

## Book Reviews

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*Seek Justice That You May Live: Reflections and Resources on the Bible and Social Justice.*  
By John R. Donahue, S.J. New York: Paulist, 2014. Pp. xvii + 310. \$29.95.

Donahue is well known for his expertise in the Gospel of Mark and related subjects. He has had a correlative interest in the biblical notion of justice beginning with a 1976 essay, “Biblical Perspectives on Justice.” D.’s work continued by teaching ministerial students and working with Walter Burghardt on the “Preaching the Just Word” project. He also acted as a consultant to the US bishops for their 1976 pastoral letter on economic justice and published a bibliographical essay on the Bible and social justice in 1993, rev. 2000 (xv). This rich background has come to fruition with more extended reflections on both the Old and New Testaments and, at the end of each chapter, abundant resources that are both extensive and (for the most part) annotated.

D.’s purpose is not to offer an exhaustive treatment of each part of the Bible but to provide “a handbook for both teachers and students in their personal commitment to the quest for justice” (xvi). The book is intended to inspire further investigation and provide resources that might enable such investigations. Since Vatican II, Catholic social teaching cannot inspire and move people without close attention to and integration of the biblical view of social justice. D.’s emphasis is on *social* justice, so the selected texts resonate “with concern and compassion for the downtrodden and powerless people who live at the margins of any society” (287–88). Thus, frequent, essential references to contemporary applications are provided.

Since the book is a survey of a wide range of material, this review will focus on certain themes or issues that surface frequently in the various sections. First, D. employs his earlier description of biblical justice as “fidelity to the demands of a relationship.” “Demands” refers specifically to God’s law and covenant for Israel and to the whole Christ event for Christians (12). Since the description is general, the specification in various biblical texts is essential. Second, Israel as a “contrast society” (46) means that liberation is a process rather than an event. The people must become “a free, responsible people” who consent to God’s vision for them embodied in the legal codes. The laws are communal and manifest a “right relationship” to God in their concern for the marginalized (63).

Third, the gap between rich and poor is a clear and pervasive theme in the Torah, the prophets, and the wisdom tradition. While wealth may be considered a blessing,

it is open to abusive power through greed and avarice. Particularly insightful is D.'s treatment of the psalms of lament as the weapon of the weak and poor: "Lament is the ultimate form of truth-telling in the quest for justice" (113). Also noteworthy is a chapter on Luke–Acts as breaking down the barriers of social location (who should be invited to the banquet), of hatred and division (Samaritans), and of rich and poor (parables of the rich fool, the unjust steward, the rich man and Lazarus). "No New Testament writing deals more extensively with the dangers of wealth, the proper use of possessions, and concern for the poor than Luke–Acts" (205).

Fourth, the Pauline and Johannine writings focus on communities of friends that counter the dominating ethos (cultural and political) of the Roman Empire. The trial before Pilate in John is about witness to truth that counters empire (262). The Book of Revelation likewise unmask the dominant ideology and warns the followers of Christ of that ideology's seductive power. The controlling metaphor is the "slain lamb," a symbol of nonviolence. "In the face of violence, the vocation of the Christian, then and now, is faithful witness and resistance to the divinization of power and prosperity" (273).

Fifth and finally, confronted with violent texts (treated on 113–15), D. cites Sandra Schneiders's contention that we must dialogue with each text about its subject matter (284) so that the word of God that is truly salvific (see Vatican II's *Dei verbum* no. 11) may be effective in our contemporary world (288–89).

The book is well written and readable with numerous citations of biblical texts. While there are a few very minor glitches (e.g., repetition of text on 14, 163–64; E. P. Sanders rather than James Sanders on 49), the book has many interesting insights and is a treasure trove for all who are interested in deepening their understanding of social justice in the Bible.

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*The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms.* Edited by William P. Brown. New York: Oxford University, 2014. Pp. xix + 661. \$150.

This work is an excellent introduction to the Psalms, one of the best-loved and most distinctive books of the Bible. Indeed, the volume's 42 essays are so comprehensive and of such outstanding quality that one can only see as overly modest the claim of its editor, a noted Psalms scholar, that "this volume aims to touch upon, rather than cover, the myriad bases of Psalms study and interpretation, both past and present" (ix). Much more accurate is his statement that this work is designed for both scholar and student, since both advanced researchers and beginners will profit from its content. Not least among this work's valuable resources is B.'s introductory essay, which provides a useful guide to both the Psalms' interpretive history and the essays that follow.

Indicative of the comprehensive nature of this work are the titles of the volume's ten sections: Ancient Near Eastern Backgrounds, Language of the Psalms,