
Book Reviews

The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources, by John D. Witvliet, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 170pp., \$16.00.

The Crucifixion of Ministry, by Andrew Purves, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007. 149pp., \$16.00 (paper).

Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries, edited by Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. xxx, 930pp., \$49.95.

The Living Voice of the Gospels, by Francis J. Moloney, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 344 pp., \$19.95.

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Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church, by James K. A. Smith, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. 156pp., \$17.99.

The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources, by John D. Witvliet, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 170pp., \$16.00.

This volume is the latest in the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies series, of which the author is the editor. The series has already sponsored ten significant studies that probe the history, theology, and practice of Christian worship. Witvliet's own contribution on the Psalms in Christian worship is an addition worthy of inclusion.

Witvliet avows that he was motivated to write "out of a great enthusiasm for a renewed appreciation for and use of the biblical Psalms" (48). His enthusiasm finds ample expression in the two parts that comprise the volume. In the first part, the author guides the reader in how to study a Psalm. Instructive here is his observation that the Psalms provide "the deep grammar or the paradigmatic structure for Christian prayer" (15). We learn the movement from praise to petition and from intercession to gratitude from the dynamic structure of the Psalms themselves. We learn how to address God in prayer in ways consistent with God's character, which the Psalms describe by means of a wide range of images and metaphors. Witvliet does the reader a service here in providing a catalogue of these (18-20).

In the second part, Witvliet explains how the Psalms can be read, sung, and prayed in public worship. Witvliet competently addresses a number of practical considerations, including the criteria to be used for the selection of a Psalm, the position of the Psalm in the order of worship, as well as guidelines for solo, choral, and antiphonal reading. Pastors and worship leaders will find this part very useful.

A distinctive feature of this book is the wealth of resources for further study that Witvliet lists in the footnotes, special sections, and bibliography. Noteworthy is commentary on the Psalms excerpted from the classical writings of the tradition. Basil, Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin, Bonhoeffer, and others provide rich fare to the reader whose appetite has already been stimulated by the author's insightful and informed discussion on the Psalms and Christian worship.

— Christopher Dorn

The Crucifixion of Ministry, by Andrew Purves, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007. 149pp., \$16.00 (paper).

Andrew Purves cuts through all the layers of meaning in ministry to the most basic question, "Who are you Lord?" His purpose in this is to remind practicing

clergy and students of theology that it is the ministry of the living Christ in which we participate, and not our own ministries. It is only the ministry of Christ that is redemptive; ours are not. Therefore, our own ministries and aspirations to ministry must be put to death and our eyes must be turned to God. It is only when we notice what God is already doing in our churches and in our communities and “hitch our wagons to that,” that we can begin to enter into the continuing ministry of Jesus on earth.

Purves has written an accessible and passionate reminder to any of us who practice ministry in the name of Jesus Christ that it is the ministry of the living Christ which offers hope and salvation. He stands in our place and we are “bumped aside.” “He offers the worship, discipleship, faith and ministry that we thought we could offer but can’t. The crucifixion of our ministry is staggeringly good news. Now ministry is now possible for us, probably for the first time, as gospel” (p.26).

This book will speak directly to the heart of the pastor who has reached a point of weariness in ministry as well as to the student who is just beginning a life of service to God with warmth and passion, inspiring each to find Christ again, alive and active, in our midst.

– Amy Nyland

Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries, edited by Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. xxx, 930pp., \$49.95.

Most of us were taught that Judaism and Christianity parted ways at an early date – if not during the time of the Apostles, at least by the time of the Bar Kochba uprising in the 130s. Within the last decade, however, several scholars have challenged this paradigm from both Jewish and the Christian sides. We now know that normative, Rabbinic Judaism was not well established until the 4th century or later. The same is, of course, true for normative, orthodox Christianity. During the “early centuries,” there were a variety of Judaisms, including various Christian Judaisms, and a variety of Christianities, including various Jewish Christianities. It follows that there was a good deal of overlap and interaction between the two emerging religions, at least through the fourth century, and well into the Middle Ages.

For readers who are interested in learning more about this fascinating period, the volume reviewed here provides a wealth of essays on virtually every facet of Jewish Christianity. The title specifies “Jewish believers in Jesus” because the focus is on those Christians who are ethnically Jewish (as distinct from Gentile

Christians who espoused what modern scholars take to be a Jewish theology). In addition to familiar figures from the New Testament like James and Paul and their followers, and the communities of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, the volume includes chapters on the Jewish Christian traditions that are preserved in later Christian writings and church orders, Jewish Christian editing of the Pseudepigrapha, the pseudo-Clementine literature, the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, the Elchasites, archeological remains, and an excellent chapter on the changing attitudes toward (Jewish) Christians in Rabbinic texts. Due to the focus on ethnically Jewish Christians, there is no detailed discussion of Nag Hammadi treatises (like the Gospels of Thomas and Philip) that may have been influenced by Jewish ideas (see 246-7).

Of particular interest to our ministers of word and sacrament will be the chapter by Anders Ekenberg on the evidence for Jewish Christian material in some of the foundational documents of our Eucharistic liturgies like the Didache and the Apostolic Tradition (attributed to Hippolytus). Ekenberg follows David Fiensy in holding that the thanksgiving prayers in the 4th century Apostolic Constitutions are not taken directly from Synagogue benedictions (and so can not be used as evidence of Jewish practice), but from a century or more of distinctive Jewish Christian traditions (654).

Readers who travel to Israel can benefit from James Strange's chapter (with helpful maps) on archeological evidence of Jewish believers. The martyrrium in Nazareth has no trace of confirmed Jewish Christian presence, but the cave cistern in Bethany does, and so does the "Tomb of David" on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (732-40).

In short, most readers will find something of interest in this volume and benefit from the new perspective concerning the "ways that never parted."

— Christopher B. Kaiser

The Living Voice of the Gospels, by Francis J. Moloney, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 344 pp., \$19.95.

This edition is a complete rewriting of Francis J. Moloney's contemporary reading of the four gospels, first published by Paulist Press in 1986. There have been many changes in gospel studies since, especially in literary and narrative readings, and they have greatly influenced the author's introductions in this edition.

The book is still intended for the interested lay reader. Moloney has been successful in avoiding technical language, and the book can be recommended to lay persons and to others interested in an in-depth study of a literary and narrative approach to the four gospels.

In the first chapter, Moloney describes the nature of a gospel as a special type of literature, the relationship between the four gospels, discrepancies that can be seen when comparing them, literary forms of the gospels, and how the character of each gospel is affected by the fact that it is written for the church by a different author. The authors looked back to the Jesus traditions they received and forward to the present and future needs of their own Christian communities as they composed their gospels.

There are four parts, one for each gospel, and each of them has a "Reading" of that gospel followed by a "Reading" of a particular passage of that gospel. For Mark the passage chosen is Mark 1:1-13, "A Prologue to the Gospel." In Matthew, Moloney has chosen 1:1-2:23, "The Infancy Narrative." In Luke, it is 22:1-24:53, "Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus," and in John, it is 6:1-71, "Bread from Heaven." Thus a gospel is viewed in its entirety and a particular part is then studied in detail to illustrate how the writers present their story of Jesus to make their own understanding and theology clear to their perceived readers, using the traditions about Jesus which they have received. Each chapter has notes and a selection of publications to which the reader might refer for further study.

The concluding part, entitled "The Gospels Today," gives a brief history of modern and contemporary gospel criticism. Again Moloney does so using as few technical terms as possible, and explaining and relating the various historical-critical approaches to the gospels and the quests for the historical Jesus. Readers might benefit from reading this last part of the book after the preface and first chapter, and then reading it again after completing the sections on all four of the gospels.

As minister and scholar Moloney does not hesitate in the last chapter to challenge the reader to respond to the call of Jesus to follow him and to listen and respond to his word who is the true bread from heaven that satisfies:

Finally, these reflections call us to recognize our vocation as disciples to 'life in Christ.' We are to 'put on Christ' so that we might recognize our dignity. All that is noble in us: our loving, our laughter, our play, our mission as preachers, our dancing, our eating and drinking, our praying alone or with others, our search for justice and peace, and the many other things that we do

in response to that which is deepest within us, is part of our journey to be as Jesus Christ was. (335)

Given the fact that Matthew and John claim that the Christian faith has replaced and is superior to the Jewish religion, this reviewer would have appreciated a section dealing with Christian-Jewish relations and how one lives and relates in a multiple faith and multicultural world. I believe that Moloney could well express his thoughts on the subject.

—David W. Jurgens

The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry, edited by Craig Van Gelder, Missional Church Series, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 253pp., \$ 20.00.

This volume of eight insightful essays is a valuable addition to the ongoing conversations on the missional church. While helping the reader to identify the intersection of missiology and ecclesiology, the writers remind congregations the significance of context in their life, witness, and self-understanding. The first section explores theological and historical resources for evolving contextual missiologies. The second part examines experiences and histories of four Protestant communities from various backgrounds. Added emphasis on Trinitarian theology and a quest for contextual missiologies are the connecting threads between the chapters.

Interpreting the history of missiology and identifying various phases of mission history in the first chapter, Van Gelder mines the theological and biblical resources helpful for congregations to develop contextual missiologies. Scott Frederickson argues that a perichoretic understanding of God (coinherence of the three persons), a radically deep Christology, and congregation's critical engagement with its context are essential components of a missional congregation. Drawing from the Reformation heritage, Gary M. Simpson redefines mission as *promissio*, *communicatio*, *communio*, and *vocatio*. Mark Lau Branson offers new ways of construing church and leadership.

The second section of the book considers the particular cases of Protestant communities in the United States, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Terri M. Elton narrates the stories of the United States and its Protestant Christianity, using the lens of discovery, democracy, equality, and diversity. Joon Ho Lee proposes a relevant missiological ecclesiology for the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Mary Dreier, citing the challenges facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and drawing resources from David Bosch, argues that a church should be missionary,

public, global, confessional, and imaginative. James Chai advocates reconsideration of ecclesiology and the policy of the Southern Baptist church in Taiwan.

With its new insights, emphasis on the Trinitarian view of God and advocacy for contextual missiologies, this volume is a significant contribution to the ongoing conversations on the missional church. Congregations, seminarians, clergy, and lay leaders will find it useful in their personal and group studies.

—James E. Taneti

The Netherlands Reformed Church: 1571–2005, by Karel Blei (translated by Allan J. Janssen), Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006. xv, 176pp., \$25.00.

Blei gives a succinct survey of the events that have defined the history of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. After an opening chapter about the impact of secularization processes on church life in the Netherlands today, Blei locates the origins of the church in Luther's reforms, which reconfigured the political and ecclesial landscape of Europe. But it was Calvin's reforms that were adopted at the national synod of Emden in 1571, the year that marks the birth of the Netherlands Reformed Church.

From the very early stages of its history this church was beset by conflicts and controversies, about which Blei provides informative summaries. The doctrinal positions and organizational structures of the church were defined at the national synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). But no consensus was ever reached on how this settlement was to be appropriated and applied. In this regard, the reader learns about the Further Reformation, in which a division emerged between the Voetians and the Cocceians over the connection between doctrine and piety. This concern for doctrinal purity and a disciplined life later introduced divisions into the church itself. In this connection, the reader learns about the developments that led to the *Afsheiding* ("separation") in 1834 and the *Doleantie* (the "sorrowing") in the 1880s, a protest movement under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920).

Blei continues his narrative with an interesting discussion of the theological fecundity that characterized the church in the years surrounding the Second World War. The reception of the theology of Karl Barth and sustained reflection on the place of the Jewish people in the economy of God's salvation are noteworthy here. Renewal in theology and church life prepared for the process of church unification involving the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom

of The Netherlands, which joined this *Samen op Weg* (“together on the way”) process in 1986. In 2004 the three separate synods formed the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Blei devotes his last chapter to a reflection on continuing Reformed identity in these changed cultural and ecclesial contexts.

– Christopher Dorn

The Promise of Baptism: An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition, by James V. Brownson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007, 223 pp., \$16.00.

Brownson’s book addresses far-reaching ecclesial needs in giving a cogent biblical and theological exposition and defense of the Reformed tradition on baptism. As a biblical scholar, Brownson gives a richly textured canonical reading of scripture which pulls together the themes of covenant, union with Christ, the pouring out of the Spirit, and the missional calling of the church in ways that illuminate the church’s baptismal practice. Brownson’s awareness of the specific textual issues and problems of scripture passages related to baptism is very strong. Thus, while a book on baptism in the Reformed tradition could be written by a liturgical scholar or a systematic theologian, Brownson makes his most unique contributions in his treatment of specific textual issues that relate to the meaning and practice of Baptism in scripture.

The book has thirty short chapters, each organized around a pointed theological or pastoral question. Brownson begins by discussing the background to the question, gives biblical and theological background for the question at hand, and presents his constructive case. This is followed by bullet points of summary, discussion questions for the chapter, and a resource listed for further study.

Brownson’s book comes at a time when the American church at large is revisiting the subject of baptism. While some Reformed and Presbyterian congregations are seeking to act as “baptist” as possible, some Baptists are beginning to wonder whether infant baptism might have legitimacy. What is clear on both sides is that the time has come to stop marginalizing baptism as a “non-essential” which is of little importance. Such marginalization results in a boiled down, generic Christianity which neither confronts the idolatries of our culture, nor faces scripture’s exalted language about God’s promises in baptism. This book is essential reading for this emerging discussion of baptism, and should be sought out by pastors and teachers who want to become more informed about this vital issue.

– J. Todd Billings

Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church, by Peter Schmiechen, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005. xi, 371pp., \$35.00.

Schmiechen contends that the message of the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection has become too closely associated with one particular – and particularly problematic – atonement theory (penal substitution), or at best with the three theories (Christus Victor, general transactional theory, liberal affirmation of love) of Gustaf Aulén's influential typology. This reduction in the number of images for thinking about the atonement has made the Church's task of communicating Christ's saving power more difficult, and has led it to abandon this very message that stands at the heart of the gospel.

For Schmiechen, revitalizing the church requires thinking about atonement in a variety of ways. So he devotes the majority of the book to demonstrating that, according to the biblical and historical witnesses, there are many theories of the atonement – ten, to be exact:

Christ died for us: Sacrifice (as developed in the letter to Hebrews)

Christ died for us: Justification (Luther)

Christ died for us: Penal Substitution (Hodge)

Liberation (Irenaeus and twentieth-century liberation theology)

The purposes of God: Renewal of creation (Athanasius)

The purposes of God: Restoration of creation (Anselm)

The purposes of God: Christ the goal of creation (Schleiermacher)

Reconciliation: Christ the way to the knowledge of God (H. R. Niebuhr)

Reconciliation: Christ the reconciler (I Corinthians 1-2)

Reconciliation: Wondrous love of God (Abelard, Wesley, Moltmann)

Schmiechen gives a clear introduction to each of these atonement theories. His love for system and typology tends to simplify. But this might urge advanced readers and those interested in systematic or constructive theology and the "theory of atonement theory," to examine the larger argument in which the typology functions (see the substantial introduction and conclusion). From the variety and irreducibility of the types, Schmiechen concludes that this theological diversity should be celebrated, for it better enables the church, in its diverse traditions and forms, to testify to the fullness of the saving power of Christ.

– Michael DeJonge

Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea, by Richard A. Horsley, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007. x, 262pp., \$24.95 (paper).

Richard Horsley is best known for his work on resistance movements led by prophets and bandits in Second-Temple Judea and the sociology of the Jesus movement. This latest book covers three of the most important Jewish texts of the Second Temple era: Daniel, the (deuteron-canonical) Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), and the pseudepigraphal Apocalypse of Enoch (1 Enoch). While many other treatments of these books are available, Horsley focuses on their political and economic context. He also challenges the widespread division between wisdom texts and apocalyptic texts, or between wisdom theology and an apocalyptic worldview, all of which Horsley regards as scholarly (i.e. literary) constructs (2-3, 132, 195-6, 199, 203-4).

Horsley rejects the traditional view of scribes like ben Sira as academicians who worked in “wisdom schools” and wrote “wisdom literature.” Scribes served as retainers for aristocratic patrons who cooperated with imperial officials of the Hellenistic world. They performed a variety of functions: orally teaching Torah, writing down oracles for prophets and reciting them to administrators, advising rulers, even serving as ambassadors for their patrons (84-7, 173). Their expertise in the Torah and Prophets provided them with a sense of authority (from God) and cultivated a deep concern for the poor who were exploited by the aristocracy (67-9, 146, 172, 174, 194). Horsley has evidently moderated the sharp contrast of “great” and “little traditions” that characterized his earlier writing. The scribes he describes fulfilled a mediating function between the upper and lower classes.

One of the principal insights I derived from this book has to do with intertextuality in the Bible – the citation of biblical texts by later writers. Horsley supports earlier observations that these citations were recited from memory, rather than by reading written scrolls. But he goes a step further to show that in many cases such citations were not quotations of specific biblical texts but selections from various repertoires or “registers” of biblical language. The scribal repertoire includes perennial topics like creation, wisdom, and theophany (142-3, 158). So-called “citations” of the Old Testament in the New could be rethought along these lines.

With regard to Daniel, Horsley shows how the role of scribes can explain details like the heavenly books that will be opened on the day of judgment (Dan. 7:10). In stressing the social-political context, Horsley does not negate the mythic aspects of apocalyptic texts like Daniel. Rather he integrates them with contemporary politics. So the one like a human being or “son of man” in Daniel 7:13-14 is an angelic being who is portrayed as nonviolent, in pointed contrast to the Gentile beasts and also the Canaanite god, Lord Storm (Ba’al, 183). The “holy

ones of the Most High” whom the one like a human being represents in Daniel 7:18, 22 are angelic guardians over the Judean temple-state. The deliverance described in Daniel 12:1-3 is a restoration of the covenant faithful and vindication of the wise scribes (“like the stars”), not (yet) an eschatological resurrection of the body or renewal of the cosmos (188, 190, 198-200).

In general, Horsley finds much more continuity between apocalyptic literature and earlier prophetic traditions (particularly those concerning the divine council) than scholars like John Collins have allowed (158, 182-3, 198-9, 204). As far as the Books of Enoch and Daniel are concerned, Horsley would abolish the scholarly construct of “apocalyptic” with its conventional demarcation of this age and the age to come. In its place, he refers to these texts as “historical visions” that combine prophetic vision with cosmological and mantic wisdom (199-200).

Horsley’s writing is always provocative, emerging as it does from the orality of the university classroom (University of Massachusetts, Boston). He unrelentingly attacks the simplistic, print-culture assumptions of other scholars. He sometimes overstates his case for orality, saying in one place that written texts were reserved as icons and not meant to be read at all (11, 99-102), only to have to explain away the use to extant written texts at Qumran and in ben Sira (112-20). What we have is a wealth of material from the “cultural repertoires” of early Judaism and Christianity, so it may take some time for scholars to rethink it all. Horsley’s work should help inspire a new generation of scholars to make the effort.

– Christopher B. Kaiser

Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp, by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006, 210 pp., \$25.00.

Son of Secession provides an analysis of nineteenth-century Dutch-American history. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres initial interest in the subject began with a family discovery. Twice, in the Netherlands and in North America, her Sjaarda ancestors had been parishioners of Douwe J. Vander Werp. Working at Calvin College, Sheeres was familiar with the name of Vander Werp. Unable to locate a biography of the man, Sheeres wrote her own. This biography of Douwe J. Vander Werp provides a vital contribution to the Dutch Reformed Church history.

Douwe J. Vander Werp, the son of a Groninger schipper (boatman), as an adult became a school teacher, pastor, church planter, editor, theological educator, and leader of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Earlier in his life,

Vander Werp became a protégé of Hendrik De Cock, one of the leaders of the *Afgescheiding*. Belonging to the northern wing of the secession, Vander Werp was a strong defender of the Canons of Dort. In 1864, Vander Werp and his family immigrated to America, and became the pastor of the Graafschaap Church, outside of Holland, Michigan.

Sheeres not only highlights the Vander Werp's professional persona, but describes the tragedies which permeated his personal life: the deaths of three of his wives and two of his sons. At his own death in 1876, which Sheeres attributes to smoking related cancer, Vander Werp was survived by his fourth wife, Gerritdina Brummeler, eight children, a legacy in the ministry, his writing, and his theological students.

In the Epilogue, Sheeres claims that the book might have been entitled *Son of Secessions* in the plural: first, about Vander Werp's disaffiliating from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands; second, his joining the *Kruisgezinden*; and third, his joining the fledgling Christian Reformed Church, which seven years earlier had seceded from the Reformed Church.

I personally enjoyed this historical and biographical portrait of Douwe Vander Werp. Sheeres masterfully captures his conscientious struggles as well as the joys of the pastoral life.

– Barry L. Wynveen

Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church, by James K. A. Smith, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. 156pp., \$17.99.

Postmodernism is an elusive concept, but it is one that church leaders and intellectuals must grapple with, since it generates the prevailing intellectual winds of our day.

Smith does a remarkable job in his book to offer a basic understanding of postmodernism. He focuses on the work of three continental philosophers (Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault), who are considered to be the founders of postmodern thinking. He also shows how their views are often been reduced to single-sentence "bumper-sticker" quotes that are taken out of context and misunderstood. Smith suggests these three thinkers, if understood correctly in their proper context, can help the church recover from its modern ways and rediscover its ancient roots.

The author opens each chapter with a scenes from a notable film like *The Matrix*, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, noting that “film is the new lingua franca” in the postmodern age (24). He uses these scenes to provide the groundwork for explaining each philosopher and presenting his own conclusions. We find via Derrida that all knowledge is fundamentally interpretation, and so the church’s interpretation should be governed by scripture. We learn from Lyotard that all knowledge is based on some sort of faith and has an inherent bias. From this Smith concludes that the church must let faith govern its worldview instead of reason. We learn from Foucault that knowledge is dictated to us by persons in power with a goal of forming us into images that are advantageous to power systems. From this Smith concludes that the church must use its power to disciple people into living like Christ. Smith’s analysis of these philosophers and their respective ideas from a Christian perspective is eye-opening, particularly for anyone who has difficulty nailing-down the concepts of postmodernism.

In his conclusion, Smith makes shifts from theory to practice and applies and develops a postmodern worship service, complete with poems, scented candles, and Old Testament lectionary readings as dances. Unfortunately, Smith’s prescription is relevant only to well-educated churches accustomed to high-brow liturgy and extensive symbolic communication. This kind of worship would be a charade to the majority of people – especially young people – who crave faith communicated in the “straightforward” and “down-to-earth” vernacular.

– Aaron Vriesman