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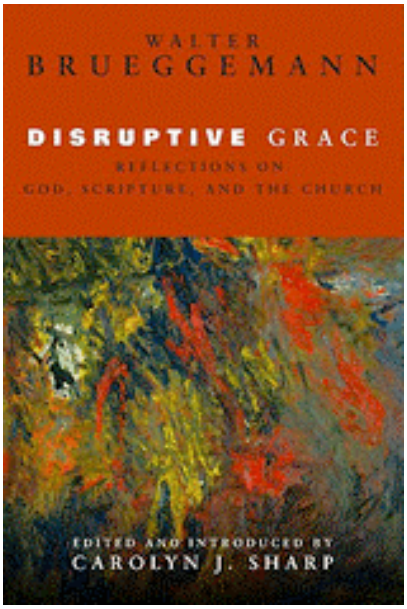

Brueggemann, Walter; Carolyn J. Sharp, ed.

Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church

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J. Dwayne Howell
Campbellsville University
Campbellsville, Kentucky

Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture and the Church is a collection of previously unpublished essays by Walter Brueggemann from addresses delivered at various locales between 2002 and 2009. The essays are divided into four major sections: "Torah," "Prophets," "Writings," and "Canon and Imagination." The volume is edited by Carolyn J. Sharp, who also provides introductions for the book and for each major section of the book. Her introductions offer a pertinent foundation for the essays that follow.

The essays are classic for Brueggemann. As in his other writings, they have the ability to both inform and challenge the reader as Brueggemann exegetes both the text and the current culture. The opening essay, "Summons to a Dialogical Life," provides an underlying theme for the remainder of the book, as it addresses the problems of a God of certitude, a God who needs no partners, where "everything is settled ahead of time" (23). Brueggemann believes that God is a God of fidelity that allows freedom. He also speaks of the dialogical covenanted self, which can only come into view when one acts freely and faithfully. Beginning with the stories of Abraham and Moses, Brueggemann accentuates the interaction between the dialogical self and the dialogical God throughout the human and divine relationship in Old Testament literature. In the next essay, "Exodus: Limit and Possibility," Brueggemann addresses the tension of certitude and possibility using the

conflict present in the exodus narrative between Pharaoh and God. The third essay, "Sabbath as Antidote to Anxiety," deals with the problem of anxiety in the present world situation, showing how the oppressive, market-driven reigns of Pharaoh and others are only anxiety-producing for all involved. Sabbath offers an "alternative model of reality that has *restfulness* at its center, of refusal to go beyond appropriate generativity in world-making or in creating a 'presence' of worth and money" (61). The final essay in the section, "The Countercommands of Sinai," contrasts the commands of God, which Brueggemann believes are found in the Ten Commandments, and the oppressive commands of Pharaoh, a contrast between what he sees as "the covenantal neighborliness of common destiny or a restless predatory contest of abusive violence" (87).

Part 2 of the book centers on the prophets. In his first two essays, Brueggemann speaks of the fall and restoration of "Jerusalem" through the works of the three major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The first essay, "Every City a Holy City: The Holy City in Jeopardy," provides a glimpse of how Jerusalem's failure as a holy city is so easily mirrored in today's holy cities, cities at the center of the lives of their people. He follows with the essay "Every City a Holy City: The City of Possibility," which emphasizes the opportunity of restoration after failure, again using the three major prophets, this time as messengers of hope. Brueggemann reminds the reader that these prophets were poets: "Finally comes the poet! Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel were not practical men, but men of poetry. Ministry in the end is not 'practical.' It is about *oracle*, *vision*, and *promise*, about *truth-telling* and about *hope-telling*" (128). In "Prophetic Ministry in the National Security State," Brueggemann discusses how the prophet often stands at odds to the wants of those in power. Viewing prophetic ministry as neither primarily prediction nor social action, he visualizes it as a ministry that calls people out of denial and despair to the risk of vulnerability and ultimate surprise. In his final essay in the section, "The Land Mourns," Brueggemann emphasizes God as creator and humanity's opportunity to enjoy creation as well as its responsibility to care and maintain it. He perceives that Solomon's rise to power imitated the surrounding powers, which in turn led to acquisitions that harmed both the land and the people. The prophetic response to such acquisitiveness is the poetry of alternative, which replaces the destructive force of desire with the alternative aspiration for care and respect for the land and those who occupy it.

Brueggemann begins the third major section, "Writings," with "The Necessary Condition of a Good, Loud Lament," calling for a recovery of the ancient lament in worship today. The chapter provides an overview of the resurgence of lament in twentieth-century scholarship and its use in modern church traditions. "The recovery of lament in practice is an embrace of creaturely reality amid bewitching ideologies that benumb us" (185). The major part of the chapter is what Brueggemann calls the ten theological preconditions for the lament to both theological datum and theological practice. In "The Fearful Thirst for

Dialogue," Brueggemann sees the danger of monologue, one-sided speech, which serves only to silence others. This is true in both church and society. It is a method to maintain control and can lead to distrust and discontent. Brueggemann provides a study of various passages, with special attention to the Psalms, to show how the biblical texts witness to the importance of openness and dialogue. In "Spirit-Led Imagination: Reality Practiced in Sub-version," Brueggemann writes about the importance of faithful worship, worship that moves beyond current trends in the church. He believes worship should be an act of imagination that provides an alternative view of the world for the worshiper. Brueggemann provides an essay on the importance of wisdom literature today in "Wisdom as Practical Theology." As with his earlier discussion of lament, he provides an important overview of the rise of wisdom in the latter half of the twentieth century. Referring to the importance of creation theology for wisdom, he shares five aspects of wisdom-creation faith that have been important in the recent resurgence in wisdom studies: (1) life is ordered and sustained by the Creator God to generate well-being (*shalom*) for all creatures; (2) this order establishes that there are God-ordained givens that cannot be circumvented or outflanked; (3) there are limits to what can be known and what can be acted out; (4) within the observed reality of order, givenness, and limit, human persons have choice; (5) freedom carries with it immense responsibility (251–55). He sees these five points as showing that wisdom is "practical theology" because it shows how one's daily life is thoroughly surrounded by the goodness of the Creator.

The final section of the book, "Canon and Imagination," continues Brueggemann's dialogical hermeneutic as it applies to the text and the reader. In the first essay, "Hosting Alternative Worlds," Brueggemann challenges readers to "out-imagine the imagination of the dominant culture" (267). To do so requires the interpreter to have artistic freedom to defy prevailing worldviews. Brueggemann provides examples of this freedom in the biblical text found in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. In the next essay, "Impossible Talk/Impossible Walk," Brueggemann continues his discussion of challenging the powers that be, that is, the empire. He describes three subversive acts that are counter to the hegemony of the empire: forgiveness, hospitality, and generosity. These are to be practiced by the church not only on the worldwide stage but also within the local church, on a one-on-one basis. In "Faithful Imagination as Sustained Subversion," he defines imagination as "an ability to hold loosely what the world assumes and to walk into alternative contours of reality, which we have only in hint and trace" (296). This is a theme that he has sounded throughout the text. Discussing the affirmation of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the ongoing teachings of the church, Brueggemann says this in itself can be subversive. Then, "Scriptural Strategies against Exclusionary Absolutism" provides a discussion of three interpretive strategies to overcome the temptation of exclusionary absolutism. First, scripture has refused any solitary voice but

instead many voices with the exception of the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus. Second, the Persian period of flexible negotiation provides for Brueggemann the preferred mode of interpretation over that of the Babylonian exile. He believes that it was in the Persian period that the practice of accommodation and resistance emerged. The final strategy is to emphasize scribal interpretation as a viable alternative over prophetic proclamation. His final essay, "A Life and a Time Other Than Our Own," speaks to the changing pace of society and the challenges it presents. He says that the preacher's task is "to *engraft* folk into this narrative of *originary miracle*, *culminating promise*, and *human intentionality*."

Walter Brueggemann has been an important voice in both biblical interpretation and practical theology through the latter part of the twentieth century into the current century. His ability to interpret and apply the text to current situations challenges those who read his works. *Disruptive Grace* is no exception, and it provides an opportunity to watch Brueggemann confront static belief systems and imagine new possibilities. The text would be appropriate in both biblical studies and practical theology classrooms.