

simplistic. The book is reminiscent of Augustine's assessment of the Bible, like a river in which "a lamb might wade and a hippopotamus might swim".

This is not to say that all is comfort and conciliation. Brown will raise eyebrows and hackles with some of his observations. There is little comfort here for either the rigid literalist or the lukewarm liberal. His regular description of the three faith communities as "Abraham's dysfunctional family" ought to make the conscientious reader of each faith group squirm.

From time to time he skates close to a style of instruction that may be read as preachy, but no one can doubt his respect for the whole people of God's several books, even when he calls, echoing Muslim scholars to be sure, for an Islamic reformation.

His vision of Judaism as the "foundation", Christianity as the "spiritual temple", and Islam as the "dome" over all, will be disconcerting to some. And it ought to be noted that Brown's work tantalizes, begging the overwhelming task for an interfaith scholarly effort to attempt a comparative commentary on Old and New Testaments and Koran all together.

Some exception will be taken that worship ought to take preeminence over all else in

religion; the biblical message and the orthopraxy of Jew and Muslim alike would argue, as did the 138 Muslim scholars, that "worship and work must be one". Still, the quibbles are small. In the 21st century, it is clear that religion is the new politics, and will be for the foreseeable future. Brown's rephrasing of the Golden Rule, that we may "understand one another as we would wish to be understood" is a sign that, as a certain telecommunications giant suggests, the future may yet be friendly.

— James T. Christie

**EMPIRE AND THE
CHRISTIAN TRADITION:
New Readings of
Classical Theologians
Edited by Don H. Compier,
Kwok Pui-lan and Jorg
Rieger Minneapolis: For-
tress Press, 2007 \$35.00**

Thirty-two essays, chronologically arranged, and written by a variety of scholars, assess the contributions of theologians whose work the editors believe can increase our current understanding of the intersection of Christian tradition and Empire. As to just what is meant by "Empire", Joerg Rieger describes it as "massive

concentrations of power which permeate all aspects of life and which cannot be controlled by any one actor alone" (p.3). The editors don't unpack the latter phrase, but we can assume that "Empire" is bigger than Julius Caesar or George Bush. The understanding that "Empire" permeates all aspects of life implies that so-called apolitical theology deludes itself when it assumes a neat division between the political and the religious. Empire, especially today, advances in softer and perhaps more persuasive ways than simply through military might. Rieger is critical of conservative theology that happily embraces Empire as a helpful vehicle for the proclamation of the word. But he is also critical of those perspectives that see the Constantinian arrangement as a complete surrender to the Roman Empire, and display a confidence that they can produce a theology that it is in no way influenced by empire. Progressive Christians may be chastened by Rieger's insistence that we never get beyond "ambivalence" in our relationship to Empire. On the other hand, Rieger affirms the value of ambivalence in resisting Empire whose nature is always to seek complete assimilation rather than to tolerate ambivalence. An example of this ambivalence can be found in the councils of Nicaea and

Chalcedon which were held in the interests of Empire's concern for unity, and yet ultimately affirmed non-hierarchical relationships of the persons of the Godhead and of the divine and human natures of Jesus.

Rieger's nuanced perspective might help theologians to stay self-critical. This perspective also keeps us open, in a constructive sense, to the breadth and depth of the theological tradition, rather than being dismissive, for even theologians through history who were not openly critical of Empire still bear witness to a "residual spirit of resistance". The concept of a "surplus" in theology emerges from this realization that even when theology is influenced by Empire and enmeshed in it, theology still offers resources for challenging it. Analysis is needed to identify where and how theology is being assimilated to Empire, not to assign blame, but to glimpse directions that are "fresh", and to use a favoured word of many of the editors and contributors, "constructive".

With the idea of "Empire" serving as an "heuristic key", history is understood as a succession of manifestations of Empire, overtly political in earlier times, increasingly commercial in the present. Historic contributors to the Christian tradition in the struggle with Empire are not limited to persons we usually think of as

classical theologians. In this volume I encountered theologians with whom I was quite familiar, ones with whom I had some familiarity, and ones I had not previously heard of. I suspect that the editors fully intend both to build on the concept of tradition that each one of us carries, and then stretch it to include greater diversity. The editors' desire to be more inclusive of women, non-Europeans, artists, and those Doug Hall once called the "sensitive", becomes more evident as the book approaches the modern era. So we are introduced to Sor Ines de la Cruz, a 17th century Mexican poet and dramatist, who was completely new to me, and Simone Weil, the 20th century essayist, about whom I had heard, but not as a contributor to Christian theology. This broad understanding of who are contributors to the tradition and the emphasis on describing their life and times (as well as the essence of their thought) will make this book appealing to a wide public as well as to those conversant in theology.

United Church readers might be drawn to the chapter on Jonathan Edwards written by Don Schweitzer of St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon. Edwards, a character from pre-Revolutionary New England, was important in helping to shape the "New Light" Reformed perspective from which 19th century American

liberal theology largely emerged. His concerns for order and community resonate in our own ethos. His appreciation for God's transcendence affirmed rather than denied the relevance of human striving towards community in history. Jan H. Pranger's chapter on early to mid-20th century Dutch Reformed theologian, Hendrik Kraemer, portrays a Christian at first supportive of colonialism (in Dutch Indonesia), then supportive of indigenous churches, and finally reconciled to Indonesian independence (having personally experienced German colonialism through the war), but never able to open himself to inter-faith dialogue for fear of syncretism, even though the vast majority of Indonesians for whom he had profoundly warm feelings, embraced Islam. I found Kraemer's story to be relevant to our own complicity in colonialism with respect to First Nations people.

The book helped me move to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Empire in the light of Christian tradition, and furthered my appreciation for a theology that values the past and makes it relevant to the present. As one whose eyes tend to roll when I come across words such as "hegemony" and "praxis", I still heartily recommend this volume to all who value the rich diversity of the Christian tradition,

and the commission to the church to speak prophetically to the world, holding up against Empire's idolatries God's vision of free and loving community.

— David Crombie

**RAGE AND RESISTANCE:
A Theological Reflection on
the Montreal Massacre.
by Theresa O'Donovan
Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid
Laurier University Press,
2007. Paperback, 160 pp.
\$25.95**

I was surprised by the opening to the appendix of this book: "Here is an invitation" (107). Theresa O'Donovan, associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Brescia University College in London, Ontario, has written more than a theological reflection on the events of December 6, 1989. While reading, I was compelled to pause for scribbling in the margins. Upon reading the invitation, I realized how this reflection effectively works *not* to give a final summation of its topic. Her book would be as good company in a methodologically-focussed interdisciplinary studies course as in a pastoral theology seminar. Students would have no problems finding something to write about.

Individual readers will likely discover renewed passion for their own work too.

O'Donovan builds upon Gregory Baum's critical theology and Dorothy Smith's feminist sociology in order to create what she calls strategic theology (102). By giving attention to the actual lives of people, strategic theology is guided by an imperative to effect "necessary change" (59): emancipation from ideological distortion through the formation of counter discourses in word, image, and act. This attention to particularity uncovers not only patterns of dominance, but also the connections among those who are saying "no!" to injustice. O'Donovan unfolds testimonies of those whose singularities resonate with one another (78). They are "practical accounts of *particular* realities" (59), of the "concrete conditions" that disallow blame from being fixed at random (63). In doing so, O'Donovan's theology means to enable an engaged "spirituality of resistance" (94).

December 6, 1989 signifies death for O'Donovan (9), while also providing her "own starting point" in the "'painstaking hermeneutic' of actual Canadian conditions" (17). On that day, Canada — both its institutions and the society — became strange and inhospitable to her.