



**THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE: CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS AFTER H. RICHARD NIEBUHR**, by Charles Scriven. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988. Pp. 224. \$19.95 (paper).

Charles Scriven sets out to correct and extend the vision of Christian social involvement presented by H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture*. However, if one were looking for a conceptual scheme that might illuminate the flaws of Scriven's work, I could think of nothing better to recommend than Niebuhr's classic essay, uncorrected.

Scriven's central thesis, which can only be called bizarre, is that "the Anabaptist way is the best way to embody Niebuhr's vision" (192). Aside from some quarrels with the precision of Niebuhr's definitions, Scriven claims to be his loyal follower. He thinks Niebuhr erred, however, in classifying the Anabaptist heritage as an example of his "Christ against culture" type. It would be both more coherent and accurate, he argues, to see it as the best exemplar of the "Christ the transformer of culture" type.

(For those who have not read *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr there outlines five styles or motifs of Christian social involvement. He begins with two positions he regards as extreme: one might call them separatist and accommodationist—"Christ against culture" and "Christ of culture." The others—"Christ above culture," "Christ and culture in paradox," and "Christ the transformer of culture"—he regards as more central to the Christian witness, and he is least critical of the latter, namely, "Christ the transformer of culture." Hence, the restiveness of his would-be disciple. Scriven claims the Anabaptists are intensely interested in transforming society. Moreover, he claims theirs is the only Christian way to do it.)

It seems to have escaped Scriven's notice that Niebuhr was isolating tendencies, not exhaustively characterizing either traditions or individuals, in an attempt to illuminate the various voices of the Christian faith. That he warned against the elimination of any of those voices is only one difference between master and disciple. That he was intensely aware of the theological and exegetical issues related to these tendencies is perhaps the most telling.

Scriven's own survey of nine theologians who have written on Christian ethics since Niebuhr's death (including Gilkey, Gutierrez, Ruether, Hauerwas, and Yoder) is neither as nuanced nor as illuminating as Niebuhr's original work. The discussions are, for the most part, monochromatic and the judgments rigid. This is not so much a failure of scholarship as a failure of sympathy flowing from a narrow theological perspective.

What substance Scriven's book has it gets from its strong presentation of the non-violent way of the Anabaptists and its indictment of churches that compromise with idolatrous nation-states. This is a serious position and one likely to gain a hearing among concerned Christians of any tradition, perhaps more so than other absolute positions might. Thus, it is all the more important to see the questionable theology that accompanies it here and to face the implications of such a stance for the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the nature of humanity

and the action of God upon the world.

Unfortunately, readers will get little help from Scriven in doing this. He seems utterly blind to the theological issues involved. One might, indeed, use this book as a warning to anyone tempted to slight the relevance of theology to the life of the Christian.

Take, for example, the treatment of the Bible. Scriven asserts the absolute, exclusive authority of the Bible and the necessity of embodying the life of Christ. (Niebuhr's attack on Christocentrism, which only seems to puzzle Scriven [162ff.], is relevant here.) Not surprisingly, he seems genuinely bewildered when Donald Bloesch, who asserts the same authority, comes to different conclusions than he does (146). He overlooks his own selectivity: following Yoder, he limits the imitation of Christ to the trait of non-violent servanthood (151). Here, the moral position, not the Bible, seems to be the authority. (On Scriven's standards, monks, who vow obedience, celibacy, and poverty, might well press their superior loyalty to Christ.) And when Scriven claims Pilate executed Jesus as a threat to the Roman Empire (150), we see not only exegetical nonsense but the lack of any vision of a purpose of God at work even in Pilate and Caiaphas, a purpose that goes beyond the conscious intentions of humanity.

Notice how this lack parallels the need for a fellowship of voluntary Christians and the claim that their witness can only be safeguarded by consciously espoused moral positions and by selective refusal of worldly involvement. The flaws here are precisely theological and they have immense practical consequences: there is no sense of a strange purpose of God in history, no sense of the presence of sin in the fellowship itself, no need for and no mysterious action of grace, no sense of the Spirit's continuing impact on the community. (Niebuhr explicitly presses these issues in his critique of the separatist position. In this book, pushing the argument it does, the failure to engage his critique is a glaring omission.)

Scriven lacks the acute sense both Niebuhrs possessed for locating the pride and self-deception of any group claimed to have left sin behind. He can never acknowledge Niebuhr's claim that the real problem is not between Christ and culture but between God and us. That *that* is a practical problem, that the church must find a way to embody *that*—say, by its sacramental life—is an issue that never occurs to him.

Because of the seriousness of the non-violent position, it is important to stress that Scriven never bothers to engage any real alternatives. His more extreme statements would entail equating police departments with the Khmer Rouge, as stages on a slope of descending brutality. But there again we see the separatist position at work: all relative distinctions among outsiders are diminished; that is not where God is at work. That any scholar could become convinced that Niebuhr would hold this position is, to this reviewer, incredible.

The voice of pacifism, as Niebuhr insisted, must be heard, as should the voices of other ideals. But, as Niebuhr also insisted, we fool ourselves, and blind ourselves to God, one another, and our own hearts, if we hear them without a sense of their own inadequacy to the revelation of Christ and the purposes of God.

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**ORDINARY SAINTS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**, by Robert Benne. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988. Pp. 224. \$13.95 (paper).

In *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy compares a Moscow deserted before Napoleon's entrance to a beehive which has lost its queen. Though it appears at first glance to be as vital as any other hive, it is in truth dying, having lost its purpose and its pulse. According to the analysis of Robert Benne in *Ordinary Saints*, Western civilization is in peril of succumbing to a similar fate, for it is presently "resting on a foundation which is shaking" (3). "We seem to be developing a huge, muscular body, but one without a central nervous system," he writes (1). In order to survive, let alone flourish, our society needs to replenish its religious and moral capital which the author believes has developed and undergirded Western civilization, but which in recent centuries has been depleted. He names five "triumphs" of the Enlightenment as having eroded this foundation: technical reason, historical reason, the liberal spirit, the ethic of self-enhancement, and secularization. Even

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page 88

though they have brought many important and positive changes, these triumphs are not adequate bearings to guide and sustain our society. The author believes an alternative grounded in community, marked by conviction and theological formulation, and engaged in dialogue with the world, is needed. *Ordinary Saints* is a Christian, and particularly Lutheran, response to this need.

*Ordinary Saints* is as such no ordinary book on Christian ethics. Because of the perceived erosion of the religious and moral foundation, the author believes our society needs to "start at the very beginning," to look behind the veil of philosophical arguments and intellectual principles which has characterized the traditional approach to ethics. As Dr. Benne words it, we need to know "who we are" and "what is going on" as well as "what ought we to do" (25). In this spirit, *Ordinary Saints* purposes to undertake the formidable task of providing a "straight-forward and comprehensive account of the Christian life" (ix), expressed with confidence and conviction. And so, like other books in its category, *Ordinary Saints* responds to specific ethical issues from a Christian viewpoint, but only after first setting the Christian bearings which should direct the discussion.

The author begins this framework with a summary of the Christian story, particularly as it has an impact on the individual, who is one relentlessly called by a loving, merciful God incarnated in Jesus Christ. This God both satisfies our deepest desires and aspirations, and shatters our expectations. Though many Christians will not find this section new, it makes an essential contribution to the book, emphasizing our primary identity which is the pulse and purpose of *our* lives. As Benne writes,

God is the hot furnace of creative love out of which all things come and to which all things go....He gives us life, holds us within it, and then pulls us out. He is as close to us as our breath yet more distant than can be imagined. (31)

This relationship forms the fundamental context for our roles in society, which the author addresses in the remainder of the book. Certainly all people, whether Christian or non-Christian, face these roles in their daily life. Furthermore, Christians do not have a monopoly on the process

of making moral decisions concerning their roles. The author clearly underscores this. Yet, Benne wants to emphasize the Christian view of God as active in each place of responsibility in the world, whether acknowledged or not.

In the heart of the book, the author moves beyond a more general discussion of moral responsibility to the particular calling of the Christian. He labels this stage “theonomy,” and sees it as the highest form of moral development. Rather than concerned only with the self (egoism) or loyalty to a group (heteronomy) or some kind of universal morality (autonomy), a theonomously moral person “aims at becoming a vehicle of God’s intentions through the Holy Spirit” (85, 86). Clearly, Christians may have characteristics of all stages of moral development at any one time, but the Christian life moves toward theonomy as the Christian experiences and responds to God’s grace in Christ Jesus, and the Spirit nurtures a response of faith, hope, and love.

Dr. Benne uses faith, hope, and love—obviously a biblically-based framework—to relate theonomy with daily life and draw conclusions about specific ethical issues facing modern American society. Faith gives a deeper meaning to our places of responsibilities, seeing them as part of God’s calling and shaped by God’s justifying grace in Christ. Agape love distinguishes the Christian calling which “upsets the nice calculus—the give and take—of mutual love” (109). It is modeled after the love of God in Christ, “a kind of divine madness that breaks the sane confines of worldly love” (109). Finally, living by the grace of God gives us the perspective of hope in our daily callings: that in spite of our sinfulness and the brokenness of the world, we belong to a loving God who holds the future. Again, much of what he says here will not be new to readers of this journal, but is helpful as a whole, because it provides a theological framework for ethical discussion which never strays from the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

In the final section of the book, the author discusses four specific callings of the Christian: marriage and family life, work,

public life, and the church. After describing each one as a place of responsibility, he then discusses the implications of each as a Christian calling. Unfortunately, this leads to excessive repetition. Perhaps that is the reason why, despite the debatable nature of this section, my interest waned here. It also seems that too often conclusions are drawn which assume a common value system within society or the church which may no longer exist (if it ever did), and so a more thorough rationale is needed. But a book as broad in scope as *Ordinary Saints* takes that particular risk.

The book delivers what it promises, namely, a comprehensive and straightforward account of the Christian life. However, I wonder whether it will serve the more fundamental purpose of helping to build up the religious and moral capital of society. Wanting to speak with confidence and conviction, Dr. Benne may not reach those who need first to struggle with their cynicism and confusion regarding religious and moral answers before they can appropriate the Christian story as *their* story. On the other hand, the book will be an invaluable resource for those who are waiting and even searching for such bearings. It especially provides a resource for teachers and students who wish to approach ethics from a theological groundwork. Even more important, *Ordinary Saints* challenges our society and our church to consider the extent of its claims. We cannot afford to ignore the question of whether our society has in fact

lost its bearings, and whether inadequate and shallow replacements guide it. Many voices speak in agreement; if we join them, then certainly as a church we need to develop a theological, evangelical, and pastoral response. *Ordinary Saints* is a beginning.

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**UNCONVENTIONAL PARTNERS: RELIGION AND LIBERAL CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES**, by Robert Booth Fowler. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989. Pp. 194. \$12.95 (paper).

What is the relationship between religion and liberal culture in America? Robert Booth Fowler offers a new answer on the basis of recent research. His book attempts to show that the standard hypotheses are no longer adequate. Religion does not simply justify American culture and is not blindly captive to its values; the classic “integration hypothesis” no longer holds. American religion is not significantly alienated from liberal culture or effectively promoting radical dissent; the contemporary “challenge hypothesis” does not hold. Fowler’s contribution to the discussion is a “suitably tentative and exploratory” first step toward a new theory: the “refuge hypothesis” (viii). His argument is attractive:

In this book I intend to provide another view, a case, I believe, that is crying out to be made: I argue that religion in America has been and continues to be an alternative to the liberal order, a refuge from our society and its pervasive values. Yet by providing that space from our liberal order, it unintentionally helps the liberal world. (4)

Fowler begins by reviewing the major theories, their best exponents, and the current research. The book is interesting and worthwhile for this review alone. The case for his refuge hypothesis rests on data which suggest that while liberal values dominate society most Americans are aware of their serious inadequacies and so hold them only ambivalently. Fowler offers the standard list of the values of liberal culture: a commitment to skeptical reason; tolerance in politics and lifestyles; the central place of the individual. He maintains that these values are in no danger of being displaced in American life. They remain appealing and powerful but they are not sufficient. Liberal culture provides no respite from skeptical reason, from ever-widening tolerance, or from “the tedium of the unrestrained self” (17). Religion as refuge provides spiritual certainties, moral grounding, and community.

The notion of refuge accommodates the majority of Americans who say that they believe in God, but who may not belong to a church or attend worship. Fowler’s refuge is “a state of mind and only sometimes a matter of place”; this state of mind is a “compensation” for the serious limitations

of liberal culture (19, 156). The need for refuge is temporary, and the compensations offered will not provide a foundation on which to build a life; in that regard the culture still dominates. Is this the “church of the gaps” which exists to provide what the culture cannot?

Fowler’s argument stands as a correction in the tradition of the integration hypothesis. His position is that religion does support the culture, if unintentionally, not because religion “is well integrated into that society’s norms and power but because it is *not*, and rather serves as a pressure-relieving escape from them” (13, emphasis original). Correction is called for because the evidence suggests that “the more the culture encourages skepticism, moral formlessness, and relativism, the more religion appeals to people as an alternative” (16). Fowler cites research which suggests that the people who do go to church or who are looking for one to join, are looking for this “alternative” and will leave churches where this is not found. The irony is that churches which are closest to the culture are the furthest away from what most people understand as their religious needs.

Adherents of the integration theory may make the logical argument that religion cannot be a refuge from society. Fowler cites Robert Bellah and others who believe that religion as a refuge is merely an opportunity for individual expression. Fowler maintains that there is evidence of people with religiously based moral grounding. He cites studies on abortion, pornography, drug use, and casual sex as examples. So while Bellah and others “describe an America flying apart, bursting at its disintegrating moral seams,” Fowler believes that they are describing “only one America. They ignore another that is involved in church and firm in its moral belief on many ethical issues” (27). In Fowler’s view this America hasn’t changed very much. “In this latter America, religion and the churches continue, on the whole, to provide some boundaries for liberalism today just as they did 150 years ago, when de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*” (27-28). Surely this is overstated. While it may be true that religion as refuge does offer effective guidance on some moral issues for some people, its real influence in drawing boundaries around liberal culture clearly is not the same as it was 150 years ago.

Fowler’s treatment of the challenge theory is demanded by the recent upsurge in political activism by conservative and liberal Christians. There is evidence to suggest that religion is moving from its traditional integrative and supporting role to promote dissent and even radical dissent. Fowler’s reading of the evidence leads him to insist that the sound of these movements “is not a good measure of their fury” (156). “Challenge” as Fowler defines it must comprise basic opposition to the liberal values of the culture in favor of an alternative. Political activism is unusual in American religion but is not yet a true challenge. So while “it is one thing to denounce Ronald Reagan or his policies at home and abroad; it is quite another to formulate serious theoretical critiques of American culture and institutions and to act on them. There is little of the latter in mainstream Protestantism” (87). While even this much is unusual and new, it is not radical. The same is true for the Roman Catholics. Fowler argues that the successful integration of Roman Catholics into American society has given the bishops “enough confidence to edge toward a more prophetic role,” and while their pastoral letters arouse controversy, they do not qualify as radical dissent (101).

Despite these tensions, Fowler believes that the relationship between religion and liberal culture remains close. Religion serves liberalism well today not so much by justifying and rationalizing the values of society but by offering a temporary refuge from liberalism’s serious

weaknesses. Liberal culture would not be well served by the demise of religion. Not to be minimized is the fact that liberalism has served religion well through the First Amendment and the decisions maintaining the separation of church and state. Religion would not be well served by the demise of liberal culture.

This book should be read both for its argument and for its review of current research. The argument is interesting and the research touches on many topics of current concern: for example, the membership decline of the mainline churches, the clergy-lay gap, and what the evidence shows

about why people come to church and why they leave. The book is well-organized and clearly written. It concludes with an extensive (21 pages) bibliography and an index of names. This work is a provocative and solid sourcebook for the study of religion and culture in America.

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**20 HOT POTATOES CHRISTIANS ARE AFRAID TO TOUCH**, by Tony Campolo. Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1988. Pp. 235. \$11.99.

Is it possible to be prophetic and still pastor a congregation? Can a preacher speak confrontively and boldly on divisive issues without alienating and polarizing her or his congregation? Why is it that many pulpits today are silent about those things which seem to occupy the minds of Christian people?

This book is born out of the tension one preacher has experienced and is written with the acknowledgement that his boldness may now come from not having to speak on a weekly basis before a Sunday morning congregation. Tony Campolo identifies here as twenty "hot potatoes" issues he believes have been avoided, downplayed, or inadequately addressed from the pulpit. His audience is clearly intended to be the Evangelical Right, but his relevance crosses the boundaries of all denominations and persuasions.

Campolo includes in his list such familiar issues as homosexuality, AIDS, divorce, remarriage, the ordination of women, and the proper use of wealth. He also adds some unusual issues under the titles "Is hunting a sin?"; "Should preachers start preaching against sports?"; "What do I do if I'm sexually starved?"; and "Is television evangelism a waste of money?" Conspicuous by their absence are such hot potatoes as abortion, foreign policy, nationalism, nuclear weapons, cohabitation before marriage, and other issues that most clergy try to avoid. Each chapter is roughly ten pages long and stands by itself, making this an easy book to pick up and put down without losing continuity.

Tony Campolo is professor of sociology at Eastern Baptist College in Pennsylvania and is probably best known as a dynamic and compelling speaker who can be found wherever two or three are gathered. His writing style reflects this and is thus more conversational than pedantic in tone. He admits to being theologically conservative and biblically literalistic and he brings those perspectives faithfully to his profound concern for social justice. His opinions are more likely to

be controversial and affrontive to his Evangelical peers than to most readers of this journal. That is not to say, however, that all of his opinions will sit well with more mainstream theologians. I suspect that many will disagree with his statements on remarriage, resurrection, welfare, and counseling. But the value of this book, I believe, lies not in its ability to evoke agreement. Rather, it is in its potential to serve as a starting point for discussion and reflection.

I would definitely *not* choose this book if I were looking for a carefully exegeted and applied use of Scripture texts and a thorough analysis of each issue. Campolo himself states that this book is “not meant to be a set of academic treatises, but a series of important questions that require readers to answer with action, not with intellectual agreement” (235).

The attractiveness and utility of this book lie precisely in its ability to begin a discussion of these issues without burying the reader in a morass of analysis, data, and footnoted text. This book is an excellent resource for Sunday adult discussion and home study groups led by a capable moderator. Campolo blends Scripture, story, and opinion in a manner that is engaging and accessible to most adult readers. While his ideas or arguments are not especially profound or new, they are honest and sin-

cere and thought-provoking reflections straight from the heart of a man who truly wrestles with the application of his faith and beliefs to his actions, choices, and words. He is also quite quotable:

[On hunting] Why is it that when we destroy something humans make we call it vandalism, but when we destroy something God has made we call it a sport? (136)

[On homosexuality] I find it interesting to note that the New Testament does not give as much space or attention to this sin as it does to others, such as neglect of the poor or lack of love for others. Actually, Jesus never alludes to homosexuality in His teachings. The fact that homosexuality has become such an overriding concern for many contemporary pastors may be more a reflection of the homophobia of the church than it is the result of the emphasis of Scripture. (115)

[On TV evangelists] Healing services are highly visual and make for good television viewing....What God can do is reduced to a simple process of show and tell....It is hard to reduce the meaning of the cross to an amusing forty-five second spot....The Holy Spirit comes off better than Vanna White because on television he assures everyone that they are a winner. (76)

[On ordaining women] It seemed to me there was a contradiction in giving women authority to preach to people in other countries and then denying them the privilege of being ordained for ministry in our country. (36)

These statements may raise a furor in the conservative circles from which Campolo hails; they may not be without cost to Campolo. It is, in fact, conceivable that some could result in a renewed charge of “heresy” similar to the one leveled at him in 1985 by representatives of Campus Crusade for Christ and its International School of Theology. At that time, there were some who saw in his understanding of Matthew 25 and his belief that Christ is present in each and every person he meets a dangerous universalism which he strongly denies.

There are probably few readers of this journal who would hurl such charges at Campolo. Nevertheless, Campolo demonstrates that there is a lively engagement of social issues within Evangelical churches—a fact about which “mainstream” theologians continue to be wilfully ignorant. For in-depth analysis of issues, one will need to go beyond Campolo’s book. But if you are willing to accept this book on its own terms, it could prove to be a useful tool and provide some enjoyable reading for those of us who too often render these “hot potatoes” into pale, timid words of mellifluous mush. If you don’t share Campolo’s theology, you might at least be challenged to engage the same issues with equal directness and accessibility.

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**HEBREW GOSPEL: CRACKING THE CODE OF MARK**, by Wolfgang Roth. Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1988. Pp. 160. \$34.95/\$16.95 (paper).

A very important but sadly neglected factor in the interpretation of New Testament texts is that which concerns the part literary conventions play in facilitating communication between author and reader/hearers. It seems obvious that a text can be intelligible only when it represents the shared world of both its author and reader(s). And yet this neglect has been to a large extent responsible for much misinterpretation and has often led into blind alleys when difficult New Testament passages are encountered. Against the background of this errant approach to New Testament studies, particularly in the gospels, Wolfgang Roth’s study is an important addition to the list of recent studies on Mark which take the literary and sociological aspects of the text seriously. (See, for example, H. Kee, *Community of the New Age*, 1977, 1983 reprint; F. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, 1979; M. Hooker, *The Message of Mark*, 1983; W. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel*, 1983; V. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 1984; J. Derrett, *The Making of Mark*, 1985.)

Roth, Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, calls into question such

notions as “secrecy” (first advanced by Wrede) and special genre in Mark. For example, in his treatment of the predicament which recent research has raised, Roth applauds Kelber’s critique of Bultmann’s and Marxsen’s form-critical and redactional approaches respectively, but laments that “Kelber’s search does not lead to a discovery of the literary form that defines the gospel in its entirety” (126). Again, while Roth accepts Kermode’s notion of an “irreducible” gospel without hidden secrets—thus one that is “perpetually to be interpreted”—he nevertheless progresses beyond Kelber’s point when he emphasizes “that once those initiated into the secret have grasped the parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-8) as the master key (Mk 4:13), they are ready not only to understand the other parables (Mk 4:21-32; comp. 33-34), but also to become active bearers of that insight” (127f.). For Roth, Mark’s gospel has now become an exercise in parabling, “moving the audience into the very place that the author has vacated—the place of those who find themselves engaged in the search for the story behind the story” (128). This

insight makes this monograph an essential contribution to Markan studies and a vital tool for those who wish to interpret the text by using the literary approach.

Roth's arguments are admirably concise *and* cogent, without digression (the less pedantic reader or busy pastor might say without distraction) to footnotes. The chapters are clearly divided and numbered into sections and sub-sections which constantly remind the reader how and where the argument is proceeding.

Roth builds on the method he used in an earlier article on the Fourth Gospel (see *Biblical Research*, vol. XXXII [1987] 6-41). There, he affirms St. Augustine's axiom: "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the OT lies open in the New." But his affirmation is based on an altogether literary approach which conceives the text in its literary integrity. Very early in that article Roth informs us that he does not proceed as form, tradition, and redaction critics would, interpreting the text as if it were the result of a process of transmission, interpretation, and redaction. He describes his method as the "synchronic approach," exploring the work as it stands and "probing its structure and its narrative plot." This approach to the New Testament allows him to discover structural elements of passages in a given book which parallel those in the Hebrew Bible, and to suggest that the later author encodes the narrative to depict the parallel circumstances in the early church to those in Israel. Thus, for Roth, a proper understanding of the text involves precise decoding of the parallel situations. At the heart of the decoding process is the role of convention—the understanding that both author and readers/hearers share the same literary conventions which the author employs to make the text function intelligibly.

This methodology informs Roth's approach to the Gospel of Mark. For him, Mark is encoded in sixteen serialized units all of which have the wonder works of Jesus becoming the focus around which the author plots the entire narrative. The paradigm for these sixteen units is from 2 Kings (2:13-13:21) which deals primarily with the wonder works of the prophet Elisha; and Roth concludes that "[t]he correspondence between the sum total of Elisha's deeds and the number of Jesus' miracles up to Mk 7:37 can hardly be mere coincidence" (7). He takes his cue for establishing a relationship between Elisha and Jesus from the gospel's "scenario of divine intervention" which "initiates Jesus' preaching with the words, 'The appointed time period is completed and the Kingdom of God has drawn near. Change your mind and believe the good news!'" (10). The correspondence he sees is between Jesus' commission (received at Jordan from John who is subsequently removed from the terrestrial realm) and Elisha's commission. There is correspondence between Jesus' ministry and that of Elisha in that the sixteen miracles of the former correlates with "the sum total of those accomplished by Elisha." Roth raises a crucial question: "Is the entire scenario of the Kingdom's establishment, into which the various correspondences would fit, a subject of discussion in Mk?" (11). This question provides Roth with a point of departure for his investigation into the Gospel of Mark, particularly the "master parable," that of the Sower (4:3-20). He concludes that "the parable of the sower seems to use the

plot of 1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 13 as conceptual-narrative foil for its description of the responses to be expected in relation to Jesus' mission" (13).

An important facet of Roth's literary analysis is his "search for analogies in Jewish-Hellenistic literature" that would validate his thesis that the author of Mark envisions the life and martyrdom of Jesus in terms of a "scriptural model." In his exploration of the

“concealment and disclosure” (81) motif in Mark, Roth accepts Daniel Patte’s (*Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine*, 1975) postulate that “broad Biblical patterns” serve specifically to structure post-biblical apocalyptic compositions. When one advances a thesis regarding a certain literary pattern in a text, it is absolutely necessary to demonstrate the pervasive nature of that pattern. In this regard Roth has accomplished his task admirably, using copious examples from contemporaneous sources. His search is therefore thoroughly justified when one realizes that these texts were not written in a literary and social vacuum. It needs to be emphasized that New Testament texts made sense to the readers/hearers of the documents because both authors and readers/hearers were participants in the world of the texts and understood the literary conventions that created the text.

Roth’s proposal recognizes the importance for New Testament readers of several literary assumptions underlying these documents. First, the New Testament authors write with the assumption that the reader(s) know(s) the Hebrew narratives. The New Testament texts, therefore, are replete with motifs drawn from the Hebrew Bible, and duplication of these motifs should serve as prompts for the modern reader’s understanding of the message. Secondly, persuasion is the goal of the authors and, therefore, rhetorical skills, drawn from the classical rhetoricians of the contemporary period, are evident in their literary products. Thirdly, the literary genre of the work should resemble some genre which is known to have existed at the time of writing, since it should be obvious that effective and persuasive communication would preclude as fallacious—a point which Talbert (*What Is a Gospel?*, 1977) argues convincingly—the notion of a new “gospel” genre created by the author of Mark.

Interpreters and pastors who have a love affair with typology should find that Roth has provided them with helpful insights with his literary approach to the New Testament. One caveat, however, is in order. Even after careful comparison of the details of the miracles in Mark and 2 Kings, perfect correspondence is still lacking. For example, Jesus performed twenty-four miracles, whereas Elisha performed sixteen; and Roth acknowledges this, but his attempt at harmonizing the discrepancy is, in my view, not entirely convincing. Perhaps he does not need to offer every justification in support of his thesis. Even when an interpretation or exegesis is articulated in a reasonably cogent manner, there are bound to be baffling elements which need not be forced into conformity with the thesis or model one proposes. Scholars who work with chiasmus, for example, know the frustration of not being able to find the matching line even in an immaculate text. Others, not that contented, have gone on to manufacture chiastic structures in myriads of biblical passages, thereby doing disservice to an otherwise insightful literary approach to the biblical text. These remarks are a “caveat” precisely because I do not intend to diminish the excellence of this monograph.

Roth does not present an interpretation of Mark, a task he thinks “must be left to a commentary on the second gospel” (89). Rather, he claims to have “cracked the code” which the author used to communicate his gospel, and now it is left for the twentieth-century reader to encode the gospel so as to understand the message of the document. This can be done only when that reader becomes familiar with the socio-literary patterns that made the document intelligible to that first audience. In today’s world of high tech an announcement of “cracking the code” produces a ripple effect; anxious peddlers rush to seek entry into the once secret world of information. Roth has ushered the modern reader into that secret world, and I eagerly await the commentaries and/or sermons that will ex-

exploit the reservoir of insights he has provided.

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**FIRST AND SECOND KINGS**, by Richard Nelson. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987. Pp. 273. \$19.95.

Richard Nelson's commentary on 1 and 2 Kings in the Interpretation series fulfills a very important need in the area of biblical scholarship. Unlike the volume by John Gray in the Old Testament Library series, and the volumes by Simon J. De Vries, and T. R. Hobbs in the Word series, Nelson's work is much more accessible as a theological tool for teachers and preachers alike. In this regard, it is an ideal companion volume to Gwilym Jones' commentaries on 1 and 2 Kings in the New Century Bible Commentary series.

Nelson approaches and treats the text fundamentally as theological literature. He values Kings as theology in the form of historiography, with God as the central focus of Israel's history. He is also cognizant of the kerygmatic nature of Kings, and interprets it in a manner that points to its relevance for contemporary readers.

The author employs a number of novel ways of engaging the reader with the text. He views the different sections as "files" on a variety of characters. The structure of "openings" and "closings" provide readers with something of a map. Within this larger structural framework, Nelson points to the importance of parataxis (the placing of shorter units side by side to build a larger piece), the words of the prophets, the narrator's evaluation of the kings' rule, and the structural techniques of apostasy and reform.

Nelson begins with the basic presupposition that the text is best understood when viewed holistically. For example, while it is the scholarly consensus that 1 Kings 8 is the end product of a complex redactional history, the author is quick to direct attention to the fact that in its final form, this text reflects a theological unity (50). In many respects this typifies Nelson's approach.

Moreover, there are several specific elements that are particularly attractive and helpful in his treatment of the text. Let me point to three such. First, his insights into obscure and ambiguous passages are interesting and perceptive. Whether it is the role of Abishag in the latter days of David's life or comments on the role of the queen mother or the story of Joab, Nelson provides insightful comments.

Second, on the subject of Solomon's consolidation of power, Nelson writes in language that has contemporary overtones. He sees Solomon's accession to power as illustrating "the brutal violence of the one party state and the utility of moral justification for politically advantageous crimes" (23). The author urges the readers not to "buy" everything that is said and done in this text. Our suspicions and questions of contemporary political machinations and ideologies must also come to bear on the interpretation of the text. That is to say, even though Kings is part of the biblical text and profoundly theological, Nelson warns against being blind to

Solomon's "self-justifying rhetoric" (30). While the author clearly places the emphasis on the theological intent of the book of Kings, he nevertheless takes issue with many of the political maneuvers of that era. As a positive guide, Nelson suggests that the text offers teachers and preachers a stimulus for widening their understanding of the basis of political ideology.

Third, the theological tension between the immanence and the transcendence of God finds expression in Kings. Nelson discusses this issue succinctly and clearly in light of 1 Kings 8. According to the author, this complex and sophisticated subject is resolved to some degree by 1 Kings 8:29-30. Nelson even uses 1 Kings 3:1-5 to shed light on the business of conditional and unconditional promises. He argues that the extreme poles articulated by Augustine and Pelagius can be balanced by a proper understanding of this text. Based on this text, he states, "God's critically important promise rests on unconditional grace, founded on a past act of obedience....Conditional

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page 100

promises are of a subsidiary nature. The Christian is comforted by the unconditional and challenged by the conditional" (35).

Throughout this commentary, Nelson's comments are uniformly helpful. His use of colloquialisms add a special style to the reading of the text. He speaks of "carrot and stick" (60-61); he speaks of the "burning out" of Elijah (122); and he refers to Gehazi and a sidekick of the likes of Sancho Panza and Dr. Watson!

The author fulfills admirably the ideals set out by the Interpretation series. He has provided a commentary that is eminently readable. Both teachers and preachers will find this an indispensable tool for their work.

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**EDUCATING IN FAITH: MAPS AND VISIONS**, by Mary C. Boys. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Pp. 230. \$21.95.

Through "Mapmaking" Mary Boys, a professor of theology and religious education at Boston College and an increasingly significant religious educator nationally, creatively provides a text surveying a comprehensive history of religious education in the United States. Her theoretical construct provides a map extended over space and time using the categories of Evangelism, Religious Education, Christian Education, and Catholic Education-Catechetics. In a shorter second part of the book she develops visions for directions.

The construct itself sets the travel direction as obviously Roman Catholic, leaving Lutherans and mainline Protestants to fill in the maps they need, but, regardless, Part One of the book is important reading. (Lutherans often just as obviously need a larger map than the too parochial history of Luther and the Reformation.)

Boys astutely begins with Evangelism because it "is deeply rooted in the American experience and cannot be understood apart from its connection with this 'redeemer nation'" (13). She charts the journey from Jonathan Edwards to Charles Finney, Dwight Moody and Billy

Sunday, reminding us that revivals were a vital means of educating an immigrant people.

Although revivalism drew a sharp distinction between secular and sacred, its preachers were likewise caught in cultural beliefs including the success ethic, and therefore failed to recognize the political nature of their teaching, forming a people in the American mythology of the self-made person—"a strange irony for a movement rooted in awareness of God's surprising grace" (27).

The American Bible Society, women's home missionary societies, and the American Sunday School Union were powerful evangelistic organizations. "Any Sunday school had the potential of becoming a nucleus of a congregation that would be supported by the Home Missionary Society" (30). We might learn today as well that educational ministry is an important tool of effective evangelism, not its antithesis.

The missionaries evangelized and left libraries in their wake.

Statistics in an 1859 *Manual of Public Libraries* document that 30,000 of the 50,000 libraries in the nation were Sunday school collections....Wherever [missionaries] went, schools and libraries followed; without the Sunday school, the entire educational landscape of the nineteenth century would have had a very different shape. (31)

Religious Education, Boys describes, is not just a successor to the evangelistic movement, but both its alternative and its counterpoint. Religious Education as a classic expression, begins, of course, with Horace Bushnell's immensely influential *Christian Nurture* in 1847. It not only countered heavy emphases on a conversion experience but was grounded in a heightened awareness of the social character of Christianity rather than in extreme individualism (40-41).

The progressivism movement of the late 19th century moves toward the influential

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page 101

John Dewey who believed that schools should not merely reflect society but improve it. Progressive education joined with liberal theology in the work of George Albert Coe emphasizing Jesus as the supreme educator rather than as redeemer. Boys agrees that hidden in this approach, with its helpful emphases on societal responsibility rather than individual sin and salvation, was a not-so-helpful uncritical regard for democracy which could equate the United States too easily with the Kingdom of God (59 and 48).

"If the classic expression *religious education* served as both counterpoint and alternative to *evangelism*, then *Christian education* functioned as the critique and corrective to...the excesses of liberalism" (66). She details the influence of neo-orthodoxy including Reinhold Niebuhr and H. Shelton Smith which stressed the norm of the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ rather

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page 102

than the humanistic Jesus as good example. She places Randolph Crump Miller in this chapter based chiefly on his early belief that theology was the "clue" to Christian Education (1950), even though his later categories of process theology have modified his earlier claim (71 and 128).

This chapter is disproportionately and disappointingly short. She helpfully contrasts this approach epitomizing H. Richard Niebuhr's "Christ and culture in paradox" to the "Christ of culture" of Religious Education, but only acknowledges the prominent place of Christian

education, noting but not following many significant directions since the late 1960s (75). Even her later chapter on Contemporary Modifications which includes the 20th-century fundamentalists, Sojourners, the Unitarian tradition and Paulo Freire's *conscientization* and *praxis* glaringly omits the ongoing work of such groups as Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans with the excuse, "Christian education encompasses a spectrum of interests, emphases and themes. It, therefore, resists easy analysis" (131).

Her chapter on Catholic Education-Catechetics is more complete, noting that the term "catechetics" focuses Catholic education since the Second Vatican Council. She traces Catholic education as associated almost entirely with Catholic schools. (The virtual equating of public schools in the 19th century with Protestant teaching meant the exclusion of the growing number of Roman Catholics necessitating a "Christ against culture" stance.) The twentieth century Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), primarily the work of the non-ordained, offered an alternative (86-7). The more recent "Catechetics" approach includes a kerygmatic renewal with deep concern for proclaiming God's word in the contemporary world, reclaiming the oral character of education in faith with its bond with liturgy. She notes catechetics has given little sustained attention to matters of curriculum and teaching and is not inclusive enough to embrace the totality of religious education (101-2).

Her Part Two on Vision soundly incorporates feminist contributions including Mary Field Belecky and the three co-authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing*. One hopes Boys will pursue her own vision in subsequent writings. Likewise she not only marks out the boundaries but helps us move beyond them into the public world, noting, "It is the educator's task to teach the church's communal language so that this imagination is formed for the good of the world" (179). She calls us to the task of conserving, liberating, and transforming so that we make both accessible and manifest the faith of the Christian community.

This "guidebook" of "mapmaking" could be a useful supplementary text for courses in religious education. It also provides parish educators—which I staunchly assume includes pastors—a memorable historical overview of religious education in this country beyond the Lutheran story.

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**ACTS**, by William H. Willimon. Atlanta: John Knox, 1988. Pp. 209. \$16.95.

The Interpretation Commentaries are intended to be neither historical-critical commentaries nor homiletical aids but rather "a third kind of resource, a commentary which presents the integrated result of historical and theological work" (v). That was the assigned task, and Willimon has produced one of the best pieces in this uneven series. Willimon has carefully considered the scholarly debates on historical and literary matters, but does not focus on them. Instead, he uses the results of such study to support a connected reading of the text. At the other end of the continuum, Willimon is well aware of the tasks of preaching and teaching, but usually avoids explicating the text for a specific context.

Willimon is comfortable with this middle way. He shows this in theologically astute comments on complex issues in Acts interpretation. A few of these will give a fair

sample of themes that are pursued throughout the commentary.

On the treatment of Paul:

While Paul and the Twelve function as the church's leaders, Acts subordinates Paul to the Twelve—Acts' way of indicating that the authority for all religious experience, including that of Paul, is subject to the criteria imposed by the ministry of Jesus (of whom the Twelve were witnesses). (16)

Experience and tradition are the parameters that center the Acts church. Nothing happens without the instigation of the Spirit, but all innovations or surprises are confirmed by apostolic authority and the Scripture—normative tradition. The inclusion of Gentiles who had not become Jews is presented in Acts as a great illustration of genuine, startling newness in God's work. However, the missionaries' experiences are only certified in Jerusalem, after reports of the Spirit's presence, and by James' citation of Amos. The leaders of the church, from Peter and Matthias through Paul, are those who can link the church to its originating events and who fulfill its mission by their own lively encounter with the risen Christ.

On Israel and its Scriptures:

For Luke the Scriptures of the Jews are the primary context within which Jesus' life is comprehended. The Old Testament is not "Christianized" in this process, rather it is allowed to speak its own word about the coming salvation. Nowhere does Luke speak of the "founding" of the church or of the formation of some "new" Israel. There is only one Israel—the faithful people who respond faithfully to the promises of God. The story of Jesus both gathers and divides Israel. (36)

God's faithfulness to the promise to Israel is foundational for the good news in Acts. There is no wholesale rejection of Judaism, no end to the Jewish mission, but there is a constant wrestling with the mystery of unbelief. And, there is an attempt to come to terms with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome—a conundrum for all who claimed to be the true heirs of God's promises, Jews and Christians.

Willimon cautions the reader that Acts cannot be used to justify modern anti-Semitism. That is one of his helpful points in a parenthetical "Reflection: Luke and His Fellow Jews" (86-91).

On discipleship:

Paul exemplified how closely the ministry of the witness and servant would resemble the life and trials of the Master....[But] unlike the death of Jesus, the death of Paul has little interest in Luke's story because this story of a servant named Paul is, in reality, a story about the risen Christ. (182)

Christians' lives will look like that of Christ. The question which motivates Acts, Willimon shows us, is not an academic, "Do you agree?" but a political and social invitation, "Will you join up?" (187). Acts is not concerned with great ideas but with holy people. The regular attention to wealth and its disposition is a discipleship issue. Repentance is never separated from consideration for the poor and a new relationship with one's possessions.

Conversions in Luke's two-volume work are beginnings, new directions, but they are first of all calls, vocations. Paul is the example of one called by God to a new mission. Willimon helps lay to rest the old misunderstanding of Paul's conversion as primarily an abandonment of his former life. Rather, the apostle moves forward in service of his God. Acts shows God as the

chief actor in this and every drama of conversion. Conversion is not an instantaneous change but a being led, and it is characterized by suffering.

On a theology of the cross/theology of glory:

If Luke's theology is one of growth, success, and victory, it is a success wrought on the hard anvil of suffering and peril. (127)

Luke does not refer to the saving significance of the cross, not even when he speaks for Paul. The resurrection is God's confirmation that Jesus was right to seek the lost and the outcast, even though it meant suffering and dying. Nevertheless, it is the gospel that succeeds and the church that grows. Individuals follow their Lord on a difficult road.

Willimon believes we share a common horizon with the church of Acts. That church was just appearing on the margins of a great empire. Today the church is more and more being shunted aside by a society

that finds its answers in politics and power. In Acts, Willimon says,

A pleasant, if somewhat idealized recollection of the past becomes an assault upon present reality, a bold refashioning of the church, a critique of our current discipleship arrangements. And why would you or I still take the trouble to listen and then to teach and preach from Scripture unless we were interested in effecting the same in our church today? (viii)

Why indeed? Acts is worth another look. This commentary will help you see.

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