

Reviews



PSALMS, by James Limburg. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000. Pp. xviii + 509. \$29.95.

James Limburg's new one-volume commentary on the Book of Psalms was the required textbook for a college course I recently taught on the Psalms. One student, who had taken a different course with me the previous semester, commented, "Why wasn't our textbook last fall this good?" After pausing a moment, she added, "Why aren't *all* of our textbooks this good?" Exactly!

Limburg's new volume is part of the Westminster Bible Companion series, which is a commentary series "intended to help the laity of the church read the Bible more clearly and intelligently" (xi). The student's comments are adequate testimony to the admirable way in which Limburg has met this intention. I can think of no better resource for laity interested in the Psalms than Limburg's commentary. This is not to suggest, however, that pastors and church professionals would not also profit from the book. Far from it! This volume should be a standard part of every pastor's library, which can be used time and again for devotional reading, sermon and lesson preparation, and worship planning.

Limburg's book is the end product of a lifetime of studying and teaching the Psalms. He combines careful attention to scholarship with a practiced passion for preaching the Psalms. He approaches the Psalms from the standard orientation of form criticism. Different psalms are understood according to their genre or type: lament psalms, praise psalms, wisdom psalms, pilgrimage psalms, entrance liturgies, royal psalms, and the like. Other com-

mentators have managed to apply this standard approach in such a way that it silences the individuality of particular psalms, with the result that after grinding all of the psalms through the mills of form criticism, the reader is left with one lament psalm, one praise psalm, one wisdom psalm, and so on. Limburg, however, manages to let the various psalms retain their poetic individuality.

In addition, he writes in such a way that these ancient poems, which often contain foreign and archaic metaphors and symbols, are heard today with a sort of main-street clarity. One of the reasons this is the case is that Limburg draws constantly upon stories and anecdotes to illustrate the meanings of phrases, images, or ideas. (For this reason alone, preachers might turn to this volume time and again.) One example of such an illustration must suffice. The first comes from the discussion of Ps 121:5b-6a: "The Lord is your shade at your right hand / The sun shall not strike you by day." Limburg writes,

My father was a private pilot. I recall the time when I was a boy flying with him in a small Aeronca Champion over the farms surrounding our hometown. In a field below we saw a farmer we knew, sitting on a tractor, plowing a field, in the middle of a hot July day. There was not a cloud in the sky, and these were the days before there were air-conditioned cabs on tractors. My father maneuvered the plane until the shadow was over our friend's tractor. We watched as he looked around; then he heard the plane, took off his straw hat, and waved to us! When I read verse 5, "the Lord is your shade," I think of that farmer and that airplane ride. (424)

Limburg draws his illustrations from

every well: history, architecture, literature, art, drama, music, hymnody, geology, ecology, liturgy, tradition, and even theological treatises!

Another significant strength of the commentary is the way that Limburg makes careful exegetical scholarship available to the reader. His hands are always dirty from digging through the Hebrew texts of the Psalms, but he presents his findings in such a clean way that lay readers will not feel like they have been dragged through a textual archaeological dig. For example, in the section on Ps 32:1-2, Limburg discusses the four different Hebrew words for sin that occur there. He describes how each word—transgression, sin, iniquity, and deceit—paints a different “picture with an insight into a Hebrew notion” (103).

A third important feature of the commentary that should be noted is what might be called the “intertextual” aspect of Limburg’s commentary. Each psalm is treated individually after the fashion of standard commentaries (each psalm is given a title, followed by the full NRSV translation of each psalm, followed by a section of commentary). But the various psalms are also considered as parts of the larger canonical stories of Israel and of the church. For example, at the end of the treatment of Psalm 2, he writes,

The royal psalms became the seedbed of messianic hope. The people sang of these hopes in their worship services. Prophets drew on these psalms to describe the messiah who would one day appear (Isaiah 9, 11). And centuries later, when Jesus asked the disciples what people were saying about him, Simon Peter answered in the language of these royal psalms; “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). (7)

None of this is to say that this commentary is perfect. There are places where one might have wanted more from Limburg and other places where one might legitimately disagree with his interpretations. But this commentary is an ideal place for

both laity and clergy to get started on reading the Psalms.

When I was confirmed, my godfather gave me a book about the Psalms by Claus Westermann. Inside, they wrote the words, “I know of nothing better for your reading than the Psalms; I know of nothing better for introducing you to the psalms than this book!” When my own godchildren reach the age of confirmation, I suspect that I will write those same words inside Limburg’s commentary.

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CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: BACKGROUND TEXTS, by Ralph Martin Novak. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001. Pp. 320. \$28.00 (paper).

Novak’s excellent book grew out of his own teaching of many adult classes and forums in Christian communities. When he tried to put primary texts into the hands of adults who wondered about Christian beginnings and were eager to study them, he discovered that there was no single good source of these texts. His book is an attempt to fill that gap. This excellent, well-organized work brings the reader into the presence of many of the texts that help us discern the relationship of the earliest believers to the Roman world in which many of them lived. These texts which are often, as Novak says, “scattered, difficult to find, and unknown to a layperson” have been assembled with extensive commentary to provide a chronological account of the first four centuries of the Christian era. After an introductory chapter on historical method, about which we will say more below, the book begins with a discussion of the possible birth date of Jesus, supplying a quick overview of Roman political history from that time. Novak ends with a chapter on the ways in which Christian emperors sought to enforce their theological and political wills with special

reference to Alexandria, Egypt, whence come many textual resources.

This chronological framework is itself framed. At the beginning, there is a brief, useful list of some of the significant events of early Christian history and the primary sources that refer to them. It ends with an excellent list of the sources and the editions cited by Novak, most of them briefly described with some biographical and/or geographical information. There are also five appendices that deal in short space with a number of interesting theological questions stemming from the relationships of Jews, Christians, and those of other religious beliefs. All this material is well and clearly written. There are a select few footnotes, a feature that adds to the readability of the book while potentially frustrating those who wish to look a little deeper.

Although this book moves primarily in a chronological order, Novak makes no bones about important realities which historians of ancient Christianity face. Most important is the lack of much written evidence, especially for the first century C.E. in which Christians were neither numerous enough nor distinct enough as a group to garner much attention from those who wrote and preserved documents. Our ability to do a thorough chronological history is limited very early on by a dearth of resources. Another significant problem for doing history of the early church is related to the kinds of documents that were saved. History done by and at the behest of the relatively small number of literate persons paid most attention to the activities of the powerful in government and religion. Not only did this category, i.e., the powerful, include few Christians for quite a long time, but it shaped the biases of those who did begin to make observations about Christian communities and beliefs. Furthermore, most documents written and preserved by Christians were written looking backward to those founding years: it becomes difficult indeed to ascertain facts from legend in those sources. Novak works very well with these difficulties as he tries to use the limited

resources to create some account of early Christianity. He assumes that his readers are adults whose understanding and imagination will want to wrestle with the difficulties of understanding imposed by the evidence.

Novak acknowledges that he does not work with archaeological and other material evidence in this book, as helpful as it may be in some cases. It would have taken him far beyond the scope of this relatively brief (four centuries in 242 pages) account to add such evidence to his text collection and commentary.

The first chapter in the book, "A Brief Introduction to Historical Method," is an important beginning which a reader ought not omit. Novak carefully lays out "five fundamental questions" that need to be posed to any text. These questions raise the issues of the cultural particularity of every text. They do this by pressing any reader of texts to consider carefully not only "what is the author saying" (2) which demands very careful reading, but also what are the author's sources, who might an author be, and how does an intended audience influence content and perspectives. These questions, not all of which may be able to be answered in regard to any particular document, call for attention to the world of the text, as well as what world the text seeks to establish, promote, protect, or imagine. To approach ancient texts with such serious questions in mind reveals the difference between the world of reader and ancient text that, at best, helps us to appreciate the "work" of the texts, the importance and impact of Christianity. Novak believes that such attention to the texts in their own time and place grants texts the ability to "inform, inspire, challenge, and convict" us (3). To fail to think historically about a faith that has been pivotal in western history and continues to be of ultimate importance to many is to risk confusing our "fantasies" about the faith with its power and purpose as witnessed historically.

In fact, my one caveat about Novak's book is that it is not well-titled. While it is

surely concerned with Christianity and the Roman Empire, what he gives us are not “background texts.” These are the texts of history; they are milieu texts. For Novak’s argument is that texts are shaped by, within, and for the world in which they arise. The ground of a text is critical to the sense and message of the text. To understand is to know all texts as parts of a whole time and place, as much as possible within our limitations.

Novak’s book begins with a quotation from Paul Veyne, “History is a journey into otherness. Surely it has as much right to help us overcome our limitations as to make us feel at home with them” (1). For Christians in contemporary North America, Christian history has not often seemed a “journey into otherness.” To make this journey, to recognize that our roots have been grounded in such “other” soil, all the while continuing to grow and develop into a hardy plant that nourishes us, is an important process. Such recognition may free us to continue to regard “otherness” in our own time and place as that which may contribute to hardy growth and development. This would be an approach to mission that all congregations would do well to ponder together. Novak’s book is a stimulating source for such a journey.

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TRUSTING THE SPIRIT: RENEWAL AND REFORM IN AMERICAN RELIGION, by Richard Cimino. Somerset, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2001. Pp. 214. \$21.95.

The denominational church experienced many movements for change during the past forty years. Some emerged within existing denominations while others came from outside. Some focused on bringing renewed vitality to spiritual practices and personal faith—renewal. Others sought to bring fundamental change to the wider structures and leadership positions—reform. These various movements for re-

newal and reform are the subject matter of Richard Cimino’s new book, *Trusting the Spirit: Renewal and Reform in American Religion*.

Cimino writes as a journalist. He is looking for the inside story on what is happening. His method is to study six reform and renewal movements from the past forty years through in-depth case studies to discern what they sought to accomplish, what happened in reality, and why things worked out that way. He explains the larger history of each movement while taking the reader inside of personal stories, and then proceeds to make connections to similar movements in other denominations. The story line is engaging, the prose is well crafted, and the insights are provocative.

A central thesis in his work is that we are continuing to see the emergence of a post-denominational church where old institutional identities are eroding and new alliances are emerging. As one who lived through this period of time, I found the author’s work helpful in painting a more detailed picture of what was happening within denominational church life. He engages such questions as: “What forces give birth to a renewal or reform movement within particular denominational churches?” “What are the dynamics that make such movements either successful, or not, in achieving their goals?” “How do such movements realign their goals over time, if not successful in their original intent?” The six case studies are carefully selected to be representative of the broad range of diversity in denominations in the United States and represent three different types of renewal and reform movements.

The first type of renewal/reform movements is evangelical and charismatic. The two cases examined are the Catholic Charismatic renewal movement that emerged within the optimism of the post-Vatican II 1960s, and the Biblical Witness Fellowship that grew out of the sexuality debates in the United Church of Christ in the late 1970s. The Catholic Charismatic movement quickly gained grassroots support and in-

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MARY CATHERINE HILKERT, OP
*“The Creation Story and the
Story of Jesus”*

Monday, October 29, 2001*
10:00AM, Chapel of the Incarnation
Luther Seminary

Prof. Hilkert is associate professor of systematic theology at the University of Notre Dame. She is the author of *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (1997).

*Please note: This is the correct date of the lecture. The date noted in the Summer issue was incorrect.

termingled with other charismatic renewal movements in Protestant denominations. But in order to survive within the Catholic Church, the movement has increasingly had to adjust its unique emphases to more mainstream doctrinal perspectives. The Biblical Witness Fellowship within the UCC surfaced as an evangelical reform movement that sought to bring the entire UCC back to its historical roots by working through the system. Over time, this movement has had to redirect its goals to being an alternative fellowship for disaffected UCC pastors.

The second type of renewal/reform movement is liturgical and contemplative. The two cases studied include the evangelical catholics in the Lutheran Church—ELCA and LCMS, and the Taizé services that have found a place in churches of many denominations. The evangelical catholics focused on liturgical renewal and the use of the adult catechumenate in calling churches back to the historic Christian faith. Emerging out of the 1970s, it gained a small but vo-

cal following but over time has become somewhat entrenched and marginalized. The emergence of Taizé services has its roots in an ecumenical monastic order started by Brother Schutz in France during WWII. Not intending to be a movement, its influence spread through word of mouth. Focusing on spiritual journey rather than faith content, the movement continues to be incorporated into a variety of faith traditions.

The third type of renewal/reform movement is progressive and liberal. The two cases studied include Call to Action, which emerged within the Roman Catholic Church in the midst of the social upheavals of the early 1970s, and Jewish Renewal born in the turbulence of the same period. The focus of Call to Action has been on liberalizing the church to bring it into the contemporary world. But as the church has turned more conservative, this reform movement has found itself on the outer edges of the church. The Jewish Renewal sought to revitalize Jewish faith and practices and make

them relevant to contemporary society. This complex movement has interacted with Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative Judaism in different ways.

The author observes some common patterns within these diverse movements. One similarity is their relationship to the socially disruptive decades of the 1960s and 1970s, which resulted in both liberal and conservative responses. Another is the graying effect within most of these movements, with real questions as to whether the torch can be passed to a new generation of leaders. A third pattern is that all the movements have experienced a significant change in their original goals.

I found this book a fascinating read. It would fit well as a supplemental text in any number of seminary courses, and would also be an interesting read for denominational staff or church leaders who are seeking to understand some of the forces for renewal or reform that may be at work within their church. Thanks to the author for a timely book on helping us sort out the complex terrain of 21st-century Christianity in the United States.

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TRINITY, TIME, AND CHURCH: A RESPONSE TO THE THEOLOGY OF ROBERT W. JENSON, ed. Colin E. Gunton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. 31. \$38.00 (cloth).

Robert Jenson has been acknowledged by David Tracy and others as America's most distinguished Christian systematic theologian. Anyone interested in how the church's proclamation and teaching should be formulated needs seriously to investigate Robert Jenson's theological program. His four-decade impact upon American Lutheranism as a college and seminary professor has been substantial. Reflective Lutheran presentations of the faith can ill afford to ignore his work. This *Festschrift*, an ecumeni-

cal collection of twenty essays by leading North American and European theologians, biblical scholars, and ethicists (including {Forde, Tuomo Mannermaa, Robert Wilken, Susan Wood, David Yeago, Richard John Neuhaus, Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert Milaender, and Geoffrey Wainwright}), is unique in that each essayist explicitly develops some aspect of Jenson's theology as it has been articulated in his recently completed *Systematic Theology*. Here, Jenson's work is honored by being thoroughly engaged by mostly sympathetic interpreters.

Several essays especially merit attention. In "Eternity, Time, and the Trinitarian God," the distinguished Munich systematician Wolfhart Pannenberg insightfully critiques Jenson's view of the relationship between the trinity and temporality. Pannenberg contends that Jenson could learn from the ancient philosopher Plotinus with regard to the nature of eternity. Counter to Jenson's contention that God's deity is best seen as a "temporal infinity," Pannenberg contends in Plotinian fashion that "time does not pass away from the presence of God, but he looks at the whole of time as we do when a period is complete" (64). In Plotinus's view of temporality "there virtually is a positive relationship between eternity and time, because eternity means the wholeness of life that in our case is disrupted in the temporal process but is still present in the temporal sequence and even forms the aim of an endeavor of temporal beings to reobtain that wholeness of life in the future" (65). However, Plotinus's significant weakness, for Pannenberg, is that his view lacks an eschatology. Also, counter to Jenson, Pannenberg argues that the notion of the *logos asarkos*, the eternal yet disembodied word (who was always to become incarnate), needs to be retained, if the triune structure is to be properly conceived (69).

In "The Lutheran Capax Lives," Gabriel Fackre interprets Jenson's theology, in contradistinction to Fackre's own Reformed heritage, as a reconfiguration of all theological themes on the basis of the *finitum ca-*

pax infiniti, the Lutheran christological and sacramental affirmation that earthly signs can adequately convey divine reality. However, Fackre seems to have a finger on some decidedly *un*Lutheran aspects of Jenson's theology when he asks "[h]ow in a systematic so focused on the resurrection does the cross get the attention it is due? Indeed, why would not such a theology make the open tomb rather than the cross the central Christian symbol?" (100)—a good question in light of Luther's "theology of the cross."

In a somewhat similar vein, Gerhard Forde sympathetically interprets Jenson's soteriology in what he identifies as three phases. The early Jenson affirmed the cross as God's judgment on human sin and folly: "in the cross God saves in that he does battle against us, condemns and rejects our rebellion, and thereby claims us as his own" (128). Forde notes that Jenson in his "middle" period wrestles with issues of the hidden God. God unconditionally promises in the gospel to save, which is guaranteed by the immutable will of God. Yet, this truth implies for all temporal events that "if it happens, God in some way wills it," since presumably God is working through all things to claim God's children as his own. This implication, which acknowledges the agency of the hidden, unknown God, has been largely given up by Jenson, for whom the cross's importance sometimes seems dissipated by the resurrection and Spirit's work in the church. Nevertheless, a vestigial theology of the cross still remains, though closeted, in Jenson's theology. Jenson acknowledges that the passion narrative indeed delivers the experience of death and negation to the "old being" (135). For Forde, the insight here that must be maintained to preserve the truth of the gospel is Luther's realization "that it is simply impossible to bring the 'naked God' in his majesty to heel by means of systematics. Indeed, God hidden in majesty actively removes or hides himself from the clutches of our control—our so-called 'free choice'" (136), a theme underplayed by Jenson. For Forde, divine attributes for the "old being" func-

tion as masks that express God's wrath, while for the "new being" they can bring comfort, a "backup" for the proclamation of the good news.

Finnish Luther scholar Tuomo Mannermaa engages Jenson's theology through his analysis of Luther's view of justification as both gift and favor as a triune event. He notes that Luther's view of the trinity is decisively Augustinian, while Jenson's is "ecumenical," in which the church is itself triunely configured and thus "understood analogously as participation in the unity of the divine nature" (144). David Yeago accentuates the ecclesiological ramifications of Jenson's contention that the church does not just have a polity but *is* a polity. Yeago contends that Lutheranism with regard to ecclesiology has particularly been a victim of the modern assumption of the "fact/value" split, which rules out the possibility of the church's witness as bearing upon the world in the form of distinctive practices that would impact public life. The Lutheran understanding of the gospel has been privatized—inhibiting it from taking shape in a public way. It thus "has no public effect" (218) and the church's social reality, as it developed in Europe, was "handed over to the civil authorities" (229). Were we to retrieve Luther's affirmation of the Spirit's agency through grace in the church to initiate the new creation, we could discern a "communion-ecclesiology" in earliest Lutheranism (234), the antidote to historic and contemporary Lutheran quietism and permissivism (antinomianism). One wonders, however, if Yeago's notion of the church as counter-culture is faithful to Luther's notion of the hiddenness of the church as well as the Christian's vocation in the world. With regard to ethics, Meilaender notes that Jenson's view of polity would be more like a family's, albeit egalitarian, than the political community in which we presently live (279). These essays will not help the neophyte understand Jenson's theology better. However, they can be read in tandem with his *Systematic Theology* with great profit. They represent significant trib-

ute to a leading and lasting teacher of the church in our time.

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THE CHILD IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT,
ed. Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. 513. \$24.00 (paper).

Imagine that you had the time to research and draw together overviews of, and insights into, a full spectrum of Christian thought—biblical, historical, and contemporary—on children. Then imagine that you had with you in conversation with such texts a group of the most lively and informed theological scholars available. If you kept records of such a conversation you might come close to the rich texture and deep treasures of this edited collection.

Growing out of a larger project on “The Child in Christian Thought,” which Marcia Bunge, the book’s editor, hosted with the support of the Lilly Endowment, this book is one small part of an even larger long-term effort of the University of Chicago’s Religion, Family and Culture Project. For several years now that project has sought to expand and deepen public discussion of issues that press against family life in an increasingly pluralistic and fragmented culture.

In the process they have raised the level of discussion far beyond the ideological divides that threaten to split Christian churches, and have moved important concerns about supporting and strengthening family life into an open and constructive public arena. The larger project website is full of useful resources, including excerpts from many other books in the series (<http://www.uchicago.edu/divinity/family/index.html>).

This book is particularly helpful in the following ways. First, it provides a comprehensive reexamination of biblical and theological discussions on children. Whether or not you agree with Judith Gundry-Volf’s conclusions about children in the New Testament, for instance, you cannot help but be

appreciative of her comprehensive detail in relation to each text that has any connection at all to children. Similarly, you may be surprised to read that even though Augustine’s and Calvin’s treatment of original sin casts a harsh light on the sinful nature of children, “and their views,” as Marcia Bunge points out, “have been used in some cases to justify the harsh treatment of children” (13), a retrieval of the full context and content of their engagement actually fosters “a more humane treatment of children” (15).

Second, the book offers a multiplicity of perspectives. You will find both conservative and feminist readings of historical theology, as well as Protestant, Catholic, and Reformed discussions of the nature of childhood and its implications for doing theology. Readers may be surprised, as I was, to discover that many of our major theologians across centuries and traditions have had lively points to make about the care and nurture of children. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Schleiermacher, and Barth are all here, but so, too, are Rahner, Simons, Francke, and women such as Mary Church Terrell. In fact, it may well be that the primary gift of this book is that it makes a compelling argument that children and childhood are an essential and vital matrix in which to engage theological discussion.

Several of this collection’s authors, after retrieving and exploring the work of early theologians, wonder aloud at the dearth of writing from contemporary authors. This collection must, at a minimum, propel our current generation of theologians to dig more deeply into the set of concerns and cultures that swirl around family life, and particularly its most vulnerable little ones.

Finally, the book is written in an accessible and clear manner. While it is not easy reading—there are no simple “tips and tricks” for raising children here—the collection’s authors have succeeded in writing about difficult and complex topics in clear and manageable prose. There is an extensive bibliography included with the book, as well as an index to Scripture references.

The Child in Christian Thought will be a fine addition to any pastor's reference shelf, and will be a rich resource for directors of Christian education and others who have responsibility for faith formation. Indeed, I would highly recommend it as a text that could be discussed chapter by chapter over the length of a year in adult study contexts.

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BIG QUESTIONS, WORTHY DREAMS: MENTORING YOUNG ADULTS IN THEIR SEARCH FOR MEANING, PURPOSE, AND FAITH, by Sharon Daloz Parks. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. Pp 240. \$21.00 (cloth)

Many people in the church share two notions about young adults, those between seventeen and thirty years of age: (1) They constitute a significant part of the general population. (2) They are not readily present in the life of the institutional church. Anyone concerned about these matters—anyone who cares for young adults at all—should find Sharon Daloz Parks's book of great interest and importance.

The book is written from the point of view of constructive-developmental psychology. Parks provides the reader with a working vocabulary by sketching the contributions of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Carol Gilligan, and James Fowler, among others. She also includes a number of charts that trace and describe the affective dimensions of the development of faith. But going well beyond the definitions and the charts, Parks makes her case with a poetic, almost passionate kind of intensity. She not only discusses the world of young adults with care, but she also writes with a sense of urgency.

The book is addressed to those who directly affect the lives of young adults: professors, counselors, campus ministers, parents, even fellow workers. Parks believes that the stakes are very high in the developmental journey of young adults. "Since the

future of our planet may depend upon us all becoming more conscious, mature adults, this book is dedicated to shedding light on that era and the critical transformation it harbors" (13).

Parks is convinced that in our hectic and fragmented culture young adults need places and spaces to ask "big questions." While our society is preoccupied with such matters as making money and having fun, young adults are asking about such matters as purpose, vocation, and belonging. These matters are at the core of faith. If the resources to deal with these questions are inadequate or nonexistent, young adults become increasingly detached, and their development into mature adults is inhibited.

The matter of faith and *recomposing* faith is central to Parks's theme. She defines faith in a way that serves her argument. While she sometimes uses the term in its traditional sense, as belief, she wants to press beyond this parochial understanding. "Faith is more adequately recognized as *the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience*" (italics hers, 7).

In Chapter 2, "Meaning and Faith," Parks discusses how adults in general and young adults in particular make meaning. She views faith as an activity of composing a sense of the ultimate character of reality and then staking our lives on that sense of meaning (20). Those readers who regard faith as something given rather than composed may have some difficulty with this part of the author's argument, especially since she sometimes uses the term in the traditional sense.

One thing Parks is very clear on—and this may be the greatest value in her book—is the need to provide mentoring environments for young adults. Early on she states: "Restoring mentoring as a cultural force could significantly revitalize our institutions and provide the intergenerational glue to address some of our deepest and most pervasive concerns" (12). Much of the book deals with this need, for where

there are helpful mentoring communities, there are opportunities for young adults to raise the big questions; and these questions in turn help young adults to fashion the dreams worthy of mature adults.

By setting forth such warm and inviting images as hearth, table, and commons, Parks invokes loci for such mentoring to occur. She discusses seven contexts where mentoring environments may take form: higher education, professional education and the professions, the workplace, travel, the natural environment, families, and religious faith communities. In her concluding chapter, "Culture as Mentor," the author expands the conversation onto a larger canvas, offering both critique and challenge to our consumer culture. By reminding us that to consume means to destroy utterly, Parks urges the reader to reflect on the power of culture as a mentoring environment which can and does work ill as well as good (210).

Throughout the book, Parks regards young adults in a positive light. This tendency may seem to some like painting a picture using only roseate colors. Whatever her palette, Parks presents the issues of meaning, purpose, and faith with a sense of urgency. Her concerns resonate with the increasing popularity of youth and family ministry programs at some seminaries. Likewise, they are consistent with the emphasis in church programs such as the catechumenate and in supportive communities such as Taizé. The positive response that such programs seem to garner suggests that her concerns—and her sense of urgency—are well-timed.

What is additionally helpful about Parks's book is her insights into the possibilities of what some have called the invisible generation. Communities of faith should be deeply concerned about young adults, and not only because they want to herd them into the vacant spaces in our churches. Because our sons and daughters are literally the future, they deserve places where they are warmed in both body and soul. They need places that nourish them. They have a legitimate claim to a life con-

nected to various forms of story and ritual. Parks's book offers a rich and textured discussion of these matters, one that gives permission and offers support for asking the big questions of purpose, vocation, and belonging. "A mentoring community offers hospitality to the potential of the emerging self, and it offers access to worthy dreams of self and world" (93). Parks invites us all to ask big questions and to dream worthy dreams.

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A BISHOP'S TALE: MATHIAS HOVIUS AMONG HIS FLOCK IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FLANDERS, by Craig Harline and Eddy Put. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. Pp. vii+387. \$27.95 (cloth).

Far from hagiography, this wonderful account of the life of Mathias Hovius is a realistic, well-researched biography that, in the tradition of *The Return of Martin Guerre*, paints not only a portrait of the Netherlandish bishop, but a landscape of the world that surrounded and made him.

The work's prose is impeccable. Its beauty is due at least in part to the plain, crystalline way in which the authors tell their tale. But the story holds our interest because the life of at least this bishop is worthy of the telling. For one, there are copious source texts on which to rely, and as the authors note, "rich documents are often the fruit of zeal" (303). As the reader quickly learns, where there is zeal, there is intrigue and drama aplenty. Furthermore, because the bishop had contact with all levels of society, from Rome to peasants, from protonotaries to nuns, the focus on what seems like the miniature that is his life becomes instead a panorama, as his activity shifts along the muddy streets that traverse vastly different worlds.

The book opens with a bird's-eye view of Mathias's harrowing escape from Mechelen after an invasion of Calvinist rebels. He

hides in a wardrobe for several days, and then scurries out of the city at the first opportune moment, dressed in a peasant's smock. He leaves as a vulnerable and common canon, but returns as the archbishop, King Philip II's third choice, and is ceremoniously welcomed with due pomp and circumstance on 18 February, 1596.

After this initial narrative of escape and triumphant return, Harline and Put immediately begin their reconstruction of the "doings" of the bishopric under Mathias. Through scrupulous attention to source materials, including piles of administrative documents, and especially through Harline and Put's discovery of a volume of the archbishop's day book in an obscure archive in Mechelen, we learn of the arrival of Philip and Isabella as the first resident sovereign princes of the Spanish Netherlands, the burial alive of the heretic Anna in Mathias's early years, a contest for power with the monks of the Affligen monastery, and much politicking in general among the clergy.

The narrative continues with two fascinating accounts of ecclesial ne'er-do-wells. The first, a crazed and suicidal canon of the chapter of St. Rombout's, Franciscus Pussius, slowly descends into depravity as his web of lies unravels. The bishop's primary asset in the encounter is his patience, which in the end sees the fall of this "enfant terrible." The second account presents us with the even more risky maneuverings involved with arresting the corrupt, relic-forging protonotary Henri Costerius. Both tales witness to the dramatic and complex life led by this conservative, yet reform-minded archbishop.

All of which confirms that all was not quiet on the Roman Catholic front. Reformation was afoot, in a Council of Trent tone. This focus on reform can also be observed in Mathias's attentions to the miracles at Our Dear Lady on the Sharp Hill. This shrine had been the site of many miraculous cures, and it was the job of the archbishop both to confirm the legitimacy of the healings, and to educate the laity on the proper source and purpose of such heal-

ings. The true purpose of divine aid was not fortune (health or otherwise), but faith. The source of power for such healings was not in, as in this case, a tree on Sharp Hill, but because God made it holy, "just as he made holy the oak where Jacob buried pagan Gods" (106). The means of these healings were, again according to the archbishop's teachings, through the reception of the sacrament, the hearing of Mass, and through prayer; not through potions made from tree bark, or the wearing of lucky charms. To supplement and buttress these teachings, the archbishop found the right priest for the shrine, commissioned the writing of an official history of Sharp Hill, and even cut down the actual tree located on the hill, in order to curtail the stripping of its bark for home remedies; he then had the wood from the tree fashioned into copies of the image of the Virgin Mary.

Efforts at reform are further illustrated by Mathias's moving sermon at the opening of an influential (and never repeated) provincial council. This council effectively instituted many of the reforms required by the Council of Trent, and the sermon itself set the tone for how the bishops and priests present at the council were to conduct themselves. During the course of the sermon, he invokes Paul, "Brethren, I beseech you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to all speak with one accord and have no quarrels among you" (113), and he concludes with observations on why Protestants have conquered formerly Catholic realms. "Let us work, Fathers, let us work, I say, to make this...an occasion of reproach for our enemies, that they may know our calamities spring not from their rectitude but from our sins, from our neglect of our spirits and duties, and from our squeamishness in reverencing God" (116).

Following this council, we learn of the archbishop's involvement in supervising three wayward pastors. The joy and playfulness of the authors' prose is well-represented here, as in the following: "In fairness to Frans van Groenendonk, who was merely irascible, Jean de Froidmont was ridiculous, a

model of the silly noble canon” (186). A later example plays the same riff: “Unfortunately two other canons had filled most ably the iniquity vacuum left in the chapter by the departure of [a provost]” (250). The attempt to compare mild mischievousness to outright rascality is humorous, if also too painfully familiar. Although Protestant readers may be tempted to allow these stories to fund stereotypes of the corruption of seventeenth-century Roman Catholicism, the fact that they found their way into ecclesial records confirms that reform was afoot.

Chapter 11 is an especially appealing chapter. It summarizes the table talk of the bishop, and is subtitled, “Any year.” Guests at table included pastors, monks, and nuns, as well as nobles, magistrates, family, and parishioners. Discussion at table included intrigue, magic, and idle banter, as well as even more theologically captivating topics, like the Sabbath-breaking miller of Brussels, or shrines that were purported to temporarily revive stillborn babies (and how local priests struggled to be true both to the faith of the church and the pain of the parents).

Later chapters reveal that St. Rombout (the namesake of Mechelen’s main cathedral) was credited with bringing Christianity to Mechelen in 770 A.D. That the bishop emphasized the “smell test” as a way of confirming the authenticity of recovered relics. That the bishop spent much energy late in life supervising the questionable activities of a cloistered community of nuns, and adjudicating a dispute over money “stolen” by an “active” religious. As a whole, the written record excavated by the authors confirms their observation that “surely this world and its ways was, as Jesus said himself, for serpents, not religious” (247).

In addition to the treasure of the archbishop’s tale itself, the book contains a number of other unique gems. First are a series of black and white prints that accompany each chapter, and sometimes supplement the text itself in order to provide maps and guides to the world of Mathias. One could wish that a greater number of

books were so beautifully enhanced. Second is a brief but helpful glossary of ecclesial and liturgical terms (like tonsure, protonotary, and monstrance), which will benefit the lay reader and help the failing memories of those who studied worship terminology so long ago. Finally, the glossary and list of relevant texts provides both insight into the specific primary sources of the researcher, along with secondary resources for those interested in the period and place.

Finally, the authors include a pleasing closing chapter describing the pleasantries and intrigues of their archival escapades. Their affection for Matthias Hovius is almost matched by their care for the idiosyncratic archivist, Constant Van de Wiel, and his curiously organized collection of papers and registers on the history of the archdiocese of Mechelen. In an age of information overload, it is a joy to hear tell of the careful collecting and cataloging, and subsequent unearthing, of old texts, the rich loamy smell of old day books, law briefs, and letters richly transported into a rollicking bishop’s tale of ribaldry and decorum, mendacity and opulence. Although little attempt is made to turn the biography in an interpretive or expressly theological direction, the book just so more accurately reflects the day-to-day administrations of Archbishop Mathias Hovius. It paints a picture of ground-level Counter-Reformation life at the border, the interstitial space between old Catholic bastions and new Protestant strongholds. For this descriptive work alone we can give hearty thanks. From the authors’ obvious joy and enthusiasm at the undertaking, we benefit all the more.

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