



**THE CALL TO CONVERSION**, by Jim Wallis. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981. Pp. 190. \$9.95.

Jim Wallis has been there, lives there, and plans to be there for some time. “There” refers to those places in which God’s world and the church encounter one another head on. His Sojourners group has been variously described. I have read of Sojourners’ theology depicted as “narrow and selective Biblicism producing a theology of rancor, half truths, and division.” But others look to them as pioneers, restoring a biblical authenticity. That contrast is encouragement to read Wallis’ book on conversion in which concern for God’s creative love in the church and the world are made real. This reviewer read it with appreciation and edification.

To be sure, a Lutheran Christian would have responded more joyously to a clearer presentation of being born again in Christian baptism. That sacrament and covenant with God needs to be underscored. I also would have been helped by a lengthier discussion about conversion as a *process* of transformation for the “erring believer” and the “lukewarm community of faith” as described in the first chapter. Too many people consider conversion to be a one-time public experience, beginning their relationship with God and perhaps leading to social actions. Again, I am not excited about the balancing of evangelicals versus the liberal Christians in what is a comparison between fundamentalist preachers versus evangelical advocates for social justice. The word “evangelical” carries as many interpretations as does the word “conversion,” and many *evangelical* mainline Christians do not fit under the terms of Chapter Two. So much for the Lutheran shading.

There is positive and personal endorsement for the message of this book as it reminds all of us of our relationship to God in faith and service clearly related to present world issues such as economic justice and the threats of nuclear war. I express a genuine appreciation for a writing style that shares conviction without the arrogance of judgment or the super pious aloofness of the reconverted self-righteous. Reading brings a sense of communion in recognizing shared involvement in personal and political alienation. Individuals as well as the corporate church are challenged. Happily absent was any message of “Once I was bad; now I am good; join my holy club and cause.”

There is a clear denial of some kind of contrived step process from conversion to future action. We are challenged by charges of how we have betrayed the gospel and therefore lost power. Without damning the church, Jim Wallis shows its entrapment. If God is to work in Washington, D.C., and the rest of the world, then the church must regain its power. Such a conversion has to do with continuing compassion so the poor and those fearful of nuclear war are related to the church. We are called to identify with the poor, or rather to see dangers of labeling.

Thus, the call to Koinonia brings the church and conversion into focus. Acceptance, forgiveness, and renewal go beyond saving souls and establishing ethical principles. Wallis relates the prophetic to the pastoral. He has strengthened the call to worship, and he has

reemphasized the resurrection power of God. The Sacrament of Communion—The Eucharist—is underscored.

There are warm and real stories of knowing a time when an evangelical might consider “The Sound of Music” (about nuns and convents and faith) unfit to view, and there is frank description of the Sojourners group, too, frankly admitting their human failures and expressing relationship in identity with the church’s problems.

Identifying the broken fellowship with God and fellow believers as the root cause of personal and political alienation,

weakening the evangelism ministry of the church in the world, Wallis writes soberly:

Everything we mean by conversion must take human form and flesh in the place we call community. Such a life is more than the Christian’s only hope. It is also the world’s only hope (139).

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**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARABLES OF JESUS**, by Robert H. Stein. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981. Pp. 180. \$8.95 (paper).

For the pastor or inquiring lay person interested in acquiring a basic understanding of the parables of Jesus, Professor Stein’s book can be very helpful. While not attempting to be innovative—he often appeals to Jeremias, Linneman, and others—he does provide the newcomer to biblical studies with some excellent tools for the interpretation of the parables.

The ten chapters of the book are divided into two main sections. In the first Stein carefully leads his readers through the process of interpreting and understanding the parables of Jesus. Assuming little previous knowledge, he attempts to define “parable” in Chapter 1, contrasting popularly held notions with the use of *mashal* in the Old Testament and *parabole* in the New Testament. While acknowledging its incompleteness, he offers for convenience this general definition: “...a figure of speech in which there is a brief or extended comparison” (22).

Since parables apparently serve to conceal the truth (Mark 4:10-12) as well as to reveal it, Stein devotes his second chapter to a discussion of Jesus’ use of parables. He concludes that Jesus used them for three basic reasons: a) to illustrate his message, b) to conceal the message from those hostile to him, and c) to disarm his listeners.

Stein’s investigation then moves to the origin of the parables that appear in the New Testament; attention is drawn to their geographical locale, their authenticity, and the nature of their material. It is obvious to our author that the parables rose out of a Palestinian and often Galilean rural environment. He concludes that since they meet the “criterion of dissimilarity” or “distinctiveness” and share the language and content of the other sayings of Jesus, they must

certainly have originated with the master and not with the teaching of the Palestinian/Galilean church. Furthermore, he highlights the “real-life nature” of these parables and the skill Jesus used in telling them.

Chapter 4 provides a brief history of the interpretation of Jesus’ parables, from the period of the early church, through the Middle Ages, to the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, during which time the allegorical method was dominant. Chapter 5 continues with the modern period beginning with the publication of Adolf Jülicher’s first volume of *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* in 1888 and including the insights of C. H. Dodd and Joachim Jeremias, the contributions of redaction criticism, and the recent work in structural analysis and aesthetic criticism. Stein calls attention to some of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and in the course of the chapter establishes four principles essential to the interpretation of parables:

- I. Seek the one main point of the parable. Do not seek allegorical significance in the details of a parable unless it is absolutely necessary. (56)
- II. Seek to understand the *Sitz im Leben* in which the parable was uttered. (61)
- III. Seek to understand how the evangelist interpreted the parable. (64)
- IV. Seek what God is saying to us today through the parable. (70)

Using the parable of the Good Samaritan as his primary example, Stein demonstrates the use of these principles in Chapter 6. From a practical standpoint this chapter impressed this reviewer as of greater value than some of the others in that it provides a helpful paradigm for those engaged in Bible study as individuals or in groups.

In the second section of the book Stein deals with significant themes in the parables of Jesus: “The Kingdom of God as a

Present Reality,” “The Kingdom of God as Demand—The Call to Decision,” “The God of the Parables,” and “The Final Judgment.” For each theme a pericope is chosen and examined for its historical setting, its point in the first *Sitz im Leben*, and the interpretation of the evangelist; finally, some attention is given to other parables that share the same basic theme.

While the author’s primary concern is the discussion of parables, some other uses immediately come to mind. This introduction commends itself in several ways as an excellent tool for introducing lay people to the critical methods of biblical study: Stein goes slowly, takes one step at a time, and illustrates the points he makes; he is far from radical in his conclusions; he insists on the element of inspiration on the level of redaction; and, by establishing a broad foundation, I believe he may whet the beginning reader’s appetite for a deeper investigation. Furthermore, it could easily serve as a tool for the study of the synoptic gospels; repeated reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-35) would make this especially so in the case of Luke’s gospel.

Yet, from this reviewer’s point of view, this book is not without its difficulties. I feel, for instance, that Stein is hesitant in his discussion of the redaction of the parables by the evangelists. Although he does agree that the reconstruction of the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus is hypothetical (63), he does not seem to appreciate many of the real difficulties involved in determining the historical setting of these words (see J. Jeremias’ ten “laws of transformation” in *The Parables of*

*Jesus*, rev. ed. [New York: Scribner's, 1963], pp. 113-114). This is reflected in the inclusion of elements which may be redactional in discussions of the first *Sitz im Leben* (e.g. 85-90, 101-105, 122-124, 135-137).

He does not deal with the second *Sitz im Leben* of the parables, the oral period, for two reasons: a) while he attributes divine authority to the words of Jesus and the writings of the evangelists, he does not believe that the interpretations of the oral period have the same authority, and b) he believes that two hypothetical reconstructions would make the study more difficult. Furthermore, while the Markan, Q, M, and L materials used by the evangelists are identified in the text by Stein's own system of abbreviation, neither they nor their significance for the understanding of the parables are ever discussed. I certainly appreciate the difficulties involved in an investigation of this material and its transmission in oral and written form, yet, assuming that the parables had a certain degree of authority for their hearers at this stage of development as well, could not such a study teach us something about the authoritative interpretation of parables in our own time?

My advice is that you read this book, enjoy it, and learn from it; it is a good place to begin.

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**WHAT THE ANTI-FEDERALISTS WERE FOR**, by Herbert J. Storing with the editorial assistance of Murray Dry. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981. Pp. vii, 111. \$4.95 (paper).

Herbert J. Storing's book is as timely as today's news, for it takes up on its own and in the proper terms a familiar topic in our "public philosophy," the topic of federalism. But the proper terms for the discussion of the topic are not simply the same as those of our ordinary partisan debates about "big government" and the like. This book, issued separately here as a paperback, is in its hard cover version the first and introductory volume of *The Complete Anti-Federalist* (\$175.00, from the same publisher), Storing's annotated seven volume collection of the varied public utterances by the original opponents of our Constitution. The importance of what they said has remained obscure, in part for the lack of an edition of their work as good as Jacob E. Cooke's edition of *The Federalist*, that remarkable apologia for the Constitution. To *The Federalist*, as Jefferson once observed, "appeal is habitually made by all, and rarely declined or denied by any" when questions about the "genuine meaning" of the Constitution arise. But now, really for the first time and because of Herbert J. Storing's distinguished scholarship, we

have not only the *apologia* but its *sed contra*, the chief alternative to it, the most sustained, indigenous critique of the constitutional pattern of American politics. Now it is possible to turn to authoritative texts as the basis for re-examining the debate over the American founding and, in turn, for judging how well that debate clarifies for us the shape of political life in our day.

And *What the Anti-Federalists Were For* is likely to be the best guide for anyone who

undertakes such an examination. Storing takes the argument of the Anti-Federalists seriously, as an argument, and presents it in a lucid and succinct way, itself a major accomplishment, given the variety and fugitive character of their writings. He judiciously assesses the virtues and defects of their argument, locating it within the debate over the founding and in the life of the American polity. His aim, he says, is “to give a sympathetic, critical, and full account of the fundamental Anti-Federal position” (5); and for having done this so well, he puts reflective students of American politics permanently in his debt.

He shows that the Anti-Federalists were not, as their name suggests, merely the opponents of the Constitution but that their opposition rested upon a positive and rather well-developed view of what the American polity should be. Hence the title of his book. They were advocates of the “small republic,” as distinguished from the “extended” or “large commercial republic” celebrated by *The Federalist*, the creation under which we now live. And as we become ever more daunted by this fact of our lives, we have ever more cause to reconsider the extent to which the Anti-Federalists anticipated why we would be daunted. They favored the small republic for a number of reasons: that only it would engender the natural and voluntary loyalties to the regime without which citizens would be ruled by force and administrative fiat; that citizens naturally could be expected to comprehend only a small republic and keep it directly responsible to themselves, thereby preserving republican liberty; that only the small republic would foster in citizens the habits which republican government, that is, self-government, requires: a care for the “public things” and a government of the self. Their word for these habits was “virtue” and it falls somewhat strangely on our ears, even though theirs was civic rather than philosophic virtue, a counsel of prudence rather than a counsel of perfection; for today we are not likely to think that self-government depends in any way on government of the self.

That we no longer do so is itself tribute to the success of the Federalist project, for it has provided institutional substitutes for civic virtue: in a complex government, “opposite and rival interests” are set constitutionally against one another, while in the “large commercial republic” a like effect is achieved by the ceaseless competition of organized economic interests. In both cases, an intricate organization of selfish and mutually self-limiting interests can usually be counted on to overcome whatever moral defects there may be in citizens and office-holders alike. Such indeed is how we govern ourselves, though we cannot easily be edified by the raucous, divisive spectacle of it all. And withal, the Anti-Federalist question remains: is a community defined in terms of selfish interests a moral community? Herbert J. Storing closes his book with this question and, in doing so, he suggests a novel perspective on Hamilton’s celebrated jibe against the Anti-Federalists: “Let us not,” said Hamilton, “attempt to reconcile contradictions,” the contradictions involved in seeking the advantages of both the small and the large commercial republics. But Americans have not altogether ceased to do just that, to fret endlessly about the nation’s prosperity and yet also to expect the flowers of civic virtue somehow to grow in the harsh and unlovely commercial soil supplied by the Constitution, that Constitution “the first object of which” (as *The Federalist* puts it) “is the protection of the differing and unequal faculties of acquiring property.” So much for civic virtue: it cannot be expected to prosper under such conditions, and our hopes that it will are usually misconceived. But the hopes persist, and that they do is our enduring tribute to the Anti-Federalists. Their voice is not wholly lost.

It is Storing’s view, then, that our “country’s principles are to be discovered” in the “dialogue” between the

Federalists and the Anti-Federalists (72). If he is correct, it must be said that an arduous and exacting intellectual task awaits the prophets in our midst, whether of the right or the left, when they undertake to enlighten us about American politics. Their task is to show their auditory that they understand this dialogue and, therewith, the principled basis of American politics. If they fail to do that, they may still be left wondering whether their prophecy differs from ignorant partisanship. A melancholy conclusion.

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**THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING**, by Charles M. Wood.  
Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981. Pp. 128. \$8.00 (paper).

This is an important book for anyone who wants to learn more about Narrative Hermeneutics/Story Theology. Narrative or canonical approaches to theology are currently at the forefront of much theological discussion. These approaches show great promise, but require further clarification for both specialists and nonspecialists. Inasmuch as Wood's book draws heavily on the presuppositions of narrative approaches it is helpful for this reviewer to sketch some of these presuppositions.

Given the problems created for biblical interpretation by the historical-critical method, narrative theologians have sought to study and construe Scripture as a piece of literature, not as a source for reconstructing the history of the early church. The text, as given final canonical form by the Christian community, is deemed authoritative, and not some reconstructed original version of the text. Although it is acknowledged that this canonical text may be construed in a variety of ways, it is typically characterized by narrative theologians in terms of its narrative or story form.

There are some attractive consequences of this approach. An appreciation of Scripture's narrative form seems to offer an interpretive framework which can account for the chronological sweep of the biblical text and still provide a credible way of talking about its unity in our post-critical era. Additionally, attention to the literary character of Scripture provides resources for dealing with challenges to Christianity's credibility posed by historical criticism. On this basis it can be argued that like any piece of realistic literature, Scripture's meaning and significance are not contingent on its historical referentiality. Therefore, the biblical claims cannot be discredited by historical research, any more than the value of MacBeth is compromised by its lack of historical veracity.

Perhaps the most attractive feature of this narrative approach, though, is that it appeals to the common sense of ordinary Christians. This is particularly noteworthy in view of the fact that much contemporary theology is more academically-apologetically oriented. Some narrative theologians even go as far as to claim that Scripture means what it says, that in contrast to other narrative theologians like Paul Ricoeur, Scripture's meaning is not hidden under layers of depth meaning, accessible only to the specialists. Rather, most pericopes are thought to be accessible to ordinary Christians, at least those whose lives have been genuinely shaped by the Christian community and its concepts. Another practical consequence of this appreciation of Scripture's

narrative character is that it provides a viable framework for Christian nurture and for facilitating the gospel's relevance. Narratives and stories grasp our attention and shape our outlook on reality. The implication of appreciating Scripture's narrative character is that the biblical Word, when presented in the form of narrative-story, should be proclaimed and will function in the same engaging, compelling, and relevant manner in which any good story is told. Thus we are provided with a model which allows us to move from credible exegesis and academic theology to actual proclamation.

In view of the contributions this kind of narrative approach to theology can make, the publication of this book is an important event. The book is concerned with the hermeneutical question of defining what Christian interpretation and use of the Bible is. More than that, insofar as

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Wood embraces the narrative presuppositions just sketched, the book endeavors to answer some of the philosophical and practical questions which narrative theologians have not previously addressed in print. It is appropriate at this point to note a few of the important issues the book raises.

Wood's narrative/canonical use of Scripture is keenly indebted to the analytic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. His basic presupposition is that understanding is the ability to use the thing understood. Understanding is not merely an internal phenomenon experience as most contemporary theology has held. Thus, Christian understanding and proper canonical interpretation of the Bible entails being given certain capacities. For example, to understand the Lord's Prayer is to obtain the capacity to pray. In this way Wood offers a reasoned account of how the Christian faith and learning its concepts can be relevant to everyday life. Biblical and other canonical concepts (Wood believes that the two can be distinguished [108, 112-113]) provide believers with capacities or instruments whose acquisition opens new dimensions of human existence. They make it possible for Christians to love God above all things and to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Wood breaks new ground by developing points implicit in a narrative approach to theology. His contention that a narrative/canonical use of Scripture entails an appreciation of its great diversity indicates, contrary to his intention, how a narrative approach may be a useful resource for ecumenics (104-105). Its canonical view of Scripture provides a framework for understanding how there can be a unity among the various confessional positions. All may be deemed legitimately Christian insofar as they are rooted in Scripture. This appreciation of Scripture's diversity also shows promise for the construction of a useful pastoral theology for contemporary ministry. Parish pastors typically find that in order to do ministry it is necessary to articulate the gospel differently in different situations. Wood implicitly confirms this when he claims that fundamental theological concepts shape believers' lives only when they are exemplified in a mode of proclamation appropriate to the circumstances (77-78).

One static theological mode of articulating the faith (as is characteristic of many systematic theological approaches) may render faith irrelevant, an intellectual abstraction. By appreciating how Scripture provides innumerable supplementary examples and illustrations of its fundamental concepts, we are provided warrant for maintaining a pastoral theology which opts for articulating the gospel differently in different contexts. Finally, Wood breaks new ground in

his effort to place his own narrative approach in dialogue with the philosophical perspectival problems posed for it by the post-Kantian world-view. This perspectivalism, embraced by narrative theologians like Paul Ricoeur and most others, entails that a text's meaning is contingent upon the prejudices or perspectives of the interpreter. The problem with such a view is that if meaning is contingent upon one's perspective then Feuerbach's critique of Christianity would be indicated (i.e., ultimately all Christian concepts and their meaning are deemed contingent upon human experience). The interesting question is whether a narrative hermeneutic, or any contemporary theological proposal, can do theology in such a way that Feuerbach's conclusion is not unwittingly confirmed. Wood does embrace the generally accepted modern contention that understanding always depends upon our presuppositions, that a concept may be understood in a variety of ways depending on the presuppositions used (10, 52). Yet unlike most contemporary theologians he defines these presuppositions in such a formal way that he seems able to avoid Feuerbach's critique. One's interpretative presuppositions are not properly related to the interpreter's existential life-commitments. Thus, contrary to most narrative theologians, Wood can assert that even the non-Christian can understand what a text of Scripture means (18, 54). Apparently, then, both Christian and non-Christian can agree about what a text means. This seems to imply that the Word in Scripture stands over-against (independent of) the particular presuppositions and experience of interpreters. Contrary to Feuerbach, Christianity cannot be reduced to human experience. There are places in the book, though,

where Wood's ability to deal with Feuerbach is not so clear. His claim that Scripture's literal sense is different in different contexts is problematic (118). This suggests that the Word in Scripture does not stand over-against our experience of it, since its meaning is always contingent on the context of the interpreter. Despite the very suggestive efforts of Wood to take seriously our post-Kantian presuppositions about the perspectival character of truth and meaning, the jury is still out in regard to whether he has presented a theological model which avoids Feuerbach's critique. Wood's further clarification of this point will be welcomed, since coming to terms with this critique is still unfinished business for contemporary theology.

This review has largely dealt with technical problems raised by Wood's book. In regard to the clarification Wood offers on these issues alone, the book is valuable. However, the text is valuable for one other, more practical reason. There are parts of the book which are spiritually edifying for the study of theology where Wood lucidly describes how Christian understanding makes the Christian life possible. Among the great strengths of this book and the narrative approach it employs, then, are the resources and guidance which are provided to show how academic theology can inform the church's ministry. This book is worth the effort to read. In addition to providing an introduction to narrative hermeneutics, it will cause one to reflect on this all-important question of theology's relevance for and use in ministry.

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**GOD OR CHRIST?** by Jean Milet. New York: Crossroad, 1981. Pp. 235. \$12.95.

Jean Milet's *God or Christ?* raises a much neglected question for Christian theology. What ever happened to God? Milet carefully traces the historical process by which belief in a transcendent God, Lord of history and nature, gradually eroded away. When science and philosophy barred access to God through

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natural theology and speculative reason, faith turned to history. Finally even history no longer claimed to retrieve facts but only to show how the consciousness of a period reacted to events beyond our knowledge. In this vacuum, access to God could only be through blind commitment. Faith became involvement. But with no objective criteria left to guide it, this involvement could easily become commitment to a Hitler, a Stalin, or a Mussolini.

As it became more and more difficult to speak of God, Christian theologies spoke increasingly of Jesus. Where Christ once mediated the divinization of humans, he now became a means for the humanization of God. Christocentrism became anthropocentrism. The transcendent referents of all Christian symbols and sacraments disappeared. Baptism became a rite of initiation into a human group. Communion became a community celebration.

Milet decries this state of affairs for two reasons. First the erosion of belief in God undermines ecumenical discussion. While belief in God unites us with other religions, belief in Christ keeps us apart. Secondly, the anthropocentrism of Christianity endangers its ability to give transcendent meaning to human life. The religious function of Christianity is in danger because it now blocks rather than mediates participation in the sacred. Since it now locks persons into their own human horizons, Christianity has become oppressive.

After Milet's historical account of the devastating defeat of theocentric belief, one wonders how it would be possible to bring about its return. Milet bases his hope for the resurgence of theocentricity on two points. First, science which once closed off access to God through natural theology is once again recognizing a logos character to the universe. One might at first wonder why theologians should excitedly follow crypto-theologians expounding on grounds of physics theological postulates which have long been laid to rest in open theological combat. But ironically, once the religious character of these scientific statements is recognized, Milet's argument becomes stronger. Where as scientists their crypto-theological statements were illegitimate, as priests of the present public mythology their statements have theological significance. They indicate the opening of possibilities for participation in a genuinely transcendent sacred, not within science as a discipline, but within science as a public western mythology.

Secondly, Milet points to popular religious experience. In the piety of Africa and much of the Americas the emphasis on the transcendent, miraculous, and theocentric character of Christianity is still primary. Milet hopes that out of this popular base a new theocentric emphasis will arise.

I believe Milet is right in placing his primary hope for a revival of theocentric belief on religious experience. For all its ambiguity, it is the past and present experience of revelatory, sacral manifestations which remains the primary ground for theological reflection. But any theology which seeks to use popular religious experience as a base for the revival of

theocentricity opens a Pandora's box. Milet does not answer Feuerbach's devastating argument that sacral manifestations look suspiciously like projections of the human on the sky. Because people do not recognize themselves in these projections they give them ultimate authority. Thus people come under the tyranny of their own projected images. Even if our experience of the sacred cannot be reduced to the very human clothes we give it, Feuerbach's description of its oppressive possibilities still stands. Any theology which builds on religious experience must take seriously its ambiguous character. It must seek to provide a mode of liberation from the oppressive effects of the sacral manifestations it unleashes.

It is at this point that Christian theology has something to say. What is specifically Christian is the limit placed on the universal experience of the sacred by the concrete occurrence of Christ's crucifixion. Christian identity is located in a casualty of the oppressive function of our own tradition's perception of the sacred. When the victim of sacral tyranny is itself perceived as sacred, the oppressive effect of the sacred comes to an end. The participation of our identity in that casualty and subsequent resurrection should prevent us from placing ourselves under the heteronomic tyranny of ultimate sacral

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demands. Thus the event of Jesus Christ does not displace the sacred. In fact it is this event which allows the retrieval of a liberating theocentricity based on the universal experience of the sacred. Jean Milet's refreshing book points to a much needed change of direction for Christian theology.

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**THROUGH PEASANT EYES: MORE LUCAN PARABLES, THEIR CULTURE AND STYLE**, by Kenneth E. Bailey. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980. Pp. xxiii + 187. \$16.95.

Parable interpretation continues apace, and many are the proposals concerning how best to do the interpreting. The goal of Bailey is to discern "the original Palestinian setting, along with the timeless theological context" (x) of each parable under investigation. In this regard Bailey stands in part within the tradition of C. H. Dodd and J. Jeremias, who also sought to understand the meaning of the parables of Jesus in their original contexts. But his concern to elucidate the "timeless theological content" of the parables is a decided shift away from the earlier pioneers—at least in the amount of space he devotes to it. He wants to get at "the decisive pay-offs of the material" (xxiii).

Bailey is a seasoned interpreter of the parables. His earlier book, *Poet and Peasant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), offered a proposal for parable interpretation, but it also contained analytical, interpretive treatments of four parables in Luke's Gospel. In both books the approach is a "literary-cultural" one, in which the interpreter gives careful attention to the literary structures (poetic forms, inverted parallelism, and the "parabolic ballad" form, as Bailey calls it) and also to those elements of Middle Eastern culture which the parables reflect. Bailey has lived and worked for some thirty years in the Middle East (he is currently a teacher in the Biblical Department of the Near Eastern School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon). He has carried on

discussion of the parables with Arab Christian students and other friends whose roots are in the conservative village communities of the Middle East, and he has made use of two dozen Syriac and Arabic translations—since all translations are also interpretations—ranging from the second to the twentieth centuries, plus commentaries written by Arab Christians. Furthermore, he makes use of modern parable studies (especially Jeremias) and commentaries on Luke (especially A. Plummer and I. H. Marshall).

The study is devoted to ten parables in the Gospel of Luke. The author is able to offer insights which are missed by interpreters in the West. For example, in the case of the Great Banquet (14:15-24) he is able to show vividly the offensiveness of the excuses made by those invited to the banquet (to go out and examine a field recently purchased, to test five yoke of oxen, and to be with one's bride); it is not the case that law or Palestinian culture allowed for such excuses or exemptions to take priority over the second invitation. Again, in the case of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14) Bailey builds a strong case for the view that it is not private prayer in the Temple (the usual interpretation), but the daily atonement ritual (public prayer) which is portrayed, and that when the Pharisee prays *pros heauton*, he is not praying "to himself," but "by himself"—apart from the gathering of other worshipers, despising them. And, again, the parabolic saying on the Camel and the Needle's Eye (18: 18-30) cannot be softened by claiming that there existed a certain small passageway in Jerusalem (or elsewhere) known as the "Needle's Eye" through which a camel could be shoved with some effort. That interpretation goes back only to 1835. There is no evidence that a portal ever existed by such a name, and there is no hint that a portal would have been signified by that term in any Near Eastern language any more than by our own. A needle's eye is a needle's eye, and "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

There are places at which it appears that information stops and speculation sets in. The treatment of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37) is a case in point. The author fills in the picture with details like the following: the priest who comes on the

scene is "most certainly riding" (43); "the Levite almost certainly knows there is a priest ahead of him" (46) and therefore follows the example of his superior; and the courage of the Samaritan is demonstrated "when he stops in the desert (for the thieves are still in the area)" (53); and so on. The result is that the parable is seen to be a narration of a purported historical event. It is of course possible that the parable was based on such. But it is equally possible—even more likely—that Jesus was a grand storyteller who composed the whole thing, using the familiar "rule of three" (used, for example, in ethnic jokes—the Englishman, the Irishman, and the Scotsman, etc.), and therefore it is not appropriate to reconstruct "what happened" and to second guess the motives of the persons in the story. It should be said, however, that Bailey does not "historicize" other parables in the way that he does this one.

To seek and spell out the "timeless theological content" of the parables—one of Bailey's goals—sounds risky. The history of parable interpretation shows how dated the interpretations of the past have been, and therefore we should expect that our own interpretations will be colored by our own times, locations, and cultures. Nevertheless, the parables do have a "theological content"—they express this, and not that—and certainly it is a worthy goal to try to get at that content. Bailey does not derive flat propositions from the parables (as the "one point" approach

sometimes does), but writes instead of the “thrust” of a given parable and the “cluster of theological motifs” which it conveys. In reading through these it is difficult to fault him. There is a healthy openness about his procedure. The reader is not told that the “point” of a parable is such-and-such—which any intelligent person obviously ought to see—but is introduced to a thrust and its associated motifs, which are listed, but which could be expanded upon by the reader.

This is a fine book. It could be written only by a person who is familiar with the cultures and traditions of the Middle East and who has fluency in the languages. The church and theological scholarship are ecumenical (in the trans global sense of the term), and this book shows how important that is in the interpretation of Scripture. Our exegesis can be enriched by this book, and our preaching on the parables discussed can be more informed and more sharply focused through using it as a resource.

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**BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO PASTORAL COUNSELING**, by Donald Capps.  
Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981. Pp. 214. \$9.95 (paper).

Use of the Bible in pastoral counseling is a controversial subject to which the author brings prudence and conviction in presenting his view. His approach is twofold: a review of literature on the subject, and the application of modern biblical scholarship to key issues faced by most pastors in counseling situations. The material is divided into four chapters, fairly even in length, but uneven in their degrees of appeal and insight.

Chapter 1, “The Bible’s Role in Pastoral Counseling,” develops the relation between the Bible and pastoral counseling begun in the Introduction, where the *role* of the Bible is asserted and the *nature* of this role is questioned. Most of the chapter is a straightforward review of attitudes over the past fifty years, under headings of “emerging consensus,” “European interlude,” “conservative developments,” and “moderate resurgence.” Many disparate opinions are brought together in a concise way and the research is thorough. Yet, the material is simply related; there is little interest in critique except in the case of William Oglesby, whose indifference to the variety of oral forms and literary genre is in direct contrast with the method employed by Capps. He wishes to show that the biblical *form* itself is creative of material for the counseling session, but that one must choose the form judiciously so that it harmonizes with the specific present purpose of the counselor: comforting, instructing, diagnosing. Capps has carefully selected three biblical forms which he believes correspond to these needs: psalms (Ch. 2), proverbs (Ch. 3), parables (Ch. 4).

In his discussion of the use of psalms in grief counseling, Capps concentrates on psalms of lament in their formal structure, which includes six elements: address to God; complaint; confession of trust; petition; words of assurance; and the vow to praise. It is characteristic of the lament to discourage specific personal references, and this makes it particularly useful as a means

by which others may identify with the original lamenter. Capps discusses the problem of vindication, the co-lamenting of the mediator, the lament of God, and the relationship between pastoral and prophetic ministry which the structure of lament uncovers. He explores the structure of the grief experience relative to the structure of the lament, showing an interesting parallel between the latter and the stages of grief explicated by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. The superior function of the biblical form is evidenced. In Kubler-Ross' structure, *bargaining* is followed by *depression*, at precisely the same point where, in the psalm lament, the *confession of trust* leads to *petition*. Finally, while the former model moves from depression to acceptance, the lament proceeds from petition to confidence and praise. The material on grief counseling engages the counselor in the process in a John-the-Baptist way—as a remover of barriers, not as the healer. It also sustains the integrity of the inter-relatedness between form and function.

Similarly, Capps' choice of Proverbs as a suitable biblical form for pre-marital counseling demonstrates the need for structure as vehicle for spirit. Following a rejection of the negative approach to Proverbs advocated in the nouthetic counseling of Jay Adams, the author attaches himself to the strategy of Gerhard von Rad, namely, the *observation of order* and *cause-effect reasoning*. He argues from the “doctrine of the proper time,” that one should use Proverbs to illuminate positive aspects of the moral commitment the couple is preparing to make, to elicit confidence in the moral order of life, and to be more directive in an educative way. This chapter is filled with insights and interdisciplinary references. One senses, however, that the theories of Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg, perceptive and related as they are, tend to obscure the form/content emphasis of Proverbs and its potential for pre-marital counseling.

Such is not the case in the final chapter where Capps draws upon the Gestalt theory and the work of Carl Rogers to demonstrate the perceptual reorganization at the root of parables. Rather, attention to these modern views highlights the divine referent as something ordinarily alien to consciousness and only perceivable beyond theory and within the metaphorical event itself. In this section, analysis is profound, but application of parables to marriage counseling is weak, for one has the impression that a reversal is really taking place: extrapolation from the counselee's experience is being read into the parabolic experience.

Overall, however, this is a study worth pondering. It avoids past moralizing and pseudo-psychology and promotes discriminant use of the Bible as a way of inviting the counselee to participate more fully in the saving Word. This participation views the Bible as a font of inexhaustible divine metaphor directed toward undoing the distortion of the world and giving direction to human life. Since this, too, is the goal of pastoral counseling, Professor Capps makes a strong case for the role of the Bible in this ministry, a role which reveres the biblical word as the authority of God, and not as a function of the authority of the counselor.

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**LUTHER AND THE PAPACY: STAGES IN A REFORMATION CONFLICT**, by Scott H. Hendrix. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981. Pp. xxii + 211. \$14.95.

In the face of the achievements of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue and various joint celebrations of the Augsburg Confessions, this study is at once timely and informative—the first thorough treatment in English. The basic scope of the work is the development of Luther's attitudes toward the papacy from October, 1517 to 1522.

Hendrix regards the indulgence controversy to be the stimulus to Luther's engagement with the question of papal authority. Indulgences were not only the special domain of the papacy; the papacy had also expanded them to include the claim of granting forgiveness itself. This claim seemed to Luther to undercut the possibility of true repentance and true religion. But what was a deep pastoral and religious concern for Luther was converted by the defenders of indulgences into a debate over papal power. Tetzl, Wimpina, Prierias, Eck, and Cajetan alike accused Luther of attacking the papacy and made this to be the heart of the matter.

Luther was thus drawn into debate on the papacy because he was pushed there by his opponents. Yet his shift was gradual, even slow (allowing for the speed with which the whole case moved). During the year 1518 his loyalty was being undermined by the failure of the papal spokesmen to give scriptural, patristic, or rational arguments regarding the religious questions he had raised. No conciliarist or scripturalist, he tried to maintain papal loyalty in public, although his reservations in private increased. Not until 1519 did he write directly on papal power (*Explanation of Proposition Thirteen Concerning the Power of the Pope*). The critique was basic: the papacy misuses the New Testament passages it calls upon for support (Matt 16:18-19, John 21:16), and it exalts itself over the people and does not feed them spiritually. The source of the evil is the false papal claim to rule by divine right, and this prevents bishops and priests, as well, from fulfilling their office. Hendrix argues that Luther's position went no further at the Leipzig debate; although he admits that Eck forced him to formulate his basic principle: "The Word of God is above all the words of men." Although the year 1520 was a time of consolidating his position and of vigorous attack on papal tyranny (for the first time he uses words like "Romanists" and "papists"), outward circumstances again accounted for the next step. The papal bull "Exsurge Domine" became the stimulus to the break with Rome, which Hendrix argues to be a several staged break culminating in papal excommunication and imperial condemnation.

The argument which underlies the whole study—and is its special strength—is that in the development of his critique of the papacy, Luther's concerns were always ecclesiological. His was not an affair of the private conscience or judgment against the social, institutional church. His was not subjective, individualistic experience opposed to objective authority. His position was determined by an understanding of the believing community in continuity with Christ through the ages. This church is universal and not a single ecclesiastical institution. The true church is not to be identified with a particular, visible church nor is it to be separated from the historical church. In the church Scripture and Gospel have primary authority; the papacy does not control the interpretation of Scripture and the presumptuous claims of the papacy to be

above Scripture and human judgment are to be rejected. The office of papacy, bishop, and priest is that of a servant; only in this way is Christ not subverted in the church, only so is the church

Christ's church.

Hendrix' position might have been strengthened if he had established early in the study what was the extreme papal position on the authority of the unwritten tradition (controlled by the papacy) and also the extreme claims to power over Scripture and gospel. (Pieras: "In its irrefragable and divine judgment the church's authority is greater than the authority of Scripture...the authority of the Roman Pontiff...is greater than the authority of the Gospel, since because of it we believe in the Gospels.") These views were held by most of Luther's opponents (see Tavard's *Holy Writ on Holy Church*). By the study of church history and historical study of Scripture, Luther called into question this whole view of tradition and authority (see Headley's *Luther's View of Church History*). Hence for Luther it was the Roman Church which perverted the function of tradition which is arbitrary with respect to authority. It was the Roman Church which lacked Scriptural, patristic, historical, and rational basis for its authority—was, in short, subjective.

Hendrix' exposition is marked by great clarity and sound judgment; it is a fine contribution.

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**THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD AND THE VICTORIAN FAMILY: THE SOCIAL GOSPEL IN AMERICA**, by Janet Forsythe Fishburn. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981. Pp. 208. \$19.95.

White, Anglo-Saxon, male-dominated Protestantism can no longer claim hegemony over American religious life, but its history is nonetheless extremely instructive for leaders, clergy and lay, of America's religious communities. The pattern of the "WASP" experience was generated in significant measure by the social, economic and political dynamics of American life. The experience of other ethnic-religious communities, inescapably shaped by similar pressures, often follows that pattern with disconcerting fidelity.

Thus Janet Forsythe Fishburn's account of the American Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries makes fascinating reading for persons who a century later want to give their religious convictions an embodiment in the social, economic and feminist politics of the Reagan era. Her analysis of the Social Gospel movement puts us and our options in illuminating perspective.

Fishburn believes that the Social Gospel was tied very closely to the culture of Victorian America—more closely than its members realized, and too closely for its own good. This view is, of course, hardly new. Orthodox and neo-orthodox critics have made it their standard criticism. The thesis is deepened here, however, by new insight concerning the specific hows and whys of this cultural dependence. The heart of the matter, it seems, is that "the social gospel was a theology written by men for men." Uneasy with the domesticated and feminized church life prevalent in northeastern Protestantism, the Social Gospel men aimed to "reveal the social power of the church at the very center of society" and to point out that the manifest destiny of American civilization "depended on the heroic morality of Christian gentlemen." The symbolic anchor of this enterprise was, however, part of the problem: they wanted a world in which the ideal Victorian family would be everybody's real family.

Fishburn selects figures from both early and late phases of the movement, and mixes preachers with academicians, to form her group portrait: Lyman Abbott, Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, William Newton Clarke, Francis Greenwood Peabody and Walter Rauschenbusch. All were family men of Victorian vintage, she points out, anxious about personal success in an uncertain economy, working compulsively to provide the marks of middle-class affluence for the wives and children with whom they spent precious little time. Their social philosophy was well calculated to justify personal success while it also heightened

awareness of social problems. In Darwinian idiom, they advocated an ordering of society which would afford to all its members the possibility of that fully developed and sexually differentiated moral selfhood which for them constituted the difference between a “barbarian” and a “civilized” person. Against Darwin and Spencer, on the other hand, they argued that the influence of the moral man, free and in control of one’s animal self, and not natural selection, was the decisive factor in the progress of civilization. And since moral man could be produced only by moral families, the loving Christian family was advanced as the solution to the ills of a competitive society dedicated to the notion of the survival of the most economically fit.

The ideal Victorian family was, accordingly, the symbol which determined the shape of Social Gospel activism and theology. With philosopher William James, the theologians envisioned a society in which war with nature replaced war between nations as the normal training ground for the virile yet Christian gentleman who would fight the forces of evil “out of his love for woman, God, and country.” The Social Gospel men generally abhorred socialism, Fishburn notes, because they identified it with “free love, communal living, family disintegration and violence.” The rule-proving exception was Rauschenbusch, who advocated a socialist economy as the cure for the twin evils of unlimited accumulation of wealth and the absolute sanctity of private property, on the grounds that it would prevent the individual moral corruption, family degradation and natural decline fostered by poverty. Most strikingly, Social Gospel leaders presented a united front against feminism, evoking the threat to the nation’s morals when the purity of women was allowed to be defiled by their participation in the competitive world of capital and industry. What might happen to America, they asked, “if men could no longer trust the purity of women?”

If the Victorian family ruled the mind of the Social Gospel as thoroughly as this account suggests—and one wonders at times if the case is not overstated—it is no surprise that it shows up so prominently in its understanding of God. In the theology of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, God is the somewhat distant procreator, the “sustaining vitality in a world understood as evolving in an orderly, sequential way.” He is also preeminently the forgiving father, unchangeable in his steadfast love, of the parable of the prodigal son or, Fishburn suggests, “the pitying, forgiving, inspiring love of the Victorian mother” who socializes her trusting children to the “code of mutual service and cooperation” in the spirit of self-sacrifice.

Fishburn’s prose is sparse. This reader missed more ample description and documentation at some points. But her perspective on the Social Gospel is keen and not entirely unsympathetic. It will be especially significant for those who have previously read Ann Douglas’ book on *The Feminization of American Culture*, which interprets the liberal Protestantism of the fifty years before the Social Gospel in similar terms. And her critique of the movement’s self-imposed,

Victorian male limitations and contradictions does give point to the arguments advanced today for women and men working together in ministry.

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**VISION AND CHARACTER: A CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR'S ALTERNATIVE TO KOHLBERG**, by Craig Dykstra. New York: Paulist Press, 1981. Pp. 160. \$5.95 (paper).

One of the most consistent criticisms of those who attempt to describe human growth and development is that the descriptions, in the hands of some, tend to become *prescriptive*. Dykstra's complaint against Kohlberg is at least twofold: one, that in his description of the stages of moral development, he has assumed a prescriptive stance; and two, that Kohlberg's approach is not acceptable for the church because it is based on faulty assumptions.

Well—who in the world is Craig Dykstra, and who does he think he is to take on Lawrence Kohlberg, the leading figure in moral development theory to-

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day? Frankly, I don't know. But, this book, *Vision and Character*, should make of Dykstra a visible figure in the church, and especially in religious education. The book is significant not only as a part of a dialogue between two points of view, but because its author senses that the church has subscribed to Kohlberg's system and allowed it to influence its approach (or non-approach) to moral education. The church has its own assumptions and ways to get at moral education, and it is Dykstra's purpose in the book to outline what those are. Only two can be noted here by way of illustration.

First, over against the juridical ethics of problem solving offered by Kohlberg, Dykstra argues that the church must be concerned for visional ethics—"a mystery encountering ethic." The juridical approach, he claims, treats people as objects who move through certain prescribed stages, and as they do, their cognitive processes allow them to respond to situations calling for moral decisions in increasingly mature ways. The visional approach treats people as subjects who are mysterious and who are confronted by a good that is equally mysterious.

Kohlberg seems to rely on knowledge for maturity. Taking that position, he not only misses the mysterious dimension of persons, but ignores the reality of sin and evil in the world. It is the church that takes those realities seriously, and therefore the church must be involved in moral education.

Second, Dykstra argues that moral growth for the Christian does not proceed through a series of prescribed stages, *a la* Kohlberg, but through repentance, prayer, and service. These theories occupy the latter half of the book and represent for the author the foundations for teaching ethics in the church. Briefly, repentance is described as a turning away from the need to make oneself the center of the world—the subject of everyone's attention. Prayer is the presence and assurance of the love of God for the one who receives it and is that presence for others. Service is the acting out of the love of God through the believer.

Though helpful, the reader of this book need not be familiar with the developmental

theories of Kohlberg. If readers are looking for some easy answers as to how to teach ethics in the parish, they may be disappointed. And, if they are of the opinion that Dykstra could have eliminated all notions of patterns and developmentalism in his approach to moral development, they will be disillusioned. Nevertheless, the book is a delight in providing a solid alternative to Kohlberg's approach. It's my guess that it is far more likely that readers will find themselves in the pages of this book, than they would in the stages described (prescribed?) by Kohlberg.

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