Book Reviews

Book reviews addressing the care of souls are welcomed (500-800 words). For a copy of SEELSORGER book review guidelines, contact Rev. Timothy Koch, revtimkoch@gmail.com

WHY GENDER MATTERS: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about The Emerging Science of Sex Differences. By Leonard Sax. New York: Harmony Books, 2005, 2017. 382 pages. $13.00.

Because faith in Jesus Christ informs all aspects of life, pastors must always be willing and able to speak the word of God to any and all situations into which they are called. This, however, can be a daunting task, not only because the modern world is increasingly less informed by biblical truths and traditional Christian categories, but also because of the ever-expanding realms of specific knowledge concerning people, regarding their physiological and psychological realities. Perhaps this challenge seems particularly acute when pastors approach care situations that intersect the topics of gender, sex, and youth development.

In view of this challenge, Dr. Sax's book *Why Gender Matters* is a helpful, practical, and scientifically astute guide to making sense of and talking about gender and sexuality, especially as they pertain to youth. While written with teachers and parents in mind, pastors will find Dr. Sax's information invaluable for pastoral care situations as well as other pastoral duties. Of course, Dr. Sax is not presenting any overtly theological arguments in this book, but for pastors who are already attuned to how to translate "first article" information and theory into dynamic pastoral care, each chapter gives clear and compelling insight into the physiological and psychological realities that surround the question of gender and how gender is meaningful in the lives of people, again especially young people.

In the first chapter, Dr. Sax argues that gender differences have more to do with physiological differences between the sexes than socially constructed differences formed by parents and/or society. This argument challenges the taken-for-granted assumption of many that gender is simply a malleable social construction. In chapter two, Dr. Sax explores the physiological aspects of gender by looking at the significant differences in smelling, seeing, and hearing abilities between boys and girls. Chapters four through eight talk about how gender matters in terms of how boys and girls engage in risk, aggression, school, sex, and drugs and alcohol. In chapters nine through eleven, Dr. Sax takes up the topics of gender nonconformity, sexual orientation, and also intersexuality and transgender identity. Finally, the last chapter challenges a one-dimensional understanding of gender, offering instead a two-dimensional understanding, which, Dr. Sax argues, is better able to make sense of gender identity and human experience.

The distinction between one vs. two-dimensional understanding of gender deserves further explanation. Dr. Sax would contend that the explosion in the proportion of people who believe that they are transgender may well represent a faulty commitment to a one-dimensional understanding of gender as a simple continuum between feminine and masculine where feminine and masculine are opposites. Dr. Sax, however, would contend that "a particular human can be very feminine, or not; very masculine, or not; both feminine and masculine

— that is *androgynous* — or neither feminine nor masculine — that is *undifferentiated*" (297). The addition of the categories *androgynous* and *undifferentiated* to feminine and masculine creates a two-dimensional plane that allows us to talk about gender in a more nuanced way that actually fits with human experience. Dr. Sax sums it up in this way: "if you are a man who has some (or many) feminine qualities, or you are women who has some (or many) masculine qualities, that doesn't mean you are transgender. It means that you are a human being" (298).

Again, while a pastor will not find cut and paste information for pastoral care in any of these chapters, their content will provide clear and scientifically trustworthy approaches to understanding gender phenomena as it may manifest itself in the lives of their parishioners. For this reason, it would be beneficial for pastors to pick up a copy of the book for themselves.

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FAITH ALONE: The Heart of Everything, Bo Giertz; translated by Bror Erickson. 1517 Publishing, 2020.

A novel for our times.

Many Lutheran pastors and laity are familiar with *The Hammer of God*, Bo Giertz' masterful application of Christ's saving work to souls under attack by sin, guilt, pride, and pietism. *Faith Alone* is a similarly masterful work, following the lives of three men — two estranged brothers and their Lutheran pastor friend — through the chaos and confusion of governmental challenges and civil war during the early days of the Reformation.

Not only does Giertz' prose draw one into the scenery, predicaments, and thoughts of his multi-dimensional characters, but also he sympathetically unravels the spiritual warfare in the souls of men placed in a time of tribulation. *Faith Alone* is a set of case studies for *Seelsorgers* (a German word that occurs twice in the book, roughly meaning physicians of the soul). Giertz exposes the idolatries that plague souls during turbulence and displays intentional care and cure delivered to these souls. Yet, this is no dry diagnostic manual, but a lively story that propels the reader eagerly along to its conclusion.

Faith Alone was first published in Swedish in 1942 as WWII wrought a tsunami of disorder. It would have been extremely helpful then. 2020 seems like the perfect year for it to appear in English thanks to Bror Erickson's easy-to-read translation.

As in other of Giertz' works, he beautifully and naturally weaves liturgy, hymnody, Scripture, and poetry — nicely valuing these gifts. He drops in a delightfully grounded defense for the marriage of pastors. He displays the consolation of the brethren as a rich gift to burdened souls in the community of the church — an open gathering of real sinner-saints rather than sham successes. *Faith Alone* counters our shallow piety with deep delivery of Christ's saving death and resurrection, and its joyful freedom even in the face of death, burial, and heartbreak.

This book offers a helpful defense of Lutheran theology and practice over against Roman Catholicism and pietism while not rejecting the good within catholic practice nor true piety.

It's a good read for anyone: laity, pastor, Lutheran or otherwise, displaying the inestimable benefits for souls in the saving work of Christ received by *Faith Alone.* Perhaps it would serve well in engaging evangelical, Roman Catholic, or others outside the Lutheran confession to gain insight into the riches of Lutheran theology and practice.

ON THE ROAD WITH SAINT AUGUSTINE: A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts. By James K.A. Smith (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, 2019), 256 pages. $24.99.

Despite the proliferation of metanarratives that characterizes our postmodern age, there remains a common thread that runs through them all. Everyone is on a spiritual journey, restlessly traveling the road looking for a home. What each one envisions as their destination differs, but what every destination has in common is that the traveler reaches it only to discover disillusionment. What we are searching for is not found in the home we thought we had reached.

James K.A. Smith's new book serves as a masterful guide to some of the destinations postmodern souls hope will be home. More accurately, Augustine of Hippo serves as the guide, since Smith's contribution is primarily in matching a broad catalogue of postmodern idols with spiritual insight and reorientation from the North African saint. Drawing from the entire Augustinian corpus but especially from his *Confessions*, Smith masterfully demonstrates how the Doctor of Grace correctly diagnoses our idolatrous desires but also shows us what will really satisfy the longing of our hearts.

For example, in chapter five Smith takes us on a journey with Augustine as he exposits ambition. What do we really want when we want people to notice us? When we pursue ambition, we think we are striving after joy. What we receive is mere attention, a pitiful substitute for what God has created us for. Ironically, ambition disappoints us the most not when we fail to achieve what we seek, but when we attain it. We receive the attention we've craved all along, confident that it will bring us joy, but when we arrive at our destination we feel more alone than ever. Augustine himself was no stranger to the disappointment of ambition. Having set out from Carthage to Rome, and then Rome to Milan, his life's ambition was to soar the upper heights of the rhetoricians' world. The result could be nothing but despair, for even when he succeeded, he was only burdened with further anxiety to keep his fame. Augustine's breakthrough came when he realized that the goal that would truly satisfy his desire was not the attention of man, but the love and friendship of God. That alone can bring true joy, notes Smith, because unlike the praise of men, "God's attention is not predicated on your performance. You don't have to catch God's notice with your display . . . God's attention is a place where you can find rest and where . . . you don't have to be worried about getting attention from anyone else" (88–89).

Besides ambition, Smith deftly brings Augustine's insights to bear on such postmodern ideals as freedom, sex, dependence, friendship, enlightenment, identity, justice, acceptance, and death. It is not difficult to draw application for the cure of souls from Smith's reading of Augustine. The real satisfaction to every one of these desires is in Christ Jesus and his gifts. Smith demonstrates how Augustine correctly diagnoses the idolatry and applies the cure, but not in a trite or clichéd way. Rather, Augustine's application of the gospel to each disease is refreshingly unique and precisely corresponded to the particular desire of the soul in question.

At times the reader may wish for Smith to extrapolate further upon Augustine's insights. Indeed, at times one forgets he is reading Smith and not Augustine directly. But the brilliance of Smith's work is that he collects the best of Augustine's spiritual insights on desire and love in one place and applies them to the specific needs of the restless heart. The result is a sort of "handbook of desires" with penetrating yet practical applications of the Gospel for a wide variety of conditions of the souls. Since the chapters are organized according to each of the "desires," it is easy to refer to the section most

pertinent to a pastoral care situation with ease. Smith's book will prove useful to the pastor as he helps the spiritually disillusioned see that the greatest longing of the soul is fulfilled in Christ alone.

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AND SHE WAS A CHRISTIAN: Why Do Believers Commit Suicide? By Peter Preus, Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern, 2011. 191 pages. $26.99.

Has a Christian who commits suicide lost their faith in God? This is one of many challenging questions addressed in the book *And She Was a Christian: Why Do Believers Commit Suicide?*

Pastor Preus states his goal in the opening section of his book: "With the aid of Scriptures and various other sources, it is my hope to offer you help with what to say to the grieving who seek both to understand and to cope with suicide's stigma" (18). Surrounding suicide are both an abundance of stigma and a lack of understanding. Through this book, Pastor Preus seeks to reverse the scales, so to speak, that an abundance of understanding and lack of stigma might aid pastors and lay-people alike in their care of those suffering in the wake of a suicide.

To open, Pastor Preus shares his personal experience with suicide — the death of his wife. In section two, Pastor Preus explores a variety of objections to the notion that a baptized Christian who commits suicide could die a believer. Section three provides a defense for the salvation of a baptized believer who has committed suicide. Section four confronts various "scapegoats" that those affected by suicide use to alleviate their suffering. The final section – primarily for pastors — gives directives for how pastors might give relief to those who are suffering from hopelessness. The appendices provide both a funeral sermon at the suicide of a Christian and resources for suicide prevention.

I found this book particularly helpful to my ministry in three ways:

First, it gives confidence and conviction regarding Law and Gospel proclamation for the funeral sermon of a baptized parishioner who has committed suicide. A question with which I struggled following the suicide of one of my own parishioners: "What on earth am I going to say when I preach at this funeral?"

Particularly helpful was Preus' treatment of depression and faith. Depression, Preus writes, is "a mental illness that alters a person's perception of himself and the life he is currently living" (83). Such an illness transports pastoral ministry into "uncharted territory" (8). The suppression of God's comforting promises which plagues a Christian suffering from severe depression gives clarity to Law preaching: suicide is not the way of Christ. Yet, it is, at the same time, almost always accompanied by the deep, blinding darkness of depression which all but extinguishes the comfort of God's promises in Christ.

Regarding faith, Preus makes two helpful points: (1) "The loss of hope does not mean the loss of faith" (78), and (2) "Both the coming to such faith and the preservation of this faith is brought about not by individual effort or strength, but entirely by the work of the Holy Spirit" (35). This gives the pastor confidence to proclaim the Gospel in the midst of a paradox. Though this person sinned, they are saved by *grace* through *faith* in Christ. Faith is a gift of God that endures depression and suicide due to the sure and certain promises of God made in "Faith-sustaining Baptism" (123).

Second, Preus equips the reader with empathy to care for those affected by suicide. He accomplishes this primarily by alerting the reader to an array of questions and emotions

that will likely occupy the minds of those affected by suicide.

Among the emotions experienced by those grieving, Preus touches upon "survivor guilt" (16) and "survivor depression" (145). He effectively walks the reader through the symptoms of each and how to care for those afflicted with them.

Additionally, Preus is not content to give convenient or unfaithful answers to difficult questions. Among them: "Is suicide an unforgivable sin?" (106), "Was this really God's will?" (139), and "Is it my fault she died?" (143). He treats each with pastoral care and the clarity of Scripture. Thus, through awareness, Preus creates understanding, and through understanding, Preus creates empathy.

Third, Preus' work promotes effective pastoral care by directing the reader to two key components of counseling: listening and presence. Preus rightly points both pastors and other comforters away from the temptation to "speak first and listen when we are done talking" (172). Rather, he guides the caregiver to tend the hurting soul by being present, listening, praying, and, when appropriate, to proclaim Christ.

To the pastor seeking to faithfully care for those affected by suicide or dealing with their own hopelessness, and to anyone seeking comfort and understanding in the face of suicide, I would recommend purchasing this book. It is an invaluable resource, and my brief review simply cannot do justice to all it has to offer.

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LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK: Companion to the Hymns. Edited by Joseph Herl, Peter C. Reske, and Jon D. Vieker. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019. 2624 pages. $179.99.

After more than a decade in the making, the long-awaited *LSB Companion to the Hymns* has finally arrived from Concordia Publishing House. The result is well worth the wait. While the publication of such a work has been highly anticipated since the early days of *Lutheran Service Book*'s release, the *LSB Companion to the Hymns* is unique in that the editors intentionally allotted enough time for an exhaustive scouring of the earliest-known sources pertaining to the background and content of the hymns in LSB. This painstaking effort is unprecedented among hymnal companions published in English (vii). The resulting *LSB Companion* is a *tour de force* in its genre, as not a single detail presented has been taken for granted by the editors and authors. The reader can be certain that the content of this hymnal companion is the result of careful and current scholarship.

The *LSB Companion to the Hymns* is comprised of two large hardcover volumes and arrives in a sturdy slipcase. The first volume presents information on each of the hymn texts in the order in which they appear in LSB. Each of the hymn commentaries is divided into three to five sections, depending on the hymn: (1) Text Background. This section tells the historical story behind each hymn text, such as information regarding the original context of the text, revisions and additions to the text throughout its history — including the reasoning behind these alterations, etc.; (2) Text Commentary. This is a devotional commentary on each hymn highlighting the theological and scriptural content of the text; (3) Use (some hymns). This presents Scripture references for the text as well as suggestions for appropriate and historical usage of the hymn text for certain liturgical days, seasons, and occasions; (4) Performance

(some hymns). This gives practical suggestions for musicians leading the hymn; (5) Historical Summary. This presents detailed historical information on each hymn text and tune derived from thousands of earliest-known sources, including geographical and confessional (denominational) backgrounds, the original source of the hymn, and other sundry items.

The second volume begins by presenting several key essays written by contemporary authors regarding a variety of highly relevant topics pertaining to hymnody. A non-comprehensive survey of such essays includes historical overviews of various eras of church hymnody, the fascinating stories behind the making of LSB, and a guide for singing hymns in the home. The largest portion of the second volume is comprised of biographies of the hymn authors, translators, composers, arrangers, and many contributors whose words and music have lent themselves to our Lutheran heritage. This is followed by a glossary of pertinent terms, a list of cited sources, hymn performance suggestions for musicians, and various indexes, charts, graphs, and lists of interesting information related to LSB.

The *LSB Companion to the Hymns* meets the highest scholarly standards and is the product of exhaustive and detailed research by many contributing authors, which will be useful for many and well worth its steep price tag. Laymen, pastors, and academics alike who are invested in the hymnody of the church and the stories behind the hymns that are sung by Lutherans day-in and day-out will find in these two volumes a usable and oft-consulted resource to have on their bookshelf. What's more, the layout of this work was organized in such a way that the reader can easily access the material he or she is seeking, whether it be devotional or specific and specialized information on a hymn.

The hymns that are unpacked in this new resource are the texts and tunes that Lutherans share in common and treasure. They are used in our corporate worship life together in our churches and in our daily lives in schools and homes as we confess the faith together — our source of joy and comfort throughout life's various events and situations. As such, having access to such a brilliantly formatted and well-organized source of stories and information on these beloved hymns will be eminently useful in adding a richness and depth to our understanding of them as we incorporate them into the daily pastoral tasks of preaching and teaching the faith and caring for God's people.

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ADDICTION AND PASTORAL CARE: From Resistance to Change. By Sonia E. Waters. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019. 226 pages. $17.99.

Sonia Waters has written a book that explores the intersection of addiction and pastoral care. This is a massive undertaking as both "addiction" and "pastoral care" are broad fields of study in their own right *and* from two different disciplines (psychology and theology). The book spends about 80% of its time on the psychology side and 20% on the theology side. In this regard, the book serves as a primer on addiction for pastors who are unlikely to have had any formal education on the matter at all.

The seven chapters of the book are developed thematically from a psychological perspective (with one exception). The first chapter asks the question "What is Addiction?" and explores briefly the history of addiction in America. The second chapter looks at what addiction does to the brain. The third chapter looks at addiction, attachment, and trauma. The fourth chapter looks at the effect addiction has on social relationships. The fifth chapter focuses more on the theology than the psychology. The sixth and

seventh chapters explore the practical models and processes that pastoral caregivers can undertake to help people suffering in addiction (specifically an in-depth look at Motivational Interviewing, and evaluating the five stages of recovery). Through these seven chapters, Waters uses the story of the Gerasene demoniac from Mark 5:1–20 as the primary theological lens through which pastors can faithfully assess and address the matter of addiction among their flock.

This is the first book that I've ever read about addiction. I don't have any formal training in matters of psychology and cannot speak to the veracity of Sonia Waters' conclusions drawn from psychological research and study. However, as a keen observer of the human condition, that which Waters says rings true. Her theological evaluation of addiction is certainly helpful.

This book helped me dispel some misconceptions I had about addiction and recovery. I had a caricature in my mind of addicts that was quickly jettisoned when I read these helpful sentences, "For many addicts, recovery is not about removing a single action. It is about managing a way of being that has infiltrated body, mind, and soul. I know that addiction is a problem, but I have been seeking to adjust the caregiver's vision about this condition so that we can approach it with more respect. I want to suggest that there is something starkly beautiful about our attempts to survive our lives" (79).

As a *Seelsorger*, here are six brief takeaways from my reading of this book: (1) Addicts are managing suffering, not chasing pleasure — proceed accordingly; (2) addiction has become a way of life, which means recovery will feel like dying; (3) the road to recovery for addicts is almost always a long road — be in it for the long haul; (4) you cannot argue someone into recovery; (5) you are not God; (6) working with addicts will humble you because you cannot control what they do.

A few theological observations: First, this book has an aggressively liberal theological slant. A single example from the book will showcase my point. When writing about Genesis 1, Waters writes, "We commonly focus on the assumed gender of that Genesis account, but perhaps we should return to a more fundamental message" (57). Second, this book says nothing about the sacraments and never stresses our baptismal identity. However, pastors are hopefully adept at utilizing sacramental theology in every situation, so it is probably best that Sonia Waters has focused on that which pastors don't know as well; namely, addiction. Third, the use of the Gerasene demoniac as a theological lens through which to view addiction is brilliantly done and worthy of every *Seelsorger's* consideration.

Addiction is a chaotic mess. There are multiple factors to keep in mind. For this reason, helping those suffering from addiction is hard work. There is no easy fix. It is not convenient. Though this book is dense and does not lend itself to speedy reading, the investment of time will save pastors hours on the other end when they find themselves providing pastoral care to those suffering from addiction.

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BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH: A Gospel-Centered Guide to End-of-Life Medical Care. By Kathryn Butler. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 224 pages. $17.99

A pastor will inevitably find himself in the hospital, spiritually caring for a parishioner and family members who are struggling with decisions about extent of care. Medical technologies that aid patients who are in severe medical distress are a blessing, but they are often misunderstood by the sick, by families, and by the pastors who provide spiritual guidance to

those navigating potentially life-ending medical cases.

With *Between Life and Death: A Gospel Centered Guide to End-Of-Life Care*, Kathryn Butler, MD provides an excellent guidebook on understanding and navigating the technologies used in Intensive Care Units (ICU) and hospice facilities. The subtitle of the book sums up her aim quite well: to keep the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of end-of-life thinking and decision making. Dr. Butler lays out the nitty gritty possibilities and limitations of various end-of-life technologies, drugs, and techniques, all while keeping consideration of them firmly fixed within the revelation of God's will in the Holy Scriptures.

Dr. Butler's aim in writing is clear, "Death has passed from the purview of families, pastors, and the quiet of home to sterile rooms that resound with alarms. The majority of us now die in institutions, facilities that run the gamut from nursing homes to acute-care centers. Up to 25 percent of people over the age of sixty-five years spend their final days in an ICU . . ." (24). "God's perfect timing seems less distinct when machinery blurs the boundaries of life and death. His will may seem elusive to us when decisions about ventilators and resuscitation confront us with check boxes. We embrace an understanding of death rooted in hope — in the gospel — that does not align with the distressing decisions that subsume our final moments" (25).

The book is laid out in three parts. In Part 1: Dying, But Alive in Christ, Dr. Butler provides an overview of the challenges facing patients and families in the ICU. The above quotes are from the opening chapter, which sets the stage for a second chapter reviewing the teaching of God as revealed to us in the Bible. "As Christians, we live not for ourselves but for the Lord (Col 3:17). As we consider end-of-life care, our goals do not begin with our own worldly desires, but instead reflect our identity in Christ . . ." (32). So how might Christians examine and contemplate the various means of care and cure that medicine provides in catastrophic or end-of-life medical situations? Dr. Butler lays out four key principles that we, as Christians, might use as a lens (32): (1) sanctity of mortal life, (2) God's authority over life and death, (3) mercy and compassion, and (4), hope in Christ.

In Part 2: A Detailed Look at Organ-Supporting Measures, various technologies and techniques are surveyed: Resuscitation for Cardiac Arrest; Introduction to Intensive Care; Mechanical Ventilation; various means of Cardiovascular Support; Artificially Administered Nutrition; Dialysis; and Brain Injury. Dr. Butler clearly lays out the positives and negatives of all. Four questions are given to always have in mind in contemplating various interventions offered (65). Is the life-threatening process reversible? What is the best conceivable outcome? How much suffering does this treatment inflict? How will pursuit of this technology influence my walk with the Holy Spirit? One significant consideration that I learned from the book is the amount of suffering and trauma that is inflicted by these techniques and technologies can be considerable. I suspect this is not always understood or taken into account.

Finally, in Part 3: Discernment at Life's End, discussion centers on the options currently in play for when a condition is no longer curable. Noteworthy is chapter 13, covering advanced care planning. Butler provides four guiding questions (serving as prompts) for a Christian to reflect on as he or she considers end-of-life care as spelled out in various advanced directives (Living Wills, etc.). *Especially* helpful is that Butler then provides her own Christian reflection on these prompts as an example to the reader. Butler actually provides a full example of a narrative-form directive of her own end-of-life desires. Any Christian reader will be greatly aided by the clear, strong confession of a living hope in Christ's ultimate healing and resurrection found in Butler's narrative.

In addition to the above-mentioned Appendix 2, appendices are also provided that provide a summary chart of all of the measures discussed in Part 2, and that cover a selection of comforting Scripture passages. The gospel predominates throughout this book. It is a helpful tool for pastors wanting to understand end-of-life medical measures and options and is especially valuable for pastors to give to parishioners to help and guide them in making God-pleasing, conscience-protecting decisions as they or their family members face end-of-life situations.

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THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure. By Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. New York: Penguin Press, 2018. 338 pages. $28.00.

Are the minds of American youth being coddled into self-destructive mentalities and behaviors? According to social psychologist Jonathan Haidt and First Amendment lawyer Greg Lukianoff, it's a statistical possibility. As a pastor who worked intentionally with youth in the past and continues to shepherd youth and young adults, this book has helped me process some of the thoughts and behaviors I've noticed over the years. Haidt and Lukianoff have also helped me recognize some harmful, societal patterns against which Christians must inoculate their children for the sake of the faith.

In order to argue their premises, Haidt and Lukianoff underscore three societal beliefs that can endanger the healthy, cognitive development of children. The beliefs, frequently repeated throughout the book, create a set of antitheses through which the duo filter current sociological problems. These are: (1) what doesn't kill you makes you weaker, (2) always trust your feelings, and (3) life is a battle between good people and evil people. These assertions have developed over many years into a form of safety-ism, which is undermining educational institutions, family systems, and the maturity of America's children.

The duo presents the prevalence of these three beliefs throughout our American culture. Any pastor who frequently encounters college students or young adults would be remiss to neglect their observations. Haidt and Lukianoff paint an accurate, albeit broad, picture of how American children are being raised, including our children. Safe spaces have been set up on university campuses around the country to protect students from opposing ideas. Some forms of speech are believed to cause physical harm to individuals. Depression and suicidal tendencies among youth and young adults have skyrocketed.

While these phenomena could be caused by a multitude of factors, what the duo recognizes is that these events are thriving within systems that claim to put the wellbeing of young adults first. Resources on youth mental wellbeing abound for parents, schools, churches, synagogues, etc. (145–46). Unintended deaths and injuries of children have dropped significantly in the last 50 years (169). University education caters to students far more than even a generation ago (199). America is far more just today than in any time in its history (230).

What then can be done to help young adults become resilient to these challenges within our culture? The duo spends significant time discussing possible solutions for parents, universities, and society at large. These solutions are definitely worth a read. They would be helpful for discussions with Christian parents who are preparing their children for adulthood. They would also be helpful when developing catechetical instruction courses so that pastors

may be better aware of the culture their students will encounter.

Maybe you're not into the social psychology of child development. Perhaps you don't pay that much attention to the political state of our nation's educational institutions. Pastors who engage in dialogue with families or young adults, however, will find The Coddling of the American Mind thought-provoking as they sharpen their catechetical tools. In the end, that's really where the rubber hits the road: catechesis. How can we best prepare young adults to be faithful in their confession of Christian doctrine and live in a way that honors the name that the Lord placed on them in Holy Baptism?

For a more detailed discussion on The Coddling of the American Mind, feel free to visit https://greeklogic.weebly.com/discuss/category/the-coddling.

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SACRAMENTAL PREACHING: Sermons on the Hidden Presence of Christ. By Hans Boersma. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016. 240 pages. $26.00.

Out of the barren soil in biblical studies left from two centuries of historical criticism's slash-and-burn program, an unlikely successor has sprung up: the so-called "spiritual interpretation of the Bible" practiced by the church fathers. Though this term is inexact, it serves as a kind of catch-all for non-literal interpretation of the Scriptures — especially, but not exclusively, the Old Testament. It is an essentially *pastoral* approach to the Scriptures, insofar as it is oriented toward edifying believers instead of impressing academics.

In order to get at the same idea, theologian Hans Boersma prefers a term that will resonate with Lutheran readers: *sacramental*. By "sacramental" Boersma means that "this-worldly, created realities participate in the heavenly, uncreated reality of the eternal Word of God" (xx). Applied to the interpretation and proclamation of the Scriptures, it means recovering "the heart of the patristic sensibility: the recognition that Christ is present in the historical realities depicted in the Old Testament Scriptures" (199). Simply put, "At bottom the homiletic implication is simply this: We always want to preach Christ" (xxii). The "performed exegesis" of Boersma's book thus aspires to be a handbook for such sacramental preaching — a manner of preaching that accords well with a Lutheran, pastoral emphasis on law and gospel proclamation aimed at the care of souls.

The book unfolds in four sections, mirroring the four-fold spiritual interpretation of the Middle Ages and interpreted through the lens of an anagogical ascent toward "happiness" (or "blessedness"), the purported *telos* of the life of faith. This is a tad ostentatious, but otherwise doesn't affect the substance of the text. Each of the four parts then comprises three or four sermonic exhibits (which were actually preached by the author in his home church, lending credibility to his pastoral applicability), followed by preacher's notes. The majority of the sermons come from Old Testament texts, as one would expect, but a few New Testament ones are included as well. An example of one of the sermons will provide the reader with a flavor of the text.

In a sermon on Genesis 28:10–22 (Jacob's ladder) entitled "The Gate of Heaven," Boersma plays with the phrase "a certain place": Jacob came to "a certain place," and there would receive his heavenly vision. After suggesting the ways in which we modern people, with our rootless lives, tend only to know "a certain place," Boersma delves into the exegesis of the passage, providing historical context and depicting the "ladder" as a ziggurat-like structure that "links

heaven and earth." Having set this out, Boersma makes his key move: "Perhaps we should leave well enough alone, and take from the text what we can just by reading it in its own narrative context. But let me be blunt: I am convinced we should never do that. We can never *just* read it as a historical narrative" (158–59). From there, in a move more explicitly methodical than in others of the sermons, he proceeds to lay out his rationale for "sacramental" exegesis: the incarnation of Christ. Finally, by way of a deft connection with John 1, Boersma brings it home: "This story says to you and me that there is a certain place you can identify as the house of God, as the gate of heaven. Jesus Christ is that place. When you stay at that place, you will be changed, you will be transformed" (161).

The value of this book is less in the sermons themselves than in the notes that follow. In this particular instance, Boersma takes things a step further than simple typology in the accompanying notes by insisting that such exegesis and preaching does not merely detect similarities between Old and New Testament texts; rather, "The biblical text is a sacrament, and Christ is really present in it. We don't *put* him there; we *find* him there" (163). Jesus' appropriation of the Jacob narrative in John 1, in other words, discloses the "actual meaning" of Genesis 28. Throughout the book, the notes are sprinkled liberally with such provocative and illuminating observations.

Boersma is unabashed in his assertion that *Sacramental Preaching* is a work of retrieval. He aims to show that "the sacramental exegesis of the church fathers is worth recovering" (197). Not only does he succeed in this endeavor, he also demonstrates, albeit in an inchoate way, *how* to recover it in our preaching. As noted above, spiritual interpretation has been gaining some traction in academic biblical studies, but to this point guidance in its practical implementation has been lacking. Boersma's book is a step toward filling that lacuna.

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THE HUNDREDFOLD: Songs for the Lord. By Anthony Esolen. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019. 224 pp. $17.95.

Anthony Esolen is one of the most scintillating Christian cultural critics of our time. Instead of simply showing that the ideas and practices of secularist progressivism are wrong, he also shows how — unlike Christianity — they are lifeless and soul-numbing. A long-time literature professor, Esolen showed his poetic talents in an acclaimed translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Now in *The Hundredfold*, Esolen has written a Christian poetic masterpiece of his own.

Today, in this lifeless and soul-numbing culture, hardly anyone reads poetry anymore. In the Introduction to *The Hundredfold*, Esolen blames the rise of free verse for the decline in poetry's popularity, going on to give us a seminar in meter, rhyme, and poetic form that can teach us how to read poetry and how to appreciate it once again.

I blame not just free verse for our current loss of poetry but also the tendency, encouraged by both modern poets and my fellow literature teachers, to turn a poem into a puzzle, something to be first deciphered and then interpreted, with the goal of finding the poem's "hidden meaning." Such an approach changes poetry reading from a pleasure to a drudgery. Other modern poems are just an effusion of emotions, a mere expression of subjective feelings. Then there are the poems, which pretend to be traditional but are not, that are sing-songy, sentimental, and idealized.

Esolen's poems are nothing like any of these. Like all poems, they must be read slowly, with concentration and close attention. But

the insight they give the reader comes from the language, the imagery, and the form of the poem, not some abstract meaning extracted from it. These poems are personal, even passionate sometimes, but they are objectively focused. They are wonderfully crafted formally, but the music of the verse is in service to its meaning, rather than distracting from it. And far from being sentimental and idealistic, they are tough-minded and grounded in reality, both that of the physical and the spiritual realms.

The Swiss Christian literary critic Denis de Rougemont has defined poetry as a "trap for meditation." A poem is a work of art, made of words like a painting is made of daubs of paint, that forces the reader — by means of its imagery and structure — to meditate on something. That might be the twinkling little stars in the night sky, as in the children's song, or stopping in the woods on a snowy evening as in Robert Frost's poem of the same name, or the Fall of Man in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In each case, the poet is contemplating a truth, an experience, or an object, evoking it and reflecting on its meaning in such a way that the reader will meditate on it as well.

In this case, Esolen is trapping us into meditations on the Bible; that is, on Christ. That is, the Christ who saves us. *The Hundredfold* consists of 67 mostly-short lyric poems, each one based on a text of Scripture; 12 longer dramatic monologues depicting someone from the New Testament or its era who encountered Christ; and 21 hymns that the church can sing in worship to Christ. Add up the number of poems, and you get the 100 referred to by the title.

Some might be surprised to find work so biblical, so Christocentric, so evangelical coming from a Catholic like Esolen, but there it is. While his Catholicism is evident sometimes, there is little to bother other Christians, and Lutherans will pick up on motifs of law and gospel, the theology of the cross, and the sacraments.

The intricately crafted lyric poems, with their enveloping rhymes, demonstrate how much meaning a good poet can condense into just a few lines. Each one begins with a text of Scripture as its heading. In ten lines or so, we jump from Eve to Mary, from the death of Isaac to the death of Joseph. Sometimes we jump from the Bible days to today, from child sacrifice to Moloch to today's "terror" of birth. Or from the Bible text to the poet's — and our — personal lives.

Interspersed with these lyrics are longer dramatic monologues. This genre, pioneered by the great Victorian poet Robert Browning, depicts a fictional or historical person speaking, telling something about his or her life. Thus, the poet is creating a character and telling a story, much like a novelist. Esolen writes his monologues (along with one dialogue and one trialogue) in blank verse, the unrhymed iambic pentamenter ("which is, please repeat three times, *not free verse, and not even close*"), the form that Shakespeare, Milton, and most other major English poets used.

Esolen depicts Mary, watching her young Son sleep; a grandfather who turns out to have been the boy who brought Jesus the loaves and fishes; Bartimaeus exultant in now being able to see; the healed demoniac from Gadara; Paul writing to his old teacher Gamaliel; and others who knew Jesus and can help us know him.

Mixed in with these poems are hymns. These are actual texts written to classic hymn tunes (including some Lutheran gems, such as Luther's "Christus Lag in Todesbunden" and Johann Franck's "Jesu, Meine Freude"). Esolen, who has written a book on hymns (*Real Music: A Guide to the Timeless Hymns of the Church*), knows that while song-lyrics are poetry, they are poetry of a special sort, designed for collective devotion and collective performance, with metrical qualities that must tie-in to the music. These hymns measure up, and a congregation could sing them with great

profit and delight. Their effect in this series of biblical reflections and meditations on Christ is to give them a liturgical context, a response of praise, so that the whole collection is something like a worship service.

In the Introduction, Esolen says that *The Hundredfold,* while made up of individual poems, is itself one poem. And, indeed, the various poems come together into a unity. The Bible verses with their accompanying poems take us from Genesis through the Epistles. There is a progression in the dramatic monologues from Christ as a boy, through his ministry, through his passion, to Resurrection, and then to the proclamation of this gospel by the apostles.

The final poem of that series is entitled "Two Disciples of Saint John, on Patmos." This dramatic Browning-style character study has three voices, not just one, making it, I suppose, a dramatic trialogue. The two young men are talking together as they watch the Beloved Disciple of Jesus, now elderly and close to death, sleeping. This ties together with the first monologue, in which Mary watches the young Jesus sleeping. This brings the sequence of poems full circle into a unity, even as it shows a movement from youth to age, from Jesus to the proclamation of Jesus. In the poem, as St. John sleeps, his mind is filled with memories of his days with Jesus, with snatches of his Holy Spirit-inspired gospel, and with vivid imagery that he would soon write down as the Book of Revelation. His two young followers think the old man is dying, but he surprises them by waking up and calling for parchment so that he could write out "the terrible apocalypse of love."

The volume closes with this account of the writing of the last book of the Bible, followed by three lyrics on texts from that book, and, finally, a longer poem to conclude them all. Like the monologues, it portrays a person and his story, but this character is the author himself, telling about *his* encounter with Christ. Like the lyrics, it is intricately rhymed, but this rhyme scheme is the *terza rima* of *The Divine Comedy*, the three-line stanzas with interlocking rhymes with which Esolen's literary mentor Dante wrote about *his* spiritual journey.

One of Esolen's dramatic monologues is entitled "The Blacksmith to St. Luke," in which an ordinary working man reports on his dealings with Jesus to the Evangelist researching his gospel. He tells about hearing Jesus talking about a sower whose seed produced "a hundredfold."

The title of the book — that is, to the larger poem of which the others are a part — refers not only to the number of poems it contains. It is an allusion to Christ's Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:8). The seed is "the word" (Matt 13:18-23), the Word of God that is the gospel, which, received rightly, bears much fruit.

The implication is that, for Esolen, these poems represent "the Hundredfold" that the word of God has produced in him. And that he hopes the words that he has sown in this book produce a "hundredfold" in those who read it.

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CHRIST AND CALAMITY: Grace and Gratitude in the Darkest Valley. By Harold L Senkbeil Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. 184 pages. $8.99.

The care of souls has ever been an essential element of the pastoral vocation. All pastors are acutely aware that suffering is a universal phenomenon amongst their parishioners, but COVID-19 has shifted the ground. These days in the West, the sum total of human suffering has transferred the bulk of its weight from largely discrete, individual experiences to the shared burdens of public trauma manifested in every city, every parish, every home, and every

soul. To a generation unacclimated to common hardship, this is disorienting, and many pastors are looking for accessible resources to offer their hurting parishioners. Specifically written during the pandemic, *Christ and Calamity: Grace and Gratitude in the Darkest Valley* is a book for such a time as this.

Award-winning Lutheran pastor Harold J. Senkbeil is no stranger to pastoral care. With nearly five decades of experience in the ministry, he is the author of 2019's *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. In this latest offering, *Christ and Calamity* — released just a year later — Senkbeil writes with the same thoughtful sincerity, offering enduring wisdom for wounded souls mired in the tumult of the pandemic. Although the book directly addresses the contemporary complexities of life under threat of COVID-19, *Christ and Calamity* is no hasty, callow offering. Timely but not trendy, Senkbeil writes with simple elegance in the tradition of Frederich Buechner and Henri Nouwen, addressing modern problems with ancient wisdom. "This is not a book about the coronavirus or the COVID-19 pandemic," he writes. "It is a book about you. Rather it's a book about you and God — and how you relate to Him in times of calamity" (3).

Structurally, the book is arranged as a series of pithy meditations on the presence of Christ in the midst of affliction. The volume is slim, but the content is rich. Chapter titles include, "When you are dying, Christ is your life" and "When you are alone, Christ is with you." These topical segments make the book easy to navigate for readers seeking immediate or targeted insight on specific troubles, while at the same time flowing seamlessly from one chapter to the next for those encountering the book in a more leisurely or devotional manner. Each chapter is brief but dense, woven through with Scripture and overflowing with cogent contemplations on the mysteries and paradoxes of abundant spiritual life in severe distress.

The book is at its most profound when it reflects on the nature and purpose of suffering. "What would Jesus do? He would suffer" (34). With boldness and compassion, Senkbeil invites his readers to dwell in faith in the tension between suffering and joy — a tension that can only be held by Christ's intervening grace. "Because He bore your misery ahead of you . . . your pain is sanctified in His" (38). Senkbeil illuminates that a pandemic is an opportunity to endure suffering with fortitude in the company of the saints in order to grow in intimacy with God. "Your private pain finds meaning in the collective experience of all of Christ's beloved" (37). To that end, Senkbeil issues a clarion call to a life of prayer. "When we are discouraged or afraid in difficult situations, we should follow the example of the disciples during that storm: go to the Lord in prayer" (112). Not only does the book encourage us to pray our private petitions, it also offers curated prayers, hymns, and Scriptures to guide us in our intercessions.

"Christ and calamity certainly go together," the author muses. For those with ears to hear, this mysterious reality of the Christian life is suffused with hope and promise. "The cross isn't so bad if it is the cross of Jesus — for by his cross he has won our salvation" (49). In this season of international crisis, many weary Christians need tangible encouragement to keep their eyes on Jesus. Pastors will find *Christ and Calamity* a valuable resource to offer their suffering parishioners.

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THE SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT HOME: The Power of Messy Prayers, Loud Tables, and Open Doors. By Don Everts. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020. 208 pages. $17.00.

Imagine your life is a reality show. You've got camera crews following you, into your house. Occasionally, at the end of the day, you watch the footage — on fast forward, because you can't re-live everything in real time. Every now and then, you freeze the frame. And it brings you back.

It felt like this when I read Don Evert's book, *The Spiritually Vibrant Home*. Don kindly warns the reader: this topic may dredge up uncomfortable emotions — because that's what it did to the people who helped develop the content. Don and his family had invited forty people over to their house. The group included exhausted parents of young kids, emotionally drained parents of teenagers, battle-tested grandparents, and a few single people who were wondering if the topic of "households" would be relevant to them at all. They met on Sundays for nine months. They recalled their household practices, past and present, and felt a mixture of regret and hope. Pondering over those freeze frames from my life, I could relate.

The book incorporates research from Barna on the practices of 2,347 self-identified Christian households. Don defines *household* as "a group of people living their life together" (34). This includes a *core household* — everyone living under a single roof — and an *extended household* — the people who "feel like family" because of how often they come over (39). When Don reviewed what the Bible said, this was the point that got me: God wants to relate to me, not just as an individual, but to my whole household (55). This made me regretful and hopeful.

Don has a knack for taking sterilized research terms and putting them in word pictures I can sink my brain teeth into. He says that God has designed the spiritual practices of vibrant households to be more like *fireplaces*, and less like furnaces; more like *meals*, and less like TV remote controls; more like *risky rescue ships*, and less like safe submarines (73). That really got me chewing on my memories.

In my family of origin, we attended church, but didn't talk about God much in our home. Today, my household often relates to life with God *less* like a messy, captivating, ever-burning fireplace, and *more* like a furnace: set it and forget it. Just go to church. That's enough (83). Don's word-picture convicted me.

To address this, I've tried to more intentionally initiate spiritual conversations in my household. However, I can cue up many replays of talks that didn't go as planned. I've learned I can't force a deep conversation. Don says it well, "There's no conversation remote control . . . conversations are a group sport — they involve conversation partners who can't be controlled like a television . . . Conversations have to build like a meal. You start with lighter fare," (130–31) and when the appetite is built, you can move into something more hearty.

Where will Don's word pictures lead me next? I'm standing in our church after a mid-week Lenten service, talking to a young man. I'll call him Bob. Bob started visiting our church recently. That night he told me couldn't come to worship on Sundays anymore. His new job has him working Sundays. "I can still come on Wednesdays," he said. I thought to myself, "What happens after Easter when our midweek services stop? You don't fit with the program, Bob." Then I thought, "Maybe I should invite him to dinner at our house?" Hmm. Bob is a quiet, single man in his thirties. He says he lives in our neighborhood, but I don't know anything about his past. Would it be safe to invite him into my home? Don's word picture flashes before my eyes: God has called our households to be less like safely sealed submarines, and

more like *risky rescue ships* (151). That's how God runs his household, right? Jew and Gentile all together — doors blown open and walls broken down by Jesus — a risky, messy, mostly uncontrollable mix of people. That's where God wants to dwell (Eph 2:11–22).

When I watch these frames from my core and extended household memories, Don's book also reminds me that I'm not watching them alone. Jesus is there with me, not to condemn, but to coach; to forgive me where I've failed, and to nudge me forward in hope.

If you are a pastor, you sometimes have the honor of meeting people in their homes. If you were my pastor, entrusted with the care of my soul, I would highly recommend Don Everts's book. With it, you might help me see how God works through households — through messy prayers, loud tables, and open doors. And at the next mid-week service, when Bob says he's scheduled to work again this Sunday, you might give me a nudge: "Maybe someone could invite him over for dinner?"

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