

access to resources. Similarly, in their call to action, the authors emphasize the need to do justice as opposed to simply declaring or desiring beloved community.

The racist troubles of today have their roots in yesterday's theological stances, personal behaviors, legal decisions, and financial arrangements. The decisions communities make today will or will not begin to undo that harm, and make justice more possible in the future. Communities that want to address racism and white privilege need to understand not only the present moment, but also the path that led to it, in order to take responsibility for the changes needed to transform society. This book can serve as an excellent resource for communities, congregations, and classrooms willing to commit to that work of transformation. In settings where learning and understanding are uneven, and newcomers to racial justice work seek to get up to speed with more experienced peers, this book offers a common analysis and vocabulary that will provide ground work for justice on a strong foundation.

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### **Redeeming a Prison Society: A Liturgical & Sacramental Response to Mass Incarceration**

by Amy Levad

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 192 pp. \$39.00.  
ISBN 978-0-8006-9991-8.

AMY LEVAD'S BOOK IS AN ESSENTIAL resource for reflection on the connection between theology, liturgy, and social reality in the U.S. She articulates a theological response to one of the most pervasive oppressive realities in our society: our prison system. The volume represents a Christian response to the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Akai Gurley, and many others.

Under the umbrella of social/criminal justice, Levad connects a fundamental triad: mass

incarceration, social sin, and reconciliation through the sacraments (with a focus on the sacraments of Eucharist and penance). She looks at our prison society through the lens of the Eucharist and goes back to the early church to engage rituals that can connect issues of our day with the holy sacraments of the church. Penance (or reconciliation), even if not considered a sacrament in Protestant churches, is an integral part of many eucharistic prayers. Levad engages both the radical inclusivity of the sacraments and their relation to agency in the world. The result is that when we partake of the Eucharist, we receive a responsibility for the present situation of death within the reality of mass incarceration in this country.

Liturgically speaking, the power of Levad's book is the connection she makes between what Christians do inside church and their actions outside of it. This reflects a new movement within the liturgical field, which is now attending to sacramental ethics, relating liturgy/sacraments and social justice issues: sacraments and justice (Doris Donnelly), sacraments and ecology (Ben Stewart and Paul Galbreath), Eucharist and globalization, economics, immigration and postcolonialism (Cláudio Carvalhaes), Eucharist and socialism (Tissa Balasuriya), Eucharist and torture (William T. Cavanaugh), baptism, state borders, and citizenship (Michael Budde) and now Levad's sacraments and mass incarceration.

The one concern I would mention is that the practice of the sacraments is never challenged. Levad expands our understanding of the sacraments and their relation to mass incarceration, but she never presses for adjustment of the sacraments themselves in connection with this reality. If practice, movements, or the language of the sacraments are never challenged, they can easily become idols or idealized religious rites. As such, they can have an effect counter to what Levad is proposing: they can keep us detached from the problem, with our minds and hearts at ease with the peace of Christ.

By an uncommon route, Levad's work makes liturgy and the sacraments matter as fundamental events in the life of our society. When we connect the sacraments with social and criminal justice, as Levad proposes, we will be very close

to fulfilling Jesus's message: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has . . . sent me to proclaim release to the captives" (Luke 4:18).

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### ***La Violencia and the Hebrew Bible: The Politics and Histories of Biblical Hermeneutics on the American Continent***

*Edited by Susanne Scholtz and Pablo R. Andinach*

Semeia Studies, 82. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016. 263 pp. \$34.95. ISBN 978-1-62837-130-7.

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS volume originated in a seminar held in 2012 at Perkins School of Theology around the theme of violence in the Bible and our present world. On a structural level the book coheres around a threefold organization: 1) evaluation of previous scholarship on a given biblical text or group of texts; 2) analysis of the nature and function of violence in the biblical material; and 3) reflection on the bearing of that material on a specific oppressive phenomenon, past or present, on the American continent.

The texts chosen come from diverse parts of the Hebrew Bible and represent many different genres (e.g., myths, laws, legends, and oracles). The postmodern perspective that runs through the essays leads to highly imaginative interpretations and contemporary contextualizations. Though the rejection of the arrogant use of historical criticism by an earlier generation of scholars is justified, I believe more attention to "original" setting and meaning could have undergirded some of the interpretations that otherwise might appear to be the fruits of unrestrained subjectivism.

The authors have made a huge contribution by lifting up the theme of violence in the Bible and placing it in the crosswinds of conflict in a world in which a few are enriched at the expense of an oppressed majority, and imperial powers

maintain control over their subjects through fear and violence. The editors express the hope that their book will provoke a wide discourse and reverse the seemingly inexorable triumph of the mighty over the downtrodden. Fortunately, imperial oppression is broadly defined to include victims south of the border, in the islands of the Caribbean, Honduras, Argentina, and the former Soviet Union, and (as the HIV/AIDS epidemic proved) even in the urban centers of the industrial West. Once all such voices have been consolidated, the walls built to divide humanity will begin to crumble.

I would welcome a deepening of the discourse through intensified theological reflection. The discussion becomes theologically fascinating when the biblical God's relation to hegemonic power is described. In some cases God takes sides with the oppressed in opposition to their overlords; in other cases God is portrayed as a perpetrator of violent acts of repression. The volume would have been enriched had the editors included among the concluding responses a discussion of the significance of that fundamental contradiction in what for many believers is an authoritative canon. May such theological reflection arise from the ongoing discussion provoked by this fascinating book!

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### ***Poetic Heroes: The Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World***

*by Mark S. Smith*

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. 660 pp. \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-6792-6.

*POETIC HEROES* reflects Mark Smith's longstanding interests in early Israelite culture, Ugaritic texts, and intercultural discourse in the ancient world. However, it asks a new question: Where does heroic poetry about warriors come from,