



THINKING THE FAITH: CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN A NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT, by Douglas John Hall. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989. Pp. 496. \$29.95.

This book is the remarkable first volume in what promises to be an equally remarkable three-volume series. Consolidating and expanding on themes developed in earlier works such as *Lighten Our Darkness* and *God and Human Suffering*, Hall writes with passion, wisdom, and a thorough grasp of the Christian tradition as interpreted in the classic tones of Luther's *theologia crucis*. *Thinking the Faith* brings hope and encouragement to any and all who still believe that theology matters not just to church and ministry, but to the very “fate of the earth.”

One thing that makes *Thinking the Faith* so remarkable is that it generates this kind of intense reaction while probing what many would consider the boneyard of contemporary theology—namely, method and epistemology. As the starting point for a Christian theology that will be followed by a second text on professing the faith's “meditative core” (theology, anthropology, and christology) and a third on confessing the faith's hope in God's reign (ecclesiology and eschatology), *Thinking the Faith* builds its approach to the hoary problems of theological method around a two-part question: “Who are we thus defined by our thinking, and what is the nature of our thought?” (58). The two-part question gives rise to a two-part book, with part one devoted to exploring faith's thinkers (“The Disciple Community”) and part two to faith's thought (“The Discipline”).

Central to Hall's elaboration of “The Disciple Community” is the concept of contextuality. After an opening volley attacking orthodoxy's pretense to timeless detachment from the world, Hall asserts: “Faith is the grace-given courage to engage that world. Theology is a disciplined reflection and commentary upon faith's engagement. Theology therefore *is* contextual, and that by definition” (74). In passages that bear the mark of long and careful conversation with George A. Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, Hall thinks open the door to what it would mean to do theology out of a North American context, as opposed to maintaining our tradition of adapting and warming over European and, more recently, Latin American theology to our situation.

Succinctly put, Hall contends: “The crisis of the dominant culture of North America is a particular species of the failure of the modern vision” (158). As Hall further discerns the crisis enveloping our North American context, he draws heavily from Ernest Becker, arguing that our “‘cultural hero system’ is no longer credible” (180), and that any religious community that allies itself with the moribund culture is likewise destined to be reckoned incredible. The challenge to the disciple community is to break free from its bondage to a culture hellbent on oblivion, and in that freedom forge from the tradition of Jerusalem a “creative illusion” (Becker) that grasps the “natural terror” of our own peculiar being-towards-death (Auschwitz, the “rebellion of nature,” the nuclear crisis), while at the same time pointing to the cross as the way through and beyond it.

In meeting this challenge the disciple community assumes a theological discipline that,

Hall contends, must strive for what Karl Barth urged all preachers to do—to hold the Scriptures in the one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. While insisting upon theology’s serious attention to its traditional elements of faith, Bible,

and doctrine, Hall also calls theology to attend to the world as it is both seen, heard, and interpreted in the arts and the sciences, but especially as it is experienced by its victims. In framing the theological method for achieving this kind of contextual theology, Hall argues, “A *confessional theology requires a methodology whose informing principle is strategic*. Everything must be geared to the concrete realities of time-and-place; everything must serve the *here and now* beloved by God” (367). At once borrowing from and critiquing Barth’s kerygmatic and Tillich’s correlative approaches to theological method, Hall closes *Thinking the Faith* with a chapter that strives to give both reason and revelation their just due.

Thinking the Faith is stimulating reading for anyone who struggles to understand and address the world, both around us and in us, in the light of Christian faith. I think the book has extraordinary value for teaching others what it means to do theology, and from the questions and ideas *Thinking the Faith* stimulated in me, I personally look forward to what Hall will be doing theologically in the volumes to follow this excellent introduction to Christian theology.

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HEAR THEN THE PARABLE, by Bernard Brandon Scott. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. Pp. 465. \$29.95.

The stream of scholarly interest in Jesus’ parables has recently developed new and interesting swirls, largely created through the application of literary critical methods to the study of the parables. Though the discussion still flows in the channel into which it was diverted by Jülicher a century ago, and though much discussion still revolves around Dodd and Jeremias, new names have caused spins of their own, names like Funk, Via, Patte, Ricoeur, and many others. Bernard Brandon Scott has been an important part of this literary critical swirl for the past decade and more. His most recent contribution, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, is, by many measures, his strongest contribution so far.

Scott designed the book to be easy to use. His design works. The book is built of four sections, the last three of which present analyses of individual parables. Each section (and even the individual analyses) can be read profitably without reading the rest of the book. Nevertheless, it would be wiser to read Scott’s first section before working through anything else. The Prolegomena sketches his method, lays out his strategy for the consideration of the parables, and defines what a parable is.

What is a parable? It is “a *mashal* that employs a short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol” (8). Those familiar with the discussion will hear all sorts of historical and methodological echoes in this definition. The bulk of the Prolegomena is given over to the consideration and explication of these echoes.

Because others in the ancient world employed parables in teaching and interpretation, Jesus' parables are to be studied in the context of Hebrew and Greek use of parables. Because parables are "short narrative fictions," they are appropriately studied using literary critical methods, methods Scott uses to discern the "originating structure" of any parable for which varying performances exist (42). Because parables "naturally move toward polyvalency" (45), Scott uses the word "referencing," a term he regards as neutral and open-ended, to refer to the working of a parable. Because the reference must be to a "transcendent symbol," several of the items that Jeremias called parables are omitted in Scott's treatment, for instance, Jesus' saying about the choosing of places at table in Luke 14.

In the bulk of the book, pages 79-418, Scott explores the parables themselves, which he gathers under three headings: Family, Village, City, and Beyond; Masters and Servants; Home and Farm. These headings correspond, says Scott, to the relations that organized the world in which first-century peasants lived. This sociological principle of organization makes for useful comparison between parables that might otherwise not be considered next to each other.

Though Scott's work on individual par-

ables owes much to structuralist method (as those familiar with his earlier work might expect), in this latest effort he avoids the forests of structuralist charts and eschews the oddest elements of structuralist jargon. (For instance, in this book, in contrast to some of Scott's earlier work, the sentences of a story are called lines and not lexies.) Scott's modifications are to be applauded.

Scott also tackles, at least provisionally, one of the thorniest problems surrounding discussions of method in biblical studies, that of the relationship between literary study of the narratives under consideration and historical study of the events related. Scott acknowledges the problems involved on all sides of this issue, and intends to use literary techniques to arrive at historical conclusions. His quest, however, is not for Jeremias's *ipsissima verba Jesu*, but rather for the *ipsissima structura* of the parable (18). This quest is intriguing, but it is not altogether clear how it finally differs from Jeremias's work. It is to be remembered that Jeremias finally dispenses with looking for Jesus' *ipsissima verba* and aims rather at hearing the *ipsissima vox Jesu*. Scott, too, is listening for a voice (65), and though he uses different terminology in his work, his reconstructed parables often look very like those reconstructed by Jeremias.

What is to be made of this listening for Jesus' voice behind the gospels? The problem is not so much in the listening. The problem is in the assumption that this listening can only be done *behind* the gospels, not in them, and in the assumption that one gets *behind* the gospels by cutting the parables out of their context. But though excision is apparently easy (and even customary), it must be asked whether it is desirable and appropriate.

Notice the image Scott chooses when he speaks about the business of excising and reconstructing the parables.

Our task is like that of restoring paintings that over the ages have darkened and lost their original luster and coloration. Just as the restoration of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel has generated controversy in the art world between those who see the project as restoring the painting's authenticity, its original colors, and those who see it as a travesty, so the restoration of the parables generates controversy.

The removal of patina may reveal contours and shapes we are unaccustomed to seeing in our favorite images. (19)

While one may approve heartily of the generation of new and vigorous readings of Jesus' parables, it ought to be noticed that Scott's governing image regards the narrative context in which the parables are found (the gospels) as grime to be scoured from the picture. This is unfortunate and inadequate.

At another point, Scott refers to the parables as one example of the "artifacts" remaining of Jesus (424). This image also is revealing, and troubling. The artifacts uncovered by archaeology are notoriously mute. They say nothing, and can say nothing, until they are connected to a story. The parables are already connected to a story. If they are to be cut out of their narrative context and dropped into alternative, invented contexts, the hypothetical, and often anachronistic, nature of these invented contexts ought to be attended to with great care.

It must be asked whether the contexts in which the parables are found (the several gospels) are not the only retrievable historical contexts in which they can be considered. One need not adopt some sort of naive, and internally inconsistent, assumption about the flat-footed historicity of the gospels in order to do this. To the contrary, if history is a kind of story that generates a whole world, one must note that the only world in which we hear the parables is the world of the narratives in which they are found, and further, that these various narrative worlds present themselves as the world in which we live, even as they collide with that world. Perhaps the sort of historical work that must be done is at once historical and theological, and must busy itself with explicating the collision (both historical and theological) between the narrative worlds of the gospels and the world in which we live. Clearly Scott has touched an important problem, a problem about which many of the necessary questions have not yet been asked, much less answered.

The most exciting feature of Scott's consideration of the parables is his treatment of their surprises. The parables refuse to be

treated as simple illustrations or examples. Many are shocking and refuse to make ordinary sense. Scott refers to this as a "tendency to play in minor keys" (66), and he is at his strongest when he deals with parables that sing in such keys.

Take, for example, his treatment of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Scott notes that this parable, by sending the tax collector home righteous though he made no sort of reparation, reverses the social map of the reader. Scott says:

...we cannot find in the tax collector merit or fix blame on the Pharisee. This only creates a new map and misses the radicalness of the parable. Despite Luke's use of the parable as an example story, it is not. There is no lesson to learn! The hearer cannot imitate the behavior of one or the other. The parable's message is simpler. The map has been abandoned, it can no longer predict who will be an insider or outsider. This parable subverts the metaphorical structure that sees the kingdom of God as temple. (97)

This can be heard even more clearly in his treatment of The Leaven (321-329). Particularly noteworthy, says Scott, is the inappropriateness of the image used for the kingdom. Leaven is removed from the house for Passover; Jesus warned against the leaven of the Pharisees; leaven was viewed as a kind of corruption. To speak of the kingdom in terms of a source of corruption is at least odd, and certainly surprising, as it undercuts what might be expected about the kingdom. He takes this undercutting to be essential.

Scott sees another sort of undercutting at work in the surprising ordinariness of the images used and the outcomes presented in these “short narrative fictions.” This becomes especially clear in his discussion of the parable of the fig tree. This little parable draws on none of the rich associations that the fig tree had in Israel. This he takes as central to the interpretation of the parable. He says:

There is no future overabundant fig tree, but in its very ordinariness there is only this tree. We are left with leaven, an empty jar, a budding fig tree, as the metaphorical network for the kingdom. (342)

More comment would be appreciated at such a point. None is coming.

There is a problem here: the gathered theological discussion occasioned by this book of some 400 pages covers only seven pages, and lands in an epilogue. This is not nearly enough. More has, of course, been provided, but it is scattered throughout the book in his commentary on each parable in its turn. Where it appears, Scott’s theological comment is often quite intriguing and suggestive. In the epilogue, however, where it is made to stand in its own ordered theological ranks, it looks somewhat diminished, rather underpopulated.

“God intervenes but not so as anyone would notice,” says Scott. “The God of the parables is one who engages in a radical solidarity with folks” (423). Arguments have been made for such notions throughout the book. A little ground has been gained here, and a little there. When Scott comes to his epilogue, however, not quite enough ground has been gained. Points made in one place seem not to square with points made in other places. For instance, Scott has noted that some parables seem, by their structure, to anticipate a power-filled denouement that does not come. This is something important to have noticed, especially since it raises questions about what the kingdom is and how it comes. But do these various observations allow the conclusion that “God intervenes but not so as anyone would notice”? Other parables might seem to argue otherwise. The evidence is mixed, and this mixing deserves more attention.

Further, Scott’s interpretive conclusions depend, in this case, on analytical work that is open to question. In particular, his notions about the unnoticeable character of divine intervention hang on his conclusions about the nature of the harvest in the parable of the sower. Is a yield of thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold a miraculous harvest? No, says Scott, against a rather imposing group of scholars. This issue, of course, is not to be settled by counting and weighing the scholars on each side of the question, but by counting the grains harvested and weighing the yield from a field. This is hard to do, especially since the parable in question does not name the seeds sown. Are they millet? Are they barley? Are they wheat? It makes a difference.

Scott leaves this question unasked and relies on ancient mentions of things agricultural,

those found in Pliny and in the rabbis among them, to settle the matter. The rabbinic accounts of harvests, being advance reports of harvests in the messianic age, are accepted as wild exaggerations. Pliny, who comes in far below messianic levels, is accepted as reporting normal harvests. But not all exaggeration in this world is messianic in scale, as anyone knows who has been in on conversations among business people or among travelers to far away places. Scott's argument requires attention, not only to such reports, but also to botanical possibilities.

It may be more profitable to consider how the parable is understood in its narrative context(s). In Mark this context includes the mustard seed parable which, along with whatever else it does, emphasizes the surprising largeness of what has grown from an exceedingly small seed. This may at least tilt one's reading of the parable of the Sower. Scott is well aware of the narrative context in which the parables are found, but it would seem that this context may be more decisive than even he acknowledges.

Hear Then the Parable is valuable, both for the way it charts the course followed by the stream of parable interpretation through past centuries and for the swirls and eddies it introduces into that stream in the present. The writing is consistently readable, the work comprehensive and carefully done. It should stir up much useful discussion.

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HOSEA-MICAH (INTERPRETATION COMMENTARY), by James Limburg. Atlanta: John Knox, 1988. Pp. 201. \$17.95.

Among all the biblical commentaries available to the contemporary Christian preacher or teacher, the Interpretation Commentary series from John Knox Press is emerging as one of the most helpful and theologically sensitive on the scene today. James Limburg's contribution to that series is no exception. Limburg's commentary treats six of the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah.

These six prophetic books are small in comparison to the prophetic giants of Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Yet Limburg ably reveals the literary artistry and theological density of these six books. In Limburg's skillful exegetical hands, these "minor" prophets turn out to wrestle with "major" themes and theological issues: peace and justice, Messiah and mission, love and forgiveness, to name only a few.

Limburg's method is largely literary and theological. He begins with a survey of the overarching structure and themes of a whole prophetic book. The smaller size of these minor prophetic books enables the reader to discern such a structure and the movement of the whole book with some assurance. Larger prophetic books like Jeremiah or Isaiah require more work to see their overarching structure, if indeed there is one. After this initial survey of the whole book, Limburg then moves to consider in more detail a selection of texts "which are central to the prophet's message and which have special potential for preaching and teaching" (81). The selection of texts is typically judicious and is always sensitive to the place of the individual texts in the overall movement of the message of the book.

Limburg certainly acknowledges the historical-critical insights about the layering and sources behind these texts. One might wish he had made more use of such insights to highlight how the shape and theology of these books developed from earlier to later forms. Of course, the

reader can turn to other commentaries for more explicitly historical-critical treatments of the minor prophets (for example, J. L. Mays

in the Old Testament Library series or H. W. Wolff's work on the minor prophets).

What pastors and teachers in the church will find most helpful in Limburg's commentary is the way in which he moves beyond the confines of the prophetic book itself to consider larger contexts: the larger Old Testament context, the relation to New Testament texts and themes, and implications for contemporary issues and concerns. A reference to fasting in a Joel text will lead to a broader discussion of fasting in the Old Testament. In studying Amos, Limburg asks, "What does it mean to 'seek justice' in the Old Testament?" The function of Jonah as a believer with too narrow a vision of God's relationship and love for outsiders and the "enemy" city of Nineveh links up with the parables and teachings of Jesus where "outsiders" are really "insiders" in the eyes of God. Micah 5 raises the issue of the Messiah in the Old Testament and its relationship to the New Testament vision of who the Messiah is. The locust plague in Joel is given life and color with a quotation from O. E. Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth* with implications for the rural crisis of recent years in some parts of the world. A saying on a synagogue wall or an inscription in the United Nations provide new contexts for old prophetic words. Limburg has a feel for how ancient words come alive and explode in fresh ways in new surroundings.

Limburg pays special attention to the way in which the message of these prophetic books has been shaped so that future generations can hear these prophetic words as also addressed to them. For example, the beginning of the book of Amos clearly anchors the prophet in real historical time and space ("the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam...king of Israel"). The book here signals the historical context as important for understanding the message of Amos. Not all prophetic books begin with such a specific historical introduction (for example, the book of Joel). But even as the book of Amos is rooted in a particular historical time, later oracles which have been added to the book begin to lift the horizon of the book to a more distant and unspecified future: "In that day....Behold, the days are coming..." (Amos 9:11, 13). The book of Joel makes explicit this concern to open up the message of the book to future generations: "Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation" (Joel 1:3).

Theologically, Limburg is able to hold together the real tensions which exist within the prophetic texts as they speak about or portray the divine. In Amos, Limburg notes "the bipolar way of speaking about God, describing God's majesty and might in working on the international scene on the one hand and God's care and mercy in dealing with the individual on the other" (91). On the issue of peacemaking in Micah 4, Limburg sets the Old Testament passages which emphasize God's role in bringing peace alongside those which emphasize human responsibility in working for peace. Such a tension cannot be dissolved; both need to be held together (183-184). The image of God as Parent is discussed in light of the issue of male and female metaphors for God (42-43). Limburg wisely acknowledges that some texts are not always clear on certain issues, perhaps intentionally so. Some of our questions are left unanswered. Some commentators strive to find or invent the answers; Limburg is content to follow the text and to let the deadends remain, acknowledging the element of mystery in the human encounter with God.

Preachers and teachers will derive much benefit from this commentary. The section titles

alone are suggestive: Sociology, Ecology, and Theology; What Is the Heart?; Reflections on Church Building; The Way to Wellness; The Convenient Dichotomy (between worship and everyday life); Earth, Wind, and Fire (on Pentecost and Joel 2); or Communion or Commotion? (on the integrity of worship and Amos 5). Perhaps the strongest treatments in the commentary are the sections on Amos and Jonah. Limburg has given us a fresh, stimulating, and readable commentary. He enables these minor prophets to assume major voices in the biblical chorus.

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page 186

CHRISTIAN EXISTENCE TODAY: ESSAYS ON CHURCH, WORLD, AND LIVING IN BETWEEN, by Stanley M. Hauerwas. Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988. Pp. 271. \$14.95 (paper).

In this book Stanley Hauerwas grapples with a very large question: How can Christians live out their faith in the post-Christian culture of twentieth-century North America? Since the fourteen essays are papers originally presented at various conference and university settings, they do not represent a systematic answer to that question. Rather, they are very loosely organized around the common theme, almost as pictures snipped out of several magazines and then taped onto a poster form the standard Sunday School collage.

Because the author wrote these essays for various audiences, they will appeal to each reader in varying degrees. Although I am a Lutheran pastor just over seven years out of seminary, with a fairly analytic turn of mind, and even though I attempt to read enough to keep abreast of current developments in theology, I occasionally found myself lost in this text, puzzled by Hauerwas' references to obscure debates among theologians and stumped by the specialized vocabulary he sometimes employs. This was especially true of "The Church as God's New Language," an essay which presumes *considerable* acquaintance with "narrative theology," but it was also true of several others. At the same time, essays like "The Ministry of a Congregation" and "Taking Time for Peace" are of general interest and so readable that I could use them in an adult forum without apology.

In the introduction, Hauerwas attempts to answer James Gustafson's contention that his theology is "sectarian" and to express the purpose of this book. The church must neither be completely involved in nor completely withdrawn from the world, he writes. Rather,

the issue is how the Church can provide the interpretative categories to help Christians better understand the positive and negative aspects of their societies and guide their subsequent selective participation. (11)

The church should be "an alternative political community." In short,

If Christians are not being sanctified, our affirmations of our belief in God mean little, and we lack the power to stand against the powers of the world. (18)

The church can do this only when it pays close attention to that history which has called it into being, particularly the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the various interpreters of Christ throughout the ages. However, this history only makes sense when it is reinterpreted by a living community of Christians confronted with the issues and concerns of a specific time and place. This community is nothing less than the continuing incarnation of the risen Christ at work in the world:

We do not just have an alternative [to misunderstanding and violence]; we are the alternative. We do not have a story to tell, but in the telling, we *are* the story being told. (54)

For Hauerwas, neither faith nor worship nor even “Christian principles” can exist apart from this community. Practical reason works through the community to reach ethical decisions, using the variety of gifts inspired by the Spirit within the community. Older saints are “teachers” who represent Christ the “master” to “apprentices,” those younger Christians who will one day assume the role of teacher, too. Within the community, the pastor’s function is determined by her sacramental office: she witnesses to the presence of God and directs people to this presence. The pastor’s sense of office, not a denominational code of ethics, should determine pastoral character, behavior, and roles. The pastor is called to be both person and professional, prophet and priest *insofar as* he fulfills his office.

The result of this interplay between history, community, and experience is a church which stands for honesty and truth rather than denial, and genuine hope rather than foolish optimism or that despair which leads to violence. Because the church celebrates the forgiveness of Christ, its members need not pretend that conflicts between them do not exist; instead, daring to share their grievances with one another, they can be forgiven and their relationships

page 188

healed. Since the church knows that falsehood is finally bounded by truth, it has nothing to fear from learning; therefore, the church can sponsor universities which seek truth for truth’s sake, at a time when public universities often abandon that quest in order to offer “practical” learning which leads to higher-paying jobs and attracts more consumer-oriented (and tuition-paying!) students.

Hauerwas insists that the church attend to small acts of ministry as well as large, because holding the hand of one AIDS victim is as much a sign of the kingdom as pouring millions of dollars into medical research. The kingdom comes when the church is present through the pastor bringing the Eucharist to an elderly person at a nursing home as well as when the church goes to Congress to lobby for peace in Central America.

In “Taking Time for Peace,” Hauerwas puts his finger on a feeling I’ve often experienced:

It is argued that unless we eradicate the nuclear bomb from our lives, then nothing we can do can have meaning, since all is threatened by destruction. People possessed by such passion tend to make the rest of us feel a bit guilty, as we simultaneously suspect that they are right and yet continue jealously to guard our right to take the time to enjoy a baseball game. (254)

However important the cause, such totalitarian claims are wrongheaded, Hauerwas insists. We must also take time for peace-*full* activities, like making dinner for our families, caring for endangered species, reading books, and—above all—bearing and raising and loving children. Otherwise, whatever peace we make in the world may not be a peace worth having. Perhaps Luther meant something like that, too, when he said that if the world were going to end tomorrow, he'd plant a tree today!

I thought *Christian Existence Today* was a challenging and helpful book. It reminded me of how easily the church is taken captive by culture, uncritically accepting values and lifestyles alien to it as its own. We the church must not accept the current concoction of western-democratic-Christian moral values as our own. We must dare to be different, to become by the power of the Spirit “God’s new language” in a world still nursing the wounds of Babel.

However, it does seem to me that Hauerwas’s theology is more *prescriptive* than *descriptive*. Aside from a few small congregations, does the kind of Christian community he speaks of really exist? He argues at one point that many congregations fit this model (121), but if that is so, alas, it has not been my privilege to experience them!

That observation may suggest that Hauerwas does not successfully defend himself against Gustafson’s charge of “sectarianism.” Indeed, although Hauerwas promises in his introduction to answer Gustafson’s criticisms, I’m not sure that he does. For example, he never adequately explains how Christians can interact cooperatively with those non-Christians who do not share their beliefs, how Christian convictions can be altered *constructively* by scientific, philosophical, or psychological developments in the “secular” world, or—perhaps most importantly—how the Christian community can resolve fundamental theological differences *within itself*.

All in all, I found *Christian Existence Today* well worth the purchase price and the time and effort it took to read it.

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HISTORY MAKING HISTORY: THE NEW HISTORICISM IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT, by William Dean. New York: SUNY, 1988. Pp. 175. \$10.95 (paper).

William Dean, who teaches religion at Gustavus Adolphus College, offers a challenging interpretation of the current situation in American religious thought. He discusses the neopragmatism of philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Nelson Goodman, Richard Bernstein, and Hilary Putnam; the literary historicism of literary critics such as Frank Lentricchia; the neopragmatic philosophies of religion of Cornel West and Jeffrey Stout; and the postmodern theologies of Gordon Kaufman and Mark C. Taylor. Despite this wide range of reference—or is it because of it?—the book is very accessibly written. Dean very instructively brings together materials which normally lie inertly apart in the wasteland of the modern university. In *American Religious Empiricism* (SUNY, 1986), which prepared the way for this work, Dean paid tribute to the intellectual stimulation to be found in a liberal arts college. Here he continues to cross conventional academic boundaries and to avoid scholarly jargon, wherever possible.

Dean is “seeking, finally, a moral and a religious style appropriate to our own harrowing times” (xii). But what is possible for us in this time? The new historicists would have us recognize “history making history.” The point here is that we have no recourse beyond the particular events of past history: “One experiences only what can be experienced within historical time and space: (1) not foundations beyond history; (2) not realities that can be known, without bias, as objective correlatives; and (3) not universal subjective characteristics, inherent in all persons” (6). What, Dean is asking, would it mean for a theologian to understand her situation in this way?

Dean is very attentive to the strictures of the new historicists, but his interpretation is hardly uncritical. He ponders what seems to be implied in their denunciations and in their passionate appeals to conversation and solidarity. In particular, he probes the writing of Richard Rorty, suggesting that certain norms drive his critique and sustain his appeals, so that “it is not as though Rorty lives without a metaphysics of his own, not one which offers the comforts of static truths beyond history, but one which must give its own sense of moral virtue, nevertheless” (31, cf. 84). But if these moves go unacknowledged and undeveloped, would not people dismiss the new historicists as merely relativistic or nihilistic? Since “most people still want some explicit discussion of what beliefs are based on” (91), will today’s “neopragmatic new historicists become nonpragmatic”? (83).

It need not be so—according to Dean’s interpretation. For there are American and religious resources available which have been neglected by the new historicists. That a method or hermeneutic can be both historicist and religious is demonstrated by two recent forms of biblical criticism, tradition history and sociological analysis. But the particular burden of Dean’s book is to argue that there are neglected American resources for revisioning today’s new historicism. He argues that during the first four decades of this century, the University of Chicago’s Chicago School of theology started and practiced a method which embodied today’s new historicism, but with an enhanced appreciation for historical antecedents. More strongly still, he draws on two theologians, Bernard Meland and Bernard Loomer, and two American pragmatists, William James and John Dewey, to suggest that a “radical empiricism” can account for values in historical experience without violating pragmatism or historicism.

So, what are the prospects for theology? Dean seems to offer no full response to this question. “This descriptive study” (143) closes with a chapter entitled “Toward a Concept of God,” but the prepositional modesty is clearly honored. Nonetheless, some of the pertinent pieces seem available. As a framework, we have a world which is “not completely determined, completely random or completely indifferent to human intention” (85), a world such that we are capable of freely conversing with people holding opinions different from our own. Within that cosmology, a kind of epistemology can be discerned, one which recognizes our ignorance and relativity, but

which also recognizes that “history yields criteria.” Dean notes that “while an awareness of how criteria grow from a historical tradition does not validate them, it does allow one to be more critical of them, more capable of openly nurturing them, or more capable of protecting oneself from accepting them simply because, for example, they are locally fashionable” (83).

Moreover, this nonfoundationalist epistemology can help us to see that we must move

beyond the focus on method which, ironically, casts a Cartesian mark even on the new historicists. Dean suggests that this is because these figures came to their views “by way of European thinkers who taught them that the real problem is making errors,” whereas, “the classical American philosophers and theologians were more interested in knowing truth than in avoiding error, even if that meant getting duped repeatedly” (124). But in, with, and under the errors some truth came to be known, on Dean’s account, as values were experienced (xi), an “empirical piety” took form (81), and a “tropism, a spin, something urging the growth of value in the historical process” was discerned (136).

I repeat: William Dean has written a challenging book. He speaks of the book as a “history of a method—a history that leads, finally, beyond method” (xi). At book’s end, Dean is asking “the last question...‘To what extent will an American historicist concept of God make a practical difference in the lives of those who accept it?’” (144). A part of the answer surely lies in how those who write from faith for faith respond to the challenge of the new historicism. There are probably trumping moves that will be tried. To claim the privilege of private ecstasy or communal exceptionalism is perhaps still possible. But it may be hoped that it is also possible to move toward and into a concept of a God who works steadfastly within the splendor and terror of human history. If persons of faith hear, with William Dean, the invigorating call to move beyond method, that could make a difference.

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PERFORMER AS PRIEST AND PROPHET: RESTORING THE INTUITIVE IN WORSHIP THROUGH MUSIC AND DANCE, by Judith Rock and Norman Mealy. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. Pp. 138. \$13.95 (paper).

Liturgical dance often struggles to find a place for itself in the worship life of the church. One aspect of that struggle is the difficulty many artists have in articulating and reflecting systematically on their intuitive knowledge and experience, and another is the wide variety of skill, approach, and theological understanding reflected in the dance community. Meanwhile, the church has had few tools to assist in the dialogue between the artist and the church as helpful or as clear as this book. It speaks systematically without leaving the beauty it celebrates out of the style, language, or content. It is a bridge helping dancer/musician and theologian move more comfortably and “grace-fully” toward a place of mutual understanding and affirmation.

I find this book to be all that the authors hoped for, namely, “that those who read it will find it a vision-bringer as they work to embody their own vision for the arts in a more inclusive church” (xxi).

Judith Rock is a seminary graduate, now dancer, choreographer, and writer based in New York. Norman Mealy, who died in 1987, was a liturgist and a professor of church music at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Together they have woven a powerful and comprehensive discussion of the church’s relationship to the arts. They ask and answer well these questions:

1. What are the elements of music and dance? That is, here is a “music contraption” or a “dance contraption”: How does it work?
2. How are dance and music catalysts for theological thinking? What issues do these art

forms raise, and what issues can they address?

3. Where do music and dance compositions come from? How do the choreographer and composer create, and what insight into tradition does the activity of the artist offer the church?

4. What role does the artist play in the religious community?

(xiii) 5. How, theoretically and practically, are dance and music vision-bringers for the church?

The structure of the book builds on the authors' own understanding of intuitive knowing.

Intuitive is used to mean many things. In this book, we mean by it ways of perceiving and responding that do not rely on steps taken from the known to the known until enough evidence is gathered to support a conclusion. Intuitive perception and response accept and respect leaps from the known to the unknown, and build upon unexpected collisions and mergers of unlike with unlike. This book is about the capacity of dance and music, as performing arts in the church, to demonstrate and elicit that kind of knowing. We believe that there are dimensions of the Christian theological enterprise, spiritual journey, and work of worship that can be illumined only through the arts calling forth intuitive response. (xii)

The book asks a question and then responds from the dance perspective and then a music perspective. The parallels between the more familiar, music, and the less familiar, dance, enables just this sort of leap from the known to the unknown, so that even the non-dance oriented person will benefit greatly and learn much from this discussion.

I found quite helpful and exciting the theological reflection on music and dance, not as devotional practices, but rather as “formal architectures of meaning; architectures of meaning that communicate through our intuitive rather than through our analytic faculties” (xiv).

Music and dance can attend to basic human questions that in turn become basic theological questions....Biblically rooted music and dance deepen our knowledge of God, ourselves, and each other. Composers and choreographers working in a religious setting or with religious material are creating and presenting theological images. These nonverbal statements have great power to shape our understanding and action—often greater power than verbal communications have. This is why it is a mistake to understand the arts in the church as simply a matter of aesthetics, unless by aesthetics we mean the fleshing out of a vision of reality. (43)

Art can bring new life to the church. In a chapter entitled “Art as Pentecost” there is an apt description of this new life and the role the arts can play as bearers of this grace.

Pentecost, new life in the spirit creating new relationships, is a promise of hope forever renewed. It is the promise of change, filled with surprise and charged with the unexpected....Grace means both play and repentance. It means settling down to live humbly and joyously in the feminine and masculine physicality of our bodies,

being willing to live with and through the sometimes splendid, sometimes terrible story of all created life. The physical world, the human body, is the only place where life, death, and resurrection happen. It, not the mind estranged or the spirit withdrawn, is the theatre of divine revelation. Resurrection assuredly does not follow logically from death. But the body and its death are the only ground there is from which to prepare for resurrection's leap. Through their intense physicality, the arts call us home to that ground. They are a voice from home inviting us to a new covenant with the often baffling physical world, and a new openness to the channels of grace its surprises are. (120)

This is a major work for all of us who long for our worship to move beyond a time of *chronos* to *kairos*, beyond a time of thinking about God to a time of "finding, loving and responding to the Holy."

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page 193

MY FAITH AS AN AFRICAN, by Jean-Marc Ela. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988. Pp. 160. \$9.95 (paper).

"Liberation of the oppressed must be the primary condition for any authentic inculturation of the Christian message" (xvi), writes the Roman Catholic priest and theologian Jean-Marc Ela in this his latest book (translated from the French *Ma foi d'Africaine* [Editions Karthala, 1985] by John P. Brown and Susan Perry).

Educated in Europe with doctorates in theology and sociology, Father Ela returned to his home country of Cameroon some ten years ago to serve as a parish priest among the peoples of the Alantika Mountains along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. From his experiences among the mountain peasants he has written this book to present the challenge placed upon Christianity by the unique African context of "those rejected by history."

The book comprises three parts: "Reawakening the Wellsprings," "Faith at the Grassroots," and "Christianity Faces the Challenge of Africa." Affirming the need to rediscover the resources of African oral tradition, the author discusses the significance of the Ancestors for Christianity and the importance of sign and symbol and spoken word in the African expression of faith.

From an initial overview of African religious thought and practice, he quickly moves to the twin subjects of poverty and oppression that become the dominant refrain throughout the remainder of the book. With eloquence and not a little repetition, he portrays the tragic existence of the people who inhabit a continent that has become a "veritable empire of hunger." While blaming much of the current situation on past colonialization, he does not spare the elite of today's independent nations for maintaining a class system that enables them to continue to exploit "the little people."

In the midst of the desperation of those who see no possible relief from centuries of physical, social, cultural, and economic violence that shows no sign of abating under the aegis of today's neocolonialism, Father Ela observes an increasing trend toward alternative, if not always

traditional, means of seeking respite. Christianity as brought by the missionaries, he maintains, has proven to be a liturgical illusion, a spiritualized flight into otherworldliness that has not provided healing from the disease or escape from the hunger that holds Africa's people in bondage. Thus, the people increasingly turn to traditional medicines and to diviners and *marabouts* and to new sects both in the villages and in the overcrowded shantytowns of the continually growing cities.

Throughout the book, the reader is impressed by the author's firm conviction that God is not neutral, that he does bring justice to the oppressed, that Christ did announce the good news of the Kingdom of God to the poor. Christ's life was one of solidarity with the marginal people; his preaching and teaching was to the dregs of society. It is those same people in today's Africa who must "reclaim the gospel and bring our disinherited peoples face to face with it" (115). The writer, therefore, emphasizes the importance of the local community, as opposed to the hierarchical church structure, that must *irrupt* in a "Theology of the Tree," as he entitles his conclusion. The Tree, of course, is not only the tree of the village square where the elders meet and hold converse, but also the tree of the cross, the tree of life which Christ offers to all humankind.

Although Father Ela makes the disclaimer that it was not his intention to develop a theology in his book, given the difficult conditions under which he wrote, it is disappointing to the reader that he does not go further than broad generalities in supporting his theological argument. Even in looking at the "wellsprings," he tends to generalize much of Africa's heritage and tradition, speaking broadly about Africa, Africans, Black Africa, the Bantu, and northern Cameroon. Unfortunately, he sometimes groups the various mountain peoples together under the name Kiridi, a term that usually bears pejorative connotations in today's usage.

In his presentation of Africa's past, one is reminded of aspects of negritude. Negative elements that may be found in any society tend to be overlooked, with the blame for Africa's current problems frequently being placed on European injus-

tices over the centuries. Nevertheless, he does make it clear that a return to an anthropological past or to some concept of authenticity cannot prove an acceptable resolution to the tragic circumstances of life for today's forgotten people.

In days when newspapers are filled with stories of plots and coups and famines, Father Ela's book provides a new dimension of understanding as he speaks about the poor and the oppressed who generation after generation have wondered what to do when the granary is empty. As he clearly reveals, the problems are more profound than those of rainfall and political power and development schemes. The issues are very fundamental ones of life and death in every sense of both words. In reading Father Ela's work, one comes to the realization that its title refers neither to the faith of an African nor to African faith as African religion, but rather to Father Ela's own faith both in the life-giving power of Christ and in the potential of the oppressed people of Africa to rise up and grasp that life in the fullness of its meaning for their daily life as well as for their eternal salvation.

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THE REBIRTH OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL RATIONALISM: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THOUGHT OF LEO STRAUSS, ed. by Thomas L. Pangle. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989. Pp. 328. \$14.95 (paper).

I first encountered the thought of Leo Strauss in a serious way as a young graduate student writing a dissertation on the theory of property in British political thought. Strauss's interpretation of Locke's views on property and natural law raised some difficult questions for my own reading of Locke. As a result, Strauss's critique drove me deeper and deeper into Locke's texts to see for myself if he was right. In the end, I was unconvinced by his argument.

But this experience shows the immense value of reading Strauss's work. He is one of the most profound and valuable critics of modern philosophical and political thought to appear in the twentieth century, a thinker passionately engaged with the fundamental questions of contemporary political life. His thought always drives to the most basic issues of theory and practice. Even if, as in my case, you are not convinced by his argument, your own position is likely to be clarified and enriched by wrestling with his work. And for readers of this journal, such encounters are enhanced because he takes the claims of the Bible and the thought of theologians seriously.

Strauss was a Jew who left his native Germany, apparently on the eve of the rise of Hitler after his own university training in philosophy, and came to teach in the United States. He was for many years a distinguished professor of political science at the University of Chicago. He died in 1973. His students are commonly identified as the "Straussian school." During his own lifetime, many of his fellow political scientists regarded him as odd for his critique of Enlightenment rationalism and for his affinity for the Classical rationalism of ancient philosophy. Not many were prone to take his critique seriously, although a few like the philosopher Morris R. Cohen and my own teacher, the political theorist Benjamin Lippincott, were also critical of historicism or empiricist assumptions in social science.

But, because the issues of the Enlighten-

ment, historicism and relativism, of rationalism, the fact-value distinction and our knowledge of the good and the just continue to be raised, Strauss's thought continues to be important. It is perhaps time for Strauss to get his due. How fortunate, then, that this volume now appears. Thomas Pangle, one of Strauss's students, has edited a very lively collection of some of Strauss's essays and lectures as an introduction to his thought. One could hardly imagine a more helpful introduction. Some pieces have been previously published. Others appear here for the first time. The book is not intended to present "the essential Strauss," but rather to invite and entice the reader to explore more sustained scholarship by giving us a kind of abstract of his major concerns.

Pangle chose three of these concerns by which to group these pieces, namely, the spiritual crisis of modern rationalism, classical political rationalism, and the dialogue between reason and revelation. The spiritual crisis of modern rationalism, in Strauss's view, is related to its embrace of historicism and relativism, and its insistence on strictly maintaining the fact-value distinction. It fails to see things as wholes, to delve into what makes humanity complete, whole, and truly human. Relativism renders it incapable of directly dealing with the questions of truth about the

good and the just. Indeed, the idea of truth is abandoned, according to Strauss, along with the presumption that “man is a rational being who perverts his being if he does not act rationally” (33). A similar and more extended critique of historicism and relativism is found in his book, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953).

Strauss regarded Existentialism, particularly that of Heidegger and Nietzsche, as “radical historicism.” In a previously unpublished lecture, “An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,” Strauss pays homage to the importance of Heidegger’s thought. He sees in Heidegger’s existentialism the core of the relativist dilemma—that in the modern world, values are freely chosen, and thus groundless. As belief in progress is now also debunked by historical experience, we have a sense of profound unease as we encounter the moral abyss. Meaning and ideals are unsupported. Man himself is “a thrown project.” He lacks the ability to understand himself in light of the whole, his origin, or his end. His is an experience of lostness.

Strauss respects Heidegger not only for his profound insight into the logical implications of modern reason, but also for his critique of his own Existentialism. That critique ultimately led Heidegger to consider the Eastern understanding of Being as a way of understanding the limits of rationalism. For Strauss, this raises legitimate religious issues that are addressed in “the deepest root of the West,” the biblical tradition.

Yet, Strauss was not only concerned to find the limits of rationalism, but also to explore its extent, depth, and strengths, which he finds particularly in the Classical rationalism of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon (of whose work Strauss published two major studies), and Cicero. In the second section, this exploration begins with a review of Classical political rationalism in an excerpt from his book, *What Is Political Philosophy?* It continues with lectures on Thucydides, and on “The Problem of Socrates.” These lectures are the core of this book.

Classical rationalism and political philosophy regarded autonomous reason as the most reliable way of discovering truth, and regarded the life of the philosopher as the highest life. The concern of the philosopher is with such questions as, What is the good? What is virtue? What is the best form of rule for human beings in society? It found the best form of rule to be rule of the wise, whose superior judgment and practical wisdom qualifies them to determine how others in the political community ought to live. Nevertheless, rule was seen not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to encourage and protect the philosophic life as a higher life than political life. The philosopher’s aim was understanding of the whole. But attainment of this aim could not necessarily be expected. The knowledge of the philosopher is always provisional, even when the aim is knowledge of the absolute.

As the title of this collection suggests, Strauss’s project was the rebirth of classical

political rationalism. Strauss lauds the philosophic life. In Classical political rationalism Strauss sees an antidote to the problems of modern political rationalism, which stem from the Enlightenment and the rejection of the classical tradition by such men as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and later thinkers. This rejection he analyzed in *Natural Right and History* and in other studies.

Strauss was aware that the religious life was also a way of dealing with the dilemmas of modern rationalism. And in the third part of the book, the essays explore the relation between the autonomous reason of the philosophic life, and the life of faithful response to revelation.

Beginning with an essay on Plato's dialogue, the *Euthyphron*, Strauss explores the philosopher's complex relation to Greek piety. And in the essay, "Progress or Return?" he reviews the traditional arguments to prove and disprove philosophy and theology as sources of knowledge. He notes the arguments are inconclusive, and adds: "I would say that all alleged refutations of revelation presuppose unbelief in revelation, and all alleged refutations of philosophy presuppose faith in revelation. There seems to be no ground common to both and therefore superior to both." He concludes that "the quest of evident knowledge is based upon an unevident premise," and "the choice of philosophy is based on faith" (269). This means that there is an inherent tension in Western societies which Strauss finds to be the source of vitality. And he thinks that philosophers and theologians ought to be open to each other's challenges.

Strauss was sensitive to issues of interpretation of ancient texts. A few of the pieces in the book raise these issues explicitly, with particular reference to the distinction between esoteric and exoteric arguments of a thinker's work. That distinction arises, Strauss reasons, when a thinker feels the need for caution in openly stating his meaning, and so must disguise it from all but the most discerning readers, or when he presents a popular and edifying teaching on one level and a deeper philosophic argument between the lines. His well-known essay, "Persecution and the Art of Writing," from the collection of the same title, explores these themes also, and offers some hermeneutic rules for esoteric interpretation. Readers familiar with Jesus' reasons for speaking in parables in Mark, or with apocalyptic literature in the Bible will not find this strange.

Pangle has included a helpful introduction, and also a bibliography with suggestions for further exploration of the themes of each piece in this collection elsewhere in Strauss's work. Of particular interest to some readers of this journal may be his published correspondence with Gadamer about *Truth and Method*.

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LUTHERANS AND THE CHALLENGE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, ed. by Frank W. Kloss, C. Lynn Nakamura, and Daniel F. Martensen. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990. Pp. 197. \$14.95 (paper).

Through committees, study groups, and publications, Lutherans have recently joined the discussion about Christianity in relation to the other world religions. This book is their latest venture into the new territory of interreligious study. Composed of five chapters by leading seminary and college professors, this book marks a first for American Lutheran educators.

In an entry that constitutes over one-third of the contents, Roland Miller argues that the mission field has come home to America, bringing increased contact with other religions and the need to understand them better. To that end, Miller presents the basic, distinctive, central element in six of the major world religions. Interestingly, Miller argues that, while we can discuss points in common among the religions, it is their "core intuitions" that are important, knowledge of which can help Christians "advance in their effort to develop an appropriate attitude and approach toward people of other faiths" (10).

Wi Jo Kang describes how community is understood in the various religions and

in Christianity, and suggests ways Christians can be good neighbors to people of other religious groups. He pleads for Christians to “take other people’s religious beliefs seriously,” and to help them “find a new community of faith in which cultural diversity is accepted as the enrichment of the whole human community” (76).

Claiming that Jesus is a “figure of world historical significance” (104), Carl Braaten sketches the picture of Jesus held by four major world religions. This “step in the direction of a possible christological interpretation of other religions” (121) can help us get at the “soteriological center, the core intuition of each religion” (122). In spite of the different notions of salvation, there is one absolute Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, who is “unique because of his unsurpassable universal significance” (136).

Pluralism has raised serious problems with Christianity and its claim to speak the truth about reality. Paul Sponheim’s chapter argues that Christian faith is true inasmuch as it meets the tests of coherence, correspondence, and “the power of the future.” At the same time, although other religions may have different notions of truth, rejecting language, logic, and Christian eschatology, it is important that Christians be open to the plurality of viewpoints around them.

In the final entry, Paul V. Martinson outlines three phases in relationships among the religions: (1) a discovery of what is held in common, (2) an awareness of differences, and (3) a willingness to change. He suggests that the mission of Christians is to practice relationship through worship that praises the God who desires that all be saved, through evangelism that offers the gospel to all, through dialogue that shares convictions, and through participation in all the circles of public life.

This book is not so much a Lutheran theology of world religions as a survey of selected topics in the subject by several Lutheran scholars. It lifts up important Lutheran themes that interface with other religions, such as salvation through Christ alone through faith alone, and the coherence of God’s cruciform nature. Other pertinent Lutheran dogmas are given no significant attention, e.g., Luther’s theology of the cross, Lutheran belief in general revelation, and Luther’s frequent use of dialectical thinking. In most of the chapters, there is no conscious, systematic development of the particularly Lutheran foundation in the arguments set forth.

However, as a book designed to “encourage congregations to reach out in friendship to members of other faiths...without compromising our Christian convictions” (vi), this collection of essays could be an excellent initial resource for congregational use. It respects exclusivist sentiments held by many Christians, while nudging open the door to the wider religious scene outside. It contains a great amount of helpful information about the world religions, presented in a style readily accessible to the layperson. It gently urges Christians to prejudge less, and listen more; to witness, yes, but also to be willing to change.

Carl Braaten observes, “Today, Christians are being challenged to make sense of their confession in their contemporary encounters with other world religions, ideologies, and worldviews” (105). This pioneer volume can help believers “make sense” of their faith as they re-envision it in the midst of the current pluralism.

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THE FREEDOM OF A CHRISTIAN: LUTHER'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY, by Eberhard Jüngel. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988. Pp. 112. \$9.95 (paper).

In this monograph Eberhard Jüngel, Tübingen systematician, explores the significance Luther could have for contemporary theology, especially as set forth in Luther's treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian*. The contents of this brief book were initially given as a paper at the Lund Congress of Luther researchers.

In three chapters Jüngel provides a thought-provoking analysis of contemporary theology, explores Luther's potential contribution to our contemporary theological enterprise, and explicates Luther's treatise with particular attention to his distinction between the "inner *Mensch*" and "outer *Mensch*." Jüngel has paid clear and careful attention to Luther's own writings and Luther scholarship, while providing his own clarifying and stimulating perspective for our day.

In chapter one Jüngel asserts, "If contemporary theology has any central theme at all, it is Christian freedom" (19). Our theological task, therefore, is to establish a doctrine of Christian freedom that is responsible both to our present reality and to the truth as revealed in Scripture. Jüngel feels this is a particular problem for contemporary theology, which tends to be so linked to present reality as to be easily divorced from its obligation to truth. He explores how Luther can help us do our theological task responsibly.

As we inquire into the truth of Christian freedom, we are tied to the question of the mystery of the person of Jesus Christ. Jüngel's is a christological formulation, done by properly distinguishing (as Luther would) between God and humanity. As a chapter one subtitle so aptly recalls for us, "We Are to Be Human and Not God. This Is the Summa."

Jüngel's use of Luther's distinctions in chapter two is particularly rough going for the reader, as the discussion moves from the invisibility of God to the hiddenness of God. God is the absent One who is present, the invisible One who self-determined to become manifest under God's own opposite, the hidden One who becomes identifiable as the One who sees better than we do. Faith is our relationship to this other One.

And, of course, we are therefore dependent upon the Scriptures. For those engaged in the diverse exigencies of parish ministry, Jüngel reminds us that our main task is exegesis.

If Luther can have any significance at all for theology-in whatever present moment-then it is above all his reminder of theology's fundamental dependence upon the text of Holy Scripture to be interpreted. Fundamentally and to the very last, theology is exegesis. (30)

According to Luther, humanity is defined by the event of Jesus Christ encountering it. We are therefore justified by faith, and our lives are lived in the tension between sin and righteousness. The "not-yetness" of our state means that, in Jüngel's words, "God is doing construction upon humanity" (46). Jüngel has now created a proper setting to discuss in chapter three the contemporary implications of Luther's treatise on Christian liberty.

Jüngel deals extensively with Luther's basic anthropological distinction between "inner

Mensch” and “outer *Mensch*.” He discusses ways it has been misunderstood and explicates Luther’s unique contribution in assigning both human freedom *and* human bondage to the “inner *Mensch*.”

Once the proper distinctions have been established between God and humanity, and between inner and outer self, Jüngel develops the theme of Christian freedom. This freedom results from the exchange between God and humanity which regenerates the inner, and then consequently directs the outer person.

And just as the inner man’s conformity with God is mediated sacramentally through the being of Jesus Christ and his office, so Jesus Christ as *example* becomes normative if the outer man should be conformable to the inner man, and by this means conformable to God as well. (Jüngel’s italics; 78)

In translating Jüngel’s work, Roy A. Harrisville used the terms “inner man” and “outer man” rather than some inclusive alternative. I appreciate the difficulty cited by Harrisville in his translator’s preface

page 201

concerning a proper translation of the German *Mensch* within Jüngel’s complicated sentence structures. The challenges to inclusivity are not easily resolved, but certainly must be resolved. Since Jüngel is dealing with the contemporary theological theme of Christian freedom, the preponderance of the generic “man” seemed poignantly inappropriate. Moreover, since language is integral to the theological enterprise, I question whether a work which resists linguistic inclusivity effectively addresses the concerns of contemporary theology. However Harrisville has, on other counts, provided us a very readable translation of this German theologian who boasts that his writings cannot be translated into English.

Jüngel suggests, in one of his lengthy footnotes, that it is surprising that we do

page 202

not have exegetical commentaries on Luther’s main treatises (footnote 1, chapter three). Jüngel’s exposition of Luther’s treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian* illustrates the potential contribution such scholarship could make.

This book is also an introduction to the themes which Jüngel treats at length in his other works. Some consider Jüngel one of the most provocative contemporary theologians. Harrisville considers him a powerful voice that deserves to be heard.

This brief book is not easy bedtime reading. One must make her or his way carefully through a very tightly-written monograph which has deep theological implications. Yet, for all the difficulties in reading, one is struck by the significance of the task. It is a challenge more fruitful than not. Unlike many self-help, non-theological, “good idea” books being packaged and peddled for the church today, this book is a stimulating theological enterprise that has significant concrete applicability.

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REVELATION, by Eugene M. Boring. Louisville: John Knox, 1989. Pp. 236. \$18.95.

The bizarre array of beasts and dragons, horsemen and harlots which haunt the pages of Revelation can constitute a pastor's nightmare. With relentless regularity parishioners request that the book be studied, while pressing questions sparked by sensationalistic books, tracts, and broadcasts on the imminent end of the world. One response is to shun the book as a hopelessly confusing source for misinformation and fantasy; but in so doing we finally surrender the book to the whims of popular imagination. Another response is to lay claim to the book as a part of Scripture and accept the challenge to interpret it in a responsible manner. Those who take up the interpretive challenge will find Boring's commentary in the Interpretation series a welcome companion.

Boring begins by stressing that the book of Revelation is a *letter* written for seven congregations in Asia Minor (Rev 1:4). Like the letters Paul wrote to Corinth and Thessalonica, Revelation speaks about the future in ways that address the needs of specific congregations known to the author. Therefore, we first must try to understand what Revelation said to Christians living in the first century, and only then ask what it says to Christians in the twentieth century. "Just as we will certainly misunderstand Paul if we ignore the particularities of the situation in first-century Corinth, we will misunderstand Revelation if we read it as though it were written directly to us" (7). The book does have a message for the twentieth century, but the way we can discern that message responsibly is to begin by listening to what the book said in the first century.

The challenges facing the seven churches are presented in Revelation 2-3: some faced persecution, others had difficulty with false prophets, and some were threatened by their own prosperity. Behind all these challenges was the fundamental question of what it meant to be a Christian in a period of friction with local synagogues and ominous pressures to conform to the predominant culture of the Roman empire,

page 203

which included worship of the emperor (8-23).

The message John sent to the churches does not provide a straightforward, linear description of events. "It moves forward as a kind of impressionistic, interrelated spiral, bringing previous scenes before the imagination in new and intensified light, but never in some predictable, diagrammable way" (32). The dark prospect of suffering surges grimly through the book, but is regularly broken by brilliant visions of hope, which affirm "not only that salvation awaits the believer in the eschatological future but that salvation is already experienced, in an anticipatory way, in the here and now, in the midst of troubles and not only at their end" (33).

Like other apocalyptic writings, Revelation was not concerned with the speculative question "Will there be an end of the world?" but with the burning issue, "Is God faithful?" (40). God had promised to bless his people, and their suffering sometimes could be interpreted as punishment for their own faithlessness. But in times of persecution it was precisely the faithful who suffered, which posed an agonizing dilemma. On the one hand, some might conclude that

God was unfaithful to his promises; on the other hand, some might think that God indeed wanted to help his people but was simply incapable of doing so. Revelation, like other apocalyptic writings, insists that despite the real and oppressive power of evil in the world, God remains in control (41). The book manifests “faith in the faithfulness of God in a situation which gives no indication of it in this world; it is faith’s ‘nevertheless’ when ‘therefore’ makes no sense” (42).

The visions of God enthroned and Christ as the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 4-5) are theological anchor points for the book. By repeatedly portraying the suffering Lamb as the conqueror, the book redefines what it means to win. Victory is won by faithfulness, faithfulness unto death (111). A helpful excursus in the commentary interprets Revelation’s violent imagery in this light. The images of horror reflect the context of persecution in which John wrote, and echo the biblical, apocalyptic, and mythic language of his time. Yet suffering ultimately is understood in light of the cross of Christ, who holds the keys to

Death and Hades, and will finally fling them into the lake of fire (118).

Expositions of individual passages of Revelation are done in the form of essays on whole pericopes, rather than as verse by verse commentary. The strength of this format-which is standard for the Interpretation series-is that it enables interpreters to identify the major issues in a block of material, without being overwhelmed by detail. The excurses on interpreting references to Revelation’s expectation that the end was near, the violent imagery, Satan language, and paradoxical statements of judgment and universal salvation present useful discussions of issues that pervade the whole book. Boring sometimes presents alternative viewpoints on issues and at other times simply gives his own interpretation. For example, he does acknowledge that some interpret the 144,000 in 7:1-8 as Jewish Christians, while presenting his own view that they represent the church as a whole. At the same time, he speaks of the “seal” given to the 144,000 as baptism, without noting that this interpretation is widely debated (129). Ideally, an interpreter will use Boring’s work in conjunction with another text which offers more commentary on individual verses. But even on its own, Boring’s commentary provides a reliable guide through Revelation’s bewildering forest of images to its dazzling vision of hope in God.

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