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Lisa Barnes Lampman, ed., and Michelle Shattuck, assoc. ed. *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns; and Washington DC: Neighbors Who Care, 1999. Pp. xv + 316. \$16 (Paper).

[1] Ivan Karamazov, in the famous chapter of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* titled "Rebellion," wrestles with questions ranging from the nature of God to how he can justify his own continued existence in such a corrupt and unredeemable universe. He recounts all manner of human cruelty, especially stories of the abuse and torture of innocent children, to his brother Alyosha, a novice at a local monastery. For Ivan, even Alyosha's recourse to the Christian gospel of redemption through the death of Jesus on the cross is unacceptable because it is simply one more story of the suffering of an innocent victim. People do horrible things to one another, and Ivan can find no way to understand or respond to the brutality.

[2] Even as I write this, the news is reporting on the trial of a man accused of sexual assaulting, beating, and murdering his girlfriend's two-year-old daughter; her mother is scheduled to go on trial for the same crimes in the coming weeks. This case has raised many of the questions that Ivan poses: why did "the system" - and God - fail to protect her (signs of abuse had been reported for months prior to her death)? What drives someone to do such a thing to an innocent child? How are we - our families, communities, and churches - to find meaning and healing in the face of such evil?

[3] The essays and resources collected in *God and the Victim* represent several attempts by scholars, pastors, crime victims, and community activists to wrestle - along with Ivan, Alyosha, and countless others - with this gut-wrenching dimension of life. The book grew out of a 1997 forum sponsored by Neighbors Who Care, an affiliate of Charles Colson's group Prison Fellowship Ministries whose mission is "to exhort, assist, and equip the Church in its ministry to victims of crime and their families" (ix). The book includes a brief foreword by Colson, essays adapted from papers given at the forum and others added afterward, and a study guide and other resources. Contributors include Elizabeth Achtemeier, Dan B. Allender, Lee A. Earl, Carl F. H. Henry, L. Gregory Jones, Lisa Barnes Lampman, Michelle

Shattuck, Gregory Strong, Harold Dean Trulear, Miroslav Volf, Mary White, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Marlene Young, and Howard Zehr.

[4] The book provides a helpful introduction (from biblical, theological, pastoral, ethical, and social perspectives) to a constellation of challenges facing the Church and its members in their efforts both to assist victims and survivors of crime, and to be a source of healing and peace in a society increasingly wracked violence. The essays are substantive without being too complex or specialized, and would be appropriate for college and seminary classes, ministers, church groups, crime-victim advocates, and victims and survivors of crime.

[5] Some of the chapters are a bit more "theoretical" than others. For example, Volf's essay on violence and retribution, adapted in part from his *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), and Allender's somewhat convoluted chapter on the nature of evil. Yet even these are not overly technical, and do contribute to a volume that fuels the move from careful thought to meaningful action.

[6] Some readers will have cause to argue with the theologically conservative thrust of a few of the essays. Henry, for example, seems to adopt the classic yet mightily controversial "satisfaction" understanding of the atonement when he states in his chapter of victims' rights: "The true purpose of punishment is to acknowledge God's Lordship, to vindicate His honor, to preserve His dignity . . ." (64). Trulear's otherwise helpful chapter on the church's role in caring for victims of crime opens with the surprising assumption that the "beloved disciple" in the Gospel of John was also the author of the Gospel - a view rejected by most biblical scholars.

[7] A more fundamental flaw with the book is its insistence on using traditional male language when speaking of God. It is a colossal irony, and a regrettable editorial decision, that a book whose focus is on caring for the victims of crime does not recognize that use of gender-exclusive God-talk is theologically, spiritually, and politically problematic. To refer to God *always* and *only* as male (He, Him, and His at every turn - capitalized, no less) is one of the more insidious ways in which (for example) women and children who have been beaten or raped by men can be victimized by the church over and over again. For some, this feature of the book will undermine its credibility as a voice that purports to speak on behalf of those who have been made to suffer.

[8] A strength of most of the essays, on the other hand, is that they remain solidly rooted in real-life rather than drifting off into the safe clouds of academic abstraction. A related strength is the authors' willingness to grapple with hard questions, confront tensions, and acknowledge the lack of easy answers. The chapters by Volf, Achtemeier (on victimization and healing in the Bible), Wolterstorff (on biblical concepts of justice and shalom), Zehr (on "restorative justice") and Jones (building on his important work in *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995]) are especially good. Chapters on victims' rights and the practical dimensions of caring for crime victims (by Henry, Trulear, Young, and Earl) will be welcomed by professionals, community leaders, and volunteers alike. Many essays (notably the chapter by Mary White, which treats forgiveness as a biblically commanded Christian obligation - a point of some controversy) are written by

people who have experienced the devastation of crime first-hand; White's son, for example, was brutally murdered.

[9] The book's purposeful attention to the lives of real people and compassionate grappling with tough questions of justice, forgiveness, anger, grief, theodicy, repentance, responsibility, and healing make it an engaging and robust resource. It is highly recommended for those who wrestle with the profound challenges to faith and life that come with crime and its aftermath.

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