



THE ROMANS DEBATE, ed. by Karl P. Donfried. Rev. and expanded ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991. Pp. lxxii+372.

The first edition of this book, published in 1977, served students of Paul's Letter to the Romans very well. It held together in one place some of the most stimulating and perspective-setting essays on Romans of our time. This new edition is likely to do for the next decade and more what the earlier one has done in the past.

The first edition contained ten essays by nine authors (G. Bornkamm, K. Donfried, J. Jervell, R. Karris, G. Klein, T. W. Manson, M. Stirewalt, W. Wiefel, and W. Wuellner). These essays are still worth reading, and they all appear in the new edition as well.

The new edition contains thirteen additional essays by eleven more authors (D. Aune, J. C. Beker, F. F. Bruce, W. Campbell, J. D. G. Dunn, L. Gaston, R. Jewett, P. Lampe, P. Stuhlmacher, F. Watson, and A. J. M. Wedderburn). Moreover, it contains a 24-page introduction by the editor, which bears the subtitle "The Romans Debate Since 1977."

The so-called "Romans debate" has to do primarily with Paul's purposes (one can hardly use the singular anymore) in writing and sending his letter to the Christians at Rome. Along with that is the question of the literary integrity of the letter. T. W. Manson suggested, for example, in his highly influential essay of 1962 (and reprinted in this volume, 3-15) that, while Romans 1-15 went to Rome, Romans 1-16 was a letter sent by Paul to Ephesus. He argued that the final chapter, consisting largely of greetings to 26 persons, would be more fitting in a letter to Ephesus, where Paul had spent several years, rather than in a letter to Rome, where Paul had never been. Günther Bornkamm endorsed that view and concluded in a highly influential essay of 1963 (published here, 16-28) that Romans, "which develops the most important themes" of Pauline theology "and which elevates his theology above the moment of definite situations and conflicts into the sphere of the eternally and universally valid, this letter to the Romans is the last will and testament of the Apostle Paul" (28).

But since those essays were published, things have changed. According to Donfried, a consensus has emerged since 1977 on some five points: (1) Romans addresses a specific situation in Rome (such as polarization among house-churches); (2) Paul had several purposes in mind in writing; (3) chapter 16 should be considered integral to the letter to Rome; (4) Paul's use of diatribe does not exclude his speaking to specific problems; and (5) chapters 9 through 11 fit perfectly well into the over-all argument of Romans (lxix-lxx).

Even if one can speak of a consensus on these points, a volume of 23 essays by 20 authors will show considerable diversity in approach to issues and differing nuances in their conclusions. The essays reflect the ways that various scholars have attempted in recent years to use a variety of interpretive methods. These include theological probings, historical-critical reconstructions, rhetorical analyses, and social history approaches. The essay by Peter Lampe on "The Roman Christians of Romans 16" (216-30, never published previously) is particularly

informative in drawing upon archaeological and literary materials from antiquity to describe the social setting of the Roman Christians. The essay by Peter Stuhlmacher on "The Purpose of Romans" (231-42, first published in German in 1986; here for the first time in English) is particularly helpful in bringing together the data from the letter itself and putting it to use in a fruitful discussion of the letter's purposes.

Future studies of Romans will continue to deal with the contributions made in several of the essays in this volume. And although there may be more here than the non-specialist cares to get into, the book will provide rich and interesting reading for anyone who is curious about Romans—

undisputedly one of the major books of the Bible—or seeks to interpret it in teaching and proclamation.

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THE MYSTERY AND THE PASSION: A HOMILETIC READING OF THE GOSPEL TRADITIONS, by David Buttrick. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, Pp. 256.

In a day and age when the Christian church in the United States is struggling for vitality, relevance, and direction, David Buttrick challenges us to be God's new humanity, proclaimers and initiators of a new world order. If we are honest about the degree of boredom and ineffectiveness in many of our religious communities, this is no small challenge. For contemporary Christians who would rather focus on the *future* of God's reign, the pages of this book will confront and indict. For others of us who would speak too quickly and glibly about living God's future *now*, there will be new challenges that push the reader past platitudes, easy answers, and denial.

With refreshing clarity and honesty, David Buttrick takes his stand as one who believes God's new order is. This is the eschatological heart of his entire project. He vividly reminds us that early Christian communities understood themselves as outposts of new human life. "Early Christian communities could see that a new brand of redeemed life was showing up in their midst. The good news they announced was already taking shape in their life together" (3). In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, Buttrick urges us also to live as people of faith who believe in the possibility and sureness of God's reign in our midst. Helping faithful Christians in general, and preachers in particular, articulate and proclaim this sureness is one of the greatest gifts of this book. At the same time, with a clear eye toward the magnitude of suffering and oppression that abounds in our common life, the author never implies or suggests that God's reign is totally realized among us.

In a world where atrocious evil exists alongside redemptive love and grace, Buttrick urges us to recover passion and resurrection as foundational realities of the faith. His biblical and theological affirmations about the mystery of the resurrection and the passion of the cross are simultaneously traditional and radical. He does not allow us to comfortably linger in our ageless

and unanswerable questions about eternal life, as he immerses us in understandings of resurrection power that are to be embodied by God's people. He does not call reader and preacher into one more individualized affirmation of personal salvation, but draws us into ever deepening understandings of corporate, communal sin and our need for profound social transformation. Ultimately, the author confronts every preacher who has ever reduced the mystery of resurrection to individual salvation, and the passion and cross of Jesus Christ to individual sin.

We are more than privacies before God, a fact that the Great Commandment acknowledges. Personalist preaching has reduced the scope of the gospel, slicing off the social shape of sin and scaling down the high and holy God of Israel to a salve for inner problems. But we do not stand one-to-one before God; there is a neighborhood in each of us that cannot be ignored. (48)

Perhaps theology and preaching is so often irrelevant precisely because preachers may be tempted to make passion and resurrection individual faith matters, instead of dimensions of faith to be lived and incarnated in local communities. Every page of this book begs the preacher to resist all such temptations, and reclaim the communal nature of these central tenets of our heritage. Any conscientious preacher might enjoy the challenge of placing Buttrick's insights about resurrection and passion in direct dialogue with Latin American liberation theologian Leonardo Boff. In his book, *When Theology Listens to the Poor*, Boff raises similar questions for our consideration when he asks: "How Ought We to Preach the Cross in a Crucified Society Today?" and "How Ought We to Preach the Resurrection in a World under Threat of Collective Death?"

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The author's insights about passion and resurrection promise to change how we understand ourselves as new humanity and creators of a new social order, and thus will change our foundational understandings of God as well. If God is revealed in the passion of Jesus Christ accepting death even on a cross, then how might we name and know God differently?

What happens if we take the broken figure on the cross seriously? What if we say point-blank that the impotent, dying Christ is the disclosure of God? Then the attributes of God are up for grabs. Omniscience? Well, omniscience can only mean to know through suffering and dying the full depth of the human condition. And omnipotence? God's power must be defined entirely by suffering, nonviolent, selfgiving love; it can no longer be conceived of as unlimited domination. (39-40)

In a world where suffering is rampant, and socially constructed oppression is ever present, the author invites us to consider the constructive ramifications of a God who is willing to suffer with, stand alongside, and accompany, rather than be dominate, distanced, and detached.

This book will stretch and expand the theology and biblical acumen of most preachers. Eschatology, passion, and resurrection come alive in ways that might infuse local religious communities with new life and profound hope in the face of our real world. Faithful to his intent

to recover the social and collective nature of passion and resurrection, the author spends almost half the book carefully working his way through all the passion narratives and resurrection accounts in each of the gospels. This is a rare and needed contribution to a preaching ministry that genuinely seeks to move beyond the sole messages of individual salvation and personal morality. David Buttrick doesn't simply believe that God's new order can be real among us, but he seeks to empower the preacher to help enable its embodiment and expression.

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF MYSTICISM, Vol. 1 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, by Bernard McGinn. New York: Crossroad, 1991. Pp. 516.

In the first volume of what promises to be a truly magisterial work, Bernard McGinn wants to present his story of the origins and earliest manifestations of the western mystical tradition, while arguing for the crucial importance of the history of the discourse of mysticism and its textual presuppositions for its systematic interpretation. The first of these tasks is executed in Parts 1 and 2 of his text. The second is broached in the Introduction and Part 3—essentially a review of the various approaches to the study of mysticism, with some estimate of their various credits and debits.

Even on the basis of what amounts to a sketch of a systematic position, it is clear that McGinn departs in important ways from the previous generation of interpreters of mysticism (e.g. James, Underhill). Showing a good deal more reserve about the possibility of an uninterpreted, and non-culturally mediated, experience of the divine, McGinn questions, on the one hand, James' distinction between mysticism as first-hand religion and the secondariness of church doctrine and belief, and, on the other, Underhill's distinction between mysticism proper and its secondary shadow, that is, mystical theology. While McGinn thinks that such distinctions are useful for certain purposes, they become dangerous at the level of theory. Thus, for McGinn, what is necessary is a fundamental ordering of priorities in which one looks at mysticism as a form of language or discourse in which the presence of the divine is both talked about and rendered. And to do this responsibly, that is, without *a priori*'s, is to pay respect to the history of this discourse or set of discourses and the texts that are at its center.

McGinn's story consists of an account of the historical roots of the western mystical tradition (Part 1) and an account of its earliest exemplifications (Part 2). In his treatment of roots (Chapters 1-5) McGinn resists the temptation to posit a unitary origin. In particular, he resists the temptation to over-

estimate the role played by Greek philosophy of a Platonic stripe. While the contemplative thrust of Greek philosophy offers a singular contribution to the Western tradition of mysticism (Ch. 2) and funds a considerable strain in the Christian tradition (Ch. 4), it is by no means constitutive. To the New Testament must be assigned a major role in the foundation of mysticism (Ch. 3). Although neither the Synoptics' figuring of Christ, Paul's image theology, nor John's in-dwelling

spirit can, strictly speaking, be called mystical, New Testament texts inspired mystical reflection and commentary in the early centuries of the common era. Indeed, a thread that runs through McGinn's historical account is the importance of exegesis rather than direct experience in the formation of the Christian tradition. This facet of the multiple sources of the western mystical tradition is most explicitly addressed in his account of the Jewish sources, for, according to McGinn, the western Christian mystical tradition owes a huge debt to the mode of non-literal exegesis introduced by Philo (Ch. 1). One of the most significant aspects of McGinn's account of origins is his assigning an important role to monasticism, both as an inspirer of mystical practices and ideas and as an institutional vehicle for its perpetuation. The point has tended to be ignored in most genealogical accounts and McGinn has set the record straight.

The cash value of the monastic thesis is clearly illustrated in Part 2. It is an essential part of McGinn's argument to insist on the monastic context of such important figures in the history of mysticism as Ambrose, Cassian (Ch. 6), and, of course, above all, Augustine (Ch. 7). In Part 2 as well, McGinn challenges those who would insist that the early western tradition of Ambrose and Augustine provides just the kind of evidence of "external" determination that the anti-mystic has always suspected to be constitutive of mystical Christianity. McGinn suggests that the manifest Neoplatonic element does not dominate in either. Neoplatonic tropes such as that of mystical ascent are christianized; no implication exists of real ontological union between the creature and God. Indeed, in his superb climactic chapter on Augustine, McGinn insists that in texts like the *Confessions* and his *Commentaries on John* Augustine effectively christologizes Neoplatonic discourse that is more comfortable speaking about the eternal than the intersection of the timeless with time that defines the horizon of Christian mystery.

To say that McGinn tells his story well would be to do him an injustice. He has simply offered the best available account of the symbolical crucible from which Christian mysticism sprang and provided a sympathetic and rich profile of the synthesis of Augustine from which lovers and haters of Augustine alike can learn. Moreover, the effect of the telling of the story is that it calls into question caricatures of the mystical tradition that would portray it as a diseased organism infected by an alien parasite. Mysticism is a genuinely Christian product with its own peculiar, historically specific language or set of languages. The fact of its genuineness, however, by no means implies that it is the only language. Taking his stand with von Hügel, McGinn sees no reason for denying the authenticity of the languages of doctrine and the incarnate language of institution. Here again McGinn displays the consummate sanity and judiciousness he displays throughout the text.

McGinn has written an important text that will profit even those suspicious of mysticism. Considering that one has to look forward to three more volumes, two of which will be on McGinn's specialty, that is, medieval mysticism, the appetite is well and truly whetted.

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A FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: DESCRIPTIVE AND STRATEGIC PROPOSALS, by Don S. Browning. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. Pp. 326.

In line with this book's hermeneutical approach, this review can be understood as a

conversation between the text and the reviewer. Participants in the hermeneutical process bring to the conversation pre-understandings and convictions: as Brown-

ing argues, there are no value-neutral understandings. (He pushes this argument to conclude that all social-scientific efforts—important partners in this conversation—contain, at their horizons, theological convictions.) I come to this review/conversation as Lutheran pastor, seminary professor of historical theology, and person/parson committed to the quest for justice and peace in society. As pastor and professor I find this an impressive and important work; as historian and seeker after justice I am somewhat disappointed with it.

A Fundamental Practical Theology is important for the way it envisions theology as practical in orientation. Standing in the lineage of Schleiermacher, together with other contemporaries such as Edward Farley, Browning reclaims practice as the ground and goal of theology. Theology is participation in ecclesial (i.e., conversational and communal) process which seeks to transform practice (within the church and in society as a whole) in light of the reign of God. Theology *is* fundamental practical theology; it begins with practice and practical issues, moves through the moments of descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and strategic (or fully) practical theology toward the transformation of practice.

What is distinctive about Browning's approach, as compared with others who reorient theology in a practical way, is his location, geographically and theologically, at the University of Chicago. Browning appropriates the theology of the contemporary "Chicago school" (Ricoeur, Tracy, Gilkey) and reorients it in a practical way. Somewhat surprisingly, it works rather well. Browning adopts Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach (in conversation with Habermas and Gadamer) and Tracy's modification of Tillich's method of correlation. Here, then, is a theology which is at once practical, hermeneutical, and envisioning a mutually critical relation between "faith" and "culture." As a seminary professor involved in the preparation of persons for ministry, I find this an important work because it provides an understanding (and some practices—e.g., the Divinity School assignment outlined on pp. 72-4) which bring "Chicago" theology into the service of ministerial and ecclesial practice.

A Fundamental Practical Theology embodies a genuine conversation among members of the academy and practitioners of the Christian faith. Browning accomplishes this by including congregational studies as important moments in the text. In-depth studies of an east coast United Methodist congregation, an Ohio Presbyterian congregation, and a Chicago African-American Pentecostal church are brought into conversation with the many diverse theologians Browning draws on. These case studies give the text real connections with "life in the trenches," and focus on questions which emerge from practice: a congregation and pastor struggling with inter-related identity crises, a congregation deciding whether or not to become a sanctuary church for Central American refugees, and a congregation committed to "sanctification in the Holy Spirit" as the key to personal and family renewal. The creation of this rich conversation between real congregations and academic theology is a distinctive contribution of this book.

In Browning's vision, theology comprises descriptive, historical, systematic, and fully practical moments. The initial descriptive moment reflects theology's practical orientation, for its task is to describe theory-laden religious and cultural practices. This includes "horizon analysis" which will smoke out the implicit theological concerns of practices (or reflections on practice)

which might claim to be secular or “value-free.” Browning’s view of descriptive theology is, not surprisingly, a real strength. He calls for “thick” description of practice and in this connection develops the “five dimensions of moral thinking” which can enable thick description and guide critical thinking about the reconstruction of practice.

Practice always occurs in a communal and historical context; thick description requires attention to the five dimensions of moral thinking: the visional (the myths and stories which shape and express worldview), the obligational (ethical understandings), the tendency-need (the pre-moral goods needed for human survival), environmental-social (constraints and possibilities provided by our physical and human environment), and

the rule-role (patterns which our practices are to follow). The visional dimension provides what Browning calls the “envelope” of practical reason, while the relation between the obligational and tendency-need dimensions provides the “inner core” of practical reason.

Browning’s distinction between the “envelope” and “inner core” reflects his recognition of the historical and communal character of practice. Because practice is shaped by social and historical location, its transformation requires a grasp of the richness and complexity of traditions. This means that description of practice needs to be thick and that the moment of historical theology, listening to past witnesses (Scripture and tradition) leads into systematic theology. Unfortunately, Browning does not develop the historical moment as fully as he might have: historical theology is not the subject of any of the book’s four major parts, unlike descriptive, systematic, and fully practical theologies—hence my disappointment as a historian. At the same time a genuine sense of the historical character of Christian practice and what this entails for theology is present in the text. Perhaps history is nowhere (getting a whole part to itself), because it is everywhere. What emerges from the encounter with past witnesses is not disinterested knowledge about historical facts, but a new vision for present practice, shaped by the encounter. This new vision and its concomitant practices are laid out in a general way and critically examined by systematic theology.

Finally, strategic practical theology takes up what has resulted from the previous three moments, and attentive to the particularity of its own situation, creates a renewed practice. At its best this practice is faithful to the traditions in which it stands; relevant to, and life-giving for, the situation in which the practice/witness is made. Browning insists that this is not mere application of theory, but is the “culmination of an inquiry that has been practical throughout” (57).

This book is impressive in its synthesis of so much diverse material into a comprehensive architectonic of theology. The book is, at once, abstract in its architectonic and concrete in its engagement with the real issues of congregations. Even more, the breadth and depth of Browning’s synthesis of ideas from a great host of theologians, philosophers, and social analysts is an impressive accomplishment. This book may be the culminating work of Browning’s long career, and the reader can be apprised of much theological, intellectual, and ministerial ferment by careful study of it. In addition to conversation partners already mentioned, Browning engages the thought of philosophers Richard Rorty, Richard Bernstein, and Mary Midgley; psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget; theologians Reinhold Niebuhr, Johannes Metz, Stanley Hauerwas, Louis Janssens, Helmut Peukert, and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza; Christian educator Thomas Groome; and theorists of pastoral care Charles Gerkin and Archie Smith. Browning also

considers the significance of non-academic movements like C.P.E. (important for descriptive theology and the self-awareness of practitioners of ministry) and provides historical overviews of recent developments in the theory and practice of pastoral care and Christian education. There is much to challenge and stimulate reflection on the theology and practice of ministry here.

Browning's critical appreciation for what might be seen as a Lutheran moment is instructive. Given the focus on practice and transformation, it is not surprising that theological ethics occupies a crucial place in this book's scheme. Browning identifies theological ethics as belonging both to systematic theology and fully practical theology: it provides something of a bridge between these two moments. In considering the Church of the Covenant and its theological-ethical struggle over whether to become a sanctuary congregation and thereby break the law, Browning identifies the contribution of law/gospel preaching in this process. He concludes that the senior pastor's "Lutheran" sermons freed people from thinking that their citizenship and respectability saved them and opened them to consider the radical option of being a sanctuary congregation. But this preaching in itself was not enough. Other ideas and practices were necessary. Crucial to the eventual decision were the affirmation of basic human needs and an ethic of neighborly love and self-sacrifice, all

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within an impressive, long-term, congregational process of Christian education/ formation. This provides an important counterpoint to claims that hang everything on the "proper distinction between Law and Gospel" and proclamation, narrowly conceived.

My assessment of this book's understanding of practices which further social justice is at once appreciative and critical. Browning's analysis of the Church of the Covenant's process reveals the complexities of these issues and the need for attention to all of the dimensions of practical reason and he rightly holds up this process as a paradigm of faithful and life-giving practice, particularly as the congregation was open to engagement with voices from beyond its membership. Still, Browning is oriented to psychology, not social theory; he sometimes omits advocacy from his list of ecclesial practices (292); and, while I appreciate his modification of Niebuhr's idealization of selflessness, he doesn't challenge the individualism which often governs Niebuhr's social theory. Furthermore, while I agree with Browning that social change requires "the development of high levels of religio-ethical culture" in religious communities, and not just "confrontation, demonstration, and prophetic pronouncement" (291), I am disappointed by his rather uncritical endorsement of the "chastened patriarchy" of the Pentecostal church which he studied. This is the weakest of the three congregational studies, likely because Browning conducted it alone, aided only by student researchers. And he fails to include womanist and homosexual voices which could make for genuine conversation about these family and sexual issues. If we are to create social visions and practices which truly move toward justice, our communication must be open and public, not only in principle, but in practice. Browning envisions a practical theology which transforms itself by such open and critical engagement; at points, especially concerning social and sexual/gender issues, I am disappointed that he didn't push the envelope further.

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CHOOSING DEATH: ACTIVE EUTHANASIA, RELIGION AND THE PUBLIC DEBATE, ed. by Ron Hamel. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991. Pp. 163.

This brief introduction to the ethical issues surrounding active voluntary euthanasia should be in every parish library. It would work well as a text for adult forums on the topic. Most important aspects of this problem are identified, and many different points of view in this debate are aired. Like all collections, the quality of individual contributions is uneven. Overall, however, the various voices blend well. The book is clearly organized, free of philosophical jargon, and generally accessible to the average reader.

The book opens with a review of four different case histories involving euthanasia. Again and again references are made to these personal narratives, so that the subsequent discussion of this dilemma remains concrete. A brief historical perspective on euthanasia follows in the second chapter, which traces the origins of this question in the west back to classical antiquity, and describes its history into the Christian era and through the nineteenth century. In the third chapter the contemporary shape of the question is explored. Emphasis is placed here on clarifying the moral difference between decisions to abate life-saving medical treatments (that is, to refuse, withdraw, and/or withhold life-saving treatments) and various forms of euthanasia (that is, active, passive, voluntary, involuntary, nonvoluntary and assisted forms of death).

The text encourages an interfaith dialogue on the topic in the fourth chapter. Here the attitudes of several major religious bodies, both western and eastern, regarding the morality of this practice are explored. The perspectives of Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Islam, well over a dozen Protestant denominations (including that of the LCMS and those of the church bodies antecedent to the ELCA), Eastern Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Hinduism, and Buddhism are reviewed. Each such summary is prefaced by a helpful sketch of the tradition or denomination, its sources of moral wisdom, and the au-

thoritative force of its official position among its members. Though nearly a third of the book is devoted to the work of this chapter, such an emphasis is not excessive. The issues raised by euthanasia are clearly ethical but they are also profoundly religious. This comparative study appropriately underscores the role theological convictions play in the debate.

The closing two chapters consider the morality and legality, respectively, of this practice. Several reflections are offered on the justifiability of active voluntary euthanasia. Some contributors press the question in reference to the incurably and severely diminished as well as in reference to the dying. To their credit nearly all the essayists note that in most instances adequate care for dying or disabled patients would eliminate the factors which frequently trigger such anguished decision-making. Not only pain but various other forms of suffering (such as respiratory distress) can be and ought to be managed better. In addition, most of the authors concur that an individual's right to self-determination is real but limited, and does not constitute an absolute right to die.

These deliberations could be greatly strengthened by an evaluation of their foundational assumptions. Some theological and secular conceptions of the human significance of both pain and diminishment are identified, but they do not receive detailed articulation or extensive analysis. Such reflections will ultimately prove decisive in this debate because it is not disease or

even the specter of death *per se* which prompts deliberations about euthanasia. It is doubt about the meaning of suffering and of dependence. Perhaps more than anything else, faithful believers can and ought to contribute to the public debate explicitly *theological* reflections on the courage and patience it sometimes takes to continue living or to die well.

Whether various forms of assisted death should be legalized, and if so, what the specifics of our public policy should be in that regard, are questions picked up in the final section of the book. Guidelines developed by the Dutch Medical Society and those recently proposed in Washington's narrowly defeated "Initiative 119" are evaluated at some length. Also considered are the important differences between good law and legitimate exceptions to it.

Much is made in this chapter of the "slippery slope" which might accompany an injudicious move toward the legalization of euthanasia. Missing, however, is an assessment of the negative consequences of our excessively restrictive public policies regarding the refusal of life-saving treatments (especially those state regulations which preemptively excluded from advance directives treatments involving artificial nutrition and hydration). Such a consideration is crucial because it is the *fear* of an artificially prolonged period of diminishment or dying which motivates premature efforts to legalize euthanasia.

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THE WAY OF JESUS CHRIST: CHRISTOLOGY IN MESSIANIC DIMENSIONS, by Jürgen Moltmann. San Francisco: Harper, 1990. Pp 338. \$24.95.

Jürgen Moltmann's recent book, the third in his systematic theology (the first two were *The Trinity and the Kingdom* and *God in Creation*), thrusts the christological debate out of the confines of Greek metaphysics—which sought to solve the mystery of Christ by creating the doctrine of the two natures of Christ—beyond the anthropological assumptions of modern times that focus on Jesus as the ultimate human, and into the post-modern era that is marked by life and death questions about the economic and political oppression of the so called "Third World" by "First World" countries, by the ecological crisis that threatens the planet itself, and by the threat of nuclear destruction. This post-modern era is not plagued by questions of Greek metaphysics nor with modern psychological inquiries that look to Jesus Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of the human. Rather, we are faced with stark questions of justice and survival. Moltmann urges us to confront the current crises as we follow the way of Jesus Christ,

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the liberator of the oppressed and the cosmic Christ of all creation.

Moltmann's book is born out of his realistic appraisal of the contemporary situation, and he finds war, injustice, and global destruction just around the corner. The christology that unfolds in this work is influenced and at times propelled by a sense of urgency brought on by the realities of these end-times in which we live. And whether you agree or disagree with Moltmann at most points, the book will fundamentally change the christological debate as it exists now and establish the parameters of the discussion for many years to come.

There is a great deal of literature available that deals with the problems that Moltmann recognizes. One of the elements that makes Moltmann's work unique is the way in which he grounds his assertions about contemporary christology deep within the Jewish tradition out of which Jesus Christ emerged. His method stands in contrast to many christologies that ignore the Jewishness of Jesus Christ. Throughout the book, this theme is present. Specifically, Moltmann reflects on the reality of the holocaust and the pall that it has cast over Christianity. He effectively weaves this theme into and around the post-modern concerns that he recognizes. The effect is dramatic. By placing the tragedy and reality of the holocaust within the same discussion as these three other critical topics, Moltmann forces us to realize the serious toll that these problems could wreak upon the planet.

If the holocaust can happen, Moltmann argues, so can mass oppression, the disintegration of the planet, and nuclear war. Thus the structure of the book and the method employed by Moltmann force us to recognize that these things *will* happen unless we address them and deal with them at the deepest level of our life, faith, and ethics as Christians. According to Moltmann, this new life is nothing less than the way of Jesus Christ:

The symbol of the way embodies the aspect of process, and brings out christology's alignment towards its goal....The symbol of the way makes us aware that every human christology is historically conditioned and limited....Finally, but not least important: every way is an invitation. The way of Jesus Christ is not merely a christological category. It is an ethical category too. Anyone who enters upon Christ's way will discover who Jesus really is; and anyone who really believes in Jesus as the Christ of God will follow him along the way he himself took. (xiv)

Moltmann helps us understand the way of Jesus Christ by exploring many of the essential elements present in any substantial discussion of christology, but in such a brief review, I can only put forth several of the unique assertions that Moltmann makes, in order to make clear what is unprecedented in his book.

In the first chapter, "The Messianic Perspective," Moltmann asks, "What does Christology mean except messiology?" He then examines the historical and theological roots of Messianism within Judaism and attempts to form a link between Christianity and Judaism out of which an authentic dialogue between the two can emerge. By tracing the history of Messianism as far back as King David, Moltmann shows us that historically there was no breach between hope for the messiah and hope for the future. Therefore, Judaism and Christianity are united in their common desire for the coming reign of God. This shared hope for the future grounds christology firmly in its Jewish origins.

Next, in Chapter 2, "Trends and Transmutations in Christology," Moltmann challenges us to envision christology in a new era—the post-modern era. He rejects the traditional doctrine of the two natures, that seeks either a Christ from above or a Jesus from below, and calls us back to a resurrection christology similar to that held by the early Christian church, which focuses on Easter, rather than contemporary incarnational theology which concentrates on Christmas. This incarnational theology, he says, is largely the result of the modern era's concentration upon the human as the ultimate creation on earth, and leads to a religion which is privatized and a salvation which becomes an ideal of the heart. Throughout the remainder of the book, Moltmann

impasse of previous christology and along the way of Jesus Christ.

In Chapter 3, Moltmann outlines the “Messianic Mission of Christ” to heal the sick, liberate the oppressed, befriend the outcast, and preach the messianic way of life and peace for all peoples. Moltmann relies heavily on the Sermon on the Mount as a model by which we are taught to live out the way of Jesus Christ, and there is little separation between theology and ethics on this path. Filled with the Spirit, we are called to live out the lessons of the Sermon on the Mount as theological, eschatological, and social persons in this new creation which, like us, is on the way.

In Chapter 4, “The Apocalyptic Sufferings of Christ,” Moltmann attempts to develop a theology of the sufferings of Christ that is relevant in our time. He reflects on three recent martyrs and shows us how they participate in Christ’s suffering:

The martyrs anticipate this end for their own time, and in so doing they become apocalyptic witnesses of the coming truth against the ruling lie...and the coming life against the tyranny of death. (204)

The martyrs participate with Christ in anticipating the goal of Christ in history. We all participate in this through the Lord’s Supper as we look to the coming creation. Thus, Moltmann argues, the sufferings of Christ were redemptive and apocalyptic, and by following the way of Jesus Christ, we participate with him as we work toward the coming future.

Chapter 5, “The Eschatological Resurrection of Christ,” and Chapter 6, “The Cosmic Christ,” both seek to broaden the traditional way in which Jesus Christ has been understood in relationship to creation. The eschatological resurrection of Christ cannot be spiritualized and considered ahistorical, nor can it be understood as the apex of human achievement and fulfillment. Rather, it must be understood as the event that redeems and unites all creation. For:

The resurrection of the dead means human persons. The resurrection of the body means human nature. Only the resurrection of nature will complete the horizon of expectation that belongs to this hope. (272)

In Chapter 6, Moltmann continues this theme of the unity of humanity and nature in all creation. He explores the relationship between creation and evolution and the need for law among all God’s creatures. Moltmann recognizes that as creatures made in the image of God we are stewards of this planet, and as we walk this way of Jesus Christ we must recognize not only human worth, but also the intrinsic worth of all God’s creatures. This equality of creatures should impact our lives and choices and must do so if our planet is to survive.

The final chapter, “The Parousia of Christ,” seeks to redefine how we understand the “parousia.” Moltmann says it is not retribution, nor revenge, nor should the emphasis be placed on the expectation of final judgment. Rather, when Moltmann speaks of the parousia of Christ, he attempts to reemphasize Paul’s understanding of the parousia as the glorification of God. Moltmann challenges us to once again take “the resurrection of the body” seriously and in doing

so implores us to live in unity in this creation and in the hope of the new creation.

The christology put forth in *The Way of Jesus Christ* will and should be the topic of study and discussion for years to come. It places questions about Christ within a contemporary framework and draws upon the current crises of our time. However, too little attention is given to feminist christological concerns and the challenge they raise for traditional as well as Moltmann's christology. Even though these questions are not given their due, the timeliness, thoroughness, and hopefulness of Moltmann's work will provide us with courage and insight as we grapple with the present and face an uncertain future.

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DESPAIR: SICKNESS OR SIN? HOPELESSNESS AND HEALING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, by Mary Louise Bringle. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990. Pp. 186.

In *Despair: Sickness or Sin?* Mary Louise Bringle offers a comprehensive and en-

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lightening presentation of the topic of despair that includes not only theological insights but personal struggle as well. Most salient in Bringle's book is her struggle with the question: "If despair is a sin, should the despairer be held responsible for the sin of despair?"

...I looked at the world around me: a world in which suicide had become the single largest cause of death among teenagers; a world in which homelessness and starvation coexisted with indecent affluence....In such a world, was despair really sinful? It seemed to me, instead, to make rather good sense. (17)

On the one hand, Christian tradition did mandate that the theological virtues were faith, hope and love. Despair seemed clearly to involve a renunciation of hope....Yet, on the other hand, despair did not seem to me to be something for which a person could fairly—or pastorally—be held accountable. (19)

With her sensitivity in asking this question, Bringle calls us away from a judgmental stance into an empathic stance. It is difficult, although not impossible, to be judgmental when presented with such a realistic and deeply moving picture of how despair "looks, acts, sounds, smells, tastes..." (29). Although, "no one can understand these things (despair) but he (or she) who has tasted them" (73), by intellectually as well as emotionally tackling this subject Bringle gives those who are of a more analytical bent and those who haven't experienced despair firsthand a chance to do so. By helping us to move from a judgmental stance to a more empathic stance, Bringle opens for us greater possibilities for deeper pastoral ministry.

The second point is that "Despair festers in isolation....Hope, on the other hand, finds its sustenance in community" (7). And again, "the third distinctive emphasis of a contemporary theology of despairing: an emphasis on communal responsibility rather than individual redemption from sin" (171). Moving from the argument that the modern ailment is less a concern over individual sin and more of a concern whether there is a future for this world, Bringle makes

a strong argument in favor of our communal responsibility as part of the body of Christ to alleviate suffering and despair to the best of our ability. She writes, “As human creatures within this creation, we are not merely participants in the groaning [of creation].... We are also partners with God—in whose image we are created—for the task of *shalom*-making” (172).

Bringle seeks to break down the barriers contemporary individualism has created. We need not cry in the dark, alone in our despair, fearing judgment as sinners. “All of us have sinned and fallen short; all of us are implicated in the hurts of one another. But, even further, just as we cannot redeem our own fallenness, so we cannot be expected to remedy our own despairing” (172). If one in our community is despairing, we all are indicted. If one in our community is despairing, we all are responsible. If one in our community is despairing, we all need a word of grace.

The “old moralists” of the Christian church cautioned individuals against despair (a daughter of *acedia*). They called upon individuals to guard against despair and to fight it when it comes. The old moralists advise much of value. Evagrius points out that *acedia* is episodic, which is a word of hope. Cassian admonishes patient endurance and courageous struggle against *acedia*. Gregory the Great and Luther advise individuals to seek company during times of despair. However helpful these writers are, their remedial advice falls short of being a word of grace, but rather is a word of law. The advice given by these writers calls for the despairing individual to dredge up resources that he or she may not have. The early writers on despair recognize this themselves. Burton (a Renaissance thinker) states that most people in despair are “too sorely afflicted” to follow his remedial program.

With the advent of science, there is still only a relatively empty word of grace for the individual; “the solutions proposed by rationalistic philosophy or by medical and psychological science may at times come up sorely lacking” (81). The bottom line is that sometimes (most times?) it is only an “epiphany,” a gift of grace, that can lift one out of the depths of despair. Ultimately, Luther recommends faith as the cure for a lack of faith. This is the word of grace the

tradition of the church has to bring: “act, but without presumption; trust, but without quietism” (153).

Bringle is able to bring an additional word of grace by addressing the communal responsibility for despair. She calls for the community to sustain the despairing individual. She calls for the community to go to the despairing individual to keep him or her company during the dark night of the soul, rather than waiting for the individual to seek out company. She calls for the community to help carry the burdens of the despairing individual, rather than waiting for the despairing one to cry out for help. By helping us to see the cure for despair in a more proactive light as a community rather than in a reactive light, Bringle gives us renewed insight into ministering to each other more effectively.

Bringle is able to balance our tradition with contemporary thought. She examines the idea that despair may not be *a* sin, but it is evidence of an underlying state of sin. She is able to state that ultimately healing of despair is a matter of grace, while still empowering the individual and the community to act in ways which might work to counteract despair. She is able to point out communal responsibility without negating individual responsibility. This balance is one of the most helpful insights I gained from reading this book. If Bringle had given easy platitudes, tried

to comfort despairers with the word that despair is not a sin, she would have rung false. If she had indicted despairers and called for repentance and a cessation of despairing, she would have been useless. In balancing the sickness of despair with the sin of despair, she is able to bring an effective word to all who are part of the body of Christ.

I find Bringle's book to be most helpful for ministry. It describes despair in realistic, nonjudgmental terms that promote empathy for the despairer rather than recrimination. Bringle brings a rare gift to a discussion that includes the word *sin*. She is able to describe despair fully and with such depth that I am sure chords resonate in many a soul when her words are read.

Theologically, Bringle incorporates the crucifixion, eschatology, and the incarnation in her modern theology of despairing. This I found to be nicely balanced. We are often tempted to give more weight to one area of Christ's ministry to the detriment of the others. Bringle emphasizes the full ministry of Jesus Christ. In this, she is able to affirm our life experiences while at the same time holding up the eschatological hope. By focusing on the cross and the crucifixion of Christ, Bringle is able to uphold the human experience of despair as part of being human:

...despairing also stands as a tragic part of the human condition—a part which should not receive undialectical condemnation, because God deigns to lift it up into the divine embrace through the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross. (155)

This focusing on the crucifixion as part of the theology of despairing allows Bringle to affirm the experience of despairing, and lift it out of the realm of pathology. Furthermore, she is able to focus on the eschatological hope that despair is not the last word, the final judgment on humankind. Viewed through the lens of the cross, eschatology resists an easy triumphalism. Instead, eschatology is upheld in its true glory, that of a patient, long-suffering and steadfast love for creation which will ultimately overcome all resistance.

The realization eschatology brings, that this world will not bring any lasting satisfaction, could easily lead one to contempt for this world and a desire for death. By weaving the incarnation into her theology, Bringle avoids this pitfall. "It is the balance—learning not to overvalue, yet also not to despise, the present world—which emerges in the conjunction of eschatology and incarnation" (160). Here, Bringle is able to affirm life on this earth and the action of God to bring about redemption today.

Mary Louise Bringle has given us a gift in *Despair: Sickness or Sin?* Comprehensively, completely, personally she is able to examine the depths of despair and bring a word of grace to those who are suffering its effects.

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