



**GOD’S PEOPLE IN GOD’S LAND: FAMILY, LAND AND PROPERTY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**, by Christopher J. H. Wright. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990. Pp. 304. \$16.95 (paper).

This volume is a revised version of Wright’s doctoral dissertation, researched at Cambridge University and submitted some fifteen years ago. The intent of the author is to fill a void in Old Testament study which he perceives to be present in the study of the ethics of Israel’s society. While I am not entirely convinced of such a void, this study is nevertheless important to the extent that it takes into consideration many of the classical works and seeks to move beyond them. Given that this dissertation was done fifteen years ago, and much scholarship has since been undertaken, this work might even be somewhat dated.

The work seeks to establish the ethical basis for life in ancient Israel. According to Wright, the important sociological and legal studies have not been integrated to produce an overall ethical perspective. He sees this study as a way of integrating Israel’s life and faith.

There are three interconnected parts to this study: the centrality of the family and the connection to the land; land and property ethics; and dependent persons as property.

Wright begins by noting the importance of the land in the tradition of Israel. The land is perceived to be central in the identity of Israel and as such integral to the covenant. Using a theological framework, he proposes the land be viewed from two angles. First, the fact that Yahweh has given the land in itself suggests that there is prior ownership. The areas of property law and ethics are dependent on the ownership of the land by Yahweh. Second, there is an emphasis on the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, where the latter is called son and heir. In addition to the importance of the land, Wright acknowledges that the family is central for an understanding of the covenantal relationship between a divine being and an earthling. He proposes that Yahweh’s ownership of the land is a theologico-economic concept. He adverts that in Leviticus 25 the affirmation of Yahweh’s ownership of the land has an intrinsic connection to the security of individual families in preventing permanent alienation from the land.

According to Wright, Leviticus does not particularly focus on some kind of grand national issue, but rather zeroes in on the function of the family. Therefore, the Old Testament emphasis on Yahweh’s ownership of the land has to do with the protection of the family. He notes in this regard that the family had certain responsibilities, ranging from national involvements such as war or the judicial system or family commitment, to expectations such as the teaching duties of the parent and catechetical instruction. The didactic expectation was shaped more by the legal tradition, while the catechetical duty had a more cultic influence.

In the discussion of land and property ethics, Wright seeks to find a theological basis on which property rights might be focused. To this extent, the author argues that creation is the basis for any kind of theological framework for property ethics. He proposes that, since God is the Creator of all things, human beings will always be subordinate to God’s ownership. He sees

divine ownership and divine gift as inseparably connected.

Given this basic presupposition, what then are the rights of the human being with regard to the land? An attempt is made to define "property rights" in a manner which relates to life, though not in any kind of

abstract way. Wright notes that "we are not concerned with an abstract, impersonal principle nor with an *inherent* sacrosanctity of property *per se*....On the basis of the Old Testament, therefore, we cannot speak of property itself being 'sacred' or of the 'sanctity of property.' It is the *relationships*, Godward and humanward, of which property is a function and indicator, which are alone sacred" (140-41).

With this understanding of property rights come certain responsibilities to Yahweh, to members of the immediate family, and to others from the community. The property owners are responsible to God and each other precisely because Yahweh is the owner and giver of the land.

In the final section of the study, Wright discusses the notion of dependent persons as property. He takes the traditional stance in this section and speaks of the head of the household and the man's relationship with other members of the family. The primary focus of this section is on the role of wives in the society. Much of this section is a survey and, while that is helpful, Wright does not in any way reckon with the sophisticated studies done by scholars such as Phyllis Tribble. This section would surely have been enhanced by consideration of feminist scholars. On the one hand, he suggests that the idea of a wife being an extension of her husband is commendable, but concludes that based on this study he could not find reason to believe that a wife is part of her husband's property (221). While this conclusion is enlightened, the study itself does not lead to this conclusion.

The discussion of the role of children focuses on the many aspects of the legal obligations between parents and children. A section is given to exploring the second commandment ("visiting the iniquities...to the third and fourth generation"). Wright concludes that children were entirely subject to the authority of the head of the house, though many of the practical aspects of using children as property are restricted. Much of the discussion of the role of children in the household centers around the relationship with the father. Perhaps here again, one would have thought that Wright might be more inclusive, for surely the motif of a relationship with Yahweh is one which carries as many female as male metaphors.

This work by Wright has importance for those who are interested in the ethics of the Old Testament. He has gathered together many of the relevant sources and has sorted through them reasonably well. The work is primarily exegetical in nature, though the author is quite clear that he is interested in implications for the Christian community.

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A well written and thought-provoking commentary is always to be welcomed. Richard Longenecker has written such a commentary which incorporates much of recent scholarship, common sense interpretation, and many helpful insights for those who wish to delve into the text of one of St. Paul's most forceful letters. The commentary is aimed at "the fledgling student, the working minister, and colleagues in the guild of professional scholars and teachers as well" (editor's preface).

Longenecker desires to make a distinctive contribution by his stress on hellenistic epistolary conventions, eclectic treatment of Greco-Roman rhetorical features, the highlighting of Jewish themes and procedures, and an "Antiochian" style of interpretation which lays stress on themes of development and fulfillment in Scripture.

An ample bibliography is cited, though one may question why the author cites an article by Dieter Lührmann but omits mention of his commentary. Omitted also is any mention of Dieter Georgi's work on the opponents in Galatia and Paul J. Achtemeier's little book, *The Quest for Unity in the New Testament Church*. Still, one cannot read everybody and the works cited cover a wide gamut of interpretation. Throughout the commentary the author relies eclectically on the commentary of H. D. Betz, and quite liberally upon Ernest DeWitt Burton's commentary.

In the introduction, Longenecker opens

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page 84

with a very helpful study of the impact of Galatians on the church. Beginning with Marcion and ending with the modern critical period, he provides us with a useful background survey of the significance of Paul's letter for the community of faith. Indeed, the background information in this book is one of its best assets. There are numerous occasions on which the reader is treated to information—for example, about Antioch on the Orontes or Jewish use of Abraham—which enables the reader to put Paul's words into sharper perspective.

In dealing with the recipients of the letter, Longenecker espouses the South Galatian hypothesis which proposes that Paul's letter was sent to the inhabitants of the Roman province of Galatia (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Antioch) and not to the ethnic region of Galatia to the north. Assuming the essential reliability of Acts, Longenecker makes the assertion that Galatians was sent to those whom Paul visited on an early missionary journey recounted in Acts 13 and 14. The letter was not sent later in Paul's career (e.g., in the 50s) but prior to the Jerusalem council of Acts 15. This makes Galatians one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of Paul's extant letters. Such a view also results in the softening of the controversy between Paul and Peter described in Galatians 2:11-14. This controversy over torah and Christian gentiles actually occurred, says Longenecker, prior to any agreement at the Jerusalem council. Peter is, then, to be partially excused for his duplicitous behavior at Antioch because the early church had not at that time settled the question of the relation of torah to gentile converts.

Both date and addressees are debated among scholars, and while Longenecker argues well for his position, there are certain questions which remain. For instance, why does Longenecker not say more on Paul's non-provincial use of the names "Arabia" and "Syria" (Gal 1:17, 21)? One of the major components of the argument for a South Galatian hypothesis is the supposed fact that Paul uses only Roman provincial names and we must regard "Galatia" as provincial (cf., Introduction [lxvii, lxx]). But clearly Paul does not use Arabia and Syria in any provincial sense as Longenecker concedes in the commentary (34, 40). If Paul may use those terms in a more

general sense, then why not also the name “Galatia”? Longenecker’s reliance upon Acts’ supposed historical reliability is also of concern since such a position is still in vigorous debate. It must be said, however, that Longenecker is scholastically forthright about the hypothetical nature of his position on the date and addressees and does not present a high-handed view of his opinion.

Following the introduction is the commentary proper, replete with bibliographical sections, translation, and useful notes on the sigla which explicate some of the textual hieroglyphics. Each section begins with comments on form/structure/setting, continues with commentary, and ends with an explanation. This manner of presentation is easy to follow and helpful when searching for information.

Longenecker views the argument in Galatians as exhibiting a unitary integrity in which Paul’s comments on life in the Spirit (ch. 5) are decidedly connected with his previous arguments in the letter. The author’s comments on legalism and nomism are quite helpful as are his balanced observations based on rhetorical analysis. He advances the view that Paul is fighting both nomistic opponents (the “Judaizers”) and indigenous libertines.

One other concern I have with the commentary has to do with the now popularized translation of *pistis Christou*. As Richard B. Hays and others have argued, this should be taken as a subjective genitive and not an objective genitive. Although this rendering is a late development within Christian exegesis, many have come to accept it as axiomatic and Longenecker is among them. But this rendering results in a thin cup of theological tea which devalues human faith and elevates a ritualistic participatory identification with Christ as forming the basis for salvation. Nor must we understand Paul’s use of *pistis* to mean both faith and faithfulness à la Judaism. The contrasts that Paul draws between faith and works in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 would argue against such a view. Also, in Galatians 3:11-12 it is clear that Paul is talking of human faith and that righteousness

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page 86

comes thereby. Righteousness coming through the faithfulness of Christ, if that is Paul’s view, is never unambiguously stated in Paul’s letters.

The format of the volume, its style, and common sense exegesis are the main strengths of this work. Any concerns center around debated topics in scholarship. For those who wish a conservative and competent interpretation of Galatians, they may certainly find it here. Indeed, if a book is to be judged as adding anything to the scholarly dialogue over Scripture and its interpretation and causing thoughtful consideration of the Bible, we may safely say that Longenecker’s commentary is a welcome addition.

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**THE DEMISE OF THE DEVIL: MAGIC AND THE DEMONIC IN LUKE’S WRITINGS,**  
by Susan R. Garrett. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. Pp. 179.

Susan Garrett’s study of magic and the demonic in Luke-Acts, a revision of her Yale

dissertation, attempts to fill a gap between what she sees as the “considerable attention” accorded the subject in Luke’s writings and the lack of attention it has received from modern scholars. She hopes to contribute both to the way ancient magic is studied and to our awareness of an important aspect of Luke’s two-volume work. Though not without its shortcomings, the book will appeal to those who wish to deepen their understanding of either.

The work is especially helpful in introducing the modern reader to an aspect of the first-century world view very much taken for granted by Luke’s original audience but, as Garrett points out, more than a bit off-putting today. The situation is aggravated by the inability of scholars who have dealt with the issue to agree on precisely what constituted magic and magical practices. In Garrett’s view, those who have treated the relationship between early Christianity and magic have put the question the wrong way. They have attempted to verify in some empirical manner, through some substantive definition of magic, that Jesus and the early Christians did or did not participate in “magical” practices. Garrett insists that no such essence of magic can be found, for the term actually functions above all *relationally*, or sociologically—that is, it is employed by a community in social discourse to aid in the ordering and interpretation of a phenomenon. Thus, what is “magic” to one group may be evidence of the power of God to another. The association of a deed with magical practices by an author or community reveals how the deed was interpreted, not whether it truly did constitute “magic”; it provides a “vocabulary” for making sense of an experience. Thus “the task of the modern interpreter is to determine how context and culture allowed a given incident to offend some believers while being regarded as acceptable by others” (21).

It was one of Luke’s major literary—and theological—aims, Garrett contends, to order and interpret for his community the acts of Jesus and the apostles and to mark them off from those of other wonder-workers. For Luke (following Jewish tradition), those who practiced magic belonged to the kingdom of Satan; to narrate their defeat was to assert the superiority of Christ and the early Christians over the power of Satan (see, e.g., 60). The exegetical portions of Garrett’s book, which comprise its heart, are an attempt to demonstrate how Luke shapes his narrative to accomplish this task.

To begin with, Garrett says, Luke places the story of Jesus and the early church in the larger framework of the struggle between God’s purposes and Satan’s opposition (Chapter 2). She admits that this mythic framework is implicit in the narrative and must be “read between the lines” (60), but her treatments of Jesus’ testing in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13), the Beelzebul controversy (Luke 11:14-23), and the fall of Satan (Luke 10:17-20) lend credence to her assertion, as do the exorcisms performed by Jesus. Garrett thus sets herself off from much previous Lukan scholarship, which, since Hans Conzelmann, has tended to see the time of Jesus as a “Satan-free” period. In her reading, however, “The struggle be-

tween Jesus...and Satan lies at the very heart of Luke’s story” (58).

The struggle continues in the life of the early church. Garrett devotes a chapter to each of three passages from Acts which deal explicitly with magic and magicians: Simon Magus (Acts 8:4-25), Paul and Bar Jesus (Acts 13:4-12), and the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:8-20). The stories serve to proclaim the impotence of Satan and Satan’s minions before the power of God, as well as to demonstrate the qualitative distinction between acts of magic and the acts of the early

Christians. The deeds of Simon Magus, for instance, parallel those of Philip, and both evoke wonder among the people. Philip's works emerge as superior, however, because they exemplify the content of his preaching of Christ, while the vanity and idolatry of Simon's deeds—and hence their demonic provenance—are exposed (63f.).

Garrett's exegesis does not seek "to identify the 'right' or 'wrong' point of view" of a deed which might be construed as magic, but rather "to discover how *one* of the participants in an ancient debate might have clarified and defended his assessment" (86). On this score, her work must be viewed as a significant contribution, both methodologically and substantively, to the contemporary debate concerning magic in the New Testament world. Though some heavy-handed exegesis occasionally interferes with Luke's voice by seeking to limit it too much (see, for example, 96f.), the book as a whole does open up a new and helpful way to view Luke's literary and theological achievement.

While Garrett illuminates Luke's hermeneutical achievement superbly, revealing how he presented the miraculous deeds of Jesus and the early church in an environment in which they were open to a variety of interpretations, she offers little direction for those grappling with the modern hermeneutical problem. She leaves unexplored what the contemporary hermeneutical and theological pay-off of her approach might be. Since she raises the specter of modern sensibilities herself (1f., 104), it would not be unfair to expect a few pages devoted to the subject. Moreover, the fact that two of the three stories in Acts clearly identify the practitioners of the black art of magic as Jews presents a further stumbling block for modern readers, which Garrett shows no desire to address (see p. 104). Still, *The Demise of the Devil* succeeds in bringing a neglected but important topic to our attention and adds a significant piece to our understanding of the cultural world of the New Testament and the early Christians' intersection with it.

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**THE CHRISTOLOGY OF JESUS**, by Ben Witherington, III. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 320. \$24.95.

"In this book, I intend to state as much as I think is plausible about how Jesus viewed himself, particularly with respect to christological matters, in an attempt to associate Christian faith with the life of the Jesus of history" (2). This is a project to make one nervous, at least initially, especially since Witherington's investigation seeks not only Jesus' hard historical edges, but also his intentions and understandings, and this in order to link them to the intentions and understandings of Christian faith. Intentions and self-understandings are slippery and easy to mistake, both in Jesus and in the Christian faith.

Initial nervousness is allayed somewhat by Witherington's proposed method. He attempts a "broad approach" which draws "not only on the usual tools of historical criticism but also on recent gains in the sociological study of the New Testament period, as well as the literary analysis of various types of ancient literature" (31). This breadth promises a sort of adequacy not found in other quests which frequently yield a Jesus cut off from his century and surroundings. This, at least, promises to be a study which takes seriously the ways people are woven into webs, tied to and supported by the people, movements, and projects of their period.

Initial nervousness further fades when one considers (with Witherington) that, however

be, Jesus did have intentions and understandings; he did interact with an identifiable set of people, groups, and movements; he did speak and act, and some of this complex of intentions and interactions must properly be understood in relation to his being the Messiah. The old question about the possibility of material continuity across Jesus' death and resurrection must still be asked. The church told stories, not only about Jesus' death and resurrection, but also about his career, and told them as if the one consistent Jesus were the subject of all the stories. Who was that one Jesus, and what did he think of himself? Initial nervousness about such a project is likely to return, but this book forces some moments of reflection on the relationship between Jesus and Christian confession. Those moments alone may make this book worth a closer look.

Witherington sets himself a daunting task, as may be seen from a sketch of his proposed method. He will look at a varied set of biblical material, not limiting himself to sayings only, or deeds only, and he will look at this material from a variety of perspectives: historical-critical, sociological, literary-rhetorical. Witherington here makes an important contribution: he recognizes how many things would have to be known in order to focus a picture of Jesus' "christology." In practice, understandably, Witherington uses a smaller set of tools, relying most typically on customary form and redaction work augmented by assumptions about the reliability of oral tradition drawn from Gerhardsson. This is not to say that the other methods listed are not employed. Sociological work, in particular, significantly informs Witherington's consideration of Jesus' relationships. Even here, however, it frequently appears that the results of these other investigations are used mainly as illustrative material for the conclusions drawn from form and redactional work.

There are problems here. For one thing, the volume of material to be covered and the array of methods lend to the book a style of argumentation that is occasionally unfortunate. Whole squads of opinions are made to stand in large, loosely organized groups (the book contains over 1000 footnotes). Once they are all assembled, Witherington issues a summary judgment, usually introduced by a terse "I conclude..." (130, 161, 163, 173, 213). He has warned the reader in his first chapter that, because of the size of the task, he will not always be able to present the results of his redaction-critical work, and that he will often present only "some evidence for the reason [he thinks] this or that form of a saying or passage is the most primitive" (28-9). While one may understand the problem Witherington faces, this book needs more arguments and fewer assertions.

There is an associated problem, one that may be expected whenever a scholar attempts a "broad approach." Much is simply ignored. This is unavoidable, and not surprising, but it gives cause for complaint when Witherington's treatment of a matter seems inadequate or one-sided. One wishes, for instance, in all Witherington's consideration of the view that Jesus emerged in confession as the Messiah only out of his death and resurrection, for some discussion of Nils Dahl's treatment of the crucified messiah. None comes.

More troublesome is Witherington's discussion of Jesus' use of Scripture "as a commentary on and means of expressing God's present activity in his ministry" (185). The passages in question are Daniel 7 and Psalm 110 separately and in combination, but the pattern of

argumentation extends to a whole complex of scripturally rooted images and names that Witherington discusses with reference to Jesus' "christology." Witherington supposes that this pattern of scriptural citation goes back to Jesus' own weaving. There are, of course, other possible construals of the origins of these linked patterns of scriptural argument, the most compelling and coherent of which has been offered by Donald Juel in his *Messianic Exegesis*. Juel understands these patterns to be the result of a creative and comprehensible process of scriptural argument made necessary by the shock of Jesus, the crucified and raised messiah. This construal of the woven patterns is not compatible with that offered by Witherington, but Juel's argument is strong and must be taken into account. Witherington's case might be more compel-

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page 89

ling if he anywhere acknowledged Juel's work on this material. He does not.

It is here, in its treatment of Jesus' conception of "God's present activity in his ministry," that this book is most troubling, and perhaps most promising. In this discussion, Witherington says that "Jesus believed that he was living in the age of Scripture fulfillment, or the eschatological age" (185). It is by no means clear to this reviewer that one may (before post-resurrection interpretation of Scripture) speak of "*the* age of Scripture fulfillment," or of "*the* eschatological age," much less of "*the* Messiah" or of "*the* Son of Man" as Witherington does elsewhere. Witherington appears, throughout this book, too often to attribute an implausible clarity to Jesus' notions about himself, implausible because it appears (from Juel's *Messianic Exegesis*) that such clarity was achieved by the church only after long scriptural argument. This is troubling.

At other times, however, Witherington holds himself back from such excesses, and prefers to speak of a "transcendent self-image," rather than of a strictly "messianic self-concept" (276, 27). This attentive restraint is promising and attractive because there was, after all, something that led to Jesus' being crucified as the "king of the Jews." Witherington has contributed a most useful attempt to consider the broad spectrum of what that "something" might have been, and of how that "something" interacted with Jesus' understanding of

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page 90

himself. One may disagree with Witherington's way of working with gospel narratives, one may well wish that he had avoided the use of spatial metaphors for the relationship of divine and human ("Jesus saw himself as above other humans" [269]), and one might certainly have hoped that he would have revealed some of the theological reflection that must accompany some of his statements about Jesus ("Nor does [Jesus' awareness of being God] exclude Jesus from partaking of some of the limitations in knowledge that humans experience about life" [277]). But Witherington has provided an occasion for reflection about the Jesus who acted, thought, planned, and later was crucified and raised. This book will provide pastors, advanced students, and their teachers a chance to talk about something that must be considered.

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**A BLACK FUTURE? JESUS AND SALVATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**, by Ronald Nicolson. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. Pp. 288. \$18.95 (paper).

Ronald Nicolson, professor of Religious Studies at the University of Natal in South Africa, has proposed an arresting project. He asks: What does it mean to say that “Jesus saves” to African youth today? Having been privileged to preach to large congregations of high school youth in the Tlhabane township in the Transvaal, I find it hard not to identify quickly with his task. How can (white), academically trained clergy witness to the power of salvation for today’s African youth? Nicolson’s strategy is inventive. If earlier apologists were concerned to address the interests of the cultured despisers of religion, Nicolson seeks to test the competency of the Christian message to address the life of a hypothetical South African child whom he calls “Sipho.” Sipho’s background is briefly sketched but there is, surprisingly, no attempt to indicate what his moral sensibility is likely to be. Instead, major attention is given to the concerns of academe: (1) a review of the current discussion of christology and theories of the atonement in Anglo-American liberal Protestantism, and (2), more briefly, an overview of selected themes in Latin American and North American black theologies of liberation.

The burden of the christological discussion is to explore the arguments for our need today “to abandon Chalcedon.” It is claimed that Chalcedonian theology rests on hermeneutical, philosophical, and cultural assumptions that are no longer valid. In fact, a Chalcedonian christology inevitably “weakens” any understanding of the atonement which could address Sipho’s world since the Chalcedonian Jesus is *sui generis* and therefore unrelated to Sipho’s own humanness. Nicolson offers a christological alternative: “The Spirit (of God) is present in Jesus in no different a way from that in which the Spirit is present in us, except in the degree of Jesus’ openness and obedience....This is his saving significance” (239). The understanding of salvation is restricted to a consideration of the doctrine of the atonement as viewed from four perspectives: vicarious (Anselm), victorious (Irenaeus), subjective (Abelard), sacrificial (Vincent Taylor). None of these, however, “seems to meet Sipho’s situation.” (The creative reconstruction of the doctrine of the atonement by the social gospel tradition [Rauschenbusch, Shailer Matthews] is not acknowledged.) Nicolson’s alternative: “A way that is true salvation for Sipho must begin with helping him to cope with and overcome his everyday environment. Then, when he is more the master of his own destiny, he can be held more responsible for sin and be brought to penitence and renewal before God” (158). Thus, the atonement is not an “objective” transaction, a recognition of the work of Christ *pro nobis*. It is rather a function of one’s ability, as inspired by Jesus, to “overcome alienation.” The abandoning of an “objective, transactional” interpretation of the atonement is necessary not only for theological reasons. Ethics, too, demands it. The assumption of apartheid that humans are “inherently evil (and) must indeed be kept apart like dangerous beasts in separate

cages” (239) springs from the pessimistic anthropology of orthodox Christianity. Clearly, an “objective” interpretation of the atonement “must mean that actually apartheid is correct” (239). Thus, it turns out that the Prayer Book’s claim that Christ’s life and death constitute “one, perfect, sufficient sacrifice and atonement for sin” is neither necessary nor tenable. Rather, Christ saves us as “the man for others” by much, if not all, of his moral record. It is this which has the

power to provide what is really needed: “a salvation from helplessness and impotence in the face of poverty and political weakness” (243). It follows that salvation can never be certain or final. It is only provisional because human beings “may not choose to live in its light” (243).

In brief, salvation for Siphon is his discovery of his own personal worth and value as a human individual. Ultimately, to be sure, salvation is grounded in Jesus’ power to show that it is God who gives value to the individual. Salvation requires that Siphon discern that his own life is a part of God’s larger purpose for all creation. Consequently, salvation presupposes Siphon’s ability to believe in the worth and rights of others. Salvation occurs when Siphon becomes the initiator of a community of persons who share these values. Salvation requires that “Jesus, if he is Saviour, must be a conscientizer of individuals” (220). While liberation theologies generally hold that individual salvation depends on change in social structure, Nicolson cautions that in practice one must be “agnostic about whether societal structures will necessarily be changed, at least in the lifetime of the individual concerned” (222). Yet one can take heart for in the long run, somehow, “God’s purposes for society will be achieved” (222). That salvation is primarily an individual affair has significant implications:

Salvation begins with individuals, but those individuals make it possible for

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page 92

other individuals also to be saved—by working with them and working on their behalf to improve their lot. I am saved...when I begin to work for the salvation of others. They are saved by my efforts, I through theirs. Jesus is (but) the catalyst of this process to begin. (234)

Thus it is not only Chalcedon that must be abandoned—along with Anselm, Irenaeus, and Luther—but the biblical message of salvation by grace without the works of the law. Siphon, whose resources are so severely limited, is not, apparently, to be given the consolation and courage which *sola gratia* repeatedly brings to seemingly hopeless situations. On a more positive note, salvation is possible for Siphon if he first hears and then finds it possible to subscribe to the values of the neo-Protestant construction first proposed about a century ago. But why should Siphon do this? Why should an African child today be expected to be willing to don the cast-offs discarded in Europe in the 1920s? Why should anyone believe that such a faith will prove more viable in South Africa at the century’s end than it was in Europe seventy years ago?

The discussion of Latin American and black American liberation theologies is brief but quite illuminating. Each is followed by an even briefer critique. It is this material, one would think, which would be of greater value to Siphon. Unfortunately the creative work by African theologians in Southern Africa is given but passing notice. The work of Manus Buthelezi, bishop of the Lutherans’ Central Diocese, which shows how the theology of the cross provides a compelling model for the African church, is cited but not pursued.

Liberalism rather than liberationism is offered as the message of the gospel for Africans today. Readers will not fail to note the irony of this proposal. The strong African churches which have proven effective in evangelization and resilient under persecution are urged to abandon their biblical and catholic confession—for supposedly academic reasons. If they do this by reaffirming religious liberalism, they may have a role in the African future—even if the predominately white

churches in South Africa burdened by this theology appear to have ever diminishing significance. The strengths as well as the weaknesses of religious liberalism are many. It would take a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, however, to believe it will find *A Black Future* in Southern Africa.

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**LUTHER: MAN BETWEEN GOD AND THE DEVIL**, by Heiko A. Oberman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. Pp. 400. \$29.95.

This book is a must read for all serious students of Luther, Lutheranism, and Lutheran history and theology. The phrase “serious students,” however, is important. This is not a work for beginners. If one is reading a biography of Luther for the first time, the recent works by James Kittelson (*Luther the Reformer*), Carter Lindberg (*Luther*), or Walther von Loewenich (*Luther*) would certainly help to prepare the way for Oberman’s volume.

This is not a traditional biography that simply moves chronologically from one event to the next as it tells its story. Oberman instead organizes his work into three parts: “The Longed-for Reformation,” “The Unexpected Reformation,” and “The Reformation in Peril.” The University of Arizona historian’s intent is to present “Luther as he was” (325) and what emerges is a portrait or collage of Luther “as a late medieval man for whom Satan is as real as God and mammon” (xvii). The subtitle thus identifies succinctly the basic thesis of the book: Luther’s distinctive understanding of Christianity is determined by the reformer’s engagement in the struggle of faith against the devilish assaults of Satan. This view helps explain both the extraordinariness and the limitations of the reformer—Luther’s greatness stems from the urgency and courage with which he faithfully struggled against the demonic powers that sought to confuse the gospel with the law; Luther’s limitations are seen in his misreading of the End-times and his disturbing tendency generally to identify his opponents (e.g., papists, Jews, and enthusiasts) as minions of the devil.

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page 94

When *Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel* came out in 1982, the reviews of the German edition were overwhelmingly positive, with numerous reviewers calling for the translation that this long-awaited volume represents. Although this is indeed a welcome event for English-speakers, there are too many translating and editing problems which unnecessarily diminish the overall success of Oberman’s fine work. The volume is peppered with distractions: from the unfortunate translation of “*Mensch(en)*” as generic “Man” to the listing of contradictory dates for the year of Pope John XXII’s condemnation of monastic poverty (1329 and 1323, at different places, are both asserted); from the undue attention given to relative trivialities and commonplaces (“Throughout the text dagger [sic] precedes a death date” [42, 355]; St. Augustine is “one of the most influential Western Church Fathers” [55]) to the lack of reference to the English translations of works Oberman had cited from the German.

Although there are other, similarly bothersome editorial issues, there is no need to list them. These diversions ought not deter the serious reader from Oberman’s otherwise most

significant contribution to our understanding of Luther. Nor should a few editorial glitches keep *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* from the study of every informed Lutheran in America.

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**TEMPTATION: A BIBLICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**, by Wayne E. Oates. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 132. \$9.95 (paper).

Wayne E. Oates is an old friend. Since the 1960s his books have been appreciated and sometimes even required by pastoral care professors at Luther Northwestern Seminary. He writes clearly and insightfully. He is particularly good at blending biblical and psychological insights, and presenting a wholesome and helpful perspective on our human experience.

In his latest book, *Temptation*, the primary thesis is that temptation has a function in the formation of character. He attempts, successfully I think, to give us a “holistic perception of the biblical and psychological perspectives of temptation” (14).

If the reader’s concept of parish ministry is formed or even influenced by C. S. Calain’s image of the pastor as a “grass roots theologian,” someone who provides insight and comment to persons who are reflecting about their spiritual journey, the book would be of particular help. (See, C. S. Calain, *Today’s Pastor in Tomorrow’s World* [New York: Hawthorne Books, 1977]. The term “Grass Roots Theologian” is the metaphor which Calain adopts throughout his work in order to identify what he believes to be a central concept in pastoral identity.) Oates articulates an understanding of the function of temptation which would allow us to see how God uses our human experience to strengthen our commitment and character. For Oates, temptation is a relatively neutral event, an experience which can be either positive or negative depending on how we react to it.

It is probably true that when pastors talk about temptation, most parishioners assume that we are talking about those small moments of decision in life when one chooses to remain strong or yield to a weakness. Because of the negative connotations surrounding the term, we often dismiss the temptation as something entirely negative, or talk of temptation only in superficial terms.

Contrary to the first viewpoint, which sees temptation as entirely negative, Oates would have us view temptation as a test which forces us to grow up and mature in faith. His viewpoint is certainly substantiated by others who have suggested that suffering and trial can have a positive function in the journey of faith and religious development.

In contrast to the second stereotype, the superficiality of temptation, one ought to think about temptation as something more than an episode in which one is tempted, for example, to eat one too many desserts. The shape of temptation or a “testing” is far

more complex and significant. To illustrate, I often hear seminary students in anguish about their sense of call and vocational decision. Oates reminds us that at the heart of temptation is the struggle to remain a faithful creature under the dominion of God. Yielding to temptation in this

case means being content to drift aimlessly instead of obeying the promptings of God who may be calling one to the ordained ministry, or to some other vocation for that matter. The issue is basic, and it relates to how we chart our lives. Such struggles cause us to evaluate whether we are following the call of the Spirit or asserting our own will against our Creator. Oates reminds us that the first sin, wanting to be like God, is still at the heart of temptation.

Although the book could have benefited from a few well-chosen case studies or illustrations of how one encounters the struggle of temptation in counseling, *Temptation* remains a stimulating book, definitely a resource for a parish pastor. Oates is probably right, we don't talk about temptation enough, even though it is an important part of our Christian experience.

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**MAKING MORAL DECISIONS: A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO PERSONAL AND SOCIAL ETHICS**, by Paul Jersild. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 128. \$8.95 (paper).

It is a commonplace of recent moral reflection that we live in a time of confusion, crippled by individualism, when our very language has been emptied of moral categories as we substitute growth, self-discovery, and fulfillment for right and wrong. Paul Jersild finds a similar confusion in the moral deliberations of committed Christians and offers an analysis of the resources and strategies available to help them make moral decisions.

I am as ready as most pastors have been, since at least the time of Elijah, to rail against the current state of morality. But I have begun to wonder if the moral confusion of twentieth-century Western society will not someday prove to be no more than the often-discussed nervousness of that same society in the nineteenth century: something much brooded over by its cultural elite, but hardly characteristic of the society as a whole. Anyone who can say what Jersild does about contemporary American life, that "we are...experiencing an unwillingness to fix blame" (11), has been reading either too many nostalgic sociologists or the wrong newspapers.

I find it hard to believe that readers will be helped by this book either to understand or to respond to our alleged confusion. It is hardly controversial to claim the Bible as a moral authority, to note that there are many factors involved in moral decisions, or to insist that morality has both a personal and a social dimension. Much of what he says is no more than unobjectionable, like the back of a Sunday bulletin. To be fair, I must stress that Jersild is a concerned and even-handed writer. He speaks for justice; he has some harsh words for the religious right and some gracious words on behalf of the gay community. But the overall impression his work gives is that of a bland floundering about in search of "an acceptable middle ground" (104), as though the church were an amateur philosophical forum.

There are two aspects of the book I found particularly disheartening. First of all, Jersild makes no attempt to think through the issue of individualism or, to put it another way, to think about the church as an embodied community. This is an issue of both theory and practice, of theological definition and historical development. (One mourns again the eclipse of the work of Ernst Troeltsch.) In Jersild's hands, the claim that we act as members of a moral *community*

becomes the very different claim that we make personal decisions *and also* make decisions together about social concerns. Indeed, the church—unless it is to be a haven of individual comfort (84)—seems to be for him simply a body of individual believers who get together to address social issues, thus giving the clearest sign of God’s presence in the world (80).

Ponder this entry in the index: “Social issues. *See Church*” (128).

He never imagines that the communal nature of morality might mean something about the social *form* of the church, not simply its social *statements*. Needless to say, the sacraments are never mentioned as communal acts of the church, events in and for social life, let alone signs of God’s presence. For a Lutheran, who is, moreover, a professor at a Lutheran seminary, to write a book about the resources of the Christian moral life and scarcely allude to baptism is staggering. It suggests a complete failure to conceive the life of the church as a unity. (Furthermore, it perpetuates the fragmentation that more incisive thinkers have in mind when they discuss the distortions of modern moral thought.)

This bears on a second, and deeper, point. Jersild talks a great deal about love and about being engaged by the message of Scripture, but one gets the eerie sense that for him it is no more than a mild antidote to ideological and moral rigidity. Pastors are counseled not to become too absorbed in social issues lest their ministries lose credibility (95); ideologists are said to be dangerous because they undermine a free society and impugn the worth of their opponents (104). As one reads these mundane cautions, one yearns for a vision of the gospel which is more than that “acceptable middle ground,” a vision which humbles human striving and gives a real sense of a divine word that transcends us, something that is more important than social commentary or bureaucratic mediation. One yearns in vain.

At one point, illustrating moral discernment, Jersild tells the story of a child spoiled by the love of his parents (48-51). The child runs away as a teenager, having become a drug addict, and is arrested for burglary. He uses the story to stress the need for objectivity in raising children, the need to inculcate responsibility and to avoid superficial happiness, the need for a service-oriented perspective. Unwittingly, it seems, Jersild has retold the story of the prodigal son, but overlooking the earlier version by Jesus, he has told it from something like the viewpoint of the elder brother. This would be hilarious if it were not a sign of how much is missing from this book. A fruitful beginning might have been made here, comparing the vision of God in the parable of Jesus with the bleak realities of a runaway teenager—a fruitful beginning for an exploration of the real tensions of Christian social thought, of its real sources and hopes, of its real failures and compromises.

But this would require a deeper encounter with the Christ of the gospels, a more concrete meditation on what it would mean to be faithful as a Christian community in a harsh world. Such an encounter and such a meditation will not be found in this book. The irony is that those are the most vital things we have to contribute to making moral decisions.

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**THE TEACHING MINISTER**, by Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 138. \$12.95 (paper).

Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen collaborate in *The Teaching Minister* to reframe parish ministry so that teaching is seen as constitutive of ministry itself. Writing from a Christian (i.e., Disciples of Christ) perspective that is, appropriately enough, broadly ecumenical and hospitable to many interpretive and critical voices, they root their constructive vision in a trenchant, no-nonsense critique of the mainline churches of today (11-26). They decry “secularization from within...the substitution of secular for religious contents within the mainline Protestant churches” (citing Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann).

It is always strangely exhilarating to read a convincingly grim account of what “mainline Christianity” has been doing wrong. Chapter 1, “Membership Losses and Theological Discernment,” packs a mighty wallop in just a few pages. The mainline churches are excoriated for their failure to offer and to elucidate a vision that transcends current cultural prejudices and patterns. Moving the argument along in clear and well-documented steps, William-

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page 98

son hones in quickly on the constructive thesis:

A major task facing the mainline churches today is recovery of the teaching ministry, one that is committed to engaging the important issues of the times from a perspective solidly grounded in the Christian faith. (20)

Spelling out how that recovery is to be undertaken, he insists that

the best way for mainliners to recover the heart of the church is for clergy to take more seriously their central task of teaching the Christian faith. (22)

From the sobering and convincing analysis of present-day conditions, the authors zoom back to a conversation with “Teaching in the Traditions of Israel” (chapter 2). “Israel,” here, is metonymous for both biblical testaments. Employing a wealth of citations—more than the casual reader would care to check—Allen demonstrates clearly that throughout the scriptural witness preaching and teaching are inextricably conjoined. The deuteronomic Moses, the sages of the wisdom tradition, the synoptic Christ, and the author of the Pastoral Letters are all cited as exemplars of the teacher-preacher.

Chapter 3, “Teaching in the Church,” is more lively reading, less like a well-documented research paper. In scanning the centuries Williamson puts to good use the “dialogical or conversational understanding of teaching” he discerns in the classic reformers. Brief and accessible sketches of figures as diverse as Chrysostom and Calvin segue smoothly into topical references to present-day perplexities (see especially pp. 52, 55, 59) which, the authors argue, can best be addressed “by reappropriating in our time the model of the pastor-teacher” (63). And it is at this point that the reviewer must register some discomfort with the constructive theses Williamson and Allen go on to sketch. This is not a pleasant thing to do with a book so fundamentally decent and even-handed.

What leaves me cold is a certain courteous blandness in their understanding of the gospel itself. Granted, “the preacher offers the congregation a symbolic universe that is defined by the gospel” (86), yet there is a hollow ring to statements like this:

The gospel is the promise of the love of God graciously offered to each and all....  
(79)

Surely, as their extensive exploration of Scripture shows, it is that and far more. One looks in vain in chapters 5 and 6 for a sense of that radical subversion of the expected routine that comes rumbling forth from Amos or Jeremiah in the first testament and the cross and resurrection in the second. With all their passion, their virtual intoxication with the word, could the biblical prophets and apostles—could, for example, Jonathan Edwards or Anne Hutchinson—constrict their fire to such tidy bounds? Does *Didache* need to be so patently didactic? This reviewer did sense within the book the resources for a far more radical and impassioned call to teaching-preaching than the rather prim and decorous interpretive schemes offered.

Having stated this frustration, however, I hasten to add that in an age when preaching threatens to sink to the level of mere entertainment and harried preachers are tempted to receive their sermons in a plain brown envelope, *The Teaching Minister* addresses a genuine shortcoming with grace, conciseness, and great integrity. As a sometimes harried pastor who still grapples with the weekly texts I recommend it especially to those who are in the same boat.

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**TELEVANGELISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE—THE BUSINESS OF POPULAR RELIGION**, by Quentin J. Schultze. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991. Pp. 264.

“It takes a lot of money to die comfortably,” wrote Samuel Butler (1835-1902). It takes a lot of money to operate the electronic church, writes Quentin J. Schultze, and the consequent financial pressures have bred ominous dangers, not only for the electronic church, but for the American church as a whole.

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page 99

Schultze is well-qualified to make such an analysis. Trustworthy credentials in theology and communications, plus the insights of a good teacher, the mind of a scholar, and a striking list of previous publications, add up to an author who is much more than just another basher of televangelism. *Televangelism and American Culture* is a surprisingly concrete outpouring of Schultze’s grief over the way the gospel has been distorted and diminished by the constraints of the television medium. His deepest grief comes as he shows how the theological deformity of televangelism has become a pervasive influence in the parish churches of America.

This is a frightening book, but I couldn’t put it down. Again and again, I recognized myself and my church in its pages. Its power lies in the fact that it is not a book about *them*, it is a book about *us*. The results are seen in congregational worship:

As the congregation becomes an audience, the worship service is presented as entertainment. Across the Protestant and Roman Catholic spectrum, local congregational worship seems more and more like a Hollywood production. Although the televisual influence is not the only one, show-business elements are unmistakable in contemporary worship. The key words used by advocates are “relaxed,” “informal,” “interesting,” and “relevant”—but the inevitable result is TV-styled services. Televangelism has helped submerge worship into popular culture, and the effects have been mostly negative. (211)

Other results are seen in popular theology:

The health-and-wealth gospel is possibly the most market-driven distortion of Christianity in the contemporary United States. Like the New Age movement, which includes faith healing, it captures a more socially acceptable faith that seemingly harmonizes the historic gospel with the present cultural milieu. Based on business principles, where marketing is king, it attempts to feed American sheep with a decidedly American gospel of individualism, prosperity, and selfishness. (151)

Yet Schultze’s analysis is basically sympathetic. Rather than calling for the demise of televangelism, he calls for its reform. Of special interest is Schultze’s treatment of televangelism’s legacy from American revivalism. He rightly suggests that it cannot be fully understood apart from that context. (It is worth noting that Gerald Brauer of the University of Chicago Divinity School has argued that revivalism is the most neglected major theme in the treatment of American history.)

The electronic church is neither a strange religious aberration, nor a crazy collection of reactionary zealots. On the contrary, it is an important reflection of many social, cultural, and economic currents in American public and private life. Televangelism will survive scandals. It will also develop new programming and establish additional social and political causes. (43)

In Chapter 1, “Beyond the Stereotypes,” Schultze argues that the news media have largely missed the real story about the electronic church: “focussing on the more sensational and unusual aspects of televangelism, they have overlooked how truly American it is” (43). Televangelism, he argues, is audience-directed, and any discussion of its problems must address the distortions of American culture as a whole. This sets him apart, in my view, from other critics of televangelism, who deal with it as though it were the sort of thing we find when we turn over a rock—which is to take televangelism far less seriously than wisdom requires.

In Chapter 2, “Faith in Technology,” Schultze examines how televangelism draws energy from the modern American faith in technology.

If the new technologies are a step forward for completing the Great Commission,

they are not the only means or always the most appropriate ones. God claims the whole world, electronic media and all, but he surely expects humankind to have more faith in him than in the technologies used by his messengers. In the United States, where technological progress has always been a symbol of hope and progress is usually defined materially, this is hard medicine to swallow. (68)

In Chapters 3 and 4, “The Cult of Personality” and “The Lure of Drama,” Schultze speaks of televangelism in the context of two important dimensions of the American character: *persona*, the American tendency to form cults of personality, and *drama*, the American love for simple, emotional, and moralistic stories. Both chapters are filled with fascinating particulars from the lives of stars in the galaxy of televangelism (Falwell, Robertson, Schuller, and Swaggert), which reveal their tendency to reinvent Christianity in their own name. Schultze offers this valuable insight, supporting it well:

God does not play well on television. Spirited televangelists do, and they offer the kind of authority that parish pastors seem to lack. (95)

Chapter 5, “The New Sorcery,” is the point in the book where Schultze will be attacked by those inclined to take issue with him. He asserts that televangelism preys upon the incredible biblical illiteracy of Americans, building its “gospel” upon their superstitious nature and offering them a shallow “pop” faith, which goes down much too easily:

The new sorcery is ultimately human-centered as well as market-driven. It looks at what human beings can supposedly get God to do for them, not at what God has already accomplished through... Christ....Televangelism itself shows how desperately humankind needs the Triune God, not some aberrant, self-oriented gospel. (152)

The next three chapters were my favorites, as they examined the impact of televangelism on American religious experience and on the life of American congregations. Chapter 6, “The Greening of the Gospel,” asserts that the “gospel” of televangelism has been recast by its marketers and promoters into a version designed to produce maximum income. Chapter 7, “The Evangelistic Myth,” seeks to prove that televangelists are not “converting the world to Jesus Christ” but preaching to those already Christian. Schultze claims that they may, in fact, be “de-Christianizing” America by implanting a false gospel in the American religious consciousness. Chapter 8, “The Congregation as Audience,” left me squirming. Schultze maintains that congregations today, taking their cue from televangelism, offer worship as something to be “consumed” passively, unreflectively, and comfortably by spectators.

Chapter 9, “Redeeming the Electronic Church,” is both hopeful and irate. Schultze offers many helpful suggestions for reform, spicing them with emotional broadsides at the televangelists for their misuse of religious authority, and demanding finally that they “clean up their act.” He concludes: “Televangelism needs to be saved from its own success” (247). This, he claims, can happen only when American denominations and ecumenical organizations demand and enforce accountability to legitimate church authority and concerned constituencies. I found

myself wishing, however, for a more extensive treatment of possible correctives to be employed in the local congregation.

While never catty, the author serves up a feast of juicy anecdotes—the Bakkers’ lifestyle, Falwell’s trip down the water-slide, Swaggert’s motels—and holds these and others up to the higher standards of dignity and integrity set by Billy Graham. Schultze is a good, often witty, writer: “the phrase ‘electronic church’ is an *oxymoron*, since a congregation meets face-to-face for worship, study, mutual edification and fellowship” (29).

*Televangelism and American Culture—The Business of Popular Religion* is an important book. It also is a very good read. I recommend it.

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