

Book Reviews

*Elizabeth Clayton, MPhil candidate,
Keble College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK*

*Tone Waters, MDiv candidate,
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

*Bridget Jack Jeffries, PhD candidate,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois*

Rebekah Eklund, *Practicing Lament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 122 pages, \$17

In the accessible and illuminating *Practicing Lament*, Rebekah Eklund sets out to persuade readers “not only that lament is worth knowing about, but also that it is worth practicing” (xiii). She does so through well-researched exegesis and insightful examples of lament in Christian and Jewish tradition. Her vulnerability sets a tone of deep pastoral care and assures readers of the author’s authoritative analyses and exhortations. That most Christians today are unfamiliar, or even uncomfortable, with lamenting is a profound problem in the church. Being able to lament well is a necessary practice in a world still in the “not yet” of God’s kingdom. Eklund’s timely book offers a helpful starting point for those individuals and communities looking to practice lament.

In chapter 1, Eklund outlines a structure of lament, including the steps: invocation, complaint, petition, and trust. She unpacks each of these with helpful examples before turning to examine aspects of God’s

character commonly called into question in biblical laments. After setting out the centrality of lament in Israel's story, Eklund moves on to show how lament remains relevant in the New Testament. Chapter 2 focuses on the laments of Jesus in the Gospels and the christological portrait which emerges from these. (Curious readers should consult Eklund's book *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus' Laments in the New Testament*, The Library of New Testament Studies, 515 [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015]) These chapters set the foundation of Eklund's argument: lament is worth practicing, and remains worth practicing for Christians, because of Christ's example as the "author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

In chapter 3, Eklund offers various apologies of the practice of lament. By anticipating and responding to possible objections to the practice of lament, Eklund affirms the transformational *telos* of lamenting—it "inclines toward hope" (40). Eklund uses chapter 4 to comment on and distinguish between two "streams" of lament: penitence and protest (59). The chapter concludes with a precise and clear engagement with the imprecatory psalms. While acknowledging the potentially dangerous nature of these texts, Eklund orients them toward God and God's justice.

In the final chapter, "Lord, Teach Us How to Mourn," Eklund offers further exhortations to practice lament. In reflecting on lamenting in and as community, she offers advice from her own relatively privileged position on how to most lovingly and respectfully "weep with those who weep" and respond to injustices. Eklund offers examples of using scripture in crafting laments that respond to injustices, which have rightly come to more widespread public attention in recent years.

Much of the strength of this book lies in Eklund's engagement with a diversity of voices—everyone from Mother Teresa to Dale C. Allison Jr. to W. E. B. Du Bois contribute to Eklund's constructed theology of lament. In doing so, she highlights the ways in which lament has not only been a crucial part of faith traditions, but also that it remains relevant for the modern world. Eklund creatively uses familiar biblical stories to inform a robust understanding of the depths to which the Christian story can make sense of grief and pain. The book engages with a plethora of biblical texts across different genres, which has the cumulative effect of accomplishing her stated aims. One skeptical of the relevance of lament to the Christian tradition would surely be convinced by Eklund's arguments, which are firmly rooted in the Old *and* New Testaments.

While Eklund refrains from offering overly specific prescriptions of the

practice of lament, this book would certainly benefit leaders who desire to see the culture of their congregations grow more hospitable to grief and suffering. The reflection questions at the end of each chapter are well suited to personal contemplation as well as small group discussion. Recovering the Christian practice of lament will be a necessary task if the church is to carry out its duty in the world. Eklund's book helps to do just that.

ELIZABETH CLAYTON

Amy Kenny, *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 194 pages, \$20

Amy Kenny's book is a must-read for anyone participating in the ministry of the body of Christ. Utilizing her own perspective as a disabled woman, Kenny guides the reader through her lamentable encounters with people inside and outside the church. She demonstrates these occurrences by illustrating the unfortunate similarities between how the world and the church perpetuate the mistreatment of disabled people. Citing her own research, as well as research by others from the disabled community, Kenny illuminates the discrimination disabled bodies and minds face on a daily basis. Although churches and ministers need to improve their approach regarding disability ministry, Kenny provides wit, wisdom, and a way forward by pointing people to Scripture and the voices of the disabled community. Her hope is that we would communally move from a mindset of curing the disabled to embracing the *imago Dei* in this "extraordinary" community of people (110).

As a minister, seminary student, and disability ally, I was emboldened by this book to reflect more deeply on who God is by learning more from the disabled community. Readers may feel that my usage of identity-first language (e.g., "disabled woman," "disabled bodies," and "disabled community") is disrespectful. However, Kenny and many others in the disabled community prefer identity-first language over person-first language. Identity-first language proclaims that disabled people are "not a euphemism or a metaphor" (ix). Because disabled people are proud of who they are, Kenny encourages churches to shift their mindset of curing the disabled to healing the brokenness created by the nondisabled through the structural systems that infect and reject the disabled from

belonging in community.

Exploring a variety of narratives from the Old and New Testaments, Kenny confirms what Christians know to be true about God: if we want to experience God, we need to stand with and listen to people on the margins. Using the dislocation of Jacob's hip at the River Jabbok as an example, Kenny teaches the reader that whenever the Israelites "butchered an animal, they were reminded of Jacob's disability through this embodied practice. We do the same today by partaking of the Lord's Table. In eating the bread and drinking from the cup, we remember Jesus's disabled body" (86). These biblical examples convey the value of the disabled. Disabled community members' lives are worthy—our life in the church is incomplete without them. My disabled daughter and the community of people with whom we enjoy life constantly instruct me to push against the rugged individualism dominant in our American evangelical context and to strive toward the "interdependent flourishing" we are called to as the body of Christ (138). "Interdependent flourishing," as seen through the lens of disability, embodies what it means to model life together in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Kenny's teaching on interdependence would greatly benefit pastors. Being personally privy to the thoughts within the disabled community regarding the topic of church, I recommend that readers use this book as a springboard to embrace the disabled perspective. Church is sometimes a harmful place focused on fixing people's problems instead of bearing one another's burdens, and congregations too seldom implement guidance from disability culture. It would be helpful to glean insight from Kenny because she approaches this topic with an honesty, grit, and humor that encompasses the spirit of the disabled community. Given that a quarter of Americans will struggle with a disability at some point in life, it is imperative that we work with, and not against, our disabled sisters and brothers. Pastors must also remember that Kenny's voice is only one voice from this beloved community. She recommends the work of several disability theologians such as Nancy Eiesland, Lamar Hardwick, and Amos Yong. These prophetic witnesses continue to refine my knowledge and praxis of disability justice and advocacy. If we, the Church, desire to co-labor with and for our disabled siblings, then we must actively strive to do so under their leadership.

TONE WATERS

Kat Armas, *Abuelita Faith: What Women on the Margins Teach Us about Wisdom, Persistence, and Strength* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 224 pages, \$18

When one peruses lists of “books every Christian should read,” it does not take long to see that recommendations of books by women—and, especially, recommendations of books by women of color—are in short supply. Given that women make up more than half of professed Christians, and non-white Christians now outnumber white Christians even in America (let alone globally), this exclusion of the voices of so many in the body of Christ cannot be justified.

Yet it persists. The Church has too often failed to sit at the feet of its sisters of color and seek out their wisdom.

Kat Armas, a Cuban American Latina and graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary, is keenly aware of this exclusion and has set about partially remedying it with *Abuelita Faith*. “I often wonder,” she writes, “in the demonizing or disregarding of other expressions of Christian faith, have evangelicals forgotten that the church, rightly understood, is a communion of saints—not just here on earth but also in heaven?” She continues to explain how she has been influenced by this communion, namely, by “the women throughout history who have gone before us paving the way, building their own tables, and offering a perspective of the divine, without which our faith would be lacking.” Armas beckons us to learn from these “often-ignored women who make up the cloud of witnesses alluded to in the book of Hebrews” (36).

While Armas does cite some established theologians (such as Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Mayra Rivera), the book is not primarily an exploration of existing *mujerista* theology or other strains of theology from women of color. Rather, it is an exploration of some of the Bible’s lesser-known women, skillfully interwoven with accounts of the actions and faith of women (especially women of color) throughout history, punctuated by Armas’s own personal and family stories. While more familiar biblical women (such as Esther, Ruth, and Hannah) and historical figures (such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who has graced Mexican currency) are sometimes revisited, it is in the excavation of little-known biblical and historical women that Armas shines.

For example, Armas recounts the resurrection of the widow Tabitha in Acts 9, focusing on how the mourning widows showed Peter the garments their fallen friend and leader had made for them (89-92). In the same chapter, Armas covers the *arpilleristas* of Chile who, in the 1970s, “came

together to sew political images and protest the loss of their loved ones,” beautifully asserting the spirituality (and sometimes, resistance) of the things women craft with their hands (85).

As another example, Armas covers the story of Rizpah in 2 Samuel 21, who watched over the bodies of her politically murdered sons for five months until David gave them a just burial. She fuses Rizpah to the 2020 murder of George Floyd, who died “calling out to his mother,” and provides readers with other examples of women who organized in protest against injustice (117). In “the midst of [her] sorrow, Rizpah does something radical and remarkable,” Armas tells us (121). “Remarkable” is the correct word for the skill with which Armas breathes new life into this unheralded biblical story and relates it to modern events.

The book is not without its stumbles and flaws. Armas’s advocacy for calling the Holy Spirit by the feminine “la Espíritu Santa” instead of the traditional Spanish “el Espíritu Santo” fails to account for the neuter and masculine references to the Spirit in the New Testament; it also seems rooted in a misunderstanding of how Hebrew grammatical gender works (28, 95n14). Furthermore, Armas does not offer a biblical basis for her identification of the Spirit with the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 and seems unaware of the many early church leaders who identified Christ with the figure of Wisdom during the critical Trinitarian debates. There may be more historically or scripturally sophisticated arguments for referring to the Holy Spirit in feminine as opposed to masculine terms, but Armas does not make them here, leaving her claims less nuanced and supported than one might hope. A few final indices of Scripture references and historical figures mentioned in the book would have also been useful.

However, these flaws do not diminish the value of the book, which should be a treasured addition to any pastor who wants to understand women of color better. More generally, it should be a treasured addition to any Christian looking to grow in their faith.

BRIDGET JACK JEFFRIES