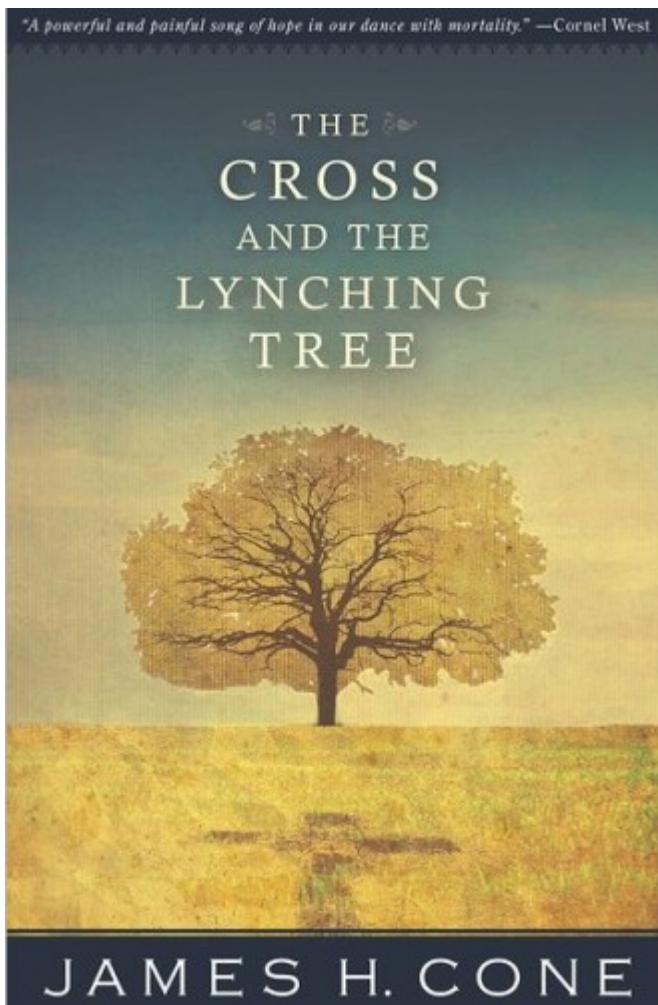


CC recommends: Theology & spirituality

selected by [Debra Dean Murphy](#) in the [December 13, 2011](#) issue

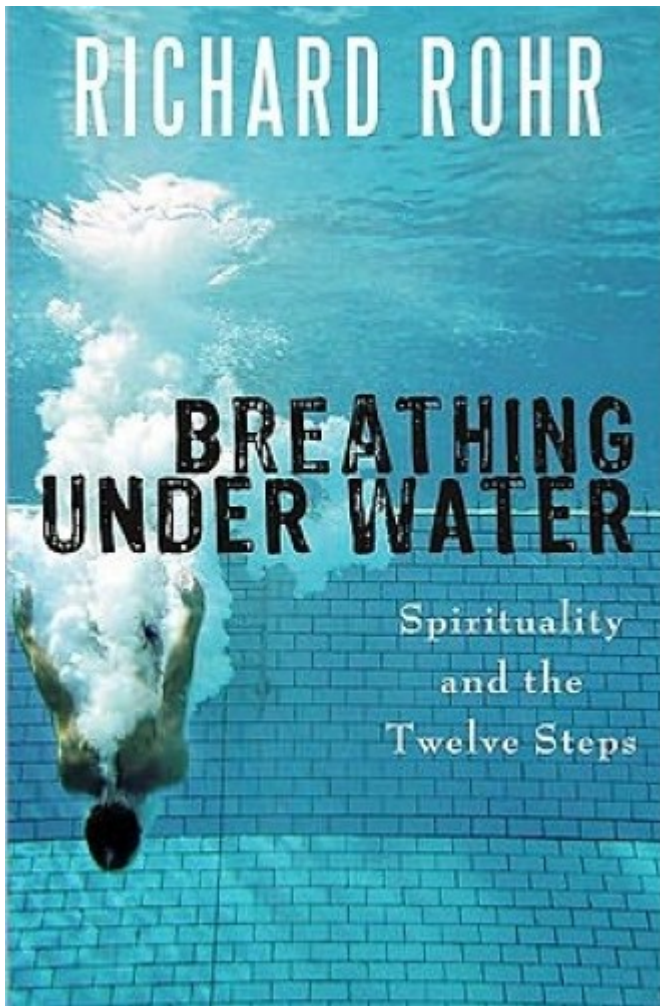
In Review



The Cross and the Lynching Tree

By James Cone

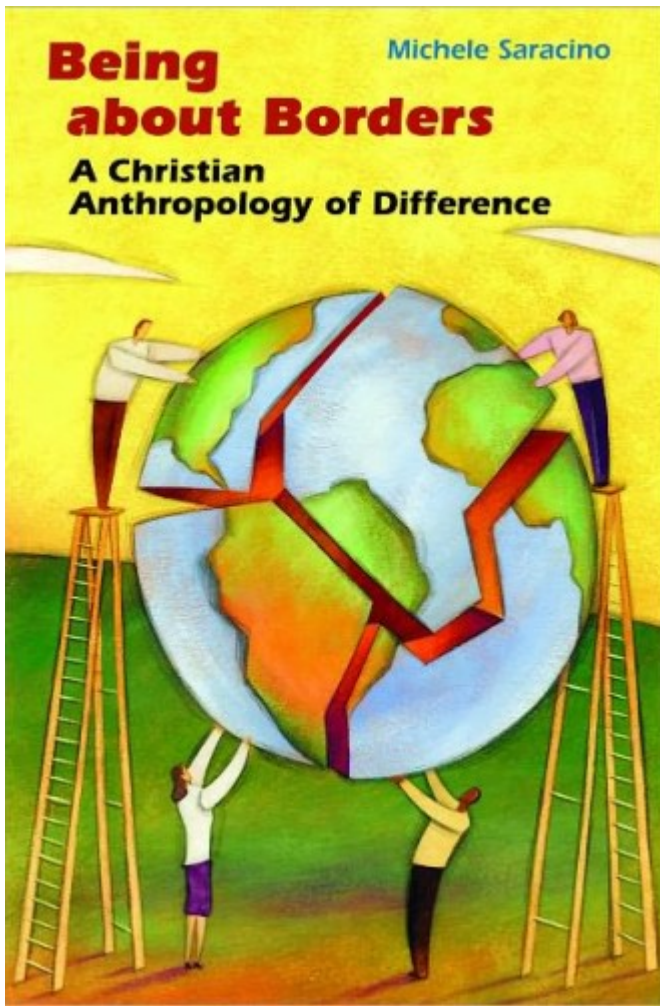
Orbis



Breathing Under Water

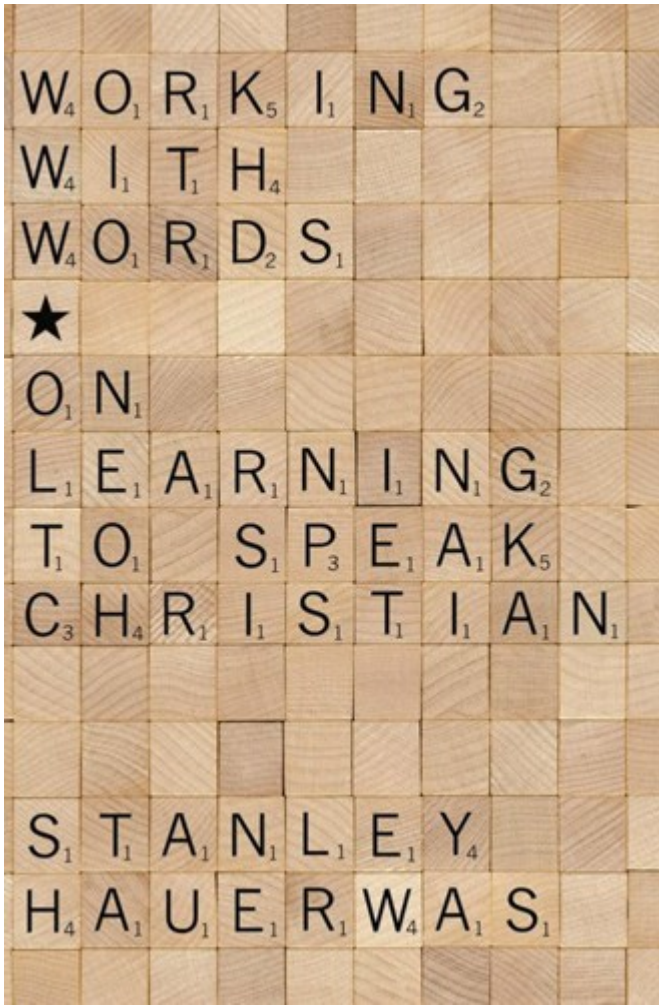
By Richard Rohr

St. Anthony Messenger Press



Being about Borders

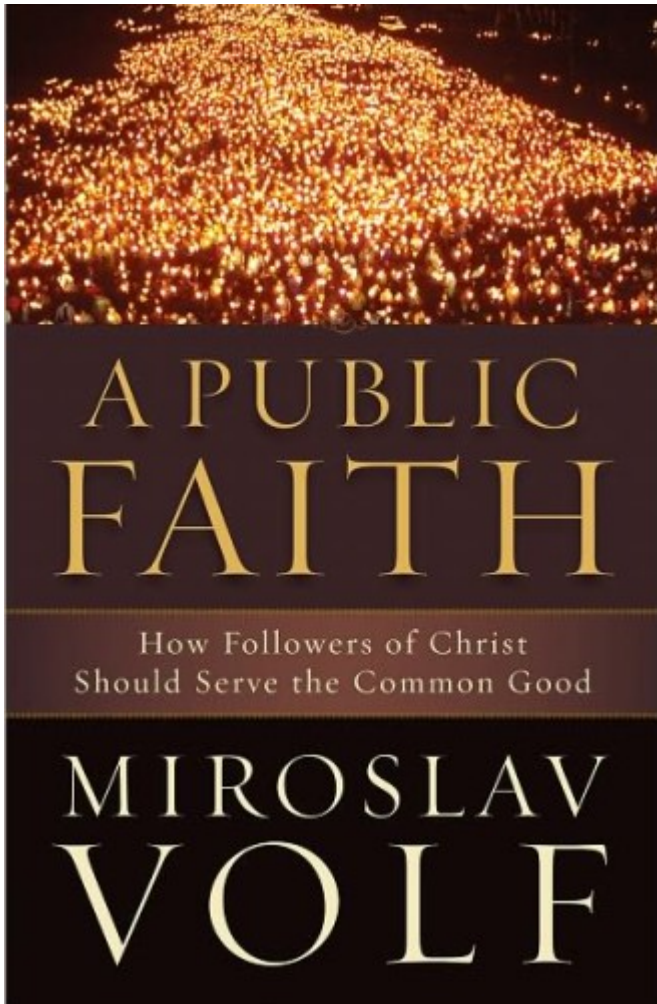
By Michele Saracino
Liturgical Press



Working with Words

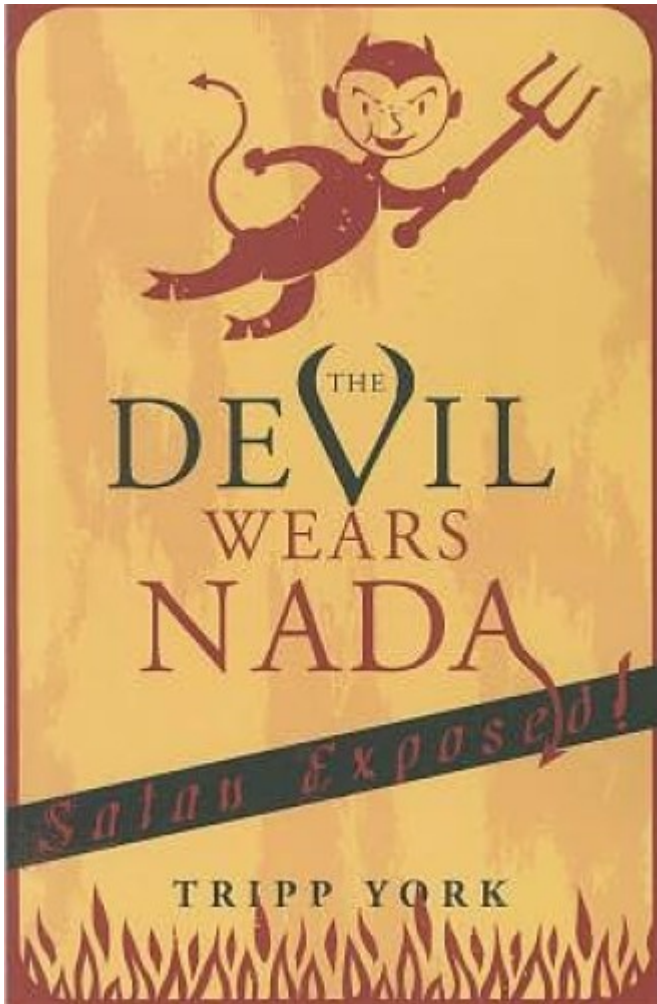
By Stanley Hauerwas

Cascade



A Public Faith

by Miroslav Volf
Brazos



The Devil Wears Nada

By Tripp York
Cascade

The Cross and the Lynching Tree, by James H. Cone. "Black body swinging in the Southern breeze," sang Billie Holliday in "Strange Fruit." Cone sets the Romans' preferred apparatus of torture and death beside the spectacle lynchings of America's shameful past. Against tendencies to both sentimentalize and fetishize the cross, Cone calls for a clear-eyed, reciprocal interpretation of the crucified Christ and "the lynched black body." The past, he reminds us, is not so past: one-third of all young black men are in prison or somewhere in the "system." You can lynch a person without using a rope or a tree.

Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps, by Richard Rohr. Spirituality is perhaps an ill-chosen word in this book's subtitle, given that Rohr's

characterization of Christianity is (and always has been) relentlessly incarnational. Here his identification of the gospel with the core tenets of Alcoholics Anonymous underscores how redemption comes to us in and through the messes we make of our lives, not despite them. Anyone with first- or even secondhand knowledge of the Twelve Steps can attest to the unsettling challenges they present to safe, respectable, middle-class Christianity: "When the churches forget their own gospel message, the Holy Spirit sneaks in through the ducts and air vents. AA meetings have been very good ductwork, allowing fresh air both in and out of many musty and mildewed churches."

Being about Borders: A Christian Anthropology of Difference, by Michele Saracino. While tough talk on borders is common (and politically expedient) these days—electric fences being one recent proposal—Saracino crosses several disciplinary boundaries in order to steer the conversation in directions that are as surprising as they are hopeful. Claiming that Christians witness to a messiah who "revels in border life" and drawing on traditional and contemporary sources in philosophy and theology, feminist theory and clinical research in the treatment of trauma, *Being about Borders* takes into account the affective dimension of border crossings: the complicated emotions that attend interpersonal, interreligious and international relationships.

Working with Words: On Learning to Speak Christian, by Stanley Hauerwas. Well known for his salty and often incendiary speech, Hauerwas tends to words with a craftsman's care. In truth he has always done this, but this collection of essays, sermons and lectures reveals him to be a humble, patient guide, helping Christians to see and speak truthfully. Hauerwas is a word provocateur, but always in service to the Word that is our life and our hope.

A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good, by Miroslav Volf. Volf navigates the complexities of Christianity's relationship to culture by charting a course that bypasses the dangers of both "exclusion" and "saturation"—withdrawal and disengagement on the one hand and a toxic mixing of church and state on the other. Especially timely in an election season, when candidates and their partisan backers routinely exploit religious language for personal gain, Volf calls for "pluralism as a political project." He argues that the faith that enjoins Jews, Muslims and Christians to love their neighbors as themselves—to receive the other not as threat but as blessing--makes religious difference a gift for the common good.

The Devil Wears Nada: Satan Exposed! by Tripp York. Would that more theologians used humor to explicate the finer points (and the thicker ones, too) of Christian doctrine. York's subject matter is ripe for comic treatment, but behind the funny stuff—or rather all the way through it—is a commanding grasp of the always devilish problem of evil. Philosophy, theology, ethics, liturgy and Ann Coulter all make an appearance in this journey to the dark side in which we discover, through York's playful, skillful guidance, that "there is either God or nothingness."