

Reviews



THE CURSE OF CAIN: THE VIOLENT LEGACY OF MONOTHEISM, by Regina M. Schwartz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Pp. 211. \$22.95.

Regina M. Schwartz has written a book about the Hebrew Bible which will certainly gain great attention. Its appearance on the front page of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* soon after publication is an indication that one segment of society, the academy, was ready for such a book. Whether the church will welcome this publication remains to be seen. Many will find it quite troubling.

Genesis 4, from which the book takes its title, is just a starting point for Schwartz's work. It actually surveys much of the Hebrew Bible. In parallel fashion, the Hebrew Bible is something of a starting point for the book. In the end, it has much to say about all of human history and society. The book is organized around the concept of human identity, both individual and collective. After an introduction which effectively links identity and violence, the five major chapters focus upon five mechanisms of identity which emerge from the Hebrew Bible: covenant, land, kinship, nation, and memory.

A further interpretive key to Schwartz's understanding of the Bible's role in the development of Western culture is what she labels "the biblical myth of scarcity" (xi). It is this principle of scarcity which led to exclusive, monotheistic religion. Schwartz acknowledges that the Bible does contain "glimpses of a monotheistic plenitude" (xi), but contends that the cultures which have been heavily influenced by biblical thought have been dominated by the myth of scarcity.

In chapter one, "Inventing Identity: Covenants," Schwartz describes the making of covenants as a violent process of

forming collective identity. The violent and divisive nature of covenants is revealed in the frequent biblical phrase "cut a covenant." Biblical covenants are agreements which grant God control and forge identity within that environment of control. Covenants carry with them the concepts of blessing and curse. Schwartz aptly observes that in the Hebrew Bible curse tends to overwhelm blessing. She provides as pointed evidence Deuteronomy 28, where not only do curses far outnumber blessings, but where "blessings are of generalized prosperity" and "curses are graphic and specific" (29). Behind covenant lurks the myth of scarcity. Only one group of people can be the people of the one God and receive the limited blessings which are available.

Chapter two, "Owning Identity: Land," focuses much attention on the exodus and conquest. Schwartz demonstrates, however, that the reality of exile, which dominates the prophetic books, is present throughout most of the biblical story. Human beings are linked to land as the close relationship between the Hebrew words *adam* (human) and *adamah* (ground) reveals. Land is a problem, though. The myth of scarcity says there is not enough to go around, and identity based on possession of land can so easily be lost through dispossession. Schwartz poignantly connects the biblical legacy of land possession to its various appropriations in subsequent history. It is on this point that she most deftly skewers contemporary biblical scholarship and its attempts to reconstruct the Israelite possession of Canaan: "But the data never seem to point in a conclusive direction; rather, the evidence becomes strangely compatible with the political biases of the scholars analyzing it" (61). The church perhaps would be most uncomfortable with

the conclusion that the human tendency to kill, both to gain ownership and as a result of frustrated attempts at ownership, is a reflection of the biblical God who kills to make Israel his people and kills Israel when he discovers that he cannot own their complete allegiance.

In Chapter Three, "Natural Identity: Kinship," Schwartz again travels through a maze of biblical texts to demonstrate how a mechanism of establishing identity creates as many problems as it solves. Israel's attempts to define insiders and outsiders steer a tricky course through the practices of endogamy, exogamy, and incest. As Schwartz puts the question, "How close is too close, how far is too far, to forge collective identities through marriage alliances?" (83). The book of Genesis weaves a treacherous narrative web in which brothers are foreigners and sisters are wives. Family relations are filled with deceit, favoritism, seduction, and murder, The Bible's mixed messages on race, family, and gender have not caused, but have allowed both constructive and destructive interpretations. Glimpses of plenitude, such as "be fruitful and multiply" give way both in the Bible and in the modern world to racial, ethnic, and generational strife.

Eventually, the Hebrew Bible defines Israel over against the other nations of the ancient near east. Chapter four, "Dividing Identities: 'Nations,'" is subdued in its conclusions because of Schwartz's wariness about anachronistic projections of the modern concept of nation into the Bible. Historical-critical scholarship is inextricably intertwined with German nationalism. While the Bible defines Israel as a nation, it could not be more honest about the pitfalls of nationhood, as in a text like 1 Sam. 8:11-18. The provisional nature of the biblical view of nationhood cautions against the establishment of governmental and institutional power based on biblical authority.

Eventually, the mechanisms of Israel's identity were lost, some partially and others entirely. The final chapter, "Inscribing Identity: Memory," describes Israel's attempt to deal with this reality. The production of sacred written texts is the most important component of this mechanism, and it has been the product of Israel's mem-

ory which Schwartz has been reading and responding to for the entire book. In the western world, Israel's memory has become part of our memory. This is no passive mechanism of identity formation, though. The formation and use of the canon(s) has perpetuated the very struggles for identity which gave rise to its stories.

Schwartz's call to open the canon falls like a bombshell at the end of the book. In fact, she goes a step further and proposes "an alternative Bible that subverts the dominant vision of violence and scarcity with an ideal of plenitude and its corollary ethical imperative of generosity" (176). One wonders why Schwartz would want to replace a book which has inspired her to such heights and depths of insight into the human condition, even if she does so often have to read against the grain of the text to reach them.

One must admire the ability of such a brilliant interpreter of scripture and tradition who synthesizes so many texts and interpretations into a stunning portrait of biblical culture, both past and present. This is not only, or even primarily, a book for biblical specialists. The author, herself, is not a biblical specialist, but a professor of English literature. While dazzled by this whirlwind tour of the Bible, some of us may also long for more sustained exegeses of the most important texts. We may grudgingly hope that Schwartz will intrude even further upon our territory in the future.

I suspect that those readers who focus on the Christian tradition as a source of many of the western world's problems will resonate with much in this book. Those who focus on Christian faith as a solution to humanity's problems will often be offended. I hope that this book does not widen the gulf between these two groups and further petrify their divisive identities, thus frustrating what seems to be the book's purpose.

Mark McIntire
Mekane Yesus Seminary
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

THE MORAL VISION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: COMMUNITY, CROSS, NEW CREATION, by Richard B. Hays. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996. Pp 508. \$25.00 (paper).

"This book risks—after years of scholarly agonizing—what every preacher must risk every Sunday: articulating the concrete implications of the Word of God for the community of faith" (xii). *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* is a proposal for what it means to regard the New Testament as the norming norm for Christians' moral deliberation. Duke Divinity School professor Richard Hays divides his work into four distinct but overlapping tasks (descriptive, synthetic, hermeneutical, and pragmatic).

First, Hays describes the moral visions of the major authors of the New Testament. What would it look like to act faithfully in Mark's narrative world, or in John's, or in the narrative world of Revelation? Well over a third of the book is devoted to the descriptive task.

Next Hays synthesizes the various portraits of faithful action that he has found in the New Testament. Any synthesis, he says, must take into account the full range of canonical witnesses, allowing substantive tensions and formal differences to stand (189-90). He brings into focus a single New Testament moral vision by means of three images: community, cross, and new creation. "The church is a countercultural community of discipleship [which,] in its corporate life, is called to embody an alternative order that stands as a sign of God's redemptive purposes in the world" (196). (Readers of *Resident Aliens* will be on familiar ground here.) That countercultural community follows the way of the cross. It "expresses and experiences the presence of the kingdom of God by participating in 'the koinonia of [Christ's] sufferings'" (197), and it "embodies the power of the resurrection in the midst of a not-yet-redeemed world," proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes (198).

Part Three examines how the New Testament actually functions in the ethical reflection of Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. After looking at how these authors appropriate

the New Testament for ethics, Hays offers his own ten-point constructive proposal for how we should use biblical texts as we seek to discern faithful courses of action presently.

In Part Four, he tests his proposal on five contemporary ethical dilemmas: violence in defense of justice, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, anti-Judaism and ethnic conflict, and abortion. These issues were chosen not because they are the most pressing concerns facing the church today (Hays says some of them are not), but because they illustrate how Hays' methodology works with different kinds of data, such as when New Testament texts are fundamentally in tension with each other, as in the case of anti-Judaism, or when the New Testament is in tension with "other serious moral arguments" (314), as in the case of homosexuality, or when the New Testament is silent on a particular issue, as in the case of abortion.

I believe the greatest value of this book is its description and synthesis of New Testament ethics around the images of community, cross, and new creation. Hays' descriptions in the first half of the book are engaging and persuasive, and the three images he lifts up are compelling enough to be watchwords of a new reformation, especially for those American Christians for whom going to church means gathering as individuals, once a week, to be comforted by a message of the forgiveness of each one's personal sins and (perhaps) to be told how to be more virtuous individuals. Hays argues that the New Testament writers had something very different in mind for the church, specifically, that its members would be a cruciform community whose very life together would bear witness to and confirm the in-breaking of God's reign as it had been clearly manifested in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

So far, I agree with Hays and am inspired by his work. I come away from the book, however, with two questions and one hermeneutical concern. First the questions. Hays argues that this vision is not an impossible ideal. The New Testament writers did not mean to drive their readers to despair or to convict them of sin when they wrote, "Only let your manner of life be

worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27), and other similar sentiments. They meant to exhort an ethic that hearers could actually enact—it is a sacrificial way of life, to be sure, but possible. My first question is, "How?" That is, how are communities empowered for such a common life? Clearly, something keeps many of us sincere, eager Christians very far from the goal of a common life that bears witness to the imminence of God's new age. Whence comes the freedom for such a life? It is possible to come away from *Moral Vision* thinking that the hard part is figuring out what the New Testament texts are calling us toward. I would argue that confusion about the vision is only one of our problems.

My second question is, "Are we having fun yet?" This is a very serious book, with lots of "musts" and "shoulds" in its hermeneutical proposals as well as multiple reminders that the biblical story leads to "the paradigmatic mode of using the New Testament in ethics" (295). Where is the joy that overwhelms Matthew's wise men when they find Jesus, joy that Luke's angel announces to the shepherds outside Bethlehem, joy that Paul says he feels even in prison, as his life is being poured out as a libation? Story leads to more than just paradigms for our behavior. Story leads to incorporation in a new reality. That incorporation has for Christians traditionally inspired doxology and joy. The moral vision of the New Testament is not likely to be enacted by a group of people gritting our teeth and humorlessly doing the right thing.

My final comment concerns something more to the heart of Hays' project, especially as he attempts the hermeneutical and pragmatic tasks. In *Moral Vision*, Hays works hard to maintain the authority of scripture against those who would argue that other sources of revelation (such as reason, tradition, or experience) should be able to trump the message of scripture. I am sympathetic to his concern, but I do not think his argument is clear. For example, Hays writes, "The Bible's perspective is privileged, not ours" (296), which sounds good until one asks, "What can that possibly mean?" Does "the Bible's perspective" mean the perspective of the biblical

authors? Does it mean God's perspective? Maybe it means a biblical scholar's perspective. Who gets to decide what the Bible's perspective is? I cannot imagine how the Bible has a perspective until it has readers, and readers always bring tradition, reason, experience, and sometimes the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the work of reading. Just as Hays rightly rejects attempts to separate out "timeless truth" from "culturally conditioned" material in the New Testament, saying, "the strategy is conceptually incoherent, because every jot and tittle of the New Testament is culturally conditioned" (299), so I would say, yes, every jot and tittle is culturally conditioned, and not only by the cultures of the New Testament's writers, but also by the cultures of the New Testament's readers. This does not mean that the New Testament is not authoritative, but it does complicate the way we may argue for its authority.

Readers of *Moral Vision* will disagree on whether this conceptual incoherence on Hays' part with respect to the Bible and its supposed agency is a fatal flaw in his work. I would counsel caution when reading sentences that describe what scripture is and does.

At other points Hays' own agency is not masked and his tone is humble. He says throughout the book that his pragmatic proposals are not presented as normative. "The conclusions reached here are offered as one performance of the imaginative task of New Testament ethics—offered to the church at large for discussion and reflection" (462). While I think Hays fails in his attempt to shore up the authority of scripture, he succeeds in performing scripture for the church in such a way that Christians may see more clearly the cruciform community into which we are called. One hopes that as a result of his work, communities of Christians are moved to discussion and reflection, and on to their own enactment of the Bible.

Mary E. Hinkle
Luther Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

COMPELLING KNOWLEDGE: A FEMINIST PROPOSAL FOR AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE CROSS, by Mary M. Solberg. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997. Pp. xv + 226. \$18.95.

Solberg writes in a personable style of important concerns for our life as Christians and human beings. Reflecting out of three years lived in El Salvador, Solberg constructs for us a frame of reference within which we can be faithful knowers. In El Salvador, her own understanding about that conflictive place and about her own role there changed from being a body of knowledge to being bodily knowledge. She was profoundly touched by the testimonies that she experienced in El Salvador, yet she recognizes that her work now must be done for people like herself, "white, relatively privileged North American Christians" (xiii). Her work draws upon two resources, feminist philosophical reflection on knowing and Luther's theology of the cross.

Feminist philosophers have altered the course of western reflections on knowing. Their attentiveness to social location and how that affects what one sees and what one ignores in the process of knowing has dramatically impacted theological work in the last several decades. Who among us can make claims to value-free, neutral, or universal knowledge without blushing? Solberg spells out three central dynamics required by feminist reflection: a significant role for experience, a new understanding of objectivity, and a clear sense of accountability. The role granted experience does not imply a generic something out there waiting to be articulated; it points to the need to be attentive to concrete, lived involvement in life. The diverse experiences that women have do not allow for an appeal to "women's experience" unless this is understood to consist of multifaceted and even clashing commitments. This leads into the discussion of objectivity. Having been treated as objects so often in history, women are wary of traditional understandings of objectivity where the lone man stood on some neutral ground and simply described reality. This kind of "discovery" is replaced by "conversation"

wherein multiple viewpoints challenge, appreciate, and correct one another from the perspective of their own lived experiences. Privileged in this conversation are those who have been excluded from and/or harmed by prior discoveries since their vision will broaden and correct the total picture. Through conversation, the community moves toward objectivity while always realizing that the knowledge gained is partial, provisional, and open to further questioning. This leads naturally into the final dynamic which is accountability. Solberg once again emphasizes the interpersonal way that knowledge must be pursued in order to be morally appropriate.

This brings us to the second phase of her study, the examination of Luther's theology of the cross. Drawing upon the most notable research in this area, Solberg presents a sketch of Luther's work in terms of critique, announcement, and equipment. On the basis of his own lived experiences of *Anfechtung* and his new understanding of the righteousness of God, Luther launched a critique of the glorified church of his day and the scholastic theologians who supported it intellectually. Yet critique was not the final word; a gracious announcement followed insisting that God is certainly with us in the midst of all that is unsettling. Everyday life is the place where God meets us and where faith takes hold of the cross. This leads to equipment.

The "practicality" of the theology of the cross begins, then, with the sense in which it equips believers for participation in a life conformed to that life made possible through the living and dying of Jesus Christ. (87)

Having mapped out two streams of reflection, Solberg then brings them together. She develops an epistemology of the cross that would serve not only as a theological tool, but also "as a more widely useful intellectual and spiritual resource, a part of the human commons" (108). This time she organizes the chapter around four themes: power, experience, objectivity and accountability. Issues of power have run through the whole discussion. In light of both of her sources, she warns suspicion of those in power who claim for themselves

an exclusive legitimacy as knowers. We must ask about the interests served by knowers and whether this attends to those at risk. Next, we must be attentive to lived experience as the means and dwelling place of all knowing; again special attention is given to those experiences lived at the "limits" where death and life are locked in struggle. These experiences insure the kind of objectivity that this epistemology privileges.

An epistemology of the cross shares with feminist epistemologies the conviction that, to the degree that relatively undistorted and ethically defensible knowing matter, the place of the least is favored—at the foot of the cross, in all its contemporary forms—is a better place to start than any place of domination could be. (118)

Attention to those at the limits yields an accountability to them which seeks to be transformative.

This book will help us reflect on what too often goes without consideration. We are to live under the cross, not only in terms of what we know—as pastoral agents, baptized Christians, human beings—but also in terms of how we know. Solberg offers us a way of knowing that is humanly, spiritually, and theologically compelling.

Phil Ruge-Jones
Lutheran School of Theology at
Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

FROM FEDERATION TO COMMUNION: THE HISTORY OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION, edited by Jens Holger Schjorring, Prasanna Kumari, and Norman A. Hjelm. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. Pp. xxiv + 552. \$39.00 (cloth).

The basic text of this volume has nine chapters wherein the LWF origins are described and seven "trajectories" or recurrent themes, "diaconic service, mission, theology, ecclesiology, ecumenism, inclusiveness, and witness in public life" (xiv), are traced through the LWF's first fifty years. A second section is a handbook with reviews of the LWF assemblies, presidents, and general secretaries, and includes the past and present constitutions of the LWF,

a current listing of member churches, and a brief survey of LWF finances.

The book avers that the primary story of the LWF's first fifty years is its growth in self understanding from a "free association" to a Lutheran "communion." The title itself, *From Federation to Communion*, makes the point. The authors further explain that, "The nine basic chapters of this volume describe from a variety of angles how the Lutheran World Federation has moved, over five decades, to become an authentic expression of *communio*" (xiv-xv).

This movement to "*communio*" has been viewed by the majority of recent LWF leaders as of primary significance for the world's Lutherans and as loaded with ecclesiological freight. A significant minority, including myself, have disagreed. As the book indicates, that conflict of points of view reached a climax at the Curitiba Assembly in 1990. A two-thirds vote was needed to adopt both a new constitution and a restructuring of the LWF. The action, which declared "The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches" (416), was adopted by a vote of exactly two thirds for and one third against.

Michael Root, in his chapter on "Ecclesiological Reflection in the LWF," describes what he and others see as implicit in this action:

The constitutional redefinition of the LWF as a communion of churches rather than a free association would form the framework for a rethinking of the organization of the LWF. A more organic, less contractual image of the LWF is projected. The churches are joined together by bonds of common faith and life that create communal obligations. Authority is thus to be "shared," rather than "assigned" or "delegated." The communion as a whole does not thus receive authority by delegation from the members churches but shares in the authority that flows from life in the Spirit. (241)

This, it is argued, is of great ecclesiological significance, with the LWF obtaining greater "ecclesial density" (235-236).

The minority views are summarized by reference to two statements presented to the Assembly and quoted in a paragraph from the ecclesiology chapter:

It was argued that the communion of churches is one thing, while its structural expression and instrument is another. As the Danish Church's Council on Inter-Church Relations said: "Communion cannot be adequately expressed within the limits of any structure at all. Communion is above all the fellowship that already exists between the Lutheran churchesAny attempt at equating the LWF with the Lutheran communion should be rejected by good, sound Lutheran theology." Frequently the use of the concept "communion" to define the LWF was attacked as a pretext for a concentration of power in the LWF. "Communion is here assumed to motivate and to justify the concentration of power in the organization," the Finnish response argued. (241-242)

In spite of the Curitiba vote, however, the book makes clear that it is not yet obvious just what the declaration that "the LWF is a communion of churches" will mean. Is the LWF an organizational instrument of the Lutheran churches that reflects a confessional communion, or does it have an ecclesiological character of its own? Are the LWF member churches autonomous, or does their being in communion mean that the LWF has an authoritative position vis-a-vis the churches? Does the decision to identify the LWF as a "communion of churches" mean that the LWF is becoming an organized global church or does it only mean that the churches relate to each other as members of a confessional family in the great communion of saints? I believe such questions will continue to face the LWF and its member churches for many years ahead.

As one very actively involved in twenty years of the LWF's life, I have understood the LWF to be an organizational instrument by which local Lutheran churches throughout the world have expressed their confessional unity by extending their mission through joint ministries in the areas designated by the LWF founders, namely: "rescue for the needy, common initiatives in mission, joint efforts in theology, (and) a common response to the ecumenical challenge" (6).

In my thinking the great stories of the first fifty years of the LWF are not in ecclesiology but in service and mission, the first

two of the pillars. While this history provides a necessary record of the way the LWF organized to do service and mission, it does not convey the deeply moving stories of what Lutherans have accomplished in service and mission through the LWF. The work of Lutheran World Service in feeding the hungry, resettling refugees, providing medical assistance and development aid has been monumental. Its breadth and depth is not plumbed in this volume. The growth of Lutheran Christian membership in many parts of the world has been phenomenal. While most of this growth is attributable to the missionary zeal of indigenous churches, the LWF has provided crucial undergirding for those local churches. A much fuller record of LWF mission initiatives needs to be entered.

It is important that the LWF be well known in Lutheran congregations. This book is full of information that will help meet that need. Lutherans can be grateful for this contribution to the written record of the Lutheran World Federation. At the same time it can be hoped that other contributions to the written history of the LWF will reach into additional facets of LWF work.

David W. Preus
Luther Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

THE CHURCH MUSICIAN, by Paul Westermeyer. Revised edition; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997. Pp. xvi + 159. \$15.99.

The audience for Paul Westermeyer's book is wider than its title might suggest. The book is valuable not only for church musicians but also for pastors, associates in ministry, music and worship committees, and all others involved in planning and leading worship. The book is well organized, easy to read, and focused. Westermeyer's down-to-earth discussions of the joys and challenges of church music are informative to the beginner and thought provoking to the experienced.

Westermeyer starts with a story about a typical Sunday morning in the life of one of the countless American "music grinders." In this somewhat depressing but true-to-life story, we are exposed to the realities of

the institutional church and the general culture that make the task of the church musician a very challenging one. The story is credible because of Westermeyer's years of having been a practicing church musician, his thorough analysis of the subject, and his love for the people of the church and their song in worship.

Early on, Westermeyer introduces the phrase "the people's song," and from then on the focus of the book is clear. This is a book about the song of the people who are gathered for worship. While it contains a lot of information and comment about church musicians, clergy, church committees, and the relationships between these three groups, the subject of the book is the song of the people of faith. He proposes that churches call their musicians "cantors" because it highlights this song of faith.

There are many pages in the book that deal at a very basic level with music and worship. If you are already a church musician, you can resonate easily with these pages. They will help you think through some of the attitudes you have brought to your job as a church musician and how they affect what you do from week to week. If you are thinking of becoming a church musician, they will encourage you and help you prepare and plan for the tasks ahead. If you are a pastor or a member of a music and worship committee, they may help you see the tasks of the church musician from a different vantage point.

A music and worship committee in the process of interviewing prospective musicians would do well to read all or parts of this book in preparation for their task. Pastors or committees who are not trained musicians and find themselves asking, "Just what does a church musician do?" will find a lot of helpful information. Westermeyer lays out some of the basic tasks—some of those behind-the-scenes things—that face the church musician every week. His discussion is understandable by the non-musician and always relates the subject at hand to the central focus of the book—the people's song. If you would remember one thing from this book, it would be that everything that the church musician does must help the people sing the song of faith.

Lutherans will enjoy the parallels

Westermeyer draws between law and gospel and the church musician's struggle between the drive for perfection and the need to experience grace. On one hand, the musician who strives only for musical perfection will never reach that elusive goal and ultimately will be destroyed. On the other hand, the musician who takes a "cheap grace" approach doesn't worry about preparation or practice and ultimately treats the people with contempt.

Westermeyer completes the book with two particularly interesting sections. The first is an autobiographical chapter in which he gives an account of some of the joys and struggles of balancing a teaching career, a church musician career, and family life. Church committees composed of people from various walks of life will be able to identify with this section—Westermeyer has feet of clay and doesn't walk on water.

The second section deals openly with some of the more recent issues facing congregations as they evaluate their worship. Westermeyer does not enter directly into these "worship war" issues but takes a step or two back to analyze at a broader level what he believes is going on in the church and in the general culture. He identifies broad currents of change in theology and worship patterns and shows how they affect the life of the church on a weekly basis. Committees, clergy, and musicians who plan worship and are faced with sorting through terms like "traditional" and "alternative," "classical" and "contemporary," "elitist" and "popular" will benefit from his discussion of what's going on in worship today. Westermeyer incorporates some very practical, basic knowledge and discussion about the realities of producing music and worship. While he doesn't avoid drawing some conclusions on hard and sometimes controversial issues, he doesn't take a confrontational stance for one side or another. The focus remains clear throughout the book—the people's song of faith is the goal.

This is a good book for the pastor's study, the church musician's desk, and the church library. The clarity of writing makes it approachable for people at many different levels. It contains both general com-

ments about the nature of church music and specific comments about the crisis in worship and music experienced by many contemporary congregations. I highly recommend Paul Westermeyer's *The Church Musician* to all those who plan or lead worship, worship and music committees, and to all people who would like to be challenged to think more deeply about the song of the people.

William J. Wilson
Svea Evangelical Lutheran Church
Svea, Minnesota

SLOUCHING TOWARDS GOMORRAH: MODERN LIBERALISM AND AMERICAN DECLINE, by Robert H. Bork. New York: ReganBooks/HarperCollins, 1996. Pp. xiv + 382. \$14.00 (paper).

If meditation upon the wretchedness of contemporary life is the purpose of your Lenten studies, then this book will serve you well. Esteemed jurist Robert Bork comes at the reader like a sledgehammer, pounding out an analysis of American cultural and moral collapse. The work is woven together by a deep intellectual pessimism that correlates today's difficulties and tomorrow's disaster to the misuse of national ideals. The core values of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" have been twisted into agents of their own destruction. Havoc will continue unless conservatives join forces to restore a common moral culture.

Bork recognizes that the ideals of liberty and equality have been essential to the development of western civilization. He has no argument with the classical liberalism that flowed from the enlightenment. The social institutions of that age were able to provide the necessary moral restraints. The expanding liberty of the individual, however, inevitably evolved into an autonomy that chafes at any attempt to set limits on acceptable thought and behavior. Radical individualism and radical egalitarianism now form an especially corrosive mix. Little from the storehouse of American history and traditions has been safe from its attacks. Bork wonders whether the intellectual and moral capital of the nation has been damaged beyond repair.

The author works with dispatch to name the enemy. A key assertion is that the baby boomer generation was too large to be properly civilized. The group formed its culture out of the natural rebelliousness of youth rather than the inherited traditions and wisdom of their elders. American families, schools, and churches were unable to handle the following "vertical invasion of the barbarians" (21). The development of a sixties counterculture would serve as the gestation period for modern liberalism.

While conservatives such as George Will may write that "the Sixties are dead," Bork insists that while the student radicals lacked political power and intellectual coherence at the time, they have since acquired tremendous cultural influence. Although only a minority of the boomer generation actually became leftists, the faction was responsible for setting the tone of conversation in the universities. Allowing the student radicals to graduate was only a temporary solution; they merely returned later to run the operations. Other influence centers such as the media, the entertainment industry, and various national bureaucracies also fell into their hands. These continue to be the fortresses from which modern liberals launch their cultural agenda. In the face of such opposition, conservative political victories are tenuous and fragile. Bork distinguishes between a cultural nation and a political nation, surmising that the two have already entered into an antagonistic standoff.

Radical individualism may be the more virulent of the twin thrusts of modern liberalism. Fueled by an optimistic view of human nature, the self demands an open vista for the gratification of its needs and the fulfillment of its destiny. Authentic expression of the inner identity cannot be circumscribed by external restraints. The end of such a quest, however, is joyless hedonism and stark nihilism. A bored and affluent society, increasingly turned inwards upon itself, can find nothing better than to indulge the primitive human emotions of sex, violence, and domination. Bork writes about vacations that celebrate promiscuity, music lyrics that are little more than ob-

scenities strung together, and internet sites that catalog stories about kidnapping and child mutilation. Technology promises to find even more ways to satisfy a fascination with the deviant and the depraved.

Radical egalitarianism proves more difficult to trace. Bork suggests the emotion of envy as the culprit. Americans have always allowed celebrities their status, but have felt uneasy about those who have earned a position by merit. The underlying suspicion has been that superior achievement comes through the exercise of unfair advantages. Thus, the modern liberal seeks to replace the meritocracy that may favor white males with a system more amenable to feminism and multiculturalism. Bork does not acknowledge the legitimacy of either ideology. The former will always follow "its single thread, the oppression of women" (196) while the latter is founded upon "the lie that European-American culture is uniquely oppressive" (311). Bork asserts that America and its standards must remain eurocentric, or the country will fall into chaos. He cites the decline of the education system as an example. No longer able to agree on a common body of knowledge, teachers now focus on the promotion of good self-esteem. More troublesome is that "equal opportunity" has changed to "equal outcome." Modern liberals insist that gender and race differences are simply due to inherited cultural constructs. An inequality is then necessarily an injustice, which must be corrected by proper social engineering.

In the end, Bork is either too pessimistic about the success of the venture or too unenlightened to welcome the program. He prefers to raise the rallying cry that the country's traditional institutions are being

swept aside by the utopian dreams of the modern liberal. Cultural warfare must be pursued to restore these mediating bodies to their former vitality. His call for allies is based upon the fear that without such intervention, America will find itself imprisoned within the city limits of Gomorrah.

While I agree with much of the diagnosis, I have reservations about the cure. Returning to "the better aspects of the 1950s" (337) is not a viable solution to the array of moral and spiritual problems facing the nation. Bork admits that conservatism cannot propose any alternative besides restoration of the past. His campaign will probably only slow the descent into moral relativism and nihilism.

Although this book does not make for enjoyable reading, it did sharpen my sense for the necessity of the church's witness to Jesus Christ. The emptiness of the modern liberal vision cannot be completely revealed by a law professor's critique of its shortcomings. The licentiousness of modern freedom might be mocked by a higher morality, but both are exposed by the paradox of Christian freedom. A movement that coerces forms of equality might be resisted by a person of superior intellect, but neither can grasp the joy of being one of the children of God. In short, the gospel delivers blessings far greater than any law can fashion. May we stand firm on our identity as Christians, even as the culture wars rage around us.

Daniel Ostercamp
Clearwater Lutheran Church
Shevlin, Minnesota
Solway Lutheran Church
Solway, Minnesota