
As a pastor who often uses the Revised Common Lectionary for the task of preaching, I admit that Pastoral Epistles, Catholic Epistles, and 1 Peter in particular, rarely become part of the grist and grace of regular congregational preaching. As a theologian who believes the task of theology is formed by the kerygma of the New Testament witness, I am equally penitent about my infrequent use of 1 Peter in service to the theological task. So I am grateful for Warner Bailey’s needed attempt to re-center 1 Peter as a crucial New Testament witness, as a source of strength to the community of believers, as a message of God’s faithfulness to those suffering in various places and times, and as a resource in our own time as we seek to make sense of this world and where and what the Christian community is called to bear in service to Jesus Christ.

Equally important, Bailey engages with the history of scholarship and interpretation regarding 1 Peter. He notes the central challenge of faithfulness in the face of persecution exhibited by these first century communities, he explores how 1 Peter was used in other contextual settings in Nazi Germany and South Africa but also by the Resident Aliens of Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, and Bailey probes theological questions about whether communal suffering can be redemptive. *Aliens in Your Native Land* also seeks to apply the lessons of 1 Peter to the modern challenges that confront us from evangelical identity to millennial disillusionment to our larger culture’s malaise, with the radical hope in the midst of suffering playing in the background.

Bailey begins the book by engaging various approaches in Petrine studies concerning why 1 Peter was written, and concludes that it was composed for Christian communities largely made up of native born members as a letter of consolation and comfort in the face of persecution. Bailey documents the use of the Book of the Twelve in the Hebrew Scriptures as a parallel source from the exile and the Persian Period, and as a model for the aims of 1 Peter. According to Bailey, the aims of 1 Peter are that the Christian community will be able to endure ‘fiery trials’ because of God’s faithfulness to them even in their suffering, just as Jesus wholly committed his life to God even in the suffering and shame of the cross. The epistle makes the claim to its hearers that because their suffering is embraced, known, and held in the suffering of Jesus Christ, because Christ’s suffering shares in their suffering, they will share in the power of Christ’s resurrection. This gospel, this kerygma of 1 Peter, graces the Christian community with a new sense of agency, stamina, and power in the midst of
their suffering. Bailey continues to make connections between the Book of the Twelve and parallel images found in 1 Peter that provide comfort to these communities in the midst of persecution, suffering, and diaspora and which helps shape the community’s counter-intuitive identity as it awaits Christ’s return.

After engaging with the history of interpretation and making the rich connections between The Book of the Twelve in the Hebrew Scriptures and 1 Peter, Bailey looks for ecclesial and theological situations in the modern world where 1 Peter has been put to use and practice by people who experienced alienation in their own land. Particularly rich in insight is his engagement with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his many uses of 1 Peter in the course of his life and ministry. In particular, Bailey’s account and reflection on 1 Peter from Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship* is uniquely insightful as he discusses Bonhoeffer’s reflections on the sacrifice of the alien suffering in their own land. Bonhoeffer’s comments are especially poignant as he writes about those who bear testimony for a threatened humanity, which itself becomes a sacrifice for the sake of humanity, much as Bonhoeffer’s own life continues to serve in our own day. Beyond Bonhoeffer, Bailey continues to explore other recent use of 1 Peter in order to nurture faithfulness in suffering and crisis. Bailey engages immigrant communities, communities of color, and the LGBTQ++ communities and their real experiences of persecution and alienation in our time. Bailey also engages the Christian community in the resident alien ecclesiology put forth by Hauerwas and Willimon. Fairly or unfairly, Bailey juxtaposes their version of discipleship to Bonhoeffer’s, with Hauerwas and Willimon arguing that separation from the world is necessary if not recommended, in contrast to Bonhoeffer’s vision of serving the world redemptively by living under its judgment, even active oppression and persecution, in an effort to transform the world. Perhaps this brief but profound ecclesiology of 1 Peter is best summed up by Bailey here: ‘this acceptance of redemptive suffering can only be sustained by employing a conscious understanding of being engrafted into Christ who bears God’s judgment of the world on the cross. By being so engrafted, one is put in contact with Christ’s resurrection stamina. As we live out of resurrection stamina, we will follow Jesus as a human for others’ (114).

Bailey concludes the book with an interesting discussion and presentation of two groups in modern America who often voice marginalization today: evangelicals and millennials. After exploring several recent studies of these groups, Bailey observes that both groups operate out of a worldview that assumes that the world is headed down the path of self-destruction and the imminent end of the world, both resigned to a sense of despair, despondency, and borderline nihilism about the future. They see a hostile, dominant culture
choking off their values and way of life, with no hope until the return of Christ. Not exactly the message of 1 Peter, though 1 Peter may indeed still speak to the millennial and evangelical in their own suffering. People who might be surprised to see the desperation and frustration of the present context similarly to their evangelical brethren, are millennials, who Bailey reminds us feel the same sense of pessimism about the future, though not necessarily about their traditional values being supplanted, but more so because of climate change, their own employment possibilities, and their student debt. Both groups see their futures in decline, have experienced real occasions of suffering, and feel a sense of purposelessness and loss. As life expectancy declines for the first time in years and suicides and school shootings increase among members of this generation, Bailey observes, ‘self-harm is a likely outcome of concluding you are living in an end-game situation’ (127). And this is where this book is a helpful piece of New Testament study, historical theology, pastoral care, and sociological analysis all wrapped together in one work. 1 Peter is a resource for communities dealing with pain, suffering, persecution, and a sense of alienation. 1 Peter helps Christian communities experiencing pain and hurt – in the first century, in 20th century Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa, and in the despair and despondency of 21st century nihilism – know that Christ enters into that suffering and offers ways of discipleship in and through the suffering that will lead to endurance, stamina, and hope. What is missing in the present crisis is any sense of redemptive suffering. And through this thorough study, Bailey deftly points us to how 1 Peter has been a handbook to the suffering, persecuted, and alienated from the first century to the twentieth century, and how 1 Peter continues to point to the source of hope for times such as these as well.

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