

Katherine Sonderegger. *Systematic Theology Volume I: The Doctrine of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.

Katherine Sonderegger is surely right that most 20th-century dogmatic theologians have tended to order their doctrines of God by starting with “who” God is and not “what” God is (xi). The divine perfections have largely been swept aside in an era where theology focuses on God’s trinitarian and Christic identity as discerned in the concrete narratives of Scripture. According to Sonderegger, ignoring the divine perfections is a mistake, because those same narratives present God uniquely as both a “who” and a “what” (192).

Animating her prayerful reflection on the divine perfections are the doctrines of “theological compatibilism” and “transcendent relations” which express the conviction that God “resides among us, without contradiction or identity or annihilation” (83). *Systematic Theology* expounds these doctrines in five parts, each taking one divine perfection as its focus.

Sonderegger begins with the Divine Oneness, arguing, contrary to views that construe Scripture’s genre and subject matter as primarily narrative in form, that the subject matter of Scripture is “the One God” of the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) and that its genre or form is Israel’s Torah (11). The Torah’s affirmation of God’s oneness and the prohibition against idols presents God as uniquely One (30). This affirmation and prohibition should not imply that God is either distant or unknowable. Rather, “God is very *near* to us, *present* in His surpassing Uniqueness” (40).

Affirming this nearness, the author then reflects on the perfection of omnipresence. Meditating on the Elisha narrative in 2 Kings 6, she suggests that God’s omnipresence is on display as “*invisible presence*” (70). This invisibility is not a disguise or mask but God’s unique “Life and Substance and Person” (84). Even in the New Testament this form of invisibility is present in the life of Jesus. His messianic identity is a secret, the kingdom is a secret, and post-ascension, his reign is in some sense secret even if located “everywhere, throughout the cosmos” (135).

Turning to omnipotence, Sonderegger admits that this perfection is fraught with “the problem of suffering, of sin and evil” (152). Going against the grain of theological trends emphasizing God’s “radical cruciformity”

(157) as the only adequate answer to theodicy, she re-affirms God's omnipotence through a complex discussion of divine causality, arguing that God's power "must be removed from the category of *cause* altogether" (177). God is powerful neither as "absolute cause" nor as the power to do "what one wills" (184). God does not have power but just is power (219), power as "Vitality, Life that radiates, effortlessly pours forth" as absolutely unique "Spiritual Nature" (310).

Sonderegger makes similar moves in treating omniscience and its methodological entailments. God "does not know things; God is Knowledge" (348). God's knowledge, in other words, is not like creaturely knowledge, only limitless, but is rather "the Source and Instrument of our knowing" (426). God does not know about creatures but rather "makes things known" as the "Light by which we see" (425). In treating Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Sonderegger shows the significance of this claim for ethics: "Directly in front of us . . . is not our Maker, but rather the creature . . . the Dear Lord . . . steps aside . . . so that our neighbor rises up, full and concrete and visible, fresh before our eyes" (426).

Finally, Sonderegger looks at the perfection of love. Appealing to the Jonathan and David narrative, she argues that just as God does not need a knowable creature to be all-knowing, nor to be absolute cause or realized will to be all-powerful, so God does not need an object to be Love or to give Love (489). The "covenant love" of Jonathan for David is an example of the faithful love of God, burning "with an eternal Love that gives itself away" (500).

Sonderegger's theological readings of biblical texts (e.g., Numbers and 2 Kings) rarely treated in works of systematic theology are fecund and rewarding for students of theology and the Bible alike. Her willingness to combat dominant theological trends challenges myths of progress that suggest theologians today are in a privileged position, having thrown off the shackles of traditional abstract metaphysics. In addition, her treatment of key dogmatic figures (Augustine, Aquinas, Schleiermacher, Kant, Barth, Rahner) is provocative and enriches her overall argument.

This volume uniquely blends academic treatments of technical theological concepts with a devotional and at times poetic style. For some readers this blending may be distracting, but it is consistent with the author's

argument regarding theological compatibilism as an invitation, within the entire creaturely realm, to “worship and praise” of the One God (xxi).

One complaint is in order. I hope numerous errors, including misplaced, misspelled, or missing words in the body of the text will be corrected in future printings.

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Robert J. Suderman. Edited by Andrew Gregory Suderman. *Re-Imagining the Church: Implications of Being a People in the World*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016.

This book is an anthology of sorts, a collection of essays penned by Robert Suderman over a period of more than a decade, presented here with a short editorial introduction to each of the 16 chapters. Most of the essays originated as public presentations in a range of gatherings—from Canada to the Southern Cone of South America and reaching to Southeast Asia. All draw upon the deep well of scripture and theological study that informs Suderman’s bracing ecclesiology.

Although Suderman has served as the top administrator of a church denomination, this book does not address questions about the polity and practice of church organizations. Rather, it is a theological exploration of God’s preferred strategy for God’s people in the world. Suderman takes an aspirational approach, consistently emphasizing what the church could be if it were fully living up to God’s design. By means of careful exegesis at crucial points, he looks back to the testimony of New Testament scriptures, and then looks forward imaginatively to the ways that God’s mission may be realized in today’s context.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part sets forth Suderman’s vision for the nature and being of the church. Particularly in the first two chapters, the author lays out a solid theological definition of the church as “an alternative community, subverting the values of our dominant society with kingdom of God priorities” (10). He argues that “Jesus’ vision for