

Reviews



THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: TESTIMONY, DISPUTE, ADVOCACY, by Walter Brueggemann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. Pp. xxi + 777. \$48.00. Cloth.

If you have not read an Old Testament theology since that of Gerhard von Rad, now is the time to do so. Walter Brueggemann is arguably America's best-known Hebrew Bible scholar. Here in a sweeping panorama, he presents what the Old Testament affirms about Yahweh, Israel, and the world. His concerns, methods, and perspectives are perfectly suited for a church in the postmodern world at the turn of the new century. True to what we have come to expect of him, Brueggemann's approach is rhetorical, political, pluralistic, and ecclesial. It is *rhetorical* in the sense that it pays close attention to the concrete text of canonical scripture as it stands in all its dialectical complexity. Brueggemann refuses to try to get "behind" the text to some hypothetical earlier form or to a reconstruction of the history to which the text allegedly witnesses. In doing this, Brueggemann is in accord with the most fruitful and exciting tendencies in contemporary biblical scholarship. Such a text-based reading moves beyond the barrenness of historical criticism done for its own sake. It also takes seriously the growing scholarly consensus that very little about Israel's foundational history can actually be known anyway. The old paradigm of a "God who acts in history" simply can no longer serve as the foundation for Old Testament theology. Yahweh is revealed only in the rhetoric and dramatic narrative of the text itself. Such an approach brackets out questions of both ontology and history. Instead it speaks only of the Yahweh who is present and active in the world brought into being by the text, and not behind the text or beyond it.

Because the Old Testament offers a variegated witness to Yahweh, Brueggemann insists that Old Testament theology

must be *pluralistic* rather than unitary. Israel's testimony about Yahweh is not harmonized or unified, but multi-faceted and dialectical. Conflicting perspectives have been permitted to stand in tension with each other without full resolution. Yahweh is said to act in passionate, gracious, covenant solidarity with the people. Yet Yahweh is also fiercely concerned about Yahweh's own personal self-regard, and this undermines solidarity with rebellious Israel. At times, Yahweh is hidden from Israel or even dangerously ambiguous and unstable. Yahweh may be "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love," but also simultaneously known for "by no means clearing the guilty but visiting iniquity" (Exod 24:6-7). Moreover, sometimes Yahweh is just plain unreliable or even abusive! These conflicting testimonies are not to be collapsed into each other or harmonized, but experienced in their full jolting contradiction.

Brueggemann's approach is also thoroughly *political* in the sense that Israel testifies to a Yahweh who is intensely focused on justice and internally driven to be recognized as God of the whole world. Yahweh's regard for justice means that the Old Testament is sometimes supportive, but often radically critical of the institutions of power. Brueggemann does not hesitate to draw fitting conclusions about present-day political and social realities.

Finally, this is an *ecclesial* Old Testament theology in the sense that it is directed at the Christian faith community. However, the Old Testament often speaks in discordant voices offering multiple testimonies. When read seriously and candidly, therefore, it has a tendency to undermine idolatrous orthodoxies and what Brueggemann suggests is a problematic drive toward premature closure on the part of Christian theology. Moreover, the task of Old Testament theology is not to provide a Christianized reading of the Hebrew Bible, which is repeatedly asserted to be a characteristically Jewish book. Instead it is to engage in an internally

coherent reading of the old Testament on its own terms and then offer this reading to the church as a resource for Christian theology.

Brueggemann's operative metaphor is Israel's testimony about Yahweh. By this he means primarily an analysis of distinctive sentences that have Yahweh as the subject of a strong active verb and a direct object (Israel, the individual, creation) to which Yahweh is connected by the verb. Because he focuses on the actual sentences of Israel's testimony, Brueggemann concentrates especially on the witness of Psalms. Because he understands the exile to be the constitutive crisis of Israel's understanding of Yahweh, the witness of Second Isaiah provides a decisive guidepost.

Brueggemann begins with a review of Old Testament theology over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, culminating in the present postmodern interpretive situation. Then in Part I he reviews the characteristic sentences of what he calls Israel's "core testimony" about Yahweh as a God who creates, promises, delivers, commands, and providentially leads. Yet, over against this core testimony Israel also spoke a "countertestimony" (Part II) that asserted an enigmatic, secret, and almost sullen side to Yahweh and was willing to call Yahweh's justice and integrity into question. Under the rubric of what Brueggemann terms "unsolicited testimony" (Part III), the reader of the Old Testament encounters Yahweh's partners in the unfolding dramatic script: Israel, humanity, the nations, and creation. Part IV considers "embodied testimony," that is, the institutions through which Israel sustained its discourse about Yahweh in communal practice: torah, kingship, prophecy, cult, and wisdom. With this arrangement, Brueggemann is able to incorporate all aspects of Israel's testimony, without marginalizing or downgrading the elements of cult and wisdom as has too often been done. The volume concludes with a prognosis of the future shape of Old Testament theology and some admonitions about the impact such a reading of the Old Testament ought to have on the church and its theological enterprise.

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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES: A SOCIO-RHETORICAL COMMENTARY, by Ben Witherington III. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. 874. \$50.00. Paper.

In his massive new commentary on Acts intended for "scholars and seminary students...pastors, and educated laypersons" (97), Ben Witherington III states that his main goal is "to try to reintroduce the reader to those neglected dimensions of the text which immersing oneself in ancient historiography and ancient rhetoric can bring to light." He pays significant attention to the social and historical plausibility of the events in Acts and their basic harmony with what we know about Paul and earliest Christianity, Paul's letters. Witherington attends to Luke's rhetoric as a means to identify the genre of Acts (a piece of serious history-writing); to clarify the nature of the speeches (not simply made up); and to deal with what appear to be discrepancies between, for instance, Acts and Galatians. He does ask, as we applaud him for doing, "how the church can best make use of the material found in Acts" (97). Although he offers useful suggestions for weighing and evaluating the stories and speeches of Acts, suggestions that have everything to do with its literary or rhetorical style, the commentary itself spends little time in literary analysis.

This disparity occurs because Witherington understands that the emphasis in Acts is on witness rather than on apostolicity. Yet this (quite correct) appreciation of Acts drives him to work hard to establish its reliability primarily as a historical source. To establish such reliability Witherington makes good use of many and various works across a number of fields of research. He also, however, is driven to abundant use of phrases like "probably," "it is not impossible," "likely," and "could have." He also argues frequently from silence (e.g., 244-245). Quite a bit of this commentary is, in a word, speculative. It represents highly educated guesses that are interesting and in some—not all—cases persuasive. Because Witherington writes such readable English, a rare gift in commentaries, it is easy to miss the amount of sheer probability that he calls upon to support some of his positions.

Frankly, however, because the commentary fearlessly tackles a number of the traditional problems in Acts with thoughtfulness and good sources, and for reasons which I will list below, I recommend it for the careful reader.

Witherington's interest in the usefulness of Acts for the church leads him to shape his commentary usefully for readers. The following features make it a valuable reference for anyone even a little interested in this once neglected book of the New Testament:

1. There is a 35-page bibliography that includes hundreds of relatively recent articles on a variety of topics pertinent to the study of first-century Christianity.

2. There are 102 pages devoted to introductory matters. Witherington concludes that Acts was written on the Greek model of more serious history by Luke, a sometime companion of Paul, in the late 70s-early 80s A.D. He answers questions of its initial obscurity and the emergence of two distinct textual witnesses (Alexandrian and Western) by reference to its production during the reign of the Flavian emperors. In this time a book positing a world-wide ruler other than the emperor would be kept hidden or burned. One need not agree with all these claims to find this section informative.

3. Footnotes are footnotes, usually brief and located on the page on which the textual reference occurs.

4. The book is well indexed with 30 pages of references to modern authors on Acts, to scripture, and to other ancient writings.

5. Woven into the 834 pages of commentary are 27 short sections, each called "A Closer Look." In these sections Witherington zeros in on areas that have been traditionally problematic in Acts. "Lukan Eschatology," "Luke, Josephus, and Historical Reliability," "Luke, Women, and Ministry," and "The Hellenists" are but a few examples of topics that Witherington addresses outside the flow of the commentary itself.

All these features make the book user-friendly, as does the fact that the commentary itself is eminently readable, albeit slightly long-winded.

Witherington is not afraid to skewer traditional positions, though he does not do so lightly or with malice. For example, he dis-

misses the view of Acts as "papering over" serious rifts between more conservative Jewish Christianity and a more liberal Hellenistic Christianity. He argues strongly against Richard Pervo's suggestion that Acts is more akin to a novel than to a history. Witherington suggests that Luke represents Paul fairly. "The Paul we see in Acts is not un-Pauline, much less anti-Pauline, but in some cases a Paul we do not hear about in the epistles, and in some cases a familiar Paul, though from a different and fresh perspective" (438). Very interesting is Witherington's carefully researched work on the stipulations of the "apostolic decree" in Acts 15, where he rightly sees that it is concerned with Gentile idol worship (459-466).

While it is true that Witherington occasionally finesses or clouds the ways in which his evidence and conclusions fit together, he is right about a number of things. He believes that Luke sees the Christian mission as out to "turn the world upside down" by uniting diverse ethnographic groups into one by means of "proclamation, signs and wonders, religious conversions, not through armies marching throughout the earth" (459). With this and much else in the book, I agree. I do recommend this book for the careful reader but with the suggestion that, especially for preaching and teaching, it be read along with another, more literary analysis.

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ON BEING A THEOLOGIAN OF THE CROSS, by Gerhard O. Forde. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Pp. 122.

Martin Luther often said, "true Christians are few and far between" (*LW* 12:151; 22:55, 197; 41:149; 45:91; etc.). One gets the impression he believed theologians of the cross are fewer yet and still farther between.

Why would Luther believe such a thing? What, really, is a theologian of the cross? What does Luther mean by a theologian of glory? And what is the difference between these two conflicting ways of 'seeing' and 'knowing' God? These are the principal issues addressed in Gerhard Forde's book,

On Being a Theologian of the Cross. Following a chapter on "Introductory Matters," Forde discusses these and related issues as he interprets the twenty-eight theological theses of Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*. The result is vintage Forde—a straight out, "tell it the way it is" presentation of sin and grace, life and faith, Christ and salvation. In short, being the theologian of the cross that he is, Forde "says what a thing is."

Here is a book worth working through and thinking through for any theologian. It would be particularly helpful as a small group study for "theologians." As Forde points out, "all of us are theologians in one way or another. Being a theologian just means thinking and speaking about God" (10). The question is, how will we think and speak about God? What kind of theologians will we be? As Forde presents it:

The thinking and speaking of a theologian of glory is shaped by an optimistic view of the human condition and our ability to know and respond to God. A theologian of glory may acknowledge human sinfulness, and therefore recognize our need of God's grace; but believes that, with the help of God's grace, *we* can prepare *ourselves* for God and the glory to come.

The thinking and speaking of a theologian of the cross is shaped by the cross. A theologian of the cross, certain that human beings are addicted to sin and self and cannot free themselves, understands that the cross means death to my sinful self and to the best that I am and do; and that only out of death will God create a new and redeemed me in Christ.

Forde describes the ways and means by which theologians of glory seek to avoid the cross and, unwittingly, to aid and abet the addiction we have to sin and self. Such ways and means include incorporating the cross of Christ into their thinking—creating *theologies* of the cross. Such *theologies* attempt to "see through the cross to what is supposed to be behind it," rather than be faced with the cross itself (76). As Forde writes, "Basically all *theologies about* the cross turn out to be *theologies of* glory" (3). Such *theologies* take the sting out of the cross by interpreting it as an act of divine reparation in which sin is overcome, our guilt purged,

and grace restored, thus enabling *us* to prepare *ourselves* to "see" and "know" God.

Forde writes, "Theologians of the cross see things differently. They can't get around the cross. They can't see through the cross to what is 'behind' it. They can't escape the realization that virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth are exactly what put Jesus on the cross" (77). Again he writes, "The cross does not merely inform us of something, something that may be 'above,' or 'behind' it. It attacks and afflicts us. Knowledge of God comes when God happens to us, when God does himself to us. We are crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19). The sinner, the old being, neither knows nor speaks the truth about God and consequently can only be put to death by the action of God. Such is the way one becomes a theologian of the cross, who can begin to speak and proclaim the truth of God, to 'say what a thing is'" (90).

Along with the apostle Paul, Augustine, Luther, and other theologians of the cross, Professor Forde would teach us that there is no cure for our addiction to sin and self, and no cure for our varied *theologies of* glory. Only as we are crucified with Christ does God recreate us in Christ's image, give us new life, and, thereby, turn us into theologians of the cross.

There is much more to commend in Forde's fine book. His discussions of Luther's understanding of humility, suffering, and free will are enlightening to say the least. If I may appropriate the rather arresting comment of a former professor, "If you haven't read the book of Acts" (and here I insert Forde's *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*) "read it again," and again and again.

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RECLAIMING THE CHURCH, by John B. Cobb, Jr. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 1997. Pp. 110. \$12.00.

As one who was a college student in the 1960s and who was attracted to an old line denomination because it clearly understood that it was called to make a difference in the world (civil rights marches, anti-war prayer vigils), I have been dismayed at the inability

of the old line churches to provide leadership in issues which face us in the 90's. The old line churches seem to be reacting to someone else's agenda, i.e., the religious right or the culture. We seem to lack any vision of what difference the presence of God ought to make in the world now and in the future. In addition, we apparently lack the confidence that God is the one who guides us into truth as well as the future.

John Cobb in *Reclaiming the Church* is calling members of the old line churches to affirm the Christian faith in a way that does not continue to harm Jews, oppress non-dominant groups, and devalue and destroy the natural world. For his argument that Christ can only become good news for anyone by becoming good news for everyone one might consult his *Can Christ Become Good News Again* (Fortress, 1995). Affirming the faith requires repenting for wrongs committed by the churches in the past, but this is not enough. It is necessary for the churches to think theologically again. The object in doing so is to create a theological consensus among believers, not only among professional theologians. This will be a risky conversation but one that is required if the churches are to speak with conviction and passion. It is this lack of common vision that causes the churches to be lukewarm and less than passionate about inviting others to participate.

Currently, most people's understanding of God and what God is about is shaped more by the religious conservatives and the media than by the theology of the old line churches. It is possible to develop a post-enlightenment understanding of God and salvation that honors the tradition's claim to mystery due to the complexity of our world. This understanding sees God "as an active participant in an open-ended process"(101). God is active in the world as Mystery, Wisdom of God, and Spirit. God as Mystery is present in a highly complex world, working persuasively to provide some order, as the source for novelty and as the ground of freedom necessary to the open-ended creative process. God as Wisdom is present in the cosmos, in persons, and in all living things. This Wisdom was embodied in Jesus so that we can see how Wisdom relates to life in the world, a life characterized by trust and love.

God as Spirit gives us an image of God that both pervades and transcends the cosmos, so that God is working at the level of subatomic particles, at the level of human history, and yet is not determined by these actions.

This understanding of God leads to a vision of salvation which Cobb calls *Basileia*. Cobb suggests a vision of salvation that is inclusive, the salvation of the whole world. This is our mission as Christians since this salvation cannot occur without our participation. Churches then become both a place of activity in transforming the world into the *Basileia* of God and a symbol of the *Basileia*.

Cobb is issuing an invitation to begin the conversation in the churches and among the churches because churches must lead instead of react or follow. It is imperative that the churches think and theologize once again for Christ's sake and for the sake of the world.

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CHRISTIAN LITURGY: CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL, by Frank C. Senn. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. Pp. xix + 747.

Except for an occasional bit of whimsy, very little about Frank Senn's encyclopedic *Christian Liturgy* might be considered light reading. Quite apart from its size and weight (3.5 lbs.), the book is a comprehensive discussion that stands legitimately alongside other sturdy works on the same subject, such as those by Gregory Dix and Luther D. Reed. In the course of his narrative Senn pays his respects to these two authors and refers as well to about one thousand other writers on the subject of liturgy. Senn digs deeply into virtually every tradition of two millennia of Christian liturgy.

Senn starts with the conviction that the study of liturgy will tell the student what is essential and what is peripheral in the church's practice of worship (xiii). Moreover, he acknowledges that he sees the story of Christian liturgy here, as he has in other books, from the angle of its cultural setting. These basic convictions inform the work

with a perspective that Senn insists is *catholic* and *evangelical*. What he means by these terms is early defined, providing an interpretive lens for what follows. "So by 'catholic' I mean an ecclesial commitment to the received tradition, and by 'evangelical' I mean an ecclesial commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as articulated in the ecumenical creeds. My interest is in the liturgies of communities that make both kinds of commitment" (xix).

Even within this defining perspective there is a great deal of liturgy to consider.

After a lengthy but informative prolegomenon on the ritual of Christian worship, Senn divides his book into three large parts in which he details the diverse growth and development of Christian liturgy. The first part, "From Meal to Mass," considers liturgy as it developed in the early and medieval church. Here, for example, the reader gets a taste of how important the Meal was in early worship. Senn examines a number of early documents like the *Didache* and the *Mishna*, showing how they were interpreted by or incorporated into later liturgi-

cal traditions and practice. Almost always he has his eye on the eucharistic meal as the center of Christian gathering and worship.

Although he admits that Sunday did not emerge as the day of celebration of the Lord's Supper until the second century (61), Senn nonetheless sees the meal as central to the development of forms of liturgy and prayer. He also finds the influence of the Lord's Supper in the evolution of church architecture. In this first section the reader is exposed to a focused and very technical discussion of early liturgical forms such as the Canon of Hippolytus and the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, as well as the later Liturgy of James and the Anaphora of John Chrysostom. Often these liturgies are presented in parallel columns for the sake of comparison. In addition to liturgies pertaining to the eucharist, Senn also pays attention to the development of other rites, like Christian initiation, penance, the ordering of ministry, and confirmation, the latter being a rite (Senn maintains) in search of a theology.

In part two of his book, "Reformation Liturgical Tradition," Senn discusses the various rites of the Roman Catholic and Calvinist traditions. It is here that the author's Lutheran proclivities are most evident. He devotes two solid chapters to liturgical matters in the Lutheran tradition, one on "Word and Sacrament in Luther's Reformation" and another on the "Development of Lutheran Liturgy." In the light of Senn's customary emphasis on the importance of the eucharist, it should be noted that he takes note of the prominence of the role of preaching in the Lutheran tradition. He refers to Luther's admonition about the preaching of God's word whenever Christians gather and concludes, "There can be no adequate presentation and assessment of Luther's liturgical reforms, and those of the Reformation generally, without attention to the act of preaching and the role of the sermon" (304).

The discussion in this middle part of the book goes well beyond Luther to consider liturgical developments in the full spectrum of reformation traditions. There are also separate discussions of the Roman reform and of developments in the Scandinavian traditions. It becomes apparent that on some occasions politics and liturgy are inex-

tricably intertwined, something that must be kept in mind even today. The complex historical discussion of the Swedish Church Order—particularly the role played by Johann III—reads like a liturgical spy story (421ff.). Other church figures like Chemnitz, Melancthon, Cranmer, and Bucer play significant roles in Senn's narrative; they flesh out the long and occasionally dry outlines of liturgical reforms.

In the final part of the book, "Liturgical Loss, Retrieval, and Renewal," Senn details the ebbs and eddies in the stream of liturgy from the seventeenth century—the Age of Certainty—to the present day—an age of far less certainty. The story of liturgy complexifies in this period because of frequent fracturing within various worshiping traditions and the challenge of numerous social and secular movements. Two general movements with which Senn seems particularly dismayed are Pietism and Rationalism. The former, he avers, has undermined confidence in the word, unleashed distrust of external forms, and created sentimental hymnody (498). Rationalism, on the other hand, led to a de-emphasis on the celebration of Holy Communion, a breakdown of liturgical order, and a flood of enlightenment moralism and sentimentality (542ff.). Senn sums up the perceived damage of these movements this way: "what began as an anti-ritualistic bias in Pietism became an assault on the supernatural in Rationalism" (540).

As in the other parts of the book, Senn lays out the context of the various liturgical traditions of the past two hundred years, considering the development of liturgy alongside church music, architecture, and other ecclesial impulses like the Oxford and Cambridge Movements. The author also discusses the current liturgical movement and evaluates recent worship books of major denominations. In three thoughtful sections near the end of the book Senn discusses contemporary liturgical challenges: inculturation, the feminist critique, and reaching the unchurched (676-692). These essay-like pieces could make helpful resources by themselves for pastors and worship committees as they ponder worship practices in local congregations.

Christian Liturgy as a whole is a valuable

resource, one that many will consider a standard for years to come. Senn himself sees his book as a companion to Philip Pfattheicher's *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship* (xvii); doubtless his work will be discussed in that vein. This book might be used as a text for seminarians or as a reference resource for pastors, though its length and technical density may make it hard going. Long as the book is, though, it would have been helpful to have a glossary of terms. It was not always easy to keep straight terms such as *enarxis* or *diptych*, that were defined in their first setting and then used again—fifty pages later—without a definition.

The sweep of Senn's book is impressive. In telling the story of Christian liturgy he tries in some measure to tell the story of western history and culture. Occasionally he tends to overreach himself by trying to do too much. Moreover, one gets the impression that, even when the evidence might permit alternate readings, Senn lets his own evangelical catholic predilections govern his conclusions. It is clear, as already noted, that he has little patience for Pietism and Rationalism. But surely these phenomena, when viewed through a different lens, might be seen as having some salutary place in the overall liturgical tradition of the west.

On balance, however, one must commend this work for its thoroughness and insight into the complex history of Christian liturgy. The exposition is both broad and balanced. Some issues, like the meaning and place of sacrifice and tradition, receive extensive scrutiny, for they play a determinative role in the story of the Christian liturgy. And even when Senn gives more weight to matters such as the catechumenate and eucharist than some may deem necessary, the subjects are nonetheless worthy of discussion.

One of the most provocative aspects of *Christian Liturgy*—though Senn may not have intended it directly—is the way in which old issues surface in different forms and in different times. Issues such as the propriety of the Eucharistic Prayer, leadership distinctions between ordained and non-ordained, the naming of God, and the confection of ersatz liturgical practices seem to rise periodically throughout the history

of the church. Senn gives a good recounting of how the wheel goes around.

With respect to the issue of liturgical deterioration, which appears to have been a threat as long ago as the seventeenth century (542f.), Senn draws a conclusion which commends itself to our attention. "Liturgy in this postmodern world," he says (704), "must aim for enchantment, not entertainment. Entertainment is a major facet of our culture. But entertainment as a cultural model is inadequate to the mission of the gospel because it works best when it leaves one satisfied with oneself and one's world. Enchantment, on the other hand, casts a spell that leads one from a drab world to another, brighter, more interesting world" (704). While one may disagree with what Senn sees as liturgically satisfying and proper, one can read his massive book and find it, if not exactly entertaining, then surely provocative, informative, and perhaps even enchanting.

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THE BIOTECH CENTURY: HARNESSING THE GENE AND REMAKING THE WORLD, by Jeremy Rifkin. New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1998. Pp.237. \$24.95.

Jeremy Rifkin complains that the futurists of the last two decades have misguided us by leading us to believe that moving into the so called "Information Age" is the single most important change we face in the coming century. He contends that while the computer has enabled us to increase the speed of computations and data storage beyond what would have been imaginable a generation ago, it is no more accurate to call us the computer age than it would be to call the nineteenth century the "printing press age." It was, of course, the Industrial Age, where the real "stuff" of industry was wood and metal and the pyrotechnic power to shape it, namely the burning of coal, oil, and finally the splitting of the atom. Correspondingly in the coming era the computer will be a necessary tool, but the "stuff" which will be manipulated, bought, sold, and fought over is the genetic foundation of

life itself. To prepare ourselves for the future by only debating the wonders of the computer age, in Rifkin's assessment, leaves us unprepared for the wonders, as well as the true moral and ethical challenges that await us in what he calls "the Biotech Century" where the two powerful sciences of computers and biology converge.

In our news media one hears more and more about the great advances in the knowledge of genes and genetic technology, from the cloning of sheep, to the manipulation of crops, to the hope of removing undesirable human genes responsible for everything from cystic fibrosis to short stature and baldness. Rifkin's book provides a primer for this coming age, which is already making fundamental inroads into our lives. Rifkin calls the Biotech Century the "second great technological revolution in world history" (15)—a "revolution which will affect every aspect of our lives: the way we eat; the way we date and marry; the way we have our babies; the way our children are raised and educated...the way we express our faith; the way we perceive the world around us and our place in it" (237).

Rifkin's book provides abundant examples of the current state of genetic research and the promise that it holds along with the new questions it raises. The risks for the future run the gamut from global environmental collapse to the violation of the most private and individual right, the right to claim ownership of one's own body and its components.

Jeremy Rifkin is not fearful of progress or technology in itself. Some of the potential benefits are truly amazing, and he maintains that this research is being done because there is a fantastic market for it. Who could not understand the great potential in being able to "fix" the genes which cause cancer or "screen out" the genes which may lead to diabetes, before a child is even born? The mammoth life science corporations are betting huge amounts of money that we will all understand the potential.

The most powerful aspects of "The Biotech Century," however, are its dire warnings about the sinister side of the new technologies and their applications. The news media often report on the strange or fantastic examples of biotechnology, like

the cloning of sheep or the proposed headless humans "grown" for organ parts. Fewer reports are heard, however, of less flashy, but profound developments such as the manipulation of plants for our food supply. Rifkin warns us of what he calls the potential for "genetic pollution" (73). That is the very real danger of scientifically designed crops and bacteria interacting in unpredictable ways with the natural environment. He warns, "Proponents of the new science armed with powerful gene-splicing tools and precious little data on potential impacts, are charging into this new world of agricultural biotechnology, giddy over the potential benefits and confident that the risks are minimum or nonexistent" (90). "But once released, many biological pathogens are capable of developing viable niches and maintaining themselves in the environment indefinitely" (73). Some of these introductions will certainly become pests which Rifkin fears could make Kudzu seem like a minor problem. In the United States, the government has not been interested in regulating these developments.

Perhaps even more frightening is the way this new technology is already changing the way we think of life itself, which parts of life can be "owned" and even what it means to be human. Rifkin asks the question, "What might it mean for subsequent generations to grow up in a world where they come to think of all life as mere invention—where the boundaries between the sacred and the profane and between intrinsic and utility value have all but disappeared, reducing life itself to an objectified status, devoid of any unique or essential quality that might differentiate it from the strictly mechanical?" (44). These are ultimately theological and spiritual questions.

Rifkin predicts new alliances of interest groups will be formed. There may soon be opportunities for those of us in the mainline and those who have traditionally aligned themselves with the "Moral Majority," as well as Roman Catholics and people from other religious traditions, to speak with one voice concerning the intrinsic and sacred value of life. Rifkin's book helps us to recognize that the issues which will face us in the Biotech Century make it worth reconsider-

ing cooperation with those with whom we have previously been unable to work.

The Biotech Century is creating, and will continue to create, new political alliances. Already there has been cooperation in legislation between such diverse legislators as Paul Wellstone and Jesse Helms who represent the far left and the far right of the political spectrum in the United States. These are lawmakers, who, while deeply divided on such issues as economic policy and the right to an abortion, find themselves united in their commitment that life itself has intrinsic value. They stand together against more

centrist politicians in both parties who would allow the life science companies (e.g., Monsanto and ADM), and those doing genetic research and experiments, to be governed by market forces alone. Rifkin warns that we, particularly those on the left, will find ourselves unprepared for the political issues of the next century if we do not begin now to think in terms of new paradigms and new alliances.

While much of the news is frightening, Rifkin suggests that there may be a way to proceed which celebrates and makes use of these new technologies without endanger-

ing either the planet or our own moral understanding of what it is to be human. He suggests that there can be a “soft” approach to biotechnology, which rather than forcing dangerous change on the genetic make-up of organisms can help us to better understand the intricacies of life in its complexity, so that we can learn new ways of living and coexisting with all the life on our planet which preserves the inherent uniqueness of

all species and the biological diversity of our world.

Rifkin is compelling in making his point that these are issues which cannot be ignored. It seems clear that people of faith must be participants in the debate. *The Biotech Century* is an excellent resource and a good place to begin that journey.

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