

references and summaries in the form of “As I showed in chapter *x*” and “As I will argue in chapter *y*,” sometimes at the rate of nearly one per paragraph, are, frankly, annoying. Ultimately, while the most vociferous engagement with this book will probably occur within VanDrunen’s denomination, the volume is a significant contribution to the field of Christian ethics and natural law and, therefore, deserves consideration and scholarly engagement far beyond the conservative Presbyterian enclave.

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Offering Hospitality: Questioning Christian Approaches to War

Caron E. Gentry

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 2013 (200 pages)

In *Offering Hospitality*, Caron Gentry challenges three contemporary Christian viewpoints on issues of war and peace: Christian realism (Reinhold Niebuhr), pacifism (Stanley Hauerwas), and the just war tradition (Jean Bethke Elshtain). Her attempts at deconstruction are rooted in feminist and postmodern approaches. Her ultimate aim is to promote a sacrificial ethic of hospitality as the appropriate Christian approach to war in our time.

Her critique creates a false dichotomy, however, juxtaposing *agape* against the power of the state. She proposes that powerful states should help sustain peace in failed states by engaging in securing the welfare of “others” (strangers) through hospitality instead of pursuing the state’s own interests. Her attempt to construct a Christian response to the problem of failed states is a legitimate one, as is her questioning of the responsibility of states regarding power toward marginalized populations in failed states. She is at her best in the three chapters that carefully analyze the Christian realist, pacifist, and just war traditions. She criticizes their imperfection based on love, despite the fact that neighbor-love (*caritas*) is a key category for just war thinking.

Gentry derives her theological basis for “offering hospitality” as a form of practicing *agape* in international relations from Romans 12:9–18 (NIV), which up through verse 13 reads:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

While naming *hospitality* as one of the primary elements of practicing love for one’s neighbor, this passage also requires Christians to “hate what is evil” and “cling to what is good.” Doing so involves making a choice to avoid evil whether it be in the form of a neighbor’s evil practices or within oneself. It should include withholding hospitality

from those who are perpetrating evil against others—a dilemma for the humanitarian-aid community, which prides itself on providing aid to all in need, without any regard for whether or not such aid actually props up terrible rulers and regimes.

Gentry indicates that one cannot have self-interest and also practice *agape*, which would disqualify Christian realism's focus on the national interest. However, protecting one's own citizens is a form of *agape* (by hating what is evil). While building up the household of God ("the Lord's people"), *agape* should also be offered to others proactively (which Gentry concludes in her reassessment of just war's last resort criterion). While this is a commendable practice regarding failed states, actually securing failed states is one way of resolving regional and/or global security for the sake of one's own state security (i.e., "living at peace with everyone"). Nevertheless, the application of *agape* to one's neighbor regardless of the neighbor's goodness or badness might go too far to allow evil in the form of taking advantage of vulnerable peoples in failed states, as well as in one's own nation.

Gentry's approach is problematic in at least two ways. First, she claims to analyze these issues from a Christian perspective that goes all the way back to early Christendom, though there is very little evidence for this. Instead, she has to rely on Eastern approaches (e.g., Gandhi, Aung Sun Suu Kyi) rather than Christian ones for inspiration. Like most peace activists who take this track, she seems to misunderstand the Eastern sources on which she draws. Eastern philosophy is not rooted in loving one's neighbor as oneself; it promotes the notion of complete self-emptying and the veneration of personal suffering, which clearly are not Christian. In contrast, Christians are actualized by love of Christ and love of neighbor, not by self-abnegation in a depersonalized system.

Furthermore, classical Christian thinking for the past two millennia has recognized inherent dilemmas for Christians engaged in the use of force (e.g., converted Roman soldiers) and the responsibility for Christians to act morally when serving in law enforcement, government, and the military. Gentry misses this wider genealogy, as perhaps best evidenced by the fact that her lengthy recitation from Romans 12 on individual love lacks any reference to the very next passage on the importance of political order and justice in Romans 13.

Second, *Offering Hospitality* could have made most of its cogent arguments without its digressions into feminist theory. Claims about what is masculinized (e.g., the West) versus what is feminized (the developing world) are simply not very helpful and seem contrived.

Where Gentry is at her strongest is in her clear exposition of the positions of Reinhold Niebuhr, Stanley Hauerwas, James Turner Johnson, H. Richard Niebuhr, and others. This is serious explication, despite the fact that she seems to use the eloquent public intellectual Jean Bethke Elshtain as a straw man for her arguments against American exceptionalism and imperialism. Her critique of Hauerwas's pacifism as, to use our own words, idealistic and irresponsible (not to mention ahistorical) is a helpful corrective to much of the weak thinking by those who represent the mainline and evangelical left churches on these issues.

Gentry is trying to get us, in part, to a discussion about how *agape* can provide a basis for hospitality in world affairs. She is locked into the idea of hospitality's becoming an academic concept within the discipline of International Relations (IR); it is not clear that

such is necessary. Her idea of hospitality is not an obvious variable for IR theorizing but that does not mean that it is not a useful idea for serious policy and/or normative consideration in its own right. Certainly, an argument can be made for hospitality—that not only states but also other institutions (e.g., civil society, churches, individuals) ought to be rooted in neighbor-love so as to promote enduring political order, justice, and peace.

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Prophets of the Posthuman: American Fiction, Biotechnology, and the Ethics of Personhood

Christina Bieber Lake

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I suppose we are all a bit scarred from high school English classes that focused on dystopias. Some educational theorist somewhere must have decided that the burgeoning adolescent psyche is best served by a diet of *Brave New World*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *1984* (with *A Separate Peace* and *Catcher in the Rye* tossed in to lighten the mood, perhaps!). Furthermore, outside the classroom, the realm of popular (and profitable) young adult fiction has been dominated by the *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies, such that the dystopic vision is a central trope of middle school America.

Christina Bieber Lake's *Prophets of the Posthuman* has made my dilemma worse, and I thank her for it. Her engagement with the disconcerting vanguard of bioethics, proponents of human enhancement technology, and hyper-evolutionary philosophers such as Peter Singer and Daniel Dennett makes for a depressing and troubling journey. However, like Dante's tour through Inferno, there is a literary imagination alongside to offer sense, or rather, a number of different imaginations, some philosophical and some literary, from which Lake draws her extended rejoinder to the posthuman apologists. The preface shows her following Hannah Arendt in the notion that political philosophy, not science, is the place to establish boundaries for technology's purview. Likewise, Lake follows critics Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth in framing ethical debates as "requir[ing] deep, nuanced, and ongoing reflection on narrative" (xvii). Having moved into this rich terrain of narrative responses to hyper-scientism, Lake perhaps is too hasty to suggest that literary studies has backed away from this difficult realm; she perhaps ignores the work of Marxist critics; the Derridian school; Richard Kearney's work; and maybe even the project of T. S. Eliot in the years between the two world wars, an age of startling dehumanization and scientific hubris. But I would say Lake's general trajectory, to pit story against empiricism, is the right move, even if it has a long backstory and feels rather familiar.

The introduction also sets out a good aim, albeit somewhat jarringly. The move from Emerson and American autonomy to the personalist vision of such thinkers as Maritain seems hasty. With a number of thoughtful quotes woven together from such substantial