

ethical thinkers as Alasdair MacIntyre, Miroslav Volf, and Jürgen Habermas, the warp and woof show through a bit. A thick sense of what personalism entails, and why it offers a strong counterargument to the posthuman discourse, never quite emerges. Lake sometimes seems to be in a hurry to move through the philosophical to reach the literary, and though her own narrative in *Prophets of the Posthuman* includes many helpful quotes and augments from a range of thinkers, the effect is episodic rather than cohesive.

That being said, when Lake finally does launch into her project proper and begins to unpack prophetic fictional narratives that twist up a posthuman or complex human vision and then release the narrative threads to see them spin and unravel, she provides an important and often insightful light that shines into dark corners of our contemporary desires.

Lake's method throughout the eight chapters of the book is to set up a contemporary champion of enhanced, winnowed, genetically perfected future humans and then to show how a particular fiction writer questions and undermines such idealized (and perverse!) visions. Some of the comparisons work better than others, but Lake always seems to find something in the literary insights that resounds with the reader, even if bioethicists sometimes seem like straw men. The juxtaposing of Flannery O'Connor's brilliant accounting for the wonder of even aberrant sexual physiology in her story "Temple of the Holy Ghost" with the faith crisis caused by a similar situation in Lee Silver's *Challenging Nature: The Clash of Science and Spirituality at the New Frontiers of Life* makes for a strong and lucid opening chapter. (It is noteworthy that Lake has written an earlier book, *The Incarnational Art of Flannery O'Connor*, and her reading feels deeper and more subtle on this tough story than on some of the other texts.) Lake speaks to her deepest point eloquently at the end of this chapter, asserting that "arbitrating between all possibilities will be disastrous if we deny that individuals make decisions through a complex tangle of facts, emotions, spiritual beliefs, and values" (42). I especially like this counterintuitive image of the "complex tangle" because it captures how narrative works and how irreducible fiction's truth telling can be, especially in the face of a hubristic empiricism.

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## Flourishing Churches and Communities

**Charlie Self**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian's Library Press, 2013 (138 pages)

*Flourishing Churches and Communities* offers a joyous, practical, and insightful primer to the integration of "faith, work, and economics for Spirit-empowered discipleship." In doing so, it seeks to drink from a "Pentecostal" well for its *ressourcement*.

The author, a noted Assemblies of God pastor-scholar and professor, inspires a pathway for leaders of Pentecostal thought to reflect on public life in a renewed way. Self's use of *Pentecostal* is conveyed with nonprovincial understanding, so that non-Assemblies of God charismatics and Pentecostals (e.g., for me, a member of Vineyard Association of Churches)

will discover his perspective to be inviting. Moreover, Self presents Pentecostalism in a nontriumphalistic manner, and mainstream evangelicals may even find it “accommodationist” to many of their own theological sensibilities.

Variouly explained and illustrated, the book’s message seeks to illuminate five guiding principles, which I will briefly cite here:

- Principle One: Work is good.
- Principle Two: Although sin has effaced human nature and work, it has not erased the divine nature in people and the ability to bring good to the world.
- Principle Three: God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ and is now working through the church to express the life of the kingdom in the present age.
- Principle Four: God the Holy Spirit actively energizes compassion for the poor and wealth creation for community flourishing.
- Principle Five: Cultural, economic, and social institutions are built on transcendent moral foundations.

The book’s seven chapters reinforce the above principles by offering a practical, biblical theology of the integration of Spirit-empowered discipleship, work, economics, and the transforming mission of God through the people of God wherever they are sent into the world. The book is engaged in world-and-life formation of a distinct kind: to discover how “a biblical worldview empowered by the Spirit will foster discipleship that will create, refine, and sustain wise participation in the economy within an ethos of stewardship and the fulfillment of the Great Commission” (xxviii).

Perhaps principles four and five are the most unique compared to quintessential “faith and work” discussions. For example, principle four witnesses to the fact that the Spirit’s activity is involved in acts of compassion *and* in “wealth creation for community flourishing.” The pious observer will readily acknowledge the former, but may find it mindblowing to recognize the truth of the latter. On the latter, Self is not endorsing a kind of prosperity gospel, which he critiques and rejects (21). His argument is related more to the purposes and stewardship of wealth creation for the good of others (see pages xxx–xxxi, 12, 24, 64–66; and here interaction with John Schneider’s *The Good of Affluence* or Frank Hanna’s *What Your Money Means* would be illuminating).

The book’s core concepts and claims are addressed with care. For example, by “Spirit-empowered discipleship,” he means a life that is led by the Spirit and is dependent on the Spirit’s enablement to fulfill Christ’s mission on earth (xxiii–xxiv, xxvii, xxix–xxx). Who would not want that to infuse economic life? Which Christian tradition would deny the need for that? He is not claiming that disciples must speak in tongues in order to be empowered. However, he is trying to awaken readers to Spirit-empowered, life-giving-life that is not merely beneficial for one’s interior or religious life or for simply having an ecstatic experience. I wonder how Self would imagine the role and practice of Spirit-led

discernment when understanding the morality of markets in order to better appreciate what freedom, virtue, and responsibility might look like in a particular situation.

Moreover, by *work* Self has in mind “all meaningful daily activity distinct from recreation and rest where we are fulfilling our purpose and contributing to *the common good*” (xxv, italics mine); it is “more than a business transaction” (95). “Our work is our daily life lived as an offering to God” (95). In that sense, “ministry”—without the sacred/secular border patrolling—can be seen to be integral to understanding the *telos* of work as worship and ministry to others under the authority of Jesus and his kingdom. Our work is enacted in an economy, which “is the social system through which people organize their work and disperse its fruit” (xxiv) and “the social framework in which our work finds value and we are able to flourish” (129). Perhaps it would be more useful to speak of work as a contribution toward common goods (Self’s “fruit”), and not simply aimed at the somewhat nebulous descriptor, the common good. At the very least, learning to understand Spirit-led contextualization of common goods would be useful here.

How, then, does the discussion develop in this book? Essentially, it develops in two main ways: (1) a focus on a biblical-theology account and (2) a focus on the practical implications. First, chapters 1 through 4 present Old Testament and New Testament explanations of God’s creational and redemptive intent to create, transform, and co-mission his people to bless all peoples (15–16) in order to help reconcile all (without distinction) to himself. (See also Christopher Wright’s *The Mission of God*.) This blessing is itself shalom, enacted not as some mere “absence of conflict” but more like the “fullness of life-giving-life” or what we might simply call *flourishing* (in its ancient-medieval sense of *happiness* or *eudaimonia*). Doctrines of creation, anthropology, and the Spirit-empowered mission animate Self’s theological reflection if for no other reason than that they are a backdrop to the foregrounding of an account of Christian discipleship later in the book.

A theology of an “already but not yet” kingdom of God infuses our concept of how we understand the continuity and distinctiveness of the mission of the people of God from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It also helps the reader understand why the enactment of the shalom of that kingdom matters—including its implications for economics—in both testaments and climaxes in the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus and of his commissioning that has been realized through the people of God since Pentecost (see chapter 3). Self is eager to show the social-economic-cultural cash value of this biblical vision, and—as though he wants to bellow the final Amen chorus of Handel’s “Messiah”—he declares:

God’s reign in Christ is present—and still to come. Every conversion, act of compassion, supernatural manifestation, economic breakthrough, and artistic expression produced by the Spirit-empowered believers is a signpost of the future, a foretaste of the eternal Kingdom where righteousness (equity/fairness/justice), peace (shalom/concord/healing), and joy (delight in the Lord and his redeeming work) are fully experienced (41).

In this book and others like it (e.g., Amy Sherman’s *Kingdom Calling*), the ecclesial- and kingdom-oriented claims are underwritten by a theology of the laity and their leadership.

“The focus of discipleship,” writes Self, “must be on all of God’s people walking in their callings and expressing those vocations in the world of work and active participation in economic and social flourishing ... while being open to releasing manifestations according to the leading of the Spirit” (55). Whether considering anointed artisans to build the tabernacle (“a community art project” in Exodus 25; 35–36), or being a people who enact the general charisms of Romans 12, Self explains the intelligent design that is realized when the people of God are who they are called to “be,” and “do” for the life of the world—the very God-bathed world that is not drearily deistic but is richly Trinitarian.

Chapters 5 through 7 move us from a biblical-theology framework to engaging in a praxis framework where “ideal meets real” as it considers the way in which “economy/work” (e.g., household, community, and transformation of culture) are situated integratively within a divine-enabled “transformational quartet” (71–78) that includes the following areas: spiritual formation into Christlikeness, personal wholeness and character development, relational integrity and social-psychological health, and vocational clarity and stewardship. Self seems to say that these four areas influence *and* are shaped by the conditions and features of economics/work, although an account of *how* that symbiotic relationship obtains is not developed.

The last two chapters explore the ecclesial dimensions and significance of stewarding that transformational quartet through the local church as a parish (84) that is Spirit-designed to incubate the people of God with the mission of God to bless all peoples. In short, the local church is the very kingdom means for equipping and mobilizing disciples for “life lived as an offering to God ... commissioned for impact in all domains” of society (95).

The conclusion, which really could be chapter 8 in its own right, offers insight concerning how to develop competent skillfulness of a spiritual variety to discern the ways of God: a “discovery” of how God is already at work in *our* world (118–19), an “integration” of how our transformation is deeply interrelated with “the current and future flourishing of the world around [us] and that such goodness is [the] integral part of the Great Commission” (120), and an understanding of “new metrics” for gauging success toward what it means to cultivate flourishing churches and communities (126–28).

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## Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition

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This book traces the development of the theology of charity toward the impoverished from the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, through the Second Temple literature, the New Testament, the church fathers, and into the medieval period. It presents an impressive account of the continuity of thought concerning the religious obligation to the poor from ancient Israelite religion to medieval Catholicism.