

Jennifer M. McBride. *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

*The Church for the World* began as a dissertation but also has roots in Jennifer McBride's participation in two non-traditional ecclesial communities: the Eleuthero Community in Portland, Maine, and the Southeast White House in Washington, DC. McBride engages the praxis of these communities through the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. She hopes to extend Bonhoeffer's thought into the contemporary context of the United States.

The book's tone is communicated well when the author declares that "My concern is not whether the church should be involved in public life but *how . . .*"(4). A subsequent feature of her methodology is Bonhoeffer's concern for the church's concrete communication of the Word of God. This manifests itself most distinctly in the third part of the book, where McBride employs ethnographic tools to examine the communities mentioned above. Her goal is to describe how American Protestants might offer a non-triumphalist witness in a pluralist setting. This draws her reading of Bonhoeffer beyond his own context and provides the book's contextual grist.

In the first part of *The Church for the World* the author contends that the witness of American Protestants, both conservative and liberal, is troubled by their assumption that they possess privileged knowledge of morality and truth. Yet Karl Barth, one of Bonhoeffer's mentors, unmasks such attempts as religious self-exoneration, an evasion of complicity in sin and injustice. Further, the Protestant misconstrual of witness as claims to moral or epistemological superiority misses what Bonhoeffer believes is the true form of public witness—incarnate presence.

The second part does the theological heavy lifting. Following Bonhoeffer, McBride argues that Christ's assumption of fallen human nature implies divine repentance. The work of Christ is apocalyptic, transforming reality. The church participates in it by taking the form of the crucified Christ through confession and repentance. This is the church's definitive work, and public recognition and turning from sin is the key to McBride's appropriation of Bonhoeffer. It is how Christian public witness avoids triumphalism. The third part of the book analyzes how this has been practically worked out in two communities.

*The Church for the World* is a timely and good book. The combination of reading Bonhoeffer closely and considering real instantiations of confession as public witness is welcome. In this way the book fits with a wider contemporary conversation about the overlap between theology and ethnography and the topic of ecclesial repentance, even though official examples of the latter are not discussed in depth. It is particularly interesting to see how the connections between Bonhoeffer's work and the current interest in apocalyptic among theologians enliven McBride's analysis of Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*.

Yet I am unconvinced that Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* should be marginalized; it can be read in greater continuity with *Ethics* and the prison writings than McBride allows. Also, the bones of a dissertation show through the skin of her book; some chapters remain saddled with the clunky, self-referential language of academia. Similarly, though the anthropological methodology is welcome, detailed quotations and minutia test the reader's interest.

Though many will applaud the goals of the Eleuthero Community, the Southeast White House, and communities like them, the question remains why these sorts of communities are not representative of the dominant form of ecclesial life. Also, why do they seem to be started by middle-class folks who move into urban neighborhoods? Where did they come from, and why is their original context not in need of incarnational witness? What would it be like to live out Bonhoeffer's theology—focused on racial reconciliation, environmental stewardship, peacemaking, or whatever the context demands—in the suburban cul-de-sac? Why does one have to move somewhere else to embody public witness? These questions aren't meant as a critique of the earnestness of such communities, but it is hard not to wonder if this sort of rootless 'incarnation' is somehow not the avoidance of either the troubles or the blandness of home. McBride's analysis is overwhelmingly sympathetic; a critical edge might have explored these questions more fully.

Anabaptists will find *The Church for the World* interesting. (McBride seems aware of this stream of Christianity. She reports, for instance, that she joined Peter Frick and James Reimer in Europe for a Bonhoeffer Study Tour.) Her work should suggest to Anabaptists, and Mennonites in particular, that vigorous theology is not divorced from practical expressions

of peacemaking and reconciliation. The book also sensitizes us to how moralistic fundamentalism characterizes some articulations of Anabaptist ethics, in both traditional and progressive circles; it reminds us that rigorous ethics can become an ideology that takes the place of God's self-revelation; and it chastens an activist mentality that assumes that once we know how we are to live we can go about it as though God does not exist.

None of those things, however, is really what the author intends. Despite a need for refinement, McBride's book is valuable for its intended purpose: it provides, in theoretical and practical ways, a vision for non-triumphalist witness in a pluralist context.

*Anthony G. Siegrist*, Associate Professor of Christian Theology, Prairie Bible College, Three Hills, Alberta

Daniel Colucciello Barber. *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011.

It is tempting to accept the terms of a conversation when it is already in progress. Arguments over the relationship between and dominance of science, philosophy, and theology characterize much of the modern period. Entering these debates has often meant making prior commitments to things like Reason, Nature, or God. Daniel Barber's *On Diaspora* challenges the terms of that debate. The author interprets the tradition of the West, from Christianity to secularism, as being consistently marked by the logic of transcendence. The invitation of *On Diaspora* is to the task of thinking otherwise.

According to Barber the logic of transcendence influences the world through authoritative claims of something *separate* and *unaffected* by the relations *in* the world. This could be a transcendent God, an edenic or utopian vision, pure Reason, Nature, or anything else that defines reality but is not itself put into play with the relations it defines. Transcendence then can be thought of, perhaps simplistically, as fixed content. Immanence, by contrast, "begins as a manner of relation" (1). Nothing is unaffected because