

books (e.g., the Gospels) or genres of literature (Pauline correspondence). The chapters are clearly written and walk the student through most of the relevant texts in each part of the New Testament. The discussion also reflects the current range of scholarly opinions on each question, and the ample bibliography at the back provides the reader with numerous paths to follow should he or she wish to go deeper. The major themes that are considered include: how the various books explain how Jesus' death atones for sin, the variant pictures for what constitutes a sin, and the consequences of apostasy. This book is a descriptive historical survey and, consequently, does not attempt to evaluate or arbitrate among the various pictures of sin and atonement that are rehearsed.

All in all, this book presents the picture of sin in the New Testament in a balanced and well-argued fashion. There are a few elements, however, that I would have treated differently. First, Siker notes that although Luke 24 declares that the Messiah was to suffer and rise on the third day according to the Scriptures, the idea is "nowhere in the Jewish scriptures." On the one hand, this is true and is often repeated in New Testament scholarship. Yet in his book *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, Jon Levenson (Yale University Press, 1993, page 30) argues that "a Jewish audience, versed in the Torah, would have recognized the dark side of the heavenly announcement" found in Mark 1:11 ("You are my beloved son"). As a beloved son, Jesus would undergo some sort of "death and resurrection." I would claim that in Luke 24, our Gospel writer applies this deep scriptural principal to the Messiah. This is not as big a leap as Siker has imagined. Second, the subject of the origin of sin (what the Christian tradition refers to as "the fall") is treated only in passing. Another theme that is given scant attention is the role that charity or acts of kindness play in the forgiving of sins. This topic has become something of a cottage industry in the field of early Christianity. David Downs' recent volume, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (2016), would provide a useful companion.

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*Scripture and Violence*. Julia Snyder and Daniel H. Weiss, eds. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. x + 144 pages. \$44.95 (paper).

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This volume sets out to explore the complex relations between scriptural texts and real-world acts of violence. It contains ten essays, beginning with an introductory overview by Julia Snyder. Three of the essays deal with Islam,

three with Judaism, two with Christianity, and one with the university classroom.

In the Islamic tradition, Omar Shaukat, in "Reading and Debating the Qu'ran with ISIS," reports on actual conversations with members of ISIS. He argues that scriptural interpretation was not their primary motivating factor, but rather a desire to be involved in political and social reform. In a similar vein, Sara Omar, in "Invoking the Qu'ran in a Muslim Debate over Suicide Attacks," finds that people on opposing sides sometimes cite the same verses and that political arguments are usually developed at greater length. In "Why Saying 'Only Some Muslims Are Violent' Is No Better than Saying All Muslims Are Violent," Nauman Faizi objects to all forms of essentializing statements about Muslims.

In the Jewish tradition, Daniel H. Weiss, in "'And God Said': Do Biblical Commands to Conquer Land Make People More Violent, or Less?," and Laurie Zoloth, "'There Never Was and Never Will Be': Violence and Interpretive Erasure in the Jewish Tradition," emphasize how rabbinic tradition found ways to neutralize ostensible divine commands to do violence. Laliv Clenman, in "Texts and Violence in Modern Israel: Interpreting Pinchas," notes a case where an anonymous poster cited the story of Phineas in Numbers 25 to justify killings at a Pride parade in Jerusalem in 2015. She argues, however, that this use of Scripture is out of keeping with normative rabbinic tradition.

Turning to Christianity, Jacob L. Goodson, in "'Left Behind?' The New Testament and American Evangelical Christian Support for War," points out that Christians as well as Muslims and Jews can cite Scripture in support of violent policies. Conversely, Jim Fodor, in "Reading Scripture Reverentially but Not Univocally: Why Words in Themselves Are Not Dangerous," argues that, in the Anglican tradition, Scripture reading is part of a larger pattern of communal worship and Scripture is interpreted in that context.

Finally, Marianne Moyaert, in "Wrestling with Scripture and Avoiding Violence in the University Classroom," finds that both religious and secular students tend to assume that texts have self-evident meanings, and they fail to recognize the importance of the context from which one reads.

With the exception of the Goodson piece on American evangelicals, all of these essays tend to loosen the connection between Scripture and violence and argue that violent writings do not necessarily lead to violent actions. They make some good points. Both Jewish and Christian traditions have often used interpretive techniques to avoid the literal meaning of the text or restrict its application. Violent people are seldom motivated primarily by Scripture and seldom deterred by it when it urges moderation. Ideology trumps exegesis. It is also true that much liturgical reading of Scripture in

the Christian tradition treats it as phatic communication, nodding reverentially while paying little attention to its actual content. Nonetheless, this is a one-sided collection. Even when Scripture is not the primary motivating factor, it often lends legitimation to violence, as in the case cited by Clenman. Most obviously lacking here is attention to the long history of the use of Scripture, in all three traditions, in support of violent action. In light of that history, the claim of Fodor that words in themselves are not dangerous is either naive or disingenuous. And if there is any evidence that violent divine commands ever made anyone *less* violent, I am not aware of it.

In all then, these essays are thoughtful representatives of one side of a debate. There are many books that are equally one-sided in indicting Scripture, so this volume too is a valuable contribution.

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*The Joy of God: Collected Writings.* By Sr. Mary David Totah. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019. xviii + 189 pages. \$18.00 (paper).

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*The Joy of God* is just what the title implies: a collection of snippets from letters, notes, and lectures that Sr. Mary David Totah wrote to her sisters in St. Cecilia's Abbey on the Isle of Wight and to family and friends on both sides of the Atlantic. The foreword by Fr. Erik Varden provides necessary background and context for Sr. Mary David's writing, and a final chapter describing her last bout with cancer gives the book closure. The writings themselves have been arranged into chapters that trace the spiritual journey from Call to Acceptance, and the editors have provided references for the Scripture and other writings Sr. Mary David cites.

As one would expect from a Benedictine, Sr. Mary David's writing is steeped in Scripture, making this a book that might appeal even to those Christians whose church does not have a monastic tradition. As one would also expect from a Benedictine, her writing is filled with practical advice. For example, responding to someone who is worried about how she feels about people and events, she writes, "Simply do without the feelings you have not got and behave as if you had them ... Just try to *act* as you know you should and all will be well" (74–5, emphasis original).

A professor of English literature before entering religious life, Sr. Mary David writes clearly and concisely, and she writes with an awareness of contemporary developments in psychology and anthropology without dismissing the rich Benedictine tradition. For example, responding to a sister who is