

Book Reviews

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Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom and David D. Bjorlin, *Incorporating Children in Worship: Mark of the Kingdom* (Cascade Books, 2014), 166 pages, \$19.

While some congregations excel in children's and youth ministries and others struggle to keep their youth connected, both groups often fail to integrate children as fully participating members in worship. *Incorporating Children in Worship* is a theological exploration of the conviction that children play a vital role within, and make an important contribution to, the body of Christ.

The initial chapters are dedicated to deepening the reader's capacity to think theologically about children and worship. Oftentimes the practical execution of ministry to children eclipses the theology of the child, with the result that this is underdeveloped or non-existent in the local church. The same can be said of worship, where conversations of form and substance supersede the theology that determines praxis. Clifton-Soderstrom and Bjorlin call the reader to consider children (including those we may consider youth) not as pre-believers or pre-members but as full members of the body of Christ. Their initial chapter also realigns the reader's perception of adult believers as "children" of God who are no more or less valued than other children.

From a theology of children the book moves to a theology of worship, understood as “the enactment of the dramatic story of the triune God by the people of God” (p. 34). For the authors, worship is primarily, though not exclusively, expressed in the participation in the sacraments of baptism and communion. Their emphasis is on baptism as the outward sign and symbol of God’s acting upon the person and adopting, or incorporating, the person into the family of God. Infant baptism clearly portrays God’s agency rather than understanding baptism primarily as human action based on belief, assent, or devotion to God. Thus a proper understanding of the child in relation to the whole body allows for the practice of infant baptism and encourages the baptized child’s full participation in the Eucharist.

The book then addresses implications of this integrative theology of children and worship in its chapters on incorporation, virtue, vocation, and vision. While this book is primarily about the incorporation of children in worship and the local church, its implications extend to the larger *ecclesia*. *Incorporating Children in Worship* is a work of missional theology expressed in terms of the worship of all of God’s people: “The particular activity that forms Christians for the work of the kingdom, or God’s mission, is worship. Worship constitutes the single most important activity in which the church engages and, further, it is the time when the body comes together regularly, forming its identity as coworkers with Christ in advancing God’s kingdom” (p. 5). Incorporation includes bringing to the center marginalized voices within the community of saints. A discussion on the understanding of virtue from the perspectives of the West and the Global South highlights the need to consider whether theology is coming from the centers of power or the margins. Though children are undoubtedly considered important to the life of the family and of the church, they are marginalized in the sense of lacking power, authority, or voice in determining the direction of worship or even church administration. The authors do not advocate a child-led, child-directed, or child-focused ministry per se. They do advocate that the church consider what it means for children to be members of the body. Here, the vocation of children in the scheme of worship is to be children, in all the unique traits and giftings only they could possess: child-like faith, the ability to hope, and uninhibited imagination.

While the authors suggest this book is accessible to anyone who ministers to children, its chapters lack adequate groundwork for those who do not already have a theological foundation. Nor do the authors pro-

vide the practical applications one might hope to find for integrating its principle insight into weekly worship gatherings. These tasks are left to the local pastor to lead staff, volunteers, parents, and others into further conversation regarding the book's implications for their particular setting. Nevertheless, *Incorporating Children in Worship* is a necessary message that all churches should engage in their practice and theology of worship.

BENJAMIN H. KIM

Mandy Smith, *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry* (IVP, 2015), 208 pages, \$16.

Church leaders in the West have long looked to corporate leaders for guidance. Books like *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and *Good to Great* are commonly found on pastors' bookshelves. Mega-churches host conferences inviting CEOs, politicians, coaches, and entrepreneurs to offer pastors lessons on leadership.

Smith, lead pastor at University Christian Church in Cincinnati, began her journey toward vulnerability at one such Christian leadership conference. As she absorbed the workshops, the speakers, and the books, something did not feel right. She was not connecting. At a dinner with some of the key speakers, she asked, "Do you ever feel like you're making it up as you go along?" For pastors who feel the pressure to perform in a consumer-driven culture, Smith's question is profound. She needed to know if these leaders had weaknesses as she had—did they also bleed? Did they also have fears and doubts? If they could offer a glimpse into their humanity, then there would be hope for Smith as well.

Wrestling with this question, Smith felt God prompting her with Psalm 51:17, "A broken and contrite spirit I will not despise," and 1 Corinthians 12:9–10, "In your weakness I am strong." For Smith, strength is not a prerequisite for Christian leadership. She concludes, "if feeling our own weakness makes us rely on God, and if the best ministry grows from reliance on him, then our weakness is a ministry resource" (p.15). God calls *humans* to be pastors—people who have limitations, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities.

The Vulnerable Pastor follows current attention to emotional intelligence, self-awareness, shame, and connection, applying insights of Brené Brown to the specific fears pastors have about allowing others to see who we really are. Smith's book could easily be called *The Vulnerable Christian*,

but, as a pastor, I appreciate the vocational specificity.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section invites the reader to feel vulnerable before God in the ways we confess sin, ask for help, acknowledge emotions, pray desperately, and read Scripture. In the second section, Smith focuses on feeling vulnerable in pastoral leadership through collaboration, listening, transparency, self-care, and faithfulness. The third section addresses vulnerability in front of an audience, particularly in preaching and in engaging the world from a place of longing and lament.

Smith does not just describe vulnerability; she models it in her writing. When she turns her attention to the ways pastors use time and energy (chapter 9), she shares in detail her weekly rhythm of work (pp. 142–43), saying, “You may also notice how little I get done in my week” (p. 144). In her honest self-assessments and acceptance of her limitations, she releases the reader from unrealistic—and worldly—expectations. When Smith allows herself to be seen, she gives us permission to feel vulnerable as well.

One word of caution for younger pastors: vulnerability is no substitute for hard work and vocational training. Smith identifies herself as a perfectionist; for someone inclined toward sloth, “vulnerability” is not a license to be lazy. There are many times when leading out of what feels authentic to us in the moment may not be helpful to those under our care. Smith briefly addresses the risks of over-sharing and having unhealthy boundaries. Discerning what makes for healthy vulnerability in pastoral relationships would be worth further discussion.

The Vulnerable Pastor is a great book for Christians, and especially pastors, who feel discouraged and ashamed of their weaknesses in a culture focused on strength, performance, and having it all together. Smith prophetically calls the church to renounce the idol of strength in leadership and to rely on God’s strength in our weakness. The practice of becoming vulnerable is a means by which a new generation of pastors can develop the necessary virtues of courage and humility.

TY GRIGG

Paul Peucker, *A Time of Sifting: Mystical Marriage and the Crisis of Moravian Piety in the Eighteenth Century* (Penn State Press, 2015), 248 pages, \$84.95.

For the Renewed Moravian Brethren the “sifting time” of the 1740s was a period of controversy, discipline, and reconciliation. The problem

for those involved in Moravian studies has been the ambiguity of the events at the center of the controversy. Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravian Brethren, with his deputy August Spangenberg, expunged the details from the records in reversing the excesses of the sifting time. Scholars of Moravian history are left to assemble a puzzle with many missing pieces.

The prevailing scholarly consensus attributes the controversy to excessive devotion to the “blood and wounds” theology of Jesus Christ. Paul Peucker, director of the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, challenges this consensus in *A Time of Sifting: Mystical Marriage and the Crisis of Moravian Piety in the Eighteenth Century*. Peucker argues the opposite: that early sources suggest the crisis was solved by a return to the blood and wounds devotion.

Peucker’s investigation reveals that in the late 1740s, Zinzendorf’s son Christian Renuus proposed antinomian doctrines that led to practices of extra-marital sex, transgendered identification, and homosexual activity in the “Singles Choirs” of the Moravian communities. The leadership condemned these innovations and sought to restore traditional marriage values to the Moravian communities while reconciling and restoring errant members.

Christian Zinzendorf’s antinomian theology grew out of three distinctive Moravian doctrines: blood and wounds devotion, where the side-wound of Jesus from the spear thrust became associated with female reproductive organs; a “playfulness” designed to confute the dour outlooks of other pietisms; and the theology of marital intercourse, based on the view that the Wedding Feast of the Lamb must then be followed by nuptials. All Christians were brides of Christ and would experience union with him like that of the marriage bed, thus the souls of both men and women were female. The elder Zinzendorf and other leaders gave both formal and tacit approval to these doctrines.

The controversy began with a liturgy in which Christian Zinzendorf pronounced absolution for past *and future* sins of the single men of Herrnhag. He then declared the single men to be castrated in their spirits so that they would all become sisters to each other. This converged with heightened sexual language in their devotion to the side-wound to inspire the choirs to extra-marital sexual behaviors, including same-gendered sexual relations.

Due to the suppression in Moravian documents, Peucker relies on testimonies of disaffected former Moravians who had published lurid

and hostile exposés. Peucker brings enough suspicion to his sources to allow for a compelling argument. It is the best theory of the sifting time to date and will likely prevail in Moravian studies. Peucker regrets that imagination and creativity, a characteristic of Moravian pietism, suffered from the discipline of the community during the sifting time. The antinomianism of the younger Zinzendorf sparked a reaction that tilted the Moravians toward the conservative Protestant mainstream. Apart from this, Peucker allows the episode of the sifting time and its aftermath to speak for itself.

Christian Zinzendorf pushed the distinctions between flesh and spirit toward a gnostic dualism and adopted an antinomian stance toward sexual acts. Such views are without parallel today, and Peucker does not attempt to apply the ethics of the sifting time to twenty-first-century disagreements on human sexuality. However, since the Covenant esteems Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf as a spiritual forebear, we can at the very least be assured that challenges to traditional interpretations of the Bible regarding sexuality are not new in our history. Perhaps churches and denominations can learn from Zinzendorf and the Moravian leaders' efforts to heal the movement through discipline, reconciliation, and restoration.

JONATHAN M. WILSON

