intellectually incapable of doing so. But is it really necessary that all Christian thinkers make a positive contribution to disability studies?

Why not judge certain forms of thought harmful and allow the reader to learn from these mistaken presuppositions?

Aside from this critique, this book is an excellent source of primary readings on disability from the breadth of the Christian tradition, introduced by mostly excellent essays that helpfully demonstrate each original author's contribution. I highly recommend this collection for those who are familiar with disability studies, those wishing to start studying this area, and even those interested in reading original sources of historical theology.

JESSE SLIMAK

Jeffrey M. Gallagher, *Wilderness Blessings: How Down Syndrome Reconstructed Our Life and Our Faith* (Chalice Press, 2013), 206 pages, \$18.99

At first scan this book appeared to be personal rather than academic or particularly theological. It is personal, as the author is relating his own experiences of dealing with the medical and developmental challenges of a son born with Down syndrome. But Gallagher also offers a wealth of theological reflections that pastors, chaplains, and counselors will find insightful and helpful. Further, Gallagher's bibliography provides a rich reading trail to follow.

The "wilderness" the title references is that of walking through unknown territory as we encounter situations in life outside of our usual experience or expectations. The "blessings" are discoveries along the way that turn out to be beneficial, even though our lives have been shaken by events we would not have anticipated or chosen. Gallagher is not being simplistic but looks honestly through the eyes of his Christian faith. He is honest about doubts, challenges, and struggles, but accepting of his son and his son's syndrome, while trusting with a positive faith in God throughout.

Jeff Gallagher begins with affirming that all are created, uniquely, in the image of God, including those of differing abilities. He was not looking for changes in his son's diagnosis but for help and guidance for doing the best possible for him and for insight into how to receive and allow for development of the gifts his son had to offer. Blessings Gallagher and his wife received were the caring and loving way difficult medical news was delivered to them and the subsequent care they received.

The author's affirmation of blessings received in his wilderness is

encapsulated in his conclusion that “without Down syndrome Jacob is not Jacob. Without Down syndrome, I am not who I am. Without Down syndrome, Jacob would not have blessed us as richly as he has. Without Down syndrome, Jacob would not bless the world as richly as I believe he will. Without Down syndrome, the world will be a sadder place. And that’s not a world I’m eager to live in.”

Gallagher affirms in several places that God is present, walking with us, and supporting us in the various difficulties and situations we face in life. He affirms the value of intercessory prayer. He affirms that God is at work—not causing challenging situations but teaching us valuable lessons in the midst of them, including changing and deepening our understanding of people, the world, and God.

The author uses these lessons even in premarital counseling, helping those about to be married think ahead about how they would face challenging situations, especially the possibility of having a child with Down syndrome. And he uses—and shares—these lessons in the writing of this book.

JIM SWANSON

Mae Elise Cannon, Lisa Sharon Harper, Troy Jackson, and Soong-Chan Rah, *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* (Zondervan, 2014), 240 pages, \$15.

F*orgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* offers the church a much needed memory check. Written from an evangelical perspective, the book addresses sins against creation, indigenous people, African Americans and people of color, women, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and Jews and Muslims. This is quite a list and, not surprisingly, there is a lot of history and specifics that the authors simply could not cover. Nevertheless, the topics they tackle reveal problematic beliefs that U.S. evangelical groups have held historically, and the authors aptly call evangelical Christians to confess their sins and transform their witness.

Each chapter includes sections on historical reflection, theological reflection, signs of hope, and a prayer of confession and lament. The primary audience is evangelicals in the United States. Given that each of the authors identifies as evangelical, the book reads as a genuine call to repentance. Evangelical Christians often hesitate to tie social issues to worship, so the inclusion of psalms, prayers, confessions, and hope that conclude each chapter is a fitting challenge.

Given the extensive reach of *Forgive Us*, the authors might have covered two other very important groups against whom evangelicals have sinned: children and the poor. The topics chosen align politically with “left” issues, which is not necessarily problematic. However, by neglecting to discuss children in particular, the authors lost a chance to bring in more conservative evangelicals who care deeply about the family. There is much to critique in evangelical views of family, and an added chapter would have completed the list of key topics.

More analysis of subtle and ongoing abuses in the church itself would have given readers more to chew on—especially those who already have some awareness of problematic attitudes towards the groups discussed. Many readers might readily agree with the authors and not find themselves implicated deeply enough in these truthful narratives, thus missing out on the opportunity for deeper examination. For example, in the chapter on women, many evangelicals would agree with the abuses named and gloss over the more subtle—yet no less hurtful—attitudes that continue to marginalize women. The same may be true for those who acknowledge historical abuses toward indigenous peoples and creation. If the authors were to publish a sequel, they would do well to include richer analyses of patriarchy, heterosexism, wealth, nationalism, and white privilege—abuses that remain entrenched in evangelicalism.

While the book was consistently prophetic, the chapter on sins against the LGBTQ community fell slightly short. It correctly argues that many Christians identify homosexuality as a sin, even while they make clear that this debate is not the purpose of the chapter. This in itself is not problematic. Yet no other chapter mentions what Christians identify as sin—even, for example, the chapters on immigration and other faiths, both of which some Christians would argue are sinful in some cases. This lack of balance negates some of the good work the authors are attempting in challenging evangelical views on sexuality.

All in all, the book succeeds in tracing critical historical abuses in evangelical Christianity and calling Christians to greater awareness. In this way, the book is not only for evangelicals, but for all Christians who desire to enact God’s justice in the world. *Forgive Us* tells the truth, and it offers hope. It ends with prayer and liturgy, acknowledging whence the power for renewal comes. For these reasons and many more the book is to be celebrated.

MICHELLE CLIFTON-SODERSTROM

Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, eds., *Reading the Christian Spiritual Classics: A Guide for Evangelicals* (IVP Academic, 2013), 337 pages, \$24.

Attendant to the surge of interest in Christian spirituality is renewed attention to classic spiritual literature. Unfortunately, those attracted to such literature often encounter unfamiliar terms, bewildering theology, and an alien historical context. Thus, used bookstores are lined with Christian spiritual classics, the opening pages of which show wear, while the remainder looks as fresh as the day they were printed.

Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, both associated with Talbot Seminary's Institute for Spiritual Formation, have collected a series of essays to ease the evangelical reader's entry into this formidable, but rich, literature. Their purpose is clear: to provide readers with an informed, spiritual, and evangelical reading of the classics. In short, their goal is to offer a hermeneutic that will equip readers with the wisdom necessary to discern their way through the sometimes dense thicket of these classical texts. The approach they take is as user-friendly as they hope the spiritual classics will become for those who follow their advice.

The volume begins with three essays that address the overall approach one should take in engaging this literature, followed by three essays that describe the basic schools of Christian spirituality. The third section turns more practical, as advice is given about how evangelicals can understand and appreciate Catholic and Orthodox spiritual literature. The fourth and final section provides specific guidance for reading the spiritual literature in its various historical periods, such as the Desert Fathers and the medieval writers. The editors' intended audience is indicated in the book's subtitle: theirs is a guide for *evangelical* readers of the spiritual classics.

That this volume is aimed at the evangelical reader is a key factor in the design, approach, and even feel of the book. It is also immediately clear that Goggin and Strobel have the more conservative side of the evangelical spectrum in mind, since early in the introduction, the editors take the space to address certain evangelicals who may not read the classics at all because they believe only the Bible should be read for spiritual nourishment. In that vein, Steve Porter's opening chapter is an apologetic, aimed at convincing evangelicals to actually read the spiritual classics. In short, he takes the entire chapter to persuade readers that it is biblically permissible to do so. This is not to deny that some evangelicals really do need to be convinced; however, since most Covenanters do not fit that

mold, the opening chapter may make one feel like this book is designed for someone else, which is not the case.

The remainder of the volume is helpful to anyone wanting assistance in reading and appropriating the Christian spiritual classics, but it is especially useful for Protestants, and evangelicals in particular. The contributors are right in reminding us that as Protestants we are a Scripture-first people (and, I would add, as Covenanters: “Where is it written?”). Thus, the volume is undoubtedly correct in stating that we must always read these classics with discernment. In this light, Bruce Demerest’s contribution in chapter 7 is especially useful for evangelicals seeking to understand, appreciate, and appropriate Catholic spirituality. Even more confusing to most evangelicals, and thus even more beneficial, is James Payton’s excellent orientation to reading the Eastern Orthodox classics. Finally, all of section four offers very insightful and practical reading assistance, as the authors introduce and explain Christian spiritual literature from various historical periods. Gerald Sittser’s chapter on the Desert Fathers is a particularly valuable piece. Covenanters will also be attracted to Tom Schwanda’s chapter on the Puritan and Pietistic traditions.

As is the case with any edited volume, there is overlap, as one writer treats a particular historical figure that fits into more than one category; and, of course, some of the chapters are more significant than others. Still, what lies within the pages of this interesting volume is some very useful material, not only for evangelicals who are tentative in reading the spiritual classics, but for all those who welcome them and want more from them.

ERIC SORENSON

Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Baker Academic, 2014), 224 pages, \$20.

As he states in the introduction to his book, Andrew Root’s primary audience is the youth worker. In service to this audience, Root explores Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s lesser-known ministry with children and youth. The book is structured in two parts. The first part offers a historical analysis of Bonhoeffer’s youth work in relation to his theology; the second part presents a theological analysis of Bonhoeffer’s *Discipleship* and *Life Together* in application to today’s youth ministry and ministers.

Root identifies two approaches to youth ministry, the “technological”

and the “theological.” He ties the birth of modern American youth ministry to this technological mindset in which its purpose was to “achieve or solve some problem,” resulting in “increased capital” (p. 5). Within this framework, successful youth ministry is determined by the numerical growth of youth groups or by the modification of behaviors deemed immoral among students. In Bonhoeffer, by contrast, Root sees the beginnings of a theological turn, in which the orientation of ministry practice moves from results-based toward one that “seeks to share in the concrete and lived experience of young people as the very place to share in the act and being of God” (p. 7). Root uses the category “theological” to intend not the conceptual and doctrinal, but the lived and experienced reality of Christ-in-community.

If one of the Root’s goals was to connect Bonhoeffer’s theological writings and his ministry experience, he was successful. It is well known that both *Discipleship* and *Life Together* stem from Bonhoeffer’s experience of sharing life with his students at Finkenwalde. Less obvious is the impact of his experience working with youth on *Sanctorum Communio*, his initial ecclesiological work. Originally published as his first doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio (The Communion of Saints)* is considered Bonhoeffer’s induction into academic significance. Root draws connections between this text and Bonhoeffer’s lived experiences as a youth worker early in his ministry. Herein also lies a clear example of Bonhoeffer’s turn to the theological over the technological. It was through concrete, lived experiences ministering to youth and children that Bonhoeffer was able to develop his theology of the body of Christ. Likewise, his theology of obedience and discipleship grew out of his experience teaching at the seminary in Finkenwalde, and his ethic of responsibility stemmed from his lived reality during Nazi control of Germany. In this way, Bonhoeffer was in every aspect a practical theologian whose life experiences informed his theology of Christ-in-community.

Root offers an alternative perspective to approaching youth ministry for youth workers today. He writes, “Youth ministry’s job is *not* to get youth to believe an idea, fighting to convince young people why the idea of Christianity is better than other ideas. Rather, youth ministry seeks . . . to invite young people to join the ministry of Jesus’s own person, to follow Jesus out into the world, to minister to the world as Jesus does, through the personal act of place-sharing” (p. 186). Derived from Bonhoeffer’s christocentric perspective of the church, Root’s book is a necessary reminder for church leaders and youth workers to re-examine

their ministry practices to discern whether they have been technologically driven to achieve results or whether they too are willing to take the theological turn to follow Jesus Christ with costly obedience. This book is recommended not just to youth workers but to anyone in leadership, as it challenges readers to re-evaluate their approach to youth ministry programs with a theological lens.

BENJAMIN H. KIM

Bruce Cockburn with Greg King, *Rumours of Glory* (Harper One, 2014), 530 pages, \$36; Brian J. Walsh, *Kicking at the Darkness: Bruce Cockburn and the Christian Imagination* (Brazos Press, 2011), 217 pages, \$19.

Bono called him a psalmist. In 2002 he was promoted to Officer in the Order of Canada, and in 2011 his face appeared on a Canadian postage stamp. In April 2015 Bruce Cockburn received the Denise Levertoiv Award and celebrated his seventieth birthday the following month. He's now taking a look back with a nine-CD retrospective box set and this memoir that traces his life up to 2004.

For Christian fans from the 1970s on, Cockburn's perceptive and honest lyrics about his Christian faith offered an alternative to the sentimental tone of what was then contemporary Christian music. Cockburn now identifies himself as more of a mystic, a God-seeker: "I have tried to keep Jesus the compassionate activist close to my heart, along with Jesus as portal to the cosmos, but I have long been leery of the dogma and doctrine that so many have attached to Christianity as well as to most other religions" (p. 2).

Long-time fans will find enigmatic references explained, as stories behind the songs are told and lyrics are quoted in full. Cockburn says that his songwriting has been inspired by reading and travel that are "joined at the hip" in a "less-than systematic mind" and by "whatever is in front of me, filtered through feeling and imagination. I went looking for humanity in all its guises. . . . That's why I don't think of the things I write as 'protest' songs. They reflect what I see and how I feel about it" (p. 280–82).

The imagery of light and darkness runs throughout Cockburn's life and work. He associates one early song with his commitment to follow Jesus: "All the diamonds in this world that mean anything to me are conjured up by wind and sunlight sparkling on the sea" (p. 133). Another, "Lord of the Starfields," marked his move "beyond fundamentalism toward

mystery” (p. 150). His first marriage had become increasingly troubled during that time and ended a few years later. As he started reaching out to all sorts of people beyond the walls of the church, Cockburn found that “Something is shining / Like gold but better / Rumours of Glory” (p. 193).

His look outward in the 1980s used more urban imagery, the light coming from neon rather than the night sky. Along with some other musicians, Cockburn was invited to travel to Central America as a war observer. When he learned of the Guatemalan government’s violence against its own citizens (rebels don’t have helicopters, he was told), his anger prompted the song for which he is best known, “If I Had a Rocket Launcher.” Over the years similar visits to Chile, Honduras, Mozambique, Nepal, and Vietnam (to name a few) changed him. Now claiming to follow the social teachings of Jesus more than other aspects of Christian doctrine, he still writes about that light: “Come all you stumblers who believe love rules / Stand up and let it shine” (lyrics, “Mystery,” p. 515).

The title of theologian Brian Walsh’s book, *Kicking at the Darkness*, cites another famous Cockburn lyric, from “Lovers in a Dangerous Time.” (The whole line was quoted in a U2 song: “heard a singer on the radio late last night says he’s gonna kick the darkness till it bleeds daylight.”) Having assured readers that he will not try to define or explain Cockburn’s worldview, Walsh does ask that we follow along as he listens to Cockburn’s songs and asks four questions: “First, Where are we? What is the nature of the world in which we find ourselves? Second, Who are we? What does it mean to be human? Third, What’s wrong? What is the source of brokenness, violence, hatred, and evil in life? Fourth, What’s the remedy? How do we find a path through this brokenness to healing? What is the resolution to the evil in which we find ourselves?” (Walsh, p. 21).

To focus on a few important examples, chapters on “Where are we?” bring together creation imagery with the human longing for home. Walsh includes sermons that juxtapose Cockburn’s lyrics with biblical texts: one brings “Creation Dream” from *Dancing in the Dragon’s Jaws* to the world birthed in Genesis and made desolate in Jeremiah. “Who are we?” begins with that image of creation as divine dance, concluding that bearers of the divine image dance sacramentally and faithfully, nurturing life. In perhaps the book’s best chapter, that joyful *Dancing* is compared with the lament of Cockburn’s next recording, *Humans*, identifying that album’s various expressions of disorientation, entrenchment, and reorientation. *Humans* not only voices Cockburn’s cry; it also portrays a man wrestling

with God, hanging on for dear life.

In both books, the songwriter and theologian have to come to terms with the evolution of Cockburn's faith: the singer is honest enough to say that he took hold of Jesus's hand, only to let it go later. Walsh, writing before the memoir was published, seems appreciative but puzzled. Is he concerned that he has to reach back to the Jesus songs of the seventies to get the material for his sermons and final chapters? In doing so, is he quoting Cockburn against himself? It is likely that the artist himself would not reject the Christian imagery of the early songs; he quoted one at his own book's end. In a recent interview, he spoke of a hope that he can keep his own static down as he tries to listen to the divine voice. Like Walsh, I'll keep listening along as Cockburn shares what he hears.

PAUL KOPTAK