

Sheila E. McGinn, Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, Ahida Calderón Pilarski, eds. *By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

What does the Bible say to communities of plenty about the starving families staring into the emptiness of food pantries because of climate change, warfare, empire, or indifference from the privileged few “unwilling to address this critical issue?” (52). While hundreds of millions of people remain food insecure today, people of faith are hungry for resources to understand and respond. Conceived in a 2009 address by Old Testament scholar Kathleen M. O’Conner, *By Bread Alone: The Bible through the Eyes of the Hungry* responds with a “hermeneutics of hunger” from a Catholic Feminist perspective.

Each of the eleven offerings in this volume stands with the hungry to interpret both the ancient context and the current social realities of readers. O’Conner observes that interpretation is “both illuminated and obscured by the interpreter’s cultural context” (19). Indeed, this is the core strength of interpretation, which is presented as both a fundamentally different and a more faithful way of reading texts than other ways.

Taken as a whole, this book is an excellent addition to a vibrant tradition of interpreting scripture through the eyes of marginal and minority groups. It belongs on the same shelf with other classic marginal hermeneutics, not only Anabaptist but Liberation, Mujerista, Indigenous, Black, Queer, and many other theologies as well.<sup>1</sup> Each chapter also stands on its own as a compelling exploration of the topic of hunger then and now. The various chapters take us from the imperial tower of Babylon to the Canadian prairie city of Saskatoon, from dangerous gaps in the Revised Common Lectionary to the gap between the world as it is and as it is meant to be.

Especially noteworthy chapters include Carol J. Dempsey’s reading of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010); Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha / In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004); Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010) and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone, *Bible Trouble: Queer Readings at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

Jeremiah 14:1-9 connecting the social roots of hunger with the ecological crisis, calling the church to hunger for the common good with the same intensity as those who hunger for food. Laress Wilkins's article unmask the intentional use of famine to inflict war, critiquing how sanctions, bloated military budgets, and indiscriminate bombing alike target the most vulnerable among us. Susan M. Elliott's use of the Gospel of Thomas—itsself part of a suppressed tradition—draws us into the psychological impact of hunger in Jesus' parables and rural Zacatecas Mexico.

Sheila E. McGinn and Megan T. Wilson-Reitz examine misreadings of the Apostle Paul's work ethic from a western perspective that tend to "water down its countercultural message, treating it instead as an apostolic ratification" of a middle-class lifestyle and the empire that makes it possible. This pointedly addresses the book's intended audience by critiquing "white collar welfare" and "ancient yuppies . . . grasping at upward mobility" (189).

The audience for *By Bread Alone*—communities of plenty with resources to address worldwide and local hunger—will find the book helpful in attempting to understand and respond to the global food crisis today. Readers looking for an introduction to marginal hermeneutics will find the articles helpful and compelling. However, an effort to interpret texts *with* the hungry rather than *for* the hungry would have been welcome. We are left to wonder about our own blind spots, and what those who are hungry might see that we miss.

This is an excellent book with eleven sharp and compelling chapters. I strongly recommend it for pastors and scholars alike. It has the potential to turn you—and the world—right side up.

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