



CHRISTIAN ANTI-SEMITISM AND PAUL’S THEOLOGY, by Sidney G. Hall, III.
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

A horrendous event motivates Hall to rework Christian theology: 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis and they were aided and abetted by centuries of Christian anti-Judaism. As a result, the church’s credibility has been lost. A possible way out of this intolerable bind is the espousing of a theology which is inclusive of Judaism. The Christian church must be finished with hatred and persecution of Jews. Hall finds such a theology ready-made in two of Paul’s epistles, Galatians and Romans. He should be a competent guide for he did his doctorate in Pauline studies.

The first chapter exposes the anti-semitism which led to the Holocaust. Prominent anti-semites include not just Hitler and his cohorts but less well-known sympathizers like Henry Ford and Charles Lindberg. Undergirding the social phenomenon of anti-Semitism is Christian anti-Judaism, which has been alive since New Testament times. Auschwitz demands a critical look at this firmly entrenched Christian tradition to see if a post-Holocaust theology is even possible. A blended method utilizing symbols and history promises positive outcomes. For example, the cross which evokes negative responses from Jews can even so bridge the gulf which separates the Jewish and Christian communities. The result of a brief enquiry is: God, Jesus, and Israel all died on the cross. His choice of the cross for a test case is crucial since Hall intends to keep in place the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected.

Chapter two seeks to revise Christian perspective on the Jews. The Gospels’ portrayal of Pharisees in conflict with Jesus, and of Jews pressing for his death, are unreliable sources of information. They lead to a gentile evaluation of Judaism as a dead religion, superseded by Christianity. Church fathers, reformers and some more recent theologians all participate in what Hall terms dysfunctional theology in need of revision.

In the crucial third chapter Hall seeks to show how the traditional understanding of Paul misrepresents him as against the law and Judaism. Augustine and Luther skew subsequent Pauline interpretation by finding in him the answer to their own spiritual quests. Hall contends that Paul’s struggle is rather over the relationship between Jews and Christians. Paul is most consistent when understood as embracing both Judaism and gentile Christianity. Read in this light, Paul is neither anti-law nor convinced that Judaism is outworn.

Chapter four, A Study on Galatians, focuses on the role of Abraham in the two faiths. Jews share in the faith of Abraham by living in the law, and gentile Christians by living in Christ. The conflict Paul wishes to resolve in Galatians is not that of Jews who want gentiles to live in the law, but that of troublemakers (gentiles) who are enamored with the law. Paul rejects this infatuation as contrary to God’s intent. The law becomes a curse to gentiles who do not know how to keep it, while it is both natural and a blessing to Jews. Galatians is addressed exclusively to gentiles, but it is the Jews alone to whom he alludes as the Israel of God.

Chapter five, which is devoted to Romans, finds the central issue to be the relationship of

Jews to gentiles, rather than justification by grace through faith. The problem to be resolved is that some Jews, not a majority, were so exclusivistic that they could not accept Christian gentiles as God's people. Paul's gospel, that Christ was crucified and risen, was God's gracious act on behalf of gentiles. Paul nowhere asked Jews to accept this gospel for themselves, but he was considerably irritated that some Jews could not accept his gospel as appropriate for gentiles. The irony is that today it is some gentile Christians who are unwilling to accept Judaism as appropriate for Jews. Hall presses for an inclusive

page 215

Christianity which accepts Judaism also eschatologically. Paul's theology is God-, not Christ-centered. There is no christology here for Jews.

Two shorter chapters (six and seven) summarize what has already been stated and calls for a new post-Auschwitz christology. Christianity must be seen as *a* way to God not *the* way. This non-exclusivistic Christianity should relate in this same way to other religions as well. It can do so only if it centers on God rather than on Christ. Once propounded, our revised christology needs to be submitted to the Jewish community for a critical response.

What are we to say to this? The fact that Fortress published it says something already. We are in a new day. Time-honored traditions can now be openly challenged. Some may rejoice that the inner sanctum of the reformation, Romans and Galatians, is at long last being reexamined. Others may thank the author for openly challenging an anti-Judaism theology which has for too long prevailed in the church. Those of us involved in Christian-Jewish dialogue have for years wrestled with how to reject supersessionist theology without relinquishing the heart of the gospel. Hall is right in seeking a positive biblical and theological base for our recognition of Judaism as a living, viable faith. He is also right in expecting meaningful action on the part of churches to take the Holocaust seriously. Why, for example, were no investigations made to discover those who participated in the murder of Jews? Was even a single baptized church member disciplined or excommunicated for such heinous crimes? It is not surprising that we are so silent and ineffectual in responding to the current ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. For the most part our various churches have not really asked how their theologies work out in dealing with people of other faiths. How many Christians are in serious dialogue with Jews? Pastors and theologians can lead the way and will in the process be enriched. The faith story of Jewish people after so many centuries of persecution ought to interest us. After all, if the Jews cannot trust God, what makes us think we can? Christian boasting and overconfi-

page 216

dence have no place in our theology or practice.

Having said all this, it is grievous to have some major disagreements with Hall, most especially over his rejection of the christologies of all the books of the New Testament except Romans and Galatians. I hope I am not caricaturing him, but it does seem that he is left with a canon even smaller than Marcion's. Granted, Paul never met Jesus during Jesus' ministry, and he does not make much of Jesus' earthly life. But where will the church be without the Gospels and the rootedness in history which they demand? Maybe Hall is only desirous of avoiding other christologies, but his surely will not be a price most Christians are willing to pay to get rid of

anti-Judaism in their theologies. One matter with which we are in deep sympathy is his insistence upon the Jewishness of Jesus. This obviously must be rooted in Gospel materials. But how can we keep the Gospels and reject their christologies?

A second matter which Pauline scholars will have to decide is whether Hall's reading of Galatians and Romans is correct. I found it unconvincing. Most problematic is his supposition that Paul would be willing to be accursed and cut off from Christ just because a minority of Jews were opposed to his gospel for gentiles (Romans 9:3). Paul was an excitable person, but would it not have taken more than that to get him so incensed? Paul and the other apostles were of Jewish not gentile background. They began and continued to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah (a Jewish title). The current supposition of Hall and others that Christianity quickly became an exclusively gentile community simply does not fit the facts. The New Testament, though written in Greek, is full of Old Testament quotes and allusions. Even late books like Hebrews and Revelation presuppose considerable knowledge of the Old Testament in their readers; without it, they would be unable to get started in understanding these books.. Further, will removing such books from the canon get rid of the scandal of Christianity which Hall seeks to remove for Jews? Will not Christ crucified and risen, even if he is only for gentiles, preserve the essential stumbling block Christianity has always posed for Jews? Those who are not scandalized by this are well on their way to becoming Christians themselves. This brings us to another major problem with Hall's solution to an anti-Judaism theology, his inability to name or recognize Jewish converts to Christianity of whatever century, first or twentieth included. Are we compelled to go to such folks and remonstrate with them over their basic mistake in leaving Judaism, or do we welcome them as fellow Christians? Do we deny them their witness as to what Christ means to them? To do so to Matthew, Mark, and John, as he does, suggests that we do so to many brothers and sisters today as well. How many of us can do that?

Finally, does getting rid of anti-Judaism in our theologies necessitate espousing universalism? Can we not validate Judaism by trusting the faithfulness of God toward both communities of faith? Do not both Christians and Jews need to rely totally on the faithfulness, grace, and love of God? This is a central Pauline theme Hall does not emphasize. It boils down to deciding whether anyone's salvation is a human achievement or an undeserved gift of God. Both Romans and Galatians center around humanity's relationship to God, and both speak to this issue. Are we prepared to accept Paul's anthropology and hamartology as well as his christology? If human sin and rebellion are not very crucial, then christology and soteriology need not be - either.

Wendell Frerichs
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

GRACE AND GRATITUDE: THE EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY OF JOHN CALVIN, by B. A. Gerrish. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

It is curiously ironic that John Calvin's theology remains such a puzzle to its interpreters. At first glance, the *Institutes*, compact and clearly mapped by a detailed table of contents, might look like a cakewalk in comparison with the mountain of print produced by Luther or with the sometimes obscure works of the radicals. Yet Calvin

may be the most elusive of all the reformers. After more than a century of critical study, there is agreement about fundamental themes in Luther and the radicals, but historians cannot decide if there is a central thrust or a hermeneutical key to Calvin's theology. Hermann Bauke may have come as close as anyone when in 1922 he proposed that Calvin's theology coheres in virtue of certain formal elements: rationalism, the conjunction of opposites, and biblicism. Since then, a number of scholars have tried their hand at finding a red thread in Calvin, but none has been persuasive.

This fine book by Brian Gerrish is another run at the problem. As his title indicates, Gerrish proposes that grace and gratitude are Calvin's themes. To this end, Gerrish bravely tackles the question of Calvin's view of the Lord's supper as part of a larger effort: "I am even more concerned to show that the theme of grace and gratitude, presented in the words and actions of the Eucharist, shapes his entire theology and makes it from the beginning to end a eucharistic theology" (vii). According to Gerrish, the goodness of God in Christ and the thankful heart of the believer are the place where Calvin begins and ends.

To make his case, Gerrish presents three introductory chapters: one on piety, another on the human predicament and the work of Christ, and a third on the nature and function of the Word of God. These are brisk essays written in an accessible style. They can be read with or without resort to ample footnotes and an excellent bibliography which relate the discussion to existing scholarship. Those who know the earlier work of Gerrish will recognize his sure touch as an expositor, and few will read these pieces without profit.

The final chapters of this work are more detailed presentations of Calvin's views on baptism and the Lord's supper. The chapter on baptism is particularly welcome, all the more because the nuances of the various reformers' views of the first sacrament are often neglected in favor of attention to their debates over the Lord's supper. Gerrish presents here a historically informed interpretation of the relevant texts, strong in its elucidation of Calvin's changing views of baptism and the resulting stratification of argument in the *Institutes*. Perhaps more persuasively than anywhere else in his work, Gerrish argues that God's parental benevolence and God's evocation of a thankful heart in the believer are what make sense of baptism. This experiential element is so pronounced, Gerrish believes, that Calvin cannot find language for it. "He struggles to keep within a cognitive framework, but he ends up with language that has gone on holiday" (118). It may be language on the loose, but Calvin nevertheless puts it powerfully: "Let it be beyond controversy that God is so good and generous to his own that he is pleased for their sake to count among his people also the children they have produced" (122).

The centerpiece of Gerrish's work is his study of the Lord's supper, where Reformation debate, ecumenical interest, and congregational practice meet. Gerrish proposes that for Calvin the Lord's Supper is primarily a eucharist, a bestowal of Christ's presence through the agency of the Holy Spirit on believers who respond with a feast of thanksgiving. Along the way he provides a carefully worked out reading of the relevant history and reckons with Calvin's interlocutors in Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Zwinglian camps. Students of these traditions will have a good deal to consider here. Protestants and Roman Catholics alike will, for example, find themselves compelled to ask with Gerrish about how sacraments as promises received by faith rather than as rites effective in and of themselves (*ex opere operato*) comport with doctrines of election. Referring to the nineteenth-century debate between John Williamson Nevin and Charles Hodge,

Gerrish is honest enough to observe: “Hodge was a predestinarian Calvinist, Nevin a sacramental Calvinist, and their debate may make one wonder if it is possible to be both at once” (170). Lutheran readers, to take another example, will be left to wonder if their present practice, with its strong emphasis on the eucharistic motif and the communal character of the liturgical rites, is often not more Calvinistic or Zwinglian than authentically Lutheran. Emphasizing points of agreement between Luther and Calvin, Gerrish notes, however, that “Calvin diverges somewhat from Lu-

ther even when, like Luther, he sets giving and receiving, in sharp opposition. The outward form of the Sacrament, for Luther, was the making of a last will and testament; for Calvin it is a participation in a feast” (151). Readers who pause at the inclusion of Zwingli in the question will also want to read Gerrish’s essay, “Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther’s Controversy with the Swiss,” (*Journal of Religion* 68 [1988], pp. 377-395). In this piece, Gerrish argues among other things that the Roman Catholic and Zwinglian positions resemble one another in their emphasis on the activity of the church as the determinative factor in the Lord’s supper. Plainly this is a work with provocative ecumenical implications and with something to say about congregational practice. Liturgiologists of both Lutheran and Reformed traditions will certainly find more than a little to ponder. Advocates of a more recognizably Catholic Calvin will appreciate this interpretation and partisans of a eucharistic theology for Lutherans will be troubled both by Gerrish’s reading of Luther and the historical company in which they find themselves. One might wish that Gerrish had made some of this more explicit, but that would have been to exceed the task he set himself. In *Grace and Gratitude*, however, he does make a start when he offers what he calls “Six Calvinistic Propositions” (135). They deserve consideration and discussion.

Whether Brian Gerrish succeeds in establishing that grace and gratitude are the architectural elements in Calvin’s thought remains open to question. In that respect, this is a proposal for scholarly experts to debate. Equally important, it is a book for the rest of us, the labor of a fine historian at work on a great theologian.

Todd Nichol
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

THE CASE FOR CHRISTIAN HUMANISM, by R. William Franklin and Joseph Shaw.
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991. Pp. 270.

The theme and title of this book may mislead one that its subject is about an abstract argument. Quite the contrary, the authors provide examples and insight which grow out of and are meant to be implemented in Christian communities of faith. Franklin and Shaw’s documented thesis is worth setting alongside the spate of church growth books which tend not to pay as much attention to the rich resources which these authors find in Christian traditions of humanism.

Ah, Christian humanism! The juxtaposition of the terms, *Christian* and *humanism*, causes conflict on the extremes of the spectrum. Therefore, in the first part of the book the authors carefully trace the “erratic history of connotation” and make their case that Christian humanism

grows out of traditional, orthodox Christian faith rooted in the scriptures, encountered in eucharistic worship, and reflective of trinitarian theology. The remaining three parts of the book center exactly on the scriptural, worship, and theological contributions to Christian humanism. In the first part of the book, the definition of Christian humanism is clearly given and then skillfully woven through the topics in the rest of the book.

But humanism is not Christian, some on the Christian right or Moral Majority argue. So some audiences are hostile to the term as representing secular or atheistic humanism; they would delete “Christian” from “humanism.”

On the other extreme is the later development in the history of humanism which accuses religion or Christianity of dehumanization in society. On this side, the positive word is humanism apart from Christianity or religion.

But the authors propose an alternative to both extremes which purposely brings the terms together as a clear expression of the mission of the gospel for today’s world. The first sentence of the first chapter says, “The time has come to speak a clear word for Christian humanism” (3). The rest of the book speaks that clear word with illustrations from Bible, history, tradition,

page 221

theology, worship, and life of congregations and institutions.

In defining Christian humanism, the authors make clear this is not liberalism revisited but rather arises out of the central resources of the Christian tradition. From within the tradition that proclaims that God became human, the word became flesh, for all humankind, they are confident that Christian pastors and congregations have a transforming gospel to answer the question “what does it mean to be human?”—“...the gospel preached in the church is a revolutionary power capable of restoring persons to their full humanity” (204). They assert that Christian humanism “is a way of looking at and valuing men and women in the light of the definitive reality which is Jesus Christ” (219).

In Part II, the concern of humanism is traced in the Old Testament, in Jesus, and in Paul. In contrast to secular humanism which elevates the elite individual, the humanizing message of the Bible cares for the individual in community. In that community, the non-elites, e.g., the poor, the stranger, and the differently abled, also are humanized in a world that often dehumanizes them. Various biblical themes, e.g., justification, liberation/exodus, are explored for their contribution to humanization of life in the world.

“Coming Together in Worship” is the title of Part III and the authors suggest that this may be the most important section of the book. Again, the humanizing dimensions of eucharist (word and sacrament) are traced historically. A valuable quick historical tour touches on Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, and the Council of Trent, up through worship renewal movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, e.g., the Oxford Movement in England, Grundtvig in Denmark, the Iona community in Scotland, and the U.S. Benedictines at St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota. The purpose is to demonstrate a “eucharistic humanism” and “eucharistic model of the human community.”
Signifi-

page 222

cant to these models is how recovery of the more frequent celebration of communion worked

itself out in humanizing daily life in the dehumanizing environment of the emerging industrial age with its depersonalization. In this section, the communal contribution of the eucharistic community is to see the local congregation as “one of God’s highest and most humanizing gifts” (11).

In the final part, “Doing Theology in Christian Humanism,” the authors look at the Trinitarian doctrine of God and then seek to relate those Christian beliefs to spheres of Christian existence. This question guides their approach: “If that is the church’s doctrine of God, how can it enrich the human situation?” (179). A positive approach in all sections of the book is to eschew the fences between private and public, individual and society. They seek to talk about the rule of God, the concern of God for all human life whether in the private sphere or the public realm. “Christian humanism is a way of looking at human existence, including public life, from the standpoint of classical Christian faith” (204). Instead of seeing sanctification as a private spiritual experience, humanism which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit turns us to the value of daily life: “What needs to be emphasized today is that the Holy Spirit carries forward the process of humanization by sanctifying the ordinary elements of daily life” (228).

The book reflects an ecumenical diversity, concern with a good society, eucharistic worship, a high view of congregation and the ways in which Bible, liturgy and theology have humanizing power for daily life and society. One may quibble about examples chosen and the tilt of generalizations, but I was impressed by the new insights and perspectives gained when these traditional Christian resources were viewed through the lens of Christian humanism. The authors believe that Christian humanism arises organically from the Christian message and is a gift or a leaven meant to be in all spheres of life.

Mons A. Teig
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

RECKONING WITH APOCALYPSE: TERMINAL POLITICS AND CHRISTIAN HOPE, by Dale Aukerman. New York: Crossroads, 1993. Pp. 250.

Stanley Hauerwas states in his foreword: “I thought his earlier book, *Darkening Valley*, could not be surpassed in its power to help us see theologically what was at stake in the threat of nuclear weapons. *Reckoning with Apocalypse*, however, is even more powerful, as now Aukerman helps us see how our current politics is intelligible only as judged by God’s lordship.” I have found the new book, however, to be far less engaging than the former.

I had anticipated reading Aukerman’s book with considerable eagerness. I have often referred back to *Darkening Valley* (1981, now available from Herald Press), finding myself looking for one particular paragraph but then rereading several chapters more because of his engaging style of reflection on biblical texts. Aukerman is a Christian pacifist and I am not, at least not theoretically. His writing, however, opened up passage after passage for rethinking. Chapters on Cain and Abel, God’s laughter (Ps. 2), and twenty-nine other topics were a striking, unforgettable reading experience. He did not simply rehearse the standard passages in the arguments between pacifists and non-pacifists. Often I added a “but” after saying “yes” to his exposition, but rarely has my “yes” been expanded as far as it was in reading *Darkening Valley*.

One characteristic that drew me into Aukerman’s earlier meditations was the degree to which he refrained from locating evil in one place. In a chapter entitled, “Hitler and the Woman Caught in Adultery,” he stated:

We need to recognize that the strong tendency to see just one or a few as *the* perpetrators of vast crimes—Hitler, Stalin, Nixon—is the attempt to put the locus of wickedness and guilt at a further remove from our common humanity. (20)

Later in the same chapter he states:

“But what about Hitler?” is often put as the weightiest possible argument against Christian pacifism. If, however, we recognize the dark continuity between him and

page 224

us, we find ourselves without a righteousness that could give us the prerogative to execute the unrighteous. And with a sense of sin’s fearful dynamism, we know that our opposition to a tyrant is to be in continuity, not with the dynamism that compels tyranny, but with the transforming dynamism that is God’s grace. (24)

Aukerman’s new book, *Reckoning with Apocalypse*, has gripped me only half as strongly. There are again some striking expositions of scriptural texts, but that which Aukerman most passionately opposes seems further removed from him and, as a result, has left more room for me to respond with a “but.” The latter half of the book, Part III (“The Messiah’s Triumph”), contains the sections most like the previous book. For example, in the chapter entitled “Promise and Parousia” Aukerman bursts the bubble of all human possibility thinking:

Even if the human race achieves the most urgently needed improvements in attitudes and policies, the dark proclivities individually and collectively would still lurk....[A]ny such liberation would not resolve the problem of death. Even in a utopian world individuals would die, would at that point lose everything, and would be left out of the future. An individual contributes to the shaping of the future but after death has no part *as person* in that future....One cannot hope for an adequate redemption of humanity within history through transformation understood in terms of the Gospel because the Gospel itself goes against any such hope....Biblical hope has to do most basically not with what humans can actualize in relation to God but with what God will fully actualize in relation to humans....“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Humanity needed far more than the law and strict adherence to it, far more than ethical instruction, insight about living, and spirited encouragement. So extreme was the human predicament that the One who came from God had to die on a Roman cross. (206-210)

He rejects as unbiblical all theologies that diminish the sovereignty of God by overemphasizing either human capacity for good (as is common in liberal theology) or for evil (as is common in secular despair): “Either God is ultimate Thou, mightier than what destroys life, or humans are basically on their own, faced with the immensity of evil” (209); “[A] nonsovereign ‘God’ who is simply co-sufferer cannot be looked to for rescue” (209).

Aukerman clearly holds to a cosmic manifestation of the “Rule of God,” a breaking in that will be the end of history. Thus, one must “reckon with apocalypse.” He, however, keeps the cross in focus in an attempt to avoid triumphalism:

[In t]he crucifixion of Jesus...humans were permitted the power and “freedom” to move against God...[but t]hat move did not impose the insurgent will upon God but was taken up by God’s incomparably more determinative countermove of atonement and resurrection. What human defiance of God imposed, God in Jesus took freely to himself for the rescue of all. (222)

He also insists that apocalyptic hope is not escapist, for in order to participate in the collapse of the wrongness of the old, present principalities and powers, one needs to imagine their overturn; the biblical apocalypse provides such imagination (200-201).

The tension lines (i.e., “both-and” statements) that were clearly present in the earlier work are also present here:

To stand behind any dividing walls, as in racism, ethno-centrism, machismo, military preparation, or war, is to reject the fullness of Jesus’ reconciling work—what he has done and is doing. However, to recognize the urgency of reconciliation only for relations between creatures (but not for the relation to God) is also a rejection of that fullness. This latter departure from the Gospel and its “message” or “reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19) has characterized the main range of peace and justice efforts in the churches. (203)

But the tension lines are not nearly as well maintained in this later book. “Them-us” language creeps in far more often: “Within the churches a remnant, a confessing church, becomes a sign of hope” (203). Who is that remnant? Those “who in faithfulness come through campaigns of seduction or persecution aimed at eliminating them” (203). Who are the seducers and persecu-

tors? The answers vary from chapter to chapter but among their number is the “Pentagon, the White House, the Capitol” (216), the State of Israel (cautiously) and their supporters in conservative churches (less cautiously, chapter six), Billy Graham, Robert Schuller, and “The 700 Club” (62), and just about anyone who in any shape, manner, or form thinks that the darker side of the U.S. does not predominate over whatever contributions the U.S. may have made to the “right order of human life” (44-47). There is repeated talk about the “managers” of U.S. society, and, unlike the previous book, sarcasm appears from time to time (e.g., “St. George vanquished the dragon” [75]). Aukerman claims: “As persons and groups in that remnant live out their faith and hope, they become for others signs of hope, pointing to the future intended by God and to God’s actions bringing it to reality” (203), but, unfortunately, I think this book will attract few new members to the remnant. Perhaps that is the way most remnants prefer to have it. In any case, this book will primarily convince only the already convinced.

And that is most unfortunate, for Aukerman repeatedly joins the Bible in articulating a hope that will gather up all creation fully within the rule of God. There is stress on the cosmic,

all-inclusive character of the rule of God which has broken in and yet is hidden, but will be disclosed fully. As he points out, too often members of the church reduce the breadth of the gospel to themselves, to a vindication or rescue of the singular self instead of God's act of reconciliation toward the whole of creation. A test of whether or not such a reduction has taken place is to explore whom we are willing to imagine is the younger brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Can we imagine the one most unlike ourselves as the welcomed younger brother? The biggest sinner to come down the road in Aukerman's view, judging from his many references to him, is Constantine. It almost seems that he wishes the Father had never let him back on the farm.

Prophetic inclusivity (God's grace) should not be bought at the expense of prophetic judgment (God's wrath) in our witness, but neither should the reverse occur. The resolution of the tension is God's work. In *Darkening Valley* Aukerman, while focused on the threat of nuclear war, helped me explore that distinction while always holding both himself and me in the tension, our sin uniting us in a need for God's grace. *Reckoning with Apocalypse* often breaks the tension, perhaps most often by pointing too vociferously to the sins of others, namely all those Constantinians out there.

Richard Nysse
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

A WORLD LIT ONLY BY FIRE: THE MEDIEVAL MIND AND THE RENAISSANCE: PORTRAIT OF AN AGE, by William Manchester. Boston: Little, Brown, 1992. Pp. 292.

In the author's note, Manchester writes:

Complete at last, this book is a source of pride, which is pleasant, though in this instance somewhat odd. It is, after all, a slight work, with no scholarly pretensions. All the sources are secondary, and few are new; I have not mastered recent scholarship on the early sixteenth century. (xiii)

It has been said that one can never write the truth about oneself. If that is true, then the above passage by William Manchester must be the exception which proves the rule. The unfortunate accuracy of the author's assessment of his "slight" volume becomes more apparent as every page is turned. *A World Lit Only by Fire* displays a breathtaking lack of scholarship. Manchester clearly has "not mastered recent scholarship on the...sixteenth century." That a noted historian would take pride in this book is indeed "odd."

A World Lit Only by Fire is the author's portrait of the sixteenth century. As Manchester tells it, the 1500s is the story of a time when "the medieval mind" was shattered by "countless events and influences." "The shattering" was accomplished by two historical movements and one historic moment: the Renaissance, the Reformation, and Magellan's circumnavigation of the

globe. Each of these were in turn aided and abetted by the growing forces of nationalism,

humanism, rising literacy, commerce, and technological advances. For Manchester, the Renaissance chased back the shadows from a world that had been illumined only by the capricious fires of superstition, only to be followed by the Reformation, a “religious revolution—which destroyed the Renaissance.” “Finally, the exploration of lands beyond Europe...opened the entire world, thus introducing the modern age” (228-9).

A World Lit Only by Fire consists of three chapters. Chapter one, “The Medieval Mind” is background, setting the table for what is to follow. It is a brief (28 pages) survey of the medieval landscape from which the Renaissance and Reformation were to spring. In sweeping strokes, Manchester paints the picture of a “dim era,” “a God-ridden age” of Christian superstition. Manchester portrays the medieval centuries as “the Dark Ages.” Manchester notes that “modern historians have abandoned that phrase” (3) because it unacceptably skews interpretation of that era. Scholarly consensus aside, that is the picture he presents:

In all that time nothing of real consequence had either improved or declined. Except for the introduction of waterwheels in the 800s and windmills in the late 1100s, there had been no inventions of significance. No startling new ideas had appeared, no new territories outside Europe had been explored. Everything was as it had been for as long as the oldest European could remember....all knowledge was already known. *And nothing would ever change.* (26-7, emphasis in original)

Or again,

Before the dense, overarching, suffocating medieval night could be broken, the darkness had to be pierced by the bright shaft of learning—by literature, and people who could read and understand it. (95)

Chapter two, “The Shattering,” describes how the Renaissance began to break the darkness of that long medieval night, but was followed by the Reformation, which challenged both the Renaissance and medieval Christianity. Chapter three, “One Man Alone” is the tale of Ferdinand Magellan’s circumnavigation of the globe: “the crowning triumph of the age, the final, decisive blow to the dead past” (291).

Manchester’s narrative is a “mosaic.” He creates a comprehensive portrait by piecing together images of everyday life, overviews of the social and political realities, and descriptions of the major figures of the day — Erasmus, Luther, Copernicus, Henry VIII, Leo X, Charles V, Calvin, Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli, da Vinci, and others.

Manchester’s method of history focuses on the internal lives of the major figures, and the socio-economic impact they had. He investigates the “original motives” of figures but often ignores how those men viewed their own actions. After all, he notes, “the true drives of men are often hidden from them” (33).

This psychological approach is smug and leads Manchester to make errors. For example, regarding Martin Luther: he entered the ministry as an act of rebellion against his parents (137-8); “the dark doppelganger within him” was the result of “a terrifying Teutonic childhood” (156, 137); his theological struggles are termed “what might be called an identity crisis” (156); and his “revolutionary Protestant doctrine of justification by faith” was conceived on the privy as a result of his anal nature (139). Recent scholarship has shown that these conclusions simply

aren't true. For a corrective, see Heiko Oberman, *Luther: A Man Between God and the Devil*.

Manchester's psychological approach leads him into as much error regarding the persons he admires as those he hates. When describing Magellan's motives, for instance, he denies that anything so pedestrian as financial gain could have been the goal. "Desperately searching for sponsorship of his voyage, he may have feigned [financial] interest in the Spice Islands. *There is no proof of that, but it would have been in character*" (33, emphasis added).

As a result of focusing primarily upon inner drives and socio-economic results, Manchester ignores the ideas which were at stake in disputes. For instance, Luther's Reformation isn't really about theology or

page 228

church reform. It is depicted as a nationalistic eruption ("wrath was a red thread binding the Lutherans together") sparked by the "inflammatory, passionate, seditious, hot, furious...born hater" Luther, within whom there "lurked a dark, irrational, half-mad streak of violence" (181, 137).

The interpretation which emerges is biased and uneven. Manchester writes that "Reflective men make uncomfortable prosecutors. By nature and by training, they tend to see the other side and give it equal weight" (115). When Manchester judges the major figures of the sixteenth century, however, he often sees only one side. With some he sees only goodness and light: Erasmus, Henry VIII, Machiavelli, and Magellan. With others, only darkness: Calvin, Borgia, Charles V, and Luther. Because of this, Manchester must interpret parallel evidence in contradictory ways. To offer one of many examples, when Manchester recounts how Erasmus turned on his one time benefactor, the pope, he writes, "But he was no hypocrite. Nor, by his lights, was he guilty of treachery; betrayal as we know it was so common in that age that it carried few moral implications" (120). But when he relates how Calvin criticized a woman who had granted him sanctuary from persecution, he says "it is instructive to note that Calvin was an ingrate. He rebuked his protectress for including, as guests of her court, Bonaventure Desperiers and Etienne Dolet" (129). And when part of Magellan's crew mutinied he writes, "treachery was not only a capital offense; it was also shameful" (257).

Obviously, the problems with this book are many. Events are sometimes related inaccurately. The conclusions drawn from particular events are often questionable. The presentation of facts is selective and biased. The method used is dubious. Someone interested in this period of history could find better books. It is hardly conceivable that one could find a worse book.

Rolf Jacobson
Como Park Lutheran Church
St. Paul, Minnesota