



FEMINIST THEOLOGY / CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: IN SEARCH OF METHOD, by Pamela Dickey Young. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 112. \$7.95.

However much critics might desire it, there is no single “Christian feminist theology,” no work or set of works so representative that it eliminates the need to consider any of the others. There are only thousands and thousands of very different works representing an immense spectrum of Christian theological traditions and movements, united perhaps only by their commitment to the active participation of women in the Christian theological conversation.

Pamela Dickey Young, assistant professor of theology at Queen’s Theological College, Kingston, Ontario, clearly acknowledges this plurality at the outset of her brief book. Despite the singular nouns in her title, what she proposes here is not “the” way but “one way among many to do feminist Christian theology” (7). Her distinctive way is one that is marked by a clearly acknowledged and quite thoroughgoing indebtedness to the work of Schubert Ogden. Hence, while Young’s development of Ogden’s reflections on theological method is helpful, those who have difficulties, as I do, with Ogden’s rejection of the normativity of Scripture and his demythologized christology may find the constructive conclusions of her book far less persuasive.

The major contribution of the book is broadly methodological. Following Ogden, Young argues that there are two quite distinct norms for assessing the adequacy of any Christian theology (including those with feminist or womanist commitments) and that these must be kept distinct: the norm of Christian identity or appropriateness to the Christian tradition (is it Christian?) and the norm of intellectual and practical credibility in the modern world (is it consistent with a modern scientific and moral-practical worldview?). In Young’s view, however, “many of the current Christian feminist theologies” (20) fail to acknowledge the norm of appropriateness to the Christian tradition, acknowledging only the normativity of women’s experience, and so fail to address critically the question whether what they are doing is *Christian* theology. While Young never specifies just how many this “many” includes, nor acknowledges that this charge might equally apply to some non-feminist theologians, her basic point is a good one. Faced with those on both the far left and the far right for whom Christianity’s very essence requires the patriarchal subordination and silence of women, Christian feminist and womanist theologians are indeed compelled to attend carefully to the question of just what is and isn’t normatively Christian. Indeed, such may be the special task of those in every age who seek a recovery of the gospel and reform of the church.

Also helpful is Young’s placement of Christian feminist appeals to women’s experience under the second norm, specifically the norm of practical credibility (chapter 3). Adequacy to women’s experience, which includes bodily experience, socialized experience, and feminist critical consciousness as well as historical and individual experience, is important because a theology that distorts, demeans, or denies women’s reality is not only morally and politically repugnant but is quite literally non-credible to us. This is an important point because the negative

criterion developed in several Christian feminist theologies—nothing can be revelatory which distorts, denies, and further oppresses women’s lives—has been charged by several critics with placing a heteronomous standard over Christian revelation. What Young’s argument suggests, I think, is that this is not some heteronomous rule but a condition of communicability. If I encounter a theology or sermon that systematically distorts or denies my reality as hearer, then I have every reason to doubt that its “revelation” is actually addressed to

or includes me, and may rightly begin to suspect its more general falsity. To be sure, in my view communicative action, and above all the gospel, have far more creative power than Ogden or Young accord them: the power to transform us and our collective reality, including what counts as intellectually credible. Hence, I would prefer that the second norm go beyond “credibility” to include the transformative power of the gospel. Yet the basic point remains a valid one. Good theology (and good preaching) needs to address the actual lived reality of its hearers before it can begin to engage and transform that reality. What’s so heteronomous about that?

Somewhat less persuasive, however, is Young’s use of the twin norms of Christian appropriateness and modern credibility to critique the theologies of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Ruether, and Letty Russell (chapter 2), largely because it is not always evident that she reads them fairly and fully. She argues, for instance, that Letty Russell finds in Jesus only an example we should imitate, not a sacrament of God’s presence, yet her own quotes from Russell’s work repeatedly suggest just the opposite, as does Russell’s work as a whole. She also maintains that Schüssler Fiorenza completely rejects the normativity for Christian theology of the biblical and Christian traditions as well as the normativity of Jesus (30). Rather, Schüssler Fiorenza appeals exclusively to “a new magisterium of women-church,” an appeal to the sole normativity of women’s experience which mirrors “the traditional Roman Catholic magisterium” in its “refusal to let oneself be normed by anything within the tradition itself” (81). Not only does Schüssler Fiorenza deserve more nuanced treatment here; so does Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Although Schüssler Fiorenza’s theology of revelation is by no means always consistently stated, account should at least be taken of the scores and scores of times she argues that the paradigmatic locus of revelation is “the life and ministry of Jesus as well as the discipleship community of equals called forth by him” as this is historically reconstructed from the biblical texts and emerges again and again in movements throughout Christian history, including the present.

What does Young believe is the Christian norm (chapter 4)? What is it that marks what’s Christian—and what’s not? Young points out that Jesus Christ must somehow be the “central symbol” for any theology claiming the name “Christian,” but this in turn raises the question: Where do we find the normative witness to Jesus Christ? For Young, the Protestant appeal to “Scripture alone” is not tenable. Scripture as a whole cannot provide us with a norm, both because Scripture is part of tradition and so cannot serve as a clearly demarcated norm over tradition and because Scripture expresses a variety of viewpoints, not all of which can be equally normative. Luther’s evangelical “canon within the canon,” programmatically summarized in the phrase *was Christum treibt* (what conveys/inculcates Christ), is briefly referred to here (82-3), but quickly dismissed. For Young, all Luther means is that somehow Jesus Christ needs to be the “central symbol” of Christianity, but this is too vague to provide an effective Christian norm. She thereby passes by what in my view is the single most powerful and true answer to the question of

what norms Christianity, and one that is by no means vague. But that requires another essay.

With Scripture eliminated, Young looks to two extra-canonical possibilities for the Christian norm. A “canon beneath the canon” in the historically reconstructed Jesus is not accessible to us, she argues, since all we have are a variety of second-hand accounts and confessional witnesses. With Ogden, then, Young proposes as the Christian norm a “canon before the canon,” the historiographically reconstructed earliest apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, particularly as this is found in the work of Willi Marxsen. Here we meet a decidedly non-apocalyptic, existential Jesus, whose parabolic sayings and deeds opened his hearers to an awareness of the immediacy of God’s presence in every event, every experience, and so also to a new sense of community with all of life.

Young concludes her theological argument (chapter 5) with a brief application of the twin criteria of Christian appropriate-

ness and modern credibility to christology and the church. Following Ogden, Young argues that the norm of modern credibility, specifically the norm of intellectual credibility, requires that we eliminate from christology any notion of a unique act of God in Jesus Christ. In the modern worldview, the world is a closed, self-contained causal nexus. The notion of God’s direct intervention in events, including the event of Jesus Christ, is no longer intellectually credible. Hence, with Ogden, Young defends a re-presentation christology. Jesus is the one who re-presents or “presents again” (101) for his hearers the God who is always already immediately experienced in every event, every experience. Significantly, Young nowhere even mentions the cross or resurrection of Jesus, and she specifically denies a future eschatological consummation, presumably because they are not central to the “earliest apostolic witness” and because they might suggest a no longer credible agency of God. Moreover, for Young, Jesus is not necessarily unique even in this ministry of re-presentation. There may well be others, female as well as male, who equally re-present God’s ubiquitous presence, other “messiahs” (89). She also argues that baptism and eucharist are not necessary for the church to be the church (though they may be useful for edification), since they are not found in the earliest apostolic witness. Any notion of God’s distinctive agency in and through word and sacrament is also implicitly ruled out.

In my own view, in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Triune God acts uniquely and eschatologically to break through the chasm of sin and death that separates us from God, and in Word and Sacrament acts to incorporate us into the living body of the crucified one, in him putting us to death and breaking us open to hope only in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, who brings life out of death. In short, Ogden’s denial of God’s unique agency in Christ and his re-presentation christology cuts at the heart of both Christian faith and Christian worship.

What is perhaps even more odd, however, is that Ogden’s theology may well fail the test of contemporary credibility as well: his “modern” worldview appears to ignore virtually every development in intellectual thought of the past thirty years. For Ogden, language and communicative interaction can only re-present an otherwise immediately given reality; it cannot transform both us and the reality we collectively share. Yet a sustained critique of just such a worldview has characterized much of the philosophy, philosophy of science, social theory, and psychology of the past thirty years. These converge with the post-Bultmannian recovery of the creative power of biblical language and story and with much contemporary theology in at least

one critical point: language and communicative interaction do not merely represent a fixed, pre-given reality or worldview but have to power to transform them, and do so all the time: in science, in society, and in the church. If we could but begin to recover the real, transformative power of gospel word-sacrament in this respect, I think we'd have our best initial clue to the meaning of God's agency.

Pamela Dickey Young argues persuasively that the adequacy of any Christian theology must be assessed by the twin norms of Christian identity and contemporary credibility. More doubtful, however, is whether Ogden's theology satisfies either one. Young herself would agree, however, that other voices in the Christian feminist/womanist theological conversation also need to be taken seriously. Among these, I would recommend consideration of the extraordinarily intelligent and powerful theology of the word developed in Rebecca Chopp's *The Power to Speak* (Crossroad, 1989), the feminist theology of the cross sketched in Carolyn Osiek's *Beyond Anger* (Paulist, 1986), the provocative meditation on the body of Christ in Mark Kline Taylor's *Remembering Esperanza* (Orbis, 1990), and the haunting exploration of the meaning of body/soma as medium of communication and community in Margaret Miles' *Carnal Knowledge* (Vintage, 1989). And that's just the beginning of a very, very long list.

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THEOLOGY IS FOR PROCLAMATION, by Gerhard Forde. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 207. \$10.95 (paper).

Gerhard Forde is, in my estimation, one of the most creative theologians writing today. The genius of his work is that he pursues unrelentingly the implications of Luther's theology for all aspects of theology and church practice. In an earlier work he wrote, "I was convinced for one reason or another early on in my theological career that I had to go the way of the theology of the cross as indicated by Luther, and that led inexorably in the direction of *The Bondage of the Will* and the law-gospel dialectic. It was and is the only kind of theology I can believe and work with" (*Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life* [Fortress, 1982] 90).

Those of us who have enjoyed the privilege of studying with him understand that what he teaches makes us rethink everything we know in terms of the doctrine of predestination. This can be a very disconcerting experience and, ultimately, a liberating experience since it means a complete upsetting of the applecart. Many favorite doctrines of pietism and civil religion come under attack: decision theology, the understanding of sanctification as progress toward perfection, the various theories of the atonement, and the notion that the Spirit can work only by our permission and consent, to name a few. Instead, we come up against the God who kills and makes alive, the God of Isaiah who says, "I work and who can hinder it?" (43:13).

Forde's thinking, like Luther's, is radical. It goes to the *radix* or root of the matter. In order to recover our true identity, he argues, we must become proponents of the radical tradition of Paul and Luther, who proclaimed the uncompromising and unconditional word of God's grace, a grace which literally does us in, puts an end to our *causa sui* god-projects. Justification by faith is a massive frontal assault on the ego and its pretensions. Lutheranism in America has domesticated the gospel, made it harmless. We don't, after all, want to offend anybody,

especially in our can-do culture. So we make preaching a form of selling, of persuasion. The title, therefore, of a book of 19th-century revival sermons is *Almost Persuaded*—almost, not quite. This type of preaching assumes that it is the job of the proclaimer to bring hearers to the point of decision, either by means of well-established persuasive techniques or by the power of the pulpit personality. In one way or another, it is our job to get people to decide to accept what is offered.

In his most recent book Forde proposes quite a different understanding of proclamation. To begin with, he makes an important distinction between systematic theology and proclamation. Theology is a second-order discipline, a matter of reflecting on the meaning of the gospel. This is the task of theology: to clarify, to explain. Proclamation, however, is another thing. Proclamation is the actual doing of the gospel to those who listen. It is not talk *about* God's unconditional acceptance of us. It is the actual speaking *of* that acceptance. "You are accepted," as Tillich said. It has, contrary to Tillich, however, nothing to do with accepting that acceptance. Whether you accept it or not doesn't change the fact that you are accepted. Now you don't have to worry about what is going to become of you when you die. That's all taken care of. Now, therefore, you can bring your attention back to earth and shift your concern away from yourself to the suffering of your neighbor and of the creation. The doctrine of justification by faith quite naturally leads us away from ego-centrism to ethics. It leads us away from heaven and our attempts to take heaven by storm or by stealth, back down to earth and the concrete concerns of our time.

It is the proclamation of God's unconditional and uncompromising promise that puts an end to the old-self, the self which is centered on its own concerns and its self-saving projects. There is absolutely nothing we can do to attain salvation. The powers of the self are simply negated, brought to nothing, put to death. Now a new self arises from the ashes of the old, a self which is content to live by faith that God will make good on his promises to us. This death-to-life theme is at the heart of Forde's thinking and is familiar to anyone who has read his books or heard him lecture. It is this death-to-life phenomenon that Forde has in mind

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when he says that in the proclamation of the unconditional gospel of grace God is doing Jesus Christ to us. The Christian life is not a matter of imitating Christ, but is actually being conformed by the proclamation to the death and life of Christ. Not *imitatio Christi*, but *conformatas Christi*. The words of proclamation do this. Preaching, according to Forde, needs to be understood sacramentally. Just as the waters of baptism drown the old and raise up the new self; just as the bread and wine and the words of forgiveness, the "for you," of communion bring an end to the pretensions and ambitions of the old self; so the words of proclamation kill and make alive.

The preacher, then, is the one who does the concrete act of election. Election or predestination is not something that God does in the abstract or in general. It is done very specifically and concretely through the one who proclaims the word and administers the sacraments. Ministry is the carrying out of the divine election, the making public the mystery of God's will. Here Forde makes a distinction between God preached and God not preached. God not preached is an inescapable terror to us, the God of wrath whom we cannot shake. This hidden *deus absconditus* or masked God becomes confused in our minds with Satan. In fact, Forde insists, God not preached and Satan are the same, we cannot distinguish between them. Attempting to do God over theologically by making God not preached feminine instead of masculine is of no avail. The hidden God, male or female, remains the inescapable God of wrath.

The only solution to the hidden God is the revealed God. It is a matter here of God contending against God. Only the preached God can deal with the hidden God. "The abstract God cannot be removed but must be dethroned, overcome, 'for you' in concrete actuality. The clothed God must conquer the hidden God for you in the living present. Faith is precisely the ever-renewed flight from God to God; from God naked and hidden to God clothed and revealed." Proclamation is the mighty act of God which engenders faith in those who hear. Ministry is the proclamation of God's concrete "I love you," which is the only word that heals and restores consciences which have been terrorized by the hidden God.

This is the most important and valuable book on preaching I have read. It may be slow going, simply because it makes you rethink everything you know about theology and homiletics. The effort, however, is well rewarded. Other writings by Gerhard Forde that will help shed light on what he is arguing in this volume are: *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life*; his article "Radical Lutheranism" in *Lutheran Quarterly* (Spring 1987), and his contribution to the volume *Called and Ordained*, entitled "The Ordained Ministry" ([Fortress, 1990] 117-136). Forde's work is, in Carl Braaten's words, "a theology that is good for nothing but proclaiming the living word of God."

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GOOD AND EVIL: INTERPRETING A HUMAN CONDITION, by Edward Farley.
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. Pp. 295. \$19.95

In 1944 Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison on the occasion of the baptism of "D.W.R." In what he wrote there was a clear recognition of the objectivity of the act:

Today you will be baptized a Christian. All those great ancient words of the Christian proclamation will be spoken over you, and the command of Jesus Christ to baptize will be carried out on you, without you knowing anything about it.

Then Bonhoeffer added a challenge:

But we are once again being driven right back to the beginnings of our understanding. Reconciliation and redemption, regeneration and the Holy Ghost, love of our enemies, cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship—all these things are so difficult and so remote that we hardly venture any more to speak of them.

He traced this development to the fact that "our church" had been "fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself." "Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force and cease..." (*Letters and Papers*, ed. E. Bethge [SCM, 1967] 160-61).

Though Bonhoeffer's name does not appear in the index of *Good and Evil*, Edward Farley (Vanderbilt University) may be numbered among the diverse company who represent a

response to Bonhoeffer's challenge. Bonhoeffer anticipated a time ahead when in engaging the world the church's form would have changed greatly, with "a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming." Farley's language is not that of first order address, but on the contemporary scene he is one of the most vigorous theologians at work to find a framework of understanding for the word (words) faith would speak.

This volume is the third in a major project. In 1975 Farley's consideration of the epistemological question of faith's relation to reality, *Ecclesial Man*, was published. That was followed in 1982 by *Ecclesial Reflection*, which addressed methodological matters of criteria and procedures. This study may be classified as theological anthropology, though Farley notes that it omits certain standard anthropological issues (especially philosophies of will, freedom, and issues of body and soul) and yet is broader in that it takes up the redemption of human reality. It is perhaps not strange that in the "new language" the categories themselves shift somewhat.

Farley's earlier work has been distinguished by what he himself terms "the rather technical deployment of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology" (xx). This volume is much more accessible and is phenomenological only in the broader sense "of an explication of reality rather than the caricatured sense of subjective idealism, indifference to reality, or Immanuel Kant's transcendentalism" (xx). Part I offers, thus, a general account of human reality and its conditions, preparing the way for Part II which explores how the various spheres and dimensions "undergo and contribute to evil and redemption" (4). This emphasis on a reference to reality is crucial to Farley's project. His introductory defense of this emphasis, "On Cognitive Style," is a particularly effective response to the predictable questions: "Is reflective ontology unhistorical?" "Is reflective ontology discredited by 'Postmodernism'?" With respect to the second question, for example, Farley calmly but pointedly answers the intimidating charges:

...are such things as meaning, presence, and representation philosophical sins that, good pietists that we are, we must ever confess but hope that the new age will overcome?...apart from meanings and presences, we have no world, no remembered experiences, no appreciated and valued things. Accordingly, I must construe deconstruction not as a philosophy that would (if it could) terminate presence and meaning but as an ever available therapeutic to the idolatry of these things. (25)

Farley considers three spheres of human reality: personal agency, the interhuman, and the social. As he works his way into Part II's explicitly theological reflection he employs these categories to analyze good and evil as "being founded" and idolatry (the individual), communion and alienation (the interhuman), and theonomous sociality and subjugation (the social). This anthropological skeleton bears substantial flesh in Farley's work. Thus in his discussion of salvation as freedom in personal terms Farley provides a most illuminating discussion of how "being founded" enables the individual to both accept and resist chaos (146).

A persistent theme in Farley's analysis is the distinction between the "benign alienation" which characterizes human life simply as finite, and human evil. Thus he helpfully distinguishes "the incompatibilities and clashes which are unavoidable when self-determining human beings live in proximity to each other" from human evil with its "mutual violation (deprivation of being) and its deposits of resentment and guilt" (235). That helpful distinction seems somewhat compromised, though, when he speaks of "the intrinsic vulnerability and tragic character of the

human condition” as not only the “background” but also as “the *origin*” of the dynamics of evil in individuals (118, emphasis mine).

Farley seeks to distinguish “the broad structure of the Christian paradigm” from “its narrative and doctrinal expressions.” Thus he does not direct us to “the cosmic narrative of divine acts, the eschatological

projection of cosmic fulfillment, or the doctrinalization and systematization of specific motifs” (140). This is a difficult distinction. Farley will likely be charged—as were Tillich and John Robinson, for example—with having jettisoned the very substance of the faith. One can certainly agree with him that Christians have interpreted redemption “by a confusing mix of metaphors taken from the sphere of the social (forensics, law) and from the interhuman (love, forgiveness)” (247). Fresh work is needed and one can heartily support Farley’s effort to develop a nonforensic understanding of reconciliation. But I am less clear than I would like to be about how the dynamics of agency are to be understood in that view.

In that connection and otherwise a key category for Farley is “the face,” a theme derived from the writings of the French Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas. Early on, Farley rules that “the interhuman is primary to both agents and the social because it is the sphere that engenders the criterion, the face (Emmanuel Levinas), for the workings of the other spheres” (29). And at the book’s end (291) we have “communities of the face,” whose task it is “to communicate the face” to the state, political parties, societies, and schools. Farley wisely does not settle for simply referring the reader to Levinas’ complex and challenging work. He writes:

Face articulates neither physiognomy (the plane of sensibility) nor acts which emotionally feel the other. It is the “infinitely strange” and mysterious presence of something which contests my projecting meanings of it, an unforeseeable depth....(39)

Theologians perhaps should not commit ironic suicide by banishing such first order speech. But one may be permitted to hope that a framework for articulating such a key category will be made available. Edward Farley would seem to have the philosophical and theological analyses in place to provide such articulation. Thus this book may be greeted with gratitude and with hope.

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THE WOMEN OF GENESIS: FROM SARAH TO POTIPHAR’S WIFE, by Sharon P. Jeanson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. 160. \$9.95 (paper).

HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN: THE LOST TRADITIONS OF THE MATRIARCHS, by Savina J. Teubal. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Pp. 192. \$29.95; 14.95 (paper).

DINAH’S REBELLION: A BIBLICAL PARABLE FOR OUR TIME, by Ita Sheres. New York: Crossroad, 1990. Pp. 176. \$17.95.

Every interpreter of Scripture brings his or her own bias to the task. For the feminist this

task includes uncovering the pain and complexity of human experience in general. The tradition has not always been kind to women. Therefore, the feminist bias is toward change—change of conventions, symbols, and people’s self-understanding, some of which in the past have tended to harm women.

The task of interpretation is complicated for those feminists who are determined to stay within the tradition. To them falls the challenge of responding in a meaningful way to a scholarly tradition which many women believe has confined them, belittled them, or simply ignored them. They haven’t the inclination to give up the tenets of the faith that has nurtured them from their birth. What is more, they often are serving, in one capacity or another, groups for which the word “feminism” holds only negative connotations. Yet they believe that reform in the church is possible and desirable.

Three women have recently analyzed stories about women in Genesis in three different ways from feminist perspectives. All are concerned that commentaries on the stories of biblical women have been biased. Their approaches to the problem differ significantly, as do their conclusions. Whether you agree or disagree with them, after reading their books you would never read the Genesis stories in quite the same way.

The Women of Genesis

Sharon Pace Jeansonne, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible at Marquette University, examines the stories of Sarah,

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the daughters of Lot, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Dinah, Tamar, and Potiphar’s wife to demonstrate that, far from serving as mere props for men, the narrator of Genesis depicts them as valuable contributors in this expression of Israel’s self-understanding. These women are not simply obedient vessels or passive participants in Israel’s drama but part of the matrix of Israel’s origins.

Jeansonne believes that Genesis above all reveals the self-understanding of the people of Israel and that “traditional methods have not examined texts as they presently stand in relationship to the greater narrative context” (3).

Using narrative criticism, she focuses on the ancestral narrative in Genesis 12-50 and tries to determine the narrator’s perspective. She analyzes the particular literary features that the narrator uses to develop not only an individual character but to deliberately link it with other stories in the larger context. She examines characterization (through action, commentary, and dialogue), perspective, ambiguity (what the author withholds), repetition, combination and sequence of narrative, type-scenes and conventions, names, diction (word choice), and setting. She concludes: “Without denying that the world view from which the narrator came placed restrictions on women’s activity, this interpretation of the accounts has shown that the women usually are portrayed respectfully and paradigmatically” (114).

Her method reveals that in a variety of ways the narrator of Genesis acknowledges the key roles of women. Some examples of this are not new, such as God’s role in the survival of the Israelites, including the fertility of women and protection of the bearers of the promise. But Jeansonne gives us new insights, for example, into the stories of Rachel and Rebekah, showing how the usual negative interpretation of their wily ways is part of the narrator’s plan to show how

God's promise is given to ones who will safeguard it. She shows how the narrator uses Rebekah's pain in pregnancy and Hagar's cry in the desert to demonstrate God's capacity to respond to humans. And she shows how the narrator deliberately created ambiguity in the story of Dinah to show distaste for the violence and appreciation of the complexity of that early situation in Israel's history.

In short, she expounds upon the aspects of the text that show the courage and flexibility and resourcefulness of the Genesis women. She successfully demonstrates that the promises given are to the matriarchs as well as the patriarchs, in fact that the women sometimes know God's plan before the men. She also shows that in many of the biblical texts women have final say over sexual matters, that they are clever, and that their men love them.

At times she takes exception to modern commentators' interpretations of texts. One notable example is the assessment of modern interpreters regarding the actions of Lot. When the men of Sodom surround Lot's house and threaten Lot's guests, the angels, Lot offers his daughters as a substitute. Jeansonne points out that many commentators are sympathetic. Among others she quotes John Skinner who says, "Lot's readiness to sacrifice the honor of his daughters, though abhorrent to Hebrew morality...shows him as a courageous champion of the obligations of hospitality...and is recorded to his credit" (35). Jeansonne replies, "While the daughters of Lot do not figure prominently, the narrator places Lot's interactions with them in the context of the events that reveal his true character. The trajectory of Lot's life shows that he is a man who becomes quarrelsome, irresponsible, and exploitative" (36). She goes on to explain the actions of Lot's wife and daughters in that light.

Jeansonne shows that the women of Genesis are extraordinary. "They are extraordinary in the same sense that their husbands are, that is, they are unexpectedly successful and strong in the face of difficulties, but they are not unusual because they are women" (116). They are valued as the mothers of a people who struggle to survive, as directors of their family's destiny, as the recipients of God's promises, and as participants in the struggles for justice and self-identity as Israel defines itself in the context of its neighbors.

Jeansonne's work is not only insightful but is accomplished with a minimum of polemic, which many readers will ap-

preciate. She employs a methodology which is helpful for those teaching or preaching. After one has read her book, the biblical characters she discusses take on three dimensions. Though sophisticated, this book reads well, and would be appropriate for any serious student of the Bible.

Hagar the Egyptian

As Teubal assesses it, the story of Hagar as portrayed in the biblical texts and interpreted by sages and scholars contains all the elements necessary for a doctrine of the subordination of women. No male figure in the Bible plays a parallel role. Her image has sanctioned the inferiority of women and the endorsement of slavery. Hagar is silent. The only personal characteristics attributed to her are that she is Egyptian rather than Hebrew (black rather than white?) and is insolent toward her superior mistress for which she is harshly punished. She seems to accept her lot as substitute womb without reservation. Then she is banished when her service is deemed superfluous. Her child almost dies of thirst, implying that she is incapable of surviving alone. Her

relationship with Sarah is one of hierarchy and hostility. Hagar is the archetypal figure of the subordinate, abused, and rejected “other.”

Over against this portrayal, Teubal combines scholarship and intuition to unearth the story of a matriarch who, like Sarah, was a woman struggling for rights, in a social environment in which both women enjoyed a considerable degree of God-given stature and authority (aside from their relationship to Abraham). In fact, Teubal says, though there is no statement in the biblical texts that any of the matriarchs were priestesses, they enjoyed a position *comparable* to Mesopotamian priestesses. Both Hagar and Sarah were matriarchs of a people—the Arabs and the Hebrews. She points out nuances in the Hebrew that attest to the importance of these women in general, and Hagar in specific. For example, *shifhah*, the word used for Hagar, means “one who joins or is attached to a clan.” Armed with this knowledge and other ancient documents, Teubal says a *shifhah* is not to be understood to be a slave or concubine, but an honorable representative of an important woman, who acquires her status. Teubal understands Hagar to be a respected companion to Sarah who lived with her in apparent harmony for many years.

But their happy home was disturbed by Sarah’s childless condition, and aggravated by Hagar’s insolence. Teubal finds similar situations in Hammurapi’s Code regarding the rights of a childless priestess to a child. The Code also states that the one bearing the child for them should not claim equality. Teubal then reinterprets the struggle between Hagar and Sarah as revolving around the acquisition by one woman of another woman’s child and claims that the problem was not between Sarah and Hagar, but Sarah and Abraham. Abraham should have interceded. The issue between Sarah and Hagar was not maternal pride or jealousy, but human rights, hence the legal statement, “May YHWH judge between you and me.”

Teubal concludes that an emerging monarchy suppressed and changed the stories of women to serve an ideological function of consolidating its people. She documents changes in Babylonian, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian religious and legal codes which illuminate the military exploits and consolidation of each of these rural regions under one government and the simultaneous suppression of females in law and religious disposition.

In the process of attempting to retell the story of Hagar, she challenges the patriarchal ideas of primogeniture and patrilineal inheritance and status. She points out, for example, that biblically, clan status was inherited from the mother. For example, the sons of Hagar, Bilhah, and Zilpah maintained the status of their mothers and became less influential tribes in Hebrew lore than those of their brothers born to Sarah, Rachel, and Leah.

Finally, using the documentary hypothesis (J, E, P, and R) and Islamic and Egyptian legend, she hypothesizes that before the redaction of the stories, there may have existed a Desert Matriarch, unnamed, whose story was combined with that of Hagar.

I found this to be an interesting book. The author believes herself to be firmly

within the tradition and sees her work as renewal of tradition to serve future generations. For Teubal, “To have any significance for us, mythology and legend need to be focused on our own concerns and adapted to our own image” (192). Therefore she is quite free with the texts, to which many would object. Some of her work is so speculative that it is of little real use, and some of her conclusions could be challenged. People who are interested in feminism would find this book challenging and imaginative. It is appropriate primarily for a scholarly audience.

Dinah's Rebellion

Ita Sheres, a Professor of English, Comparative Literature, and Judaic Studies at San Diego State University, offers a feminist Jewish perspective on another of the stories of women in Genesis. She poses the question of the political motives of the redactor in Genesis and looks at women in Hebrew culture through the lens of the story of Dinah's rape. She draws connections between the painful and traumatic experiences of contemporary Jews and those of sixth-century redactors. Finally, she sees Dinah as a model for Israeli women who are trying to move toward Palestinian accommodation and peace, because she sees Dinah as a woman who was heading toward cooperation and socialization with an outsider.

Sheres says the story of Dinah is ostensibly about a sister who was violated by a stranger-enemy. But the story is used in the midrashic tradition by the redactors as a social and political commentary. "[Dinah's story] demonstrates the impact of what became a stern nationalistic agenda that sometimes placed land and possessions (the two major ingredients of Yahweh's covenant with the patriarchs) above universal and humanistic values" (8).

In chapter 1 Sheres examines the position of women in Genesis. She stresses women's dependence on men and the paradoxes of childbearing—or the inability to bear children, which renders them powerless.

In chapter 2 she compares the stories of Eve and Dinah. Both Eve and Dinah are used by the redactor as transgressors who "made an effort to widen the realm of their experiences and in the process offended patriarchal values." They were quickly put in their place.

Chapter 3 reiterates some of the motifs of chapter 1. Here Rebekah and Rachel seem to function according to prescribed patriarchal rules and function successfully within the tent. Dinah on the other hand defies her male protection and her rape is portrayed as the result of this as well as her ill-considered behavior.

In chapter 4 Sheres examines the narrative in detail. She discusses the physical, social, and psychological violence done to Dinah, whom she describes as a woman who tried to "socialize in a new environment." She discusses circumcision and the moral and political dimensions of Dinah's dealings with a non-Hebrew and how she also sees the story as a warning to women about dangers, personal and familial, that lurk "outside" (the house).

Chapter 5 analyzes the story of Dinah from a political, contemporary perspective, and shows how certain trends in Genesis have a bearing on the problems of the Middle East. She sees the story of Dinah as a modern day parable. She lays much of the extremism and inflexibility of Middle Eastern thought at the feet of the exclusive covenant the Hebrews had with Yahweh, since the idea of compromise is missing in the covenantal relationship.

The idea of being chosen by God can bring extraordinary opportunity, but is also a harbinger of rigidity, stiffness, and isolationism....[A]lthough the concept of covenant laid the groundwork for a superb philosophy of dialogue and understanding, it also furnished and encouraged questionable positions about morality and political behavior which had a lasting impact on Jews and Western civilization alike. (18)

Sheres concludes that the collapse of the more noble aspects of covenantal theology resulted in nationalism and negative effects on strangers and women. The price Dinah paid for "going out" was a loss of voice...there was an institutional response to her individual act. She

echoes Martin Buber's concern that Jewish nationalism, without the concept of a faithful community responding to the will of God and regarding "the other" as highly as the "I,"

becomes an end in itself, and "a unique national destiny deteriorates into a nationalistic superiority that has no room for anyone who steps outside the rigidly defined ideological line" (9).

Sheres' general political critique is helpful, as is her explanation of some of the religious fanaticism in the Middle East. In many ways it is a fascinating book. However, in order to accept some of the conclusions of this book, one must first accept Sheres' assessment of the intent of the redactor in Genesis, namely, a conscious subjection of women and a far-reaching political agenda. One must also understand the redactors to be involved in a midrashic process, producing their "midrash" on God's word as it was given to them. "The overt as well as the hidden assumption behind the midrashic phenomenon was that the word of God was revealed at a certain point in history, but that it was addressed to everyone at all times." Midrash is "the open word, the open door, through which we are always just passing" (89). One must also accept that modern interpreters are entitled to their own midrash.

Sheres' description of covenant is one-sided. Readers will have reservations regarding her conclusions on specific texts and her assumptions concerning the motives of biblical characters. Nevertheless, those who are interested in the conflict between Arabs and Jews and the struggle of women in the Middle East will be interested in this book.

Part of the feminist interpretive endeavor is helping women re-member their past and claim it so that the present may also be theirs. These books reflect that work well.

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INCARNATION: CONTEMPORARY WRITERS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT, ed. by Alfred Corn. New York: Viking Penguin, 1990. Pp. 361. \$19.95 (paper).

Alfred Corn has given us a tremendously useful and meaningful book. Its assumption is "that the New Testament, in whatever translation, is read today and that its readership includes a good many contemporary writers" (xiii). This is an assumption I have never thought of making, in spite of the fact that so many works of literature that I read today make use of biblical themes. I have apparently missed much by paying too much attention to the claim of some that honest intellectual inquiry cannot spend its time on either the texts or ideas of pre-modern minds, or the institutional manifestations of those texts in the worship and theological life of the churches that are normed by those texts. I have made the error of assuming the Scriptures to be the possession of too narrow a discipline or piety.

This is indeed a mistaken notion! Corn has gathered together in this volume a collection of essays from a wide range of contemporary writers. The novelists, poets, essayists, and teachers of literature represented here bring their own lives to the texts of the New Testament, and in the process reveal the unusual depth of life in the Scriptures. Thinkers and writers such as John Updike, Mary Gordon, Annie Dillard, John Hersey, David Plante, Reynolds Price, Grace Schulman, and Michael Malone are among the 23 award-winning contributors to this collection.

Corn says that this book was conceived as a complement to David Rosenberg's *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible*, and was in fact suggested by Rosenberg. The format of *Incarnation* follows that of *Congregation*. Corn selected this crew with an assignment—take a text of the New Testament and go with it (some texts were assigned, some selected). Each contributor took the task to heart. In no case did I ever feel that the writer had failed to do research or consult the background material or scholarship for their text. In many cases, the depth of background research—and in some cases original Greek

translations—served to ground their own new experiences of reading the text.

The real value of this collection, however, is not in the seriousness of the research exhibited by the writers, but in depth of meaning conveyed in their telling/re-telling of the content of the texts through their own faith, doubt, personal history, and struggles. To a person, the writers of these essays reveal the importance of the New Testament in literature, ideas, world events, world catastrophes, and in their own lives, thought, and works. Not all came to the task with profound belief, or belief at all. Not all left the task believing differently or more deeply. None, however, ever doubted the necessity of dealing with the texts of the New Testament—its teaching, its characters, or its central character.

Most of the contributors to this collection relate an experience and concern echoed by Robert B. Shaw in his essay on the Letter to the Hebrews: “What saddens me about the biblical illiteracy of the students I teach is realizing how much resonance they miss in the older literature they are attempting to read. And for writers, too, the eclipse of the Bible as common intellectual currency has meant a certain impoverishment....Most readers, of course, aren't aware of this. Like people raised on skimmed milk, they don't know what they're missing by forgoing the real thing” (278). Over and over, these essays confront us with the number of times in Western intellectual history the Scriptures have been explored and used, and the treasures unearthed have enriched us immeasurably. I am pleased to say that these essays reveal valuable expressions of new treasures to be found and made manifest by great writers of our own time.

For example, few commentators have captured the wonder of the Gospel of John as has Reynolds Price in a mere 34 pages. In the end, the message is simple. The Gospel is a story that, with a clear voice, says what we need and crave to hear: “*The Maker of all things loves and wants me*” (72).

Gjertrud Schnackenberg's treatment of the swirl and frantic movement of speculation on the nature of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians is masterful. I am amazed at so much content in so few words. Yet, the strength of these essays is the power of the word to convey, and the love these writers have for that word.

Anthony Hecht opens for us some of the pain and terror unleashed by centuries of speculation on the same issues dealt with by Paul in the Letter to the Galatians. As a Jew who cannot, and will not, ignore the depth of meaning the New Testament has for the culture in which he lives, he at the same time recognizes in Paul's benedictions and curses a sense of foreboding. In Paul's curse in 1 Corinthians (“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha”) he can see a “tone of voice I recognize from news accounts of the desecrators of graveyards, synagogues, and even churches; it is the tone of the fanatic” (153). Yet, as alarmed as Hecht is at the seeming fanatical self-confidence of Paul in his convictions, and the hatred that

kind of confidence-become-curse may spawn, it “may serve as a warning against my replacing his fixed convictions with my own” (158). Hecht reminds us that the depth of meaning arising from the events told in Scripture has power, and that power is as evil in our hands as it is good.

For pastors faced with the regular joy/pain experience of preparation for preaching, the images and mind-plays of Mary Gordon as she muses on the scenes of the Gospel of Mark are of particular value. There is the example of Mark’s telling of the raising of the daughter of Jairus. Gordon plays with the idea that “If He can say it [*talitha cumi*] to her, He can say it to anyone. Perhaps death is always only a perceptual error” (14). The turns of phrase, shifts in meaning, and images found in this essay are often inspired. Gordon deals with scenes and images: bread, devils, fig trees, the man in the white sheet. All are dealt with in a manner destined to bring about visions of the masterful Sunday sermon.

It would seem logical to expect that among the 23 contributors to this book, some would have approached the task with less energy or interest than required. Perhaps, if asked, some would admit to that, if measured by their own standards. But I, the reader, was amazed to find that I could not

make that charge. The high quality is uniform.

This collection of essays has use beyond the desk of this preacher and student. I plan to use it in teaching a college survey course on the Scriptures. I advise its use in literature courses, in seminaries, or in congregations where adults and youth seek examples of how one can read and meditate on Scripture. It belongs in the collections of theologians as a reminder that we don’t have a monopoly on the depth of the meaning of the Bible.

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A TESTAMENT TO FREEDOM: THE ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, ed. by Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson. San Francisco: Harper, 1990. Pp. 579. \$32.95.

Few readers of these pages will be unaware of the importance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer for those who struggle with what it means to be a Christian in the midst of current complexities. His name and at least a few pieces of information and opinion can be expected to emerge whenever serious Christians engage in extended conversation about the delicate connections and distinctions between God’s word and God’s world.

The problem for those not well acquainted with Bonhoeffer is how to get some perspective on the vast and variegated Bonhoeffer legacy, how to be responsible in sorting out legitimate and frivolous references to his life and writings, how to arrive with some confidence at judgments about the contours of his discipleship and the trajectories of his theological reflection.

In *A Testament to Freedom* we have for the first time a comprehensive presentation of Bonhoeffer’s writings in a single volume. There are 73 pieces, carefully selected and skillfully introduced by the editors. (Geoffrey B. Kelly is professor of systematic theology at LaSalle University in Philadelphia. F. Burton Nelson is professor of Christian ethics at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago.) Arranged in a roughly chronological manner, they provide the

reader with materials by which to make judgments about not only Bonhoeffer's reflections but about his life as well.

In Part 1 (Christ as Community) the reader is introduced to the young student vicar in Barcelona and to the writer of two academic dissertations, one of which Karl Barth called "a theological miracle." The intellectual power and the christological focus of Bonhoeffer in his early twenties sets the stage for later developments. Part 2 (Bonhoeffer the Teacher and Lecturer) gathers together representative pieces from the years of the Hitler takeover of Germany, 1932-33. In addition to papers and addresses dealing with the church and with peace, there are selections from his university lectures on Genesis 1-3 (*Creation and Fall*) and on christology (*Christ the Center*). Part 3 (Bonhoeffer's Confession of Faith) takes the reader through eight selections from the Nazi period prior to the outbreak of war (1933-38). The focus here is on Bonhoeffer's active participation in the Confessing Church, that group of Christians which opposed the "German Christians," those who amalgamated Christianity with Nazi ideology.

Part 4 (Bonhoeffer the Pastor) could better be called "Bonhoeffer the Preacher." He was a parish pastor in England for eighteen months, and there are included here a few pages of writings on what could be called pastoral care. But this part of the volume is actually dedicated to the presentation of 29 sermons, taken from the period 1928-39. It is a rare feast for anyone who longs to hear the word of God effectively proclaimed. Nowhere else available in a single English volume, this selection of sermons alone is worth the price of the book. I know of no better example anywhere of a sermon which is totally faithful to presenting the text, and at the same time totally faithful in addressing the situation, than Bonhoeffer's sermon on Matt 16:13-18, preached on the day when a critical election was taking place in the struggle between the Confessing Church and the German Christians.

Part 5 (Bonhoeffer on Following Christ) contains selections from his best known works *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life*

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Together (1937; 1939). Part 6 (Bonhoeffer's Ethics) offers an important but little known 1929 lecture entitled "What Is a Christian Ethic?" along with selections from his most important (but unfinished) mature work *Ethics*.

Part 7 (Bonhoeffer's Correspondence) gives the reader some idea of the extensive interchange that he carried on and the intensity with which he pursued important ideas with his family and friends. A sub-section gives us an example of some of his remarkable poetry.

There are, of course, items for discussion with the editors. Is "freedom" really the best word to gather up the legacy of this extraordinarily disciplined Christian martyr? Is "Solidarity with the Oppressed" (the editors' title for the introductory biographical essay) in fact an accurate but far too trendy phrase to gather up the details of this life dedicated to knowing and following Jesus Christ? It is not difficult to second guess the editors here and there. The fact is that no other such volume exists or begins to do what this one does. It is a splendid way to become acquainted with Bonhoeffer, either at one's own desk or in the classroom.

Not to be missed are two other recent publications. One is *Worldly Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics*. The editor, translator, and commentator is Clyde E. Fant. This 1991 volume by Crossroad is a revised edition of the 1975 *Bonhoeffer: Worldly Preaching*. There is much to be learned here from Bonhoeffer's passion for what he calls "presentation" of the text.

Another volume of interest is *Dietrich Bonhoeffer—His Significance for North Americans* (Fortress Press, 1990) by Larry Rasmussen. This collection of insightful essays allows the reader to explore with Rasmussen some interesting avenues of interpretation and application of Bonhoeffer themes.

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KEEPING THE SABBATH WHOLLY, by Marva J. Dawn. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989. Pp. 213. \$10.95 (paper).

For most Christians keeping the Third Commandment means going to church on Sunday morning. Marva Dawn suggests it means much more. In this book she invites Christians to keep the Sabbath by weekly dedicating a full 24-hour day to the honor and glory of God. Dawn contends that we “wholly” keep the Sabbath when we practice the rhythm of six days for work and one day for ceasing work.

Dawn firmly believes that “the observance of such an ordering of our days preserves more wholistically the fabric of our existence” (xi). She has woven a workable contemporary pattern for Sabbath-keeping, capably drawing on Scriptures and tradition—especially the rich treasures of Jewish experience. Through numerous personal examples she illustrates that Christian Sabbath celebrations can be “theologically informed, practically possible—and a whole lot of fun” (16).

Dawn extends to the readers

an invitation to *cease* work and worry, to *rest* deeply in the grace of God, to *embrace* the values of the Christian community, and to *feast* physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. (206 [italics mine])

Ceasing. Resting. Embracing. Feasting. These are her four categories for observing the Sabbath wholly, and they are the basis for the four parts of the book.

Ceasing the business busy-ness of our lives is the first step she describes in keeping Sabbath. Six days of the week are dominated by our ceaseless agendas and strivings, stress and expectations. On Sabbath we stop. Our multi-directional graspings cease, that we might be grasped by God’s love. Quite literally, good ol’ Lutheran “grace alone” theology has its day on Sabbath. The world scrutinizes our productivity for evidence of our worth. One day each week we celebrate that it is not so with God. During Sabbath ceasing we are reminded “that we are precious and honored in God’s sight and loved, profoundly loved, not because of what we produce” (20).

Resting on the Sabbath provides peaceful renewal of ourselves on a number of levels, including the physical. Resting is difficult when there is so much to be done. “The two steps of the first two sections of this book are underscored by Luther’s proclamation ‘that our works cease and that God alone works in us’ as we rest” (56). As we rest in God’s grace, God sets us free to

delight in life just as the Creator delighted in creation when God rested on the seventh day. Recognizing that many people fear the boredom of a 24-hour resting Sabbath, Dawn offers “Aids to Rest” (chapter 12) so that the readers might discover creative paths of taking delight in their own lives.

Ceasing and resting involve stilling the raging voices of our culture which scream at us from all sides, driving us to fulfill the agendas the world sets for our lives. Dawn’s discussions of ceasing and resting in Parts I and II of the book enable us to “turn down the volume” of the world around us, so that we might become attuned to a renewing word.

There is a progression in the book, although the four parts are closely intertwined. Embracing and feasting, which occupy Parts III and IV, are the affirmations which build on the ceasing and resting of Parts I and II.

Embracing Sabbath values deliberately and intentionally nurtures us in a life of order and wholeness as God intended it. “We don’t just think God’s values are good. We embrace them wholly” (102). Therefore, we rest from our 6-day strivings to embrace time rather than space, people rather than things, God’s activity in history rather than fate, freedom rather than our schedule, giving rather than acquiring. Dawn suggests some simple Sabbath customs which will embrace what is meaningful for each of us and make Sabbath-keeping a “delightful habit”—not an “empty ritual” (140).

Fourth and finally, feasting is the “fun and festivity of a weekly eschatological party” in which we experience present joy and anticipate our future eternal joy (151). Feasting on the eternal is foremost as we immerse ourselves in the dialectic of God-with-us and God-promised. Although she provides stimulating concrete suggestions for Sabbath-keeping throughout the book, in Part IV Dawn shows just what we might *do* to festively celebrate the Sabbath feast. For the author, feasting means savoring the present realities of grace through worship, Scriptures, music, beauty, affections and, of course, food.

In a time when declining worship attendance challenges many mainline denominations, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* courageously calls for commitment to a disciplined and intentional pattern of life which embraces worship as just one part of a 24-hour celebration.

To keep the Sabbath is closely connected with God’s *shalom*, for we can experience the wholeness of his design only if we follow the orderly pattern—commanded in his Word and written into our being—for six days of work and a day of rest. (146)

This is Dawn’s premise—unapologetically, unswervingly, uncompromisingly. Yet she hasn’t forgotten Jesus in the grainfield; she never becomes rigid, impractical, or coercive.

This is basically a Christian handbook for neophyte Sabbath-keepers. Although the author presents Lutheran perspectives, she has gathered from many traditions to create this richly-quoted sourcebook for Christian Sabbath-keeping.

Dawn’s prayer is that this book “will reawaken a desire among Christians to keep the Sabbath” (94). *Awaken* might be more accurate than *reawaken*. I suspect most contemporary Christians have no experience in this kind of Sabbath celebration and are uneducated as to the possibilities. This book takes a significant step toward changing that.

Marva Dawn has not only studied Sabbath; she observes it. Throughout the book she not only talks about Sabbath; she *does* Sabbath as she ushers the reader right into her living room to

share her observances and reflections, her joys and her struggles. That is perhaps both the most compelling thing about this book and its greatest difficulty. It is instructive and inspiring to see that Sabbath can really be observed in the ways she advocates. On the other hand, she writes so autobiographically that sometimes it is distracting, and her own story

becomes as intriguing as her Sabbathkeeping.

To read this book is to become very aware of the grace of the Third Commandment. The author's intention is to encourage more Christians to live within the discipline of keeping the Sabbath, so that both individuals and the church might be renewed. She has succeeded in inviting me into the celebration.

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN, by D. A. Carson. Leicester and Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity and Eerdmans, 1991. Pp. 715. \$29.95

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, by Kenneth Grayston. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. Pp. 177. \$14.95.

These two recent commentaries embark onto the sea of Johannine studies in markedly different ways. Those who read Carson's work should prepare for a bracing plunge into the whirling streams of contemporary scholarship in the company of an interpreter who battles against the current. Those who read Grayston's contribution will glide more gently with the tide, pausing frequently to contemplate the majestic view.

Carson, a professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is unabashedly conservative in his approach. Thoroughly familiar with a broad range of recent biblical scholarship, he firmly and consistently interprets the gospel in traditional terms. Most scholars are reluctant to harmonize John with the Synoptics, but Carson argues that superimposing the views of the four gospels on each other provides a more complete picture of the historical and theological realities involved. Although many scholars maintain that the identity of the gospel's author is unknown, Carson identifies him as the apostle John, the son of Zebedee. Although interpreters frequently conclude that John's gospel was intended to nurture the faith of an established Christian community, Carson argues that its purpose was to evangelize Jews and Jewish Christians.

A number of recent studies have interpreted John's gospel as a piece of literature, commenting on its plot line, narrator, techniques of character development, and use of irony. Carson recognizes the value in treating the gospel as a finished literary product rather than as a collection of sources compiled by a rather clumsy editor, but he sharply criticizes those who compare the gospel's truth claims to the truths conveyed by a contemporary novel. If the evangelist is reliable only in the way a novelist is reliable, "we have sacrificed the Gospel's claims to certain historical specificity, to eyewitness credibility, to the *truth claims* of this Gospel, and set sail on the shoreless sea of existential subjectivity" (65).

The comments on specific passages of the gospel reflect this basic interpretive stance. For example, when commenting on the gospel's opening line, "In the beginning" (John 1:1), Carson

first considers the connection with the biblical creation story (Gen 1:1). Next he notes that Mark's gospel opens with similar words. Therefore, assuming that John's gospel was written by the apostle John and that it should be read along with the other gospels, Carson suggests that John may be "making an allusion to his colleague's work, saying in effect, 'Mark has told you about the *beginning* of Jesus' public ministry; I want to show you that the starting point of the gospel'" is the "*beginning* of the entire universe" (114).

When gospel accounts appear to contradict each other, Carson assumes that the same historical reality undergirds both versions. For example, Mark's gospel says that Jesus was crucified at "the third hour" (Mark 15:25), while John says Jesus was not sentenced to death until "it was about the sixth hour" (John 19:14). Carson addresses the problem by insisting that we should not expect precision from people who wrote before watches were available. "If the sun was moving toward mid-heaven, two different observers might well have glanced up and decided, respectively, that it was 'the third hour' or 'about the sixth hour'" (605).

Carson's comments are provocative, sometimes bellicose, and often unconvinc-

ing. Yet his work should not quickly be dismissed by those who do not share his views. By resolutely sailing against prevailing currents in Johannine studies, Carson helps prod those who float comfortably with the stream to re-examine their own assumptions. And by relentlessly pressing the question of the gospel's truth, he refuses to let interpreters limit their work to technical exegetical issues or observations about the evangelist's literary technique. He demands that interpreters be clear about the sense in which they deem John's gospel to be true.

Grayston is a Methodist minister and Professor Emeritus at the University of Bristol. His work is based on the Revised English Bible, the successor to the New English Bible. It is a non-technical commentary intended for pastors, teachers, students, and church members. Grayston walks with readers through the movement of each text, pausing frequently to discuss leading words and ideas at some length. When discussing John's prologue (1:1-18), for example, he comments on the flow of the passage as a whole, makes observations about 1:1-2, then provides several paragraphs on the meaning of the term *logos* before turning to 1:3-5.

The sections on the gospel's key words and ideas are a useful and distinctive feature of this commentary. In addition to the discussion of the *logos*, there are treatments of life, light and darkness, name, Moses and the law, awareness of God, *kosmos*, and many other matters. These special sections deal mainly with the theological significance of each idea, with references to the various occurrences of the idea in John's gospel, the Old Testament, and some extra-biblical texts. These explanatory notes will be useful for sermon preparation and teaching.

Grayston's approach to the gospel is generally in the mainstream of current Johannine scholarship. He is content not to know if the Beloved Disciple was really John the son of Zebedee. He suggests that the gospel was composed in stages and put into its present form by someone other than the Beloved Disciple. He recognizes that John's gospel sometimes differs from the other gospels in matters of historical detail. For example, Jesus was crucified on the day before the Passover meal was eaten, according to John, but on the day after the Passover meal according to Mark. After noting several different approaches to the problem he comments, "Whatever the correct answer may be, exegesis must pay chief attention to what each Evangelist

has decided to tell his readers” (107).

Grayston maintains that the gospel was written primarily for use within the believing community, rather than for evangelizing outsiders as Carson argued. The context in which the gospel was composed, according to Grayston, was marked by the unbelieving world’s opposition toward God, Christ, and the Christians. The evangelist addressed those who asked, “How is it possible, in a world such as this, to experience joy, healing, mobility, nourishment, reassurance, sight and resurrection...?” (xxiv). In other words, readers needed “not more stories about Jesus but assurance that Jesus was God’s representative and could act on their behalf” (xxiv). As the evangelist shaped a narrative to meet those needs, he appropriated older Jewish traditions, but conveyed them in terms of “rebirth” and “knowing,” which were well-known ideas in the wider Hellenistic world.

Grayston’s work is balanced and clearly written. His tone reflects the same assuring quality he finds in the gospel itself. The strength of his approach is that he interprets John’s gospel in a pastoral way for contemporary Christians, who also want to experience “joy, healing, mobility, nourishment,” etc. The result, however, is that he tends to soften the gospel’s polemical edge and to bypass the issue of the gospel’s truth claim, which Carson presses so vigorously. Nevertheless, Grayston has provided a fine guide to the Fourth Gospel and a useful tool for preaching and teaching.

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