

Reviews



NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY, by Frank J. Matera. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Pp. 307. \$26.00 (paper).

The study of New Testament Christology has tended to focus on issues “behind the text” of the New Testament itself. In that respect, books and articles have dealt with such matters as christological titles and their use by the writers of the New Testament or the historical development of christology through various phases or communities. Those approaches are important, and they contribute substantially to others.

The approach taken to New Testament christology in this book is fresh and salutary. The author combines both historical and literary analyses and applies them to the actual text of the New Testament. According to him, the subject matter is “the Christology embedded in the text of the New Testament” (2). He goes on to say that one gets at that by attending to the stories of Christ contained within the New Testament. Still, if one is interested in christology, the stories are to be read with certain questions in view: how they portray Jesus’ relationship to God and humanity, how they spell out the significance of his life, death, and resurrection, and what titles are attributed to him.

The plan of the book is to cover all of the important documents of the New Testament in their final, canonical form. There are, for example, no sections devoted to the christology of Q, the christology of pre-Pauline Christianity, or the self-consciousness of Jesus. What appears instead are sections within six chapters that carry on analysis and discussion of the

christology of nearly all the books of the New Testament (left out are Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and Jude).

Each chapter is informative and well written. The book does a lot more than its title would lead one to expect. Matters of New Testament introduction (questions of authorship, dating, and contents) are often brought into the discussion where necessary. Various critical issues are dealt with as well, such as the question of the authorship of 2 Thessalonians (often considered deutero-Pauline, but Matera treats it along with 1 Thessalonians) and the connection between the Gospel of John and the Letters of John (the latter being considered by Matera as of a different authorship, later than the Gospel).

Some of the most skillfully written parts of the chapters are those that survey the contents of the books of the New Testament being studied, particularly the four canonical gospels. Their christologies are then summarized at the end of the larger discussion. In these places the work of literary, historical, and theological observations is interwoven skillfully.

What seems to be entirely new is the application of the same approach to the letters of Paul. The letters of Paul do not relate stories. Nevertheless, Matera attempts a narrative approach to Paul’s christology “by focusing on the underlying story of Israel and Christ that his letters presuppose” (84). He reconstructs what he thinks would be the underlying story and then identifies which part of that story is recalled in each of the Pauline letters. So, for example, the *parousia* is the main issue in the Thessalonian letters; the nature of the resurrection body

is a main concern in the Corinthian correspondence; and the promises to Abraham are important in Galatians and Romans. At one point the author says about his book: "this work is primarily concerned with the Christology *in* the Pauline letters rather than in establishing the Christology of the historical figure of Paul" (135). He does not declare that Paul's christology cannot be established, but he wants to preserve the contingent character of the letters. By showing how contingent they are in light of their "underlying story," he is able to respect both the contingency of the letters and the coherence of Paul's thought.

The final and seventh chapter is devoted to "The Diverse Unity of New Testament Christology." Here the author begins by saying that the diverse Christologies of the New Testament do not always complement each other. Yet he speaks of a "creative tension" between them. And there is a unity after all: "there is a constant witness in the New Testament that God sent Christ to free, liberate, redeem, and save humanity from a predicament of sin and slavery to powers beyond its control" (252).

The book is not only well researched, making use of the work of other scholars along with that of the author in a productive way, but lucidly and interestingly written. It can be recommended highly for those interested in the ways that the various writers of the New Testament construe the meaning and significance of Christ for the human condition, the church, and the world.

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, edited by John de Gruchy. New York: Cambridge, 1999. Pp. 281. \$ 54.95 (cloth).

The witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer continues to inspire, inform, and provoke. Now, with the completion of the sixteen-

volume critical edition of his works in German, and the appearance of the first volumes of the new English translation of that edition, we are in a better position than ever before to gain a proper understanding of his life and theology. *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by the South African theologian John de Gruchy, is a collection of essays by prominent Bonhoeffer researchers that aims "to provide a guide for those who wish to explore the legacy of this remarkable pastor, theologian, and martyr, and to discover some of the reasons why he has such an attraction for many people in many different contemporary contexts" (xvii).

The book is in two parts: "Bonhoeffer's Life And Legacy" and "Major Themes in Bonhoeffer's Theology." The first part is the most useful for those seeking a general orientation to Bonhoeffer. It opens with a succinct essay by Australian historian John A. Moses on "Bonhoeffer's Germany: The Political Context." Many readers of Bonhoeffer have little conception of the profoundly anti-western mentality of pre-1945 Germany. Moses shows that the cultural elite in Germany, stung by the defeat of its crusade for what it considered true morality and religion against the "degenerate" western liberal democracies in World War I, was seduced into thinking that cooperation with Hitler would further its goals: a strong Germany as a bulwark against the threat of liberalism in the west and of Bolshevism in the east. Bonhoeffer was in fundamental ways a product of this elite and his writings must be read in light of his critical appropriation of it, not as if he worked in the context of the traditions of western liberal democracy.

F. Burton Nelson follows with a helpful short overview of Bonhoeffer's life, drawing on his extensive research and personal acquaintance with many of those who knew him. Martin Rumscheidt then gives a valuable survey of the influences that contributed to the formation of Bonhoeffer's theology. He points out how Barth helped

him escape from the Idealism of his Berlin teachers, who had made Christianity into the mere satisfying of an innate human capacity for experiencing God. He emphasizes the centrality for Bonhoeffer of Luther's gospel of justification by faith, with its christology of Christ *extra nos* and *pro nobis* and the concept of the sinful self as *cor curvum in se*.

Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., the Director of the Bonhoeffer Center in Philadelphia, takes the occasion of the completion of the German critical edition to survey the whole corpus. Bonhoeffer's life, he writes, "was a life well-written, celebrated in literary fragments—letters, poems, essays, sermons, each of which becomes a note played against 'a kind of *cantus firmus* to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint'" (71-72; quote from *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 303). Floyd's article provides a useful roadmap to anyone who wishes to explore Bonhoeffer's literary legacy.

Finally, John de Gruchy sketches the reception of Bonhoeffer's theology. De Gruchy highlights the significance of Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's friend, biographer, and original editor of his posthumously published works, and traces various trends in Bonhoeffer research from the early debate between Bethge and Hanfried Mueller (an East German theologian who cast Bonhoeffer in Marxist terms) to the present. He notes that Bonhoeffer interpretation has, perhaps to a larger extent than with other theologians, largely been a function of the interests and pre-conceptions of the interpreters, leading to the danger of "creative misuse" of his life and thought (95).

This danger of the "creative misuse" of Bonhoeffer comes to the fore in the second part of the book, "Major Themes in Bonhoeffer's Theology." The themes the authors explore include sociality and Christian community, christology, Bonhoeffer's witness for peace, discipleship, church and state, the "Jewish question," ethics, the "world come of age," and Bonhoeffer's conception of the Christian life. All the authors are thoroughly immersed in Bonhoeffer

and follow his thought with subtlety and care. They marshal Bonhoeffer's themes, explain his distinctions, interpret them against the background of his context, but without showing the reader the deep structure of Bonhoeffer's thought and life, that which makes it all cohere.

What is missing is the vital center of Bonhoeffer's life and theology, the real substitutionary presence of Jesus Christ in word and sacrament as the justification of the ungodly through faith alone. The operative theology for these interpreters seems, in the end, to be a mere *imitatio*: Christ is example, inspiration, and, perhaps (in some unspecified way), the energizing power for personal, social, and political transformation. But Bonhoeffer taught that the gospel is Christ's actual bodily presence to effect the radical eschatological break with the old and the beginning of the new creation. Only from the perspective of this new creation, from the ultimate, can we truly discern and affirm the good in the penultimate. Without this center, Bonhoeffer's theology is finally vacuous—or simply baffling. Its only use is to be mined for concepts and slogans that can be wielded for one's own moral, religious, and political projects.

The first part of this volume, then, can be very helpful as a guide to reading Bonhoeffer. But the second part is more likely to confuse and puzzle than to enlighten. Meanwhile, Eberhard Bethge's biography, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, remains the best guide to his life and thought. (Augsburg Fortress will soon publish a new translation, including passages omitted from the present translation.)

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WHY WE'RE EQUAL: INTRODUCING FEMINIST THEOLOGY, by Val Webb. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999. Pp.155. \$14.99 (paper).

At the end of this slim volume Val Webb declares, "My case rests" (144). And well she might, for in nine brief chapters she has presented an argument that is clear and compelling. Taking Gal 3:28 as her text, the argument is that "women's subordination and inequality" are "*contrary* to the radical message of the freedom of the gospel" (142). Accordingly, feminist theology is not an "alternative lifestyle" pitch by a few problem women, but "a new, liberating way of looking at God and the world for *everyone*" (109).

Or perhaps not so new. Five of the nine chapters are devoted to the historical background for the challenge facing contemporary Christians. Much of this is difficult to read, and I can imagine readers in sadness and anger giving up on the book or the book's challenge. For example, Webb notes how 1 Tim 2:11-15, speaking of Eve in subordinationist terms, gets linked with Greco-Roman models of male leadership. There is the painfully familiar appeal to an "order of creation" by which religious support is mustered for a gendering of society by which different rules are applied for women and men. This story is not a happy one. Liberals, for example, will shake their heads as they hear theologian Horace Bushnell speak of the importance of women "respecting" their subordination (68) or politician Adlai Stevenson wax eloquent in 1955 to the graduating class of Smith College about their vocation with a baby on their lap and a can opener in their hands (83).

It is hard to read this story. But it is important that the record of oppression and discrimination be faced, including the discouraging reality of Christian support. But fortunately the story has more than a single plot line. Lilith (21) and Thecla (24) rise up in the early stages of the story to offer alternative images. Later there are the inspiring

examples of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth (75-76). There are enough of these brighter spots that the liberating way Webb finds feminists looking at God and the world seems not so new, after all. And there are interesting strategic lessons to be learned from the history. For example, the story includes the considerable advances made "under cover" by women involved in the "pro family" agenda of the temperance movement (70). And there is the remarkable story of Henricus Cornelius Agrippa and his 1529 treatise pleading the superiority of women. Agrippa's appeal to female "refinement and extraordinary spiritual beauty" makes Webb smile, but she pointedly notes that his sentences "are no more fantastic than those for male superiority already filling ecclesiastical halls" (57).

The plot line of Webb's story does thus have considerable complexity to it. What chapter would she have us write today? That chapter will not have a tight focus, for "choice is key to feminism" (145). Early on Webb announces that "the goal of this book is to look at the diversity of the feminist movement" (3), and that goal is served by specific illustrations. There are several options available when confronted by biblical verses that seem to speak against equality (105). Young '90s feminists "have reacted against the 'patriarchy' of their *women* professors" reared in the feminism of the '70s (91). And "womanist" theologians need to warn white feminists about the mistake of neglecting race and class in the drive for equality (88-89). So Webb will have variety in what is to be written now. Yet the diversity does not dilute "the solidarity of a *named* common experience—feminism—[that] gives strength to continue with the resistance" (11).

The book is subtitled "Introducing Feminist Theology," but the explicit attention to that subject is limited to three chapters, some fifty pages. Here Webb offers a chapter recounting the developments of the last four decades, featuring such well-

known women as Valerie Saiving, Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. There follows a “God chapter” in which she argues for the metaphorical character of our descriptions of the “I Am Who I Am” and notes the plurality of metaphors available. This chapter includes an undeveloped reference to “a unique relationship between God and Jesus” (116). This topic, Webb comments, is “beyond this book,” but I hope it will not be beyond the scope of a later book. Finally, there is a chapter on “reclaiming Eve.” Here she can well make the point that God does not abandon the human project after the garden. Thus this Genesis story becomes a “beginnings story of hope” (140). Webb’s emphasis on diversity will permit her to make common cause with those who make these moves, while not following her in saying “there is no ‘fall’ or ‘original sin’ in the Genesis 3 story” (136) and that “sin and blame are not at issue” (137).

Val Webb writes with admirable clarity and her case is compelling. This book would be an excellent resource for congregational study groups and adult forums. To that end she has added some highly engaging discussion questions for each chapter. I hope the resource that the questions—and, emphatically, the book—represent will be put to extensive use in the churches.

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CHRISTIAN ETHICS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS, ed. by Lisa Sowle Cahill and James F. Childress. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1996. Pp. xi + 399.

Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects presents twenty-one essays by contemporary leading North American theological ethicists as a *Festschrift* honoring the work of James Gustafson. The essayists have all been students of Gustafson; the volume concludes with a response from Gustafson.

This book seeks to further Gustafson’s work by engaging it with recent social and intellectual developments that bear upon ethics. The essays are categorized under two themes. The first theme, “Shaping Theological Ethics,” addresses issues of sources and methods: the role of the Bible, the heritage of the Reformed tradition, and the impact of modern perspectives such as empiricism, hermeneutics, and scientific method. The second theme, “The Moral Life,” engages substantive issues such as pluralism, marriage, sexuality, democracy, economics, human rights, and just war theory.

Readers unfamiliar with Gustafson’s work will be able quickly to decipher his theological agenda on the basis of these essays. Here, many essayists follow Gustafson’s thorough rejection of faith as somehow “instrumental,” or self-serving, as if God exists primarily for human welfare. Rather, most of these essayists affirm Gustafson’s “theocentric” approach that argues that humans ought to accept their limits with respect to the cosmic and social forces that both sustain and bear down upon them. Gustafson’s analysis of reality is thoroughly social and relational. The upshot of this truth is that humans need to discern various patterns of interdependence and development within which human activity and life occur. In so doing, humans should be able to relate to themselves and to all things in a manner appropriate both to themselves and to all things by means of a primary relation to God.

As will be seen especially in the first section of this book, Gustafson and his followers maintain a kind of “agnosticism” about the character of divine agency. They maintain an unrelenting *via negativa* that disallows concepts of personhood or intelligence to be attributed to God. They are ambivalent about God’s “friendship” or “enmity” towards humans. These essays tend to take the doctrine of creation and scientific method more seriously than many traditional systems of Christian ethics. The figure of Jesus is relevant to ethics because we

continue to be empowered by his incarnation of theocentric piety. These essays also, with the exception of Stanley Hauerwas's essay on the theme of ethical agency, tend to avoid the "sectarian temptation" that assumes a privileged epistemic stance for the Christian faith tradition. Hauerwas argues on the basis of his narrative perspective that character is the source of agency and not vice versa (187).

Notable in the first section is the position that the sources of morality are to be found not merely in consensus, preference, social utility, or the imagination, but in the "divine otherness" of the reality of God. Thus, the Christian tradition is committed to a realistic perspective on God. God ought to be the chief source for ethical wisdom, and God is to be known through a variety of means, including both tradition and recent modern modes of knowledge. The Bible, in this regard, should be looked to for communal practices and not rules. Its various ethical positions should be understood in symbiotic relation with culture and not in communitarian insulation. Christian ethics needs to honor the pluralism intrinsic to scripture itself and to affirm Jesus as an iconoclast with respect to the "powers that be" in his own milieu. Hence, the Bible needs to be read "over against" ourselves and not as "us in disguise."

The essays engaging science and medical technology are particularly helpful for our current intellectual context. The sciences would seem to reinforce Gustafson's contention that humanity is less significant cosmically and evolutionarily than our religious heritage would suggest. Hence, humanity is not the pinnacle of creation, but "one of millions of species that have enjoyed a fleeting moment in the sun, destined, perhaps, to sink someday into evolutionary oblivion" (152). A helpful critique of sociobiology, the position that ethics can be reduced to human genetic evolution, is also offered in the first section.

In the second section, essayists address specific issues of the moral life: ecology, the

family, sexuality, democracy, economics, and human rights. In general, these essays are balanced. Their tendency is to present responsibility to God as the key by which to chart paths through the dilemmas that affect both the public and personal realms. Hence, humans need to find appropriate boundaries in both the economy and population to human expansionism. Humans need to learn to respect the limits imposed upon them by nature. Humans also need to honor the family, including the role of the father in the family. They also (perhaps in contrast) need to accept greater sexual diversity in our current pluralistic environment. Democracy ought to seek to limit the political power of the advantaged on behalf greater justice for the disadvantaged. Finally, religion helps provide society a larger framework in which to engage in economics. As Jon Gunnermann notes, "Money marches on when the spirit flags, but only for a time. When the spiritual capital is spent, the collapse of political economy is inevitable" (328).

These essays tend to reject an insular approach to Christian ethics. Christian ethics must not only engage the world, it must learn from the world. Lutherans will find this book helpful because Gustafson's work parallels Luther's quest to properly distinguish God from the world; God ought not to be used to justify ourselves, our beliefs, or our politics. Instead, we need to acknowledge our dependence on God. Nevertheless, many Lutherans will see Gustafson's overall doctrine of God as tantamount to the "hidden God" (*deus absconditus*). For some critics, Gustafson could uphold both a robust creedal approach to Christian faith and knowledge from the secular world if he would recognize the differences between the "two kingdoms."

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CONFIRMATION: ENGAGING LUTHERAN FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICES, by Robert L. Conrad et al. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. Pp. 284. \$20.00.

Confirmation: Engaging Lutheran Foundations and Practices is a collection of ten essays by Lutheran seminary professors, exploring topics raised in the 1993 ELCA “Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report.” Intended to balance the theoretical and practical, the book reflects the scholarly pursuits of its writers and provides an outstanding opportunity to survey the history, theology, and practices in Lutheran confirmation.

Part 1: Lutheran Practices, includes two chapters. In chapter 1, Mary Hughes writes about “Confirmation Ministry: Models and Stories.” She identifies four different ways of helping persons connect with the Christian community and participate in its mission: experiencing the faith community, living a life of discipleship, knowing and understanding the faith, and personal growth in faith. Any of these emphases may be experienced in a variety of formats such as weekly meetings, special events, clustering with other congregations, personalized instruction, or home-based programs.

In chapter 2, Kent Johnson examines “The Changing Face of Confirmation.” He surveys the past forty years in Lutheran confirmation, which have seen the biggest changes in two areas: the relationship of confirmation and first communion, and understanding the needs of the learner. Johnson chronicles the impact of educational developments on confirmation, the changes in published curriculum, and the programmatic changes—individualized instruction, longer and later programs, and the relationally oriented approach.

Part 2: Lutheran Foundations, includes three chapters focusing on the history, theology, and content of confirmation. Chapter 3, by Luther Lindberg, addresses “Lutheran Confirmation Ministry in Historical Per-

spective,” an excellent history of confirmation from the third century to the present. He provides a superb, concise review of historical theology, understandings, and practice. The author points out that, “Even though (confirmation) practice has been taken seriously—perhaps too seriously—for centuries, its theology and meaning have seldom if ever been clear” (44). Congregations must begin to examine their assumptions about confirmation ministry, what it is and what it is not, before they decide how to flesh it out in their program.

Chapter 4, “The Theology of Confirmation,” by Margaret Krych, surveys the history of the theology of confirmation. She identifies the Lutheran foundations as justification by grace through faith, the means of grace, the word of God, and the sacraments. They were given contemporary focus by the Lutheran confirmation studies of 1970 and 1993 that emphasize confirmation as a process, not simply a rite. The studies define confirmation as pastoral and educational ministry, through word and sacrament, in which youth identify with and participate in the Christian community and in the church’s mission.

Chapter 5, “The Content of Confirmation,” is also written by Krych. She uses the 1993 ELCA report’s list of content areas, including grace, baptism, Bible, Small Catechism, emphasis on human relationships, integration into the worship life of the congregation, and affirmation of baptism as a lifelong process. These are areas stressed by all of the authors. She encourages an extended time of confirmation for youth: to allow for repetition and reflection, to develop abstract thinking, to unteach misconceptions, and to give youth time to wrestle with ideas. Use simple, clear language to explain concepts. Explain fully and slowly. Allow theology to mature. (Young adolescents, new to abstract thinking, will often be more conservative theologically, developing greater openness as they age.) Youth need to move from knowing ideas to being transformed by them spiritually. This process re-

quires pastors, lay teachers, and parents who are grounded in their own faith and ready to share it with youth.

Part 3: Confirmation Ministry: God's Work through Community, includes the final five chapters. In chapter 6, "The Congregation as Confirming Community," Norma Cook Everist gives an energizing, inspiring look at the potential of congregations to live out the mission of God to be a confirming community. In this community, the Holy Spirit works through and with the gifts of all (not just a pastor and a few lay teachers) to affirm the baptism and confirm the faith of all youth, of all members. Everist begins with her own story, her experience as a child of being enfolded, loved, served, included, and empowered herself to serve by a congregation that reached out to her family after her father died. Each congregation needs to do this in its own way. Everist includes models, questions for reflection, and individual stories.

Chapter 7, "Living in the Spirit," by Robert Conrad, follows infant twins Christine and Christopher and their parents from their baptism through life in their congregation, "living in the Spirit." In Conrad's words, "The whole purpose of this chapter is to explore the times and places in which the Spirit is present" (172). Conrad examines the roles of worship, prayer, Bible reading, confession and absolution, and the rite of affirmation of baptism. He includes program ideas and resources.

Chapter 8, "Adolescent Development," by Diane Hymans, highlights the central adolescent task of identity formation and the adolescent's newly developing capacity to think abstractly, exploring how these both create opportunities and present challenges in working with youth in confirmation ministry. She underscores the importance of the church in a culture that can be isolating and toxic for so many of our youth.

Chapter 9, "Lifelong Education and Pastoral Ministry," by Nelson Strobert, places confirmation in the broader context of lifelong learning. Strobert identifies the tasks,

issues, opportunities, and successful educational approaches for each age and stage of our Christian pilgrimage, including all of us as both learners and teachers.

Chapter 10, "Educational Approaches and Teaching Methods," by Donald Just, examines a variety of educational goals for Christian education. He emphasizes the importance of being clear about goals in order to choose appropriate teaching methods. Just reviews a variety of confirmation models.

Recurrent themes throughout the book come from "The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report" from 1993 that is found in Appendix A (266-281). I would strongly encourage readers to begin here, to become familiar with the basis all of the authors used. Common themes include the centrality of baptism, confirmation as a life-long process, the Bible and *Small Catechism* as primary texts, grace both taught and lived, the importance of relationships, and the call to each congregation to express its context uniquely in confirmation ministry.

This book would seem an ideal choice for seminary classrooms, equipping pastors to think about what confirmation is (and is not) and how to keep it faithful to its Lutheran roots while shaping it to fit and reflect the specific congregation.

This is not a practical, what-should-I-do-next-Wednesday-night book. Rather, it is an opportunity to slow down, step back, examine our roots, our unique context, and to think afresh about how we might intentionally shape our confirmation ministry to embrace our roots and serve the needs of those growing in faith with the rich resources of all whom God has gifted to build up the body of Christ.

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CLERGY WOMEN: AN UPHILL CALLING, by Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998. Pp. 198. \$20.95.

How are things going for women in the ministry? In the early 1980s Hartford Seminary sponsored a study of clergy women, entitled *Women of the Cloth*. Over a decade later, women had been clergy for long enough and in great enough numbers that Hartford Seminary sponsored a follow-up study, funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc. The results are published and interpreted in *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*. People who pick up this book because of its focus on women in the ministry will find themselves swimming in broad currents of American Protestantism at the close of the 20th century. Women clergy is not a “specialty” subject, but one that engages most if not all of church life and ministry. Women and men from a broad spectrum of denominations will read their own colleagues’ views and concerns on what it means to be called and ordained; leadership styles in the church; dealing with stress, conflict and burnout; the value of seminary training; attitudes toward feminism; why people leave ministry and why they stay in it; and much more.

So how *is* it going for women in ministry? There is good news and bad news. The numbers of women clergy continue to grow though the rate of increase has slowed in recent years. Most women report that they enjoy challenge and satisfaction in their callings. But meanwhile female pastors continue to report discrimination within congregations and denominations. This research shows that there is still at least a 9% overall gap between the salaries of female and male clergy (even after taking differences of age, experience, education, and denominational standards into account). It still takes longer for women to find their first calls, and in second and third calls, women are far less likely than men to be sole

(solo) or senior pastors. Female pastors with children report greater pressure in balancing parenting and ministry than do male pastors with children; single women pastors (especially in rural areas) report loneliness and isolation similar to that of single male pastors—but the uniqueness of the female pastor’s role makes companionship even harder for women to find than for men. Female pastors are more likely than male pastors to pursue specialized forms of ministry or to leave church-related work altogether. In parish ministry as in other callings, women’s vocational patterns are not like men’s. Whether this is good news or bad news depends on why women leave parish positions and whether they understand their work in other settings to be ministry.

The research of Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang suggests that women clergy tend to have a broad view of ministry, stretching beyond classic congregational or parish models. Do the career paths of women reflect “glass ceilings” and sexism in the church, or do these paths show creativity and freedom on the part of women? The answer is “probably both.” For anyone interested in the vocational pathways of women clergy and how these paths contrast with men’s, this book is a must read. Individual experiences do add up to larger patterns. The authors state two goals for the book: (1) to raise awareness of church leaders to the inequities and pressures that women clergy face, so that congregations can accept and benefit from women clergy in their midst; and (2) to “give women hope and sufficient courage” to express their ministry in and beyond the church.

Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling can be read and used at several levels. First, it displays research results in thirty pages of statistical appendixes. The data is arranged to allow comparisons between male and female clergy, denominations or denominational groupings, age-related differences, and more. The second level, the narrative interpretation of this data, comprises the bulk of the book. The authors do a fairly

good job of keeping this part lively—no easy task in the genre of interpreting surveys and interviews. They avoid simplistic answers, taking many variables into account as they interpret their data. Frequently they offer several ways in which the same data can be interpreted.

At a third level, the authors explore how women are transforming ordained ministry through innovative career paths and through creative approaches to traditional settings. They invite readers to ponder: should the effectiveness of clergy women be measured by how many women attain the rank of senior pastor (or other high-profile position) or should it be measured by women's ability to re-shape the practice of ministry? Or is it about being faithful to the gospel, in season and out of season?

The authors do some sustained work with the values of high salary and senior pastor position. Since relatively few pastors (male or female) find administration to be a rewarding aspect of ministry, one wonders why that which is least rewarding is also so highly coveted as "successful." And if pastors try not to adopt worldly standards of success, does that mean they should therefore be blind to the inequities that exist within the church?

Women clergy still have to deal with the problem of being type-cast: "You are a woman in ministry—therefore you must have a set political or theological agenda." Those who are "for women" in the church are often only "for" the women who express a particular agenda. If you as a clergy woman do not espouse that agenda, then even people who are "for" women are not "for" you! But *Clergy Women* does us all a service by documenting among female clergy a wide range of attitudes about feminism, motives for seeking ordained ministry, and professional goals within ministry. For comparative purposes the authors have grouped denominations into three categories: "spirit-centered" churches (holiness and Pentecostal); "institution-centered" churches (high liturgical and ontological

views of ministry); and "congregation-centered" churches (which vest decision making responsibilities in local congregations). Between these groups, the differences among women clergy can be much greater than many of the differences between male and female. For example, when it came to naming the most rewarding aspect of ministry, 72% of women surveyed from spirit-centered denominations cited "personal salvation of individuals." Of institution-centered women clergy, 68% chose "conducting worship and administering sacraments" as most rewarding. Of women in congregation-centered groups, "preaching" was the top choice for the most satisfying aspect of ministry (51%).

Generational differences appear among women clergy as well, for example in attitudes toward feminism(s). The survey conducted by Hartford Seminary in 1980-81 showed that, in the first large wave of women who became pastors, over half "indicated that a contributing factor, although not the central reason" in seeking ordination was to "change the sexist nature of the church." But by 1993-1994, no more than about one third of women pastors (in the same denominations surveyed earlier) said that this was a reason even of "some importance" in their decision. Only 10 percent in the later survey said that "changing the sexist nature of the church" was "quite important."

Noting this change in goals and attitudes, the authors say that newly ordained women are more likely to interpret any problems they experience individually rather than as part of a broader pattern. "Women embarking on a ministerial career in the 1990s and beyond may actually be less capable of coping with sexism than women clergy who entered ordained ministry in the 1970s....New graduates expect to be recognized and rewarded on the basis of their skills, experience and training...they honestly believe that the worst forms of discrimination are over...and do not recognize when situations are biased against them because of their gender." The authors clearly think

that a strong feminist awareness is helpful, indeed, essential for women clergy to thrive. However, their own research on clergy women in “spirit-based” groups shows another model: these women (and of course, many women in the other groups) do not approach life and ministry as a battle of feminists against sexism, but a battle of God against Satan, good against evil, sin and grace, to name only a few possible frames of reference. Some women clergy will see a decline in feminist consciousness as a gain while others will see it as a loss.

The authors do not make the common mistake of assuming that women enter the ministry just to “be women pastors” as though that were an end in itself. Like men, women have many motives for entering ministry and they understand their callings in many ways. The challenge is, on the one hand, to be aware that discrimination against women clergy is very much alive and needs to be changed. Regardless of their own motivations, women in ministry are often seen as exemplars and role models for the “cause” of female clergy against sexism. On the other hand, if awareness of sexism *dominates* one’s ministry, then this awareness has become another gospel. The reviewer believes that the most radical view of ministry is not feminism vs. sexism but the priesthood of all believers.

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CONGREGATIONS TALKING ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY, ed. Beth Ann Gaede. Minneapolis: The Alban Institute, 1998. Pp. xii + 146. \$13.25.

There is little doubt that concerns about homosexual ordination and same-sex marriage will drive the agenda in the early 2000s in the mainline Protestant churches. It is therefore prudent that a book tries to show how congregations might be “led through” the perilous discussion of homosexual is-

sues. Unfortunately, apart from one essay this book is too superficial and one-sided to be of much help to congregations confronting this important issue.

Published by the Alban Institute, *Congregations Talking about Homosexuality* is comprised of three parts, “Getting Ready to Talk,” “Talking about Homosexuality,” and “What Works?” each of which contains short chapters authored by different writers. While the editor and Preface author, Beth Ann Gaede, declares that the tone of the book “is pastoral, not doctrinaire” (ix), I found some rather doctrinaire assumptions permeating it, particularly the supposition that becoming comfortable with the “difference” of homosexuality somehow entails morally accepting homosexual practice. Gaede explains at the outset that some congregations “welcome folks who are different, some do not, and most are in the middle” (ix). The statement clearly reflects the book’s unabashed proclivity to prefer sociological platitudes of “inclusiveness” and “difference” to serious reflection. While the intended audience is “pastors and lay leaders who are thinking about developing a plan to guide members and friends of their congregation in the study of homosexuality” (x), its real value may well be in showing how *not* to guide such a study.

Four essays comprise Part I. In the first, Sylvia Thorson-Smith does a fashionable read on the history of the church’s teaching on homosexuality. Karen McClintock explains why homosexuality is hard to talk about, and Carl Dudley and Hugh Halverstadt argue that the passions aroused by the subject matter demand a special type of treatment. Only Marc Kolden’s contribution accomplishes what the section advertises, for only it provides balanced advice about actually leading congregations in an open-ended discussion of the issue. (I believe that there are two types of “discussions,” one where the outcome is known and where discussion is undertaken so that others might discern this truth, and the other where the outcome is unknown and

where there is genuine openness to the dialectic of the conversation. While Kolden counsels dialectic of the latter type, the other contributors seem to assume their position's truth as a *fait accompli*.)

After Thorson-Smith reports that sex has been hard to talk about in the church because of the "dualistic framework" assumed in the tradition, McClintock shares her own father's closet homosexuality en route to discussing the process of a congregation's acceptance of homosexuality: confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis. (She believes congregations "come out" in analogous ways to individuals.) Finally, Dudley and Halverstadt tell us that "grenades" can be mitigated by "focusing more on faith than on dogmatic beliefs or abstract arguments," "encouraging interpersonal communication," and concentrating on pastors as people who can "be trusted" rather than as "authorities regarding the congregations rules and beliefs" (28). (Can one really construct such simple polarities between "faith" and "dogmatic beliefs"?)

After these essays, Marc Kolden's "Rules for Talking about a Difficult Issue" is a breath of fresh air. Kolden lays out the necessary conditions for a constructive conversation about homosexuality: fairness and noncoerciveness. Such fairness cannot occur unless the simple fallacies of informal logic are avoided. One must eschew *ad hominem* attacks, the genetic fallacy (confusing the justification of the position asserted with the motivation of the one asserting it), strawmen arguments (arguing against caricatures of your opponents' positions), and ambiguity. In addition, the basic distinctions of introductory ethics must be maintained: the distinction between the rightness of an ethical *standard* and the rightness of a particular *act*, between what is *morally* permissible and what is *legally* permissible, and between what is *morally* proper and what is appropriate in a context to say about what is morally proper. It astounds me that only Kolden's essay mentions the standard ethical theories and how

they might be useful in the process of working through this difficult issue.

Part II comprises seven essays by advocates who were largely successful in helping to shepherd their congregations to declare "open and affirming" statements on homosexuality. The congregations in these case studies were generally small, and had long histories of social justice leadership and concern. (Most were UCC, but there was also a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and an ELCA congregation.) Part III contains two essays: one which rather redundantly summarizes the results of the previous case histories while offering some analysis, and the other by Speed Leas of the Alban Institute discussing the dialectic of challenge and comfort. (Lutherans might think here of law and gospel.) In contrast to Kolden, Leas believes that a study without the "threat of decision" will not likely be productive to the congregation. The book concludes with a ten-page bibliography of books, audio and videotapes, and organizational resources. Not surprisingly, conservative studies of homosexuality are underrepresented in the bibliography.

While this book may have use in certain contexts, it is less helpful for those congregations who have not already made up their minds and who desire a more balanced presentation. Although it is frustratingly sparse theologically, the book's underlying tone cannot mask its commitment: Christians ought to embrace practicing homosexuals and bisexuals; they should tear down the walls of prejudice that grant only heterosexuals the "privileges" of ordination and marriage; and they must pastorally aid critics in developing proper sensitivity to the historic injustice of gay exclusion. Readers who are not already committed to this interpretation may yet find one essay of the collection helpful. Kolden's contribution alone offers sufficient guidance about how to conduct a study of homosexuality in the congregation.

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