

Reviews



THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION: A NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION, by Gabriel Fackre. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Pp. x + 230.

Fackre, a theologian at Andover Newton Theological School and a leading voice in the “post-liberal” approach to theology, re-thinks the doctrine of revelation with fruitful consequences by critically engaging the thinking of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, and Carl Henry on revelation. He seeks a theology of revelation that returns to the centrality of biblical narrative which had been “eclipsed” by modern and post-modern premises which “collide with its assertion of overarching coherences” (3). He follows the lead of the late Hans Frei and George Lindbeck of Yale by seeing theology as articulating the “grammar” of the Christian faith, a “cultural-linguistic” enterprise. In this perspective, Scripture should be read as a “history-like” narrative similar to nineteenth-century realistic novels “in which the identity of characters emerges in their interaction with the common ventures of life” (4). Unlike modernity, the first goal of theology should not be apologetics but an interpretation of the “storied world of the canon, read typologically, with special reference to the micro-narrative within it” (4). Hence, he claims that “narrative, testimony to the biblical tale of an inextinguishable Light, and in touch with twentieth-century sensibilities, provides here the interpretive framework” (3). As a post-liberal theologian, Fackre affirms seven crucial aspects to the doctrine of revelation: (1) we like Karl Barth can interpret the world anew from the “strange new world of the Bible,” (2) the overarching biblical narrative will render the identity of the Christian God manifest, (3) Jesus Christ is the interpretive key to the whole scriptural narrative, (4) the place of Israel in God’s purposes is ineradicable, (5)

the ecumenical Christian community is a resource in the interpretation of Scripture, (6) culture is not the primary framework for understanding Christian truth, and (7) extrabiblical experience should be used “eclectically” on an ad hoc (and not normative) basis.

Fackre develops his view of the doctrine of revelation around the rather traditional themes of “general revelation,” “special revelation,” and “revelation as reception.” However, he develops these themes comparably to a “baby systematics.” He analyzes the concept of general revelation by developing the themes of creation, the fall, and the “covenant with Noah.” He analyzes special revelation by means of investigating the “covenant with Israel,” Jesus Christ as “incarnate action,” and the inspiration of scripture. And, he analyzes “revelation as reception” by means of presenting the church as “ecclesial illumination,” salvation as “personal illumination,” and consummation as “eschatological illumination.” Since he sees himself not only as a “post-liberal,” but also as an ecumenical, evangelical, and “catholic” thinker, he interprets God the Trinity as the source of the divine self-disclosure. For Fackre, “revelation is narrative-specific, the story of the triune God’s self-disclosure, the gift of the knowledge of God given in the history of God with human beings to human beings” (15). Given the Barthian heritage of the Yale theology, it is surprising and refreshing that under the category of the “covenant with Noah,” emphasizing God’s favor to all humankind, Fackre finds some common ground with Paul Tillich’s theology. Fackre argues that we must question any intrasystematic rationality that would appeal only to one’s own “web of faith,” or community of common commitment or social location. Ironically, then, arguments for the internal

rationality of one's faith perspective made in the public domain presuppose what they deny—a rationality that goes beyond self-defined boundaries. Fackre uses Tillich's thinking against post-modern "sophisms" that would affirm a reason that belongs only within the group as if they were not attempting to relate their truth-claims to criteria that is public.

Given his understanding of Tillich, Fackre reads Barth so as to develop as many points of contact as possible between the distinctive Christian narrative and wider culture. While the wider culture is not given a normative voice for Christian truth, it certainly offers analogies of Christian teaching, according to the later Barth. Again, on the basis of the "Noachic covenant," there is a common grace that sustains the world. However, the common faith that is commensurate with this "grace of preservation" does not save souls (145). That alone is the unique task of the gospel.

A theory of revelation cannot avoid dealing with the issue of how the Bible is a revelatory text. Hence, Fackre addresses Carl Henry's "moderate form" of biblical inerrancy (159). With Henry, Fackre affirms that there is some illumination in the entirety of the Bible (168). However, he challenges the fundamentalist assumption that there is an unqualified inerrancy in all parts and all the subject matter of the Scriptures. This assumption, according to Fackre, confuses the "present Dawn with the final Day" (170). Instead, witness to Jesus Christ is the criteria by which to discern God's word within the words of Scripture. Fackre's affirmation with Karl Rahner that the fullness of truth is linked to the wholeness of the church (199) through the agency of the Holy Spirit within the church (200) distances his thinking from an unwholesome biblicism and situates it in conversation with the catholic tradition.

Fackre's theology of revelation is a welcome addition to the growing number of works dedicated to engaging orthodox Christian theology with contemporary thinking. The professional theologian will

appreciate the subtleties of his work while pastors and professional church workers will appreciate the readability. Fackre pushes Yale thinking by engaging it with "correlationalist theologies" and in so doing strengthens the viability of this method.

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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, 2 vols., by Robert W. Jenson. New York: Oxford, 1997-1999. Pp. x+244; vi+380. \$49.95 and 55.00 (cloth).

Where most dogmatics cause slumber, Robert Jenson's two volumes of systematics plays a loud reveille. As others champion length and obscurity, this systematics invigorates with its lively elaboration of detail, breadth of material, and clarity of task. Readers of *Systematic Theology* will profit from the long-standing work and contribution of Robert Jenson.

The titles of the two volumes state Jenson's assignment: *The Triune God and The Works of God*. Both are rigorously trinitarian. In all instances, Jenson solves theological problems and liturgical tasks in trinitarian fashion. Such thoroughgoing and consistent work is welcome among the aimless wandering of so much theological writing.

A wide range of discussion and careful focus emerges from a concern for the one church. Jenson writes the systematics in "anticipation of the one church" (I:viii). This systematics distinguishes itself from many other attempts, which solve ecumenical problems in advance, or simply ignore them and extend the division of the one church.

For these tasks, Jenson understands Christian theology to "recognize and adhere" to the biblical God (I:90). He does this in terms of distinguishing the God of Israel from other putative gods and claims for eternity. Religion is the cultivation of eternities and salvation in any religion depends upon the identity of that god or savior (I:54-55). In that, his main prolegomena are an expanded form of Luther's explana-

tion of the First Commandment in the *Large Catechism*: “What is it to have a God?” The question of the existence of any gods is itself trivial. Instead, the question is: “Which is the true God?”

In answering these questions, Jenson carefully exposit the Scriptures. His summary is that the biblical God identifies himself in the exodus of Israel and the resurrection of Jesus. These are the blatantly temporal marks that identify that God. Where other gods tried to keep Israel in Egypt, Israel’s God brought her to freedom.

Compared to most other systematic statements of the last century, these volumes do not have lengthy prolegomena. Jenson does not have an interest in saving his readers from confusing beginnings, he just has a proclivity to get to the chase. His study of such prolegomena shows that if they are not themselves part of Christian teaching, the “prolegomena sooner or later turn against the logomena” (I:9).

Beyond beginnings, Jenson is clear that theology involves two other activities: prayer and proclamation. Without both, Jenson claims that theology loses both its object and its assignment (I:14). In that, his systematics is only finally useful insofar as the church uses it in its discourse identifying God, how it helps the church’s preaching, and whatever final use it is in the kingdom.

Theology’s business began as the church’s preaching moved out on to Greek soil. Since the gospel has a history, the task of identifying the biblical God has become more and more difficult. In his account of this history, Jenson clearly notes that the “foolishness of the cross to the general piety of Mediterranean antiquity” as well as to the Jews, for whom it was an offense because “interpretation of God by the cross made all too eminent sense” (I:49, n. 54).

Continuing the task of identifying the biblical God in light of these problems alters the order of doctrines. Christology, pneumatology, the triune character, all parts of systematics normally located outside of the doctrine of God, here constitute it.

The actors of the triune drama together

form the *dramatis dei personae* (I:75). In the center of this narrative stands “the Son.” This particular actor includes Jesus and Israel: “*totus Christus*...meaning the risen Christ including and included in his community” (I:77, 81). This actor would have little significance without the Father who sends him, or the Spirit who raises him from the dead (I:83, 86). Together, they are the life of the triune God.

Jenson holds that the resurrection has the centrality that crucifixion normally does (I:179, 194). This goes along with his criticism of western theology’s Father-Son binity (I:146). God is Spirit, a much underdeveloped part of Western doctrine (I:87). He commends the observance of the Triduum Sacrum to comprehend the events of Holy Thursday to Easter (I: 190) as well as a fuller observation of Pentecost (I:190, 146).

The role that the cross plays in the risen Jesus’ life does not create discontinuity. The abandonment of Jesus instead belongs to the relation he shares with the Father (I:181). What such abandonment means for the identification of God, Jenson at least addresses in his criticism of eschatological proclamation in other parts of the first volume (I:168ff.). At this crucial point Jenson either overcomes the difficulties of past generations or his doctrine of the Trinity fails to be as radically rooted in the Spirit who raises the dead as he intends.

It would be possible to consider the identification of God complete when one comes to the final sentences of the first volume about God as a great fugue (I:236). But God having so identified himself by rescuing Israel from bondage and raising Jesus gives way to vol. 2, *The Works of God*. God has “space” in him and has in fact created, so the exposition of the identity of God includes his outward works (II:367).

“It is God’s Trinity that allows him to create freely but not arbitrarily” (II:28). The sections on creation involve a clear expression of God’s outward act and its relation to the triune God. “That God creates means

there is other reality than God and that it is really other than he" (II:5).

Jenson does not stay away from the narrative of the Bible long in the discussion of creation. Israel and no other confesses "in the beginning God created...." "The history of Israel's own coming into being is a history of promise...it is into history so conceived and told that Genesis incorporates also the beginning of the world." Creation is "Tov," good for something. For Jenson, the narrative of creation points towards the fulfillment of God's promises, the very universal conditions necessary for Exodus and ultimately Jesus' resurrection (II:13).

On the stage of this creation stands the church. Because Jenson understands that the "body of Christ" is no metaphor, the church properly belongs to an exposition of the second person of the Trinity (II:167, 212 n. 9). In the midst of much current churchly debate, Jenson frames many of the questions. His work comes out of ecumenical consensus and sharpens it.

After the church comes the end, the account of judgment, the kingdom, and the saints themselves. At the root of the kingdom for Jenson is the fact that "the people of God cannot yet assemble." The promise is that they will. "The perfect community of the kingdom is and can only be a community of the resurrected" (II:334).

All in all, *Systematic Theology* amounts to nothing less than a consideration of a decidedly Greek concept, "being." Jenson sums up the usual metaphysics: "what can be and what cannot be are determined by abstractly universal principles and never by a particular." In its place, he insists that "if the gospel is true...the individual human person Jesus is, by the initiative of the Father and in the freedom of the Spirit, the material determinant of what generally can be and cannot be" (II:215). Jenson's task is not simply giving Christian answers to Greek questions, but a concern to carry out the implications of the identification of the biblical God.

In his long reading of the Bible for this task, Jenson confronts the opinion that "old

Israel had no talent for metaphysics" (II:157). Such a claim simultaneously despises poetry, Israel, and metaphysics. In its place, he takes seriously the Bible's confession of God's faithfulness to Israel in time, not outside of it. The course of the gospel's history subsequently encountered the questions of "being." In identifying God, "the concept has become an inextricable determinant of the actual Christian doctrine of God," but never apart from exposition of the Bible (I:207).

These developments both bring Jenson to stand over and against the tradition at large, but force him to reject radically eschatological formulations of God. He decides in favor of ontology, though a particular kind which overcomes many western problems.

Jenson draws deftly from many theologians, from Maximus the Confessor to Jonathan Edwards. His own Luther interpretation admittedly relies upon David Yeago, whose full argument on a "catholic Luther" has yet to be seen, and the Finnish Luther researchers. Jenson's range equals his depth.

Jenson's own clarity and pursuit is exemplified by one of these important theologians, the Swabian reformer Johannes Brenz. Where Brenz steadfastly confessed the union of human and divine in Jesus, Jenson consistently pursues the identification of the biblical God.

In both volumes, Jenson asks of his readers: "the following is offered for whatever use the church can make of it" (I:vii). So it is fit to read, consider, criticize, and think on such a fine work. Readers of all kinds will benefit from Jenson's *Systematic Theology*.

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WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING?: RE-IMAGINING SPIRIT AND POWER, by Lee E. Snook. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. Pp. 171. \$17.00 (paper).

Drama coaches sometimes use a rhetorical exercise to demonstrate differences in meaning and intention: See how many dif-

ferent ways you can say, "Give me a jelly bean." Depending on one's tone of voice and where one puts the stress, one can convey everything from invocation to impatience, and perhaps even desperation. Lee Snook, in his book *What in the World Is God Doing?* aims for a similar effect. Although the editing on page 75 is confusing, Snook challenges the reader to pose the eponymous question with differing emphasis. Said one way, he suggests, one could convey desperation about the world. "But if the emphasis shifts...we would have to re-imagine—that is, change our minds about—what the power of God as Spirit means" (75).

Asking the question with the proper emphasis and re-imagining Spirit and power are what this slim but provocative book is all about. The term "re-imagining the Spirit" appears in two of the seven chapter titles and recurs frequently throughout the book. This *re-imagination* is crucial, according to Snook, because of a basic crisis of *imagination* with respect both to Spirit and power. "The argument has been that the failure to discern the forms of power at work in ordinary life is a failure of imagination, and that the failure of imagination in turn exaggerates the difficulty of discerning the Spirit in all forms of power" (96).

This failure of imagination has its root in the tendency to disregard the pervasive role of Spirit in both church and secular world. With consistency, Snook demonstrates the fact that the Spirit is either neglected or misappropriated. For some the Spirit is held captive by structure. For others the Spirit has been subordinated to the Word, resulting in a virtual "binitarian doctrine." Even pentecostal protest has relegated the Spirit solely to expressions of experience. Because we have neglected to see the Spirit in all forms of power, Snook contends that there is a pressing need for re-imagining the Spirit and power. "[I]t is urgent that Christians in America learn quickly to re-imagine power....Christians can play a role in helping America understand that the Spirit is incarnate in all forms of power" (121).

Snook draws this concern from his own experience, particularly his prolonged exposure to life and thought in Africa. Throughout the book he bears witness to and gives thanks for his time in Zimbabwe where he soaked in the Spirit. The prime image for the central part of the book derives from an imaginative exercise of trying to describe to an African the shape of American history (36). Four key "emplotments" or forms arise in the telling: comedy, tragedy, romance, and satire.

Each of these emplotments becomes in turn a focus in the middle four chapters of the book; and each in turn limns the various faces of power wherein the Spirit is active. Comedy, in the classical sense, evinces power as domination and truth (chapter 3). As tragedy, power can be seen as freedom and justice (chapter 4). Chapter 5 deals with power in the sense of a romantic tale, involving beauty and love. The power of equality and dissent frames the discussion in chapter 6. His eight powerful images accent the human experience from which the Spirit is never absent. Seeing and making the connection between Spirit and power, in both their beneficial and their malign senses, is crucial to Snook's program of re-imagination. "Imagination, I argue, is the human spirit's way of envisioning (or re-imagining) the power of the Spirit to effect new possibilities for the future, so that when by the power of the Spirit people make these possibilities actual, persons are no longer held captive to mere matter-of-factness" (38).

The discussion in these central chapters is dense but never turgid. And it is potentially very helpful to readers who may agree that the Spirit is the neglected person of the Trinity. The argument has further appeal because it connects with many practical areas of life. Reconciliation and truth, for example, are not mere abstractions here; they impact on people's lives in the real world. Similarly, Snook develops a careful discussion of the power of the Spirit in victory over evil, and offers some suggestive insights into love, evil, and beauty's capacity to save the world.

When Snook's speech reaches that latter level, however, the reader might wish to sit down with him and consider these rhetorical matters in more detail. Is this claim for beauty real or is it just a figure of speech? Are the figures of speech (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and satire) that Snook invokes all there is to the rhetoric of Spirit and power? Or could one just as well invoke and expand upon antanacsis or syllepsis? Another issue might be raised as well. No matter how favorably one may feel about the place of popular culture, would one ultimately want to maintain, as Snook does, that "rock music is the sound of the Spirit" (117)? The Beatles, perhaps, but the Red Hot Chili Peppers?

Some might also be prompted to demur as Snook develops his argument along certain other lines. His very favorable reading of the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (about six pages, 103-109) and his considered critique of those who favor a theology of proclamation or a christocentric theology (84) might provoke fruitful discussion. So would his claim for the ubiquity of the Spirit. "The Spirit is everywhere, existing in the omnipresent secular forms of the Spirit's power. There is no place in the world where the Spirit is not" (125). That is a palpably attractive assertion. But, in considering the matter liturgically, one might wish to know why, and in what way, one engages in *epiclesis*, invoking the Spirit as if she comes *extra nos*.

All of which suggests the thoughtful richness of the material presented in this book. Not only is the argument carefully crafted, but it is presented clearly. Snook would appear to be a member of the "tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you've told them" school of writing. The central argument is made proleptically on pages 9-11 and again on pages 36-38. It is given in rich detail in chapters 3-6. And an excellent summary is offered on pages 119-125. Indeed, if one does not have time to read the full 133 pages of text and the 25 pages of informational notes, one can profitably im-

bibe the essence by reading those summary 7 pages.

This book would make fruitful reading for pastors, students, and anyone interested in issues pertaining to the third article of the creed. It could prove to be a useful stimulus to thought and action, especially if one agrees with Snook that there is a failure of imagination because we have overlooked or misidentified what in the world God is doing. If, as he says, we come to think that the Spirit is acting only in the church and not in the world, then God is doing nothing in the world.

But whoever finds the book's title question and God's worldly activity beguiling should find this book rewarding reading. "What in the world is God doing? God is not doing everything, but God is doing what only God can do within and among all creatures to cajole, persuade, lure, entice, and inspire them to use the power of their God-given freedom for the sake of justice, to the end that the kingdom of God come on earth" (74). How to ask for a jelly bean effectively may be an important exercise for discerning actors, but how to contemplate what God is doing in the world is a crucial matter for dedicated disciples.

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POLITICS, RELIGION, AND THE COMMON GOOD: ADVANCING A DISTINCTLY AMERICAN CONVERSATION ABOUT RELIGION'S ROLE IN OUR SHARED LIFE, by Martin Marty with Jonathan Moore. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. Pp. 174. \$22.50 (cloth).

In our strident political climate, where the presence of religious concerns is often perceived to be little more than destructive zealotry and the end of coherent conversation, this book brings refreshingly constructive wisdom. As part of the Public Religion Project funded by the Pew Charitable Trust and hosted by the University of

Chicago, it falls under an assignment “to promote efforts to bring to light and interpret the forces of faith within a pluralistic society.” The book certainly carries out that assignment, but it is not a document that fulfills the demands of a grant with little value beyond a perfunctory requirement. This book is worth reading. It contributes to our common life. In a fashion typical of Martin Marty, it surveys the landscape with compassionate fairness and organizes a conversation the reader is invited to join.

Marty begins by laying out the unique terrain of American politics and religion where separation of church and state has never yielded a neat divide and where religion is an ever-present reality. He notes that the “‘wall of separation’ metaphor” is neither in the Constitution nor the Bill of Rights, but comes from a letter of Thomas Jefferson (125). After defining politics, religion, and public religion, Marty distinguishes between argument that all too often leads to “unbudgeable roadblocks” (19) and conversation that encourages learning. Then he asks what the conversation is about. The following chapters unpack the content of the conversation by means of six theses.

The theses range widely. Though not explicitly so divided, they tend to fall into groups of twos. The first two state opposites: public religion can be dangerous and cause trouble, yet it can also contribute to the common good. The next two work out from individuals to the increasingly broad institutional circles of congregations, denominations, and ecumenical agencies. The fifth suggests that for the foreseeable future religious people are most likely to funnel their political energies into special-interest groups. The last proposes that the common good needs religious people to join the political conversation and get involved.

You will not find here an argument for a liberal or conservative position. Historical examples from all sides of the political spectrum are represented. Nor will you find an avoidance of controversial issues. Topics that generate emotive and strongly-held positions pepper these pages with ample

historical detail, like abortion, prayer in schools, slavery, homeless shelters, racism, sex education, capital punishment, physician-assisted suicide, gun control, and homosexuality. You will also not find any one religious perspective encouraged to take up an imperialistic posture. Groups that make up the constituencies of this country—like Jews, Christians, Muslims, non-believers, secular humanists, fundamentalists, liberals, and Native Americans (each in many guises)—are all welcomed. If there is a group you find absent (and it would have to be a relatively small one since the net of examples is wide), the implication is clear that it too is welcome to the conversation as long as its intentions are constructive and honorable. Nowhere in the book is any perspective cast out: good rather than ill will clearly stands underneath the whole enterprise as an unwritten assumption. Marty is dealing here with the value of the insights the whole religious community can provide the republic. His concern is for the interplay of ideas, competing interests, and alternatives, how groups work and call their opposites into being, reasons for and against compromise, the push and pull of historic forces including the influence of power and money and size, the common good, and the importance religious perspectives provide the whole mosaic.

That should not be interpreted to mean Marty minimizes the particularity of any given perspective. This is not a book that argues for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim differences, for example, to be blended into some religion-in-general mush or even for differences within any single community of faith to be blended in such a way. On the contrary, Marty is sensitive to strongly held differences. He is not interested in minimizing or betraying them and clearly knows the power of the prophetic word. He realizes people believe different things and that people of the same faith may themselves differ on critical questions. He does not call for people to pocket their most cherished beliefs nor shackle their preachments. His interest is in making a conversation possible and bringing beliefs to the

table in the most coherent and helpful way possible so as to inform our common life for the common good.

While this is a text that relates directly to the political sphere of the country as a whole, perceptive pastors and church-goers will immediately see that the conversation it stimulates is not only applicable to that context. There is no explicit mention of constructive conversations elsewhere, but clues are there for congregations or denominations that confront “unbudgeable road-blocks” in the divisive issues they face.

Footnotes are appropriately terse for a text of this sort. Unfortunately they appear in four pages of “Notes” at the end of the book rather than on the pages to which they apply. This “clean look” publishers seem to prefer makes using the notes awkward. Ease of use for the book as a whole is assisted, on the other hand, by a helpful Index.

The writing is lively yet serious, carefully researched yet not technical, and accessible to any reasonably well-informed citizen. It will not give a reader neatly packaged answers, but it will stimulate hope and good will. And, “in a distinctly American way,” it will help to interject into the public arena the insights of the religious community in this country.

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THE AUGUSTANA HERITAGE: RECOLLECTIONS, PERSPECTIVES, AND PROSPECTS, ed. by Arland J. Hultgren and Vance L. Eckstrom. Chicago: Augustana Heritage Association, 1999. Pp. xv +301. \$25 (paper).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America might be understood as a mighty river formed by the confluence of smaller rivers, themselves formed by the confluence of smaller streams. In understanding the “ELCA River,” it is helpful to travel “upstream” to those smaller rivers and streams whose water flows as a heritage in the current river. This book gives us a taste of the

Augustana Lutheran Church, one of those smaller streams.

The Augustana Lutheran Church began in 1848 in New Sweden, Iowa, with the organization of the first congregation that would eventually become part of Augustana. To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of that congregation, an Augustana Heritage Sesquicentennial Committee organized a gathering held in Chautauqua, New York, in 1998. This book is composed of essays which, for the most part, were originally presented orally at this gathering.

Almost all of the authors write as much out of memory as out of research, having themselves been active participants in the Augustana Lutheran Church, which officially went out of existence in 1962 when the “Augustana River” flowed into the “Lutheran Church in America River.” Their essays range from the serious and scholarly to the “down home” and “folksy.” Taken together, they provide a picture of a church that, though never without its failings, “worked.” In his essay on “The Piety and Polity of Augustana,” Lyman Lundeen quotes a letter from Lyle Schaller as follows:

“My big regret of the second half of the twentieth century is that we have yet to produce a denomination that displays all the positive attributes of the Augustana Synod. That was my favorite denomination, for the few short years I knew it before the merger created the LCA. The people of the Augustana Synod knew what church was all about. They balanced doctrine, worship, heritage, celebration, relationships, family, teaching, fellowship, and missions in ideal proportions.” (15)

The essayists whose work appears here would agree with Schaller. Their affection for Augustana is clear. They are proud of the Augustana heritage, and hope to keep it alive in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In the first essay, “What Was/Is Augustana,” former ELCA Presiding Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom establishes the terms of the discussion that follows, identifying four

prominent elements of the “Augustana spirit”: personal piety, dignified worship, social consciousness, and global awareness. Later authors explore topics ranging from worship to youth ministry, from theological education to global missions, from women’s ministries to the social ministry institutions of the church, from evangelism to ecumenism to American missions, from piety to ties with the Swedish-American community. The giants of Augustana walk these pages, leaders like Conrad Bergendoff, Lars Paul Esbjorn, T. N. Hasselquist, Oscar Benson. This is not a book to teach the institutional history of the Augustana Lutheran Church, although much history is here. Rather than systematic history, it is a book that will give the reader a taste, a feel, of what Augustana was like.

The essays include humor. James Ford remembers matriculating before the faculty at Augustana Seminary and being greeted with the question “Ford, do you dance?” Hartland Gifford tells of a basketball team at Augustana Seminary that called itself “the Flying Irishmen,” since no one with a name ending “son” was allowed to be on the team.

The essays include a little mystery. Several authors refer to a small revolution which took place at Augustana Seminary around 1930, but no one seems to know exactly what that revolution was about or what it involved, those who do know aren’t talking, and the historical record of the time seems to have been “cleansed.”

And the essays are not without a few sharp insights into the failings of Augustana. Ford points out that the fine piety of Augustana could sometimes degenerate into a stifling pietism. Charles Bergstrom reminds readers that racial and religious prejudice were not totally absent.

The danger of such a volume is nostalgia. The Augustana Lutheran Church no longer exists. It represented a style of church life that no longer exists. In some ways that is a good thing. It is striking and representative of that old style of church life that of the 28 contributors to the volume, 26 are men, and one of the two female authors writes on the

Women’s Missionary Society and the Augustana Church Women. But it was also a style of church life that had much to commend it. Augustana worked. It carried a strong sense of both the importance of the local congregation and the reality of a church larger than any local congregation. It had its periodic disagreements, but those disagreements never became church dividing.

Perhaps this was the case because Augustana always did have a strong sense of identity, and a security about that identity. Maria Erling, in her essay on “Augustana’s Heritage and Prospects,” describes a time in the late 1930s when Augustana was

actively exploring possibilities for further fellowship with the United Lutheran Church in America, [while at the same time participating]...in the more conservative and Midwestern-based American Lutheran Conference. This put Augustana on friendly terms with most other Lutheran groups in the country. Used to speaking on friendly terms with other Lutherans, [Conrad] Bergendoff, in speaking to a Missouri [Synod] pastor, adopted a firm tone when he made this charge: “I believe I speak truly when I say that many Lutherans in America do not accept the Missouri Synod as the judge of their faith, or of their Lutheranism. You treat us as non-Lutherans. We resent it....It is my contention that we are to meet each other as Lutherans, and not as suplicants asking for the right to be called Lutherans by others who have decided what Lutheranism is.” (128)

As an institution, the Augustana Lutheran Church is no more. As a heritage, it lives on, and has much to contribute to the church of today and tomorrow. This volume is a good way to get acquainted with that heritage.

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