

Reviews



SUFFERING DIVINE THINGS: THEOLOGY AS CHURCH PRACTICE, by Reinhard Hütter. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. 314. \$25.00 (paper).

What is the locus, task, and character of theology in the present post-modern, post-Christendom context? In addressing this question, Reinhard Hütter's goal in this newly translated version of his 1997 work *Theologie als kirchliche Praktik* is to offer a "pneumatological-ecclesiological account of the connection between church, doctrine, and theology," while stressing the themes of public, pathos, and practice (25).

Through the first three parts of this book, Hütter endeavors to lay the basis for the necessity of his understanding of theology as church practice, an understanding that he explores more fully in the final part. In laying this foundation, Hütter reviews the thought of several twentieth-century theologians. Although he observes limits in each theology when applied to the contemporary situation, he finds much on which to build his own proposal.

The study begins with an analysis of issues facing contemporary Christianity. Hütter approaches this task through the correspondence of Adolf von Harnack and Erik Peterson. The loss of the church's public character emerges as the central issue. The result for Protestant Christianity is a movement in two directions: to private knowledge and experience or to fundamentalism. Theology in turn becomes a matter either of "anything goes" or clinging to "eternal truths." Hütter, however, asserts that the church and theology can pursue different directions when they reclaim a public character.

In seeking such alternatives, Hütter turns to the thought of Oswald Bayer and George Lindbeck. Bayer's emphasis on promise and on the pathos of theology is particularly significant. Hütter agrees that

theology has a passive character of reception. He also finds an attribute of the pathos in Lindbeck's thought. For Lindbeck, however, the pathos of theology is "characterized by the inseparable juxtaposition of faith actualization and faith content" (45). Here stems the concept of "practice." "Faith actualization" consists of those practices that identify one as a Christian, forming the Christian's faith. For Hütter theology itself is one of these practices. Simultaneously, practices must be seen in connection with "faith content" or dogma, which functions as a grammar or rules of faith. This grammar is necessary but secondary to the Christian practices. (One can see how Lindbeck's thought has been influential in ecumenical endeavors. Such a model allows for differences in doctrine to be explained not as substantive but simply as different rules referring to different practices, and thus "agreement" may be achieved.)

Although Bayer and Lindbeck contribute much to his proposal, Hütter finds fundamental deficits in how both address ecclesiology, the role of the church, and pneumatology, the place of the Spirit. In order to try to overcome these deficits Hütter turns to a controversy between Karl Barth and Erik Peterson regarding the nature and task of theology in its relation to church and dogma. This controversy reveals an alternative within western Christianity of two understandings of the church: institution or charisma. Hütter observes, nonetheless, that both models are deficient in the place they give to the person and work of the Spirit.

Seeking to forge a third alternative, Hütter turns to the Orthodox understanding of the church as "communion." In this understanding the church actually participates in the triune communion through the Spirit. Participation in the life of the triune communion is then the form of creation's re-

demption. The church is both the body of Christ and the eschatological new creation of the Holy Spirit. Thus it is both being and event, institution and charisma. The church is the means and locus of this saving activity of God.

The church, then, for Hütter, is defined by its pathos of core practices, one of which is theology, by its public character, and ultimately by its identity as the means and locus of the Spirit's work in bringing about God's saving activity. Such an understanding has significant consequences. The combination of public and practice requires that the core practices and the public nature be clearly defined. In practical terms, this means fixed liturgical practices and a magisterium must be established to insure the public means of the Spirit's work. The church in effect is given a sacramental status.

Still, aspects of Hütter's proposal remain unclear. His "pneumatological-ecclesiological" view neglects any acknowledgement of the reality of sin in this public or visible understanding of the church. Certainly the Spirit works in and through the church, but the ever-present reality of sin requires such an understanding of church to be a matter of faith rather than a visible, public reality. Furthermore, Hütter's great emphasis on the Spirit is not supported by a clear and thorough doctrine of the Spirit. Finally, in spite of Hütter's assertion of theology's place as one of the core practices of the church, ultimately the definition and purpose of theology never become fully discernible.

Admittedly there are questionable aspects in the content of Hütter's proposal. But the obscurity of Hütter's writing, rather than his content, creates the greatest obstacle for the reader seeking to benefit from this book. The confusing nature of the writing may have roots in the translation, but it also is due to heavy use of technical language and long multi-clause sentences. Furthermore, the eighty-seven pages of endnotes, instead of providing clarification, add to the confusion. On more than one occasion, the text to which the note is attached

refers to one author while the note itself cites another (e.g. pp. 84-85, note 150).

The importance of a study of the task and nature of theology cannot be denied. Unfortunately, *Suffering Divine Things* has too much going against it to be of value to anyone but a select group of systematic theologians.

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DISRUPTIVE GRACE: STUDIES IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH, by George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. 375. \$39.00 (cloth).

George Hunsinger's collection of essays on Karl Barth's theology will provide the impetus for much reflection for those with interests in political, doctrinal, or ecumenical theology. Hunsinger is an acknowledged expert on Karl Barth and director of the Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, so students of Karl Barth have here an excellent colleague in their study. Most of all, this book is for those who agree with Hunsinger that the only proper theological connection for progressive politics is with orthodox and traditional faith and its ecumenical reconstruction (5-6).

Hunsinger divides the essays into three sections: political, doctrinal, and ecumenical theology. He concludes the volume with the excellent "Meditation on the Blood of Christ." These essays involve Barth with many interlocutors, from Hans Frei to Martin Luther and Gustavo Gutiérrez, and address a diversity of topics from "Hellfire and Damnation: Four Ancient and Modern Views" to "Truth as Self-Involvement."

Barth's political activity goes hand in hand with his seriously theological work. Considering this as well as studying theology in America, Hunsinger introduces the book by setting Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barth side by side. Hunsinger intends in the section on political theology to "fill out that unspoken christological basis" of King's theology (4). This stretch of Barth's life and

work would not have been accessible to him, Hunsinger admits, if he had not had King's life and witness to open them to him.

"Karl Barth and Liberation Theology" exemplifies this relationship. Barth and Gustavo Gutiérrez are put into a positive and mutual conversation. Most specifically, Hunsinger criticizes the tendency of liberation theology to place the love of neighbor as primary or equivalent to the love of God (54-55). Here the reader can see Hunsinger's method of grounding political action in Barth's trinitarian reflection.

Two essays on the confessing church, both historical and critical of the United States in the contemporary, are some of the key essays in this volume. Hunsinger and Barth's criticisms are not simply those of a cultural critic of culture and government, but also of the church's "inability to utter a clear and unequivocal *No!*" Hunsinger does not refer to producing solemn statements that determine only a denomination's official lobbying strategy but a *No!* that "commands consent and commitment from the pews" (67). Together with a statement on sectarian politics these essays all point from political theology towards doctrine.

In "Karl Barth's Christology" Hunsinger moves to a more explicit statement of that christology. He explains Barth's dialectical christology, showing how it is truly orthodox in its "Chalcedonian character" (132). Hunsinger deftly lays out the stamp of Chalcedon's rules for christology and expounds Barth's vast treatment of Christ Jesus (133ff.). Particularly insightful is how Hunsinger sorts out Barth's varied directions of thought, aiding the beginning student of Barth to avoid mistakes and helping the critic avoid misplaced judgment.

Similarly, "*Mysterium Trinitatis*: Karl Barth's Conception of Eternity," "The Mediator of Communion," and "Hellfire and Damnation" all show valuable forays into important topics in Barth's theology, such as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit or Barth's disputed universalism.

In Barth's time and in ours, theology has and has had many challenges. The last col-

lection of essays, ecumenical theology, contains these conflicts and encounters. Barth engaged Roman Catholic theology, and "Baptized into Christ's Death" shows this mutual critique as Hunsinger employs no less than Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Likewise, Protestants had their own intramural debates. Hunsinger summarizes one of these lengthy exchanges in "The Harnack/Barth Correspondence: A Paraphrase with Comments." The differences between Harnack's liberal Protestantism and Barth's own way not only are historically interesting, but they also address our own situation, either in contemporary forms of liberal protestantism or in the essays and publications on church and theology which consider these debates.

Perhaps most interesting to Lutheran pastors and theologians will be "What Karl Barth Learned from Martin Luther." Much has been made of Barth's relation to Lutherans, but this piece shows Barth's debt and critical relationship to Luther. It outlines more of their agreement than Barth's opposition to Luther.

In essays involving hermeneutics, Hunsinger is at his most constructive. In "Truth as Self-Involvement," "Beyond Literalism and Expressivism," and "What Can Evangelicals and Postliberals Learn from Each Other?" Hunsinger involves Barth in very timely and useful constructions about reading the Scriptures. Close readers of Hans Frei and those who have an interest in narrative theology generally will benefit from these invigorating chapters.

A collection of studies does have its limits. With the lengthy introduction and pairing of Barth and King, one wishes that Hunsinger had explicitly related King's theology to Karl Barth in another essay. Certainly, a reader can imagine what it might look like with Hunsinger's work in these areas. Similarly, a collection of essays on a single author can create an atmosphere where the subject in question continually trumps any particular issue. This problem does invade the tenor of the essays on occasion, but the more critically engaging pieces place

Barth and Hunsinger's topics and other theologians on an equal footing.

Nevertheless, this volume is a fine collection of essays on Barth made stronger by bringing Barth into conversation with many other theologians of the last century. Its value will be for general readers of theology as well as those who have an interest in the careful task of joining radical political commitment with orthodox faith.

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ASCENSION AND ECCLESIA: ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE ASCENSION FOR ECCLESIOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGY, by Douglas Farrow. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. 340. \$35.00 (cloth).

On the face of things, the doctrine of the ascension would appear to have little relevance to the mission, ministry, and structuring of the church in our current world. You will rethink this assumption after you read this important book. Farrow notes that the ascension was once "celebrated as the crown of Christian feasts and the ground of the sacraments. Today it is something of an embarrassment" (9). However, he contends that the ascension should be given far more attention than it currently receives. He claims that it is the doctrinal standard by which the humanity of Christ is protected. All too often, theological theories of the ascension present the humanity of Jesus as *not* something currently absent, but instead as absorbed into a cosmic dimension, a "cosmic Christ" omnipresent throughout the universe. In this view, Jesus' humanity is totally absorbed into his divinity, and what is worse, Christ's divinity is then defined on the basis of our standard cosmologies. When this occurs, as Farrow ably documents, the church loses its genuine sense of mission as a "prophetic sign to the world that God has organized all things around the one whom he has enthroned at his right hand" (32) and assumes that her own pres-

ence is itself a sacramental reality in total continuity with Christ.

For Farrow, there is a paradox between Christ's presence, in the eucharist for example, and Christ's absence as a specific, particular man. The Christ who is present in the eucharist is not to be found in or is absent from the false ideologies of our age. Indeed, if Christ is present, it is not due to his ubiquity (here Farrow closely follows Calvin's and Barth's view of the eucharist); rather, Christ is present by means of the Spirit, who is the pledge that the new age which has dawned will come to its fullness. Again, following Calvin, he is troubled by the notion that if Christ is held to be everywhere present, then the specific man, Jesus of Nazareth, is really nowhere. Farrow notes that "The church, then, is marked off from the world, insofar as it is marked off, not by race or culture or even by religion (marks which are definite enough by worldly standards and more or less acceptable) but by its mysterious union with one whose life, though lived for the world, involves a genuine break with it" (11). Too many current views of the ascension transmute Christ's humanity into a vaporous omnipresent cosmic "reality." However, when the absence of the human Jesus is neglected, then the church misunderstands its mission and falsely sees itself as both *in* (a correct view) and *of* (an incorrect view) the world. Were it to uphold the truth of the ascension and recognize the absence of Christ's humanity, it would assume responsibility for its martyriological voice before society.

For Farrow, the best theologian of the ascension in ancient times was Irenaeus (45). Irenaeus was very careful to preserve the eschatological dimension or discontinuity between the ages that is entailed by the need to preserve the ascension's "paradox of presence and absence." Irenaeus was careful not to let cosmology control christology (53). Irenaeus's view of ecclesiology would affirm that "the church, believing in the renewal of creation, offers an oblation which commits it to a life of responsible engagement with the world for the sake of its trans-

formation...the renewal which it seeks is hid with Christ in God—there is no nascent liberation theology here, nor hint of triumphalism” (72). Such a missional church recognizes its discontinuity from the world and thus “can neither agree with the world nor let go of it. It can only take up the cross and the offence of the cross, wrestling with the world to the bitter end in hope” (80).

Both Origen and Augustine lacked this eschatological dimension in their theologizing of the ascension and tended to correlate the two ages rather than see them in conflict (114). Thus, the particular story of the church becomes the universal truth of humanity. In opposition to Origen and Augustine, Calvin echoes Irenaeus’s ecclesiology, since for Calvin it is the Holy Spirit who is the “proper basis for real presence” of Christ in the eucharist (177). A faulty view of the ascension in modern times has led to the development of the notion of a “progressive advent” (192) of Christ into human evolution (220). This thinking can be found in Hegel, Hans Martensen, Teilhard de Chardin, and a host of other “cosmic Christ” enthusiasts. A countervailing trend, represented by Kierkegaard and Barth who do not “abandon the universality of Jesus nor universalize him at the expense of his particularity” (236) is to be preferred. Farrow contends that ecclesiology should not smother eschatology. Hence, the “church lives in the world as the community in which this absence [of Jesus] is, or should be, acutely felt and acknowledged” (265) and Christians should look forward to the Lord’s return (273).

Farrow favors Calvin’s eucharistic theology over Luther’s, which he criticizes as “Origenist” in this regard. Lutherans might wish quickly to defend Luther’s eucharistic and christological theories in the face of Farrow’s critique. Nevertheless, Farrow’s ecclesiology is, in many respects, markedly Lutheran. He develops a kind of “theology of the cross” approach to ecclesiology, and in today’s ecumenically conflicted environment this approach deserves a hearing. While Farrow’s views will in some circles be

quickly dismissed as Calvinistic and Barthian, the integrity of the church’s mission that he is calling for merits close attention in theological circles.

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CATHOLICS AND THE EUCHARIST: A SCRIPTURAL INTRODUCTION, by Stephen B. Clark. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000. Pp. 274. \$11.99 (paper).

The ecumenical season has not been bounteous in the past few years among the Christian rank and file. Among Catholics, for example, the most intense spiritual activity is occurring among the conservatives who often move in an unecumenical direction. For them this phenomenon often means that the sermons they hear and the books they buy draw them away from closing ranks with those Christians outside the Catholic fold. The sad result is that a chasm of theological and liturgical ignorance has opened up between Catholics and Protestants who otherwise should be consolidating and celebrating their common roots.

Now from among those same Catholics arises an author with a different perspective on ecumenism, and Catholics and Protestants should take note. If Lutheran pastors and teachers can get past the title of Stephen B. Clark’s book, *Catholics and Eucharist: A Scriptural Approach*, they will find a book that offers hospitality to their theological interests and desires. The book appeals to Lutheran strengths in the realm of biblical foundations for liturgy and sacrament while maintaining the Catholic focus on tradition and eucharistic “real presence.” The biblical dimension of the book is striking: each chapter begins and ends with biblical pericopes that illustrate the topic at hand. The focus on tradition and real presence manifests itself in Clark’s grasp of history and philosophy. Punctuating the teaching are what the author calls “meditations,” so that the reader is reflecting not only upon

an academic issue but also upon what the Greek Church calls the “mysteries” of the faith.

The common ground shared by Catholics and Lutherans need not trouble the vanguard in either camp. When Clark educates his intended audience about the prominence of the Liturgy of the Word in relation to the Liturgy of the Sacrament, the centrality of festal meal to Eucharist, the importance of community for personal prayer, Lutherans can listen in and take heart. For the spiritual manifestations often most troubling to them among Catholics—private revelations, after-Mass veneration of the sacred elements, and rosary devotions—are not at the heart of Catholic spirituality and theology. Clark relies on the conventional Catholic authorities—the Church Fathers, the *Summa* of Aquinas, Vatican Council documents, and the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. But Lutherans also may find Clark’s use of Eastern Catholic and Orthodox and Syriac sources to be a fascinating survey of what Catholics in liturgical discussions consider to be authoritative.

The strength of the book’s public appeal lies in its organization. The book is divided into three parts, not including helpful appendices on ancient sources and modern scholarship at the end for those who want to investigate further. The three parts neatly fit the structure of the Catholic Mass, the first chapters dealing with the Liturgy of the Word, the next few chapters dealing with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the final chapters with the specific wording of the Eucharistic Prayer III. This format allows for an effective presentation of a wide scope of complicated issues.

The context for the eucharist is, by design, the Scriptures. Thus, the book begins with chapters on the Liturgy of the Word. Liturgically-minded Christians, especially Catholics, often view public worship only in terms of the eucharist, but *Catholics and the Eucharist* shows how the ancient and modern authorities insist upon worship and liturgy that is based on hearing the word of God. First, the theological concept of the

biblical canon is discussed. Then the book appropriates records of such public ceremonies in the covenant renewal writings of Exodus and Nehemiah as models for the Liturgy of the Word.

The chapters on the Liturgy of the Eucharist follow two broad theological lines: eucharist as sacrifice and eucharist as covenant. From the Lutheran point of view, one of the most perplexing questions about the Catholic Mass is its relationship to the atoning sacrifice of Calvary. The main biblical text for NT ideas on sacrifice comes from the Letter to the Hebrews. Though the author oversimplifies the arguments of Hebrews as a composition, still he cogently links the Calvary sacrifice with the notion of the eucharistic liturgy as a re-presentation of Calvary. The eucharist as covenant springs largely from the exegeses of 1 Cor 10:14-22 and 1 Cor 11:23-27. The exegeses are not technical, but they demonstrate a clear and reliable reading for non-specialists.

The third part of the book on the Eucharist Prayer III is devoted to answering many, largely theological, questions about the eucharist and its meaning. Here the questions are answered in a manner that is intended to reach out to an audience larger than the Catholic public. The discussion covers such topics as “real presence,” “anamnesis” in the context of a Jewish cultic background, *ex opere operato* and transubstantiation, bread and wine as sacrificial elements, and so on. There is a fascinating philosophical foray into sacramental presence and how it differs from historical presence.

Lutherans and others can rest assured that a scriptural and traditional understanding of eucharist prioritizes personal conversion and transformation over particular devotions, liturgical practices, or frequency of reception. Such conversion and transformation will find expression in such things as deeper prayer and a Christian perspective on time and calendar. In this respect, the Liturgy of the Hours is given pride of place. Clark offers a down-to-earth explanation of its theology.

In short, the book should have broad ap-

peal for a general Christian audience, moderately educated in theological and technical matters. It is the kind of book that would fit well in a seminary classroom or parish study. Although the specialist would have desired more details, Clark's book will entice those who otherwise are retreating from ecumenical dialogue to consider how vast and valuable is the deposit of faith outside the denominational camp.

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THE SACRED IN MUSIC, by Albert Blackwell. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Pp. 225, \$25.00 (cloth).

Lamenting the neglect of music in the study of religion, Albert Blackwell—Professor of Religion at Furman University and an Episcopalian with Baptist roots who directs his church's choir—sets out to fill the la-

cuna. His book is a salutary contribution and invites further dialogue. It is clear, cogent, and understandable interdisciplinary writing about music and theology, accessible to readers willing to take the requisite time with it.

Parts of the book are exceptionally strong. The musical descriptions, both the technical ones of physical phenomena like the harmonic series and the descriptive or analytical ones of specific musical pieces, are written in a way that makes what is complex understandable to people who do not have Blackwell's technical expertise. An added bonus is that these are crafted with artistic sensitivity so that they are a joy to read. The candor with which Blackwell expresses his likes and dislikes is also refreshing. His courage to speak honestly, yet without rancor, about music that is not worth much is unusual.

The strongest part of the book, though not Blackwell's main thesis, is his argument against deconstructionism. It is hard to refute. Blackwell argues that we live in the

universe God created. For sound that means the universe of the harmonic series. No sound can exist in the world as we know it without a stack of pitches above it, organized in precise ratios and relationships. This does not drive Blackwell to embrace a full-blown medieval posture of cosmic harmony, but he nevertheless wants to say that deconstructionists who argue there is absolutely no meaning in music other than momentary cultural constructs are wrong. He thinks there is something in our music that “transcends contingency” (see especially Chapter II). He argues persuasively that God’s created order of the harmonic series embraces all our musical systems and that there is quality in some music. Whether he is as convincing that some music can also be “potentially sacramental” is another question, as I’ll indicate shortly. Mozart, as usual for discussions like this, is cited often, though Blackwell does not restrict the “potentially sacramental” to Mozart’s music.

The book might be described in several ways. (1) Blackwell is making a musical case for Schleiermacher as opposed to Barth, then turning Barth against himself by means of Barth’s love affair with Mozart. (2) The book might be seen as part of the Wisdom tradition. The Wisdom of Solomon, for example, is used as a “seminal theological text” (42) and quoted often (e.g., 42, 46, 88, 102). (3) One could see the book as mysticism in the sense of panentheism by which Blackwell wants to acknowledge “both transcendent immanence and immanent transcendence” (203), in which “the created world [is regarded] as a fabric of theophanies, [with] music a medium of divine grace” (37). These are all related, of course. (4) A more comprehensive approach might be to use H. Richard Niebuhr’s typological frame in *Christ and Culture*. The book then might be perceived as a high art version of Christ of Culture with beauty a central theme and Simone Weil a “foremost” 20th century “companion” (18). Blackwell peels off from the Christ Transformer of Culture posture those portions of Augustine, John Calvin,

and Jonathan Edwards to which he is especially drawn, then adds an Anglican version of Christ Above Culture and Luther without his characteristic Christ and Culture in Paradox motif. Christ Against Culture is not there either. The last two won’t fit. The fly in the ointment is the reality of sin that is considered with engaging musical insights in Chapter IV. Blackwell wants to acknowledge how bad the fall is and realizes beauty cannot save us (158), but he backs off from sin’s radical nature. That’s why he resonates with Schleiermacher rather than Barth. Things aren’t really broken. The Fall “distorts” but does not “eradicate” our judgement, and “sacramental appreciation requires us to exercise musical judgement to the best of our abilities” (146).

Barthians will obviously have trouble with Blackwell, but that’s not the main problem with the book. The main problem is the idiosyncratic way Blackwell treats what he calls “sacramental.” Blackwell argues that there are two great sacramental traditions, the Pythagorean and the incarnational, the first imperceptible and inaudible, the second perceptible and audible (39-40). While there is much to be learned here, fashioning the case this way is likely to elicit some incredulity on the part of sacramental theologians (and probable offense on the part of Pythagoras), especially since sacramental themes related to the Supper, for example, in theologians like Ambrose, Augustine, Radbertus, Rabanus Maurus, Ratramnus, Berengar, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli are omitted.

But that’s not what Blackwell is up to. He’s engaged in a wide-ranging attempt to pull together seemingly divergent phenomena around a Schleiermacherian perspective in which music is perceived to be “potentially sacramental.” He’s not so much discussing what the church has called sacraments as he is a general catholic sense of the universe as sacramental. Following Richard P. McBrien’s definition, he uses the word “*sacramental*...in its widest sense...[as applying] to any finite reality through which the divine is perceived to be disclosed

and communicated, and through which our human response to the divine assumes some measure of shape, form, and structure” (18). This means that music, by means of beauty, oceanic feeling, and absolute dependence, can potentially transcend contingency and communicate some sense of God or of God’s grace, in a way that works essentially by analogy. The main argument here is similar to what a musician like Robert Shaw might have said about music being in some way revelatory without the sacramental undergirding.

Martin Luther, speaking for large portions of the church, would resonate with much of the writing and be grateful for many of the insights. He would accord music a weight and significance as great as Blackwell does, but he would have reservations about the way the sacramental suggestions are framed. He would affirm the necessity to craft the musical resources of God’s sonic creation and would agree with Blackwell that distinctions need to be made about musical quality. At the point, however, where it would appear that we by our musical efforts can lay hold of God, he would be more than a little suspicious.

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THE UNNECESSARY PASTOR: REDISCOVERING THE CALL, by Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. 256. \$14.00 (paper).

The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call is a book whose basic question bears some urgency for the church. Is the pastoral calling to be shaped by God’s word or by the culture in which the vocation functions? The church exists with the business model of pastoring ascendant in suburban congregations and even with one of its seminaries extolling the virtues of leadership in its mission statement. Free-lance Lutheran theologian Marva Dawn and Regent College professor emeritus Eugene Peterson pro-

vide an antidote to church-as-corporation and pastor-as-CEO in their picture of the pastor whose work is unnecessary in the world’s eyes.

The authors’ premise is that the ideal unnecessary pastor of the book’s title arrives at that status in three ways: First, gospel-oriented pastors are unnecessary in the eyes of the culture because they do not see themselves primarily as providers of social stability and morality. Second, these pastors refuse to see themselves as “the linchpin holding a congregation together” (3). Finally, they are unnecessary to congregations who demand that pastors function as “managers of their religious company” (4). Apart from this unified beginning, the book offers no single vision, but instead presents two parallel takes on a common topic with the authors alternating chapters (primarily because the book is a print version of a series of lectures given by the authors).

Peterson argues for Paul, Timothy, and Titus as exemplars of pastoral ministry in the earliest days of the church. By his exam-

ple in Romans, for instance, Paul shows us scripture's proper authority for ministry and draws us back to "live in the awe of the God of mystery" (70), especially in the apostle's use of language and in the immersion of his hearers in community. Timothy and Titus, for their part, function for Peterson in much the same manner: Timothy pastors through the "congregational mess" of Ephesus by using "sound words" (121ff.) and Titus provides a picture of pastor as community builder and leader (185).

While Peterson's chapters straightforwardly present his image of the pastor's calling, Dawn's goal in her chapters is less clear. The primary problem is one of a style which keeps the reader at a remove from her chapters' content. Dawn's near stream-of-consciousness style makes for an exasperating read and after the first chapter the endless self-referential anecdotes and footnotes (fully a third of which refer to her own previously published work—including one which serves as a footnote-vertisement for a forthcoming book!) become truly annoying.

Dawn's chapters take a didactic Bible-study approach, using the text of Ephesians as a starting point for the author's attempt at a correction of the pastoral office. She argues for a four-fold pastoral calling: to be a living doxology, to triumph over the principalities and powers, to be formed and transformed, and to build community. Dawn shows her kinship with both George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas when she describes faith as "a language, a culture, a way of living" (31) and thus proposes a pastoral office whose primary job description is the immersion of one's parishioners in "the deep symbols of the Christian faith" (36), as well as moral formation within an overly romantic picture of Christian community.

The Unnecessary Pastor makes a good, if occasionally shrill, argument against the culture's view of truly Christian pastors as unnecessary:

Contrary to popular opinion, pastors are not jacks and jills of all trades. We have been bullied long enough by well-meaning but ignorant demands telling us

what we must do, telling us why we are necessary to this or that program, this or that life. (184)

Even so, neither of the authors makes a convincing case for the necessity of the pastoral office. All of Dawn and Peterson's arguments for their preferred vision of pastoring rise from the kingdom on the left: leadership, moral formation, keeping evil at bay, building community. What makes such work uniquely Christian? To paraphrase Luther, a wise infidel could accomplish these tasks as well as a Christian pastor. Throughout the book, the reader waits for the authors to move past their veiled anti-clericalism and show some good reason for the existence or uniqueness of Christian pastors. It never comes, because in this book there is no real necessity for a public office of ministry: "We have important work to do, but if we don't do it God can always find someone else—and probably not a pastor" (4).

Those interested in studying the question of the necessity and purpose of ministry and especially of their own calling would do well to look elsewhere. Marc Kolden's splendid article on the necessity of pastors in a previous issue of *Word & World*, Gerhard Forde's article, "The Ordained Ministry" in *Called and Ordained*, and, of course, Martin Luther's commentary on 1 Corinthians 15 are solid entries into the theology behind the pastoral office. Each argues for a public, word and sacrament ministry that is inherent in a Lutheran theology of the word: God's speaking, electing activity requires a public mouthpiece. G. H. Gerberding's century-old *The Lutheran Pastor*, on the other hand, provides wisdom on the pastor's tasks from before the age of self-actualized pastors and theologians. Until a better treatment of the topic than *The Unnecessary Pastor* arrives, these works will have to suffice.

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