

Clive Pearson, ed. *Imagining a Way: Exploring Reformed Practical Theology and Ethics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. 372 pages. \$40.

*Imagining a Way* is a collection of essays exploring the ways Reformed theology and the Reformed tradition might address pressing contemporary ecclesial and social challenges in varying contexts around the world. This collection is a product of a conference hosted by Princeton's Center of Theological Inquiry in April 2004 in Stellenbosch, South Africa. As the final conference of three convened under the title *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, the organizers from CTI asked scholars to reflect on the question: "Does being Reformed mean doing practical theology and ethics in a distinctive and sometimes different way?" (39).

One of the great strengths of the book is its global and multi-disciplinary perspective. Due to the international nature of the conference, the contributing authors come from all over the world, including South Africa, the United States, South Korea, Switzerland, India, Germany, and Australia. These scholars speak with unique voices out of their primary disciplines in practical theology, systematic theology, Christian ethics, homiletics, and liturgy, and each offers their insights as to how Reformed theology might respond to questions of race, economics, ecclesial decline, worship, communal ethics, justice, globalization, pastoral care, and technology.

The international origin and variety of disciplinary perspectives presents both a gift and challenge for the richness and cohesiveness of the book. There is a great depth to the conversation due to the broad and multifaceted perspectives on Reformed theology, ecclesiology, and context. However, such breadth also presents a challenge in defining what is intended by "Reformed theology/tradition" and the presenting problems of varying contexts.

Editor Clive Pearson seeks to bridge these gaps and offer a guiding hermeneutic in his opening essay of "Welcome." Pearson first notes the importance of attentiveness to the author's location, adopting theologian Hugh Kerr's positioning question: "Where are you from?" Second, Pearson seeks to draw the circle wide in offering a broad view of what it means to be "Reformed." Adapting Charles Taylor's concept of the "social imaginary," Pearson advocates for a "Reformed imaginary" which "draws upon the past for the sake of establishing a principled framework...in order to understand and interpret the present for the sake of the future" (35). This Reformed imaginary shares assumptions about the sovereignty of God, the costly love of neighbor, the reality of sin, the need for God's grace, and the centrality of Scripture.

Many of the contributing scholars engage this Reformed imaginary by looking to the Reformed tradition to address contemporary ecclesial and social issues. For example, Hmar Vanlalauva looks to Calvin's theology of the knowledge and sovereignty of God in order to rethink how mainline Christians might relate to a religiously pluralistic context, particularly as encountered in India. Cameron Murchison rereads Calvin's theology of creation and calling in order to offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Reformed theology and capitalism. Finally, Jana Childers utilizes the Reformed tradition and Calvin (whose "model seems uncannily timely") to argue for preaching in this "age of the Holy Spirit" marked by restlessness and searching that is focused on careful interpretation of Scripture, embodied practice, and a focus on God (233-234).

Despite looking to the Reformed tradition as a source of help and hope for contemporary issues being considered by ethicists and practical theologians, these essays are not a mere glorification of the Reformed tradition and Reformed theology. There is a clear-eyed view of the failures and complexities of the Reformed tradition. As Susan E. Davies articulates in her essay, "Justice Healing," "The Reformed tradition has much blood and agony on its hands including the

theological travesties of apartheid and Manifest Destiny...[the Reformed tradition] need[s] to be broken open by the voices and theological insights of those on the margins of our churches and our societies” (96). Attention to the complexity of the Reformed legacy is especially prominent in essays from South African scholars as they wrestle with the Dutch Reformed Church’s support of apartheid. Dirk Smit considers whether more or less Reformed theology would have made a difference in South Africa, while Denise M. Ackerman traces how Beyers Naudé’s Reformed convictions led him to stand against the DRC.

Just as the book draws from a breadth of scholars, so, too, the book will be interesting and helpful for a broad variety of scholars, students, and ecclesial practitioners including ethicists, practical theologians, systematic theologians, and those who find themselves in conversation with ideas housed in the Reformed tradition. *Imagining a Way* succeeds in its goal to open wide an imaginative, multi-faceted, interdisciplinary, and global conversation about the contributions, challenges, and legacy of Reformed tradition and theology.

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