
I recall a conversation among graduate students and professors during a coffee break at Union Seminary in Virginia in the mid-sixties. The subject was Old Testament theologies, and the rivalry between the treatments of Walther Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad, whose second volume had just appeared in English translation in 1965. One of the professors reported that he had been at a pastoral conference where a young professor named Walter Brueggemann had been lecturing on an Old Testament theme. After the lecture, Brueggemann was asked to list the ten most important recent books in Old Testament for pastors. “I need to think about that overnight,” was Brueggemann’s reply. The next morning he announced that he would begin by giving the group his top-ten list. He stepped to the board and wrote “Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology”—ten times.

And now a new edition of von Rad’s Theology has appeared, with a 23-page introduction by Walter Brueggemann. Brueggemann begins by declaring:

It is clear that von Rad (1901-1971), long-time professor at the University of Heidelberg, is the defining and preeminent interpreter of the Christian Old Testament in the twentieth century, and that this two-volume work is the most definitive publication in his long, prolific scholarly career. Von Rad’s work occupies such a dominant place in twentieth-century theological exposition that it is possible and useful to trace theological interpretation in the twentieth century in terms of periods “pre-von Rad, von Rad, and post-von Rad.” (ix)

Brueggemann continues with a review of the history of the discipline of Old Testament theology, beginning with Johannes Gabler, whose well-known lecture in 1787 resulted in freeing critical biblical scholarship from domination by dogmatic theology. That scholarship in Germany resulted in “developmentalism,” tracing the growth of Israel’s religion from polytheism to monotheism, and in the “Documentary Hypothesis” that sorted the Pentateuch into the JEDP sources. But much nineteenth-century scholarship was arid when it came to describing and appropriating the theological claims of the text. Then along came Karl Barth’s Romans commentary in 1919, and the struggle with National Socialism in Germany. As a young pastor, von Rad was “formed and shaped by the force, vitality, and liveliness of the work of Barth” (xi), and along with Walther Eichrodt, Barth’s colleague in Basel, soon began to lead the way in a recovery of the Old Testament for the Christian church.

Brueggemann identifies three features of von Rad’s emerging theological work that reflect Barth’s influence: (1) the primal mode of theological statement is narrative; the “credos” of Deut 6:20-24, 26:5-6, and Josh 24:1-13 are at the heart of the Old Testament; (2) this narrative is testimony, that is, “active, out-loud, public utterance whereby Israel makes its faith claim in an either/or mode of presentation that vigorously counters other religious claims” (xv); (3) this testimony that is central to the Old Testament is a counter-truth against the claims of “Canaanite religion.” Brueggemann observes that von Rad’s polemic against “Canaanite fertility religion” was “a polemic against National Socialism with its focus on ‘Blood and Soil’” (xiii). Brueggemann believes that von Rad reports on that confession of ancient Israel in a posture of his own confessional readiness. The “confessing situation” of
the Barmen Church in the 1930’s, when von Rad wrote this essay, surely makes such a confessing perspective inescapable for him. (xv, xvi)

Brueggemann declares that in volume one, *The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, von Rad “does the most to make a fresh contribution to Old Testament theology and to establish himself as the premier interpreter of his period” (xvii). Brueggemann refers to von Rad’s “amazing discussion of wisdom” in the last part of this volume and points out how this finally developed into a complete book, *Wisdom in Israel* (1970), “which functions almost as a third volume to his theology” (xix) and which pointed the direction that subsequent Old Testament studies would take.

While appreciative of much of the material in volume two, *The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, it is in connection with this volume that Brueggemann has his major criticisms of von Rad. He finds here a “soft form” of supersessionism that “did not acknowledge the existence of vibrant contemporary Jewish faith communities” (xxvi). Brueggemann quotes with approval a statement about von Rad from Jon Levenson:

> Rather than flaying Judaism [as per Eichrodt], he generally pretended that it did not exist. In fact, his theology was, to a certain degree, implicitly predicated on the disappearance of Old Testament tradition after the death of Jesus. (xxvi)

Whether one has read von Rad or not, all readers will find Brueggemann’s introduction to these volumes an informed and invaluable guide. This English edition reprints the translation published in 1960 and 1965, which was based on the German with revisions for the second German edition. But von Rad’s work in German has appeared in ten editions, through 1992, with major changes from the fourth German edition onward, including an expanded discussion of apocalyptic and a concluding chapter at the end of volume two, “Rückblick und Ausblick” (Retrospect and Prospect). It is unfortunate that these more recent materials have not been included in this new English edition.

A symposium on von Rad and his work was held in October, 2001, in Heidelberg. Among the papers presented there was a short biographical statement that begins: Gerhard von Rad is to be counted among the most meaningful and influential teachers of the Old Testament in the twentieth century. “The lecture halls in Goettingen and Heidelberg where he taught became places of pilgrimage....There was a magic that went out from his spoken and written words that touched many people” (R. Smend; my translation).

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In this volume, the companion to his earlier *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (John Knox, 2000), J. P. Fokkelman, Professor of Classical Hebrew Literature at the University of Leiden, takes on the challenge of describing the art of Hebrew poetry. His goal is to introduce the rules and literary conventions of the poetry (which comprises nearly a third of the Hebrew Bible) to those unfamiliar with biblical Hebrew. Should readers learn to recognize and apply the rules, he contends, “the texts become generally self-explanatory” (13).

Fokkelman opens with the question of definition. What is Hebrew poetry? Two preliminary analyses of Isa 1:16-17 and 2 Sam 1:19-27 present the Hebrew poet as a “master of proportions” who conveys complex meanings through compact, measured speech. Given that the poet’s raw material is language, Fokkelman identifies some of the distinctions between biblical Hebrew and English. He then assesses critically “the old definition” of Hebrew poetry that consid-
ered a poem to be determined largely by meter and the parallel arrangement of verses. Instead, he argues, the Hebrew poem is a "hierarchy of layers, each layer having its own characteristics and rules and making its own particular contribution to the overall effect of the work of art on the reader" (30). He identifies these layers from smallest to largest as sounds, syllables, words, versets, verses, strophes, stanzas, sections, and the poem as a whole. Claiming that the Hebrew poet strives to perfect the form and expression of each layer, Fokkelman proposes this definition of a Hebrew poem: "A poem is a result of (on the one hand) an artistic handling of language, style and structure, and (on the other hand) applying prescribed proportions to all levels of the text, so that a controlled combination of language and number is created" (35).

Fokkelman devotes the rest of the book to illustrating how this understanding of a Hebrew poem as a "well-constructed hierarchy" informs interpretation. He constructs a model of a poem from the verset to the stanza to demonstrate (a) the importance of numbers (particularly two and three) in the crafting of each layer, and (b) that the verset, the verse, and the strophe are the fundamental building blocks of a poem. He elaborates on the model in subsequent chapters by considering the smaller (verset, verse) and larger (strophe, stanza) layers in more detail. Then, speaking to the poem as a whole, he explores how beginnings and endings are marked and repetition may function. Fokkelman applies the model to selected texts from the wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) and the Song of Songs. He also reflects on the role of the reader. He urges rigorous and open-minded interpretation, without concern for the origins or historical particularities of the poem. As incentive for the reader to continue to "tackle these puzzles" (viii), Fokkelman concludes with a list of strophe divisions for all of the psalms and such other selected poems as Gen 49, Deut 32, and 2 Sam 22. There is also a glossary of technical terms and a Scripture index.

Fokkelman succeeds in offering a heuristic method for interpreting Hebrew poetry. He rightly calls attention to the intricacies of form and meaning in a poem and articulates a definition and model to reflect that complexity. He guides his readers along step-by-step, offering extended discussions and numerous examples. Particularly helpful, in my estimation, are the "questions to be asked of biblical poetry," a list of eighteen questions arising from his model that he considers important to ask when interpreting a poem (208-209).

At the same time, Fokkelman’s writing is quite dense for an introductory textbook. This is due, in part, to the inconsistency with which he defines the many technical terms he uses. He defines some terms in the text—though not necessarily the first time they occur—but does not include them in the glossary (e.g., verset, strophe, stanza, meter, acrostic). He defines other terms in the glossary only (e.g., caesura, metonymy). Some terms he defines in both places (e.g., prosody, inclusio), while others he never clearly defines anywhere (e.g., radical criticism). The result is that the reader has to backtrack or read ahead to find definitions that are not provided in the glossary or in the immediate context. A more comprehensive glossary would have been helpful.

Fokkelman also tends to dismiss curtly those interpreters whose analysis of a poem is different from his own. He contends, for example, that Job 10 "has so far not been correctly analyzed anywhere, but a sound structural analysis will put the correct articulation beyond doubt" (179); and, with regard to Prov 10:1-29:27, that "the average Old Testament scholar lacks the necessary theoretical knowledge and analytical skill" to recognize its larger poetic structures (176). Such rhetoric is not only unnecessary, but may promote the misperception that there is only one correct way to analyze a poem.

Walking his readers up the layers of a Hebrew poem like a staircase, Fokkelman makes an important contribution to the study of Hebrew poetry. Many, whether new to the task or experienced interpreters,
will find that they reach the landing with a fresh appreciation for the poets' toolbox. However, as Fokkelman acknowledges, what makes a poem art remains, always and predictably, beyond theory.

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Perhaps there should be something similar to the Surgeon General's Warning printed on the spine of this new translation of the Book of Concord. That caution might read something like this: “WARNING: Reading this book and inhaling its content may lead to some serious discomfort with current religious practices as well as abiding dissatisfaction with one’s own underexamined life of faith.” That is, taking a deep inhalation of these defining documents may leave the reader gasping for breath, painfully aware of the shallowness of much that passes for religious thought and practice in the church today.

For many Lutheran pastors the confessions are something from the past, a body of literature that was once swiftly covered and subscribed to at the beginning of their ministry. Thereafter, the Tappert edition of the Book of Concord, that redoubtable red book, has likely languished on the shelf. One is committed, after all, to pressing and practical matters of ministry; and one tends to look to many more fashionable, popular guides to help in the doing. With so many facets of ministry to polish, it is no wonder that Tappert gathers dust.

Still, many of us must admit to once having heard—and affirmed—the question posed at ordination: “Will you therefore preach and teach in accordance with Holy Scriptures and these creeds and confessions?” Further, we are distantly aware that the various constitutions of our church accept the Augsburg Confession and “the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalkald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.” Moreover, these constitutions go on to confess the Lutheran confessional writings, along with the gospel and the ecumenical creeds, as “the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God’s mission in the world.”

As an antidote to amnesia and as a guilt-free way of refreshing our doctrinal memory while tapping our theological roots, many of us can read afresh The Book of Concord, prepared by a bevy of translators under the editorial leadership of Robert Kolb from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod) and Timothy Wengert at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Reading the confessions, like any physical or spiritual exercise, requires diligence, time, and patience. It is not an easy fix, but in the long run it can prove both beneficial and satisfying. The conviction voiced in the Preface to the Augsburg Confession in 1530 is still compelling more than 470 years later: “we offer and present a confession of our pastors’ and preachers’ teachings as well as of our faith, setting forth on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture what and in what manner they preach, teach, believe, and give instruction in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories” (32).

Since the Book of Concord saw itself in light of the creeds of the ancient church, it begins with “The Three Chief Creeds or Confessions of Faith in Christ Which Are with One Accord Used in the Churches.” Readers who
are familiar with the 1959 edition of the Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore Tappert, will notice the freshness of the new edition at the outset. For one thing, the editors point out that the Augsburg Confession generally follows the order of the Creed, moving from God and creation to Christ, the Holy Spirit, and finally the church, sacraments, and resurrection (19). Moreover, the title of this section sets a certain ecumenical tone when compared to Tappert’s edition, which reads: “The Three Chief Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith which are Commonly Used in the Church.”

There are many features in the Kolb/Wengert edition that will prove helpful to the reader who perseveres. The editors note that over the past half-century English-language usage and style have changed, scholarship on the history and language of the Confessions has proliferated, and the training and preparation of Lutheran seminary students has undergone transformation (viii). These conditions have stimulated the move toward more inclusive translation, extended introductory materials, and the rich body of footnotes (which have enriched and enlarged the basic text by about 25 pages).

One example of the new approach can be seen in the pivotal Article IV [Concerning Justification] of the Augsburg Confession. Tappert renders the translation from the Latin text this way: “Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins” (Tappert, 30). The new translation of Article IV, in this case by Eric Gritsch, reads thus: “Likewise, they teach that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins” (40-41). Affirming faith as a gift for human beings suggests a given platform from which to ponder and proclaim the heart of the confessions.

Revisiting the confessions, though, is more than a chance to appreciate the scholarly skills of translators. It is an opportunity to relearn by reacquaintance and to rethink issues that may have lain dormant for decades. Some of the recent accords that have been reached with Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and the Reformed take on a fresh luster (perhaps a challenging radiation as well) when considered in the light of these new translations. For instance, one might want to read and then discuss with colleagues such matters as repentance (Article XII). One cannot but be struck with how often the issue of the terrified conscience and the comfort of the gospel are iterated here and throughout the other confessional writings as well. The matter of a just war (in Article XVI) is as much a concern now as in the sixteenth century, and it is helpful to have an enframing insight.

Of course, there are issues raised in the confessions with which we may find some difficulty and discomfort. Since we live in a different world, it may not be easy for us to press some confessional hot buttons such as the Pope as Antichrist (338), the dismissive attitude toward the Jews (440), the struggle with “Pharisaical and even Mohammedan” monastic vows (282), and the power of the bishops (94). The sheer length and difficulty of the magisterial discussion on faith in the Apology (Article IV, pages 120-173) take much concentration and patience. This article (and the entire Apology) was translated by Charles Arand.

The discussion of justification may seem repetitious and hair-splitting to some. But the extensive treatment of this doctrine demonstrates conclusively its centrality as a matter of life and death. Much of the discussion in the sixteenth century was aimed at the arguments of opponents, sometimes (to us) in less than conciliatory language. However, in response to those who then and now look elsewhere for justification—to those
who confuse law and gospel, to those who think that all you need is love, to those who may yearn for a basis for spirituality—to such as these the voluminous discussion in Article IV may prove eye opening. It may even help to reattach some dangling theological and homiletical moorings. “The proclamation of repentance, which accuses us, terrifies consciences with genuine and serious terrors. In the midst of these, hearts must once again receive consolation. This happens when they believe the promise of Christ, namely, that on his account we have the forgiveness of sins. This faith, which arises and consoles in the midst of those fears, receives the forgiveness of sins, justifies us, and makes alive. For this consolation is a new and spiritual life. These things are plain and clear” (130).

It is clear from rereading the confessions that certain theological and practical matters were of great concern in the sixteenth century. In addition to the matter of justification, robust attention was given to such issues as *ex opere operato*, the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of holy communion, the two natures of Christ, and monastic abuses. Some of these issues are still with us, of course, and the confessions continue to provide markers for conversations today. Other issues that are of our time, however, (like mission, leadership, spirituality, or worship wars) do not appear high above the confessional horizon. But, as with Scripture, we find ourselves having to develop a usable confessional hermeneutic. Such hermeneutic would not only expand the conversation within the Lutheran family and with ecumenical partners, but it would also keep us rooted to our singular tradition.

Some of the confessions are more pacific than others. The Small Catechism, newly translated by Timothy Wengert, is virtually free of argument and full of helpful instruction. In his footnotes Wengert informs the reader that early printings of the catechism were accompanied by woodcuts and references to the Bible. Unfortunately, this edition of the catechism in the *Book of Concord* is without illustration. But, in his 1994 *Contemporary Translation of Luther’s Small Catechism*, Wengert does include illustrations, making it a valuable and visual handbook for ordinary pastors, preachers, children, and heads of households. The Large Catechism, here translated by James Schaaf (deceased), is intended “for instruction of the simple, often poorly trained clergy in the basics of the faith” (377). Rereading the Large Catechism, contemporary simple clergy may realize anew how this work can assist in ethical discussions and decisions. Doing good to the neighbor (412), cleaning out the cesspool of all sorts of immorality and indecency among us (414), attending to the detestable, shameless vice of backbiting or slander by which the devil rides us (421): these are some of the issues to which the Large Catechism justly and provocatively draws our attention.

Some of the confessions are more argumentative or convoluted. In the Smalkald Articles (translated by William Russell) and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (translated by Jane Strohl) the temperature of the discussions rises well above temperate. The strong language with respect to the pope (307) and the designation of Antichrist (338) are evidence of fires past, leaving us with the challenge of finding a new language for a new day. The Formula of Concord, translated by Robert Kolb, tries to be a more moderate, though no less technical, document. Claiming itself “A THOROUGH, CLEAR, CORRECT, and Final Repetition and Explanation of Certain Articles of the Augsburg Confession on Which Controversy Has Arisen...” (486), this document attempts to set the doctrinal record straight. Along the way the writers and signers “have come to fundamental, clear agreement that we must steadfastly maintain the distinction between unnecessary, useless quarrels and disputes that are necessary” (530). That principle, valid in the late sixteenth century, is equally sound in the church today.

There is a genre of television shows that purports to tell the background stories of popular movies and how they are made.
These shows are really movies about the making of movies, and they give background information, display discarded out-takes, and discuss the first ideas behind the final product. Anyone who enjoys this kind of entertainment will enjoy Kolb and Nestingen’s book *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*. This volume gives some of the back story of the larger and official confessions. In fourteen separate documents the reader is treated to rough drafts and first starts.

For example, two early attempts at drafting catechisms are included. One of them contains a touching series of conversations between The Soul and God in Scripture. The argumentative *Four Hundred Four Articles* of John Eck are reproduced. One sees from Eck’s quotes (some not entirely accurate) what spiked the arguments in the confessions themselves. For example, Article 355 (a quote attributed to Melanchthon) states: “A bishop is not allowed to do anything else but to teach the Word of God. To preach the Gospel thus properly belongs to a bishop. So if he does not teach, he is not a bishop.” Many of Eck’s other observations are similarly prickly.

This book may not be to everyone’s taste. But for those who would like to know the inside story of the Leipzig Interim or the Saxon Visitation, the volume should prove to be of some interest. Luther’s moving 1533 Torgau Sermon on Christ’s Descent into Hell and the Resurrection is also included. This sermon not only figured in the shaping of the Formula, but it also says some suggestive things about the value of art in depicting doctrine. Along the way it makes a strong point about speaking simply about those things God has revealed for us and not racking our brains about those things that God has not seen fit to reveal. Simply put, if we believe that Christ died and was raised, says Luther, “[i]f we believe this, then we would live well and die well” (251).

Who should read (or reread) the *Book of Concord* and its sourcebook? Obviously students preparing for ordained ministry should. It would also be of immense value to others who are preparing for leadership roles in the Lutheran church. Beyond this audience entering ministry, though, these volumes would be of inestimable value to those who have been in ordained service and would like to get in touch with their theological and confessional roots.

These works could be read as a kind of spiritual discipline during Lent. This reviewer took it on as an Advent project, though it spread well into Epiphany. A retired colleague admitted that he and his wife used the *Book of Concord* as a devotional guide for a period of time. Perhaps clergy study groups could make a covenant to read one or both of these books over the course of a year. Such study of the confessions would be enhanced by also using Günther Gassmann and Scott Hendrix’s *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions*, published in 1999.

Some readers will be familiar with Robert Putnam’s writing in which he talks about the value of social capital. Recently, Dan Bartlett, the White House communications director, pointed to the value of political capital. “I think,” Bartlett has said in the *New York Times*, “if you have capital you must use it wisely—but use it.” The Lutheran church, by the presence of the Book of Concord in its tradition, has immense theological capital. It has not always used that capital wisely; sometimes it has not used it at all. But if the proposed warning on the spine of the book is to be heeded, we are obliged to take seriously that which we have to offer in the larger theological conversation. Preaching might also be enhanced; certainly it would be more faithful. Teaching the faith confessionally and with integrity would surely have a positive effect on a church in mission. Figuring out the difference between the slick and the solid would be a bracing exercise in faithfulness.

Finally, taking the confessions seriously and developing a robust confessional hermeneutic would be capital well spent. In the end it might honestly be said that those to whom we speak “will find that we do not lurch from one teaching to another, as our opponents
falsely allege, but that we earnestly desire to be found faithful to the Augsburg Confession (as it was originally presented) and to its straightforward and intended Christian meaning. By God’s grace we shall persist steadfastly and firmly in this confession against all adulterations of the truth that have arisen” (Solid Declaration, 531).

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Our Western culture is seeing a tremendous revival of interest in the relationship between natural science and spiritual issues. This revival usually goes under the title of “the dialogue between science and religion.” This renaissance of dialogue and discussion between disciplines too long divided is one sign of our so-called postmodern culture. Science and technology are no longer the purely positive priests of knowledge and truth: the dark side of technology has come upon us with a vengeance. At the same time, philosophers and historians of science have undermined the older claim of scientists to be purely logical and rational: science itself is based upon value judgments and human factors. Developments like these have opened up a space for natural science to embrace religious and spiritual questions. Major scientists are writing about religion, and taking seriously issues of value and spirituality that would have been unthinkable in the 1950s.

Alister McGrath, one of the most prolific theologians alive today, has already written two introductions to the current science and religion discussion (Science & Religion: An Introduction and The Foundations of Dialogue in Science and Religion, both published in 1999). Both of these make good introductory books for those interested in this subject. Now McGrath, a professor of historical theology at Oxford, has started a more ambitious project with this new book.

In a projected series of books, entitled A Scientific Theology, McGrath sets for himself the goal of a serious and sustained investigation of key issues in the relationship between theology and science. This series goes beyond introduction, seeking to make a substantial contribution to the literature. The first of three volumes, Nature, discusses the history, theology, and philosophy of the concept of “nature” in both Western science and Christian theology. Written in clear academic prose, and grounded in fine scholarship and serious theological reflection, McGrath has written what must be the best volume on this topic in print from a theological perspective.

Despite what we might think, the term “nature” is not a neutral one. Drawing upon postmodern thought, McGrath argues cogently that the concept of nature is a contested and constructed cultural artifact. In an excellent chapter on “The Construct of Nature,” McGrath traces the history of this idea from Plato to modern science. His main point is that “nature” is an interpreted and socially mediated category, not a neutral ontological term. Which concept shall the Christian thinker accept and develop? McGrath argues for the concept of creation as the basic Christian idea of nature.

There follows an excellent chapter that sets forth a Christian doctrine of creation. For the most part, McGrath follows the work of T. F. Torrance, the famous Scottish theologian. Torrance is notoriously difficult to read (there is even a book called How to Read T. F. Torrance (!)) and McGrath himself wrote an intellectual biography of Torrance as an introduction. Several of the key themes of the work under review develop ideas that Torrance has long defended. Even the terms “scientific theology” are used in the sense that Torrance developed.

By “scientific theology” Torrance and McGrath mean a theology that takes seriously the need to engage with and interpret natural science. McGrath argues, “a positive working relationship between Christian the-
ology and the natural sciences is demanded by the Christian understanding of the nature of reality itself” (21). Therefore, some Christian theologians must engage contemporary science and its interpretation if theology is to fulfill its vocation within the mission of the church. In this vocation, McGrath defends the medieval notion that the sciences are *ancillae theologiae*, that is, “the handmaidens of theology.”

A major contribution of this book is its defense of natural theology in a new key. If theology can and should engage natural science, then natural theology will once again become an important topic for Christian thought. Since the work of Karl Barth, natural theology has been very much on the defensive in the twentieth century. Much of the critique of natural theology, however, has been based upon an extreme separation of natural from revealed theology. Barth was critical of natural theology as a substitute for revelation, while in our time Alvin Plantinga has criticized natural theology because it assumes that belief in God is unreasonable without evidential proof. In Christian history, Luther was also critical of reason and natural theology when these were understood as replacements for faith in Christ.

The final chapter of this book contains an excellent response to criticism of this sort, especially Barth’s. Following Calvin, McGrath shows that natural theology can work together with faith and revelation, as long as it is not a substitute for faith, or seen as the rational foundation of faith. Both Torrance and McGrath want to reject natural theology as understood by its critics. That is, McGrath is at pains to reject natural theology as a foundational resource for Christian faith, independent of Christ and revelation. Instead, he argues for the importance of “natural theology” understood as a Christian theological framework for the interpretation of the natural world, and therefore also of natural science. A better name for this approach might be “the theology of nature,” but under any name this kind of reflection is needed in today’s churches.

Evangelical theologians and church leaders would do well to reflect upon McGrath’s defense of natural theology. In an important final section on “natural theology as discourse in the public arena,” McGrath rightly points out that learned non-Christians will demand some Christian response to the natural sciences and to the ever-popular scientific atheists of our day. To be true to its mission, the church must contend in public for a Christian understanding of the natural order and of natural science, over against popular science authors like Richard Dawkins who assume that science and religion are antithetical. For too long, the Lutheran church has ignored natural science (while accepting the human sciences with open arms). Yet many people today, inside and outside of churches, still look to science and technology for meaning and salvation. Evangelical mission and confession in a scientific culture require the discipline of a theology of nature, and perhaps even some work in natural theology.

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This brief study with the arresting title, *Greed*, is a manifesto to the church and to whomever will listen in the wider community of business and government. The author, professor of theology and ethics at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, is well qualified to address the topic of business and ethics. He has authored books and articles as well as taught ethics at the School of Business, Capital University. What prompts him to write with such urgency are a number of disturbing issues in the economy that are discussed in subsequent chapters.

The basic Christian conviction that underlies his evaluation of economic life is this: the Christian love ethic, with its commitment to sharing and generosity, reflecting God’s love and generosity in Christ, works
toward the building of caring communities, contrary to the prevailing ethic of greed. Each of the nine chapters begins with general comments on the topic, followed by an ethical analysis of the problem (both Christian and secular) and a concluding summary of Christian perspectives. A very useful “Questions for Discussion” ends each chapter.

The opening chapter, “Greed: A Character for All Seasons,” surveys the contemporary scene that promotes the “commodification” of all of life. Two entrenched habits of our cultural mind-set need challenge: the prioritizing of individual freedom ahead of the common good, and the belief that wealth is always capable of expansion. The latter argues for infinite growth on a finite planet. In sharp counterpoint, our biblical/theological tradition recognizes the limits of finitude and the human sin that creates greed and injustice.

Chapter two, “From Parable to Paradigm,” seeks to develop a biblical paradigm over against the prevailing “soul of our culture.” While the triad of individualism, unlimited growth, and control by the affluent governs our capitalist economy, an alternative view is necessary. Here the author draws creatively from the Lucan parables of reversal and other sources to propose a biblical paradigm in which sharing, that is, caring for the basic needs of all, is the goal. Scripture places limits on individual freedom and recognizes the self-centeredness of our human nature. The paradigm of sharing also means persons are to live in solidarity with those in greatest need.

The provocative chapter “The Business of Business is Avarice?” takes on two current ethical problems of corporate business: downsizing and excessive CEO compensation. Both occur at the expense of other stakeholders, the employees, and their communities. While there may be some legitimate reasons for downsizing, the author argues, “layoffs not driven by the tragic necessity of...survival are morally wrong” (44). With regard to CEO compensation, in 1999 top executives earned more than 419 times the average of workers. The result is a growing “economic apartheid” between CEOs and employees. In response, Childs draws on Luther and others to shape a vision of more equitable sharing in which the key question is that of the good of the whole.

The chapter on “Unshared Goods: Health Care in America” deals critically with two problems: the move to managed healthcare and the lack of universal coverage. Childs notes the good of managed care but fears that corporate greed has placed profits above patients (I noted nothing is said about excess in the medical profession). On the need for universal healthcare, it is noted that forty-three million persons have no coverage, plus many are underinsured, in the richest nation on earth. Here the moral conviction to universal care is required, undergirded by our Christian commitment to the poor and vulnerable. I found particularly apropos the need to question our preoccupation with prolonging life rather than focusing on sustainability of our natural lifespan. A fine reflection on Christian hope concludes this discussion.

The hotly debated topic of the global economy constitutes chapter five, “Unshared Goods: Hunger and the Global Economy.” While its advocates argue that this new economy will raise the standard of living for all, its critics see its cost to the environment, the workers, and the social fabric. The author argues for a global ethic that blends economic and humane goals, with the community the prior good. On the massive problem of increasing global hunger, Childs draws effectively from Bread for the World publications. Hunger is rooted in poverty and poverty remains the global problem par excellence. “The evidence is overwhelming that improving health and education among poor people, with a particular emphasis on gender equality and improved female literacy, contributes enormously to economic growth and poverty reduction” (68). Our recent stay in South Africa only confirmed the reality that poverty lies at the core of what plagues our globe, including AIDS.

In chapter six, “Toward a Sharing Soci-
ety,” Childs develops his biblical vision of a sharing society “amid the out-of-whack realities of this world” (79). This vision requires a willingness to face our limits, a renewed emphasis on the community, and more equitable local and global standards. Especially intriguing is the proposal to substitute the present GPA with an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare. In this vision of a sharing society, Christians act like leaven to create a more just economy.

Chapter seven, “Stakeholder Capitalism: A Case Study in Sharing,” is a bold argument for a new understanding of business within our society. The current theory and practice promotes “shareholder capitalism,” in which the stockholders and top management control the wealth and power, with profit the bottom line. Against this, “stakeholder capitalism” insists that business needs to consider all the parties involved in their activities, with employees and the community equal partners. The vision here again is that of a sharing society in which the good of the neighbor takes precedence and companies serve people, not merely profit. Again, one finds this proposal powerfully appealing but one only hopes its argument gets heard amid the cacophony of “shareholder-only” decisions so rampant today.

The final two chapters are moving invitations to teach and practice the biblical and Christ-centered vision of neighbor-love and community sharing (“Teach Your Children Well” and “A Question of Calling”). In its modest yet balanced way this study joins a growing chorus of voices urging our government and businesses to rethink much of their beliefs and actions. The welfare of the common good and the vision of a local and global community of sharing are the heart of the ethical challenge. After ENRON and the growing list of company downsizings, there may be a new opportunity to rethink “shareholder” capitalism and other topics. I found the author too gentle on “capitalism” and its adverse effects in our nation and globe. Living in South Africa, Namibia, and the mid-East is not easy when one sees the horrendous gap between the rich and the poor. Maybe capitalism and the global economy are not the answer for two-thirds of the world! Still, this book is a must for Christians and others to read and study. Use it with profit in adult class or business meetings.

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From the outset, Barry Callen defines his goal for writing this work as assisting “Christian believers” who have a “desire to better understand and pursue the Christian spiritual life” (11). He certainly achieves his goal of providing a resource on Christian spirituality that is both comprehensive and accessible to those who “have no extensive knowledge of theology or church history” (11). The book lends itself easily to “personal and devotional levels of study” for individuals, but I would also recommend it for adult education forums. Each chapter concludes with questions for reflection that guide the reader’s study, though other questions certainly arise as one works through the material. The notes are helpful yet unobtrusive since they follow the glossary of key terms at the end of the work. In addition, there are practical select bibliographies and indices that can serve as further guides for the enthusiastic reader who desires to continue studying, but Callen is emphatic throughout the work that “advancing in spiritual maturity requires being committed to a journey with the Spirit of God as opposed to engaging in an academic exercise” (11). This is not, however, a “how-to” book for those wanting to embark on a journey with the Spirit of God. Nevertheless, the final chapter does provide some suggestions for Christian practices that will advance spiritual maturity.

Callen uses the first chapter to define his terms. So how does he understand “authen-
“Authentic Christian spirituality” is a consciously chosen relationship to God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the context of the community of other believers. Theologically speaking, being spiritual in the distinctly Christian way is explicitly trinitarian, christological, and ecclesial (the fullness of God seen in Christ and realized together in the whole church). (30)

The Christian believer who is on a journey with the Spirit of God, then, is on a “biblically informed quest for holiness” that emphasizes the priority of Christian community (31-32). Callen continues by outlining five types of spirituality based upon Geoffrey Wainwright’s work that employs H. Richard Niebuhr’s five “Christ-relating-to-culture types” (see Geoffrey Wainwright, “Types of Spirituality,” in The Study of Spirituality, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold [New York: Oxford University Press, 1986] 592-605). The “Christ of culture” and “Christ above culture” types of spirituality are viewed as deficient polar opposites, while the remaining three types receive approximately equal treatment. The first chapter concludes with insights for spirituality that can be gleaned from marking time according to the church or liturgical year, but as one progresses through the book, one learns that Callen truncates the church year to three major seasons (i.e., Advent, Easter, and Pentecost).

The heart of the book (chapters 2-7) is devoted to the presentation of six major traditions of Christian spirituality, including what Callen identifies as the evangelical, contemplative, charismatic, holiness, incarnational, and social justice traditions. He draws correspondences between these traditions, the church year, and the Apostle’s Creed by reaping insights from biblical, historical, and theological resources. Contemporary authors such as Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, and Barbara Brown Taylor are also cited as Callen attempts to cull the best of each spiritual tradition presented in a manner that is both respectful as well as constructively critical. His own preference for the holiness tradition is evident in his suspicion of “mere religion” as a Christian religion that speculates about “abstract religious concepts” while it minimizes the role of divine revelation and personal experience (80, 123, 133). Callen’s preference for his own tradition does not undermine the positive value of the book; in fact, he issues a challenge to all Christian congregations as follows: “The goal of any Christian congregation should not first be concerned about being relevant, growing, or successful. The central goal is to be alive in God’s Spirit” (120). He is equally critical of what he sees as a “currently popular search to be freed ‘to be me’” movement that all too often passes for Christian spirituality (159).

Callen acknowledges that he comes from a Wesleyan/Holiness tradition and while his preferences are evident throughout his book, he does strive (successfully, I might add) to reach an ecumenical reading audience. At times I found myself being challenged by Callen (in a positive manner) to evaluate my own Lutheran biases with regard to the pursuit of the Christian life. Statements like “[g]rowth in the life of faith is more likely when deliberate attention is given to spiritual traditions not previously considered, not natural to one’s personality type, or not often appreciated by one’s denominational environment” were thought provoking (65). While I did not always concur with Callen’s theological conclusions (e.g., his claim that the Holiness tradition offers a “better answer” when it comes to a Christian understanding of sin), I did appreciate the breadth of his study (148). In light of increasing interest in issues of spiritual formation, especially in seminary communities, Callen’s work is a welcome addition which both goes “beyond mere religion” and the “individualistic assumptions many Christians now bring to their spirituality” (116).

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