

**WHY JOHN WROTE A
GOSPEL**
by **Tom Thatcher**
Louisville, Kentucky:
Westminster John Knox
Press, 2006. Pp. 193 + xviii.
Paperback.

Why did John – living as he did in a culture where most people couldn't read, fewer could write, and no one regretted that fact at all — write down his ideas about Jesus? Why did John write a Gospel? Why does the fourth Gospel exist? (p.xv)

As Tom Thatcher explores this question, he does it through the lens of an emerging discipline called Social Memory Theory. Like many preachers, I generally approach texts with a view of understanding the author's agenda. Thatcher speculates not only on the author's agenda, but also on the social memory of the audience. He does a very good job of introducing the concept of Social Memory Theory and applying it to the question, Why did John write a Gospel? He doesn't seek to address the historicity of the Gospel, but to understand the historical setting and recognize a social approach to memory that will provide an opportunity to answer his question.

Part One focusses on the word "write". The nature of the written

word is an important foundation to the question at hand. Here we look at the way in which early memories of the contemporaries of Jesus, that are passed on orally, became incorporated into a written form by those who did not have first-hand knowledge. This recognizes the historical context in which John chose to preserve his unique perception of Jesus.

Part Two is mainly concerned with John's memory of Jesus, and the rhetorical function of writing. John's understanding of memory goes beyond personal recall, for knowing Jesus is an interaction of memory and the Holy Spirit. For John, the Spirit is the archival source of Jesus information.

Part Three makes use of the Social Memory theory to analyze the various influences that had an affect on John's decision to write. The ultimate answer to Thatcher's question is set out in Part Four, where we are offered John's reasons for writing a Gospel in a culture that was predominantly oral. It had to do with his conflict with the "Anti-Christ's" of the day. A written Gospel was the best way to freeze the memory of the Jesus that John believed in, while denying the opinions of the Anti-Christ's.

While this book could easily be understood by anyone, it is a great asset for theological students, or anyone interested in historical

research. It provides a wonderful application of a Memory Theory that all scholars should become familiar with. I highly recommend this book.

— Deborah Shanks

**VULNERABLE
COMMUNION:
A Theology of Disability
and Hospitality
by Thomas E. Reynolds
Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos
Press, 2008, 256 pages.**

Thomas Reynolds is associate professor of theology at Emmanuel College in Toronto. He and his life-partner, Mary, have two sons, Chris and Evan. Chris has been diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder of the brain, and with Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning disorder on the autism spectrum. His father notes, "Chris is making his way in the world. But the principalities and powers of the world are not set up to make his way easy" (p. 12).

In this book Reynolds shares his experiences, both joyful and painful, as the father of a child with, and a child without, disabilities. He also writes as a theologian who has read widely about, and reflected at length upon, disability and its implications for Christian thought

and practice. This is an extensive analytical work that explores how Christians might think differently about disability and act differently toward people with disabilities. "Nurturing communities of abundant hospitality is the goal" (p. 14).

Chapter 1 offers an overview of the promises and the perils of thinking theologically about disability. It presents a searing analysis of theodicy as a theological enterprise that results in denigrating and trivializing disability, while objectifying and demeaning persons with disabilities. Reynolds confronts as well the "medical model" that underlies dominant social and theological views that regard disability as a personal tragedy. He calls for a rethinking of "the paradigm by which disability is perceived as an anomaly" (p. 30).

Full personhood is neither diminished by disability nor confirmed by ability. Instead, it is a factor of the interdependent relationships we share with one another as creatures loved into being by God in the image of God. There is a wider horizon in which all persons in their uniqueness and vulnerability coexist within the enfolding presence of a gracious God. This horizon is our shared humanity, a fragile and contingent