

Reimer draws upon her work on Mennonites and the artistic imagination. Here we find a deeper reflection and the foundational assumptions behind the invitation to approach the Divine through symbol. She offers a critique of Mennonite/Christian over-reliance on words and suspicion of images, which have the effect of flattening out the artistic elements of scripture. “We are used to thinking about God communicating with us through the spoken word, not through images or tangible, physical representations” (88). To counter this, she references the visual splendor of the temple and the wealth of metaphorical images in the Hebrew scriptures, and lays out a case for the arts and imagination in our encounters with the Bible and with culture. Importantly, the author sees this as a way to avoid an “impoverished literalism” (91).

*Approaching the Divine* will be helpful in its intended purpose of resourcing lay individuals in Mennonite congregations as they explore symbols and artistic expressions from the Christian tradition.

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J. Denny Weaver. *God without Violence: Following a Nonviolent God in a Violent World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016.

Considering that, as I write this, news of white supremacist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, is circulating widely, the timeliness of J. Denny Weaver’s *God without Violence* is hardly debatable. In this popular version of his earlier books, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (2001, 2011) and *The Nonviolent God* (2013), Weaver traces evidence for divine nonviolence throughout the narrative of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection within the “conversation about the character and identity of God” spanning the Old and New Testaments (115, 128-29), addressing seemingly stubborn examples of divine violence within mainstream understandings of the atonement and the book of Revelation, and delineating the implications of divine nonviolence for Christian ethics and social justice. He frames his discussion with a

child's simple question— "A parent would never put their child to death on the cross, right?" (1, 197)—which he hopes will also resonate with adults who have left, or are skeptical of, the church and theology due to similar misgivings about "worship[ing] a God who would require the death of God's Son and who would kill thousands of people at one blow with an earthquake or a hurricane" (3).

Among the strengths of *God without Violence* is Weaver's wide definition of violence, encompassing everything from war, physical violence, and spousal and child abuse to "psychological harm" and the "structural" or "systemic violence of poverty and racism and sexism and patriarchy and more" (7, 57). This allows Weaver to move beyond the traditional nonresistance of his Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition to denounce both the myths of redemptive violence and redemptive suffering, following contextual theologians such as feminists Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock, womanist Delores Williams, and Black liberationist James Cone (42-45).

Based on his claim that "[t]he God of Jesus does not kill and take life," but "is a giver of life and a restorer of life" (21), Weaver offers retellings of biblical narratives and concrete examples—biblical and contemporary—of creatively and nonviolently confronting racism, sexism, heterosexism, economic disparity, and the hegemonic violence of empire. In this way, he helpfully addresses many common concerns regarding divine violence and distills complex theological concepts—atonement, Christology, the doctrine of the Trinity, and biblical hermeneutics—into accessible language. Weaver's call for Christians to be honest regarding their biblical hermeneutics, which are not, in fact, as 'flat' as many Christians assume, is particularly well articulated (137, 142, 144). His largely implicit but deliberate avoidance of Christian supersessionist logic is also notable (5, 107, 115).

The atonement bookends Weaver's discussion, and he again makes the case for his "narrative Christus Victor" model of the atonement centered on Jesus' nonviolent life, ministry, and resurrection—here simply termed "nonviolent atonement" (31-33). While there is much to be lauded in Weaver's broadening of redemption from Christ's death alone to include the narratives of his life and resurrection, this view arguably underemphasizes the cross. In particular, Weaver distances God from the crucified Christ, thereby neglecting interpretations of the cross that place God—not only

God's Son—in solidarity with human suffering and unjust death. This creates a disconnect between Weaver's view and, for instance, Gustav Aulén's distinction between atonement as a "continuous Divine work" (carried out by God) within the *Christus Victor* model and as a "discontinuous Divine work" (carried out by Christ for God) within Anselm's and Abelard's models. Weaver instead presents the historic *Christus Victor* model as likewise 'discontinuous' (34).

Weaver also does not engage more contemporary and overtly nonviolent theologies of the cross as divine solidarity, such as the work of feminist-liberationist Dorothee Soelle, womanist JoAnne Marie Terrell, and Cone's recent *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. These omissions ultimately detract from the critique of redemptive suffering, as Weaver glosses over the lived experiences of suffering reflected in diverse feminist and liberationist perspectives on the cross (43-45, 80-81). His one passing mention of solidarity is puzzling both in its low Christology and its reliance on Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder rather than contextual theologies (179). Weaver also uses Yoder's work without acknowledging his legacy of sexual abuse, as is becoming common practice among scholars, especially those sensitive to women's experiences of violence and abuse.

Overall, while Weaver's latest offering takes important steps in making nonviolent biblical theology accessible to a wider audience, opportunities remain for developing a more thoroughly intersectional and contextual nonviolent theology.

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