

David P. Gushee. *In the Fray: Contesting Christian Public Ethics, 1994–2013*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014. 230 pages. \$25.20.

If I were to capture in a word how I feel after reading David P. Gushee's *In The Fray: Contesting Public Ethics, 1994–2013*, it would be this: *convicted*. What unifies this collection of essays is Gushee's relentless quest to present a bold public witness for Christ in the midst of cultural, political, and theological turmoil. Gushee couples a concrete pragmatism with a theological hopefulness, embodying the ideal of dwelling *in* the world while not being *of* the world.

The essays are all striking in their clarity and forcefulness. Gushee does not veer to the right or left, but drives right to the heart of each matter at hand. Many of the essays were originally delivered as speeches and one can still discern the orality of Gushee's prose in them, which makes for delightful reading. This book functions as a sort of primer on Christian public ethics, and thus it could be useful for homiletics professors teaching courses at the intersection of preaching and justice. While I did not acquiesce to all of Gushee's arguments there was no denying their import. It is a book that I highly recommend.

In the Fray consists of eighteen essays and a concluding, evaluative essay by the recently departed Glen Stassen. Several of the essays (chapters one, four, five, seven, and thirteen) build upon Gushee's seminal work on "the righteous gentiles" who offered protection and care for persecuted Jews during the *Shoah* and the enduring legacy of their witness. These essays are must-reads in my opinion because, in spite of their occasional nature, they bear timeless significance about how Christ-followers are to relate to the state. Several of the essays deal with interpersonal relationships, addressing divorce (chapter two), marriage (chapter eight), homosexuality (chapter twelve), and race relations (chapter seventeen). Another important concern that Gushee addresses is ecological ethics, and especially the reality of climate change (chapters eleven and sixteen). And several more essays challenge facile notions of Christian political theology vis-à-vis evangelicalism (chapters seven, nine, and thirteen), war (chapters three and fifteen), poverty (chapter fourteen), and Israeli-Palestinian conflict (chapter eighteen). Chapter six stands alone as a very helpful exposition on the discipline of Christian ethics, tracing its evolution and casting a vision for the future.

An alternative subtitle for this book could easily have been *Inaugurating a Moral Vision* because that is what Gushee does throughout. With patience and an unrelenting passion for Christ, the Church, and the world God loves, Gushee leads the reader through a kind of socio-political catechesis. As he puts it in one of his essays,

[W]e must seek to nurture morally fruitful Christian communities. Such communities would be the kind of communities that would produce rescuers working alongside friends and strangers, Jews and other Christians, in skillful supportive networks. . . . The development of this kind of community with these kinds of skills and commitments ought always to be the churches' goal, regardless of the particular immediate crisis or lack thereof. This commitment is simply the character of an authentic Christian community—a community ready at all times to act on behalf of the victimized, the powerless, the hungry, the homeless, and the stranger (10–11).

We could read this as a thesis for the entire book. Gushee is indefatigable in his conviction that the Church is called to nurture a "repertoire of piety and spirituality" that is marked by "compassion and orientation to others' needs" (12); the former fuels the latter and vice-versa. Or,

as he puts it otherwise, “the weaker our ecclesiology, the stronger our tendency to confuse the identities “American” and “Christian” and to offer excessive loyalties to worldly powers” (78).

One of the themes that I found personally convicting was the importance of Christians and churches to actively engage the state in matters of faith and praxis. As a Baptist, I had always affirmed the radical separation between church and state. However, Gushee’s brand of evangelicalism—a “New Evangelicalism”—offers a nuanced understanding of separation. In his “Evangelical Declaration Against Torture,” Gushee avers, “One aspect of this discipling process is to help congregants prepare for the exercise of their citizenship responsibilities” (116). Or, as he writes elsewhere, “Christians need to urge the political leaders who represent us to specific, policy-based action. . . . We are accountable to God for our choices. Judgment begins with the household of faith” (180). Not only is this book important for Christian ethicists, homileticians, and political theologians, it is accessible enough to aid the preaching of pastors and the moral development of thoughtful Christians.

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