



HUMAN PERSONHOOD

RESPONSIVE BECOMING: Moral Formation in Theological, Evolutionary, and Developmental Perspective by Angela Carpenter. New York: T&T Clark, 2020. 200 pages. Paperback; \$39.95. ISBN: 9780567698162.

Carpenter, in this well-written, methodologically astute, and thought-provoking study on moral formation rubs several unusual sticks together: Reformed theologies of sanctification, extended evolutionary synthesis theories, and current offerings in developmental psychology. The result is a wonderful fire that sheds much light on all these areas. This study is sure to be an important conversation partner for those interested in the ongoing dialogue between theology and the social sciences, as well as those interested in the doctrine of sanctification and its relationship to understandings of moral formation. We are in Carpenter's debt for such stimulating interdisciplinary work.

The subtitle lists Carpenter's three main interlocutors. In her first three chapters, she begins with a theological analysis of the views of sanctification of John Calvin (chap. 1), John Owen (chap. 2), and Horace Bushnell (chap. 3), in which she uncovers several "recurring questions and difficulties" in the Reformed tradition (p. 3). These difficulties include, first, the extent to which sanctification should be dependent upon "a particular cognitive-affective state" (p. 36)—namely that the believer trusts in God as a loving parent such that one's good works flow from this state of "faith." This can prove to be an unstable foundation given the "unreliability of subjective awareness" (p. 152). A second question centers on the extent to which God's trinitarian sanctifying action should be understood to work through, or alternatively totally displace, "intra-human sources of formation" (pp. 37, 152). Calvin's theology is filled with tension in these areas, tensions which are resolved in one direction in John Owen's theology as he reacts against "Pelagian" threats in his day and upholds "the integrity of grace" (p. 3) in a certain way. Owen emphasizes the objective work of God in sanctification, such that human cognitive-affective states do not matter much, nor is sanctification seen to be mediated through any human formative influences. Bushnell, responding against revivalist

accounts of sanctification in his day, takes the opposite tack, and emphasizes both the human subjective response to God and formative processes such as the nurture of children by Christian parents, so much so that "the activity of the Spirit cannot be considered apart from the natural means through which it operates" (p. 87). I learned much from Carpenter's appreciative yet incisive exposition and analysis, not least of which are the ways that typical Protestant views of sanctification, such as those of Calvin and especially Owen, can pull one in the opposite direction from much of the recent revival of virtue theory and discussions of formative practices in Christian ethics and practical theology.

The key link between these chapters and the following ones is the importance of the parent-child metaphor for the relationship of the Christian to God. "God as a loving parent and the faithful person as the adopted child of God" (p. 5) is a common and important image for Calvin, and indeed for the Christian tradition as a whole, as attested by the first two words of the Lord's Prayer. This raises questions about the extent to which the divine-human parent-child relationship has dynamics that are analogous to human-human parent-child relationships, and the extent to which natural processes of human moral formation are related to the process of sanctification through the gracious activity of God, our heavenly parent.

She pursues these and other questions through a deep dive into the intricacies of current discussions of evolutionary theory (chap. 4) and developmental psychology (chap. 5). In both these chapters, a recurring motif is that relationships of care, affect, and social acceptance bring about important changes in humans. The "niche construction" of systems of affect, attachment, and "concern for the emotions and welfare of others" (p. 111) plays a key part in our evolutionary history, and "early and affective social acceptance" (p. 129) plays a key part in the moral development of children. One can see how important moral changes that these natural processes create in human beings resonate with descriptions of sanctified human behavior that result from the parental love of God. Could these processes, especially when seen in light of trinitarian accounts of the work of Christ and the Spirit, help us better understand God's sanctifying work, without reducing God's gracious action

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to simply these natural processes? Could such an account help one move through the tensions within doctrines of sanctification in the Reformed tradition? This is the direction of Carpenter's questioning and answering throughout the text and especially in her constructive account of sanctification in chapter 6, "Sanctification Revisited."

I have so much admiration for this excellent study, and there is so much to respond to in this rich text. One key lesson I gained was that love, here understood primarily as an affective relationship of social acceptance and care, is not some added luxury in human life, but rather is a foundational component for human evolution and moral formation. As a theologian this will change the way I think about "justification," which was interestingly not a word highlighted in the text. Carpenter pushes me to anchor my Protestant understanding of justification deeply within the realm of a relationship of acceptance and care between a human and God, rather than seeing it primarily as a juridical status. Carpenter shows there are important "sanctifying" aspects of this relationship; the two theological concepts are linked in important ways.

I also came away with two primary sets of questions, especially regarding her proposals for a revisited doctrine of sanctification. The first has to do with the description of sanctification itself. What does a sanctified or holy life look like? Carpenter emphasizes aspects of sanctification that are direct results of being adopted as a child of God; in this way one becomes a "new being" in Christ (p. 153). This relationship with God satisfies "affect hunger" (p. 158) and provides a social context in which a "new heart" can develop (p. 158). Instead of focusing on an examination of one's own heart (p. 161), or alternatively on following rules or examples outside of oneself, such as the example of Jesus understood "legalistically" (p. 158), Carpenter emphasizes that the Christian life of sanctification is an ongoing repentance from alienation from the creator (p. 162); vivification occurs when one turns again and again to the loving arms of God (p. 163). My wonder here is whether increasing conformity with clear models of God's holy intentions for human life that go beyond the activity of continual repentance and returning to God should also be emphasized. Carpenter certainly talks about conformity to Christ, but the pattern of

Christ is usually talked about in terms of "repeated returning" (p. 161) and "perfect fellowship with the Father" (p. 162). I sense perhaps an overemphasis on Spirit, and not enough on Word or the patterns that sanctified life takes: in Calvin's trinitarian theology, "Word" (related to attributes of form, pattern, or way of life) and "Spirit" (related to the energy by which that form is achieved; see *Institutes* 1.13.18) must go together. While the law and prophets hang on the command to love God and neighbor, such love is fleshed out in a variety of holy ways of life that God intends for humanity. Carpenter's wariness about virtue ethics seems to go hand in hand with this reticence to name behaviors, virtues, or practices other than repentance, acceptance, and positive affectivity. It is unclear to me whether this is simply a matter of scope and focus—"focus on the relationship with God, rather than on one's inner life or outer behaviors" is a clear and salutary message throughout the text—or is a feature of her total understanding of sanctification.

I also wonder whether Carpenter's description of God's activity in sanctification could be improved by considering different ways that God relates to the world. Both Karl Barth and especially David Kelsey (in *Eccentric Existence*) have taught me to consider that God's activity toward all that is not God takes three primary shapes or "trinitarian taxes" in God's work of creation, reconciliation, and in drawing all that is not God to eschatological consummation. Carpenter's important insights about the foundational nature of affective relationships might find greater sharpness through a distinction between (1) God's creational work (which would be mediated generally through evolutionary processes which include human parent-child relationships), (2) God's reconciling work (which many would claim is mediated primarily and more particularly through the people of God), and (3) God's "kingdom" work (mediated through Spirit-inspired renewed ways of life). This might create greater space for talk of justice and vocation, as well as greater distinctions between God's activity in Christian communities and elsewhere. All three avenues of God's activity and human response to it involve the intertwined, yet unified, sanctifying work of God that is based upon affective acceptance; however, by noting these distinctions, greater space might be created both for greater specifications of holy living and for distinctions between

God's more particular and more general work in the world.

None of these wonderings should detract from the seminal nature of Carpenter's work. Her emphasis on the importance of intra-human and divine-human affective relationships in moral formation and sanctification provides an important foundational structure to discussions of sanctification. Carpenter's methodologically careful, insightful, and thought-provoking work will surely be a voice of continuing importance in ongoing discussions of sanctification within theology and in the needed intra-disciplinary dialogue between theology and the social sciences.

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Φ PHILOSOPHY

ALL THINGS WISE AND WONDERFUL: A Christian Understanding of How and Why Things Happen, in Light of COVID-19 by E. Janet Warren. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021. 208 pages + index. Paperback; \$27.00. ISBN: 9781725292031.

In *All Things Wise and Wonderful*, E. Janet Warren develops a multidisciplinary, Christian understanding of causation with the hope that it will help us "to respond with integrity and compassion for those who suffer" (p. 182). Warren is not short on familiar examples of uncompassionate responses to suffering that are worth critiquing: "God caused the pandemic to teach us to be kind" (p. 127), "Everything happens for a reason" (p. 180), and "This tragedy happened to grow your faith" (p. 22). Warren argues that these symptoms point toward a common diagnosis: a false, "omni-causal" view of God, according to which God "causes everything that happens, including pandemics" (p. 31).

Chapter 1: Introduction lays the groundwork for the rest of the book in two ways: first, by giving a complex taxonomy of philosophical distinctions bearing on causation; second, by introducing (as Warren argues) the problematic practice of too easily explaining an event as the result of God's direct causal intervention (e.g., God provided a parking spot!) when mundane explanations suffice. The tension between the complexity of causation and the human tendency to gravitate toward simplistic (divine) explanations becomes the book's recurring

theme. In chapter 2, Warren surveys biblical claims about causation, concluding that the Bible "does not give a simple account of causation," (p. 45) and encouraging the reader to "accept ambiguity and complexity" (p. 36) in the text rather than demanding a coherent biblical theory.

The third chapter, "What Does Christian Theology Say about Causation?" is the clear standout and would make a provocative discussion-piece for an undergraduate class on divine providence in a science and religion course. Warren contrasts two pictures of God, one in which God is an omni-causal, omni-controlling dictator of a deterministic world (pp. 57, 77) and another in which God is a servant king who relinquishes the option to utilize God's power in order to preserve space for indeterministic, creaturely freedom (pp. 53, 58). The strokes are intentionally broad, nudging the reader to see the potential ethical pitfalls of positing an omni-causal God. In particular, Warren worries that an omni-causal God would not be capable of being lovingly responsive to creaturely agents (p. 57).

In Warren's preferred picture, God builds a world that can host longstanding causal patterns without repeated divine intervention; once created, the world is, in some sense "self-causing" (p. 35) and does not require any special act of divine conservation. Although God does act in the world, God refrains from fully exercising his power to control in order to respect "the freedom he has granted to humans and the created order" (p. 60).

The contrasting portraits, however vivid, also preempt discussion of various middle views—one might distinguish between an omni-causing and omni-controlling God, for instance. Warren is also stronger on critique than on the details of her own positive proposal—perhaps by design. "The language of metaphor and analogies is more accessible," Warren writes, "than the language of philosophy or science" (p. 68). This is faithful to her refrain that real-world causal networks are messy and not easily wrapped in neat theological packaging, but it may prove frustrating to those readers eager to engage the details of a constructive project.

In chapter 4, Warren gives the reader a crash course in statistical concepts that are useful for understanding causation, quickly covering (for instance) base