J. Denny Weaver, *God Without Violence: Following a Nonviolent God in a Violent World*. Eugene, OR: Wiph and Stock, 2016. Pp. 316. Softcover, $25.00 USD.

J. Denny Weaver has been an influential Mennonite theologian for several decades. He is perhaps most recognized for his book *The Nonviolent Atonement,* and its more recent supplement, *The Nonviolent God*. These two books most comprehensively spell out the concern that has animated Weaver's writing career as a whole, namely, that classical Christian conceptions of God as either implicated in or directly responsible for violence are the result of extrabiblical theological abstractions that emerged from imperial contexts. On Weaver's telling, such imperialist theology explicitly contradicts the fundamental principle of Jesus's life and teachings: nonviolence. Since Jesus is the fullest revelation of God (at times, Weaver states that Jesus is the *full* revelation of God), all of Scripture, indeed theology and ethics *in toto*, must be interpreted through the foundational narrative of the canonical Gospels. Weaver thus sets out to reinterpret Christian theology (atonement theology in particular) through a retrieval of the essential motif of nonviolence.

God Without Violence is an attempt to synthesize and abridge those earlier works for a popular audience. The result is a text broad in scope but mostly perfunctory in detail. The book can be thematically divided into five sections. The first section introduces the foundational narrative of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and concludes that the entirety of Jesus's work can be encapsulated in terms of nonviolent opposition to and triumph over evil forces. Weaver's primary focus in this section is the concept of

atonement, the alleged locus of deleterious classical theology. According to Weaver, the criteria of nonviolence entails a rejection of all traditional atonement motifs. Weaver is left with a modified, nonviolent version of *Christus Victor*, the only atonement theory that stays true to the narrative of the New Testament. In the second section, Weaver moves to apply the principle of nonviolence to contemporary moral debates. Economics, race, ethnicity, and gender issues are all reinterpreted through the lens of nonviolence. The third section addresses nonviolence in light of God's omnipotence, particularly as it is revealed in the Old Testament. Weaver admits that at times the Hebrew Scriptures do present God as violent. However, he thinks the overall picture is mixed; the Old Testament alone cannot decisively determine whether God is violent or nonviolent. Only the foundational narrative of Jesus resolves the debate in favor of nonviolence. The fourth section applies the principle of nonviolence to the images of judgement in the book of Revelation. The final section addresses the methodological concerns that arise from Weaver's self-consciously novel approach to theology. Weaver attempts to abate potential objections by contending that theology has adapted to contemporary contexts from its inception. Contemporary awareness of the oppressive dynamics of gender, race, class, and ethnicity ought to push us beyond traditional theological abstractions that justify violence toward fidelity to the New Testament narrative of Jesus.

Weaver does us all a service by challenging us to rethink our own theological presuppositions about Scripture. Yet, one cannot help but feel that he is blithely unaware of the ways his own context has shaped his reading of Scripture. His Jesus seems to be a distinctly nineteenth-century, historical-critical Jesus who opposes evil through acts of civil disobedience. Jesus (and by extension theology and ethics as a whole) is reduced to a single principle: rejection of violence. Once this criterion has been established as fundamental, all other aspects of Jesus's life become secondary. Additionally, Jesus is strangely abstracted from his Jewish and canonical context. For example, the reader is never told how Jesus's alleged acts of civil disobedience would have been understood in his own context as a first-century Jew under Roman rule. Or, in reducing Jesus's death to a form of nonviolent civil disobedience, whole swaths of Scripture that speak of Jesus's death as sacrifice, propitiation, and justification (among others) are simply ignored. These are substantive lacunae in a book on the moral and soteriological significance of Jesus. These may not be fatal objec-

tions to this book but it does lead the reader to question its value as a primer for the theological novice.

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