

BOOK REVIEWS

Augustine, Daniela C., *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019. xii + 257 pp. \$49.99. paperback.

In this inspiring yet eruditely crafted vision of a Pentecostal public theology, Daniela Augustine delineates a theological ethic and practice of imaging God's face for the "common good," in manners robustly counter to contemporary de-humanizing violence against "ethnic, religious, political, cultural" human alterity (4, 11, 15). Coupled with her "Prologue" that biographically grounds the book's major themes within her 2011-2012 field research in Eastern Slavonia (where much of the violent ethnic-religious rooted 1990s Balkan conflicts transpired, leading to the break-up of the former Yugoslavia), Augustine beautifully explicates this vision through four chapters and a concluding "Epilogue."

Hence, we might also classify this work as a practical theology aimed towards funding practices within the liturgical life of Christian community, and its acts of witness within the public sphere. Yet I must stress that for Augustine, this public sphere comprises the whole world rather than just one immediate national locality. Her work is thus deeply missiological, with a consistent horizon aimed towards enjoining our accountability as Christians towards human and creational flourishing worldwide.

For those not familiar with its history, the phrase "common good," is a stock political notion dating back to Aristotle. We might at a base level define it as mutually recognised needs and aspirations a people might agree they share with one another, regardless of perceived differences. Hence, through her Prologue and first chapter ("From the Common Image to the Common Good") Augustine presents a "Pentecostal" contribution to a Christian vision of the "common good" emerging from the biblical imagery of "Pentecost" (9-10, 19, 49-51, 59-60).

She consistently argues how its imagery theologically suggests five themes that together clarify this vision. First, Pentecost paradigmatically portrays the inclusive "hospitality" of God, comprising the welcoming of human diversity within the *shared* "space" of Christ's body (51). Second, being "human" created in the image of the triune God, pre-eminently

means lovingly living for the *good* of “others,” particularly, those *different* from ourselves (9, 11, 27), which thus defines our human vocation (17, 27). Third, this responsibility derives from the “common image” we mutually mirror to God our creator (13-14, 27-28). Fourth, practicing this vocation describes the pedagogical ascetics that brings us into Christlikeness (11, 16-17, 27, 45-46, 52-54), and how we image God’s likeness within creation (21, 28, 46, 60). Finally, this divine pedagogy comprises the great lesson of the Eucharist. Namely, that God gives us the world to share with those different from us (11).

In chapter two (“From the Iconoclasm of Violence to Love as the Life of the New Creation”) Augustine applies this pneumatological vision to the problematics of human violence. Working from the first fratricide rooted in Cain and Abel’s “sibling rivalry” over perceived “limited goods” (65-89), she roots violence to this enduringly perceived predicament. She suggests then that human violence comprises iconoclastic efforts towards dismissing the “divine face” within human otherness (71-72, 77).

Drawing from the Old Testament prophetic tradition, Augustine’s antidote comprises “repentance” (101-102), meaning from “iconoclasm” to “covenantal accountability” towards the “face of the other” (107). Diagnosing how this malice malignantly shapes both market economies and human behaviour through its de-humanizing “secular liturgies,” in chapter three (“Recovering of Eucharistic Being in a Market-Shaped World”) Augustine delineates how practicing the Eucharist should pedagogically discipline us with practices of “sharing” aimed for global healing and flourishing (127-132, 145-147, 153-159). Then in chapter four (“From Forgiveness to the Common Good in the Spirit’s World-Mending”) she elucidates how practicing forgiveness primes us with visionary motivation towards actually labouring for the common good with those different from us, worldwide (164, 174).

In her Epilogue, Augustine weaves her first-hand interviews with Christian Balkan war survivors, into “a Hagiography of a Community Committed to the Common Good.” By “hagiography,” she refers to how their lives exemplify the “saintly life as a form of embodied, communicative ethical practice,” offering “a concrete, applied model of Christian ethics” (227). Hence, from these gathered chronologies of people practicing forgiveness, and “Christian peacebuilding” for the

good of their enemies during the war, the Epilogue presents a lived commentary on Christian “love”; here defined as “an embodied commitment to the well-being of the other, perceiving their physical and spiritual flourishing as inseparable from” their own (206).

Augustine thus posits that such “hagiographies” can iconically function as mediators of grace, empowering us towards “peacebuilding and reconciliation, economic justice, socio-political inclusion, and ecological renewal” (228). Frankly, I found these closing pages the most winsome and innovative part of Augustine’s work. Yet actually, we might best recognise that its inspiration rises not foremost from her poetic prose, but from the suffering labours of these Eastern Slavonian “saints” inspiring us through their example—to the true way of “Christoformation” (227).

Biographically speaking, this book reflects Augustine’s own Eastern European heritage and many years of ministry within that region, coupled with ecumenical involvement with the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In fact, Eastern Orthodox theology deeply funds this book’s themes. Along with Lévinasian-Derridean hospitality themed philosophy, Augustine has skilfully woven these elements into a brilliant, Pentecostal public theology for the “common good.” On a practical and level, she also regularly suggests how this theological vision translates into both liturgical practices of spiritual formation and missional practices of public witness and service.

I might add that, like her past works, this book exemplifies Augustine’s unique ornately-rich writing style. Yet as an example of constructive theology, her prose remains refreshingly inspiring, and provides us another needful Pentecostal foray within the genres of public, political, and even liturgical theology in the key of Pentecost. For these reasons, I recommend this book as a needful volume not only in these areas, but as inspirational resource towards a Pentecostal practice of spiritual formation and missional life style.

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