

Karen Bray. *Grave Attending: A Political Theology of the Unredeemed*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020. 259 pages. \$29.49.

Karen Bray's new book is significant as a work of political theology grounded in affect theory. Her concern is for the unredeemed, those whose moods fail to measure up to the narratives and metaphors by which neo-liberalism and its alliance with certain forms of Christianity would presuppose for our lives. Redemption, after all, is more than a garden variety theological narrative or metaphor; it is at root an economic one. Where persons suffer from moodiness, the realities of life in the presence of disabilities, or any other form of marginalized existence, there is a struggle between the prescribed happy ending of the late capitalism and the reality of life in brokenness. It is in this gap where Bray writes about a doing of theology that opts out of neo-liberal and traditional Christian theological coercion and an economically defined vision of redemption.

Affect theory plays a large role in Bray's book, and homiletics has until now taken little notice of it. A little familiarity with it helps to guide the reader through her deconstruction of the language of redeeming. Bray follows the work of scholars like Lauren Berlant, whose signal writing in *Cruel Optimism* lays out how tending to affect helps us to see and understand why human beings emotionally hold to the very dreams that make life miserable. We believe, say, in the promise of America even though it is a cruel taskmaster. There are the values that we think we know; more important are the values of what we really know in our bones and lives. Can you feel even now how what our culture or politics calls optimism might actually be cruel? (And would it be so hard to smile?) Affect theory presupposes that the life of the emotions precedes what we say or think about realities. Affect theory wishes to tend to the truth of emotions and bodies even in the face of what is professed by the powerful as True.

Bray's book proceeds chapter by chapter through a series of negations: "Unbegun Introductions," "Unsaved Time," "Unproductive Worth," "Unwilling Feeling," "Unreasoned Care," and "Unattended Affect." The first five of these negations follow clearly: affect theory opens up space for rethinking the value of those constructions that organize human life by way of prescription—what is timely, worthy, emotionally positive, and reasonable—especially insofar as they aid the neo-liberal economic project. The final chapter, "Unattended Affect," is a bit of an outlier in that Bray uses affect theory to unpack her own mystifications around race, white supremacy, and power. Along the way, the reader begins to see how affect theory takes apart not just theological constructions that demand so much of Bray in her "moodiness," but in her own will to power as a white woman.

Bray's book is a demanding read. It is also important to preachers. Those familiar with trauma theory will note that attending to wounds pushes back on theological conceptualities that speak of redemption and suffering in ways that rush prematurely to closure and fail in the end to truly attend to the other. Bray's use of affect theory is similar: "grave attending" is a lot like Shelly Rambo's Holy Saturday—it is an in-between space that cannot presume that resurrection will erase its memory in happy-ending redemptions. These are always good lessons for preachers to learn. Beyond that, however, it drives preachers to a deeper respect for a kind of lively theological anthropology that truly does the work of "grave attending" and in the process discovers not so much redemption as the deep and moving solidarity of the unredeemed.

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