story-telling, preaching, offering, thanksgiving, celebrating, practising hospitality – are both deeply human undertakings and also profoundly theological (and christological): ‘it is God’s turning towards human beings that is the basis for all communication with him’ (p. 239).

This is not a book for introducing new students to the field of practical theology. Notwithstanding its aspirations to empirical enquiry, it is uncompromisingly theoretical. Its argument is pursued exhaustively via surveys of literature, primarily within German-speaking contexts, with some additional discussion of authors from the United States. Its structure also betrays the extent to which, institutionally, practical theology in Germany has been bifurcated into Protestant and Roman Catholic approaches. Given the predominance of a largely inductive model within the English-speaking field, which adopts a movement from practice to theory and back to practice, the absence of concrete, lived examples within this book may strike many readers as odd. It is hard to make the leap of translation into such a very different intellectual and disciplinary context, and the detailed exposition of so much work with which I was unfamiliar was challenging. However, Grethlein’s central theme, of practical theology as the mediator between human and divine communication – or as the Australian practical theologian Terry Veling puts it, ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ – remains with me as a creative and thought-provoking proposition.

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Susan Wessel, *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. xvi + 273. £64.99

Compassion is no simple thing, either in theory or practice. Wessel’s book makes this abundantly clear. Her own starting point was an attempt to find an early Christian approach to what modern philosophers discuss in terms of empathy. What she found was not ‘empathy’ (feeling what another feels), but a range of ways of contemplating oneself or Christ in relation to another’s suffering. ‘Empathy’ was attributed to God alone, in humbling himself to take on mortal flesh. This corresponded to early Christian patterns of attention to the scriptures: the Gospels often describe Jesus being ‘deeply moved’ (*splanchnizesthai*) when he healed people, but early Christians usually passed over this. They took comfort from his tears at Lazarus’ death, but Wessel argues that it was the passion narrative that was crucial for developing their teaching on affective compassion. They read this in light of the incarnation, which laid Jesus open to such suffering (Phil 2:6–8; Matt 25:35–40).

The book takes a thematic approach to the early Christian material. After a meaty introduction, five chapters group together types of situations or emotions that give rise to discourses of compassion – suffering (ch. 2), disgust (ch. 3), feelings (ch. 4), charity (ch. 5) and love (ch. 6). Each chapter selects two or three authors from the early church (fourth to seventh centuries) and explores how they engage with this theme in their particular situations. Wessel examines how their rhetoric and theology respond to their own social and psychological context. Where relevant, she puts this in dialogue with modern philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Arthur Schopenhauer and Martha Nussbaum.

Wessel finds coherence in the early Christian accounts of compassion through the recurrence of three challenges: identifying who was a worthy object of compassion; grasping the importance of feeling for them; and relating that feeling to compassionate action.

Several things made it difficult. Ideologically, the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* was powerful among educated Christians. Ascetic practices were shaped by that ideal, leaving Christians such as Augustine in a quandary about their own feelings. It is one of Maximus' favourite authors, Clement of Alexandria, who is credited with reinterpreting Stoic *apatheia* to structure an ideal of Christian love. In practical terms, there was a risk of 'compassion fatigue'. People needed to remain steadfast in helping; they needed to feel the right amount, but not too much. Gregory the Great is the first on record to give an account of the different stages in developing a sense of compassion. He emphasises that it is important to go the right distance, but not too much, towards the sufferer.

Theologically, the emphasis on the incarnation became more fully integrated in accounts of compassion after Chalcedon. Christians were encouraged to imitate Christ's love in emptying himself and taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:6–8). Maximus saw this as part of the *communicatio idiomatum*, while Gregory the Great emphasised that compassion restores cosmic equilibrium, since it is 'the place where the divine capacity for healing met the human experience of suffering' (p. 204).

Despite her initial disappointment that early Christians were uninterested in a concept like empathy, Wessel's discussion is peppered with analogies and fruitful comparisons between ancient and modern. In the conclusion, she even claims that Nietzsche was far more similar to early Christians than he or his readers have recognised. Nietzsche's lament concerns not the ideal of compassion, but its inadequate realisation.

This is a rich account of the tapestry of emotions in the theology, rhetoric and social practice of the early church. It contributes to a growing industry in scholarship on emotions and on suffering in the Christian tradition. It makes a powerful case that compassion is not to be taken for granted – not just in the sense that people might not live up to their ideals, but that the ideals themselves are theologically complex. Although Wessel does not write a systematic theology, a strong strain of systematic interest runs through her account, and suggests the need for an independent systematic response. The structure of the book by theme and case-study is effective in clarifying the contingency of the issues and discussions in the sources, and in introducing a measure of rhetorical variety. However, since each theologian is featured primarily in relation to a different theme, the possibility of establishing clear lines of comparison or historical development is limited. Wessel's commitment to concise analysis and short endnotes stems from a praiseworthy desire to keep the book short; nonetheless I would have been glad to hear the voice of the primary sources more often, and a slightly less brisk pace through the material would in my judgement have been rhetorically effective.

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William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), pp. x + 532, $45.00.

Although study of John's Gospel has undergone a number of shifts in perspective in recent decades, not least through the dominance of the hypothesis of a 'Johannine community', serious theological engagement with it has had to return repeatedly to the insights of Rudolf Bultmann and in particular to his identification of the centrality of the mythic descent of the revealer for Johannine christology and soteriology. While Bultmann's theories of the religio-historical origins of the descent myth have been largely assigned to the 'pre-Nag Hammadi' history of gnostic study, his grasp of its theological centrality both for the Gospel and for reflection on the latter's continuing power has continued to excite readers and to provide an essential point of reference for further discussion.

William Loader first addressed the *Christology of the Fourth Gospel* in a monograph published nearly thirty years ago (Frankfurt, 1992^2 [1989]) – whose occasional description as a 'first edition' of the present work undervalues