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**Unto Us a Child is Born: Isaiah, Advent, and Our Jewish Neighbours,** Tyler D. Mayfield, Eerdmans, 2020 (ISBN 978-0-8028-7398-9), xvi + 192 pp., pb \$19.99

According to Jerome, Isaiah should be considered more of an evangelist than a prophet. And the liturgical season of Advent is marked by a series of resonant readings from Isaiah, many of which immediately bring to mind the music of Handel's *Messiah*. There is, however, a dark underside of anti-Judaism to the Christian treasuring of Isaiah, which Tyler Mayfield tackles head-on. His aim is to give preachers the skills and confidence to make creative use of the Advent Isaiah readings, 'while also valuing the vibrant faith of Judaism' (p. 2).

Mayfield invites us to take a bifocal look at Isaiah – to use our 'near lens' to explore the treatment of Isaiah within Christian tradition and our 'far lens' to focus on our ethical responsibility of love towards our Jewish neighbors. He is not advocating a retreat into narrow historical interpretation: 'Both lenses open up explicitly theological understandings of Isaiah' (p. 5). In the two chapters following his introduction, Mayfield examines each of these lenses in turn. Under 'near vision' he reflects on the liturgical season of Advent as an appropriate hermeneutical context for reading Isaiah. He notes the complex nature of Advent, which pulls us in different emotional directions. It proclaims two theological themes: 'the coming of Christ as a child and the future coming of Christ at the end of time. A first coming and a second coming. Incarnation and eschatology' (p. 17). He sets out the details of the Revised Common Lectionary provision to show how the book of Isaiah is used to address these themes. As he notes, the tension between them is often resolved by a focus on 'waiting'. Mayfield is critical of a simplistic portrayal of the Old Testament as 'the site of that waiting process' and the New Testament as 'the culmination of the waiting' – a 'prophecy–fulfillment' interpretive paradigm (p. 23). Such a paradigm ignores both the way in which the Hebrew prophets addressed the theopolitical issues of their own day and their potential to speak into our own contemporary situations. He argues for 'a more back-and-forth conversational approach' (p. 25), which encompasses the entire history of the interpretation of Isaiah, from ancient Israel, through Second Temple Judaism, to the divergent concerns of Jewish and Christian communities up until the present time. Such a conversation would go beyond the traditional Christian 'slight fixation on messiah' (p. 35) to take in the Hebrew prophets' concern with God's work of peace and justice.

Under 'far vision', Mayfield sets out the issues needing to be faced if we are to read Isaiah during Advent 'while loving our neighbor and upholding the validity and vibrancy of Judaism' (p. 42). The first issue is the complexity, and historical development, of the concept 'messiah'. 'We now know that Isaiah, a book written during the eighth to fifth centuries

BCE, would not have had a concept of messiah as it is later sketched out in Second Temple Judaism' (p. 44). This does not mean that Christians must renounce their claims of Jesus as the Messiah, but that they should open themselves up to other ways of reading Isaiah. The second issue is supersessionism – the ways in which Christians have appropriated Jewish scriptures, traditions, and theological concepts, while simultaneously denying Judaism's continuing vitality. In the case of Isaiah, Mayfield sees supersessionist tendencies in the Christian interpretive shift from Isaiah as prophet to Isaiah as evangelist. 'As an evangelist, Isaiah becomes a distinctly Christian book instead of a prophetic book for both Jews and Christians' (p. 52). The third issue is anti-Judaism – the long history of Christian animosity towards Jews and Judaism, including the caricaturing of Judaism as self-righteously rule-bound. In our post-Holocaust world, the challenge is to rethink the interpretation of Isaiah so that 'our overtly Christian readings of the text do not lapse either explicitly or implicitly into anti-Jewish readings' (p. 56). Mayfield takes up that challenge in the subsequent eight chapters of the book, which examine in detail the passages from Isaiah in the Advent lectionary: four of them 'messianic' (7:10–16; 9:2–7; 11:1–10; 61:1–4, 8–11), and four of them 'visions of the future' (2:1–5; 35:1–10; 40:1–11; 64:1–9). Each chapter ends with a short 'bifocal look' summarizing the near vision and far vision themes of the passage it has explored.

Mayfield examines each individual Advent passage from a variety of perspectives. He explores the various historical contexts of the original prophecies, from the eighth century Syro-Ephraimite war; through the Babylonian exile, when Israelites grieved over the loss of Jerusalem, the temple, and the land; to the postexilic Judean community living under Persian rule. He examines the details of Isaiah's wording, including paying attention to verb tenses; and considers the genre of some of the passages, making comparisons with psalms. He draws attention to translation as a tool of interpretation and discusses the Septuagintal wording, including, of course, the rendering of *almah* (Hebrew, 'young woman') as *parthenos* (Greek, 'virgin') in Isaiah 7:14. Mayfield rightly points out that although Matth. 1:22–23 is dependent on this translation, the Gospel does not stay close to the Septuagint in all respects. However, he misrepresents the details: The most straightforward reading of the Hebrew of Is. 7:14 is 'she will name him'. The Septuagint does not follow this, as Mayfield suggests, but reads 'you (sing) will name him'. Matthew has 'they will name him'. The importance of the Septuagint translation is also brought out in the discussion of Is. 40:1–11. The natural way to punctuate the Hebrew of Is. 40:3 is: 'A voice calling out, "In the wilderness prepare ..."'. The Septuagint translation – 'a voice of one calling out in the wilderness' – provided an opening for early Christians to identify the voice with John the Baptist.

Much of what Mayfield provides could be categorized as 'reception history'. He focuses in on the New Testament with its prophecy-fulfillment

paradigm (Is. 7:14/Matt. 1:22–23; Is. 9:1–2/Matt. 4:14–16; Is. 35:5–6/Matt. 11:4–5; Is. 61:1–2/Luke 4:18–19) and messianic lens. But he also discusses interpretations of Isaiah by Justin Martyr, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. He comes up to the present day with the inclusion of Black liberation theology. He considers the musical interpretation of Handel's *Messiah* and the artistic representation of the Jesse tree. On the Jewish side, he ranges from Second Temple Jewish interpretations, including those of the Dead Sea Scrolls, through the Targums, rabbinic traditions, and Rashi, to the contemporary use of Isaiah in Jewish lectionaries. He introduces us, for example, to the 'seven consolation readings from the book of Isaiah used as Sabbath reading following the Ninth of Ab, *Tisha b'Av*, a commemoration of the temple's destruction' (p. 156). And he notes the Christian neglect of Isaiah's love for the holy city of Zion/Jerusalem. Throughout, he bears the needs of preachers in mind, taking a close look at the Christian lectionary pairings of Old Testament and Gospel and drawing out themes suitable for sermons in today's contexts. He insists that we take seriously our embeddedness in a religiously pluralistic world and concede that 'Christians are not the only people with religious and interpretive imaginations' (p. 104)! He stresses the messianic hopes – the visions for a better world – shared by Jews and Christians. He brings out the richness of Isaiah's prophetic poetry and its capacity for multiple interpretations. The strategy he proposes of preaching Christian messianic interpretations of Isaiah while simultaneously valuing Jewish perspectives is a high-wire act, and the analogy of 'near vision' and 'far vision' does not always do justice to its complexities. But there is plenty of inspiration and food for thought here. The book is recommended for anyone required to preach during Advent.

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**Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin: A Thomistic Analysis**, Taylor Patrick O'Neill, The Catholic University of America Press, 2019 (ISBN 978-0-8132-3254-6), x + 326 pp., hb \$75

Taylor Patrick O'Neill, Assistant Professor of Theology at Mount Mercy University, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has provided a wonderfully detailed account of a fascinating debate within historic and more recent Thomism. O'Neill's monograph, a published account of his doctoral thesis written at Ave Maria University, provides a way into the means of handling