J. Denny Weaver. *The Nonviolent God.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013.

After *The Nonviolent Atonement* (second ed., 2001), J. Denny Weaver has come out with a new book that again centers on the theme of nonviolence, *The Nonviolent God*. Just like the former, the latter urgently calls upon the church to recognize nonviolence as its calling and as a key motivating factor. Weaver is known for his commitment to a theology of nonviolence from a Mennonite perspective. However, in his introduction we encounter the diplomatic style of a theologian trying to connect to a wider public: "Although the theology to follow does pose some alternative images to and alongside the classic formulations, it is established on an ecumenical foundation" (8).

The first part of the book picks up the argument Weaver developed in *The Nonviolent Atonement*. Those familiar with his earlier work will find familiar things, but they will also discover new insights. Those who did not read the previous book or who are not familiar with his position will get a firm introduction here. However, readers will need to pause after chapter 3 to reflect on Weaver's perspective on atonement, called "Narrative Christus Victor," as it truly reflects a paradigm shift. Readers sympathetic towards his ideas will probably be convinced by his passionate style. However, those wrestling with his interpretation of the cross might have hoped for a more profound analysis of the satisfaction theories Weaver rejects—both the Anselmian theory and the later theory of penal substitution atonement, as well as the moral influence theory of Peter Abelard.

Having formulated his theological stance in the first part of the book, Weaver in chapter 4—"Divine Violence: Bible versus Bible"—demonstrates how the Narrative Christus Victor approach might help us deal with the violent images of God we encounter in the biblical narratives. In fact, this chapter is central to the argument: "The key to dealing with this longstanding and prevalent challenge to the nonviolent character of God is to recall that God is revealed in Jesus Christ" (104). That is, God most fully revealed himself in the life and teachings, the death and resurrection, of Christ. If we use this narrative of the nonviolent Jesus as the norm, Weaver says, we can shed a different light on those stories that seem to portray a violent God.

The author presents a new reading of presumably violent stories, for example the story of the Egyptian army hunting Moses and the Israelites,

building on the work of Old Testament scholar Millard Lind. The Israelites were able to cross the Red Sea because they passed on dry ground that could carry the "lighter travelling" Israelites (110), but the Egyptian army chariots got stuck. Then the water took its natural course again. It was a deliberate choice of the Egyptians to pursue the Israelites and put themselves at risk. There was no supranatural event involved. The evil ones suffered from the consequences of their own deeds. "God is always loving," says Weaver, "but respects the choice of the evildoers to continue in their evil ways, thus condemning themselves to a 'hell' of their own making" (50). This relates to another central element in his theology: free will. Rather than ascribing violence to God, we should recognize that violence originates with human beings, Weaver argues.

In the second part of this volume, the author lays out some consequences for the church, stressing the importance of a "lived theology." He demonstrates how the concept of restorative justice mirrors the interpretation of Narrative Christus Victor, even if there is no theological argument supporting it. He sets the agenda for the church in dealing with topics like racism, gender, and social and economic inequality.

I would have liked Weaver to go deeper into the kind of violence ascribed to God in the OT, analyzing and discussing both traditional interpretations that presume a violent God and the nonviolent alternatives. He could then have discussed consequences for the church in a third book that could be called *The Nonviolent Church*. Nevertheless, he does demonstrate the relevance of talking about a nonviolent God: God calls the church to follow the path of nonviolence in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth. This also demonstrates the relevance of further studies on the question of God and violence in Scripture.

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