



MATTHEW, by Douglas R. A. Hare. Interpretation Commentary. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1993. Pp. 338 + xiv. \$22.00.

This commentary appears in a series that tries to create something new. The preface to the whole series states that each volume is “for those who teach, preach, and study the Bible in the community of faith,” and that each writer seeks “to create an interpretation which is both faithful to the text and useful to the church” (v). Given these aims, the verdict on Hare’s work is that it is highly successful.

The introductory section is exceedingly brief (only 4 pages). Hare simply asserts some critical judgments: the Gospel of Matthew was probably written in the decade A.D. 80-90, perhaps in Antioch of Syria, in a mixed (Jewish/Gentile) Christian community, by an anonymous writer (a Jewish Christian, but not Matthew the tax collector), who made use of Mark, Q, and oral traditions. In regard to structure, Hare does not endorse any current proposal, except to say that Peter’s confession and the subsequent passion prediction (16:13-28) constitute the turning point of the gospel.

Commentary on the actual text of Matthew proceeds unit by unit, rather than verse by verse. The usual procedure is to include both comment on the details of the text under discussion and comment on how it may be applied to contemporary life. The terminology used for these two moves is explanation (exegetical work) and application (vi). In some instances the two moves are sequential; in others the exegetical work and its application are interwoven.

The exegetical work is ample and skillfully done, even though it is necessarily done in minimal space. In spite of the space restraints, Hare is able, on occasion, to give an accounting of more than one interpretation of a passage—for example, the contested passage concerning the Sheep and the Goats (or Final Judgment) in 25:31-46—with fairness to positions taken by other interpreters, and finally to give his own considered position. Generally the exegetical work is at the theological level, and historical issues behind the Matthean text are avoided. At times that can be disappointing in two directions. For example, when Hare discusses the massacre of the innocents (2:13-23), he gives no hint that one might wonder about the historicity of the account; one gets the impression that there is no question but that it happened as recorded. On the other hand, in his treatment of the trial before Pilate (27:11-26), where there is less reason to be skeptical in general, Hare says that “the function of the passage is primarily theological rather than historical” (314). Well, yes, that can be granted, but surely the passage is informed by pre-Matthean accounts of events that have some basis to them and yet have been interpreted in light of historical factors up to Matthew’s own time. Some of the details demand an assessment. Nevertheless, the strength of the commentary is precisely its theological engagement with the text, something which is lacking in too many other commentaries.

The applications made by Hare are well done. To take a neuralgic test case, his treatment of the passages in Matthew concerning divorce and remarriage (5:31-32; 19:3-12) includes brief

comment on how they have been used in the history of the church and how they might apply today. Here the author goes beyond the plain meaning of these two texts to contemporary issues surrounding the divorce and remarriage of Christians. While it might be claimed that, at least theoretically, a passage of Scripture can be applied directly to contemporary faith and life, that does not become obvious in this volume. What a passage meant in its original setting, and what it might mean to the contemporary Christian community, are not always the same thing. There is no hermeneutical key that can be used universally to bridge the gap, and the author proposes none. Some-

times Hare, appropriately, makes the text of Matthew sing; at other times, appropriately, he forces it into a wrestling match.

The down side of a commentary of this type is that, since it applies the text to contemporary faith and life, its shelf life could be brief. Like sermons, it can become dated, and too localized (America of the 1990s), and no longer able to address faith and life in another time and place. But the same kind of criticism can be leveled against the commentaries of Luther and Calvin. It is refreshing to see and use a commentary that does solid work with the biblical text, including an engagement with it theologically, contextually, and pastorally. We have an excellent commentary here by a seasoned Matthean scholar. Hare has spent some thirty years teaching the Gospel of Matthew at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and we stand in his debt for sharing his work and insights with the rest of us who make frequent use of this gospel in preaching and teaching.

Arland J. Hultgren
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

WRITTEN ALSO FOR OUR SAKE: PAUL AND THE ART OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, by James W. Aageson. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. Pp. 156.

Biblical hermeneutics may be considered an intriguing quagmire. The area of study frequently leaves one besmirched and gasping for air. Nonetheless, it remains a decidedly valuable and fascinating branch of inquiry that deserves ever new and vigorous attempts to negotiate its perilous terrain.

James Aageson has given us another glimpse into one scholar's efforts at navigating through biblical hermeneutics. He has done so with the non-specialist in mind, including pastors and students. The text is clear and thought-provoking.

Aageson emphasizes a "conversational model" of hermeneutics. In the first part of the book he outlines what he means. St. Paul's hermeneutical relation to the Hebrew scriptures was not altogether different from our relation to Paul's letters. While not insisting that modern interpreters mimic Paul's methodological use of the Old Testament, Aageson does suggest that Paul used a conversational-style hermeneutics that we would do well to study.

There is a dialogical interaction between a reader and the text that involves the world of the text and its author, and the world of the exegete. There were and are communities in which

texts emerged and survive. All this must be taken into account when practicing biblical hermeneutics. The exegete must not only address the text, but be addressed by it and the community within which it exists. Interpretation thus becomes a conversation.

How did Paul converse with his scriptures? He was a Jew steeped in apocalyptic, messianic, and covenantal thought. He was a Christian for whom Christ was the major presupposition which the apostle brought to his exegesis. His christology enabled him to read scripture with fresh insight. Paul did not so much concern himself with the original intent of the biblical author but with the literary integrity of a living word which testified to the beliefs of his community. He not only listened to scripture but engaged it.

The second part of the book deals with particular passages in Paul's letters which deal with Old Testament themes and characters. For instance, the Abraham material was appropriated by Paul not for expounding upon individual salvation but served Paul's theological argument that gentile believers should be included in the people of God. Though Genesis 15:6 meant something different in its original context, it nonetheless provided ammunition for Paul in his argument to include gentiles. Paul therefore, contends Aageson, found a meaning beyond the original context of Genesis and one that is corporate in character.

Other topics such as the relation between Israel and the church, the Adam/ Christ typology, and the theme of Torah, Wisdom, and Christ are all explored to hear how Paul addressed and was addressed by scripture. In each of these sections Aageson argues against a few popular interpreta-

tions in favor of a more balanced understanding based on his conversational reading of Paul's use of those Old Testament subjects.

An epilogue concludes the work. The conversation between text and reader is an ongoing one. Paul's methodology supplies us with a way to keep that conversation alive. The church, argues Aageson, cannot merely be a conduit for the received tradition but must, in conversation with its tradition, move beyond its "narrow institutional concerns" (34).

It would have been beneficial to have included a small section on rabbinic exegesis in Paul's day. This would have given the reader a better understanding of Paul's background. It also might have cleared up some difficulty in confronting Paul's use of "seed" in Galatians 3:16 since Paul's argumentation in that passage depends largely on rabbinic exegesis.

It might also have been beneficial to point out that some of Paul's exegesis was done in contrast to that of his opponents (e.g., the use of Abraham). Paul's interpretive context was often constrained not only by a community of friends, but by his adversaries.

This leads us to the fundamental question implied by Aageson's work. While reading the book one wonders whether Paul was faithful to scripture or not. Did he manipulate the text? Did he view himself as an equal conversational partner with God's Word capable of engaging the text on a level footing? Should we? Prof. Aageson's intention, however, is not to answer these questions but to be part of an ongoing dialogue that discusses one way in which we might better understand our relation to scripture. To that degree the book is quite successful and will supply many pastors and students with thoughtful reflection concerning their own conversation with scripture.

First Lutheran Church
Litchfield, Minnesota

NEW CREATION: CHRISTIAN FEMINISM AND THE RENEWAL OF THE EARTH,
by Catharina J. M. Halkes. Translated by Catherine Romanik. Louisville: Westminster/John
Knox, 1991. Pp. 192.

The World Council of Churches recognized the disturbing relationships between environmental problems and social injustices when it appealed at its 1983 assembly for serious reflection on the meaning of peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. In her book, *New Creation: Christian Feminism and the Renewal of the Earth*, Catharina Halkes directly responds to this appeal. She attempts to promote a meaningful dialogue about these themes by reflecting on images of “woman” and “nature” in Western culture, for she believes these images have contributed to the domination of both. Her book aims “to help our contemplation of the more deepseated causes of the inequality of power between women and men and the division between nature and culture” (2), thereby disclosing some of the roots of our current ecological crisis and pointing to changes that are necessary “not only for survival” but also for living “humanly and creatively” and for leaving “our children prospects for the future” (7).

The book has two parts. Using studies from a number of disciplines, Part I focuses on images in the history of western thought that have depicted nature as a lifeless object to be dominated, women as passive and closer to nature than men, and men as creators of culture. Halkes pays particular attention to the use of these images in natural science and philosophy. She also points out connections between the domination of women and the oppression of indigenous peoples during the period in which many European countries claimed colonies.

Although the five chapters of Part II aim to be more theological (3), two of them (Chapters 8 and 9) continue the examination of western culture begun in Part I by summarizing recent developments in the natural sciences, the feminist movement, the ecology movement, eco-feminism, and deep ecology that are providing new and helpful perspectives on our relationship to nature. Halkes directly addresses theological themes in the remaining three chapters.

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Chapter 7 provides an overview of various interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 which have promoted the attitude that human beings are to dominate nature through technology. She also discusses what can hinder and what can serve the development of an adequate creation theology. She criticizes theologians who have separated nature and history, presented a transcendent God who is disconnected from nature, and overemphasized God’s redemptive activity while ignoring God’s continuous act of blessing expressed in nature’s fertility. She applauds Jürgen Moltmann’s interpretation of the Sabbath as the “feast of creation” and his trinitarian theology which “connects the God who transcends the world with the God whose living presence is in the world” (91).

In Chapter 10 she sketches her own theological anthropology. She claims both female and male are made in God’s image and are called to be “God’s representatives” who “preserve and

keep watch over the garden” and who “see to it that justice is done to everything and everyone” (132). She believes that Christ sets in motion a new life in the Spirit which strives for “equal relationships between men and women, between whites and nonwhites, between rich and poor” (141). She denounces forms of domination promoted by our “culture of violence,” criticizes prescribed gender roles, and emphasizes that both men and women are called to create culture and that both belong to nature.

Halkes characterizes Chapter 11, the final chapter, as a “utopian fantasy” which provides new images of human beings and nature. She highlights her view of men and women outlined in the previous chapter and, relying on the work of Sallie McFague, presents an image of the world as God’s body. She claims the effectiveness of this image depends on the willingness of human beings to bear their responsibility and be “God’s co-workers and partners” who treat “the whole of creation respectfully and carefully” (154).

For those who have never explored western images of women and nature and ways that their domination is interconnected, this book offers an excellent review of insights from important studies (such as those by Sherry Ornter, Carolyn Merchant, C. P. MacCormack, Evelyn Fox Keller, Ynestra King, and Susan Griffen). It also introduces the contribution of theologians (such as Moltmann, McFague, and Gerard Liedke) to more adequate views of human beings, God, and nature. In this way the book provides essential material for promoting meaningful dialogue about peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

However, if one is already familiar with literature about the interrelationships between the domination of women and nature and with recent theological studies that have addressed issues raised by environmental problems, then the book will be disappointing. The chapters are disjointed and do not build a well-grounded theological position that could truly contribute to the current theological debate. Her view of God and the world echoes the insights of Moltmann and McFague. Further, her section on theological anthropology addresses important themes but not in great enough detail to deepen our understanding of human beings and their relation to nature. She also does not adequately clarify many of her claims, such as that human beings are “God’s co-workers and partners” (154), they are “co-creators” (91, 131), and they “cooperate” in God’s work of salvation (131). Other features of the book are also disappointing, such as her brief, narrow summary of eco-feminism and her generalizations concerning the inadequacies of Lutheran and Reformed theology.

Despite these weaknesses, the book provides a significant contribution by reviewing some of the important work that has already been done in several disciplines concerning images of women and nature and the connection of these images to the present ecological crisis. Halkes thereby highlights crucial themes that need to be taken into account in any study of the roots of our environmental problems and in any theological response to them.

Marcia Bunge
Luther College
Decorah, Iowa

THE ABUSE OF POWER: A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM, by James Newton Poling.
Nashville: Abingdon, 1991. Pp. 224. \$15.95 (paper).

The Abuse of Power is necessary reading for any of us who are in positions of authority in

the church. This book adds depth to the diagnosis of the problem of sexual abuse and reveals a hopeful prognosis. James Poling recognizes that gender, race, and class are interrelated in this discussion of power not only within society but also within our own locational perspectives. As an empowered white male in this society, Poling examines his own potential for violence and abuse of power over others. His approach offers a fresh awareness to the current literature.

He confronts sexual abuse of women and children as a problem not only for families and society but also for the church because of its complicity in silencing the voices of the victims. He courageously addresses the tough “theological” questions that arise from the experience of victims. The power of this book is its refusal to comply in the usual silence of both the church and academic theologians about the complex questions raised by the many victims of sexual violence. Poling empowers those silenced voices by giving their questions theological credibility.

He integrates case histories of both victims and perpetrators with the theories of process thought, feminist thought, psychoanalysis, and African-American sociology

and theology to focus upon power and the abuse of power “as it is manifested in sexual violence toward women and children” (20). His study reflects the methods of practical theology which use the practice of ministry as the ground from which question about the relationship between God and the world result. “A hermeneutical principle in this research is that those with the least power can reveal the most about the nature of the good and unmask the abuse of power” (14). This principle validates and authorizes the voices of those whom the church and society have silenced. However, it is precisely these persons whose voices are less powerful that can teach the church about the resilience of the human spirit and the hope of life itself.

The first section of the book analyzes power in its ideal, abusive, and redemptive forms. Poling draws upon the work of the process thinker, Bernard Loomer, for a theological analysis of power in its ideal form. Within Loomer’s framework, power is roughly identified with life itself. From a process-relational perspective, power is identified as the creative energy that constitutes our relationships. The nature of power cannot be understood apart from the relationships that are formed. The abuse of power is “motivated by fear and the resulting desire to control the power of life” (27). The web of relationships in an abusive family typifies the circumstances created by an abuse of power. The parents, who are in a privileged position, violate the relationship of trust with their children. Poling defines this as “unilateral power,” that is, when one attempts to produce effects upon another while sustaining only minimal impact on the self. Finally, the courageous and inspiring witness of survivors of sexual violence is the key to the redemption of power. Through the resistance to the abuse of power, God’s power and the resilience of the human spirit can work to restore trust in the broken relationships.

The most powerful and helpful section of Poling’s book follows this brief analysis of power. He utilizes the case study of a survivor of sexual violence to give an “interior picture of the suffering that comes from the abuse of power and the resilient hope in the human heart” (35). Her story is significant not only in its painful and profound details but also for the fact that much of her abuse occurred within the confines of the church. This case story intensifies the questions that the church must face about its complicity in the abuse of women and children. Poling follows the case study of a survivor with stories of recovering perpetrators. This is a significant advance in the work about sexual violence. From the work with these men, Poling examines

some of the conditions of their lives that lead to such acts of violence.

The final section of the book examines the abuse of power from personal, social, and religious dimensions. The most valuable contribution in these sections is Poling's use of Bernard Loomer's category of ambiguity. In order to continue healing, the survivor must face the continued tensions of life between good and evil, love and hate, life and death. Poling notes that "the ability to sustain the self in the midst of contradictions is crucial in order to sustain the higher values" (111). At the end of this section, Jesus is offered as a model of the relational, ambiguous self. God reveals through Jesus the full potential of the human being who doesn't avoid the ambiguity of life but is enmeshed in it. Living in this kind of ambiguity requires "a strong network of support and patience to live with uncertainty" (120).

Along with feminist/womanist theologians and others, Poling joins the voices of those who raise the problem of God's ambiguity and of the community that worships this God. Victims of sexual abuse often experience a crisis of faith not only in their family and in themselves but also in the God in whom they have placed their trust. Poling claims that "abuse of power is a theological problem." He takes great care to explore the texts in scripture, theological doctrines like the atonement, and the silence of the church towards the cries of victims. His solution draws upon Loomer's notion of an ambiguous God who can fully embrace the depths of good and evil "without losing integrity" (182). My question is whether or not this is a God that victims can trust. While it is true that we need new reformulations about the understanding of God, we cannot merely redefine the God

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problem and expect it to go away, How does the victim know that this God will not again betray them? The question of trusting God is one that isn't always solved by theological redefinition but by letting the questions, cries, and laments of the victims ring in the ears of those who don't want to hear them. Too often we run in with theological solutions that silence the complexity, poignancy, and honesty of the victims' cries. It would be unfair to say that Poling has run this risk, but whether or not this God of ambiguous stature is helpful must remain the decision of the survivors' voices.

Ann Pederson
Augustana College
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

THE SECULARIZATION OF SIN, by Richard K. Fenn. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. Pp. 208.

"Are [modern people] any less tormented than those who still rake through the remains to see what signs there may be of life among the dead? Is our search of the underworld less filled with agony than the search of those in antiquity?" (131). Richard K. Fenn thinks not. He asserts what he calls an "outrageous hypothesis," that modern society is marked by the fear that it will have to pay for its self-assertion, luxury, and greed. Fenn's characterization of modern society is made by comparing it to primitive cultures; specifically, the way these cultures were absolved of their guilt. In ancient times, both individuals and society were purified through dramatic rituals

performed by “priests.” Sin had not yet been “secularized.” The actions of the priest were sufficient to appease the gods and restore the harmonies of the universe. Fenn’s thesis is that the purifying ritual formerly carried out by priests is now laid at the feet of the individual. He blames this phenomenon on “the Protestant Reformation [that] has given the individual the responsibility and powers of the priest to offer up a properly purified sacrifice to God” (147).

Fenn is a professor of Christianity and Society at Princeton Theological Seminary. His argument is made using a psychological hermeneutic; he seldom departs from the language of depth psychology. Terms such as *desire* and *debt* are not generic but are technical terms denoting the operations of the unconscious. If the reader takes the time to ascertain the precise meaning of these terms, Fenn’s argument is much clearer. Even so, the ambiguity of such terms makes his argument difficult to grasp. Fenn makes no apology for his method; the reality of the unconscious is assumed instead of explained. In his defense, such an attempt is beyond the scope of and tangential to this work. Although the sometimes tedious and confusing use of these terms and the resultant journey through the unconscious may not appeal to every reader, the effort is worthwhile. Fenn’s critique of the church, that it is binding the sins of God’s people instead of loosing them is a worthy challenge to the preacher and pastor, as well as the theologian. Even though he never explicitly uses the law/gospel distinction, Fenn’s concern is that the church’s preaching and teaching is characterized more by a law that kills rather than the gospel that gives life.

For Fenn, sin has become secularized, not so much because the acts that are considered sinful have changed, but through the way in which sin is absolved. The absolution is no longer offered by the priest but by individuals themselves. Fenn calls one’s sense of sin the accrual of psychological indebtedness. It is produced as follows: Desire, a universal psychological trait, “seeks the calm satisfaction of the womb, the end of striving” (148). The womb imagery is used because it is the place where all of one’s needs are met. In the conscious world, desire can take many forms, such as the seeking of tenure, or the guarantee of one’s place in the institution. A facetious student might say that once this desire is achieved, there is an end to all striving. The author calls a surplus of desire a debt, or unsatisfied longing. Since this debt can never be paid off, “no matter what one’s pleasures or accomplishments, no matter what one’s standing in life” (98), it must somehow be discharged if the unsatisfied desire is to be relieved. Fenn argues that the dramatic rituals of primitive societies were effective

means by which debt was discharged. The rituals of those ancient priests appeased the gods and restored the harmonies of the universe. According to the author, modern society is not so adept at forgiving debts. It has diversified the payment of psychic debt to the point that one’s payment can be made by walking down any number of avenues that promote societal good or self-actualization.

This modern system appears to have its charms. It is diversified, and far less rigid than the former sacrificial system. In our market economy, the term “diversification” has a positive connotation, that of a less risky, more secure investment. On the contrary, Fenn takes the position that diversification in the way one can make psychological payments is dangerous. At risk is the placing of an undue burden on the individual:

There is a cost to be paid for this modern form of innovation. Each individual is expected to have unique gifts, to be original, and to find words or gestures that enable his or her personal gift not only to come to light but also to serve some recognizable social purpose. No longer is the virtuoso...the only one expected to develop such gifts; the entire society is dedicated to the principle of developing each individual's capacities. (59)

The modern sacrificial system requires a "virtuoso" performance of unattainable heights. All are "priests," and all are responsible for society's purification, a legacy that Fenn blames on the Protestant reformation.

The mark of our "reformed," modern society is that its citizens have not been forgiven their sins. Using Fenn's terminology, they have not been "purified." He calls this process the movement of the task of purification from the sanctuary to the kitchen:

The modern individual accepts the obligation to purify the self, to engage in personal growth, and to fulfill his or her potential, which are the generic obligations of the modern self....The prize, however, remains a thinly disguised maternal milieu: a place where one's needs are met promptly without struggle or question. (148)

Fenn argues that the church is ineffective in absolving individuals of the impossible task of purification. He states that the church is not only ineffective in absolving this debt, it actually adds to the individual's burden. One's desire, whether for tenure, or to settle accounts with the dead, is easily converted into ecclesiastical duties. According to the author, the church is guilty of promoting a "new asceticism: not only self-discipline and restrained consumption but also a commitment to realize the self over time" in which "the emergence and recognition of the true self is subjected to a process of continual development" (187). In other words, in our secular society, one's sin is absolved only when one has truly "realized" one's true self. Given the plethora of self-help books on the market, the desire for individuals to "find" themselves is apparent. Fenn calls on the church to refrain from placing this unnecessary burden on its people.

The unexamined exaltation of primitive ritual is the major weakness of Fenn's argument. Although he admits the difficulty in establishing the psychological effectiveness of ancient rites, he relies heavily on this truth in his critique of modern culture. Throughout the book, primitive culture is the foil to modern culture. The psychological good that was done for primitive individuals and their societies in ancient rites is such an integral dimension of Fenn's argument that it needs to be more definitively established. For example, his assertion that a debt to desire was satisfied in the traditional potlatch ceremony begs the question, "Was it satisfied?" Moreover, there is a kind of sacramentalism in Fenn's argument, a belief that ritual has magical powers to solve profound problems. This belief is yet another important aspect of his argument that is left unexplained.

Still, Fenn's often prophetic, sometimes mystical, though not always thorough, voice is worth hearing. His solution to the "new asceticism" is his proclamation of the way God's grace frees us from bondage. In his conclusion, Fenn strikes a chord that resonates with the preaching of the gospel. Though writing from the halls of the seminary, his voice is that of the depth psychologist who has a profound sense of the good

news that needs to be heard if the members of modern society are to be released from the obligation to find one's true self or to create a heaven on earth. In calling for us to acknowledge our original sin, he cries out for an end to the unattainable goals of a modern works-righteousness, an end to the sacrifices we make for the goal of fulfilling our dreams or those of our culture.

Tim Tostengard
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Spokane, Washington

NEW ADAM: THE FUTURE OF MASCULINE SPIRITUALITY, by Philip Culbertson.
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992. Pp. 175.

Philip Culbertson, Episcopal priest and professor of Pastoral Theology at the University of the South (Sewanee, Tennessee) has written an unblinkingly honest and genuinely hopeful book about men. Beginning with a sociological-psychological analysis of men's problems, he quickly moves to a description of "the new Adam" in Hebrew scripture and rabbinic tradition: the possibility, realized only in community, of a profound change in personal character marked by spiritual discipline, a stronger sense of one's social relationships, and connectedness to nature.

However, before he delineates the good news for men, he treats us to a series of chapters on the bad news. Following the cue of biblical scholar Phyllis Trible who has unpacked a series of Old Testament "texts of terror" for women, Culbertson does a corresponding job with three texts of terror for men. These three chapters are, indeed, sobering, for they throw "the harshest analytical light...upon the bankruptcy of many of our traditionally inherited male assumptions and definitions" (44). At the same time, these chapters are a wonderful treat of careful biblical exposition and extraordinarily fresh, insightful interpretation.

The story of King David and his son Absalom unmasks the emotional dysfunctionality of father-son relationships in which sons are consumed by the neglect, the emotional distance, and the authoritarianism of their fathers. In the relationship between Abraham and Ishmael we see the unintended victimization and alienation of a son by a father caught between two families and trying to cope with his own emotional paralysis. The story of Jonathan and David might seem to be more hopeful for men, offering as it does an example of emotionally vulnerable male-male friendship. However, there is terror here, too, for it is also a tale of society's misunderstanding, mistrusting, and fearing intimate bonding between sensitive men.

Culbertson's hopefulness finds its biblical grounding in a chapter on Jesus' friendship with men. Admitting that there is too little in Jesus' recorded teachings on which to base a comprehensive philosophy of Christian friendship, the author nevertheless finds in his behavior two sources of guidance. One is the values that Jesus exhibited, such as compassion, integrity, flexibility, humility, cooperativeness, and dependence on a community of men. The other guideline is Jesus' bravery in facing the new creation that God sets before humanity in spite of his awareness that fundamental human change is enormously difficult. (Tellingly, in this discussion of friendship Culbertson finds himself drawing on Aristotle and Emerson; there is precious little on friendship in our male-dominated theological tradition.)

The last third of the book is the author's reflections on the problems and possibilities of new male spirituality. Playing out the connections between sexuality and spirituality (even when those connections are negative), Culbertson first identifies twelve "masculine stumbling blocks to prayer." Most traditional (read "patriarchal male-shaped") spiritual disciplines are based on individualistic models of achievement and ladders of success. Hence, they are not of great help to us men in shedding our acquired impediments to a richer spirituality such as our fear of the feminine, our emotional constipation, our emphasis on doing over being, our need to control spontaneity, and the distrust of our bodies. Culbertson hopes that in shedding our phallic linearity we might learn to pray "in circles," exploring a far more communal

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spirituality than most men now know. And for men seeking transformation from oppressive and oppressing gender roles, spiritual community now must be particularly formed with other men—sensitive men who dare to sing, tell their own stories, and sit together in silence.

The concluding chapter offers a marvelously insightful critique of Robert Bly's masculinity model, "Iron John." As an alternative fairy tale (also found in the Brothers Grimm), Culbertson suggests the tale of "The White Snake." The snake itself symbolizes the paradoxical power of penile flaccidity, and the young servant in the story comes to terms with his relaxed identity as a spiritual person in the community of other persons and creatures.

In the burgeoning literature coming from "the men's movement," there is precious little that addresses the spirituality of Christian men. Culbertson's book is a rich addition to a presently small handful of volumes. Admittedly, like many sermons, it is longer on sin than on salvation. He spends more time analyzing men's problems than delineating the "hows" of our change. In fairness to the author, however, this may be simply where we presently are in the movement for men's transformation. One of the legacies of masculinist language (the generic "mankind," etc.) is that in taking the male human being as normative, we who are men have been long blinded to our distinctive experiences *as men*. In the past two decades since we have begun to develop some consciousness about this, we have focussed more on "what's wrong with us?" than on "what are the dynamics of our change?"

Culbertson honestly acknowledges that presently we cannot see clearly what the new Adam will look like. But we do have some indication of the values that the new man will reflect, and he describes them well. Further—and this is a note Culbertson strikes repeatedly—we know that male transformation will happen only in community. While I would have hoped for more probing of the dynamics of men's transformation, perhaps the author's honest reticence is realistic.

I would have liked even more personal self-disclosure throughout the book than Culbertson chose to share. The passion with which he writes makes it obvious that this is a deeply personal book for him, though the direct revelations occur mainly in his introduction and in several remarkable pages on forming a men's group. Admittedly, for most of us men-in-process, it is still easier to talk *about* personal vulnerability than to do it.

I also wish that the author had taken greater pains to include gay and bisexual men in his audience, and single heterosexual men as well. I do believe that his intent is inclusive. Happily, there is a virtual absence of homophobia exhibited in the book and, indeed, Culbertson gives a positive biblical grounding for affirming homosexual orientation. On the other hand, too

frequently he seems to assume that his readers are all married heterosexuals, e.g., “A man may begin his journey to change by trying to understand the woman to whom he is married....” (132). Had he more consciously included gay men in his focus, he might have grappled more directly with the anti-gay (as well as anti-woman) basis of so much contemporary masculinity.

But my caveats are few and my praise is manifold. Culbertson is masterful in his suggestive biblical interpretations. And he has both the grace and the pedagogical wisdom not to impose his own interpretation immediately upon the reader. I found myself led through the complexities of these several Hebrew stories in a way that compelled me to grapple with the texts myself, and only after that would I learn the author’s own conclusions.

The book is strongly pro-feminist in both tone and content. Culbertson knows that men need to do their own work in men-only groups. He knows that men’s spiritual development is not identical to that of women, precisely because of our gender role shaping, and possibly because of our sexual biology, too. But the critical lessons we men must learn from feminism are abundantly present in these pages.

Implicitly, without naming it, Culbertson leans strongly (appropriately so, in my judgment) toward social constructionism in his interpretation of masculinity. He is critical of Bly’s essentialism (the notion that there is an essential “Iron John” masculin-

ity somehow buried in each male, an essence awaiting discovery). At the same time, he deals openly with the distinctiveness of male genital experience which is, indeed, important to our spirituality. Yet, he knows well that anatomy is not destiny, for the meanings we have given to our biological experience are susceptible to being transformed.

Culbertson is well-read in the current literature of the men’s movement, and he incorporates a vast number of insights from other authors. His scholarship demonstrates the communal commitment of which he speaks, and his bibliography of men’s studies resources is both impressive and useful. Furthermore, his eight pages on “Beginning a Men’s Group” are exceptionally wise as well as revealing about the process experienced in his own group. In this one brief section he has provided the most helpful guidance I have seen not only for fledgling men’s groups but also for groups long in existence.

This is a book written by a feminist-sensitive man who knows well the perils of distorted masculinity, and yet who enjoys being a male—especially one in the process of transformation. Philip Culbertson knows that the Hebrew text about Yahweh’s name is far too static when translated “I Am who I Am.” This author helps men to claim a more hopeful and dynamic translation for themselves as well as for God: “I am in the process of becoming what I will be for you tomorrow” (135).

James B. Nelson
United Theological Seminary
New Brighton, Minnesota