



JUSTIFICATION: THE ARTICLE BY WHICH THE CHURCH STANDS OR FALLS, by Carl E. Braaten. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 192. \$12.95 (paper).

At the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth makes the following statement: “I have found by experience that ultimately ‘people’ (so highly respected by many Churchmen and theologians!) than and only then take account of us, when, quite untroubled by what ‘people’ expect of us, we do what is actually laid upon us” (I.1.xiii). “Doing what is laid upon us” is a good description of the tenor of Carl Braaten’s recent book on the doctrine of justification. Is it still true, he asks, that justification is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, or is justification one doctrine among many?

The doctrine of justification may not be dead, but it has been giving a lifelike imitation of a corpse for some time. Braaten traces the demise of this doctrine back to Melanchthon, who introduced a note of synergism in his *Communes Loci* of 1535, where he argues that conversion is the result of the working of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the willingness of the individual not to resist. This is a subtle but substantive departure from Luther’s teaching that the will is able to do nothing *but* resist the Word and the Spirit. For Luther, any positive synthesis between the human will and the Spirit is ruled out.

It is Braaten’s intention to help recapture the radicality of the doctrine of justification, to overcome what Gerhard Forde has called our failure of nerve in proclaiming an unconditional, uncompromising gospel. Braaten argues for justification understood objectively and prior to faith. Objective or forensic justification is the very core of the gospel. Justification, that is to say, is an unconditional act of God which is not dependent upon a subjective change for the better or upon our willingness to accept it.

For Melanchthon, as well as for later Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism, faith became the necessary precondition for justification. This is clearly seen in Orthodoxy’s understanding of faith as *notitia, assensus, and fiducia* and in Pietism’s emphasis on the subjective appropriation of grace. Both make justification into a subjective affair. Paul’s teaching of the justification of the ungodly became for Orthodoxy and Pietism a matter of the justification of the godly. The bite was taken out of forensic justification and the sheer radicality of this doctrine was denied.

Yet, Braaten asks, is not making faith the precondition of justification really humanism? After all, according to this scheme “the final link in the chain of salvation is forged by human decision and historical contingency” (38). The Scriptures seem to suggest, however, that “when one is declared forgiven because of Christ one becomes converted, if at all, against and in spite of one’s perverse will” (40). It still seems to be true, as Edgar Daugherty noted seventy years ago, that “there has been more bunk, piffle, persiflage, futilely foisted on the world of faith and comment *in re* the ‘New Testament faith’ than Barnum ever loosed in the morning time of American humbuggery.” For “American humbuggery” we could substitute “the tradition of Pelagius,” which makes God much more cooperative and humanity much more worthy than Paul

or Luther ever did. The doctrine of the justification of the ungodly is always polemical, fighting against our own supposed privileges before God and our self-sanctifying idolatries.

Braaten examines in two very interesting chapters the theologies of Paul Tillich

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and Karl Barth with an eye toward seeing how the doctrine of justification fared in their hands. These are fascinating chapters which show that while Tillich and Barth were part of the movement initiated by their teacher Martin Kähler to restore primacy to the doctrine of justification, they both robbed justification of its centrality in dogmatic theology. Tillich placed regeneration prior to justification, thereby making faith a precondition of justification, even though he always insisted that faith is only receptive. Faith, Tillich said, is *nihil facere sed tantum recipere*, doing nothing but only receiving. Nevertheless, it is still a precondition for justification. Barth made justification one element in his comprehensive doctrine of reconciliation, in this way making of justification not *the* word of the gospel, but *a* word. Yet, as Käsemann argues, “We cannot say *crux nostra theologia* unless we mean that this is the central and in a sense the only theme of Christian theology” (*Perspectives on Paul*, 48). This is reductionism and is acknowledged as such by Braaten. He quotes Einar Billing: “Anyone wishing to study Luther would indeed be in no peril of going astray were he to follow this simple rule: never believe that you have a correct understanding of a thought of Luther before you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the thought of forgiveness of sins” (83).

Liberation, Braaten argues, is knowing that nothing we can do can provide us with ground to stand on *coram Deo*. We are dependent solely on the forgiveness of God. Moralism, our tendency to seek premature security before God in our own fulfillment of the law, is a way of escaping this absolute dependency upon God. To make faith a precondition of forgiveness is to turn the gospel into law.

The first part of this book consists of essays which lay the theological foundations for the doctrine of justification. The second part consists of practical applications of the doctrine of justification. Here Braaten deals with the ecumenical dialogues, examining how justification has fared in talks with the United Methodist, Evangelical Conservative, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Roman Catholic traditions. He comes to the conclusion that Protestants and Catholics alike are allergic to the doctrine of forensic justification. Other chapters deal with the meaning of evangelism; properly distinguishing between law and gospel in preaching; CPE; and the doctrine of the two kingdoms. In each of these chapters Braaten demonstrates how the doctrine of justification has either been deradicalized or simply swept aside. What, for example, does the psychological model of self-fulfillment have to do with justification? In the model of self-fulfillment, the locus of action has clearly shifted away from God’s declaration of acceptance to the individual’s striving after acceptance. Justification, however, means the word of consolation which comes completely from the outside to those trapped in guilt and doubt. Justifying grace comes completely *ad extra*, not in the form of a positive synthesis between our actions and God’s.

This is an important, highly readable, and intriguing work, which challenges us to participate in the ongoing struggle to recover for our time the message of radical justification which goes to the very heart of the human situation. It is also a challenge to other theologies, “liberationist, feminist, deconstructionist, theocentric, pluralist, postmodern, New Age,

neopragmatist, and what-not. All of these are turning on a different axis, heralding a different gospel, than that normed by the article by which the church stands or falls" (79).

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LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND ITS CRITICS: TOWARD AN ASSESSMENT, by Arthur F. McGovern. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989. Pp. 299. \$14.95 (paper).

Arthur F. McGovern's 1981 study, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective*, won plaudits from readers ranging from Msgr. George G. Higgins to Michael Harrington, and established his reputation as a skilled interpreter of the history of Marxism, particularly with reference to the social justice tradition of the Roman Catholic

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church. His new book, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics*, builds on the earlier study by greatly expanding its investigations into the history and significance of Latin American liberation theology. While clearly sympathetic to his subject, McGovern carefully reviews the objections voiced by its major critics. And the criticisms have been many. McGovern considers each in turn with a fair-mindedness and seriousness that is as refreshing as it is rare. Particularly important is his demonstration that much of the hostility evoked by the liberation theologians rests on misunderstandings of the literature and its context. Not only have liberation theologians worked on a far wider range of issues than is commonly noted, but the substance of their work over the years has so developed that much of the critique laid on them has become dated if not obsolete.

Before plunging into the substance of his discussion, McGovern provides a salient historical overview of the origins and development of liberation theology. The legacy of Hispanic colonialism, the successive impact of British and North American interests—commercial and political, the domination of the hemisphere by the capitalist/communist struggle, the revolutionary significance of the Second Vatican Council with the subsequent papal social encyclicals, conferences at Medellín and Puebla, and the Vatican's responses to Latin American theology are all summoned to provide the requisite context for the discussion.

The structure of the book is determined by its evaluation of liberation theology from three perspectives: theological, socio-political, and ecclesiological. The theological focus describes how Catholicism south of the Rio Grande is being transformed by a new reform movement as radical as any in Christian history. The theological concern of the movement is examined by an investigation of two major and two minor themes. Most decisive is the ascendancy of the Bible both as the authority and the inspiration for Catholicism today. Traditional hermeneutics have been abandoned in favor of an interpretation of the scriptural Word understood as a message engaged in the social/moral trauma of Hispanic culture. Concretely, the biblical message compels the church to "lend its power and influence to the cause of the poor." Initially the importance of the Bible was based on the Old Testament message of Yahweh as creator and liberator of an oppressed people: "The creator God fashions a human being in the image of the divine—as creator. From this human beings receive their mission 'to build up the world.' 'Human beings are

called to freedom for themselves and for others" (64). Representative voices stressing the Hebrew Bible are Gustavo Gutiérrez, Pablo Richard, J. Severino Croatto, and Jorge V. Pixley (Protestant).

More recently the theologians have shifted attention to the christological heart of the gospel: Jesus is seen as God's own act of radical identification with the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed. In the words of Leonardo Boff: "Jesus preached neither himself nor the church but the kingdom of God....He came to confirm the good news: this sinister world has a final destiny that is good, human, and divine" (74). Others given special attention are Jon Sobrino and Juan Luis Segundo.

Still more recently, feminism and spirituality have received increasing attention. Spirituality is now understood as the community's integration of its commitment to social transformation with its contemplation of the dynamics of its new life in the Spirit and the communion of sisters and brothers (Segundo, Galilea, Gutiérrez). The cognate theme focuses on feminism in Hispanic terms (Elsa Tamez, Ivone Gebara, Consuelo del Prado, Maria Clara Bingemer).

More difficult for most North American readers is the third major section of the study: the social history of Latin America. Much of this material is political rather than precisely theological in character and reviews a narrative largely unfamiliar to so-called First World people. Primary emphasis is placed on the dominant role of internationals capitalism in relation to Latin American poverty. The foundations for contemporary social imbalance, McGovern stresses, were laid by Spain and Portugal in the colonial period. But since the subsequent economic development—generally capitalist in character—has manifestly

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failed to meet the basic needs of the major portion of the population and has no inclination ever to do so, it appears especially vulnerable to Marxist social criticism. Marxism, thus, has been used by the liberationists not as an ideology but as an instrument for social analysis. The objections by critics that the two cannot be separated is met with the counter argument that contemporary theology makes significant use of other atheist thought: Freud, Sartre, and Heidegger are cited. Unsurprisingly McGovern favors dialectical over functional models for sociological analysis. Conservatives will be more pleased with his judgment that dependency theory (to what extent are "underdeveloped" nations controlled economically by the developed nations; to what extent is their poverty determined by internal forces?) is of diminishing importance. It is clear, however, that the main argument for socialism (the historic failure of capitalism in Latin America) has encouraged liberation theologians "to give existing socialisms much higher marks than most North Americans would."

As in earlier reformations, it is the transformation of the church itself which the theologians seek. The "basic ecclesial communities" that have been both the inspiration and the primary public structure of the liberationist movement are shown to vary significantly from Brazil to Nicaragua and, in fact, operate under three very different models. Special attention is given to the work of Leonardo Boff, his conflict with the Vatican over ecclesiology, and his reflection on the experience of the base community movement. McGovern himself suggests that theologians need to provide more assistance to "the poor and their pastoral agents" by helping them develop ethical norms to enable them to distinguish between which means for fundamental

social change are appropriate for Christians—and which are not.

Clearly, Arthur McGovern, professor of philosophy at the University of Detroit, has provided an unusually valuable text for Protestants as well as Catholics, for political scientists as well as religious leaders, and for Christians across the globe. There is no reason to suggest that liberation theology, for all its limitations, will not increase in influence and strength. As such it is both a gift and a challenge to all who take Christian theology seriously.

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REAL PRESENCE, by George Steiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Pp. 256.
\$19.95.

Against the modern cultural climate, informed by death of God philosophies, Steiner proposes the courageous thesis that the capacity of speech to communicate meaning is guaranteed by the assumption of God's presence, and that "the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this "real presence'" (3).

He begins with a parable. He imagines a Utopia in which all literary, art, and music criticism would be banished except for the philological-historical. In this ideal republic the receiver (reader, viewer, listener) would experience the aesthetic act directly, without interference from academic or journalistic comment. In the absence of all secondary discourse, actors and musical performers—whose risk-taking performances in plays or musical compositions make them truer and more responsible interpreters than critics—would serve as models for the private reader or listener, who would then take risks of consciousness in cultivating direct contact with the work of art, even learning passages by heart. The social and political results would be significant. "A cultivation of trained, shared remembrance sets a society in natural touch with its own past. What matters even more, it safeguards the core of individuality" (10).

Steiner recognizes the impossibility and even undesirability of banning all meta-texts in the real world, but it is within this spirit of direct contact with the aesthetic act that he develops his concept of presence. At

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the root of his argument is a question: Why should there be poetic creation when each individual work of art could very well not be at all, this absolute gratuitousness and unpredictability bespeaking its freedom? Steiner affirms that there is aesthetic creation because there was first the original creation. The aesthetic act is an imitation of the initial *fiat*, whether perceived as Big Bang or understood in terms of the narrative of creation in religion. As receivers, we freely allow the ingress of the free aesthetic creation, and through the experience of its forms we recognize the outlines of creation itself. An "irreducible 'otherness'" (210), that area of unknowability in an art-act which eludes the most penetrating commentary as it even eludes the artist's complete control seems to Steiner "to be, almost materially, like an ever-renewed vestige of the original,

never wholly accessible moment of creation" (210). That "otherness"—whether attributed historically or in other cultures to the transcendent, or to *daimon* or Muse—is the affirmation "of the agonistic-collaborative presence of agencies beyond the governance or conceptual grasp of the craftsman" (211). What gives richer than real life to characters such as Odysseus or Anna Karenina is that they are not just combinations of lexical signs on a page, as much of current literary interpretation would have it, but a fusion of aesthetic form with "otherness" in meaning, with vestiges of the original creation. Works of art are "re-enactments, reincarnations via spiritual and technical means of that which human questioning, solitude, inventiveness, apprehension of time and death can intuit of the *fiat* of creation, out of which, inexplicably, have come the self and the world into which we are cast" (215).

Steiner does not suggest that all great art contains direct religious reference, but that it addresses that which is "grave and constant" (224; here he is quoting Joyce) in the human condition. This gravity and constancy are religious. Throughout his passionately argued case for presence in aesthetic creation Steiner cites examples of and commentary by poets and painters. This encyclopedic tour of Western art and thought from Steiner's perspective is one of the rich gifts the book offers.

Diametrically opposed to Steiner's concept of language and aesthetic creation ultimately underwritten by God's presence stands deconstruction, which finds a declared or undeclared delusion in any correspondence between word and world. At the present moment, when deconstruction is considered by some to be already *passé* while at the same time still exerting a formidable grip on the imagination of the academic community (in part because of its arcane jargon?), Steiner's essay offers a bold challenge and suggests new directions. His analysis of the origins of this crisis in the meaning of meaning as well as his attempt at a rebuttal of deconstruction are both engrossing.

He locates the precise source of this break between world and world in Mallarmé's statement that what gives life and vitality to the word *rose* is "*l'absence de toute rose*" (96), the absence of any rose. While immensely freeing to the vitality of poetic language, Mallarmé's affirmation that words refer to other words, not things, had other far-reaching effects for referencing in general. Steiner continues to trace the history of this broken contact through Rimbaud, Wittgenstein, linguistics after Saussure, psychoanalysis, and *Sprachkritik*. In recent years, computer "language" has perpetuated the crisis of the word.

Steiner admits that deconstruction cannot be refuted on its own terms, within its own logical system. The argument has to move to a different ground. The rebuttal starts with a description of philology, that love of the word which is the form of textual commentary which Steiner favors. Founded in careful lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical analysis, philology exemplifies tact, a robust courtesy, toward the visiting art-act. Philology is a bulwark of positive meaning, a "rich, legitimate ground" (165).

Furthermore, the marginality of most of the texts which deconstruction has so far addressed serves to discredit it. Again, citing examples of testimony by artists concerning the nature of their creation, Steiner says that he has found no deconstructionist among them. He also asserts that the notion that characters are no more than arbitrary sign sequences is clearly false to human

assumption of the meaninglessness of meaning lies another assumption that there is no transcendent to underwrite the human word. Steiner's counter-affirmation of presence is a major part of his rebuttal. While admitting that some of its insights have been fruitful, Steiner sees deconstruction, in an age when "cool" is admired, as part of a general failure of courage, of our embarrassment and reluctance to try to explain what happens to us when we risk our individual vulnerability as host to the mystery of otherness in art.

In addition to multiple examples drawn from literature, *Real Presences* offers interesting comments on other topics, such as Freudian and Marxist criticism, the profound effect of music on human consciousness, and the inappropriateness of the term *theory* when applied to literary studies. Perhaps the book's most moving message is Steiner's firm belief in the importance of great art, in its unique ability to communicate the human condition. For Steiner great art is life-changing. "The 'otherness' which enters into us makes us other" (188). At the end of his essay his tone becomes almost prophetic concerning the nature of art now and in the future. "What I affirm is that where God's presence is no longer a tenable supposition and where His absence is no longer a felt, indeed overwhelming weight, certain dimensions of thought and creativity are no longer attainable" (229).

The subject of this book as well as its clear and elegant style should make it interesting not only to theologians and literary scholars but also to all amateurs of aesthetic creation and to anyone concerned about the present state of Western culture. It would perhaps be intriguing to ponder the possible connections between the "break of the covenant between word and world which [...] defines modernity itself" (93) and the title of the journal in which this review is appearing. Also, given Lutheranism's investment in the idea of real presence and its relationship to the Word, Steiner's idea of presence in literature should provide much food for reflection. Steiner's book is not only thought-provoking in a variety of directions, but by the originality of its message and the fire of its challenge is—like the great art which he loves—a potentially life-changing text.

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LIBERATING EXEGESIS: THE CHALLENGE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY TO BIBLICAL STUDIES, by Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989. Pp. 213. \$14.95 (paper).

The hegemony of the historical-critical method has been intensely challenged from several angles in the last decade or two. In the volume under review, Rowland and Corner press that challenge through their enthusiastic presentation of the ways biblical interpretation has worked in liberation theology.

First, Rowland and Corner provide a sample of liberation theology's biblical interpretation as it occurs in Basic Christian Communities and in the published works of several leading individuals. The parables of Jesus are used to argue that the notion of detached objectivity, the presumption of many First World exegetes, is simply untenable. The "modern interpreter has to appropriate the parable as it is embedded in life today" (32). There must be (and inevitably there is) attention to life; abstract discussion will not bring one to truth. Scholars too

often claim the latter but, in fact, they are engaged in the former. The result is that they are inattentive to their context and become complicitous in the preservation of the oppressive status quo—or, at least, so the argument goes.

Secondly, in the central chapters of the work, Rowland and Corner directly explore questions that have been raised about additional assumptions of First World exegesis. For example, great emphasis has been placed on the quest for the original meaning, but all too often the result is that

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interpreters flounder when asked to “relate [their] journey into ancient history to the world in which [they] live and work” (35). These core chapters focus on both the foundation of liberation exegesis in “grassroots” interpretation and the revisions such interpretation brings about in the understanding or meaning of the canonical stories of Jesus and New Testament eschatology. In addition, one whole chapter is devoted to the “rehabilitation” of the book of Revelation—it is not escapist, rather it is a significant social critique.

Thirdly, the authors seek to import liberation theology’s critique into their own context (Thatcher’s Britain) and to have it alter the dominant pastoral practices and understandings of the Christian tradition current in the “established” church. They seek to explore “ways in which [they] can engage in an appropriate liberation theology in Britain.”

Throughout the book there is no pretense of writing from a neutral position. Only occasionally does one encounter sentences that chide from a middle position; for example,

If there is a danger of the past being displaced by liberation theologians who adopt the Bible as an additional weapon with which to mount a pre-determined campaign, there is a danger of the present being displaced in the approach to the text of much academic scholarship. (79)

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Neither of the authors wish to abandon totally the historical-critical approach to biblical interpretation—it is useful for correcting “self-indulgent” readings. Nevertheless, they readily admit to having a “canon within a canon”—everyone has one, they assert (51). Likewise, they acknowledge “reading into texts, whether consciously or not, [their] own social and political preferences” (5)—something they regard as “an unavoidable part of the complex process of finding meaning in texts.” Their restatement of a liberationist critique of First World exegesis is clearly impassioned.

When it comes to being critical of liberation theology’s exegesis, Rowland and Corner let the critique come from within the circle of liberation theology’s practitioners. Specifically, they draw upon Clodovis Boff’s discussion of liberation theology’s methods of interpretation in *Theology and Praxis*.

Two approaches predominate: (1) the correspondence of terms and (2) the correspondence of relationships. The first proceeds as if

Christian communities today—or at least some Christian communities—live in a

world which is similar to, if not identical with, the world in which Jesus himself lived. Hence the Christian community today can be related to its contemporary political context in exactly the same way that Jesus was related to his political context. The task of hermeneutics then becomes analogous to that of producing the same play in modern dress and with characters drawn from the contemporary world. In the twentieth century the part of Sadducees is played by the dependent bourgeoisie, that of the Zealots by revolutionaries, that of Roman power by modern imperialism, and so on. (54)

This approach is characteristic of *The Gospel in Solentiname*, a collection of commentaries by Nicaraguan peasants living in the small Christian community of Solentiname in Lake Nicaragua. “The presumption...is that the conditions of contemporary Central America bear a similarity in crucial respects to those of first-century Palestine, and that for precisely this reason [there is] artistic freedom to represent biblical characters in modern form...”(56). The flight into Egypt described in Matthew 2:13-15 is directly paralleled by flight from a National Guard attack on a campesino community.

The argument is that a community with experience of persecution, exile and torture is justified in representing the biblical story in terms of its own environment precisely because of a historical correspondence between its own life and that of the Jesus movement in its early days. (56)

Rowland and Corner join Boff in commending liberation theology’s insistence that “the *Sitz im Leben* of the interpreter is of crucial importance to the work of exegesis” (57), but they recognize the potential for a “naive equivalence” between the situation of the ancient text and the contemporary setting. Important divergences are too readily ignored and, mistakenly, the notion is given that history simply repeats itself or is static.

The correspondence of relationships approach, in contrast, does not assume direct access to Jesus. It acknowledges that access to Jesus is mediated through the Bible. The needs of the communities who composed the Bible must be taken into account. Biblical texts come to the contemporary communities of faith in a layered fashion, and, therefore, the interpreter must pay attention to form and redaction considerations.

In the light of modern biblical criticism...it cannot be assumed that the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are the words which he actually spoke, or that the circumstances of his life and death depicted in the biblical texts are those which actually occurred. (59)

The written biblical text itself is an interpretation of the words and deeds of Jesus done in “creative fidelity.” It is argued that “the primary intention of the biblical writers was to awaken a commitment of faith from their readers, not simply to inform them of events that had taken place” (60). The Bible “represents the response of the early Christian communities to the challenges of their day, one which could speak to their present reality only through a ‘creative fidelity’ to the words and works of Jesus” (61). Similarly, the modern interpretative task is concerned with “awakening a faithful commitment in the present

rather than in researching the past.” In the words of Boff, the task today is “to re-effectuate the biblical act, the act that gave birth to the Bible itself as a text.” The formation of the Bible itself, it is argued, justifies liberation theology’s employment of the “correspondence of relationship” approach. It fits with what Gerhard von Rad termed a constant renewal of old traditions in view of new situations. It is, therefore, claimed that liberation exegesis “fits within a respected tradition of biblical interpretation” and is a “truly biblical approach, since it was one practiced by the biblical writers themselves” (60-61). It is not surprising, then, to find Rowland and Corner join Boff in preferring the “correspondence of relationships” to “correspondence of terms.”

The manner in which the “correspondence of relationships” approach is described and commended leads, again not surprisingly, to an initially favorable comparison with Bultmann’s approach to exegesis. Bultmann employed the existentialist language of Heidegger, the authors assert, while liberation theology uses “categories drawn from a tradition of socio-political thought owing more to Karl Marx.” Both, however, stress the “crucial question of what [the Bible] means for us today” (70).

Bultmann’s chief failure was his lack of attention to the political and economic environment. Dorothee Sölle’s work is seen as a corrective extension of Bultmann’s approach. Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas are also brought into the discussion to underscore the attack on conventional historical-critical approaches and to press the point that it is “impossible to study the *Sitz im Leben* of the [biblical] writer without at the same time examining that of the reader” (76), for “facts of the past are fashioned into ‘historical phenomena’ according to the style of the age which is fashioning them” (74).

Rowland and Corner claim that the critics of liberation theology’s exegetical approach are wrong in their accusations of subjectivism and relativism. On the contrary, they claim that its approach is not only “biblical” but also in keeping with the general thrust of hermeneutical studies in the twentieth century. They conclude that liberation exegesis is *not* to be regarded as a “mere aberration, a stray egg dropped by a Marxist cuckoo into the Christian nest” (77). After all, many of the leading figures in the first generation of liberation theologians did their advanced study in Europe. This defense is unlikely, however, to be convincing to anyone inclined to term liberation theology a “mere aberration.” Such critics are not likely to regard highly the hermeneutical tradition of the twentieth century and a close association with it may condemn more than commend.

Equally problematic is the distance between the general reader’s view of Scripture and that of the hermeneutically informed liberation theologian. Even Rowland and Corner admit that those who enable dialogue in Basic Christian Communities seek to modify “a naive equivalence between the situation in ancient Palestine and that, for instance, in Nicaragua.” Adding social analysis does not necessarily remedy the problems of the historical critical approach, for again trained interpreters, i.e., those who have had time to learn more about either the biblical world or the modern world, have gained knowledge that might contribute to the reflections and actions of the contemporary community of faith. As soon as the authors employ the word “naive,” the central problem with the actual practice of the historical critical method—the separation between the scholar’s study and the church’s pulpit—reappears in new dress. From-the-bottom-up or grassroots theology becomes a romantic fiction as soon as the condensing term “naive” is introduced.

This book deteriorates in the last chapter, entitled “Liberation Theology in a First World Context” and in the conclusion. Fundamentalist are predictably scoured, talk of reconciliation is dismissed as the ideology of the status quo [which it can be!], and so-called prophetic challenges abound. Typically, the authors assert, “The integration of Britain under Thatcherism into the network of global capitalism represents a twentieth-century assimilation to forces of injustice” (197). Charity is, of course, castigated, for it works within the old system of global trade and capital; “[t]he same sys-

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tem that makes the poor of the Third World powerless to be helped makes many of the rich in the First World powerless to help” (164). Thus, “the only practical means of change is through a radical challenge to the international economic system” (164). Clearly capitalism cannot be identified with the kingdom of God, despite the enthusiasm of some of its more doctrinaire supporters, but neither is it simply the demythologized equivalent (à la Dorothee Sölle) of the demonic powers cited in the New Testament. Fortunately (and perhaps unfortunately) life is more complex and ambiguous than that. This lack of subtlety is paralleled by the authors’ collapsing the Christian witness into a social project. The gospel is reduced to “harsh demands” and radical challenges—there is no law *and* gospel in their perspective.

Nevertheless, Rowland and Corner have produced a useful book. It documents diversity and mutual critique within liberation theology and links liberation theology to other contemporary theologies. This reviewer was particularly helped by their presentation of liberation theology’s challenge to the status quo in historical-critical approaches to Scripture. In the latter respect, it joins a chorus of criticism, the response to which must in many instances simply be “guilty as charged.”

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TEACHING FOR CHRISTIAN HEARTS, SOULS, AND MINDS, by Locke Bowman.

Throughout his career as an educator and writer, Locke Bowman has been interested in the importance of teaching and the way this task affects the church’s ministry of education. His writings and workshops have been challenges to find better ways to help people grow individually and together in the community of faith. For Bowman, it is the teacher who plays the major role in the process of growth. When that role is not attended to with seriousness and commitment, the life of a congregation and the whole people of God suffer.

This interest is clear in Bowman’s earlier books *Straight Talk about Teaching in Today’s Church* (Westminster, 1967) and *Teaching Today: The Church’s First Ministry* (Westminster, 1980). And it is the foundation of what he writes here.

Bowman’s particular focus on teaching is interactive learning. When he speaks of the role of teaching, he is not concerned primarily with methods or with communicating a body of knowledge or with producing attitudes and behaviors in learners. All these elements of teaching are important. But they need to be connected, first and foremost, in relationships between teacher

and learner. The key in Christian education for him is what goes on in the place where teacher, pupil, and community of faith meet. The teaching role is, in the final analysis, a shared responsibility of the whole congregation.

The impetus of that claim has made Bowman's work over the years the source of paradigms for experiments in intergenerational learning in present-day congregations.

Teaching for Christian Hearts, Souls, and Minds carries forward Bowman's concern for the human act of teaching in the Christian community. It is a collection of reflections on personal experiences in teaching and the ongoing scholarly and practical discussions in education.

Bowman's thesis here is that the work of teaching is to inform and enable the whole person to know how to live the life of faith. To describe this work he uses the image of "furnishing the mind," an image that comes from Paul's exhortation: "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5).

To furnish the mind means to provide learning experiences that can orient life and give it a center in which the disparate details of life can be rooted and find meaning. That kind of teaching is based on fundamental concepts of the Christian faith and not on the trivia of belief. Bowman calls these the magni-concepts, the value-concepts, for living and asserts that for Chris-

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tian education they are: God's love, God's justice, the gospel of Christ, and the church (Christ's body).

Teaching is, thus, not only a matter of cognitive and affective concerns. It is both these and more. The fundamentals of the faith are not things to be known simply as systematically oriented outlines of dogma. They "furnish the mind" when they are taught through the interaction of teacher and pupil in ways that embrace heart and soul and mind together, fostering thinking about one's faith that is organic and organismic. To this end language and conversation are crucial in teaching if the fundamental concepts are to be known, the mind furnished, and the experiences of daily life centered in the values of the faith.

So, Bowman writes to renew the "focus on our need to conceptualize, to acquire a vital religious language, and to enrich our vocabularies, in the conviction that such an emphasis is uniquely at the heart of good religious education" (95).

Bowman attends to his claim throughout that this book is a constructive, holistic approach to Christian education. But, as is often the case with use of the concept of wholeness, the claim is more inclusive than the structure or details of its description. Bowman's aim is to discuss "the nature of learning, the definition of teaching, and the essence of education" (10). He wants to make known what kind of teaching should be going on to effect good learning. And yet, after his 108 pages, the reader is left with a sense that the limitation that the genre of "the holistic approach" seeks to avoid has once more been realized. One wishes, for example, that Bowman had dealt more with the factor of learning readiness so that teachers might be better equipped to plan learning experiences that are appropriate.

Nevertheless, Bowman does establish his claim for wholeness with many insightful comments that try to balance his focus on teaching with the inevitable scope of learning he envisions.

Though this book continues a theme that has been at the center of Bowman's life as an educator, it is a fresh statement on the educational work of the church today. As such, it is a

challenge and an encouragement for those who go about the task of teaching. It is a book that will be helpful to lay people in congregational educational programs as well as to pastors and seminary students.

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CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN A POSTMODERN WORLD, by Diogenes Allen. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 238. \$15.95 (paper).

In an article from twenty years ago, “Possible Courses for a Theology of the Future” (*Theological Investigations*, XIII, 320-60), Karl Rahner asserted that in the decades to come theology will be able to rely less and less on a church membership shaped by nurture in the Christian tradition and will have to speak to a Christian community transformed by “those who believe as a matter of personal conviction and individual decision” (40). This appears to be one theological prediction that is actually coming to pass. At Luther Northwestern, for instance, the numbers of students who are new converts to the faith rather than born-and-bred Christians has been on the rise in recent years. Denominational traditions that stress the importance of conversion and adult decision have experienced remarkable success. Indeed, the most distinctive characteristic of worldwide Christianity is the growth of evangelicalism; what Ernst Troeltsch labelled long ago as the “sect-type” churches.

For many who find their Christian identity in the heritage of the magisterial Reformation with its “church-type” of theology that conceives of the church as the institutional dispenser of a salvation given by God as unmerited grace in Word and sacraments, any discussion of “decision theology” is often met with an unsympathetic response or even a sneer. To answer the challenge of the modern world, they are willing to look almost anyplace else for

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guidance. In this regard, some traditional Protestants fervently believe that the sagging fortunes of the mainline church can be turned around by a renewed commitment to churchly traditions with a particular emphasis on cultic practices and the structures of clerical authority. This is the hope of many engaged in ecumenical theology, especially at the level of official dialogue. But such antiquarian pursuits have little chance of shaping a “theology of the future.” This is the modern world after all, not the Middle Ages. Creaky documents such as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* deserve little more than respect for all the work that went into them—a respect that, as Markus Barth remarked some years ago, can best be shown by “packing them away behind glass and preserving them in a safe place.” Others look to liberation theology for the answer. But the spectacular collapse of international socialism beginning in 1989 is the kiss of death to any theology dependent on Marxism. *What is needed for renewal within mainline churches are theologies directed to the central matter of conversion—the redirection, the metanoia, of individual lives.*

This latest book by Diogenes Allen of Princeton Seminary is a significant contribution to this crucial task. Like one of his teachers and mentors, the great Paul Holmer, Allen has labored

diligently to provide direction for adults who have religious feelings and intimations of God but who find it difficult to interpret them and act on them because secular culture (especially as defined by the English analytical tradition of philosophy) deems religious belief to be unreasonable. In books such as *The Reasonableness of Faith* (1968), *Finding Our Father* (1974), *Between Two Worlds* (1977; reissued in 1986 under the title, *Temptation*), and the magnificent *Three Outsiders* (1983; a spiritual guidebook grounded in the insights of Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, and Simone Weil), Allen has patiently charted a path for thinking men and women on the pilgrimage of faith. In *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, the insights of these earlier works are drawn together in a systematic vision that is directed (in good Calvinist fashion) to the understanding of the act of faith in relation to evidences from “the book of nature” and “the book of Scripture.”

In turning to the book of nature, Allen reopens the question of the cosmological argument for God’s existence. It was Hume and Kant who supposedly closed the door on this argument by making it appear “pointless to ask whether the universe has an external cause” (3). But developments in recent secular philosophy (Allen draws especially on the work of William L. Rowe) have gotten around previous objections by the reformulation of the question. The classical mistake of the cosmological argument was to look for God as a First Cause in a series of causes, a process of reasoning which relies on the causal principle applied to concrete objects (all human beings have mothers; all particular things have causes) but then applies the principle to an abstraction (the human race has a mother; the universe has a cause). This is the “fallacy of composition.” But one does not have to make this mistake. It is reasonable to ask why the universe has the particular order it has and not another one. In asking this question, one is led to recognize that the order and existence of the universe *are not explained* by its members. To realize this is to raise the question of at least the possibility of God as an explanation of the universe’s particular order and, indeed, its very existence.

To argue for this possibility, that God is Creator (not cause!) of the universe, Allen turns to the consideration of human needs for the belief. This is the hallmark of Allen’s method or argument throughout his work, namely, to defend religious belief on the reasonable ground that it meets human needs. This is because the fundamental character of religious propositions as truth-claims is not that they are meant to satisfy the intellect (although they may do that) but that they are directed to the matter of human need, indeed the greatest human need of all: “the redemption of broken and ensnarled lives” (*The Reasonableness of Faith*, 85). In the “postmodern” world, the question of God is no longer superfluous. The confidence in scientific and moral advance that was the hallmark of the modern mentality since the Enlightenment has broken

down. Human beings, claims Allen, need to know the status of the universe—that is to say, whether it is ultimate or dependent on a greater Being—for a number of reasons. It affects the types of choices they make in life and the goals they seek. It helps them to cope with the magnitude of their aspirations and desires which are larger than the world can fulfill. It aids in their understanding of the order and beauty of nature that they experience. It also places the afflictions of life in a context of purpose instead of randomness and pointlessness.

To believe that the universe is in fact dependent on God is an act of faith which comes

about for the vast majority of people not “by studying philosophical theology but by responding to the witness of a living religion” (96). This leads Allen to turn to the book of Scripture where he measures the truth-claims of Christianity in relation to the needs of human beings to know the status of the universe and to mend broken lives. For Allen faith is a matter of interaction with Christianity, not armchair theorizing; it means having one’s life affected at the deepest level by the truth-claims and imperatives that one encounters: “We cannot receive anything from God...by remaining the same or by desiring to remain the same” (102). It is in this way that one comes to faith. In short, faith is the experience of conversion.

It is impossible in a short review to examine the depth and richness of Allen’s argument. Suffice it to say that there are joys on nearly every page for the attentive reader. Allen’s practical bent of mind, his ability to employ a wide variety of intellectual sources, including literary, philosophical, and scientific, and most of all his sensitivity to the predicament of the modern individual in the quest for a meaningful life, make the book a valuable source for the teacher and preacher.

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JEREMIAH 1-25: TO PLUCK UP, TO TEAR DOWN, by Walter Brueggemann. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. Pp. 222. \$10.95 (paper).

Amidst the recent flurry of commentaries on Jeremiah—Carroll (OTL), Clements (Interpretation), Holladay (Hermeneia), McKane (ICC), and others—Walter Brueggemann offers a distinct and significant contribution. While fully cognizant of the complex compositional history of the book and informed by the historical-critical debate, Brueggemann chooses a somewhat different perspective, giving special attention to sociological and literary analysis.

Sociological analysis holds that a text reflects the particular social context in which it was given shape. It seeks to discern the variety of “voices” (of various social groups) which interact in the text. Via such analysis, Brueggemann concludes:

The text of Jeremiah articulates a dispute (reflective of a conversation in Jerusalem) about who rightly understands historical events and who rightly discerns the relation between faith, morality, and political power. The tradition of Jeremiah articulates a covenant-torah view of reality that stands in deep tension with the royal-priestly ideology of the Jerusalem establishment. (13)

Literary analysis attends to the subtle nuances of the text to understand the world of the text itself, rather than construing the text in relation to an external referent. In this sense the text is evocative; the book of Jeremiah invites the reader to imagine the termination of a royal world order and envision a new community of covenant faith (16).

These two methods yield respectively “a critique of ideology” and “a practice of alternative imagination.” Thus read, Jeremiah both critiques every “structure of domination...including our own military, technological, consumer-oriented establishment,” and “issues a forceful invitation to an alternative community of covenant, including a risky invitation

in our own time to practices of justice, risks of compassion, and sufferings for peace" (17).

The book of Jeremiah constitutes a sustained theological reflection upon the

political events of 587 B.C.E. and the trauma of exile. Brueggemann points to three elements as key to its theological perspective. The first is an understanding of "Israel's covenant with Yahweh, rooted in the memories and mandates of the Sinai tradition" (3) and "related to and derived from the traditions of Deuteronomy" (4). Secondly, set against the reality of covenantal sanctions is Yahweh's yearning pathos which wills a continuing relation with Israel and moves beyond the expected covenant sanctions. "The mediation of the claims of covenant through the surprising power of Yahweh's pathos permits the book of Jeremiah to move beyond the crisis of exile and death in the 7th and 8th cents. to envision a newness that is wrought out of God's gracious resolve and powerful will" (5). Thirdly, the tradition of Jeremiah presents a counterclaim to the "royal-temple ideology of Jerusalem," which "claimed that the God of Israel had made irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy, had taken up permanent residence in Jerusalem, and was for all time a patron and guarantor of the Jerusalem establishment" (6). History vindicated Jeremiah's claim that Jerusalem was not immune from judgment.

Brueggemann offers lucid exposition with careful attention to Jeremiah's poetic images and metaphors. He heeds well his own observation: "Engagement with the poetry requires not simply that we get 'the main point,' as that is relatively obvious. What matters is that we attend to the nuance of the language and the suggestive, imaginative quality of the literature" (82). One strong point of the commentary is Brueggemann's treatment of those passages which seem most disjointed (see, for example, his exposition of chapters 16, 20, 21). Frequently in Jeremiah distinct elements have been brought together and shaped to form a message coherent as a whole. Brueggemann does a good job of making sense of Jeremiah's strange disjunctions and odd juxtapositions, without resolving the tension of the underlying traditions (e.g., 179).

It is surprising that a commentary which gives the utmost respect to the final, "canonical" form of the text (e.g., 44-45, 109, 132, 150, 171, 216) nevertheless concludes with Jer 25. Within the critical tradition this division of the book is commonplace, yet to pay such attention to the final shape of the text without attending to the structure of the whole seems inconsistent. Surely one crucial aspect of the canonical form of the text is its overall structure. If Clements is on target that the message of hope in 30-33 now forms the "pivotal center" of the book, this lack of attention to the structure of the whole may be a significant flaw.

The International Theological Commentary series aims to provide *theological* interpretation which values (but also moves beyond) the contributions of historical-criticism; to offer a Christian perspective which interprets the Old Testament in relation to the New while upholding the integrity of the Old Testament scriptures; and to emphasize the relevance of each book for the life of the church today. The author's Christian perspective is clear, but never obtrusive. New Testament references are few and entirely appropriate (e.g., 25, 96, 164, 219). While there are occasional analogies to the contemporary situation (77, 78, 97, 101, 197), the exposition itself provides ample and excellent theological reflection to fuel contemporary preaching. As Brueggemann observes: "The text requires very little 'application' to see that centers of domination still lead to exile and death, and that covenantal alternatives, mediated by

God's sovereign graciousness, continue to be a fragile offer of life" (14).

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REMEMBERING ESPERANZA. A CULTURAL-POLITICAL THEOLOGY FOR NORTH AMERICAN PRAXIS, by Mark Kline Taylor. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990. Pp. 292. \$29.95.

Until recently, twentieth-century theology has been dominated by two groups. The one is denominational and/or confessional theologians arguing for the particularity of faith and in favor of brand-name loyalty *against* the claims of modernity and the pretensions of philosophy, science, and other religions. Barth is their model of the true modern theologian. The other is apologetic and philosophical theologians arguing for the intelligibility of faith and in favor of a mutually critical partnership *with* modernity for the sake of the universal community of humanity in all its diversity. Tillich is their model. The two groups disagree on literally everything theological but agree on the task of theology, namely, to engage "modernity" either dialectically (Barth) or correlatively (Tillich). Meanwhile "modernity"—presumably characterized by the attitude, commitments, and world-view found among university intellectuals—has generally ignored theologians of both groups. In fact, "modernity" has apparently been succeeded by "post-modernity." But the Barth-type and Tillich-type continue to debate with each other even if most intellectuals and nearly all ordinary Christians could care less. Even so, both types have been stung by the lingering suspicion of the Enlightenment that religion in all its forms is mere superstition, pre-scientific fiction, and childish illusion. Both types take that suspicion very seriously and continue to argue with each other about how to respond to it. Both types assume that the lingering suspicion poses a dilemma for Christian faith.

The dilemma can be stated thus: The tradition is no longer intellectually compatible with the dominant world-view as it was, let us say, in the time when its classical formulations were struck by St. Paul, Augustine, or Luther. That dilemma has captured the theological attention and energy of both theological types ever since Schleiermacher.

Mark Kline Taylor, of Princeton Seminary, believes the dilemma to be the playground for debates among white, privileged males. These debates of "modern" theology have assumed an idealized tradition which never existed and pitted it against an idealized version of modernity. Both terms of the debate are fictions totally removed from the ambiguity of the tradition and of human existence today. The high-falutin' conversation among North American theologians concerning the claims of the tradition and the claims of modernity has been dramatically interrupted by a third, and until now, unheard voice: the voice of those who are learning to resist oppression: women, blacks, the impoverished people in the first and third world. North American theology must turn away from its debates about an abstract dilemma and face the *trilemma* which is far more complicated, far more down-to-earth, and exceedingly more ambiguous than the agenda of "modern" theology.

The trilemma is genuine. In this post-modern age it will no longer suffice to deny one's own tradition. So own up to who you are, where you come from, what shapes your

consciousness. Every tradition is ambiguous but its importance is real. Secondly, accept the value of plurality in religion, ideology, politics, ethical systems, and world-views because plurality is the best check we have against the pretensions of all isms: traditionalism, secularism, capitalism, socialism, scientism, or positivism. Third, own up to the historical facts of oppression against women, against the native peoples of North America, the people of color, of other classes, and of other sexual orientation. Theologians like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza have taught us that to re-member is to restore connections, to make new connections, to deepen understanding, and to empower those who have been dis-membered.

The trilemma of theology today is genuine because the Christian tradition, the complexities of plurality, and the world-wide resistance to oppression are not commensurable in any self-evident way. Nor

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can we justify either retreating into traditionalism, or uncritically celebrating pluralism, or embracing all activism. The trilemma cannot, for convenience' sake, be avoided by focussing only on one of the three possible polarities in the triad. "Tradition and Pluralism" is a morally bankrupt intellectual exercise. "Plurality and Resistance" lacks the spiritual resources for the inevitable long haul in the struggle. "Tradition and Resistance" cannot successfully orchestrate the many in the work of resistance and tends toward collapsing the Christian tradition into ideology.

Taylor's constructive proposal is as intriguing, persuasive, and complex as the trilemma he places before North American theology. I am drawn especially toward his christological enterprise because he dares to accept all the risks of constructing a Christology for the sake of an adequate and accessible soteriology, a Christo-praxis for Christian churches at the end of the twentieth century. At the same time, his bold and imaginative Christology—richly informed by tradition and contemporary social theory—is exactly suited to the North American context. It will make all of us who have drunk deeply at the table of the Barth-Tillich discussion squirm because Taylor does exactly what he intends to do: he interrupts the conversation and obliges us to listen to the dis-membered ones. The Christ who speaks through them—gathered up as it were in Taylor's remembering Esperanza, a young Zapotec woman from his childhood—is the Christ who has, until now, been—well—anonymous. It is none other than Christ the rough beast and *Christus-mater*. Read for yourself and I wager Taylor will leave you, as he did me, breathless and grateful.

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PASTOR, OUR MARRIAGE IS IN TROUBLE: A GUIDE TO SHORT-TERM COUNSELING, by Charles L. Rassieur. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988. Pp. 129. \$11.95 (paper).

Those of us who are parish pastors observe things as we relate to people in the contexts of congregational and community life. Sometimes we pick up clues to the healthy or unhealthy

nature of a marriage. We wonder if it is appropriate—or when it is appropriate—for us to intervene. And sometimes we wonder if there is much influence we can have on the marriage relationships of our parishioners.

Charles Rassieur notes that pastors often despair about their effectiveness. He writes, “It is a commonplace for clergy to feel virtually powerless...when couples show signs of significant marital stress and strain, many clergy discount the significance of their role as intervenors in comparison with such other professionals as psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers.” Yet Rassieur goes on to say that although we live in an age which is often questioning and suspicious of authority, it is often the case that a pastor moves into the lives of people with a kind of authority which is not granted to other professions. It is “the authority of one who teaches the fundamental values that undergird marriage.”

Even though Rassieur affirms the importance of the pastoral role, he has no lofty, unrealistic expectations of clergy. Among the underlying assumptions of the book are: that pastors stick to short-term marital intervention, that most pastors are not equipped as sophisticated therapists, and that not all marriage conflicts can be resolved. Yet given these limitations, the pastor nonetheless “holds a unique position and office in the church, which offers both the authority and the opportunity to intervene and bring healing to conflicted marriages.”

Against the backdrop of these assumptions, Rassieur offers a normative model for pastoral intervention in marital crises, although he readily admits that any such model “appears to offer a simplistic approach to a complex process.” Included in this model is a complete “Pastoral Marriage

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Counseling Questionnaire” (which he grants readers permission to use in their own work). The model is laid out in detailed chapters on “Initiating Short-Term Marriage Counseling,” “Individual Sessions with Each Spouse,” “Concluding Joint Sessions,” and “Special Concerns in Marriage Counseling.”

Although this is definitely a “how to” book, it is not without theological and biblical reflection. The author sets the practical model in a biblical and theological context, albeit a brief and perhaps oversimplified one. Paul Tillich is the one theologian upon whom Rassieur draws for the theological context.

This book will be especially helpful to those who are in beginning years of parish ministry who need some affirmation of their own position and ability to bring help to troubled marriages. It will offer to these pastors some concrete steps for how to begin and how to proceed. The book will also be helpful to pastors like this reviewer who have had several years of parish experience and have tried many approaches to working with couples. We are reminded that we are best off not getting lured into long-term counseling and there is a specific model for us to follow after a variety of attempts has us frustrated.

Sprinkled with a number of case studies and real-life examples, Rassieur’s book also offers an extended list of recommended reading. Female clergy will be pleased to note that Rassieur takes pains to be inclusive in his references to clergy and has a sensitivity to the particular gifts and needs of women. At the same time, there is not question that his perspective on theology, counseling, and practical aspects of marriage is that of a male whose educational and theological formation came in the ’50s and ’60s. His own awareness of this is highlighted

with a quote from Carol Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice*, where she says that her research suggests men and women may speak different languages. Rassieur himself writes, "the pastoral counselor, whether female or male, should never forget how profoundly different are the disparate experiences of men and women. Younger counselors may readily and wholeheartedly endorse and follow such a recommendation. But in many instances it is the older, more experienced counselors who need to exercise the greater caution...about their assumptions regarding the inner world and needs of persons of the opposite gender."

In the specific geographic section of the Twin Cities where this reviewer is involved in ministry, Rassieur is known for his own work in pastoral counseling and for his steady, caring consultative work with pastors. It is no surprise that he should conclude his book with a challenge to the church and to pastors: "Marriage counseling is a responsibility and a call that must be taken seriously by every pastor and can hardly be avoided by any pastor."

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS (Hermeneia), by Harold W. Attridge. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989. Pp. 437. \$39.95.

Winston Churchill's statement about "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" could well be applied to the Epistle to the Hebrews. The piece is anonymous; its intended readers unknown. The form is peculiar and much of the contents seemingly "without father or mother or genealogy," like the figure of Melchizedek. The path to interpretation of the epistle is littered with ingenious but unconvincing attempts to resolve its mysteries. Attridge judiciously avoids proposing another idiosyncratic hypothesis about the origins of the letter. He observes that "the beginning of sober exegesis is a recognition of the limits of historical knowledge" (5). After surveying various attempts to discern the identity of the author and intended readers he concludes that "critics want to be able to know more than the evidence allows and want to use that knowledge to guide their perceptions of the author's literary and theological strategy" (12). Attridge himself will say only that the anonymous author perceived that his anonymous readers were

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threatened by some form of external pressure or persecution and by a waning commitment to the community's confession of faith (13).

The form of Hebrews is distinctive. Although it is usually called an epistle, it lacks many of the traits of a letter. Many prefer to treat it as a homily or sermon. The argument of the book has been understood in various ways and Attridge rightly tries to highlight both the work's "static" structural features and the "dynamic" development of its thought (17). Following the lead of Albert Vanhoye, Attridge proposes distinguishing five "movements" in the book: Christ exalted and humiliated, a suitable high priest (1:5-2:18), Christ faithful and merciful (3:1-5:10), the difficult discourse (5:11-10:25), exhortation to faithful endurance (10:26-12:13), and concluding exhortations (12:14-13:21). The first two movements concentrate on Christology; the

last two on exhortation.

Attridge's outline is viable and his interest in the movement of Hebrews well-placed, but the commentary itself does not always make it easy to discern the dynamic unfolding of the epistle's argument. The commentary is divided into pericopes of two to thirteen verses in length, each introduced by a brief "analysis" of the passage as a whole, which does deal with some of the author's literary techniques and the contents of the pericope. But most of the discussion focuses on individual verses, making it easier to do detailed research on

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short sections than to grasp the argument as a whole.

The theology of Hebrews is regularly discussed in terms of the author's adaptation of traditional materials. This approach is often a productive one, since the Christology of the epistle is largely developed through the exposition of Old Testament texts. Discussion of the antecedents of the epistle's high priestly Christology also helps to show that the author's thought is not "without father or mother or genealogy," but has developed a significant line of Jewish tradition in Christian terms. Moreover, recognition of the author's "appeal to and manipulation of ecclesiastical traditions is of fundamental importance for understanding Hebrews' christology" since the author bases his affirmations "on the proclaimed faith of the community addressed," which probably included many of the statements made in the epistle's first two chapters (25-26).

Attridge also deals with the epistle's theology by comparing and contrasting it with other writings of the period in a way that demonstrates a thorough familiarity with an extraordinarily wide range of ancient literature. For example, in his discussion of "perfection" he surveys the character of the idea in philosophical sources, the Old Testament, Philo, the Dead Sea scrolls, early Christian and Gnostic sources. He concludes that in Hebrews Jesus is perfected not through enlightenment or moral development, but through the sonship characterized by faithful endurance, which makes it possible for his followers to take the same route (87). Again, on the vexed idea that it is impossible for apostates to repent, Attridge sketches out related views in ancient literature, concluding that the author of Hebrews indeed believed that those who rejected the value of the sacrificial death of Christ "simply, and virtually by definition, cannot repent" (169).

Attridge approaches the theology of Hebrews descriptively. Unlike Karl Barth, he does not obscure the chasm that separates the first from the twentieth century or expect that he and the biblical author should speak with one voice. What is gained by this is the freedom to let the biblical author speak, even if one disagrees with what is said. For example, Attridge himself thinks the idea that apostates cannot repent "unjustifiably limits the gracious mercy of God" and that "the church's later position on the possibility of repentance and reconciliation seems to be more solidly founded on the gospel message" (172). A sense of distance from the text also permits him to confront the author's theological contradictions more directly. What is lost by this approach is a passion to press beyond the contradictory elements to the inner coherence of the message.

The value of the commentary will depend on the needs of the reader. The book is invaluable for research; there is nothing comparable in scope in English. Those engaged in teaching and preaching at the parish level will find it less useful. There are detailed notes on textual issues and individual words; the bibliography is exhaustive, the footnotes extensive.

Attridge's refusal to reconstruct the historical situation of the epistle's author and intended readers means that his work will not soon go out of date, but it makes it more difficult to see how the epistle addressed the needs of an actual first-century Christian community. The extensive comparisons of texts from Hebrews with a full range of other ancient writings are valuable for research, but the focus on this type of detail makes it more difficult to discern the coherence of the author's message as a whole. The commentary's descriptive posture means that contradictions in the epistle are not reduced to a facile harmonization, but it also makes it harder to sense the urgency of the epistle's message.

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