



**FAR MORE PRECIOUS THAN JEWELS: PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLICAL WOMEN,**  
by Katheryn Pfisterer Darr. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 211. \$15.95 (paper).

The cover illustration of Katheryn Pfisterer Darr's *Far More Precious than Jewels* portrays a statue of a seated woman. The woman holds a timbrel, and her flowing hair, long robe, and fine jewelry give her an air of stately grace. The woman does not play the instrument in celebration, however, but sits dejected and listless. Resting her head on one hand, she lets the timbrel hang silent in the other. The book's title proclaims this woman "more precious than jewels," but her disconsolate posture belies the title assigned her. Though literally (as a statue) on a pedestal, she is grieving; memorialized, she is yet unable to speak. Perhaps this is the youthful daughter of Jephthah, her dancing celebrations cut short by news of her impending death. Or this might be Miriam, once triumphant at the sea, but now weighed down by an untold sorrow. This unnamed woman, at once honored and downcast, appropriately represents the biblical women whose often ambiguous stories Pfisterer Darr retells in this compelling book.

Written in a lucid and engaging style, *Far More Precious than Jewels* examines the biblical accounts of Ruth ("More than Seven Sons"), Sarah ("More than the Stars of the Heavens"), Hagar ("More than a Possession"), and Esther ("More than Just a Pretty Face"), addressing both the texts and the questions and problems they raise for the modern reader. Pfisterer Darr's method in this study is novel and interesting in its own right. Recognizing that most readers have limited access to the broad range of biblical interpretations, the author proposes to give the reader "an opportunity to listen to a rich mix of voices, and to learn new ways of understanding the stories of four biblical women" (13). Specifically, the four women's stories are viewed from the perspective of historical criticism, of traditional rabbinic interpretation, and of feminist criticism. This method is intended to encourage us not to limit ourselves to "the ideas of 'people like us,'" but to take advantage of other points of view "that could inform and enrich our own perspectives" (193).

Each of four chapters begins with the retelling of one woman's story, along with pertinent historical-critical background. This is the least innovative part of the book, but Pfisterer Darr's accounts are lively and the data she provides are helpful for the lay reader. She notes, for example, that Ruth's request in 3:9 that Boaz "spread [his] skirt" over her probably "expressed [Ruth's] hope that Boaz would enter into a levirate marriage with her" (67); levirate marriage is also explained.

Then follow discussions of rabbinic responses to each woman. The rabbinic material highlights the rabbis' remarkable freedom in the questions they brought to the text and the answers they found there. Faced with the account of Hagar's expulsion into the wilderness, the rabbis wondered what finally became of her: "Did she live a long life? Did she ever find happiness with a man who loved and honored her for herself? Yes, they replied, pointing to the biblical tradition that, after Sarah's death, Abraham married a woman named Keturah who bore

him six sons (25:1). Who was this Keturah? .... She was Hagar” (147). The rabbinic material is delightful in its own right, but Pfisterer Darr also presents it as a possible model for the modern reader. Stressing the flexibility and adaptability the rabbinic method of interpretation allows, she sees in this approach a means of keeping the Scripture always applicable to an ever-changing world. The rabbis’ unflinching integrity in their appraisals (not always positive) of biblical characters also serves as an invitation to honesty in our own reading.

Pfisterer Darr’s discussion of each of the four women ends with consideration of feminist responses. Pointing out that there is no single “feminist viewpoint,” she presents a variety of feminist assessments of each biblical figure. Sarah’s mistreatment of Hagar, for example (Gen 16:6), can be understood as solely Sarah’s responsibility, or as a situation in which Sarah, Hagar, Abraham, and even God are complicit in a situation that makes the two women’s rivalry inevitable, since both seek the honor and security they can gain only through childbirth. Pfisterer Darr is remarkably sensitive in her treatment of the feminist materials: sensitive to the dignity and pain of the biblical characters as well as to the suffering of modern women who struggle to find viable models in the biblical heroines.

In addition to the considerable insight the author provides into the characters of Ruth, Sarah, Hagar, and Esther, the book offers a bonus in the excellent review of historical-critical, rabbinic, and feminist methods contained in the introductory chapter. The account of the development and goals of historical criticism includes brief descriptions of source, form, and redaction criticism, as well as outlining the role of the social sciences and of literary approaches in contemporary biblical studies. The description of rabbinic exegesis gives a summary account of the origins of the Oral Law, as well as succinct definitions of Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash. Similarly, the introductory section on feminist interpretation sets out both the history and the underlying agenda of feminist criticism—“to interpret the Bible in the service of women, whose lives have historically been enriched but also constricted by scripture and its interpreters” (35). Pfisterer Darr’s overview of her hermeneutic methods serves well as either an introduction to, or a review of, these approaches to biblical interpretation.

Pfisterer Darr has drawn out for us the deep ambiguity of our biblical foremothers, their characters, their circumstances, and their often painful choices. She invites the reader to share the task of pondering these women and their lives. We are, for example, asked to consider whether Ruth represents “a paradigm of faithfulness, a puppet in the service of patriarchy, or a radical call to inclusiveness” (76). “Something of each” is Pfisterer Darr’s own reply, but she concludes the chapter asking us, “What will be your answer to the question ‘Who was Ruth?’”

*Far More Precious than Jewels* is thought-provoking and highly accessible. It should appeal to a wide range of readers—pastors, theology students, and lay people, especially adult Bible study groups. Though it is in some respects a troubling book, tarnishing the flawless image of the illustrious heroines of faith, it is also a deeply affirming work. Pfisterer Darr’s compassion for her subjects allows all four biblical women ultimately to emerge as honorable foremothers, not perfect, but in their courage and humanity, far more precious than jewels.

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**A LIGHT AMONG THE GENTILES: JEWISH MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD**, by Scot McKnight. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. Pp. 205. \$12.95 (paper).

The main intent of this book is to “describe the nature and extent of Jewish missionary activity during the Second Temple period” (116). After examining the literature of that time, McKnight concludes that “there is no evidence that could lead to the conclusion that Judaism was a ‘missionary religion’ in the sense of aggressive attempts to convert gentiles or in the sense of self-identity” (116-117). This judgment stands in stark contrast to the established scholarly consensus that Second Temple Judaism was indeed a “missionary religion.” But while questioning the missionary zeal of the Judaism of that period, the title also draws attention to McKnight’s conclusion that Jews did perceive of themselves as “a light among the gentiles.” He means by this that the Jews, except for a few groups, were flexible in adapting to gentile society as long as it did not compromise their faith. They were for the most part quite friendly

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to gentiles: gentiles did participate in Judaism to varying degrees, and some even converted, largely due to the lifestyle and good deeds of individual Jews.

In the Introduction McKnight reviews earlier scholarship on the topic, defines his focus and use of terms, and explains his procedure. In chapter one he analyzes Jewish attitudes toward gentiles and the tendencies to integrate with or resist gentile society. In the second chapter he considers Jewish attitudes toward proselytes. In the next chapter he identifies methods of Jewish proselytizing: God’s intervention (usually an apocalyptic act), Jewish missionaries, literature, the synagogue as a proselytizing institution, education, good deeds, force, and other means. Special attention is given to *Joseph and Asenath*, the propaganda techniques of Philo and Josephus, and the situation in Rome. (Rome requires special attention because of the considerable evidence that Jews were actively proselytizing there. McKnight suggests that Rome is an exceptional and sporadic case of Jewish missionary activity.) In chapter four he looks at various requirements for proselytes, including circumcision, baptism, and the offering of sacrifices. He then describes various levels of gentile attachment to Judaism, which range from marginal participation to full conversion. Not until chapter six does he discuss any of the New Testament writings, looking at material from the Q source, the Pauline corpus, Matthew and his traditions, and the Lukan writings. Even there, however, he states that he is only concerned about non-Christian Jewish missionary activity as it can be discerned from the New Testament, and so the missionary efforts of Paul and Peter are excluded from his study. The final chapter provides an overview of his argument.

McKnight writes in a clear and consistent fashion. At the beginning of each chapter he states the focus of what follows and at the end he provides a succinct conclusion. In chapters one to five he follows a uniform pattern of considering first the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, then the Qumran writings, Philo, Josephus, and finally the rabbinical corpus. Inscriptional evidence and the comments of Greco-Roman authors are presented where appropriate. When he introduces any author or writing, he provides a brief but helpful background description. McKnight is sensitive to layers of tradition and the problem of attributions, especially in the cases of the New Testament and rabbinical writings. Greek and

Hebrew terms are transliterated and usually accompanied by a translation. Since all footnotes are placed at the end of the book, it is easier to read through the text without being sidetracked by unnecessary details. Attention to the material in the footnotes, however, indicates the extent of McKnight's scholarship and provides a wealth of additional information for further study of the topic. A bibliography and indices of subjects, authors, and passages complete the book and enhance its accessibility.

McKnight is well aware of the difficulties involved in making generalizations drawn from a wide range of literature reflecting a Judaism that was by no means monolithic. His "synthetic" approach—by which he means that the issue of Jewish attitudes towards proselytes is the organizing theme for studying the ancient literature presented in a roughly chronological order—is probably the best a person can do. The value of this book is precisely that it provides a generalization against which we can compare specific situations. The problem of a generalization, however, is that it cannot accurately reflect the differences between, for example, Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism, or between an author at Qumran and a Philo. In *general*, however, I think that McKnight is successful in demonstrating that Second Temple Judaism, though open to the gentile world, was not a missionary religion.

For the most part McKnight surveys the ancient literature and simply highlights its pertinent insights. Only occasionally does he go into deeper exegetical study of a text. These provide some of the more fascinating moments in the book (as with pages 93-96 where he discusses Philo's *Mos.* 1.147 and the textual history of Exod 12:38), but they also indicate a point where he needs to reconcile the texts with his conclusions. One questionable exegesis is on page 104 where he cites Galatians 5:11 and Paul's

question, "Why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision?" (NRSV). McKnight states that this "probably" refers to the time when Paul preached circumcision in some sense. Leading commentators (e.g., Betz and Krentz) are much more cautious about asserting whether this verse refers to Paul's pre-Christian activity. By page 105, however, McKnight's "probably" is used to support his conclusion that there were Judaizers who devoted themselves to the total conversion of partially converted gentiles. This conclusion then becomes important on page 107 when he explains Matt 23:15 ("Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert" [NRSV]) as a reference to such Judaizers seeking to make total converts of gentiles who were already sympathetic to Judaism.

In addition to its conclusions about Jewish missionary activity, this book is valuable for other reasons, especially to New Testament scholars. It provides useful insights into Jew and gentile relations in Jesus' time. The sections on baptism and circumcision give a helpful background to understanding these issues in the New Testament. McKnight also contributes to the ongoing discussion about "God-fearers" and raises some new questions. (With the downplaying of Jewish missionary activity, one wonders how gentiles were induced to become "God-fearers"; McKnight emphasizes the influence of good deeds done by individual Jews.) Finally, on page 116, McKnight admits that "a major impulse for this study is the desire to understand the origins of the aggressive missionary behavior of earliest Christianity even though such an attempt is not to be made here." Let us hope that he continues to build upon the good foundation he has laid by making such an attempt in the future.

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**DANCING IN THE DARK: YOUTH, POPULAR CULTURE AND THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA**, by Quentin J. Schultze, et al. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991. Pp. 348. \$13.95 (paper).

“One of the signs of maturity among North American adults is a recurring sense that not all is right with youth.” With these words we are invited into an academically articulate and incredibly insightful investigation of the youth culture and how it is being shaped by the electronic media. If you have any interest in understanding the youth of today, you need to read this book. It may be challenging and disturbing, but it invites the reader to understand the alienation and isolation within today’s youth culture. Not all is right with youth, and this book serves as an important resource for church and civic leaders who are concerned with the situation.

In the fall of 1988 six professors from Calvin College began a year’s study of North American society and culture. Reflecting diverse academic disciplines that include history, literature, film, communications, music, and philosophy, they authored this book as a joint project. One drawback is that these six white, middle-class North Americans do not deal much with such phenomena as rap music and the influence of African-American and hispanic cultures in general. Nonetheless, the value of the book lies in its understanding of the dominant culture of most youth in mainline denominations.

Chapter one, entitled “The Big Chill,” lays important groundwork for what lies ahead. The authors’ perspective is clear: “youth are who they are in no small measure because of how adults view them: adolescence is implicitly defined by adult-run media, churches, and schools” (2). This is evident in the way in which we view them as consumers by giving them their own clothes, movies, and songs. In the church we provide them with their own youth pastors, “whose age, energy, and style supposedly will ‘speak’ to young people. Then the main, or ‘old’ pastor is free to be pleasantly outdated and blissfully irrelevant to the ‘youth group’” (4).

Youth are not only consumers; they are also involved in a personal search for iden-

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tity, intimacy, and meaning. Much of what they hear is consumer based: “If you’re depressed, buy some new clothes. If you’re bored, take in a movie or rent a video. If you’re hungry, head for a restaurant....The pattern for finding identity and intimacy is increasingly clear: reach out and touch *something*—your wallet at the store” (7).

Chapter three, entitled “Lost in Time and Space: Youth in an Electronic Culture,” details the isolation of today’s youth and the false intimacy that is developed through the electronic culture. In churches and schools the importance of face-to-face, interpersonal relationships is clear. But consider the world of an average teenager who watches a rock video channel two hours each day, alone, and without parental conversation. A false sense of intimacy results from experiencing the same musical electronic culture with millions of other teens, and a fabricated

relationship is projected on to the deejay, who speaks to the teens as if he or she knows them. “Far more than any other forms of mass communication, the electronic media supply appealing alternative mentors and ‘friends’ when the adult world seems unattractive” (57).

“Risky Business: Youth and the Entertainment Industry” further describes both the alienation of youth from their elders and the discovery of their potential as consumers. Teen rebel movies of the 1950s, such as *Rebel without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*, set the stage for parents, teachers, and others in authority to be portrayed as incompetent and indifferent. These attitudes gained strength through the sixties with *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Graduate*, and *Easy Rider*. The potential of marketing soundtracks from teen movies was demonstrated in the phenomenal success of *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*. Movies such as *Flashdance*, *Footloose*, *The Big Chill*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Top Gun*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, and *Batman* all took advantage of both box office and soundtrack sales dollars from the consumer-driven youth culture.

The most disturbing chapter is entitled “Rocking to Images: The Music Television Revolution.” Rock videos have invaded the music industry in such a way that not only can you hear the music; you can watch and experience it. “MTV rapidly became the most synergistic of all teen media, integrating successful techniques from rock music, popular movies, and live and recorded television programming....And it relied exclusively on the same lures of other mass media—sex and violence” (180). For a youth culture in search of identity and intimacy, MTV provides much of what they think they seek. “By directly manipulating human emotion while hiding the strings, by creating an appealing, impressionistic mood that devalues logical analysis and rational critique, MTV gives young viewers what they want without clarifying what it is that they get” (204). Chairman Bob Pittman has said, “At MTV, we don’t shoot for the 14-year-olds, we own them” (192).

“Looking at Teen Films: History, Market, and Meaning” is an exploration of teen films that form the values of the youth culture. Though many teen films have redemptive value, such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *The Breakfast Club*, many others are about nothing more than foul language, crude gags, and sexual triumphs. Soft-porn movies in which adolescent sex is celebrated is a topic of most teen movies. “According to these films, sex is the best toy in the playpen of adolescence” (247). The series generated by popular films such as *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, and *Nightmare on Elm Street* reflect a disturbing trend of what will sell in the disillusioned and alienated world of the youth culture. Phallic assaults and the mutilation of young girls draw huge teen crowds to movies, but what is it doing to their young minds?

What can be done? The authors offer a note of hope by encouraging those who care to get involved in the lives of youth, rather than letting the isolation continue. “Simply put, adults must make the effort to engage themselves with the world of youth; they must care enough to enter youth’s enclave, breathe the same air, learn the language, and exchange reports on what the world, life, and the movies are like” (249). This book offers a unique entry into that world for adults who think the youth of today are worth saving.

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**SINS OF OMISSION: A PRIMER ON MORAL INDIFFERENCE**, by S. Dennis Ford.  
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 128. \$7.95 (paper).

S. Dennis Ford prods the reader to grapple with the most fundamental of ethical enigmas, indifference.

Indifference is the most persistent problem in ethics. It is the beginning point from which moral reflection must begin. Most people could not care less about moral deliberations. Indifference, hardness of heart, apathy, moral sloth, caring less, are problematic because we live in an imperfect world. In a perfect world, indifference would not be a problem. In our world, however, indifference is never morally innocent. Until the eschaton, indifference remains a central, if often overlooked, aspect of the moral life. The liturgical confession “we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves” becomes a moral question: What are the things we have left undone; what are we missing? Ethics is a search for absences, a reflection on inaction. (121)

To address the question of moral indifference, Ford develops a cogent and helpful framework for analyzing its constituent elements.

It ought not take long to convince the reader that indifference is in fact a monumental obstacle to morally responsible action. Ford defines indifference as “the failure either to see, to acknowledge, or to act on behalf of others” (12). In the first chapter, Ford gives an overview of his book and introduces the pervasiveness of human indifference in the face of desperate social problems. One example he uses to illustrate the avoidance of responsible action is choosing to read a book rather than do something. Let the reader beware!

Ford refers to Reinhold Niebuhr’s interpretation of sloth as the fundamental basis of indifference. Sloth is rooted in the anxiety of the human condition, caught as it is between finiteness and freedom. The two primary forms of sloth are idolatry and the flight to nothingness. Sins of sensuality are those which avoid the dilemma of freedom by escaping into mere finitude (sexual license, gluttony, extravagance, drunkenness, lust, etc.). Ford’s description of these dynamics is clear and compelling.

Religion makes its own contribution to the promotion of indifference. In chapter three, Ford details how indifference has been undergirded among evangelicals by certain notions of the church, the Bible, dualism, and individualism. Lest liberals enjoy his critique of the ethical foibles of evangelical theology too much, Ford criticizes liberal theology for (1) its tendency to deny individual responsibility in its attempt to understand the systemic nature of ethical problems; (2) its often inept proposals for addressing complex issues; and (3) its undermining of transcendent warrants for taking action.

Chapter four develops two myths from popular culture which serve to negate moral action on behalf of others. Both the myth of the self-made entrepreneur and that of the self-reliant American cowboy provide raw material for complacency about the situation of people in need. In addition, the absence of a positive myth nurturing responsibility leaves us with an ethical void. In our culture the myths Ford articulates have largely supplanted the Jesus story as shapers of our

common life.

Not only in popular culture but also in public life thought patterns are shaped by concepts leading to indifference (chapter five). Ford is at his best as he explains how rhetoric about “freedom” can contribute to moral neglect. Freedom, e.g., from the state, from religion, from reason, from the future, and from others, can be used to rationalize moral indifference. Ford suggests that the most powerful myth leading to indifference is based upon a distorted understanding of freedom: “Acknowledgment of my obligation to others is the largely invisible casualty of a history of freedom” (84).

It is in chapters six and seven that Ford outlines his constructive proposals for overcoming indifference. Three elements are crucial for moral commitment. First, one must have experience of a moral problem, or, in the absence of firsthand experience, at least be enabled to imagine such a case. Second, one must have access to a conceptual framework adequate to interpreting experience. Lastly, one must be empowered to consider one’s efforts on behalf of social change to be effective and worthwhile. The absence of any of these three

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components works to subvert moral commitment. The arenas within which one undertakes moral action range from the political order through intermediate social institutions to the personal realm. As Ford unfolds his various categories, he always offers helpful illustrations and examples.

*Sins of Omission* presents a clear framework for analyzing and addressing the problem of moral indifference. Ford’s categories serve well to introduce and organize the material. The examples he uses are suggestive of others. One can begin to see, for instance, how the Jesus story has been too often coopted by the powerful myths of the entrepreneur or the cowboy. Likewise, as Lutherans, we would do well to consider how a caricatured two-kingdoms doctrine has provided theological warrant for indifference on the part of Christians when confronted with urgent political issues. Where two-kingdoms thinking has led to Christian withdrawal from public affairs, it well illustrates an “ideology of indifference.”

The major problem with the book is its failure to take seriously enough human sinfulness as fundamental obstacle impeding ethical responsibility. Near the conclusion of his work Ford writes:

Nevertheless, indifference is neither natural nor inevitable. We do not possess a gene for indifference in the same way that we possess genes for blue eyes and five fingers. We acquire, we learn indifference; indifference is a human artifact. (120)

Ford’s solution for overcoming indifference seems to be one of education. As we understand the dynamics of indifference, we can learn to broaden our experience, sharpen our thinking, and be emboldened to act. Insofar as education about the causes of indifference will lead to their resolution, Ford has done a great service by the publication of his well-written book. At the end of the twentieth century with its wars, holocaust, and environmental crisis, however, one must seriously question whether even the best education is sufficient for turning the tides of human self-interest, selfishness, and greed. Ford may not recognize that “education,” as important as it is, can also function as a myth of indifference. Finally, we require divine power to effect our

transformation from indifference to commitment. It is the saving power of God which was at work in the ministry, cross, and resurrection of Jesus that overcomes our self-concern and keeps us from saying, “I don’t care.” What Ford lacks is an adequate appreciation and discussion of what Christians mean by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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**MARTIN & MALCOLM & AMERICA: A DREAM OR A NIGHTMARE**, by James H. Cone. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991. Pp. 358. \$22.95.

This volume is about two towering figures who represented the main alternative positions on civil rights matters and on what constituted the ideal society for African-Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. Written by James H. Cone, the prominent black theologian at New York’s Union Theological Seminary, it challenges all Americans to reconsider the ideas, methods, and legacies of Martin and Malcolm and what these can contribute to the continuing struggle for a society free of racial oppression, economic exploitation, and wars of aggression.

Cone begins his study with a treatment of what he calls “two great resistance traditions in African-American history—integrationism and nationalism” (3). He moves on to characterize Martin as “a Christian integrationist” and Malcolm as “a Muslim nationalist.” Problems emerge at this point in Cone’s discussion, especially as he attempts to place Martin and Malcolm in the broad historical and cultural contexts of integrationism and nationalism. Cone seems to suggest at times that “black integrationists” and “nationalists” are mutually exclusive, thus making such labels inadequate as a means of understanding the complex personalities, ideologies, and movements of Martin and Malcolm. There was much of the *nationalist* in King and something of the *integrationist* in Malcolm.

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The powerlessness of their people in a land of contradictions—in a society claiming to be free while sanctioning white supremacy and black oppression—made it necessary for them to combine both integrationist and nationalist elements in their liberation strategies. Although Cone appears mindful of this, he still lapses from time to time into a rigid categorization of Martin as pure integrationist and Malcolm as pure nationalist.

Equally problematic are Cone’s suggestions that Martin’s integrationism included the values of accommodationism and assimilationism. This is evident in Cone’s references to Martin’s love for European culture and education (33). Such a view should not be accepted uncritically. Integrationism for Martin never meant accommodationism or a complete assimilation into white value systems, traditions, and institutions. From Montgomery to Memphis, Martin always subjected white society to serious critical scrutiny to expose its shortcomings. His love for aspects of Euro-American cultures always existed side-by-side with his deep appreciation of the black church, extended family practices, the folk-wit and humor, the culinary customs, and other traditions of African-Americans. Thus, Martin’s references to

Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* as one of his favorite operas, which Cone cites as an example of the civil rights leader's appreciation for European traditions, must be interpreted with caution, especially when one considers that Malcolm X the Black Muslim, one of the greatest black nationalists in this century, subscribed to many of the values of white Western capitalism.

Cone should also have devoted careful attention to the difference between political nationalism and cultural nationalism in African-American history, a distinction quite essential for understanding Malcolm before and after his trips to Africa and the Middle East. Malcolm's nationalist perspective, like Martin's nonviolent philosophy, developed and matured over time, sometimes taking on new definitions and dimensions. Cone's effort is slightly marred by his lack of serious attention to these developments and by his failure sufficiently to treat Malcolm in relation to the various forms of black nationalism going back to David Walker (1785-1831). Cone's treatment of these concerns would have been more penetrating and sophisticated had he drawn more on the writings of Sterling Stuckey and other historians known for their exploration of aspects of black nationalist theory and practice.

Cone's discussion of the different backgrounds of Martin and Malcolm is quite impressive. He concludes that Martin's rootedness in the south, in a middle class home environment, in the black church, and in a system of highly formalized education naturally accounted for his integrationist position, while Malcolm's nationalist perspective was shaped and informed by his upbringing in the north and his exposure to urban poverty, the criminal lifestyle, prison, and the Black Muslim movement. Cone is right in contending that these differences in backgrounds help explain Martin's vision of the "dream" and Malcolm's concept of the "nightmare."

Much of Cone's focus is on Martin's idea of the *unrealized dream* and Malcolm's view of the *realized nightmare*. He perceptively employs the "dream" and "nightmare" images to focus the two leaders' perspectives on America, to reveal something about the audiences to whom and for whom they spoke, and to highlight their differences concerning the love ethic, integration, nonviolence, and the role of religion in the African-American freedom struggle. At the same time, Cone argues convincingly that each leader became increasingly disenchanted with his original vision, which experience ultimately led Martin to speak of the American nightmare and Malcolm to become more receptive to the possible fulfillment of the American dream. Interpretively, Cone's analysis is strongest at this level, partly because of the brilliant insight he provides into both the polarities and convergences in the thought of Martin and Malcolm.

While recognizing the amazing strengths of Martin and Malcolm, Cone does not hesitate to underscore what he terms "the most glaring and detrimental limitations" of their leadership (273). He criticizes the two leaders for their failure to identify the problems of sexism and class-

ism along with racism as equally harmful to the cause of freedom. Cone is essentially correct in his identification of Martin's and Malcolm's sexism, but he erroneously suggests that the former saw marriage as a male-dominated partnership instead of a shared relationship. Furthermore, Cone refuses to acknowledge that Martin and Malcolm, despite their sexism, contributed to the direction and momentum of both the black womanist and the white feminist movements through their struggles for the liberation and equality of all human beings. The same can be said of the two men in relation to the poor and the problem of classism. Martin and Malcolm refused to

separate classism from racism, especially given the high levels of poverty in the black community of their time. They attacked rich and powerful nations that exploited poor nations, and they pointed to other forms of economic injustice. Moreover, they were highly critical of black middle class organizations and their failure to contribute to the uplift of their people. Cone's reflections on Martin's and Malcolm's limited perspectives with respect to classism are open to serious question.

*Martin & Malcolm & America* is a very interesting, well-written, provocative, and highly readable work. It cannot be casually ignored by anyone who values the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X to the transformation of American life and culture.

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**TECHNOLOGY, THEOLOGY, AND THE IDEA OF PROGRESS**, by David H. Hopper.  
Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 153. \$14.95 (paper).

We applaud the political changes in the Soviet Union as victories for the forces of democratization. Perhaps we need to be more cautious in our celebration, for the real cause of the change may be the erosion of a political ideal by the powerful attraction of modern technology in a country unsuited to compete technologically with the west and Japan (118). Our political ideals are undoubtedly facing the same challenge.

David Hopper's *Technology, Theology, and the Idea of Progress* is not a treatise on current events in the Soviet Union, but his discussion of the role of technology in the modern world provides helpful insights for an analysis of contemporary society, whether in the Soviet Union or the United States. Hopper's thesis is that modern technology, once the servant of a communal vision of progress, has instead become the content of the notion of progress, leaving us to the mercy of technological advances, whether or not they serve any clear or desirable goal.

Hopper begins by describing how crucial the disasters of Chernobyl and the Challenger have been for us. Why? Because in our contemporary world much of our national pride has been wrapped up in the technological advances of our society. These failures profoundly challenged the self-image of Soviet and American citizens alike. Hopper suggests that the significance of these two technological disasters raises another question: "Why is our vision of progress so intimately tied to the status of our technology?"

This question leads Hopper to examine the idea of progress in western culture, which, he argues, is essentially a modern concept. Ancient Greeks and Romans looked to a Golden Age in the past. The Christian civilization that followed looked, not for progress, but for heaven. Although Hopper finds some roots of the idea of progress in the Protestant Reformation, especially in Luther's affirmation of the equality of all persons before God, he locates its origins primarily in the enlighten-

ment period, formed by emphases on the human and the rational and by the success of science. The idea of progress was shaped by thinkers such as Newton, Comte, Darwin, and Marx. Not

only do they turn toward the future instead of to a past Golden Age, but they also locate that future in this world rather than in some other-worldly realm.

The idea of progress, however, has taken two quite different forms. The earlier of the two views “defines progress in terms of citizenship and the shaping of a cohesive, fulfilling, human society” (30). In the other, more recent view “reliance is placed upon a technical elite to move humanity forward,” although the direction of this forward movement is often unclear (29f.). In the earlier view of progress, technology plays a subordinate role, serving the development of community; in the later view technology itself becomes the goal. Hopper believes that in the twentieth century we have abandoned the first view of progress for the second largely because of the disillusionment with socio-political goals caused by the devastation and despair of World War I. He warns of the danger of the contemporary view of progress, suggesting that we have fallen into a directionless addiction to technological advances that war against our sense of community and common human purpose.

Theology, according to Hopper, has an important role to play in our encounter with technology, but it has often failed to recognize the depth of the challenge technology presents. He examines and dismisses the theological positions of Paul Tillich and Jürgen Moltmann, arguing that they do not provide adequate criteria for a theological critique of technology. Instead Hopper advocates a theology that realistically and humbly accepts its role in twentieth-century society, eschews irrelevant universal absolutes, and supports efforts to create the kind of “cohesive, fulfilling human society” that technology threatens.

First, I want to say that I found Hopper’s clear and readable analysis of technology and progress to be both insightful and helpful. His placement of technology in the historical context of the concept of progress was enlightening and, coupled with his charge to today’s theology, suggestive of ways for people of faith to criticize and counteract our technology-addicted society.

However, I do think Hopper could have presented a more balanced view of technology. One can easily infer from his analysis that it is essentially a demonic force in contemporary society, leading us on an aimless journey towards individualistic consumption of technological toys with no concern for human community. As much as I agree with Hopper that we must be cautious about it, I cannot agree that technology is so universally dangerous. While, for example, it is true that computers, telephones, and automobiles have had destructive effects on human community, have they not also played crucial roles in fostering “the cohesive, fulfilling human society” Hopper longs for? Even Mumford, no enthusiastic fan of technology, seems more balanced than Hopper with his distinction between “democratic” and “authoritarian technics,” a distinction that Hopper would have done well to explore more fully (89-91).

Hopper calls on theology to don a proper humility and give up its claims to represent what is truly universal about the world and human reality. Even though I sympathize with Hopper’s concerns, I must ask whether theology can remain true to its task without pointing to the God whom believers affirm as the source and foundation of the created order. Whether our secular, technological society recognizes it or not, I believe that our task as theologians is to witness to God as the universal source of meaning in ways that speak to our contemporary world.

Finally, as helpful as Hopper’s book is, I wish that he had found his own voice more. I felt that the book was too much a pastiche of the views of others—J. B. Bury and Carl Becker, for example—and that it seemed to follow, not Hopper’s logic, but the logic of a course where students read these works and those of Buber, Tillich, and Moltmann.

Roger E. Timm

**OUR NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: A PROSPECT FOR NATURAL THEOLOGY AFTER KANT AND BARTH**, by Ned Wisnefske. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

This is an ambitious book. As the title indicates, the author presents a closely argued case for natural theology that makes an end run around the obstacles presented in (a) Kant's philosophical consignment of the knowledge of nature to the limits of human understanding (*Verstand*) and (b) Barth's insistence that all theological claims emerging out of autonomous human reflection are idolatrous. Wisnefske does this on the philosophical front by appealing to Wittgenstein's concept of a "form of life" and to what he sees as creative possibilities in Kant's analysis of the trans-subjective character of aesthetic judgment. On the theological front, he discovers inconsistencies in Barth's own arguments and turns for support to modest yet noticeable assumptions about natural theology in Luther and Calvin.

By "natural theology" Wisnefske means a limited but universal awareness of what Christians call "God," and one which is mediated by our participation in the flow of planetary life. It is important to Wisnefske to avoid appeals to an anthropologically grounded "natural theology" in broader senses of the term. This primarily means the traditional understanding of "natural theology" expressed, for example, in Thomas Aquinas' claim to reach a valid though limited knowledge of God through rational analysis of empirical experience. Kant's criticisms inevitably undermine all such attempts to examine nature and then to claim understanding of anything beyond limited creaturely experience.

Wisnefske also seeks an alternative to the sort of claims to a universal knowledge of God which are associated either with past notions of "natural religion" or with what today is being called "foundational theology." These approaches interpret elements of psychological awareness as immediate intuitions of relationship to the divine. Agreeing with Feuerbach, the Barthian attack on all subjective, anthropological starting points holds that any "god" acknowledged by such means is nothing more than a reflection of its human origins. For these Kantian and Barthian reasons, Wisnefske does not see the potential usefulness of a metaphysic which, like process thought, builds up implications of a scientific understanding of nature or, like the existential ontology of a Tillich or Rahner or Macquarrie, spells out elements of our human awareness of what it means to be.

Instead, Wisnefske points to a universal—even if limited—implicit awareness of God that emerges out of the very shape of human participation in life. At stake are neither any specific ideas about a supreme being nor any particularly religious feelings. Implicit knowledge of God is expressed in a "form of life," that is in mundane, commonly-acknowledged ethical or aesthetic responses to our human participation in the universal flow of natural life. Appealing to Kant's analysis of the intersubjective character of aesthetic judgments, Wisnefske insists such implicit recognition of God represents a genuine *response*, not a self-enclosed psychological state. It is generated not by the human psyche but by the givens found *within* natural life.

These natural patterns and rhythms of human participation in the wider flow of life have us engage in work and respond in rest. Work aims at sustaining life, improving its conditions,

and extending life beyond the present generation. “In so doing, we acknowledge that our natural life itself has fundamental worth” (102) and intimate that “the fitting response to our natural life which allows human life to thrive is gratefulness” (103). This respect and gratitude are the core of the ethical dimensions of our form of natural life. Equally fundamental are the aesthetic responses of admiring wonder and delight that enable us to be drawn out of ourselves and our work by the sheer sublime character that nature and living have. Natural knowledge of God encompasses these *pragmatic* ethical and aesthetic responses to natural life’s inescapable mystery.

This, Wisnefske believes, does justice to the Pauline intimations of a natural theology in Romans 1:19 and reformation theology’s affirmation of “a common though unstable knowledge of God

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through the natural world” which “was neither inferred from nature nor immediate in the soul” (126). At the same time this agrees with Kant that theoretical reason cannot provide knowledge of God even while insisting that pragmatic reason can. And it agrees with Barth that religious speculation is untrustworthy, even while arguing against him that some ordinary human associations of God with nature stem from “the quickening present in our very natural existence and from the real mystery present there to us” (122).

Wisnefske’s approach is a stimulating one. It should be of special interest to those who have an anti-metaphysical bent but who, in this day of profound ecological concern and dissatisfaction with a scientific analysis of nature unconnected to value, are interested in connecting acknowledgement of God with the patterns of natural life. Such an approach is coherent with reformation theology, but it is not the only one. Despite Barth’s protest, foundational theology need be neither heaven-storming speculation nor anthropocentric constriction of knowledge of God. From its base in human self-awareness, foundational theology phenomenologically outlines universal features of human response to life’s inescapable yet ungraspable mystery. As the Augustinian tradition understands, the intimations of human beings’ transcendent reaching beyond the parameters of finite existence may not give us specific knowledge of God. But they do show that the restlessness of our hearts implies relationship with an ungraspable mystery within the core of life and can reflect elements of that relationship—even as estrangement.

This is also a surprisingly readable book given (a) the need, particularly in the section dealing with Kant, for very close argument and (b) the probability that this is a reworking of a doctoral dissertation. Wisnefske’s style is lucid, even winsomely poetic and aphoristic—a refreshing alternative to the “academese” of too many books in philosophical theology.

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**FACES OF JESUS IN AFRICA**, ed. by Robert J. Schreiter. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991. xiii + 180 pages.

One of the writers in this selection of essays, Douglas Waruta of the University of Nairobi, expresses the conviction of the others: “I contend that Africans have every right to formulate their own christology.” His fellow writer from the Ivory Coast, Efoé Julien Pénoukou, is even more pointed: “For the Christian of the churches of Africa it is a question of need, first to deliver Christ from Christianity—that is, from institutions, practices, theological currents and so forth, based on cultural monolithism, which always render him unrecognizable in other cultures. Even today, many African Christians continue to think that the West has delivered Christ to them bound hand and foot.”

John Waliggo of Uganda surveyed both the history of western missionary theology and some of his own theological students’ views of Jesus Christ. The majority of missionaries, he thinks, believed that “Western Christianity had been equated to Christianity itself.” Even to many African Christians, “the Euro-American world is the center of the universe. It is the model of what is good, just and holy. It is the center of God’s love and presence.” Some African theological students, when asked to give their image of Jesus, responded that he appears as “a European who is opposed to African culture, religion and medicine.”

Robert J. Schreiter, who has collected and edited these essays from previously published papers generated at several pan-African theological conferences, is well known for his *Constructing Local Theologies*. He begins his introduction with an often cited fact: “Africa is the fastest growing Christian continent in the world today. Sometime in the 1980s its numbers surpassed those of Christians in North America....It is estimated that Africa will have nearly 325 million Christians by the year 2000.”

Such bare projections do not begin to capture the contradictions of promise and peril, the complexities of vitality and threat, the simply incomparable beauty and hospitality, the unparalleled suffering and poverty which are Africa today. As for the

consciousness of the American public, their political leaders and overseas investors, Africa is no longer on the back burner. It has fallen off the stove. Northerners now confess to a certain “donor fatigue” as regards Africa and are currently re-directing billions of dollars in aid to Eastern Europe and to the states of the former USSR. Meanwhile, beset by drought, poverty, disease and political turmoil, the Christian mission thrives in many places in Africa, and for that reason alone the continent continues to capture the imagination of Christians and some scholars of religion, at least, in the north.

How can the mission of God’s gospel still have such staggering results at the very time that the indigenous Christians have freed and are freeing themselves from the colonial legacy without which Africa would never have heard the gospel? Surely there is something other than the theology exported from Europe and North America which accounts for this phenomenon. Theologians from the north cannot presume, by ourselves, to answer that question, telling the Africans what God is accomplishing among them. Thus, Schreiter urges his fellow Euro-Americans to learn from African theologians who are constructing genuinely African theologies. The plurality of theologies in Africa reflects the obvious fact of a continent of more than fifty nations and hundreds of languages and diverse cultural inheritance. He writes, “This collection of essays has been assembled to show not only the problems that christology in Africa is facing, but also the stunning contributions it is making to the world church. Africa has

important things to teach and recall to the minds of the rest of the church, and these need to be celebrated alongside the difficulties with which it struggles.”

Charles Nyamiti, one of the most important of African theologians (a Tanzanian who teaches in Nairobi), provides a splendid survey essay of African christologies, and is very helpful in sorting out the diverse proposals—Christ as Chief, Ancestor, Liberator, Initiator. At the close he makes an important observation: that African theologies have very little practical influence even in the African churches, with the possible exception of Black christology in South Africa. “White theology still dominates in Africa, and in most seminaries and other theological institutes. African christologies are either unknown or simply ignored.” Nyamiti then proposes an hypothesis which he believes should be researched for possible verification, namely that the African people “received [the Christian] message in its Western form according to which it was delivered and [at the same time] in accordance with their African experience....” He believes that research would reveal unacknowledged and often rejected but nevertheless “authentically African christologies” such as can be found in the fast-growing African Independent Churches.

Efoé Julien Pénoukou agrees, in what I found to be the best essay, a very compelling and imaginative contribution, entitled “Christology in the Village.” In the village “being” is not thought of primarily as “essence, substance, nature and idea” but basically as “relation, community and solidarity.” To be is not so much to think or speculate but “to be there with.” Christology in the village, then, is above all primarily trinitarian and ecclesial. In the village God is not so much the timeless and absolutely other deity of so much western theology; rather, the “African God is a *transcendently intimate God*—a God who, without being identified with history, rules and wields the universe by creating and ordaining act.”

Africans have a long history of rejection and subjection by Christian outsiders “and their Euro-American theology,” which often claimed biblical sanction for such dismissal. John Walligo rehearses the countless ways Africans have been the rejected people. He goes on to imagine an African christology based on Christ as the rejected stone. “The living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him,” is but one of the images offered up in this collection, which as a whole, at least to this reviewer, is the “stunning contribution” to the rest of the world church that editor Schreiter promised.

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**UNDERSTANDING FUNDAMENTALISM AND EVANGELICALISM**, by George M. Marsden. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991. Pp. 208. \$12.95 (paper).

George Marsden is “the closest thing one can imagine to a pontiff of evangelical history,” says Leonard Sweet (“Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves: The New Evangelical Historiography,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66 [Fall 1988] 398). The author of several well-received works on the subject of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, Marsden brings together in this book seven essays published between 1983 and 1990: two essays of historical overview, four on how fundamentalism relates to politics and science, and one on J. Gresham Machen.

The introductory essays cover the years from 1870 to the present, placing fundamentalism in the context of its parent, evangelicalism, and in the context of social and political changes occurring in the United States. Marsden defines evangelicalism as the common name for the revival movements that swept across the English-speaking world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that came to dominate American Protestantism in the antebellum period. (How this fits in with the cool reception to revivalism among the creators of the Princeton Theology, of enormous influence on twentieth-century evangelicalism, Marsden does not say.) After the Civil War a series of developments split many of the Protestant churches into liberals (or modernists) and fundamentalists. Marsden makes clear that in the first half of its history fundamentalism was engaged in a fight for control of the denominations and, by extension, for control of the culture. It lost both battles, but it did not die. Since 1930 the byword for fundamentalism has been separation, resulting in the creation of mission boards, denominations, schools, publishing houses, and other organizations dedicated to the fundamentalist cause.

After World War II fundamentalists divided, some maintaining the militant posture of the 1920s and others moving to the more moderate position that was called neo-evangelicalism in the 1950s, and simply evangelicalism by the 1960s. To compound matters, the post-World War II evangelicals and fundamentalists did not stay put in neat categories, so a whole array of positions within both movements (and recall fundamentalism is a subset of evangelicalism) has produced bewilderment on the outside and internecine quarreling.

Marsden finds two traditions about religion and politics in American history. One, the Jeffersonian, views religions as “tribal” and divisive; religion and government are best kept at a safe distance from each other. The other tradition, to which evangelicals were drawn, was “intent on uniting the nation under divinely sanctioned moral principles” (87). Marsden traces American party politics, as both the Republicans (earlier) and Democrats (later, with the nomination of Bryan in 1896) developed reformist wings. At the same time, by about 1900, a secularizing component appeared in American politics so that the moral principles idea became quite generalized and the force of a specifically evangelical presence in the two major parties was diminished: “from 1928 to 1968...most evangelicals remained on the fringes of American politics” (94). When evangelicals did re-emerge in politics in the 1970s, they brought one wing of the Republican party back to its nineteenth-century heritage of moral concern, but without either the antiCatholicism or the strong black advocacy of the earlier period.

Now the stage is set for “Preachers of Paradox,” an analysis of the New Right of the 1970s and 1980s. In this least effective of the essays, Marsden realizes one of the book’s aims—to show the complexity of evangelicalism—but in so doing the meaningfulness of the paradoxes eludes the reader. This is also the chapter where he is least clear in his use of key terms. Definitions are important in this book, and Marsden usually handles them with clarity, but here the swings between evangelicalism and fundamentalism are at times confusing.

The general survey of evangelicals and science is cast in a Warfield vs. Kuyper debate. Benjamin Warfield (d. 1921) argued that both theology and natural science proceeded from the same epistemological basis and therefore both could be proved in similar ways. His contemporary, Kuyper, ar-

and, while they might agree on any number of matters, their ultimate referents meant that a supernaturalist view was only one of several competing for dominance in the culture. The Warfield view, built on the earlier evangelical “Baconianism” (empiricism), produced a two-tiered Protestant Thomism, “with the laws of nature below, supporting supernatural belief above” (131). Thus, when new scientific ideas like Darwinism came along, reconciliation was necessary. However, by about 1920 a biblicist view of science was removed from the field; the supernatural view had simply been crowded out in the marketplace of competing ideas.

The special interest in creation science derived in part from this loss, but Marsden reaches back to a whole series of factors, some of them longstanding, to explain the rise of creationism: the role of the Bible, millenarianism, Protestant scholasticism, rational Christianity, Scottish common sense philosophy, and the cultural crisis in the postbellum south. They laid the basis for the converging factors in the era after World War I that brought the anti-evolution forces together.

The essay on J. Gresham Machen is a gem, with a small flaw. Tightly written, clearly presented, the essay provides a sensitive look at Machen, with Marsden acting as neither advocate nor detractor. Commonsense philosophy led Machen to see the long-term negative results of the modernist hermeneutic. Marsden contends that his southernness, thus his position as outsider, led him to advocate vigorous intellectual debate with the modernists. Reducing beliefs to their social function is to “overemphasize a partial truth and so to underestimate the powers of the belief itself,” says Marsden (117). This excellent essay is flawed because Marsden does not demonstrate how Machen’s southernness urged a vigorous defense of the faith.

Wesleyan historians might not fully appreciate this book. For even though Marsden says he is not reviewing the holiness and pentecostal traditions, and they are therefore peripheral to his studies, the Wesleyans might well reply, precisely, and not to include these movements is to truncate evangelicalism and fundamentalism; anything else is simply too Reformed. Although this criticism may be valid for some, the book must be read by anyone interested in American religious history. The insight, clarity, and scholarship of these essays form an exemplar of contemporary evangelical historiography.

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**PIETY, PURITY, PLENTY: IMAGES OF PROTESTANTISM IN AMERICA**, by Robert L. Ferm. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. Pp.142. \$8.95 (paper).

My interest grew as I read the opening pages of Robert L. Ferm’s book, *Piety, Purity, Plenty*. Reminiscent of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s intended audience of two centuries ago, Ferm addresses this book to the “cultured despisers” who have been disenfranchised by the church. Ferm’s intention is partly evangelistic. How can the church speak meaningfully to those who are disenchanted with the church (v)? In other words, the evangelistic task must in some sense be theological. That is a challenge for the church. After all, one characteristic of American religion is its willingness to divorce religion from theology. Ferm’s observation is well taken: “I have been continually impressed by how much we as Americans apparently hold religiously dear and yet how little we understand what we believe” (vi). Since the nineteenth century there has been an

increasingly large gap between laity and theologians so that now many Christians are unclear about the relationship between doctrine and faith. Ferm's book aims to answer why this happened and what can be done about it.

The labels "piety, purity, plenty" are Ferm's descriptions of three ways that Americans have searched for a Christian identity. Each image contains a grain of truth about religion, but they are finally theologically inadequate. Moreover, by indulging ourselves in one image or another,

we Americans have actually distorted the faith. Observers of the American scene will quickly grasp what Ferm is talking about.

Put simply, "piety, purity, plenty" are an inadequate ways to relate faith and doctrine. The first and third images do so by deflating the importance of doctrine. Ferm defines pietism as an "uncritical acceptance of moral precepts that...demand a heartfelt response and defense" (34). Tracing pietism back to the classic debates over original sin and free will, Ferm shows how it has tainted the church with respect to theological education and proclamation.

If the image of pietism defined Christian identity in terms of behavior, the image of plenty defined it in terms of voluntarism. Tracing this image back to the democratic roots of our country, Ferm shows how voluntarism militated against scholarship, the established church, and the authority of ordained clergy. Like the image of pietism, the image of plenty understood preaching to be persuasive rather than proclamatory, leading to revivalism. For the pious and plenteous parishioner "mere" proclamation of the gospel is never enough.

The image of purity defines Christian identity in terms of rigid doctrinal formulations. The inadequacy of this image lies in its militant anti-modernism (fundamentalism). One must keep in mind that Ferm is criticizing a theological inadequacy in this chapter (and there is much to criticize with respect to this image). However, the way he crafts his argument oversimplifies the issue, as if one must decide between antimodernist fundamentalism (Harold Lindell) and enlightenment rationalism (Rudolf Bultmann). Ferm creates the impression that naive fundamentalism exhausts the theological alternatives for those who refuse to norm doctrine according to an enlightenment rationalist world view. Consequently, he concludes the chapter with these troubling words:

No credal statement is in and of itself an essential ingredient of the Christian faith; unless these [credal] affirmations are rethought and made our own, they have become theologically dead, although they may serve a strictly liturgical purpose.  
(72)

Here Ferm places two thousand years of tradition on trial, with more than a hint of presumption. He would do better to suggest that if the meaning of a doctrine is not immediately transparent, it should be explored rather than dismissed. Secondly, to suggest that "dead" doctrine may "serve a strictly liturgical purpose" is an insult to liturgy. As Geoffrey Wainwright has pointed out, there is an essential interconnection between doctrine, liturgy, and faith.

Of course, as one gets farther into the book, one sees the goal toward which Ferm is aiming. He wants to make doctrinal commitments incidental to Christian identity. For example,

he says that “the specific Nicene formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be made a *sine qua non* of Christian belief” (98). Ferm leaves one with the impression that doctrines are isolated from each other and have no interconnection. Not true. Central to Lutheran confessional theology is the commitment that all knowledge of God is trinitarian (we know the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit), that justification is trinitarian (we have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ), that ecclesiology is trinitarian (we glorify the Father by being joined to the body of Christ in which the Spirit works), and so on down the doctrinal line. To isolate the doctrine of the Trinity as Ferm tries to do is to misunderstand both doctrine and the Trinity.

In the conclusion Ferm offers his proposal to find a way out of the trap of piety, purity, and plenty. Ferm argues that the way out is through rethinking the doctrine of redemption. There is much to commend his proposal. He wants to rescue redemption from the dangers of individualism, but the problem is that Ferm’s proposal is non-trinitarian. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ have no place in Ferm’s proposal. The only role he gives to Jesus Christ is that of a moral example for the community of faith (117). By diminishing Christ’s mediatorial work in this way, Ferm actually promotes what he earlier criticized: pietism. Here Christian identity is not based upon the mercy that God has shown the world through Jesus Christ (which leads Christians to bear fruits of the Spirit), but rather upon the way that the

community behaves with respect to its Role Model.

Lengthy quotations abound in this book. At times they are helpful; at other times they interrupt a thorough development of a line of thought. When that happens I am left with the impression that Ferm’s conclusions are drawn from assumptions instead of arguments. In spite of that, the “piety, purity, plenty” proposal is useful. This book helps the reader untangle the many-faceted aspects of American church history.

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**RELIGION IN THE NEW WORLD: THE SHAPING OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN THE UNITED STATES**, by Richard E. Wentz. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 370 (paper).

As the title promises, this volume surveys religious traditions of the United States and explores the mutual influence of the “American” context and these traditions upon one another. It also demonstrates the influence of history of religions methodology on the study of American religion. Thus its usefulness to readers will be of two sorts: for some the book’s chief value will be the information it conveys about specific religious traditions; for others the author’s discussion of the phenomenon of religion as illustrated by these traditions, individually and comparatively, will be of prime interest.

Richard E. Wentz is both a teacher of religious studies (at Arizona State) and editor of *Anglican Theological Review*. His experience as a teacher is evident in this book, which takes little for granted. Explanations of basic terms, creed and shaman for example, are provided for the beginning student but placed in footnotes where they need not distract the reader who comes

to the book for review rather than introduction. Endnote citations to sources are minimal though suggestions for further reading are provided for each chapter. Without calling undue attention to itself, the prose is lively.

Wentz's examination of religious traditions, whether Episcopalian, Mormon, or Islamic, is respectful, placing each in its best light. Unlike older general volumes on religion in the United States, such as Winthrop Hudson's standard work, this book is not organized by a single chronological narrative that moves from the Puritans to the present. Rather, each chapter offers a discrete treatment of one tradition, complete in itself. When appropriate, chapters begin with attention to the tradition prior to its arrival in the United States and conclude with its history here. Following Joachim Wach, Wentz often discusses the internal life of the tradition under the headings verbal, social, and practical expressions. In other chapters his organizational scheme centers around distinctive characteristics of the tradition being examined.

This arrangement by single traditions or clusters of traditions recommends Wentz's book to the casual reader who wants to know about one religious group as well as to the student interested in the whole of American religion. Both its structure and content make it a valuable resource for an adult education series on religious groups in the United States, either as common reading or a reference for the leader. Of course, the limits of the volume's introductory intentions should be kept in mind, as should Wentz's approach.

Along with Catherine Albanese (*America: Religions and Religion*) and Peter Williams (*America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures*), Wentz considers American religion much as another scholar might approach the study of religions in India. All three authors have recently published volumes intended as textbooks suitable for use in the colleges and universities in our pluralistic and often secular nation. None of the three will replace Sidney Ahlstrom's comprehensive *A Religious History of the American People* as the general history of American religion. Rather, their contribution is in positing a different conception of the study of American religion, one informed by anthropology and sociology of knowledge and shaped by serious attention to both religious pluralism and the influence of the American context.

In two introductory chapters Wentz lays

out his definition of religion, stressing its form and function and highlighting the importance of stories (myth and legend) and ritual. Throughout the volume he reminds readers that "when we study religion we study the way of perceiving and transforming the world by particular people in particular times and places" (14). These perceptions of reality and their context must be taken seriously if one is to understand a tradition and its adherents. While attentive to the particularity of each tradition, he also alerts readers to similarities such as that between Orthodox Christian use of icons and Buddhist use of *mandalas*. This is not to suggest that the two are the same but to enrich knowledge of both by awareness of their common function.

Generally I am impressed with this examination of American religion. Of the three new volumes mentioned here, Williams is the most conventional; Albanese the most innovative; and Wentz falls between. While it does not deliver the "extensive" treatment of women promised by the cover blurb, and I might want a more nuanced discussion of Lutheran pietism, it does present a great deal of information in an engaging and accessible fashion. This quotation from the chapter on the Methodist tradition is typical of both style and approach.

A camp meeting was a place to find order and meaning in the chaos of frontier existence. The meeting grounds themselves were temples in the wilderness, models of the frontier universe. They were like a sacred center in an otherwise hostile environment. It was a fragile world into which the preached Word of the Christian gospel was brought, organizing existence around the worth of the individual soul in the eyes of God....Sometimes the preach-

ing, the praying, and the singing led to rather extraordinary behavior. People shouted and screamed in pain and in ecstasy....They experienced the liberating action of the Holy Spirit. Emotions and passions that had been pent up in the anxiety of on-the-edge existence were released, and the people knew that God was good, that God restored their lives to new meaning. These were humans like us, no less intelligent or gullible. They were mortals in dire circumstances, discerning whatever ultimate order and meaning was available to them. No doubt, many or most of us would have been among the ecstatic creatures of the camp meeting.  
(158)

For more detail one might still turn to Ahlstrom; for reference, to InterVarsity's *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. However, for a fresh, thoughtful look at religion in the "new world" Wentz's volume has much to recommend it. The general reader will profit from either a steady progress through the whole book or the perusal of a single chapter for information about a particular tradition.

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