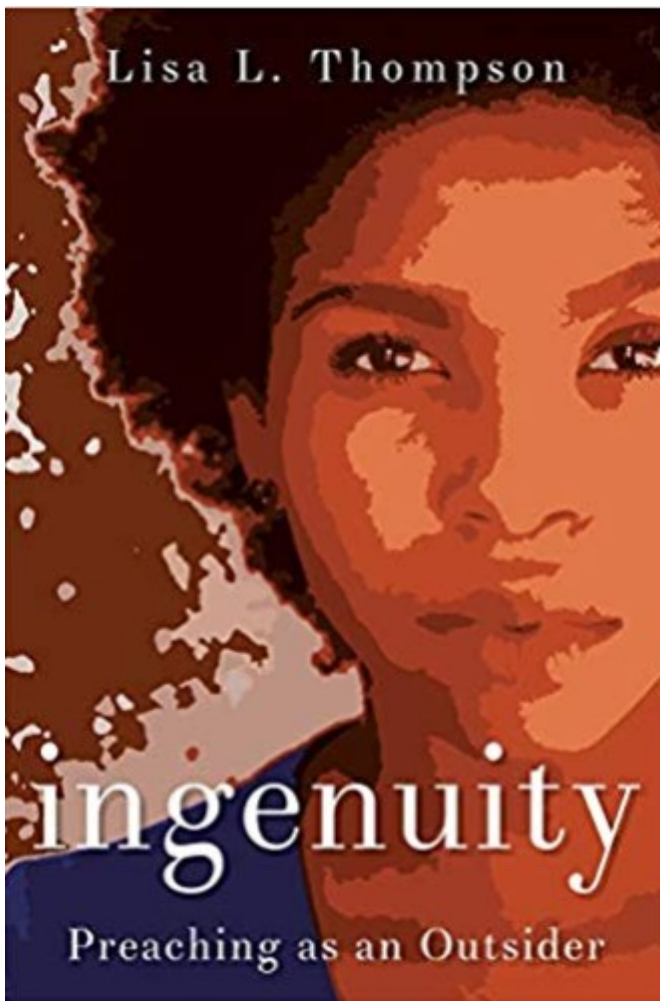


Take & read: Practical theology

## **New books that are shaping conversations about practical theology**

by [Mary Clark Moschella](#) in the [October 23, 2019](#) issue

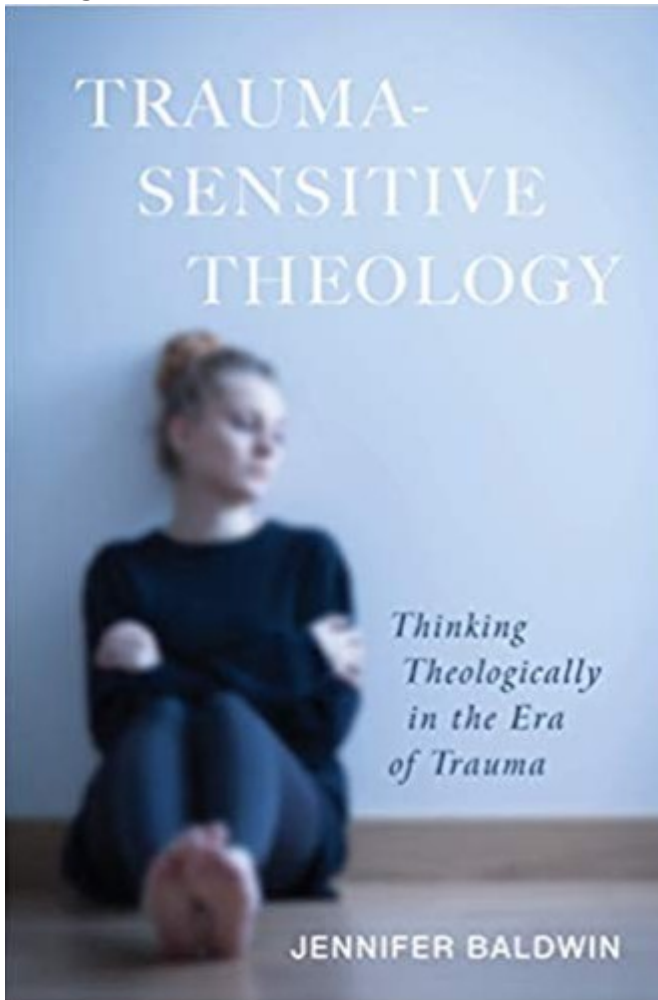
### **In Review**



### **Ingenuity**

Preaching as an Outsider

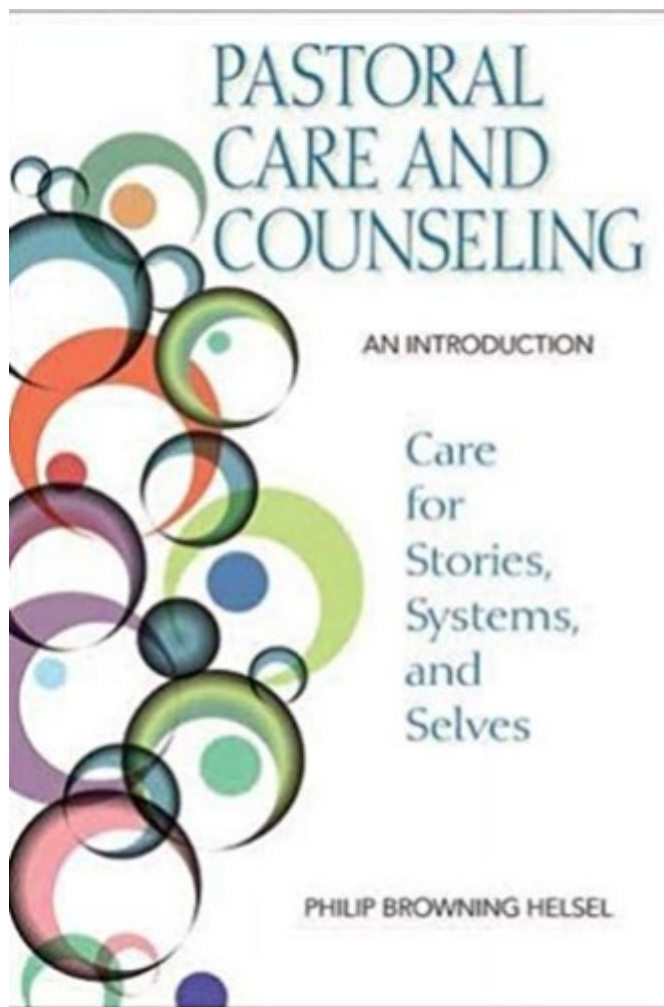
by Lisa L. Thompson  
Abingdon



## **Trauma-Sensitive Theology**

Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma

by Jennifer Baldwin  
Cascade

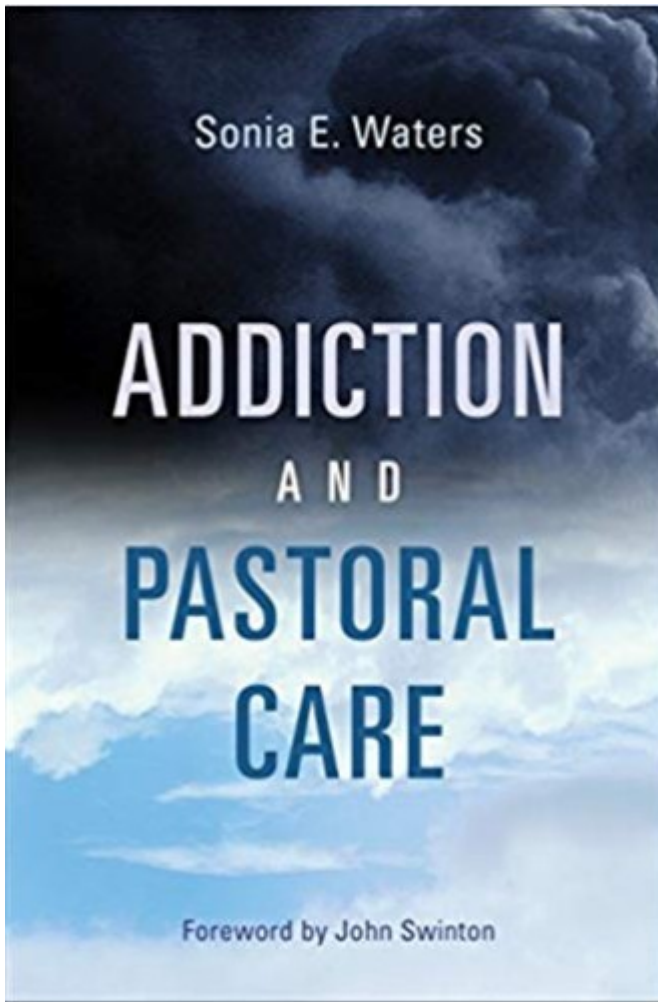


## **Pastoral Care and Counseling—An Introduction**

Care for Stories, Systems, and Selves

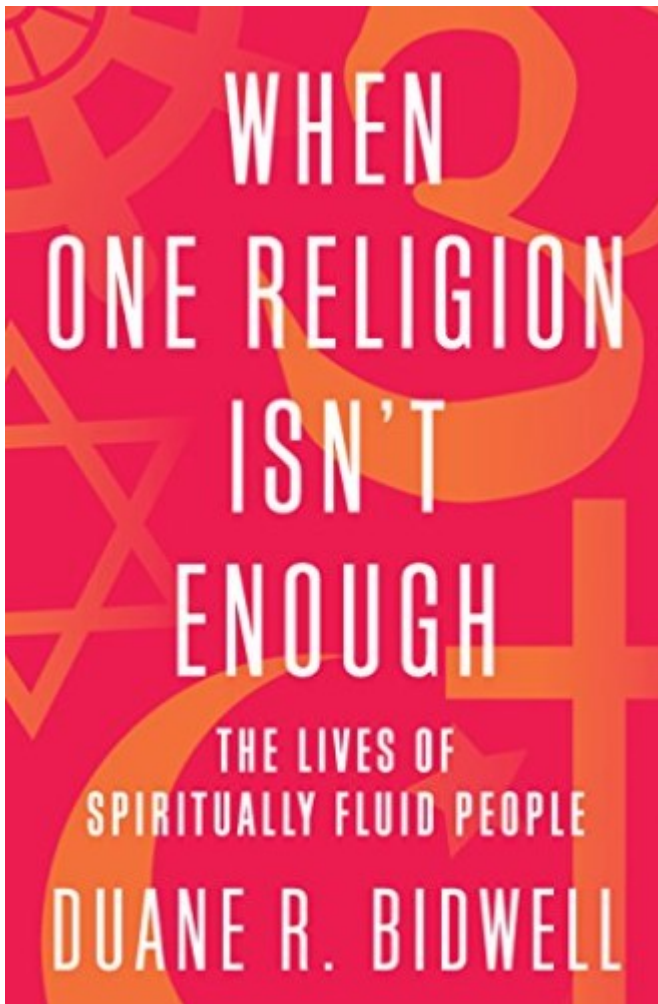
by Philip Browning Hesel

Paulist Press



## **Addiction and Pastoral Care**

by Sonia E. Waters  
Eerdmans



## **When One Religion Isn't Enough**

The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People

by Duane R. Bidwell

Beacon

How do we perceive God? Whereas traditional theologians believed that we do so through a rational soul that is distinct from the body, contemporary theologians acknowledge that our consciousness, our awareness of life, and our spiritual connection to the holy are profoundly rooted in our bodily human condition. It is encouraging to see a number of recent books in practical theology that emphasize the importance of how we encounter, practice, and proclaim theology as embodied human souls.

Lisa L. Thompson's *Ingenuity: Preaching as an Outsider* (Abingdon) shows how black women's preaching challenges the invisibility socially assigned to bodies that are perceived as other and extolls the preacher's task of embodying the sacred text. When black women are allowed to preach from the pulpit, Thompson notes, they are often judged to be too masculine or too feminine, somehow not quite fitting the ideal of a preacher. Since "preaching is carried out by flesh and lands upon flesh," Thompson encourages black women preachers to consider their own experiences as primary resource material for sermons. She highlights strategies like attentiveness to language and repurposing of traditional theological ideas as modes of ingenuity in preaching.

Thompson, who teaches at Union Theological Seminary, illustrates her ideas with passages from black women's sermons and provides practice exercises to stimulate preachers' thinking. These exercises have an embodied quality that engages readers' creativity and focuses on what is at stake in the act of preaching. A black woman preaching, taking the risk of proclaiming her deepest convictions, opens up space for every body.

Pastoral theologian Sonia Waters, who teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary, calls attention to the incarnation as a sign of God's compassion for the embodied soul suffering of those who struggle with addiction in our time. *Addiction and Pastoral Care* (Eerdmans), a comprehensive treatment of the pastoral care of people with addiction, is unrivaled by anything that's been published since Howard Clinebell's *Understanding and Counseling the Alcoholic* (1956). Addressing the particular human frailty that leads to the soul-sickness of addiction, Waters challenges caregivers to understand addiction as motivated not by sinful, indulgent pleasure seeking but by the desire to avert pain. She uses the parable of the Gerasene demoniac to frame her discussion of the possessed-like quality of addiction and to highlight Jesus' compassionate response to a man who is overtaken by a legion of inner voices that he can't manage on his own.

Waters shows how theological debates over the sin or illness models of addiction miss the scientific nuances of "your brain on drugs." She offers a detailed yet surprisingly readable chapter on the science of addiction, explaining how changes in the brain over time lead to a flip from impulsive to compulsive stages of drug use. She explores the legion of risk factors for addiction, explaining the human need for attachment, vulnerability to trauma, and the increased stress in the body politic caused by poverty, inequality, and daily experiences of racial discrimination.

Addictions often begin as a way of coping with enormous pain and stress before they become intractable sources of greater suffering.

Pastors, professors, and other professionals know that many people suffer from the effects of trauma, whether related to extreme weather events, catastrophic loss, combat stress, childhood abuse or neglect, sexual assault, car accidents, or gun violence. A clinical trauma therapist and educator, Jennifer Baldwin is also a systematic theologian. In *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Cascade), she defines trauma and explains its effects at different levels. Our bodies carry memories of injury at many levels, including primary, secondary, intergenerational, societal, and cultural trauma. Religious leaders and the laity need to know how to interact in ways that support traumatized people and avoid inflicting further harm.

The effects of trauma are often long-lasting, but Baldwin asserts a robust faith in human resilience—the ability to bounce back. But resilience does not mean landing in the same place as before. Because traumatic wounds get stored in our bodies, people need integrative treatments for the whole person as well as the adjunct support of compassionate, informed faith communities to bolster resilience along the way.

Corporate singing, prayer, and meditation are religious resources that can strengthen the somatic recovery from trauma. Systematic theology also should attend to trauma, Baldwin believes. To that end, she examines a number of doctrines—creation, the Trinity, pneumatology, hamartiology, soteriology, ecclesiology—through the lens of traumatic suffering.

Philip Browning Helsel likewise offers a holistic approach to caring for individuals' stories, social systems, and caregivers' own embodied selves. In *Pastoral Care and Counseling—An Introduction: Care for Stories, Systems, and Selves* (Paulist Press), Helsel manages to communicate something of the essence of what it means to live in communion with God and each other.

Hsel masters the adage of “show, don't tell” as he invites readers into stories of caregiving in contexts that are varied, complicated, and classic. While drawing upon extensive recent literature in the field, he lets the stories convey the basics of wise practice. He includes stories about poverty, the grief of suicide survivors, the trauma of domestic abuse, the suffering of addiction, and the violation of sexual boundaries

in the church. He shows how caregivers can help people “feel remembered by God” in the midst of such daunting struggles, and how congregations can also advocate for necessary social and political change.

Offering theological reflection at every turn, Helsel shows how reflective theological practice can undergird a faithful pastoral ministry. Pausing to reflect on the mystery of pastoral care with a “not knowing” attitude toward the experience of another, he demonstrates, allows caregivers to connect more deeply with God and with each other.

Duane R. Bidwell also takes up the themes of mystery and unknowing in *When One Religion Isn't Enough: The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People* (Beacon). Writing for a broad audience, Bidwell argues that a growing number of people in the US are multiply religious or “spiritually fluid.” Those who claim or find themselves claimed by more than one religion may be challenged by the question: How can there be more than one ultimate reality? For Bidwell, such multiplicity is not a logical puzzle to be solved but a complex spiritual life to be lived. He accepts his own unknowing and names the divine that he encounters Mystery.

Rather than approaching spiritual fluidity through comparative theology, Bidwell focuses on self-reported descriptions. He reflects on interviews with five multiply religious persons as well as the published accounts of many others. He emphasizes that spiritual fluidity “is encountered and formed through relationships, practices, and communities, all of which we experience through our bodies.”

Some of the people Bidwell writes about choose to practice more than one faith. Others absorb spiritual fluidity through familial bonds, as when a child born to a Jewish parent and a Christian parent learns to practice both faiths. Still others find that immigration and living in a pluralistic culture open up new possibilities for religious affiliation while foreclosing others: a Mexicana woman practices both Hinduism and Catholicism with a sense of completeness rather than conflict. Bidwell includes stories from his own life that illuminate the gifts and graces of such a complex path. Spiritual fluidity comes with particular costs and joys; this book challenges readers to look upon their multiply religious neighbors with understanding and respect.