

creations of God. All the contributors follow this lead, touching on the question of disability by discerning what a particular theologian says or could say about disabling conditions. While recognizing differences in perspective, the writers acknowledge Christian awareness of the fundamental connectivity of all people through theological concepts like the image of God, the notion of kinship, the fact that being born of a human makes one human, the reality that we are all common in sin, the promise that all humans bear the divine gift of life or that *all* people participate in the mystery of human life.

Second, while recognizing that our predecessors did not hold a “theology of disability,” the essayists expose the resources our heritage provides for contemporary reflection on disability by using creative methodologies. They reorient the discussion of disability by offering commentary on a wide range of texts that reflect perspectives on disabling conditions. These texts run the gamut from Aquinas’ systematic logic that reflects on humanity from a distance to Julian of Norwich’s redemptive identification with the messy excretion of human weakness. Martin Wendte uses Hegel against Hegel to demonstrate how the theologian’s framework did, in fact, obligate the Christian community to “enable mentally disabled people to take part in the sphere of the absolute spirit” (p. 262), though Hegel himself never acknowledged this. Deborah Creamer notes the complexity of conversing with Calvin about disability because he provides us with theological themes that can both liberate and annihilate the humanity of disabled people. While Luther’s regrettable reflection on disabilities is well known, Stefan Heuser reminds us that he also provides the theology for understanding all humans as potential bearers of God’s word.

As in any compilation, there are gems as well as essays that are more challenging to read. The brief primers on Aquinas’ and Barth’s massive

theological systems are welcome, but may not adequately prepare the average reader to appreciate their contributions to the conversation. In an essay that departs from the book’s general format, Jana Bennett argues that being a woman could be considered a disabling condition—at least, a condition that provides a perspective on disability that is grounded in experience and missing in the discourse of male theologians. The real gem of the collection is Bernd Wannewetsch’s essay on Bonhoeffer, which frames the issue of the value of disabled humanity as a battle between Bethel (a village that cared for the weak) and Buchenwald (a concentration camp). Additionally, contributions by John Swinton and Hans Reinders on contemporary theologians and advocates are particularly insightful and reflective of the fact that both have been involved deeply in disability studies and in the Institute on Theology and Disability in the U.S.

Disability in the Christian Tradition makes a unique and important contribution to the ongoing discussion of disability and theology by bringing the Christian tradition to bear on the contemporary conversation. At the same time, it provides a model for faithful and creative engagement with texts from different eras.

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The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy

by *Eric A. Seibert*

Fortress, Minneapolis, 2012. 220 pp. \$23.00.
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ACKNOWLEDGING THAT IT IS “difficult to read the Old Testament for very long without bumping into passages that depict or describe violence in

some way" (p. 3), Eric Siebert undertakes the task of documenting and assessing the "pervasive presence" of texts that appear to condone rather than condemn the use of violence, texts that present "virtuous violence" (p. 27). He notes that these texts have historically been used to justify war, to legitimate colonialism, and to support slavery. To address this "troubling legacy" (p. 15), Siebert proposes an ethically responsible approach (rather than a method) for reading virtuously violent texts: 1) naming the violence rather than sanitizing or ignoring it; 2) analyzing the violence in terms of what motivates it and whose interests it serves; and 3) critiquing the violence by such means as reading with the victims in the text and reading from the margins. Though critical of violent scriptural texts, Siebert clearly identifies himself as a "committed Christian" whose intention is not "to disparage the Bible and discredit Christianity" but to help "Christians use the Bible in a way that deepens their faith and strengthens their resolve to love God and others" (p. 5). Therefore, Siebert also wants to move beyond the critique to embrace these texts constructively.

Although Siebert offers a thorough and provocative analysis, I wonder if he has at times attempted to explain and account rationally for scriptural phenomena that are simply inexplicable. Significantly, he does not discuss Isa 28:21, which characterizes divine violence as the alien work of God. Perhaps this omission is a reflection of his personal commitment to theological peace traditions, which leads him to "regard all forms of violence as inappropriate for Christians" (p. 6). I also wonder about his use of the somewhat misleading term "virtuous violence." Some of the texts that he considers under this label might reflect the use of violence to safeguard what could be called "national security." Such texts might be regarded

as presenting realistic violence as opposed to virtuous violence. (Think, for example, of renewed interest in Reinhold Niebuhr's "Christian realism.") That said, Siebert should be commended for an accessible, carefully-researched book that should promote a vigorous debate among scholars, clergy, and laypeople alike. Perhaps promoting such an important discussion is the most significant outcome that can be achieved when engaging a subject upon which there is likely to be little agreement or consensus.

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Reading Samuel: A Literary and Theological Commentary

by *Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos*

Reading the Old Testament. Smyth & Helwys, Macon, GA, 2011. 247 pp. \$22.00. ISBN 978-1-57312-607-6.

GOOD READING OF THE BIBLE requires patience, attention, and openness, Johanna van Wijk-Bos contends, three qualities she models in *Reading Samuel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. As part of the Smyth & Helwys Reading the Old Testament series, this commentary seeks to make "cutting-edge" biblical scholarship accessible to a wide-ranging audience in order to help its readers become "more competent, more engaged, and more enthusiastic readers of the Bible as authoritative Scripture" (p. xiii). Van Wijk-Bos offers a literary and theological analysis of 1 & 2 Samuel, focusing the reader's attention on the "fictional shaping" of the events referenced in the text and on such literary features as characterization, plot development, use of key words and