



**WOMEN IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: A FEMINIST LIBERATION PERSPECTIVE**, by Ivoni Richter Reimer, translated by Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995. Pp. xxvi + 302.

Persons who pass over this book assuming that it represents special interests and a narrow perspective will miss an important book on Acts. This study of selected narratives in the Acts of the Apostles makes important contributions to Luke-Acts scholarship and provides valuable material for the parish preacher and teacher.

The book includes an introduction on method followed by chapters on Sapphira, Tabitha, Lydia, the Philippian slave, Priscilla, and “Women Mentioned Briefly, or Not at All.” In each chapter, the author reconstructs the narratives apart from patriarchal biases through careful exegesis of literary and material evidence (knowledge of Greek is helpful but not necessary). The results, in each case, are fresh readings of the narratives and engaging ideas for teaching and proclamation.

The chapter on Lydia provides a good example of Ivoni Richter Reimer’s work. Lydia has a popular image among Christians as a wealthy woman, and as a dealer in purple cloth and apparent head of a household, probably a widow. The author concludes the following: Lydia belonged to a “working class,” likely the class of freed slaves; the place of the gathering on the sabbath was a synagogue (16:13) and the gathering was a regular Jewish worship service; and the hospitality shown by Lydia in inviting the traveling missionaries to stay at her home was a subversive act involving risk.

The author disagrees with scholars who assume Lydia was a woman of high standing because she was a godfearer and/or because Acts mentions elsewhere women of high standing who become believers (17:12). Richter Reimer argues that the godfearers were not a socially defined class, and women attracted to Judaism were not exclusively upperclass women. Her arguments are based on thorough investigation of inscriptions, extra-biblical literary evidence, and, of course, the biblical text (300). There is a scholarly debate concerning the meaning of “proseuch” usually translated “house of prayer.” Is it synonymous with “synagogue” or not? Not all will agree with the author’s conclusions, but her support for translating “proseuch” as “synagogue” in 16:13 is impressive. She also uncovers some apparent sexism and misunderstanding of early Judaism among scholars who claim that a group of women could not possibly be conducting a formal sabbath synagogue service (91-92).

Lydia’s hospitality is not in question. But it makes a difference whether we imagine a commonplace invitation and the accommodations provided by a wealthy woman, or the act of a lower class working woman who offers safe shelter for Jewish missionaries in a Roman colony. The author observes the conclusion of v. 15: “She prevailed upon us.” This, she argues, echoes other offers of shelter where there is a hint of danger, where the guest may be at risk and, therefore, the one who offers hospitality as well (see Luke 24:28, for example). According to

Ivoni Richter Reimer, hospitality, in these cases, means solidarity: “In Lydia’s case, the pressure she applies is a sign of solidarity” (124). The author’s support for this interpretation includes convincing evidence from both biblical and extra-biblical sources.

The portrayal of Lydia which emerges from Richter Reimer’s exegesis is in con-

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trast to the Lydia of traditional Christian interpretations. The same can be said about the women featured in each chapter. One need not agree with the author at every point to gain some new insights or be challenged to rethink some suppositions about these narratives in Acts.

I wish to call attention to two particular strengths of this book not already mentioned which I think enhance its credibility. A quote from the Lydia chapter serves as illustration:

It was not only because Lydia was a Christian, and not only from the moment when she became a Christian, that she revealed her gratitude through hospitality; for Lydia is not the first in this field, nor is she the exception. As a woman who reveres God, she stands within a tradition in which non-Jewish women adhered to Judaism, practicing its way of life and also, when the situation required it, supporting and sheltering Jewish women and men in danger. (124)

First, the author consistently debates with feminist interpreters as well as with dominant white male scholarship. This indicates the mainstreaming of feminist scholarship and its diversity. There are many feminist perspectives. In the quote above, she departs from a tendency among some feminist interpreters to lift up the women named in the New Testament as “first” or exceptional, and often at the expense of Judaism. (The matter of Christian feminist anti-Judaism has received attention in a number of journal articles.) And, unlike some interpreters, she does not find it necessary to “redeem” all women as model characters. See the chapter on Sapphira, for example.

Second, she avoids a common tendency in liberation interpretations of the New Testament to liberate Christianity from Judaism. Quite frankly, nothing about the author’s social location or method led me to anticipate I would not encounter all too familiar negative images of Judaism as a backdrop for the emergence of Christianity. Ivoni Richter Reimer is from Brazil; she studied and wrote in Germany. Her work is based primarily on the German scholar-

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ship which characteristically reads Acts as a document of Christian supercessionism. Yet she consistently reads these narratives about women *within* the context of first-century Judaism rather than placing them over against their social and religious context. The quote above is a good example of this—a natural interpretation apart from an expressed agenda.

The only limitation of this book, from the perspective of an American audience, is that her dialogue partners are for the most part German biblical scholars, and many of the sources are quite dated. The author is well acquainted with feminist scholarship in this country, but apparently not with current Lukan scholarship.

I think this is an important book in the study of Acts. it is an excellent representative of a

feminist liberation interpretation, but its usefulness extends beyond readers who are drawn to that perspective. Scholars, teachers, and preachers will find insight and inspiration grounded in solid scholarship and commitment to the gospel.

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**THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY**, by Rodney Stark. Princeton: Princeton University, 1996. Pp. 246. \$24.95.

There is no book quite like this one on early Christianity. Although other books incorporate insights from sociology, this is the first one written by a sociologist exclusively from the vantage point of that discipline. He explores the numerical growth of the church up to the fifth century, women, social classes, martyrs, organization, and teaching—all with a view toward explaining the rise of Christianity through statistical analysis, laws of probability, and a fresh reading of the sources. It can irritate some readers and surprise others, but all will find here a highly readable, stimulating, and plausible story of the early church.

Based upon our knowledge of modern growth of social movements and ancient texts, Christianity grew at the rate of 40% every decade (similar to modern Mormons) so that by 300 A.D. there were approximately six million believers or 10% of the population. Constantine's conversion, the author insists, was not the catalyst for the growth of Christianity but rather it was his acknowledgment that the church was already a powerful force in the empire.

As to growth by conversion of pagans, the author calls upon numerous modern studies on conversion to suggest that the church grew rapidly primarily through contacts with family and friends (Mormons gain only one convert in a thousand house calls, but one out of two through friendships). Following a steady and natural growth rate, by 350 A.D. the church numbered 33 million which was 56% of the empire.

Whereas earlier historians have suggested that Christianity first attracted the lower classes, recent writers insist that the early converts were primarily from the middle and upper class, a conclusion Stark supports. People do not embrace a new faith if they are content with an old one, an axiom of sociological research. Stark goes on to show from studies in antiquity that it was the upper class in Rome that was skeptical and disenchanted with pagan religion, a conclusion amply supported by ancient texts. "Paul's missionary efforts had their greatest success among the middle and upper classes" (45). We know that from early days Christians had friends in high places; indeed, Joanna (Luke 8:1-3) was the wife of one of Herod's officials; emperor Commodus's mistress, Marcia, was a Christian; Diocletian's wife and daughter were Christians.

A large pool of converts came from Judaism, not only in the first century but well into the fifth. Another sociological maxim is that religious movements grow because their members continue to form new relationships with outsiders. It was by way of Hellenistic Jews that Christians made the bridge with the gentile world, and a mission to the Jews remained a high priority for centuries. This explains Chrysostom's anti-Jewish polemics in the early fifth century, for it reveals that church and synagogue were still greatly intertwined. Stark adduces archeological evidence to support his conclusions.

Two disasters in the empire, devastat-

ing epidemics in 154 A.D. and 251 A.D., carried off a large percentage of the population. Stark suggests that the Christian responses to this calamity did much to commend their faith to the pagans. "Christianity offered explanation and comfort. Even more important, Christian doctrine provided a prescription for action" (82). Through mutual care and nurture, Christian mortality was less than pagan. Using data from both the third and the twentieth centuries, Stark concludes that as a result of these epidemics, by 260 A.D. there was one Christian for every four pagans in the city of Rome, whereas before it had been one for every eight.

One of the book's most fascinating discussions is on the role of women in the early church. Simply put, pagans devalued women whereas Christians saw them as equals. In the pagan world there was always a shortage of women due to infanticide and the marginalization of girls. In Christianity there were more women than men, and one way in which the church grew was simply by outproducing pagans. Not only was infanticide or abortion a sin, but procreation was seen as the only legitimate reason for sexual intercourse.

In discussing the martyrs Stark first offers data on choices people make when risk is involved, which includes peer pressure, support groups, and above all, rewards. Unlike most sociologists, he concludes that Christian martyrs were eminently rational in their decision, and that the example of the martyrs was another factor in the growth of the church. In his conclusion he points to the weakness of paganism as another reason for the church's growth, but more significantly to Christianity's "central doctrines" of a loving God, charity, and virtue. "It was the religion's particular doctrines that permitted Christianity to be among the most sweeping and successful revitalization movements in history" (211).

This is a book unlike any other, providing a vivid and unconventional account of the rise of Christianity. The author admits that his conclusions are still open to question, but using the best sociological data available both from studies in antiquity and modern times, his suggestions appear highly plausible and credible. It is already becoming a book that many people are talking about.

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**REACHING OUT WITHOUT DUMBING DOWN: A THEOLOGY FOR THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY CULTURE**, by Marva J. Dawn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. Pp. xi + 316.

The heat and ardor in Marva Dawn's book are reflected in the impassioned title and maintained in the first four chapters. Thereafter the temperature drops somewhat, though the intensity never really lets up. Dawn's primary concern is the integrity of worship in the contemporary church. She is convinced that the practice of worship has been severely compromised, primarily because of bad habits engendered by television. She considers the destructive nature of television to have spawned an environment in which entertainment sets the agenda for worship leaders. But Dawn refuses to give in to these tendencies and offers an argument which is summarized in the book's title: *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*.

Her jeremiad against television is uncompromising, seeing the medium as responsible for much of what is wrong in contemporary American society. Drawing heavily on Neil Postman's work, Dawn describes the dire consequences of television. "As its influence materialized, television revolutionized the structure of our thought...television pictures the world in rapidly shifting images that destroy all the virtues formerly associated with mature discourse" (23). It follows for Dawn that television has helped bring about a destruction of our thinking, a subversion of familial life, and a societal loss of a spiritual center.

Such a loss has resulted in the modern compulsive need to be entertained. Of special concern to the author is the effect that this entertainment mentality is having on worship. Throughout the book this concern is manifest. Typical of Dawn's passion in this matter is the following: "To attract peo-

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ple from our culture, some Christian churches depend upon glitz and spectacle and technological toys, rather than on the strong substantive declaration of the Word of God and its authoritative revelation for our lives. This tendency is blatantly demonstrated by an emphasis on 'Entertainment Evangelism'" (50).

Having gauged the temperature of the waters in this book, one might be inclined to pull the plug if one disagrees with Dawn's line of argument. Or, if one agrees with Dawn's point of view, one might dive in gleefully to see how many oxen are gored. Reading on steadily, however, has its rewards, for as the book unfolds, a surprising tone of moderation sets in. For example, there are observations spread throughout the narrative that have a ring of authenticity for anyone who is concerned about worship and contemporary society. With a fine sense of paradox Dawn cogently observes that "Music that shapes community will use many styles to invite greater inclusivity, but when the gospel is heard therein and obeyed it will ultimately prove subversive to the wider community" (178). Dawn likewise offers a provocative pensee about worship when she notes: "In a society doing all it can to make people cozy, somehow we must convey the truth that God's Word, rightly read and heard, will shake us up. It will kill us" (206).

The book does have a measure of unevenness, which derives, perhaps, from the heat of its passion. Too often an argument proceeds from personal and anecdotal experience, giving the narrative a kind of gossip quality. Just as often, however, the personal experience that precedes a line of thought does lend an air of authenticity. When Dawn launches into a discussion about the negative impact of applause during worship, for example, she draws on an experience when some young girls were obviously ill-prepared and sang badly off-key; nonetheless, they received a round of applause by the congregation (157). Such anecdotal argument appears frequently and, while illustrative, does tend to impair the validity of her overall argument.

Another practice which lessens the impact of her narrative is extensive over-quotation. There are so many lengthy quotations from works by Neil Postman, Leander Keck, Pat Keifert, and David Wells, that one senses these are book reviews in disguise, being pressed into service. It is sometimes hard to tell where Postman or Keck leave off and Dawn picks up. On the other hand, such amply quoted material does demonstrate the points in her argument. It further whets the reader's appetite to find these books and read them as well.

In spite of the harsh edge to some of her argument and the unevenness of the narrative, the book has a propulsive quality, making it hard to put down. The term "dumbing down"

appears as a *cantus firmus*, something like a post horn calling the pack to the hunt. Recognizing the power of death even in the church, Dawn sounds the clarion: "When we allow our society to force us to 'dumb down' the Church, we kill theological training, inhibit the forming of character, prevent appreciation for the rich gifts of the Church's past. Most of all we miss the infinitely faceted grandeur of God and destroy the awe and wonder that characterized worship before God became only a 'buddy' ill-conceived and only subjectively experienced" (55). Later, in chapter 11 Dawn takes up the matter even more forthrightly, without flinching, taking on church growth and other contemporary idolatries.

There are many parts of Dawn's discussion that might bear fruit in any church group that is concerned about worship. For instance, in chapter 4 she talks about worship as a subversive act, framing her observations in helpful dialectic terms: tradition and reformation; truth and love; social change and counterculturalism; thought and feeling. These tensions provide a thoughtful framework for conversation as well as for worship planning. Elsewhere, Dawn is quite pastoral, even irenic, when she offers insights into the various parts of the liturgy. Her discussion of the "passing of the peace" (247-248), for example, is very helpful, as she directs that act away from conviviality toward God's presence.

Dawn is insistent that authentic worship should always have three purposes: God must always be the subject in worship; worship must form Christian character; worship must shape the Christian commu-

nity. Eschewing immediacy and superficiality, Dawn believes there is a workable and faithful alternative for worship in the contemporary church. "We could plan worship that keeps God as the subject, that nurtures the character of the believer, that forms the Christian community to be a people who reach out in God's purposes to the world. Our worship could reach out without dumbing down the faith..." (304). Anyone interested in a book that sizzles and pops while probing important matters of worship and church life might well enjoy (and be challenged by) Marva Dawn's passionate attempt to articulate a theology of worship for the turn-of-the-century culture.

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**PREACHING CHRIST TODAY: THE GOSPEL AND SCIENTIFIC THINKING**, by Thomas F. Torrance. Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmans, 1994. Pp. 71.

T. F. Torrance, professor emeritus of Christian Dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh, has presented us with two addresses which represent his mature thinking. Those familiar with Torrance's work will immediately recognize the close connection between the title of this book and its subtitle; the content of genuine Christian preaching (bound as it is to the Nicene *homoousion* and to the hypostatic union) has anticipated important dimensions of, and can be intelligibly advanced in light of, the contemporary revolution in the nature of scientific inquiry. For years now, Prof. Torrance has through the most rigorous analyses attempted to navigate back

and forth between Athanasius, Calvin, and Earth, and scientists such as James Clerk Maxwell, Albert Einstein, and Michael Polanyi in order to show that thinking scientifically means being faithful to the object of one's concern in such a way that we come under the compelling claims of its intrinsic rationality, and in order to explicate what this means for Christian theology. These themes are worked over in this volume in easy-to-follow presentations; this is probably one of the best introductory works to Torrance's central theological project.

In "Preaching Christ Today" (originally delivered to the Scottish Church Theology Society), Torrance addresses three crucial issues related to preaching as we seek to be faithful to the revelation of God in Christ: the unity of the kerygmatic and didactic material in the gospels, the unbroken relation between the humanity of Jesus and God, and the cross of Christ. In some quarters of our distinguished academy, Torrance is dismissed as a Barthian holdover hopelessly out of touch with contemporary exegetical and theological concerns. Here, however, he demonstrates that he is well aware of the game, and gives us good reason to suspect that it is much of the religion academy that is out of step with the most profound advances in the way we have come to understand our universe of space and time. The whole modern business of tearing apart the theological Christ from the historical Jesus is really dependent upon an outmoded Newtonian concept of time which rules out any possibility of God's interaction with us in history. This way of thinking motors the nearly unquestioned distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*, a dualism which does violence to the gospels' portrayal of Christ, in which the historical and theological are given to us as a unity. The way in which the empirical and theoretical factors are wedded together in the gospels actually anticipates the findings of contemporary physics, in which empirical and conceptual ingredients cannot be separated. Indeed, Torrance says, it is only for "extraneous dogmatic reasons" that certain scholars have shorn from Jesus those objectionable theological elements in the evangelists' accounts, and have attributed them to the later activity of the early Christian community.

Torrance also realizes that, perhaps paradoxically, the very thing so prized by some of those same scholars—Jesus' humanity—can be preserved only by stressing the unbroken relation between Jesus and God. In other words, tear Jesus out of the revelatory context in which he is pre-

sented, and accommodationists of all stripes come home to roost! Jesus is inevitably reduced to an empty symbol into which we project our own fantasies or interpret in terms of our own self-understanding or culture. Just a glance at the history of Christian thought will confirm that insight. Torrance's emphasis on oneness in *being* between Jesus and God also supports their oneness in *act* in Torrance's exposition of the "very center of the Gospel," the cross of Christ, in which God has penetrated "into the deepest depths of our wickedness and violence and taken them all upon himself in order to judge them and redeem us from their tyranny over us" (28). However, concentration on this radical New Testament notion of substitution compels us to recognize Christ in our place (in the sense of 'for us') not only on the cross, but also Christ in our place "in all our human life and activity before God" (30). Thus in confessing that "the life I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God" we refer primarily to Christ's faith laying hold of us, and only secondarily to that faith evoked in us. In preaching unconditional forgiveness, Torrance advises, we need to remain true to the radical character of this substitutionary role, so that total

judgment and total forgiveness are proclaimed whether people believe or not—to do less is to throw people back onto their own pitiful resources of faith. So much of our evangelism, he says, needs to be evangelized!

In the second address in this volume, “Incarnation and Atonement in the Light of Modern Scientific Rejection of Dualism” (originally given to the Theological students’ Forum at Princeton), Torrance continues his critique of those above-mentioned outmoded dualisms in which many theologians and biblical scholars are still entangled. In light of the advances in scientific thinking, Christians actually have a tremendous opportunity to advance the claims of the faith, yet many do not understand the possibilities now afforded to us, and so are quite worried about the interrelation between science and theology. In response to this confusion and anxiety, Torrance sets out three—really very pastoral—tasks in this essay. He explains, in basic terms, the nature of scientific thinking as he understands it, asks how the early church handled the problem of dualism, and finally, explores what we are to do today in light of contemporary scientific rejection of dualism.

Torrance’s understanding of scientific inquiry is summed up as follows: “In any rigorous scientific inquiry you pursue your research in any field in such a way that you seek to let the nature of the field or the nature of the object, as it progressively becomes disclosed through interrogation, control how you know about it, how you think about it, how you formulate your knowledge of it, and how you verify that knowledge of it” (45). This way of inquiry Torrance terms *kataphysic* inquiry, meaning according to nature. We must, in other words, adopt modalities of reason that are appropriate to the specific nature of whatever it is that we are investigating. With God, however, our knowing undergoes what Torrance calls an “epistemological inversion” of the ordinary knowledge relation—a *metanoia* in our thinking—since it is only through God’s gracious self-revelation that we can know him at all. Although from this explanation it is clear that the theologian and the scientist move in very different directions—the former looks from the world to its Creator; the latter, concerned with the contingent universe, does not reckon with God among his or her data—yet there *is* an overlap, since the Christian faith is concerned with God coming into space and time, without ceasing to be God. “Thus the incarnation and atonement cannot be expounded except as involving space-time coordinates” (49). In some rarefied theological circles today, that would be considered quite a claim.

Similarly to our struggles, the early church had to fight against a widely accepted *chorismos* or separation between the eternal and the earthly, the intelligible and the sensible, the effect of which was to encourage interpreting the claims of the gospel out of a crude, mythological framework. The efforts of Athanasius, especially, in his relentless exposition of the truth that in Jesus Christ God’s eternal Word has become incarnate, helped to demolish that way of understanding the gospel. But dualism at the point of christology has threat-

ened the church’s proclamation at several points in her history, with damaging consequences both epistemologically and soteriologically. Since, according to Torrance, dualistic ways of thinking have now been largely dismantled in several of the sciences, the contemporary dialogue between theology and science should be appreciated and encouraged by Christians. With respect to this dialogue Torrance leaves us with five important wide-ranging observations, among them,



notably, the importance of the recent scientific appreciation of *singularity* and how our explication of the identity of economic and immanent trinity can further the rejection of dualism in theological thinking.

*Preaching Christ Today* is a short book, but contains a wealth of vital theological and scientific insight, and bears reading a few times to capture the gist of Torrance's concerns. In closing, it might be helpful to clarify the limits of his claims, especially with respect to his rejection of "dualism." In affirming that the New Testament writers present to us a Christ in whom the historical and theological components are given together, and that this unified portrayal somehow seems to anticipate scientific advances in our own day (by way of the theory of general relativity, for example), it is still possible, of course, that the gospel accounts are simply wrong about Jesus, or that the original kerygma was in fact extensively adumbrated theologically by the later Christian communities. If I am reading Torrance correctly, however, what one *cannot* do is object to an original unity of kerygmatic and didactic material in principle, on the grounds that empirical and conceptual ingredients cannot be given together—put theologically, that God could not really have entered time and space and have spoken as the man Jesus as recorded, so that the community *must* have added theological material about the person of Jesus alien to his own preaching and, of course, unacceptable to us "moderns" with our sacred canons of historical research. Considered in this light, Torrance's rejection of dualism seems in some respects almost a modest venture, yet it still deflates much of the "scientific" cocksurety in many of the objections to the gospel accounts raised by the so-called historical-critical method. The author does not address related questions of a more literary nature, yet given Torrance's stated aims, this book can be strongly recommended on account of its fine balance of theological erudition and readability.

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**SHAME: A FAITH PERSPECTIVE**, by Robert H. Albers. Binghamton, New York: The Haworth Press, 1995. Pp. xiii + 148 (paper).

In the story of humankind, as in individual stories, shame appears early and it appears often. By the second chapter of Genesis, the concept of shame has been introduced and holds pride of place as the first cited intrapsychic determinant of attitudes and behavior. From that point on, the notion of shame appears in the scriptures hundreds of times, often with profound impact on individuals and on the course of history. Whether as remote as Adam or as recent as last week's Sunday church school class, it is difficult to imagine anyone who has not heard from some quarter those indicting words, "You should be ashamed of yourself." And for most people, those words echo in one's consciousness throughout life.

Strangely, for all its pervasiveness among people, the concept of shame has not often been addressed, and the absence of comprehensive studies and even serious attention to definitions has been particularly evident in the religious literature. Robert Albers attempts to fill the void with this thorough-going treatment of shame from the perspective of the faith community.

Perhaps we think we are more conversant on the topic of shame than we actually are because we confuse shame with its close cousin, guilt. Albers is at pains to distinguish the two.

Drawing on a number of secular sources, Albers sees guilt as that feeling state of regret resulting from an action which violates a code of conduct or an established value system. Remediation

occurs through clearly established mechanisms: confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation as the way back to full participation in community. Shame is more global in its impact on the self, encompassing one's whole being so that the feeling state becomes that of worthlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness. In such a state, the way back is made even more difficult by the inclination to hide from others so that one's worthlessness is not exposed and becomes cause for rejection.

Albers rightly points out that "given the imperfect nature of human beings, one could say that the shame experience is an inevitability for every child born into the world" (30). But it is not this garden variety shame which is his concern. Rather he focuses attention on those persons for whom the shame experience has become so deep and pervasive that it comes to define for them their whole identity. These persons, who hide in the shadows of our communities, frequently feel abandoned even by those agencies of society which propose to bring healing, and remain untouched by the rituals aimed at assuaging guilt. Among those especially prone to such a shame-based identity, Albers argues, are persons with physical defects, those with emotional disorders, social "misfits," those who have endured public defeat and have "lost face," and those who are victims of abuse and defilement by the actions of others. Specific to this treatment of shame from a faith perspective is the inclusion of those who experience a shame identity because they are made to feel "spiritually defective," i.e., to be lacking in the spiritual gifts and expressions of personal piety which are valued by the community.

As with many conditions in which the inner awareness of a problem threatens well-being, the person with a shame based identity may develop defense mechanisms. Recognition of these defenses is important because they frequently provide the only detectable signs of the underlying problem. Particular attention is given to those defenses which emerge in the faith context: perfectionism, self-righteousness, assumption of the martyr role, and control through disguised manipulation. To be sure, it would be quite wrong to assume that these characteristics always point to underlying shame, but finding them should give one pause for careful thought.

True to his intent to write from a faith perspective, Albers' work is strongest in its discussion of theological resources which address the issue of shame. By focusing on the goodness of creation and incarnational theology, it is possible to provide a powerful counterpoint to the sense of worthlessness a shame identity promotes. Further, for Christians and Jews, remembering the covenantal relationship clearly signals God's acceptance over against an inner sense of deficiency and disgust. The announcement of this acceptance in the proclamation of grace (steadfast love) is at the core of drawing the shame-identified person into renewed relationship with God and with the community. But words are not enough. Healing requires a connectedness with others whereby the words resonate not only with the intellect, but with the emotions, and a sense of acceptance is achieved. To this end, common prayer, fellowship, and participation in the eucharist can provide a solidarity which fosters both healing and hope.

Finally, developing a model out of St. Paul's "fruits of the Spirit," Albers sets forth a faith-based strategy for working therapeutically with shame-identified persons. By advocating use of such qualities as patience, faith, and hope, this strategy may be helpful, but it is certainly

not specific, for these same qualities are profitably employed in dealing with all types and conditions of humankind. Yet, even in this Albers may have unintentionally underscored one of his major tenets. For if it can be conveyed to the shame-identified person that he or she is being treated no differently than any other suffering person, this realization may go a long way to challenge the sense of personal worthlessness and open doors to “the way back.”

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**FOR THE LOVE OF CHILDREN: GENETIC TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF THE FAMILY**, by Ted Peters. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1996. Pp. xv + 210.

Near the end of the fourth chapter of his book, Ted Peters concludes that “as we approach the area of selective abortion for purposes of sorting out desirable genes from undesirable genes, most Christians are not ethically ready” (117) to make the kinds of decisions that will face us in the future. In fact, however, the ethical unreadiness that Peters identifies is not applicable only to questions of selective abortion. Rather, Peters is concerned about a whole range of issues that advancements in reproductive technology place before us for which we are ethically unprepared.

*For the Love of Children* is intended to serve as a wake-up call for Christians for whom reproductive choices involve moral values as well as technical decisions. The need is for an ethic that can inform such decisions and the purpose of Peters’ book is to begin to layout the framework for such an ethic.

Two particularly important factors make such an ethic necessary. One has already been noted: namely, the staggering advances in genetic science. The second is, to some extent, a consequence of those advances, namely, the fact of choice. Peters describes it this way: “The explosion of progress in reproductive technologies is creating choices in a dimension of life we previously consigned to destiny, namely, procreating children” (33), and it is what will happen to the children that are brought into the world that is Peters’ greatest concern.

Neither the advance of genetic science nor the possibilities that result from such advances need to be feared. Both factors need to be acknowledged and accepted, however, if Christians are to meet the moral challenges represented by such factors and if children are not to be “commodified” and treated as means rather than as ends to be valued in themselves. What is needed then is an ethic, and Peters is convinced that it cannot be an ethic that relies on “outdated cultural or biological restraints” (3).

The central and guiding principle for such an ethic is the affirmation and admonition that “God loves each of us regardless of our genetic makeup, and we should do likewise” (4). There are a number of issues that have the potential for violating that principle, depending on the choices that are made. Thus, Peters proceeds to discuss some of the issues that both demonstrate the need for the desired ethic and the difficulty in achieving it. The weakening of the traditional family unit, for example, has led to changes in how commitments are made and responsibility exercised on behalf of children. Likewise, the variety of reproductive technologies, including those that lessen both the biological and emotional bonding between mother and child, represent

another set of challenges to how children will be accepted and valued.

Peters pays special attention to the matter of surrogacy and surrogate motherhood. He also has an extended discussion about how selective abortion may become a tool in the desire to eliminate undesirable or “defective” genes. The fact that such options are before us is not a problem. The question is whether there is an ethical framework in place which can guide decisions about what options to pursue.

Thus, he also reviews some of the ethical thinking that has occurred in relation to such issues, and in the process identifies some of the resources available for the construction of the necessary ethic. A Roman Catholic ethicist, Lisa Sowle Cahill, is a helpful dialogue partner for Peters at several points in his discussion. But in the final analysis her position, like that of most of the western theological tradition, does not go far enough. In Peters’ judgment, an ethic that will make the love of children central needs finally to cut the tie that has been posited in the Christian tradition between sexuality and procreation and to develop an ethical justification for healthy sexual relations that is based on something other than giving birth to children.

Sheer observation of the phenomenon of sexuality shows that it cannot be reduced to brute biological procreation, and the slightest contact with Christian theology shows that the quality of human relations cannot be reduced to a brute biological act of copulation in the service of procreation. (149)

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The Russian Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Solovyev, with his emphasis on the intrinsic value of love between parents may provide the kind of theological reasoning that can be helpful.

Peters ends his book by sketching a framework of the necessary ethical stance. Ultimately it is the category of the future that is most important. What is determinative is not past biology but future transformation. Love of children then is justified by the conviction that it is the future which will confirm the value of the present act.

Peters ends as he began-by affirming the necessity and ethical responsibility of loving children.

Rather than appeal to reactionary variants of biological essentialism to obstruct the creative use of reproductive technologies, proleptic ethics encourages their use as means toward a further end. That end is the love of children regardless of their genetic makeup or reproductive origin. (182)

Advances in genetic science and the explosion of reproductive technologies are not the most burning issues that most of us face in our day-to-day ministries. In that sense, *For the Love of Children* may seem a bit esoteric. But by framing the overall concern as a question of how children are loved and valued, Peters has broadened the issue to one that affects both us and our ministries and encourages us to attend to our ethical readiness to address such questions.

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**CONSUMER RITES: THE BUYING AND SELLING OF AMERICAN HOLIDAYS**, by Leigh Eric Schmidt. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. Pp. 363.

In 1900, an article in the *Dry Goods Chronicle* remarked, “Easter, in common with the other great festivals of the year, has already been recognized as a basis of trade attraction, and, while it commemorates an event which is sacred to many, yet there is no legitimate reason why it should not also be made an occasion for legitimate merchandizing” (18). The quotation is an apt one for Leigh Schmidt, an historian and Associate Professor of Religion at Princeton University, to use at the beginning of this fascinating account of the complex interweaving of commerce and the sacred in American holidays. Christmas generally is recognized as the nation’s pre-eminent consumer rite, and ministers and other critics have long decried the transformation of this religious celebration into a secular, commodified occasion, using familiar rallying cries to “Keep Christ in Christmas.” Schmidt admits that he shares some of the concerns and criticisms, but his book avoids being a simple jeremiad, attempting instead to provide a balanced historical account of how the present situation evolved. After a brief preliminary discussion tracing religious festivals and commerce through medieval, Puritan, and enlightenment developments, Schmidt devotes full chapters to St. Valentine’s Day, Christmas, Easter, and Mother’s Day. He seeks to offer “the first sustained interpretation of American holidays and the consumer culture” and in the process demonstrates that it is a complicated, multi-layered story (13).

Schmidt’s introductory historical survey reminds us of fairs, markets, and hawkers that arose around medieval European Sundays and feast days or at camp meetings on the American frontier. (Commercial symbiotic relationships with religious events are not new.) Yet forces in early America attempted to restrain the calendrical festivities. Puritan New Englanders, in liturgical austerity, tried to focus on the Sabbath as the only break from industrious labor, rejecting Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide celebrations. Enlightenment mercantilists saw holidays as a distraction from commerce, a position that was justified for the sake of civic prosperity but that Dickens depicted negatively in his famous portrayal of Ebenezer Scrooge. In spite of these restraining attempts, middle-class Victorians longed for the “recreative zest” of festivity, and merchants soon learned that the rhythms and rituals of a holiday calendar held promise for expanding consumer culture; they discovered that their

businesses might benefit from actually promoting the holidays.

One can make the case that the commercial revival of such holidays in the United States began not with Christmas but with St. Valentine’s Day. Starting with a holy day dedicated to the remembrance of one or more martyred saints, the poetry of Chaucer and his contemporaries somehow conjoined the saint’s day with romance, and it became an occasion for English aristocratic expressions of courtly love and sometimes licentious folk celebrations. Yet it was considered a British observance, largely unknown in America, until the sending of valentine cards became the rage of fashion in Philadelphia, New York, and beyond in the 1840s. The use of the word “valentine” itself shifted from a saint, to a relationship (be my valentine), to a commodity (send a valentine), and merchants seized upon public interest to expand the day, applying it to family and friends in addition to romantic love interests, and adding gifts of candy and flowers. Critics complained that the commercialization made genuine sentiment into

something artificial and trivial, but the public embraced it as an entertaining diversion, and today Valentine's Day is second only to Christmas as a card-sending event.

Christmas in early America was part of a long winter season of festivities that extended beyond New Year's. Commercial connections to Christmas were limited largely to food purchases at Christmas ba-

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zaars for the holiday feasting, and New Year's Eve and Day actually were the centers of gift giving and the most unrestrained revelry. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century the custom of gift-giving transferred to Christmas, for several reasons, and the marketing of Christmas developed rapidly, with department store parades and displays and the consolidation by advertisers of the Santa Claus symbol as a jolly gift giver. The fashion of sending Christmas cards emerged in the 1870s and 1880s. Schmidt also describes American ambivalence about the modern Christmas, summarizing concerns about superficiality and the loss of religious meaning. The American marketplace became "a site of competition about the meanings of Christmas" (191).

The book contains much more: Easter's fashion parades and extensive church and store decorations, the invention and promotion of Mother's Day in the 1910s and 1920s, the interplay of local traditions and national trends, and the role of women and the home in holiday celebrations.

In addition to providing an interesting historical account, Schmidt's book indirectly raises complicating questions that critics might want to consider. First, we might reflect upon the very nature of festival. "A common feature of festivity is to overindulge, to eat, drink, or spend to excess, lavishly to use up resources otherwise diligently saved" (8). How much of the criticism leveled by Christians is rooted in nervousness about festival and celebration itself? Secondly, perhaps we should hesitate in claiming that all commercialization is simply the result of manipulation by business interests. Merchants have tried to promote other holidays that did not succeed, and they were unsuccessful in an effort to regularize the date for celebrating Easter. They are not all-powerful. When certain developments have been embraced by the public, it must say something about the needs and longings of all of us, not just manipulation by controlling interests. Thirdly, we might ask whether churches have benefited in some ways from the commercial promotion of holidays. For example, does not the culturally pervasive character of Christmas celebrations give

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Christianity some advantages of predominance in the national culture? What is it like for Jews or Buddhists to live through the Christmas holiday season in the United States? Religion and commercial interests have used each other. Fourth, even critical crusades can be co-opted by commercial culture. There exists a certain irony when one can *buy* mugs or shirts emblazoned with the phrase "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" or when the slogan appears on the commercial vehicle of billboards. These are miscellaneous reflections the book prompts for me; *Consumer Rites* is provocative enough that each reader undoubtedly will create his or her own list.

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