

Book Reviews

Book reviews addressing the care of souls are welcomed (500-800 words). For a copy of *SEELSORGER* book review guidelines, contact Kyle Mietzner, kyle.mietzner@gmail.com.

THE THEOLOGY OF ILLNESS. By Jean-Claude Larchet. Translated by John and Michael Breck. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 2002. Paper. 132 pages. \$17.00.

MENTAL DISORDERS AND SPIRITUAL HEALING: Teachings from the Early Christian East. By Jean-Claude Larchet. Translated by Rama P. Coomaraswamy and G. John Champoux. Angelico Press. 2011. Paper. 180 pages. \$16.95.

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY. By Jean-Claude Larchet. Translated by Michael Donley. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 2016. Paper. 107 pages. \$16.00.

We at DOXOLOGY have invested a considerable amount of time and energy via our classic program and focused seminars towards resurrecting the time-honored heritage of the care of souls as it applies to the complexities of the twenty-first century. One of our main goals has been to combat the unfortunate modern division of human beings into spiritual, mental, and physical components. The Bible, we take pains to point out, is adamant that human beings are a complex amalgam of body, mind, and soul. All three need attention if pastors are to be able ministers of the New Testament and stewards of God's mysteries in a world that is spiraling ever more rapidly into moral, spiritual, and social free-fall.

People don't *have* a body, we contend; they *are* bodies. Likewise, they don't *have* souls; they *are* souls. Humans, in short, are *embodied* souls – or conversely, *spiritual* bodies. This conviction lies at the core of DOXOLOGY's mission to

equip pastors for informed and effective soul care in our convoluted times. Yet, old notions die hard. The focus on reason, to the detriment of faith prevalent ever since the Enlightenment, continues unabated, albeit reinvigorated in postmodern garb.

Postmodernism, as it has unfolded over the last three decades, in many ways has turned out to be merely modernism on steroids. The project of modernism, Robert Jenson wrote more than thirty years ago, was the attempt to fashion a narratable world without a divine narrator.¹ God was banished from his creation. During the era of modernism, human reason was the sole arbiter of truth. More recently, reason itself was abandoned, and now the spotlight is on human feeling and emotion. We no longer *think*; we *feel*. The ancients saw the mind and higher rationality as essential constraints on the lower impulses. When human desire and passions are allowed to run amok, it leads to moral and cultural disaster. Sexual integrity and family coherence are among the first casualties, as we are discovering in our society in which the body is increasingly viewed as a tool for sexual exploits and a mere avatar of gender preference and self-expression.

The savvy pastor in the midst of such ideological turmoil has his work cut out for him. The good news is we needn't reinvent the wheel. The early church was called to mission in a world that in many ways mirrors ours. What others view as an increasingly secularized society is actually a resurgence of the old paganism. This means that

¹ Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things* (October 1993).

we can look to the New Testament, not just the divinely inspired record of the history of the life of the church in apostolic times. It is an effective template for evangelization, catechesis, and pastoral care for us in a world that seems to grow more chaotic with every passing day.

Enter Jean-Claude Larchet. A French philosopher and theologian, he is an expert on how the Eastern fathers of the third and fourth centuries went about the care of souls. To say he is a prolific writer is an understatement. His Wikipedia bio mentions upwards of thirty books and hundreds of scholarly articles and book reviews. Born into a Roman Catholic family in 1949, he was chrismated into the Orthodox Church in 1971. A patristic scholar of the first order, he is likely the foremost contemporary expert on the teachings of St. Maximus the Confessor (580–662). His “Theology of the Body” was the first on my radar. I have since discovered his writings range over an impressive array of theological and philosophical topics. Yet, he is no theological egghead; in recent years he also has published books on the spiritual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of social media on human flourishing.

His masterwork is his monumental “Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses,” an 800-page work in three volumes that explores the wisdom of the first through the fourteenth centuries on diseases of the body, mind, and spirit, as well as medical and psychic therapeutics designed to restore or enhance human physical, spiritual, and mental health. This would be the book to read if you wanted to absorb all there is to know in this field. It is a veritable DSM for pastors when it comes to spiritual disease and cure. Since it currently sells for \$100, however, I have confined myself to the three titles above.

Theology of the Body

Of the three, his *Theology of the Body* is unquestionably the most valuable. As current

thinking regarding the body is nearly engulfed by neo-gnosticism, this small volume (97 pages) is a bracing antidote rooted in the concrete flesh of the human body as both the creation of God in his own image and likeness and—in the incarnate body of the Son of God—the instrument of our salvation in this world and the next.

This book is liberally sprinkled with scriptural references, though it also introduces many of the Greek fathers much better known in the Orthodox Church than in our midst. It comes as no surprise that all three books stress repeatedly that the destiny of God’s people is divinization: “God became man so that man may become God” is perhaps an over-simplification of Eastern Orthodoxy’s trademark doctrine of *theosis*, which, in my opinion, obscures the distinction between God and his creation essential to the faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It also undermines the efficacy of the Word by which God justifies the ungodly, bestowing the righteousness of Christ upon repentant sinners. It’s no surprise then that sanctification gets confused with justification in this view.

But I digress. These books, though distinctly Eastern Orthodox in flavor and tone, have much to teach us who live and work in the legacy of the Western church. True, you will be introduced to pastors and thinkers long dead of whom you have never heard, but you will be enriched by their insights of how the sacramental word can be brought to bear on suffering humanity.

Take, for example, Larchet’s short excursus on the human passions and their detrimental symptoms when viewed from the perspective of soul and body:

Thus the passions that develop in fallen humanity—and which are all pathological forms of attachment to sensible reality and to oneself—involve soul and body simultaneously, tough in varying proportions, by reason of the

very close links between them. Some—such as pride, vanity, dejection or *acedia* [listlessness, despondency]—affect the soul more; others—such as gluttony or the sexual passions—involve the body more; yet others—such as avarice, cupidity or anger—affect both soul and body more or less equally (35).

Larchet views marriage as the giving of the entirety of oneself to the spouse. Husband and wife share not merely their bodies but their *persons*. As we all know, after the sexual revolution, even the Christian marriage bed is defiled by notions of sexual achievement and conquest. Larchet reminds us that sensual pleasure, though a byproduct of sexual union as designed by our Creator, is never its sole aim (63). Pastors would do well to equip young marrieds to think more holistically about sex.

Each of the two people united by love gives his or her self to the other and receives the other in return. In this communion they are each enriched, blossoming to the full extent of their being.... Sexual passion, by contrast, is a form of *philautia*, revealing an egotistical love of self. It causes the person it possesses to be introverted, completely shutting out other people. It prevents all genuine exchange, since under its influence those affected are only concerned with their own interests. They give nothing to the other person, wishing only to receive, and taking only that which satisfies their passionate desire (67).

The divine destiny of the human body is a recurring theme in this book. The body of the believer, originally designed to live forever, will be raised incorruptible. Thus, in a very real way, when the body of a deceased believer is laid in its grave, it marks the death of death.

As St. John Chrysostom puts it, death is nothing more than the death of corruption and the destruction of death. Although we still must die, it is no longer so that we may cease to live, but so that—death having been transcended—we may live again, rise again, and put on incorruptibility

and immortality. For what is seen “is not made alive unless it dies” (1 Cor 15:16) (94).

Mental Disorders and Spiritual Healing

Of the three Larchet books I read, the book on mental disorders was most disappointing. Part of this, I’m convinced, is because its English translation is much more wooden than the others. Likewise, its layout and composition pales in comparison to its companions. That said, there is much to be gleaned from its pages.

Larchet demonstrates a considerable acquaintance with the history of mental illness and its treatment, bemoaning the contemporary tendency to prefer medications over psychotherapy: “Psychotropic medications will act to alleviate symptoms, but in most cases have no effect on underlying causes. While they unquestionably act to relieve distressing symptoms, it is often only at the cost of an internal and external inhibition and blunting of affect that causes as much distress to the patient as did the original illness” (3).

In early Christian thought, there were three factors which could conceivably be the cause for mental disturbances, Larchet asserts: organic, demonic, and spiritual (8). Thus, he observes that the widespread consensus that the early church believed all mental illness was actually diabolic possession is completely false.

The contemporary behavioral phenomenon now known as narcissism was noted also by the fathers: “...the primal passion of ‘philautia’, the passionate love of oneself which has the body as its primary object” (12). Common neuroses and psychoses currently identified were already anticipated by the ancients who explored the negative impact of the “passions,” that is, disordered desires. Anxiety and anguish they believed to be connected to the passions of fear and sadness. Aggression was identified as anger. Psychotic depression was connected with “acedia” (spiritual lethargy) and “despair”—an

extreme form of the passion of sadness. The point is that many of the insights of modern psychology were anticipated already by the ancients.

Likewise, when it comes to treatment, the barbaric attitudes and practices of early generations regarding mental illness were not encouraged by Christian practitioners. Larchet asserts that Byzantine society regarded the insane as objects of scorn and rejection, yet the great saints in the Christian community treated them with reverence and respect. The “fool for Christ” who was different and weak was treated with the love that was reserved for the most destitute and needy among mankind.

In chapter one of this book, Larchet provides a very helpful survey of human anthropology as understood by the Eastern fathers (16–33). He points out that they used both the dichotomous (body-soul) model of humanity and the trichotomous (spirit/intellect-soul-body) model, as do the Scriptures. Yet, in both models, the human being is viewed as a cohesive, albeit complex, whole. “The intimate relationship between soul and body is due to the fact that the soul penetrates each part of the body and uses its members as its organ” (24). The mind, or *nous*, governs both body and soul. Yet, “the *nous* is not external to the body” (30). Contemporary brain science is attempting to define the nature of cognition/mind and its relationship to the body (brain)—without much success, as far as I know. Yet, these ancient fathers were very much aware that one cannot ignore the body when treating the human mind and soul.

Chapter two deals with insanity due to somatic problems (34–43). Here Larchet notes that the fathers took pains to ensure that their spiritual treatment was offered in connection with accepted medical standards of the day, in accordance with Hippocratic-Galenic classifications and treatments, “with medications based on animal, vegetable, and mineral substances, baths and diet being the

most important” (40).

Chapter three, dealing with insanity of demonic origin, as might be expected, is quite extensive (44–88). Yet, Larchet notes that the fathers by no means saw all mental illness as caused by demons. “They distinguished quite clearly between physical and demonic etiologies not only with regard to illnesses or infirmities arising from different causes. All this goes to prove that having recourse to a demonic etiology in no way indicates a naivete of belief, an ignorance of other causes, or an inability to explain things otherwise” (45).

In chapter four, Larchet takes up insanity of spiritual origin (89–125). This is the chapter I found most valuable in this book because it takes up various ailments of mind, body, and soul in turn and then outlines treatment plans followed by the fathers. Sadness and depression, almost endemic today, is covered extensively. In sum, the ancients were quick to point out that, as there is no one cause to depression, so consequently there is no one prescribed treatment. Rather, the physician of the soul will need great discernment and care so that his treatment addresses the actual underlying ailment and not merely the symptom of profound sadness. There is simply no substitute for gentle, compassionate listening so that the soul may disclose the root of its problem. Though there were indeed any number of bodily and mental contributing factors, the spiritual warfare dimensions of anyone’s predicament must be in the picture for the discerning pastor. St. John Chrysostom, writing to his friend Stagirus who was suffering ongoing melancholy, notes the element of demonic deception: “The devil surrounds your mind with these dark sorrows as with a deep obscurity, and strives to rob you of any thought that might reassure you. Finding your soul isolated, he overwhelms it with blows and wounds” (97).

Having written elsewhere about the ancient temptation of *acedia* (spiritual lethargy)

and its pervasive and disastrous impact on contemporary clergy,² I was especially interested in Larchet’s extensive treatment of it in this chapter (115–25). He points out that, since acedia occurs almost always in isolation, it must be fought primarily by the sufferer himself. While he can indeed seek assistance and advice from a spiritual companion, the practices which he institutes will need to be carried out in the isolation of his own heart and mind. Because acedia by its very nature separates a man from the healing ministrations of God’s Holy Spirit by his Word, it is potentially the most deadly of the deadly sins. The near unanimous counsel of the ancients was that it must be fought with the virtue of patience (*hupomonē*). Larchet quotes St. Maximus, stressing that this was the treatment prescribed by Christ himself: “*Acedia* alone seizes control of all the soul’s powers and rouses almost all the passions together. That is why this passion is more serious than all the others. Hence our Lord has given us an excellent remedy against it, saying ‘You will gain possession of your souls through your patient endurance’ (Luke 21:19)” (118).

The Theology of Illness

Having helped my wife through more than twenty years of physical pain and debilitation and then what turned out to be her terminal illness during fourteen months in home hospice care, I was drawn some time ago to Larchet’s *The Theology of Illness*. If you’ve ever been a partner in suffering to anyone enduring chronic pain for years on end as I have, your interest will be peaked as well. In fact, since as a pastor a good share of your time is given to visiting people who are ill and homebound, I would say this book is a “must-read” for you.

The first thing to note is that a reliance on God

² Harold L. Senkbeil, “Lead Us Not into Temptation: Acedia, the Pastoral Pandemic” in *You, My People, Shall be Holy: A Festschrift in Honour of John W. Kleinig*, eds. John R. Stephenson and Thomas M. Winger (St. Catharines, ON: Concordia Lutheran Seminary, 2013).

and the ministrations of the Word in its oral and sacramental forms, together with prayer and blessing, is not the sole means of healing for the Christian. Larchet points out that the early history of medical centers in the Byzantine Empire was interlaced with the work of notable Christian leaders. St. Basil built a hospital in 370 in a suburb of Caesarea with all necessary qualified staff. St. John Chrysostom founded several hospitals in Constantinople. More than five hundred nurses were employed by the Church of Alexandria in the years 416–18. St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil themselves learned state of the art medicine in the course of their studies (103, 107).

Physical illness, of course, results from the mankind’s fall into sin. In God’s original perfect creation, there was no sickness, pain, suffering, or death. St. Basil wrote, “God, who made the body, did not make illness, just as he made the soul but by no means made sin” (17). Of course we dare never assume that all illness and suffering is a direct result of specific sins of the sick person. We engage in the healing arts, be they of a physical, mental, or spiritual nature, treating each ailment appropriately after diagnosis by trained and qualified practitioners. All three elements frequently effect a comorbidity; physicians of body, mind, and spirit need to collaborate as much as possible in treatment of illness of any sort.

The ancients were in the vanguard of holistic health treatments. There was none of the fragmentation all too often evident in modern medicine in those days. The Eastern fathers had a clearly defined way of understanding how physical, mental, and spiritual factors all impacted sick people, with clear implications for how comprehensive treatment plans should be prepared.

St. Nicholas Stethatos, for his part, generally incriminates *philautia* or egotistical self-love—considered by Eastern ascetic tradition as the primordial passion—as the passion

which engenders all others and contains all others within itself. The chief cause of illness, however, are those passions they called ‘bodily,’ not because they have their source in the body itself, but because they can only manifest themselves through the body, finding their basis in the body’s tendencies, such as *gastrimargia* or gluttony, together with *porneia*, which in the ascetic literature signifies sexual passions in general. To these we can add *akedia*, the weariness of soul which engenders listlessness of the body, irascibility, which produces well-known physiological disturbances, as well as fear and sadness (50–51).

Larchet has much to say about Christ’s healing ministry and its implications for pastoral care. He notes the pagan observers called Christianity a “religion for the sick,” so central was healing and spiritual deliverance in Jesus’ ministry and the life of the early church (82). To be noted are Larchet’s many cases studies and examples from what to us are obscure Eastern fathers about the place of prayer in the ministry of healing, as well as anointing, fasting, and exorcism.

As I note at the onset, there is much in these books with which confessing Lutherans will not agree. Yet, on the whole, I believe Larchet’s work deserves our scrutiny as a window into an earlier era when a church facing persecution and exclusion, much as we do today, practiced its faith boldly and accomplished remarkable healing for suffering bodies, minds, and souls in Jesus’ name.

Harold L. Senkbeil,
Executive Director Emeritus
DOXOLOGY
Waukesha, WI

FUNERALS: For the Care of Souls. By Tim Perry. Lexham Press. 2021. Hardcover. 257 pages. \$17.99.

I read *Funerals: For the Care of Souls* by Tim

Perry about a week before my father’s death. I did not know that he was going to die when I read this book. Needless to say, I would assign this little book to anyone who is headed for a funeral, which is everyone. I’ve conducted dozens of funerals over my decade of ministry, and I don’t think I’ve ever come across a book solely devoted to the topic, which is surprising considering how frequently we deal with this reality.

The first five chapters of *Funerals* deal with theory, or doctrine, while the final four offer considerations for practice. The doctrinal chapters are quite engaging and present the perspective of someone outside my own Lutheran tradition on the topics of death, judgment, hell, and heaven. Perry takes several stances with which I wouldn’t necessarily agree, but which caused me to think deeply. Iron indeed sharpens iron. These chapters provide an intellectually stimulating perspective on issues that our gnostic-influenced world would rather ignore. Pastors need to be thinking about these things.

The practical chapters delineate the fourfold funereal task as being catechist, liturgist, evangelist, and pastor. Perry is helpful in breaking down the general role of a pastor into these different categories. He also offers practical advice, such as how to approach the first meeting with the bereaved based on how closely they may be involved in the life of the church. This is both a why and a how-to book on funerals.

Perry masterfully causes the reader to think about the things that they are probably already doing. I doubt that many pastors reading the book will find a new practice to adopt but will find new meaning in their duties. For instance, he praises the post-funeral meal in the parish hall as a feast in defiance of death. Who knew an egg salad sandwich could mean so much?

A couple of pages devoted to eulogies are quite

interesting. My guess is that most readers of these pages will be staunch members of the no-eulogy camp. Perry's experience has led him to believe that the "pastoral power of a good eulogy is worth the liturgical risk." Again, while I might not agree with him completely, I was led to reconsider my own practical position on the matter. Any pastor working on funerals will doubtless come across this question and will be better equipped to thoughtfully deal with it after reading *Funerals*.

My father's funeral was wonderful. I allowed myself to sit among the bereaved with the rest of my family. Receiving the care of another pastor was such a joy. Funerals can seem normal and mundane to pastors at times, but they are a major part of what we do in the vocation of *Seelsorger*. We must remain vigilant for we never know when another funeral will need to be planned. I highly recommend this book for anyone training for or already called to the ministry. Perry's experience, coupled with theological precision makes for an informative and enjoyable read.

This book is also one of the first to be issued in the new and often-expanding series of Lexham Ministry Guides, which remind me a bit of Harvard's Brief Introduction series. These little books are quite handsomely designed and provide an easily digestible, yet theologically thorough treatment of many different topics in practical theology. The suggested reading portion of these books is especially helpful. Lexham and general editor Harold Senkbeil are to be greatly thanked for this new series.

*Kyle Mietzner, Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church
Anchorage, AK*

OF GOOD COMFORT: Martin Luther's Letters to the Depressed and their Significance for Pastoral Care Today. By Stephen Pietsch. ATF Press. 2016. Paper. 336 pages. \$23.77.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Pietsch has given us an insightful and practical volume on depression, Luther's treatment of it, and guidance for true *Seelsorge* in these gray and latter days. Theodore Tappert's *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel* has provided case studies from Luther's care for souls. Early on in Pietsch's work of pastoral counseling, depressive students "reported that they found these 500-year-old letters extremely helpful and comforting" (xvii). Consequently, Pietsch freshly translated and carefully studied twenty-one letters Luther wrote to souls suffering from depression. The product of his doctoral research is this valuable, exhaustive, and practical book that would benefit every pastor and many laity.

In our day, the care of depressed souls has been placed only in the realm of medicine and psychology, but Pietsch's contention is that, while such care often is quite helpful, we also need faithful Christian care as well:

The intent of this book is to return to addressing the long-forgotten theological and spiritual dimensions of depressive illness, drawing on the unique insight and experience of Luther. As we engage with his advice to his readers, which is born out of his own profound experience of depression, and his spiritual reflections upon it, we not only find that Luther is able to address us meaningfully today, but that his theology and pastoral counsel have potential to enhance and even transform our practice of Christian care and comfort with depression sufferers (xxv).

Of Good Comfort accomplishes this fully. Pietsch examines the vocabulary and treatment of depression as Luther arrives on the scene. He carefully notes the similarities and differences among melancholy, terrors of conscience, depressive sadness (*tristitia*), and fear of damnation. He unpacks Luther's use of *Anfechtung* (attack) and *tentatio* (closer to depression). He leads us through the ancient art of *consolatio*, which were usually stoic rationalizations. Luther borrows from

this tradition but reshapes it to provide true Christian comfort by proclaiming the Gospel, thus providing *Seelsorge*. He saw it as every Christian's duty to offer "the mutual consolation and conversation of the brethren."

Luther, above all, was a teacher and a pastor—a *Seelsorger*. He viewed theology "as the servant of church and its work of saving and comforting lost souls" (20). His letters displayed a lightness as he understood the burden of depression and masterfully enacted the Gospel of grace with joy and consolation through his writing. Pietsch leads the reader through an exploration of these letters with tremendous insights on how Luther can be our guide today.

Pietsch also untangles the complicated landscape of modern care for depression. He finds many useful tools in current psychological treatment of depression, while also cautioning against what is shallow and harmful.

Especially helpful is the section entitled "Pastoral Care Attitudes and Approaches" (131–35), which concludes that the return of the *Seelsorge* tradition is most encouraging. *Seelsorge* "brings together much of the spiritual wisdom about depression of past eras and resonates strongly with the best pastoral research today, emphasizing the classical spiritual practices of the church: the pastoral care and counsel of the Christian community and its clergy; loving and faithful Christian friendship; the liturgy, symbol and ritual; the means of grace; prayer and devotional life" (135).

In chapter four, Pietsch creates a conversation between Luther and contemporary practice. What can we learn from both? This is eminently practical with deep reflection on what it means to care for depressive souls. He examines cognitive-behavioral practices and finds some helpful congruity with Luther's approach. He opens up Luther's "demonology of depression"—the spiritual warfare aspect of depression and how to fight it. He points us to

the powerful use of justification, Gospel, and confession and absolution in healing souls. The deep suffering of depression and the helpfulness of a proper understanding of the theology of the cross is addressed in detail. Of particular note is the insight that often in modern practice we have tamed God into a *Deus Domesticus* instead of wrestling with the true, all-powerful God.

In this fourth chapter Pietsch continues with a quiver-full of tools: hope, prayer, cruciform listening, the silence of the cross, the word of the cross, use of Scripture (especially taken to heart in our own meditation and delivered to burdened souls), the value of liturgical public worship, humor, Christian community, and the power of God-given joy. Luther's letters are full of joy given by the Gospel. Pietsch observes that, because our lives are so bland with abundance and security, we rarely experience the depths of grief and scarcity nor the heights of joy. "The whole movement of the liturgy is really a divine process for the transaction of joy" (236). "Christ takes what is ours and gives all that is his, including his joy!" (237).

David Fleming,
Executive Director for Spiritual Care
DOXOLOGY
Grand Rapids, MI

PASTORAL CARE. By St. Gregory the Great. Translated by Henry Davis. Paulist Press. 1978. Hardcover. 296 pages. \$32.95.

I have long been disturbed by the short-sighted history in the field of psychology, which was my first profession. The field itself seems to think that its history starts from nothing with the advent of Wilhelm Wundt, Ivan Pavlov, and, especially, Sigmund Freud. Historians of psychology are willing to admit that Greek philosophers were developing some very rudimentary theories about the human psyche, but these historians seemed to jump from the 400s BC to the AD 1800s as if nothing happened

to help people struggling in their personal lives. In fact, whenever something is cited in General or Abnormal Psychology textbooks about the history of “people-helping,” it is nearly always to criticize earlier Christians for clinging to “bizarre myths” about demons and demon-possession as the causes of what we now (in our enlightened, scientific world) call mental illnesses. Even the field of pastoral counseling too often seems to believe myopically that Freud (an atheist) is its earliest ancestor. It is as if only the onset of the scientific approach brought on any care of the soul.

St. Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care* (also known as *Pastoral Rule*, from the Latin *Regulae Pastoralis Liber*) reveals this presupposition to be false. Written when St. Gregory reluctantly became the pope in AD 590, it was read and re-read for centuries, molding the practices of pastoral ministry and soul-care throughout Europe. It is still valuable today.

Pastoral Care consists of four parts. Part I describes the role of office of the “ruler” (bishop) and the responsibilities and motivations of those who seek (and avoid) the office. Part II illustrates the life of the pastor and what characteristics he should strive to develop (e.g., discretion, devotion to the Word, compassion) to fulfill the office admirably. Part III, by far the largest section, teaches how the ruler should admonish his people differently depending upon their traits or situations of life. Part IV is a short conclusion warning pastors to not be so inappropriately focused on the virtues God has given them that they become proud and conceited. Therefore, Parts I, II, and IV concentrate on the pastor, and Part III helps pastors understand their parishioners better.

In Parts I and II, St. Gregory exhibits keen insights into the complications of this pastoral role, like how difficult it can be to know when and how to console and challenge people, and how vices can masquerade as virtues.

Part III is the core of the treatise. St. Gregory desires to share his experiences and expertise with God’s people to all the bishops who will read him. He asserts early on that pastoral exhortations must be custom fit to the different qualities of hearers. He writes, “[W]hat is profitable to some, harms others. Thus, too, herbs which nourish some animals, kill others. ...Medicine that alleviates one disease, aggravates another” (89). He ends the prologue with this theme, “[E]very teacher...must touch the hearts of his hearers by using one and the same doctrine, but not by giving to all one and the same exhortation” (90). St. Gregory then develops a long list of characteristics—thirty-five in all—on which people may differ, and tells bishops “we must distinguish between” them. The list is much too long to include here, but can be broken into three groups: (1) situations in life (like age, gender, economic status, health); (2) various struggles with sin (like sins of deeds versus sins of thoughts, those who commit only small sins, but commit them frequently versus those who occasionally fall into serious sins); and (3) differences in temperament (like impudent and timid, impatient and patient, taciturn and talkative).

I find St. Gregory at least as insightful as early modern trait theorists in psychology. He did not spend much time trying to analyze why certain people have varying temperaments; he simply asserted that people differ and that pastors had to be prepared to treat those differences in different ways. He admonishes pastors to approach the “fainthearted” with an “indirect approach” (sounding similar to non-directive counseling), emphasizing their good points and avoiding that “their spirits (be) broken in dejection” (104–5). He posits that a “gentle approach” be used with the timid, but that the impudent may have to be “reproved by many” (sounding similar to group alcoholic interventions). He describes the differences between “taciturn” and the “talkative” (129–31) that sound very similar

to “introvert-extravert” dimensions. In each case his counsel is sensible. The pastor should be direct and assertive with those who need to hear that, but gentle and patient with those who need a softer approach. Nowhere does he blame “demon-possession” for the human problems that pastors will observe.

While I was impressed with St. Gregory’s sincere, compassionate style, *Pastoral Care* focuses on issues of sanctification, not justification. I did not find anywhere that he confessed his Christology or how the power of the Gospel and forgiveness could be used in this pastoral care (just like much of modern “Christian counseling” is a “soft-law” approach rather than Gospel-focused). He did not emphasize the cross or the empty tomb in this treatise. In fact, he rarely mentions Jesus by name.

*Rick Marrs, Professor of Practical Theology
Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, MO*

PREACHING BY HEART: How a Classical Practice Helps Contemporary Pastors to Preach without Notes. By Ryan P. Tinetti. Cascade Books. 2021. Paper. 126 pages. \$17.00.

Every preacher worth their salt wants to improve their connection with their congregation. How do I speak in such a way that they not only hear what I have to say but take it to heart and actually live it? No matter how carefully we craft a sermon, making that connection can be elusive and frustrating.

For many teachers of preaching, one of the keys ways to make this connection and improve communication with the congregation is by memorizing the sermon. The most popular text for this in recent years is *Preaching without Notes* by Joseph Webb. While this is a step in the right direction, it can also make for

preaching that is too rehearsed and mechanical, where you spend more time making sure you get each word right rather than focusing on the hearer and what they are receiving.

Ryan Tinetti in his new book *Preaching by Heart* takes the structure and method of classical rhetoric and seeks to apply it to contemporary preaching. The “hook” for the book is learning how to preach without notes, but the ancient rhetorical approach to preaching is much more than that. Tinetti is comfortable in both the realm of classical rhetoric and contemporary homiletic literature, and he moves between them with ease.

At the heart of the book is what Cicero (and many others) called the Memory Palace. The Memory Palace makes use of spatial memory and ties our use of place to root our memories into something that can be consistently recalled and brought forth. Using a physical space that the preacher knows well, like one’s home or perhaps a place from one’s childhood, the Memory Palace has us connect the different concepts or ideas of the sermon to the different places. The more details that one can tie to specific concepts, the more specific one can get when learning it by heart.

The advantages to this approach over reading a sermon or memorizing it are enormous. It allows for much faster recall without that recall being tied to a specific word order or phrase. A good storyteller does not tell the same story the same way every time. It can be the same story but told to the people who are right there in front of him. In the same way, the Memory Palace allows for the creation and arrangement of a sermon that is solid and built upon the Word of God but is also flexible and designed for the people and context at hand.

I first learned of this concept through the book *Preaching by Ear* by Dave McClellan. Written about seven years ago, McClellan sought to bring the work of Quintilian into the modern

time. The book freed me from the need to write out a sermon word for word. More importantly, it gave me a framework for constructing a sermon that is more hearer oriented and less focused on whether I say each word exactly as I had written it down.

If anything, *Preaching by Heart* is better than the McClellan book. It is simpler and more accessible, but it has the academic research behind it allows one can delve as deeply as one wants, with Tinetti serving as a guide.

If you are a preacher who is stuck and wants to rethink preaching in a way that is faithful to the text of God's Word and that is oriented toward the hearer of today, then this is the book for you. It will be a great introduction for new preachers, but it will be even better for preachers who know their craft and want to focus more on how to connect with the congregation.

Dr. Todd A. Peperkorn, STM, DMIN
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry &
Missions/Director of Vicarage
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, IN

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP. By Aelred of Rievaulx. Translated by Lawrence C. Braceland. Cistercian Publications. 2010. Paper. 144 pages. \$15.85.

“What statement about friendship can be more sublime, more true, more valuable than this: it has been proved that friendship must begin in Christ, continue with Christ, and be perfected by Christ” (57).

One of the five things every congregation needs to know about church workers is that they need friends, wrote Beverly Yanke in the October 2018 issue of the *Lutheran Witness*. Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wegner wrote in *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* that not having a friend was one of the top four reasons pastors left their

local parish.

This is not new. In 1164, the abbot Aelred of the Cistercian monastery in Rievaulx, England, wrote *Spiritual Friendship* for the whole Church, especially for the monks he served. By growing up with (Aelred was from a family of pastors), living among (a quarter of the 650 monks were ordained), and leading pastors, Aelred knew firsthand the importance of friendship for pastors. In *Spiritual Friendship*, Aelred put to letter what he lived and practiced.

There are four parts to *Spiritual Friendship*. The stage is set in the prologue by invoking Christ's name and using Scripture as the primary source; then, in the first book, Cicero's definition of friendship, “For friendship is nothing other than agreement in all things divine and human with benevolence and charity” (27), is a springboard to define the nature of friendship, its origin, and its cause. The second book covers the fruits and benefits of friendship. The third book shows how and with whom to have friendships.

In the prologue, Aelred grounds friendship in creation and redemption. Every human needs friendship to flourish because it is in tune with the way God created humanity. As Christians, there are always three friends because Christ is always in the middle, thus reflecting the Holy Trinity. Then, Aelred shows friendship's primary fruit is the other person by using how Christ desires humanity to be in a relationship with Him for their own sake. Lastly, Aelred demonstrates that friendship only occurs based on the personal decision to test, commit, and work on the relationship. For Aelred, friendship doesn't just happen but is gifted, received, protected, and tended by Christ and the two people.

One of *Spiritual Friendship's* main sources is St. Ambrose's *On the Duties of Clergy*, where he writes how friendships between pastors help pastors grow in holiness and joy. Aelred makes the case that, since friends guard each other's

souls, share each other's burdens, and are completely honest, the best group from which pastors would choose a friend is precisely other pastors. Most of the discussion in seminary is about whether a pastor should be friends with a congregant, but, unfortunately, there is very little discussion on friendships among pastors. Without this emphasis, pastors can isolate themselves from other pastors, resulting in no friendships at all; with this void, pastors often turn to their wives for friendship. Inadvertently, the married pastor puts his beloved in a position for which she is not meant, thus creating tension at home and a lack of joy in the ministry.

This is why *Spiritual Friendship* is so needed; it is grounded in Christ, Holy Scripture, and tradition. Pastors can use it as a manual to help them develop friendships with other pastors, and, by developing real spiritual friendships, pastors can grow in holiness, thrive in their humanity, and experience the joy of the ministry.

There are many other interesting topics in *Spiritual Friendship*. Aelred explores false friendships, examines the friendship between David and Jonathan, distinguishes the universality of love versus the particularity of friendship using John 15, and walks through the process of making and breaking friendships. The book is short but packed with so many thoughts to keep you reflecting upon Christ's friendship with you and upon your friendship with others.

*Marcus Nelson, Pastor
St. John Lutheran Church
Wheaton, IL*

STEWARDSHIP: For the Care of Souls. By Heath R. Curtis and Nathan Meador. Lexham Press. 2021. Hardcover. 144 pages. \$19.99.

I set myself up for failure. In front of me sat a thin small book that I hoped would provide the ecclesiastical equivalent of a "get-rich-

quick" plan for giving. I wondered eagerly what three-step plan might lie behind the cover. Who doesn't want their church to give more money? Which pastor doesn't desire for giving to increase in his congregation? I knew that I was misguided when I opened up the book and it began with prayer...really good prayer about stewardship. This journey wasn't going to be some wisdom of man's nonsense; this was going to be a proper biblical teaching and understanding about stewardship.

The book begins by addressing why stewardship is needed and why it is such a struggle for the church. Stewardship must be taught because stewardship goes against our sinful nature.

This book is co-authored by Rev. Nathan Meador and Rev. Heath Curtis. Formatted in an alternating authoring of chapters, Meador faithfully frames why Christians are called to be stewards by God. He continues with not only why the stewardship life is the sanctified life, but also stewardship as pastoral care for souls. He says of the church that "stewardship is not a program" and, for the Christian, it is not "their activity but their identity" (38). Pastoral care must begin with a biblical understanding and teaching of the *why* of stewardship.

Moving from exegetical to practical, Curtis describes how pastors can better incorporate the teaching and preaching of stewardship into the care of the souls of God's people. This chapter was especially convicting of my ignorance and avoidance of addressing stewardship. Again, this highlights and emphasizes that stewardship is more than preaching about giving money. Many pastors, myself included, try to avoid being a stereotypical fire-and-brimstone preacher (or perhaps these days a church-growth vision caster), yelling and laying on the guilt that the church must give more. Yet our churches are in their present financial state because we have been reluctant to preach and teach on stewardship. "I can almost guarantee you that far fewer than half of the members

of your congregation are giving a faithful, generous, sacrificial, firstfruits proportion of their income (1 Cor. 16) toward ministry of your church” (44).

From this striking statement, Curtis moves to the *how* of changing the stewardship culture of your congregation. Building on the concept of concentric circles of leaders, teaching and preaching on stewardship takes planning and patience, and it begins with the elders. Whether you preach from a historic lectionary, *lectio continua*, or a sermon series, Curtis offers sage advice to not jam in stewardship into every sermon. Yet “you have to make a plan for this preaching” (62).

Every church has a culture of stewardship. Meador notes, “your congregation’s culture will have its own distinct characteristics as well” (73). Many churches have a culture of scarcity, holding back not only money but also time and talent. A meet-the-budget mentality is not a faithful stewardship culture. A change in stewardship culture is a heavy but necessary burden for the pastor and church leadership. It begins by “taking strengths and making them stronger” (84). God has blessed many churches in our denomination with decades of Gospel proclamation. When a church celebrates its 100th or 150th anniversary, it is a celebration of stewardship—the giving of both money and time by the congregation. With celebration is also a call to repentance. Pastoral care of souls will be a daily call to repentance and new life for both the congregation and the individual steward. “There are no shortcuts in this process. It takes time. Time is exactly what the Lord has given us” (92).

This informative and encouraging book ends by exhorting pastors to be faithful and recognize that stewardship is not a curse but a blessing. “Your stewardship story and the stewardship story of your congregation are a matter of the gospel. That means it is really not your work” (106). This short book on stewardship is not

a “get-rich-quick” scheme. It is far more! It is ideal as a primer for pastors and church leadership to begin a path towards a proper teaching of Christian stewardship. I appreciate that the word “money” hardly appears (perhaps this is intentional by the authors). Money is a mere component of a more robust theology of stewardship. By addressing stewardship, one ensures that the gospel will go out. “Fundamentally, we only have one thing to steward...it is the gospel” (104–5). Buy this book for the sake of the gospel and delight in its fruits.

*Aaron Spratt, Pastor/Missionary
Faith Lutheran Church
Alaska Mission for Christ
Juneau, AK*

VOCATION: The Setting for Human Flourishing. By Michael Berg. 1517 Publishing. 2021. Paper. 136 Pages. \$12.95.

The Reverend Dr. Michael Berg is an assistant professor of theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College and the cohost of the educational podcast, “Let the Bird Fly.” Such experience makes him more than qualified to write a book on vocation that is both doctrinally sound and accessible to the average layman.

There are a few books on the market tackling the topic of Luther’s doctrine of vocation. Berg’s *Vocation: The Setting for Human Flourishing* differentiates itself from the others by its fresh approach in using often self-deprecating examples in a humorous way to highlight applications of the doctrine in concrete life. Berg shows how often it is that our own piety gets in the way of living in a God-pleasing manner and how a true understanding of vocation as God’s calling can restore a love for life and the joy of our salvation even in the midst of daily hardships.

Pastors may find this as a nice resource for a

summer seminar in their congregations. It will also help pastors aid parishioners in answering that perennial question, “What does God want me to do with my life?” The book is further helpful in explaining the Table of Duties from Luther’s Small Catechism, not only as it relates to such things as the duties of employers and employees, but also where it concerns itself with a proper relationship between the pastor and the congregation in their mutual responsibilities.

*Bror Erickson, Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM*

THIS TOO SHALL LAST: Finding Grace When Suffering Lingers. By K.J. Ramsey. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020. 221 pages. \$18.99.

In an effort to bolster my pastoral care skills to those suffering from chronic pain, I picked up *This Too Shall Last* by K.J. Ramsey.

Ramsey has a story to tell the church, and it isn’t a “before and after story.” This isn’t a story of sickness turned to health or fatiguing pain giving way to boundless energy. It’s a story of enduring suffering, of ongoing weakness, and, ultimately, it’s *the* story of the ever-abiding faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

It’s no secret that American culture hates weakness. It’s lamentable that this attitude has far too often been absorbed by Christian congregations in the United States. Ramsey talks about how weakness and suffering is often ignored in the church, and, how on those rare occasions when they are not, they are viewed only as a “problem to fix.” Predictably, when the problem lingers and the prayers for healing are answered in the negative, then the suffering is viewed with suspicion, or, worse yet, some moral failure is assigned to the sufferer for their condition. This is not good, because such reactions to suffering are not faithful to the

biblical witness or the will of God.

Ramsey invites the reader into her own story of chronic pain. You cringe with her when she recalls the less than helpful comments she has received from others. You suffer with her as she recalls the shame and difficulty of what her illness means for her life. You breathe a sigh of relief with her when people have accompanied her in her illness with grace rather than judgment.

Ramsey wants the reader to know that chronic pain (and suffering in general) does not disqualify someone from the grace of God. Jesus Christ is with the sufferer in the midst of their suffering. This necessary note of hope is occasionally obscured by Ramsey’s own writing.

On the one hand, Ramsey presents a beautiful account of human suffering that is consistent with what Lutherans often call “the theology of the cross.” She warns against peering into the hidden things of God when she writes, “Most of us see the cloud over the purpose of our pain and try to blow back the fog by finding an explanation.... We think that if we could find the reason we’re stuck in suffering, maybe we could learn the lesson and leave.... When we overspiritualize our suffering, we turn our hearts away from the sacred mystery of how God is forming us in our suffering.... [And] in the absence of a lesson, we try to create our own purpose...we’ll make something of our suffering, we’ll profit from the pain” (106–7). Ramsey rightly directs the reader to eschew such “theology of glory” talk when she summarizes her argument thusly, “God is not on the other side of our suffering. He is in it” (109–10). This is beautiful.

On the other hand, Ramsey will sometimes speak in a way that makes the experience of God’s grace conditional, as though the sufferer needs to meet certain requirements before he or she can experience God’s grace. Sometimes

grace is treated as something to be discovered and found, rather than something to be received and trusted. For example, she writes, “Finding my way to blues skies will only happen through first being honest about the clouded space I occupy. I have to acknowledge...I need to notice...I must be honest...I have to notice and name...in order to find grace right here” (113). Language such as this obscures the hope she was proclaiming earlier.

With that said, Ramsey *did* often leave the reader with Christ. Such as she did at the end of chapter 6 where she says, “Advice or consolation from someone whose life has been easy isn’t that comforting or welcome. Jesus has earned the right to be heard.... This is grace: God joined us on the floor of this earth in the person of Jesus and forever changed the abyss into a portal. In the faithful life of Jesus and in the Spirit’s raising him from the grave, we can anticipate and even taste our liberation” (136–37).

I unreservedly encourage pastors to take up this book, learn from its pages, and increase their witness and testimony to the stories and lives of sufferers in their midst, all while proclaiming the grace of Christ that does not flee from suffering but meets and abides in it.

Timothy Koch, Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church
Linn, KS

