
Although their style, purposes, and intended audiences are very different, these wise books pursue the same goal of healing the subject/object dichotomy that catalyzed the Enlightenment and is now questioned by postmodernism.

The more unusual effort is provided by Griffiths, who, through treating “the vice of curiosity,” provides a fresh take on timely matters, useful as almost a meditative resource for anyone interested in rethinking the Western style of organizing scholarship and academia. Griffiths, offering the 2005 J.J. Thiessen Lectures on which the book is based, draws on Augustine to provide a lens to see how troubling are the effects of the modern faith that humans can separate themselves as knowing subjects from the objects they claim to know. As he observes, in contrast to the Enlightenment/modernist valuing of curiosity often uncritically assumed in Western culture, “Curiosity for Augustine is nothing other than the ownership of new knowledge” (7).

Throughout Griffiths’s short yet deep tome, the problem with curiosity turns out to be the quest for ownership and the consequences flowing from it. Curiosity’s drive for ownership of knowledge yields people “bent on living according to themselves and thus also upon hugging the knowledge to themselves, delighting in knowing themselves as knowers, embracing as their own what can only properly be loved as God’s” (12). We who are curious in this way are responsible for setting up the modern university as a site valuing discipline, mastery, and novelty. Griffiths summarizes the effects of this unholy trinity:

Students and scholars … are disciplined into thinking of their studies as a device whose principal purpose is to provide them ownership and mastery of their chosen fields [disciplines]. Novelty is sought and rewarded and the display of the mastered and sequestered object of knowledge is undertaken when the reputation of the one doing the displaying will be most enhanced…. (59)
The antidote? Studiousness. Studiousness involves grateful and delighted participation in the gift of what is being studied, which is ultimately God’s world. Studiousness is not anti-intellectualism but redeemed use of intellect.

Though the language is different, the above view is approximately the starting point for *The Passionate Intellect*, whose authors follow a path overlapping with that of Griffiths. Their core strategy is to show the fatal flaws in the subject/object split, then to sketch out the intellectual credibility that Christian thought can reclaim once thinking is defined not in subject/object but in embodied humanistic terms. Their path is indebted to the postmodern critique of Enlightenment tendencies. They show how figures like Heidegger, Gadamer, Levinas, Foucault, and Lyotard have helped clear a space for a recovery of the human through the awareness that no one of us can think as a disembodied observer above what we study, and that we are already enmeshed in Being, or tradition, or bodies and their desires, before we begin to study. At the same time, Klassen and Zimmerman make helpful distinctions between the more humanist (Gadamer, Levinas) and more antihumanist (Heidegger, Foucault, Lyotard) postmoderns, and how such figures complement and critique each other.

Their intent is to make room for Christian faith as part of the humanist project, and their name for this is “incarnational humanism.” If no one can start to think from any fully disembodied, objective perspective, then starting from within Christian faith is no less legitimate than starting from other vantage points. In addition, incarnational humanism solves problems not otherwise solved in either Enlightenment or postmodernist thought, because

[H]uman dignity, the dignity of nature, and the interpretive nature of truth become possible without fragmentation or totalization. Thus incarnational humanism allows for considerable common ground with postmodern scholarship even as it maintains a distinctively Christian orientation. (147)

*The Passionate Life* risks giving short shrift to nearly any topic it addresses. But that is in the nature of a resource intended as a guidebook for Christian university students beginning to wrestle with intellectual currents
of the day and seeking to understand how they can both learn from and address such currents with integrity. Within that context, the book does its job well.

My main discomfort with both books is that each risks hiding its light under a bushel by making it a gift primarily for the Christian community. In Griffiths this happens in startling comments that seem too stingy to match the generosity of thought surrounding them. In seeing the implementation of his vision as perhaps requiring alternative institutions of education – itself a potentially stingy approach – Griffiths suggests that “every student and every teacher would be encouraged to find his or her primary and most direct audience in the community of the baptized” (78). I’d have little problem with wording along the lines of “encouraged to include the community of the baptized as one significant audience.” It saddens me, however, that precisely when postmodernism is making Western intellectual currents more receptive to such a vision than has perhaps been true for centuries, Griffiths urges that the baptized community, rather than any community wounded by the subject/object split, become the primary audience.

The overlapping move made by Klassen and Zimmerman is this: They contend that “only the incarnation enables a recovery of humanism as the heart of university education because the incarnation allows us to retain the best elements of the greater humanist tradition and of its postmodern critics without repeating their shortcomings” (147). This is not a thoughtlessly stingy move; they stress that “common grace” enables persons of different or no faiths to nurture each other (181-82). They make a good case for their perspective, and as a Christian I say yes, such incarnation-based wisdom is a gift my faith offers.

Yet I feel the same sorrow on reading this as I do whenever encountering similar moves. After all the wrestling with alternate perspectives is over, it is explained that, amidst all we can learn from others, we must congratulate ourselves: We are those who know the truth. Maybe there is no way fully to embrace what I’d wish to: the ability simultaneously to hold passionate Christian convictions yet to acknowledge in radical humility that any truth entered with conviction tends to look convincing to its holder. But I do wish it were possible to speak of the incarnation in a way that does not make
its persuasive power so dependent on belonging to the Christian in-group. Even stated ever so gently, as in Klassen and Zimmerman, such arguments are still rooted in control: We Christians control the truth. Might we model our argumentation more radically on the Incarnate One – who died rather than exercise control, relinquishing to God the next moves?

I raise such concerns not to denigrate these valuable projects. Rather, I hope their light radiates to far corners. Amid polarizations, our era does provide avenues for rejoining subject and object, for thinking “within” and “through” and not just “above” our traditions, biases, bodies, faith commitments, or objects of study. Christian and not-Christian, we need such books to help us conceptualize, critique, and share in this moment of opportunity.

Michael A. King, pastor, Spring Mount Mennonite Church, Telford, PA; owner, Cascadia Publishing House LLC; editor, DreamSeeker Magazine


With popular interest in Jesus fanned by recent epic films, bestselling novels, and announcements about the discovery of ancient gospels and artifacts, one is not surprised by the appearance of yet another book on Jesus. However, in the bewildering mix of sensationalizing declarations and novelistic embellishments of the story of Jesus, Recovering Jesus comes as a refreshing resource. As the sub-title indicates, this book intends to facilitate serious encounter with the New Testament witnesses to Jesus.

Yoder Neufeld wrote this book having in mind students in his college classroom, who come with a range of prior attitudes toward Jesus “whether religiously indifferent, highly skeptical, or passionately Christian” (9). He writes as a scholar and teacher eager to guide students in their study of Jesus and the various first-century claims made about him. He also writes within
a confessional faith commitment to Jesus as Lord. Both the scholar and the believer are everywhere evidenced in what the author communicates. A foundational hermeneutic of trust in the scriptural sources does not deter him from asking the tough historical questions, nor does his scholarly enterprise cause him to refrain from theological reflection and exploration of ethical implications.

The title of the introductory chapter asks, “One Jesus or Many Jesuses?” In chapter 2 Yoder Neufeld turns to the field of archeology for an evocative metaphor. As 21st-century readers we are invited to “dig through the layers” of developing traditions from the present through the Enlightenment, the Reformation era, the creeds, the NT canon, and eventually the individual writings themselves. The third chapter on “One Jesus – Four Gospels” profiles each of the four canonical gospels and their respective portraits of Jesus. Chapter 4 provides a sweeping overview of the historical, geographical, political, and cultural dimensions of the world into which Jesus was born and in which his life and ministry unfolded.

Having dealt with these introductory matters, Yoder Neufeld proceeds to focus on Jesus’ beginnings, public ministry, and death and resurrection. He devotes chapter 5 to a consideration of the nativity narratives in Matthew and Luke. In chapter 6 he returns to background issues in a treatment of the Kingdom of God theme within the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jewish literature contemporary with Jesus. The rubric of “Kingdom” continues in chapters 7 through 10 in a survey of how the NT witnesses depict Jesus’ proclamation, teaching, ministries of compassion, and ethical instruction. In chapters 11 and 12 the focus is on Jesus’ death and the resurrection. Chapter 13, “Jesus – Christ and Lord,” moves into the realm of Christology, an exploration of the phenomenon whereby Jesus became the object of religious devotion.

Several features of the book are self-consciously pedagogical in their intent, obviously constructed to facilitate student exploration and learning. Each chapter includes an inset listing but not defining some “Key Terms and Concepts” pertaining to its primary subject. Brief bibliographies at the conclusion of each chapter point students to resources for further reading. Helpful charts and diagrams appear throughout the book.

Recovering Jesus will potentially have an audience beyond the college students for whom it was written. Scholars may wish for more documentation of the grounds for Yoder Neufeld’s conclusions, or they might find his
hermeneutic of “humility and awe” (122) before the witness of the NT writers lacking in precision, but they will find in this volume a remarkably comprehensive discussion of interpretive issues in current debates about Jesus. Interested and motivated youth and adults in congregational study groups will find this to be a compelling guidebook to help them sort through the maze of competing interpretations currently promoted by scholars and the media. Pastors and teachers can also benefit from consulting this book, especially because of the breadth of its scope in discussing Jesus and his world.

The index could have been constructed in ways more beneficial for readers. In particular, an index of ancient sources would assist teachers, pastors, and other interested readers to locate the many treasures buried in the book’s pages.

In sum, Yoder Neufeld models a remarkable integration of scholarly clarity and Christian conviction. His model has the potential of furthering a recovery of Jesus and his vision of liberation in our fractured world.

Jacob W. Elias, Professor of New Testament, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN


Since his landmark *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* was published in 1984, philosopher Albert Borgmann has been frequently cited in discussions about technology not only among philosophers but among sociologists, environmentalists, and even theologians. Borgmann has continued to publish widely on the topic, and at first glance his most recent book may appear out of place. The title suggests a political platform or manifesto, an impression reinforced by the opening line of the preface:
“This book is my attempt to come to terms with the country I love” (ix). Connections with the rest of Borgmann’s corpus soon become apparent, however, and I think this book is an attempt to unpack the broader political significance of his philosophical reflections on technology and culture.

Borgmann does clearly situate himself within a particular political context. One of his overarching arguments is that there must be a renewal of distinctively American virtues, such as generosity and resourcefulness, if the United States is to flourish. This renewal requires the “concentration and illumination” of dispersed movements of reform through a vision that is national in scope (197). As someone who has written much about households and local communities, this does seem to be new terrain for Borgmann. Yet the more basic argument he develops here is that his nation is in need of renewal because its citizens have been disengaged by consumerism and modern technology – by the commodification of both private and public goods. In short, moral conduct not only governs, but is governed by our “tangible environment” (30). To underline this point, Borgmann repeatedly quotes Winston Churchill, a surprising choice for a book on American ethics: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us” (5). Nonetheless, “Churchill’s principle” echoes and encapsulates much of Borgmann’s earlier work on technology, and buildings come to serve as a metaphor for common structures that are social and political as well as physical.

This book can also be viewed as a significant work in philosophical ethics. Indeed, it is because of the complex relationship between ideas, actions, and the tangible environment that Borgmann is convinced Americans need to reconsider their understanding of ethics. Thus: “Theoretical ethics, practical ethics, and real ethics should be thought of not as rivals but as complements of one another” (30), and this book is structured around three parts focusing on these three dimensions. Part one engages philosophers such as Kant and Mill in the course of discussing “The Charms of Principles” (47) and “The Dark Sides of Utilitarianism” (55). Part two is informed by virtue ethics, as Borgmann moves on to consider practices. Along the way he considers personal virtues such as wisdom, courage, and friendship, and political virtues such as justice, stewardship, and design. Part three focuses on his own contribution to ethical discourse, what he calls “real” ethics. As
he says in an introductory chapter:

Ethics has to become real as well as theoretical and practical. It has to become a making as well as a doing. Real means tangible; real ethics is taking responsibility for the tangible setting of life. Real also means relevant, and real ethics is grounding theoretical and practical ethics in contemporary culture and making them thrive again. (11)

After linking the contours of real ethics with both “The Economy of the Household” (ch. 13) and “The Design of Public Space” (ch. 14), Borgmann concludes by revisiting his earlier discussion of Thomas Jefferson. What makes Jefferson so compelling is how he exemplifies the ideal of centering our lives in our households in ways that “can give us the courage to join with our neighbors in the design of a public realm” (201).

There is much to commend in this volume, not least of which is Borgmann’s accessible writing style. Newcomers to both philosophy and Borgmann’s work will also appreciate his penchant for moving beyond diagnosing the ills of contemporary culture to offering a prescription for its renewal. However, his interest in framing ethics within his own political context will be less helpful for those not sharing this context or not agreeing that the nation “provides a fair scope for ethics” (3). No doubt Canadians are shaped by the same kind of commodification as their neighbors to the south, and no doubt Mennonites and other Anabaptists have much to learn from the attention Borgmann pays to the environment that shapes our daily lives. But in my view those who find themselves in these categories have more to gain by starting with one of his earlier works.

Paul C. Heidebrecht, PhD candidate, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI

This study illumines the early church’s practice of commensality (fellowship at the table) within a community of goods, arguing against much of scholarship that careful attention to Acts 2:41-47 and 6:1-6, and to recent literary and social scientific research, shows that the practice was real and important to Jesus’ early followers. Moreover, the widows mentioned in Acts 6 were not simply the most destitute and vulnerable among the poor of the early believers, but more than likely exercised an important role in the ministry (*diakonia*) of preparing and serving the daily common meals. Their marginalization from this function occasioned the crisis that resulted in choosing the Seven to augment the ministry of the word as practiced by the Twelve.

Finger undertakes a thorough critique of scholarship that has too often approached the texts with unwarranted historical skepticism, inadequate literary and anthropological sophistication, and outright sexism. By means of painstaking dissection of scholarship and sophisticated reconstruction of the social world, aided by a feminist alertness to the reality of women within a patriarchal world as recorded in androcentric texts, she provides a rich introduction to the social world of early believers, particularly those residing in Jerusalem.

Finger’s book consists of four parts, each subdivided into chapters, for a total of fifteen, and it provides clear introductions, summaries, and prospects. An introduction offers an overview of the contents and a preview of the methodology. Part I (chapters 1 - 4) lays the groundwork, outlining the “interpretive presuppositions” and critiquing the history of scholarship. Part II (chapters 5 - 8) provides a social history of the early Jerusalem community of Jesus believers, employing the social sciences, including cultural anthropology. Relying heavily on Harmut Stegemann, Finger draws a close connection between Essene patterns of shared life and those of Jesus’ early followers, claiming that Jesus’ eating practices drew heavily from Essene practice.

Part III argues that the commensality reflected in Acts has its origins and inspiration in Jesus’ own practices of eating. In relation to the marginalized Hellenistic widows (Acts 6:1), Finger explores the role of
women in preparing and serving meals in the Mediterranean world, arguing that in the Jerusalem church they were not merely the neglected poor but were denied their traditional honorific female roles of participating in meal preparation and serving. The fourth Part offers a careful word-by-word exegesis of Acts 2:41-47 and 6:1-6.

In addition to meticulous textual exegesis, this volume is a mine of information on the social world of Jesus’ early followers, ranging well beyond the immediate concerns of whether they practiced commensality or what role the widows played. We learn much about the social conditions in Judea, the life of urban poor, the meaning and practice of eating, and the role of women, particularly widows. Provocative are the close connections Finger sees between Jesus and his followers and the practices of the Essenes, even if very different notions of purity make easy parallels difficult to draw. This will no doubt be subject to further testing as Qumran scholarship continues to evolve.

More provocative and illuminating is the way Finger shows how Jesus and his early followers took on traditional female roles in providing and serving food, thus representing a radical alternative to patriarchal assumptions about male roles. As important as this insight is, it left me wondering what happened to the widows once the Seven were chosen. They do not reappear in Acts. Did this subverting of gender roles lead ironically to the displacement of women (widows) from the place they had called their own and in which they could exercise a degree of authority and autonomy? No effort is made to draw on 1 Tim. 5 to further illumine the role of widows in the church’s ongoing development.

There are some minor irritants that closer proofreading should have caught, but they should not be allowed to distract from the study’s overall excellence. For example, the dative plural is too often allowed to serve as the plural on Greek words such as *trapezai(s)* (81, 257) and *agapai(s)* (61-2); the *xi* should be replaced with a *chi* in *psychē* and *psychai* (221-24); Leitzman should be Lietzman (57-8), Leinhard should be Lienhard (86), and Stephen Neil should be William Neil (87).

In a final chapter Finger argues forcefully that with all the distance between present North American reality and the largely agrarian reality reflected in Acts, the practice of Jesus’ early followers eating together has
found an echo in such diverse communities as the Casa San Diego Catholic Worker House in Houston, Texas, and the Open Door community in Atlanta, Georgia. She aims to instill in readers a sense of urgency and creativity in realizing the practical dimension of following Jesus in terms of eating together, in particular with the poor, and to do so in a way that makes real the presence of the reign of God. That, as Luke 24 reminds her and us, is how Jesus will be recognized.

I could not help but place the implicit and explicit challenge of Finger’s study in direct relation to the present urging among Mennonites to discover what it means to be a global community of faith. What does this “fictive kin group” demand of those having too much in relation to “sisters and brothers” having much too little? Finger would insist that Acts 2:41-47 and 6:1-6 have a direct bearing on contemporary faithfulness.

In addition to being a storehouse of learning, Of Widows and Meals is a clear prophetic challenge to practical faithfulness. It should serve equally well as a resource for study and preaching and as a textbook for graduate courses.

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, ON
Since 1996, the Society of Biblical Literature’s annual meeting has included sessions on Character Ethics and Biblical Interpretation. Each volume under review comprises 16 papers from these sessions. Focusing on “character ethics,” they concern themselves with the way(s) Scripture may help form individuals and communities as moral agents, or may nurture certain virtues. All 28 authors represented are Christian, and most are Protestant biblical scholars. Two who fall within these categories are also Mennonites: Theodore Hiebert and Willard Swartley. Women and scholars from beyond North America are well represented.

These anthologies, comprising some 500 pages of rather fine print, make for challenging and sometimes exhilarating reading. That they were first presented at joint annual meetings of two “learned societies,” the SBL and the American Academy of Religion, portends more challenge than exhilaration for readers unfamiliar with the argot of those societies. Occasionally, the argot runs away with itself. In the NT volume, Robert Brawley’s four-page flight across an intellectual landscape extending from Nietzsche and Heidegger to Levinas, Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor, in an essay on Galatians, leaves one breathless. However, many chapters in both volumes do cross boundaries in an instructive way – boundaries between biblical studies and ethics, but also between the academic guilds and normal folk seriously interested in the Bible and ethics.

All the essays relate themselves to the subtitle: “Moral Dimensions of Scripture.” Almost all assume Scripture as at least a moral resource, and provide expositions of specific texts drawing on and exemplifying that assumption. Jens Herger, writing on Titus 3:3-9, and Sylvia Keesmaat on Romans 12–13 serve as prime examples, each performing a powerful, constructive exegesis of texts typically read otherwise and as counter to both Jesus and enlightened Western sensibilities.

On the OT side, the sky is cloudier. Cheryl B. Anderson, writing on
the laws, reminds us of those marginalized therein, both women and non-
Israelites. The moral dimension of Scripture consists, then, in our necessary
criticism of just that dimension. J.J.M. Roberts seeks to disabuse us of
appealing to Isaiah 2:2-4 for peace purposes, pointing out its imperialist
background. Roberts is entirely correct as regards background, so far as
I know – a background that makes much of the NT intelligible. Oddly,
he concludes that we now “have the power and responsibility to govern
according to God’s will” (127-28). By “we” he means “modern Christians
in Europe and North America” (127). Writing on Micah 4 and 6, the former
parallel to Isaiah 2, and writing from experience quite different from
Roberts’s, M. Daniel Carroll speaks modestly and clearly about moral
formation. The differences between Roberts and Carroll include technical
matters of history and exegesis, but also much more.

The “much more” comes to light also in the NT essays, and in a
poignant way. Jens Herzer relates his reading of Titus 3 directly to Germany’s
reunification and a former Stasi (East German State Security) informer as a
member of his family. In the course of a response, Jinesong Woo describes
his incarceration in South Korea. Their exchange, which is not at all about
“I had it worse than you,” has the virtue of returning to the text, to Scripture,
with questions about justice/justification, forgiveness, reconciliation,
and also about directly or indirectly relating the Bible to these existential
questions.

Obviously, no common interpretive approach governs the 32 chapters
in these volumes. Some perform an almost purely historical-critical operation,
while others draw biblical texts into a variety of contemporary intellectual
or social matrices; some do both. Kathleen M. O’Connor on Jeremiah, and
Jacqueline Lapsley on Ezekiel, relate their studies to the disaster that the
Judean community experienced: Judah’s and Jerusalem’s utter destruction.
By somewhat different means and to somewhat different ends, their elegant
essays reach a congruent conclusion: the disaster resists understanding. In
one of the most powerful and provocative sentences in either book, Lapsley
writes, “Making sense of their experience is specifically disallowed” (96).
The very idea that moral formation may include a proscription on making
sense of a defining experience seems outrageous. Perhaps only those who
have genuinely suffered could comprehend the idea.

Along with suffering, peacemaking has a remarkably high profile in these books, even beyond contributions by Willard Swartley and Glen Stassen. Theology, on the other hand, seldom figures expressly, though several essays address matters related to atonement and salvation. L. Ann Jervis’s comments on Philippians 3 and suffering “in Christ” are theologically rich. Systematic or dogmatic theological categories do appear in Swartley’s chapter, by way of his quoting James Fodor and “the Trinitarian model of \textit{perichoresis}” (233). And Theodore Hiebert, writing on creation (the subject appears prominently in the OT volume) and against \textit{Heilsgeschichte}, concludes that “[t]he old language of ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence,’ of ‘natural revelation’ and ‘special revelation’ will no longer work” (9). Hiebert relies entirely on the Bible for this judgment.

Allen Verhey, professor of Christian ethics at Duke, offers one of the more exhilarating chapters. Verhey, whose work has fruitfully transgressed the boundaries between biblical scholarship and ethics, here treats the Beatitudes through affirming Scripture as scripted and as script. As scripted, Scripture requires rigorous attention to what its authors did “with the words they had available to them.” As script, Scripture must be performed “again and again in the rhetoric and practices of the churches, in their theology and in their worship, in their ethics and in their politics” (19, in the NT volume). In this Verhey echoes Nicholas Lash, whom he credits, but the echo is worth hearing. And he foreshadows the contribution by Elna Mouton, who points to the disorienting and reorienting, or reforming, function of Scripture in worship or liturgy. Perhaps, as regards much contemporary worship, this function has a counterfactual or eschatological character.

A brief review cannot hope to list, much less respond to, all these diverse essays. At least, I cannot hope to do so. But I can and do commend these two volumes, whose mediocre or occasionally bewildering parts set the best parts in bolder relief. Among the best and the bewildering is J. Clifton Black’s chapter on Mark’s gospel. Black waxes eloquent on the cross as “the \textit{epistemological crisis}” and on suffering as “\textit{epistemic}” (13-14). In this, Jesus is one with us and at our front. But is the cross principally about how we should or should not understand our or others’ suffering? Does that begin to exhaust what Mark wants us to understand about Jesus? But these books
are all about character ethics, which defines their limitation. One breathes easier when they occasionally, but clearly, stress God’s initiative.

*Ben C. Ollenburger*, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN