

Reviews



USELESS BEAUTY: ECCLESIASTES THROUGH THE LENS OF CONTEMPORARY FILM, by Robert K. Johnston. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004. Pp. 208. \$17.99 (paper).

Like other scholars who hold that film is an important conversation partner with the perspectives of faith, Robert K. Johnston proposes to put film and Christian Scripture—and, specifically, Ecclesiastes—in a creative two-way dialogue. What makes *Useless Beauty* notable and well worth reading, however, is Johnston's effort to resist the usual methods of Christian movie critique. Frequently, he claims, films are viewed principally through the filter of biblical standards of truth, a procedure that inevitably relegates film to a second order of analytical reflection. Rather than following this worn path that grants the biblical witness or theology epistemological priority, Johnston intends to reverse the "hermeneutical flow," moving quite intentionally from cinema to scripture. He maintains that this approach, beginning as it does with the moviemaker's cameras, will give fresh insight to the message of Qoheleth. In short, this book intends to "take Ecclesiastes to the movies" (11).

Because Johnston aims to provide a sort of reader/reviewer criticism that sees Ecclesiastes through the lens of film, it follows that the bulk of the book is devoted to a careful review and analysis of important recent movies. Indeed, Johnston's sensitive and insightful discussion of films is the chief strength of this book. One need not have seen all the movies he treats in order to benefit from the volume, although the book does provide a compelling incentive to rent

and re-view films such as *American Beauty*, *Monster's Ball*, *About Schmidt*, *Signs*, and many more. In each instance, Johnston's descriptions reveal important aspects of the filmmaker's art and message before bringing them into alignment with the insights of Ecclesiastes. A genuine side-benefit of the book is that it helps the reader to become a more sensitive and informed viewer of the film genre even as Johnston prompts the reader to consider, in new ways, the interface of culture and faith.

Given this goal, the author pays little heed either to historical-critical concerns or to the history of the interpretation of Ecclesiastes. For example, alternative interpretations of Ecclesiastes are barely mentioned in the three pages that comprise the first of the book's appendices, and there they are simply dismissed as being too "undialectical" to do justice to a biblical book that resists being understood as a constructed whole (181). Elsewhere, in a five-page section of the final chapter titled "Let the 'Preacher' Respond," Johnston outlines his understanding of Qoheleth's message, again with no attention to alternative interpretations of Ecclesiastes. This is unfortunate because, of course, reversing the usual "hermeneutical flow" does not dissolve the reader/reviewer's role in the interpretive process. The "flow" remains a hermeneutical circle regardless of the starting point and, consequently, the way in which film provides insight into Ecclesiastes remains dependent, at least in part, on *what* one understands the message of a film and the message of Ecclesiastes to be. For example, Johnston judges Woody Allen's existential *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, with that film's stress on the importance of creating one's own

meaning amid life's ultimate meaninglessness, to be antonymous to Qoheleth's counsel that his readers, in the absence of any final wisdom, ought simply to enjoy the gift of life (56). Nevertheless, it appears quite likely that scholars such as James Crenshaw, Douglas Stuart, and (perhaps especially) Michael Fox would discover in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* a quite different, more congruent, insight into the message of Ecclesiastes.

Unfortunately, the book also excludes Qoheleth's full participation in the promised two-way dialogue between film and scripture. Johnston maintains that many of the films he reviews portray an authentic human life as one that is lived in the delicate balance between an individual's recognition of life's ephemeral character, on the one hand, and the discovery of deep joy in life, on the other. Life lived in this balance, he avers, is also Ecclesiastes' message. But beyond the aforementioned five pages, Qoheleth's participation in the dialogue—and thus the reader's chance to see a movie as Qoheleth might view it—is largely limited to brief quotations that appear as proof texts that reaffirm the insights of the film's characters and of their directors. For example, Johnston describes how Graham Hess (Mel Gibson's character in *Signs*) comes to understand that God is in charge of even the apparently random suffering that befalls all human beings. He writes, "Graham's painful yet liberating insight echoes that of Qoheleth," and then straightaway cites Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 7:13–14 (144). This procedure establishes *Johnston's understanding* of Qoheleth as a validation of the work of *Signs* director M. Night Shyamalan, but it does little to further the reader's understanding of Qoheleth's message.

The book's shortcomings notwithstanding, this volume will be a useful tool in the library of pastors and youth workers. First, there is an interpretation of Qoheleth here, if not the only one possible. Second, films—far more than the Bible—have become the common "texts" of our society. Understanding these powerful expressions of contemporary culture is therefore a crucial task

for any who would bear the message of the cross into our culture. Johnston's sensitive interpretation of movies serves to equip pastors and others who seek to find ways that movies might converse with the biblical witness. Finally, preachers seeking some pertinent connection with the lives of their parishioners in the Sunday sermon are likely to find an inspirational model in Johnston's approach. And that is no small accomplishment!

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PERSPECTIVES OLD AND NEW ON PAUL: THE "LUTHERAN" PAUL AND HIS CRITICS, by Stephen Westerholm. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. 488. \$35.00 (paper).

Like Gaul, this volume is divided into three parts, and like Gaul, it should give its critics pause before they plan another attack, though like Rome, perhaps, they may never give up trying.

In this discursive, lengthy, but excellent book Stephen Westerholm of McMaster University, Ontario, examines contemporary studies on Paul bent on refuting a "Lutheran" reading. At issue, writes Westerholm, is whether or not justification by faith apart from works of the law or Gentile admission to the people of God is at the heart of the apostle's thought. The old Paul, the "Lutheran" Paul, current critics argue, has been saddled with the scheme of Luther's spiritual quest for a gracious God, resulting in a caricature of Judaism as championing salvation by works. In his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress, 1977), watershed of the old and new perspectives, E. P. Sanders insists that Paul was not concerned with whether one earned salvation by works but with on what terms Gentiles could get in, and as for Judaism, its unifying concept was not law and an absence of grace, but rather "covenantal monism," membership in Israel. Sanders's position has been seconded

or nuanced by a host of others, among them the Durham scholar James D. G. Dunn, who describes the thrust of Paul's attack as the restrictiveness implicit in Jewish emphasis on the law.

First, Westerholm espies a "curious anomaly" in Sanders's linking texts dealing with justification to a process by which outsiders make it in. In none of these, he adds, is the context "covenantal." And as for Dunn's nuance, Paul's point is skewed when applied merely to the law's perversion. All in all, the notion of recent scholarship according to which Paul is at pains to show that Gentiles needn't become Jews is short-sighted; more, it obviates the necessity of Christ's death. Following what had to be a tedious reexamination of the pertinent texts, and reminiscent of Carsten Colpe's rehearsal of materials on which members of the history-of-religions school once pasted the figure of the "Redeemed Redeemer," Westerholm concludes that, according to Paul, Jews, in essence, did not differ from Gentiles, for which reason there can be no righteousness based on law. Thus, he adds, all the essential features of the "Lutheran" Paul are supported by the relevant texts.

However much the "Lutheran" Paul may have transgressed historical occasions, it has rightly captured Paul's rationale and basic point and, after all, it's the point that's crucial. In a puckish reflection on the chutzpah of Paul's current interpreters, to right or left, Westerholm writes, "As the assumptions that governed Paul's thinking become more and more remote from our own, the assurance with which we pronounce on the direction and deficiencies of his reasoning seems only to increase. Isn't America wonderful?" (214).

This is not to say that the recent crowd has gotten nothing right. In fact, Sanders's conviction that Paul did not begin his thinking about sin or redemption by analyzing the human condition, or in other words his interpretation of Paul as moving from solution to plight and not the other way around, is eminently correct. (Thanks are due Werner Georg Kümmel for challenging that old canard regarding Paul's psychic shipwreck prior to his conversion.) More's the pity that while Sanders deserves appreciation for getting Paul back on his feet or sympathetically depicting Judaism, neither he, Stendahl, and all their tribe have

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ever gotten beyond the portrait so dear to the heart of Roland Bainton and every other romantic of an introspective Augustinian, whose anguish prepared for a skewed reading of Paul that has ended in a travesty of Judaism and in the midst of a mountain of evidence for the Reformer's insistence that the confession of Jesus Christ is *prior*, not anterior, to knowledge of sin and law. But Luther himself is to blame for it, with that *zusammengeschrumpft* "biography" of his in the 1545 preface to the Romans.

In all this discussion, of course, the "negative" complement of Paul's gospel has gotten the lion's share, and no wonder, given the occasions for his letters. But there are hints at the "positive" complement, and by both sides. Let Jürgen Becker speak for them all: Paul's "pressing concern is how he can let the Christ who is near in the gospel determine and value everything" (248).

Once this complement enters the picture, once it is acknowledged that Paul proceeds from solution to plight, everything in fact needs revaluing. As for the law, absent of or replete with grace, it is clear now that it was never intended to be the ultimate expression of the divine will. It rather leaned toward an event in which the Creator would not merely draw near to his creatures but become one with them. Again, if recent interpreters had gotten past their kindergarten Luther or troubled to consult someone outside their discipline, they would have learned that for the Reformer "justification" was no mere moratorium but a christological statement that promised the presence of the giver in the gift. This "invasion," as J. Louis Martyn put it, explains why "the human path to blessedness" could never be an issue or a possibility for Paul, and why any other route spells "religion" (240). Too bad Lou and his teacher, Ernst Käsemann, didn't get more space in this book. But I give it an "A" all the same.

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**APOSTLE OF THE CRUCIFIED LORD:
A THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION
TO PAUL AND HIS LETTERS**, by Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. 610. \$39.00 (paper).

This book is not simply another member of the "Introduction to Paul" mob. Gorman has included several unusual features that are so well conceived and carried out that this text stands apart from the crowd. Gorman's stated aim for this book is to help the readers "engag[e] Paul and his letters as the pastoral, spiritual, and theological challenge they were intended to be" (xi). For the most part, Gorman succeeds admirably in this.

The book begins with six chapters on Paul's life and thought. Notable here is that Gorman includes not only a chapter on Paul's theology, but also one on Paul's spirituality. By "spirituality" Gorman means the shape of life in Christ, and he finds six adjectives to describe that life according to Paul: (1) It is covenantal, i.e., it has to do with the activity of the faithful God of Israel. (2) It is cruciform, in that the cross of Jesus is not only the source, but is also the shape of this life. (3) It is charismatic, lived by the power of the Spirit. These first three characteristics also point to an insistent and recurring claim Gorman makes about Paul's thought and spirituality: though Paul did not formulate a fully developed theology of the Trinity, Gorman finds that "Paul's experience of God can best be described as trinitarian—he knows one God in three realities: Abba/Father, Messiah/Son of God/Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit/Spirit of God/Spirit of Christ" (139). Gorman finds that from the saving activity of this God come three further characteristics of the life of faith: (4) It is communal, (5) it is countercultural, and (6) it is (new-)creational.

Next, Gorman includes a chapter on each of the Pauline letters. In this discussion, Gorman treats authorship as a rather broad continuum ranging from Paul composing the letters himself (including 2 Thessalonians), to his authorization of an associate's composition (Colossians and

Ephesians), to an editing together of genuine pieces from Paul (2 Timothy), and thus finds that Paul is more or less responsible for all of the New Testament letters that bear his name except 1 Timothy and Titus. Gorman sees these last two letters as lacking in Paul's own spirit, though Gorman still suggests that the best approach is to be agnostic about the authorship of these two letters.

Each chapter on one of the letters is a miniature commentary, and this is a great strength of the book. These chapters are organized around three discussions. First, there is the "story behind the letter," the historical and cultural background for this particular letter. In these discussions, Gorman finds the account of Acts to be a largely accurate guide. Then comes the largest part of these chapters, "the story within the letter," a section-by-section commentary. Here Gorman is careful to note where there is scholarly disagreement about the interpretation, especially for the most notoriously problematic passages. He is clear about his own reading of the text, though he seldom argues at length to prove that he is right, and even less frequently names authors and works that would disagree with his reading. The Greek words that Gorman mentions are always transliterated and translated, making the book accessible for those who do not know Greek. Throughout these discussions, Gorman notes significant features of three English translations: New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, and New American Bible, a useful inclusion of what probably are the most widely used translations in mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic settings, respectively. After the commentary section of these chapters, Gorman includes a brief section termed "the story in front of the letter," a selection of quotations from church leaders and scholars with heavy representation from the last few decades of scholarly work, though including a good number of ancient voices as well. This is a helpful way to bring the reader into the larger conversation of the church regarding these letters, though

of course the voices included are selected by Gorman.

Every chapter in the book concludes with two very useful pieces. First, Gorman has included a set of provocative and open-ended discussion questions. These questions open up new possibilities for how the texts are read and lived whether in one's own thinking about these issues or in a classroom setting. In the chapters on individual letters, the final question is always the same, and reflects the core of Gorman's reading of Paul: "In sum, what does this letter urge the church to believe, to hope for, and to do?" This question grows out of what Gorman sees as the fundamental shape of the cruciform life according to Paul: faith, hope, and love. "That is the question, in fact, that drives the book" (xi). The final part of each chapter is a very helpful annotated bibliography, divided between "general" works and those that are more "technical."

As Gorman notes regarding Paul's letters at the beginning of his book, "The interpretation of every verse, nearly every word, is disputed" (x). Thus, there will of course be plenty of opportunities to argue with Gorman's interpretations. His broad attribution of Pauline authorship will mean, for some readers, a softening of themes that would otherwise distinguish the "genuine" Paul from the Paul of the disputed epistles. However, Gorman's treatment of the texts as a whole is careful and reasonable. He reads Paul's letters with penetrating theological insight, and always with an eye on what these texts mean for the life of the church. Gorman has produced a rare and welcome book: a clear and unencumbered introduction to, or review of, Paul's theology and letters.

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THE CHURCH COMES FROM ALL NATIONS: LUTHER TEXTS ON MISSION, compiled by Volker Stolle, translated by Klaus Detlev Schulz and Daniel Thies. St. Louis: Concordia, 2003. Pp. 111. \$16.99 (paper).

Whether the Reformers were indifferent or even hostile to mission has been discussed for a long time. The Lutheran failure to reach out to overseas territories during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been observed by Catholic opponents of the Reformation such as Cardinal Bellarmini, who claimed in 1586 that the spread of the church over the whole world was a mark of true Catholicity absent among the Lutheran heretics. This lack of missionary impetus in the emerging Lutheran churches is also evident within Lutheran orthodoxy. In the *Wittenberg Opinion* of 1652, the Theological Faculty of Wittenberg advised against preaching throughout the world, advocating service at home instead. Some scholars projected this negative attitude back to Luther and the early reformers. Among them was Gustav Warneck, Professor at Halle and the doyen of German missiology, who missed in the Reformation “even the idea of missions, in the sense in which we understand them today” and concluded that Luther was not “a man of missions in our sense of the word.” In rebuttal, Werner Elert sarcastically replied: “The poor man! Instead of founding a missionary society, accompanying Cortez to Mexico, or at least assuring for himself a professorship of missiology, he devoted himself, of all things, to the reformation of the church!” Elert pointed out that if one rejects the idea of missions as a theory that engages in an undertaking, understanding it, rather, on the basis of the impact of the gospel, then it is clear that Luther’s theology was missionary in nature: “[H]ow could Luther, who expounded the Psalms, the Prophets, and Paul, have overlooked or doubted the universal purpose of the mission of Christ and of his Gospel?”

This interpretation of Luther coincides with a new understanding of mission as it emerged in the period of decolonization.



Gerhard O. Forde

1927–2005

BY FAITH ALONE: ESSAYS ON JUSTIFICATION IN HONOR OF GERHARD O. FORDE

edited by Joseph A. Burgess
and Marc Kolden

350 pp. • Eerdmans, 2004

Twenty-one chapters on the continuing importance of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, written by authors from several traditions as well as six different countries—including Oswald Bayer, Avery Cardinal Dulles, Leif Grane, Roy Harrisville, Scott Hendrix, Robert Kolb, George Lindbeck, Klaus Schwarzwälder, Jane Strohl, George Tavard, and Tim Wengert, among others.

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Mission is no longer understood as one part of the world evangelizing another but as a movement from the fellowship of faith all over the world to all who stand outside this fellowship. Since the World Missionary Conference at Willingen (1952) it has also been stressed that God, not human agencies, lies behind this movement. If mission means being sent by God to witness to what he has done in Jesus Christ, then there are many relevant texts in Luther's writings, and we thank Volker Stolle for compiling some of them.

The book, an enlarged version of an earlier German publication, is divided into three main chapters: biblical foundations for mission, practical realization of mission, and the history of mission. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction, followed by the texts, presented with headings intended to summarize key messages. The book also includes an epilogue, biblical references, and a select bibliography.

A number of familiar themes appear, such as the priesthood of all believers (21), law and gospel (28–29, but also 31!), missionary forms of liturgy as in the German Mass and Order of Service (43), and, of course, Luther's famous illustration of the movement of the gospel: "as if one throws a stone into the water" (24). Less familiar are Luther's admonishments concerning the war against the Turks (69), statements about the role of outsiders in the Old Testament (17), and recognition that the gospel is always on the move: "The Gospel was in Egypt, then it was gone; furthermore, it has been in Greece, in Italy, in France, and in other lands. Now it is in the land of Germany, for who knows how long?" (82). This is indeed a relevant message for us as we observe that the gravity of Christianity is shifting once more—now from North to South, to Asia and especially Africa, where we find the most vibrant and fastest-growing churches.

The Church Comes from All Nations therefore offers many useful glimpses into Luther's missionary thinking, for congregations and seminaries alike. However, some critical comments have to be made. First of

all, an annotated apparatus would help identify such obscure references as the Jew at the court of Emperor Sigismund (38).

More importantly, however, it is impossible to deal with an extremely complex topic such as Luther's approaches towards other religions by selecting twelve rather small extracts. We know, for example, that Luther changed his attitude towards the Jews between the 1520s and the early 1540s. His earlier writings were friendly and open, while the later publications, such as *The Jews and their Lies* (1543), were hostile and anti-Semitic. These are beyond defense. But we have to face the fact that Luther wrote them. Simply to omit them, or to refer to them only in passing, cannot be a solution.

Similarly, in regard to Islam, one misses Luther's interpretation of some Bible texts that help in understanding his view of Islam in its historic context. Referring to Revelation 9 and 10, Luther saw the rise of the Turkish empire as a sign of the end times and regarded Mohammed as "the second woe" (after Arius). He understood Islam as a Christian heresy. The view that there were also strong parallels with the Roman Catholic Church derived from his interpretation of the book of Daniel, in which Luther saw both Islam and papacy predicted. In the twenty years between the German and the English publication of *The Church Comes from All Nations* (in 1983 and 2003, respectively), some important contributions on Luther's view of Islam appeared, such as Paul Rajashekar's studies in English (*Luther and Islam: An Asian Perspective*, Göttingen, 1990) and Hartmut Bobzin's research in German (*Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Beirut, 1995). There are also major new works on Luther and Judaism, among them Heinz Kremers, ed., *Die Juden und Martin Luther—Martin Luther und die Juden* (Neukirchen, 1985), and Peter von der Osten-Sacken, *Martin Luther und die Juden* (Stuttgart, 2002). There are no references to these books in Stolle's bibliography.

Finally, if we understand mission in the wider sense of God's mission in which we participate by witnessing and proclamation, the question of other important con-

tributions by Luther arises. The “*simul iustus et peccator*” (righteous and sinner at the same time) principle is as relevant for missions as texts on the theology of the cross, which emphasize the reevaluation of all things and God’s solidarity with the poor and marginalized. In this context, one could refer not only to the Heidelberg Disputation (especially thesis 20), but also to Luther’s interpretation of Psalm 121, in which he explains that the word of God means “to believe in invisible things and to believe [that there is] in poverty richness, in sadness joy, in loneliness help and in expulsion sure and eternal grace.” This perspective is also emphasized by Asian and African theologians such as Paul Devanandan and Zephania Kameeta. Last, but not least, there is Luther’s immense contribution in “Translating the Message.” His German Bible is widely regarded as the greatest literary event of the sixteenth century. However, Luther’s main objective with his Bible was to communicate the gospel as good news to the people. He started in his own family and gladly referred to the immediate impact of his translation: “Now my Katie understands the psalms better than all the papists did then.”

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**CHRIST CRUCIFIED: A 21ST CENTURY
MISSIOLOGY OF THE CROSS**, by

Mark W. Thomsen. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2004. Pp. 121. \$16.00 (paper).

In this suggestive work, Mark Thomsen boldly proceeds to articulate a missiology for the twenty-first century that, for him as a Lutheran, necessarily is grounded in Luther’s theology of the cross. Thomsen both culls out decisive missiological implications of Luther’s theology of the cross for the church’s witness in the twenty-first century and rejects the overriding individualistic thrust in Luther’s theology and in the inter-

pretations of Luther and Lutheran theologies, especially Lutheran orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Convinced that Luther’s theology of the cross is cosmic and creation-centered in scope, Thomsen places the doctrine of justification within the more inclusive vision of the theology of the cross. This assumption ought to challenge the reader to pursue and examine further.

Thomsen builds his argument upon the pivotal Reformation principle of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But, he places this principle not in an abstract world of theological arguments concerning what is orthodox; rather, he places it in the world of religious diversity, Western colonialism and imperialism, poverty and exploitation and other forms of human suffering that have been and are still often ignored and/or even justified and promoted in the name of the cross of Jesus Christ. In this regard, the author opens his work with a terse description of the haunting reality that historically hosts of people of other faiths (and ethnic and racial backgrounds)—such as Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians—experienced, and thus came to associate the cross, “a universal symbol for Christianity” (9), with widespread and sustained oppression, the holocaust, and dehumanization. At the same time, he rightly observes, “[A] multitude of Christians inhabiting the poor regions of the third world have seen the cross as a hope-filled symbol of Christ’s solidarity with their pain and oppression” (10). Thomsen finds that it is precisely non-contextual readings of Luther that have played such a demonic role in the history of Lutheran and other interpretations of Luther.

Thomsen calls for a theology of the cross in which the priesthood of all believers is primary in the missiological vision of *Missio Dei* (mission of God) and the approaches to the *Missio Dei* that are called forth in today’s world are commensurate with that vision. The pervasive and variegated presence of the laity in God’s world needs to be at the center of all strategies for cruciform mission

and servanthood living. Thomsen corroborates his accent on the primacy of the laity for the *Missio Dei* by drawing attention to the fact that “Lutheran theology is molded by its radical critique of the medieval Roman Church embodied in a priestly hierarchy which claimed that the church through the sacraments validated by the priesthood enabled all of Christendom to participate in eternal salvation” (13).

He insists that “the proclamation of the crucified Jesus” must be seen “within the context of four other Lutheran theological emphases” (12): “salvation is sheer gift: justification by grace through faith” (12f.); “the Church is a gospel-created and gospel-proclaiming community” (13–15); “creation is good and is the arena of God’s presence and mission” (15f.); and “hold to Christ and for the rest be totally uncommitted” (16f.).

In his pursuit of a theology of mission centered in a theology of the cross, Thomsen draws on some valuable sources that he engages and critiques with care and respect. Thomsen’s analysis and use of Luther’s theology, including Gerhard Forde’s exposition of Luther, show Thomsen’s indebtedness to Luther, and they call for exploration of the missiological dimensions of Luther’s theology beyond the focus on the sinful individual self. Thomsen writes:

Luther’s thought, rooted in a 16th-century medieval piety which has contributed richly to the evangelical message, is so centered upon the self that it fails to see the theology of the cross as a missiological resource beyond preaching justification by faith. The preaching of justification is a powerful dimension of the theology of the cross; however, it is a much richer resource for mission than that which is articulated by Luther. (18)

He acknowledges Forde’s “challenging voice” that “has continually called the church to a gospel that focuses on grace, justification and forgiveness as sheer gift” (65). But, Thomsen argues, Forde’s work lacks the vital and necessary groundings in contextual realities. Drawing on the cri-

tique of feminist and liberation theologians, who assert that sin “is the devaluation of the self” (43), Thomsen candidly says: “What disturbs me about Forde’s exposition is not so much his own exposition of Luther’s theology of the cross, but his incapacity to understand what is being affirmed by his theological adversaries, the sentimentalizers of the cross” (43–44).

Thomsen critically evaluates various works that posit a pluralist approach or offer an alternative to such an approach, showing their theological and missiological strengths and shortcomings. His own inclusivistic approach, rooted in Luther’s theology of the cross, is a timely call for the church and individual Christians not to be shy or ashamed, through a cruciform, servant way of being, to share the gospel of God’s incredible offer of forgiveness through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thomsen’s work defies the ideological categories and pitfalls of liberal and conservative, precisely because its premise is that language about God is necessarily language that is christologically and pneumatologically trinitarian and missional. Here the reader is given a splendid, insightful, at times poignant, missiological vision centered in God’s work in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Thomsen’s conversation partners and sources are wide and varied, which offers the reader some insightful resources for further reading. I highly recommend this work to a wide audience, lay and ordained, to read, ponder, discuss, and engage in word and action. This would be an invaluable resource to be read in conversation with the Lutheran Confessions and with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (31 October 1999). We owe much to Mark Thomsen for providing us with such a provocative work, one that truly deserves to be described as dialectical.

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**TREASURE IN CLAY JARS: PATTERNS
IN MISSIONAL FAITHFULNESS**, by
Lois Y. Barrett et al. Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. 172. \$18.00 (paper).

Treasure in Clay Jars is a collaboratively written book that tells the story of eight congregations and one cluster of congregations in becoming missional communities of faith. One of the first collaborative books coming out of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) was *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998). Its purpose was to lay down the theological vision of congregations in mission. In its aftermath, many questions were raised: "How would you know a missional church if you saw one?" "What indicates that a congregation is missional?" "How can our congregation find enough encouragement to continue to move toward becoming missional?" Since *Missional Church* was a study of the character and activities of the church, *Treasure in Clay Jars* builds on this work and gives some real-life examples of congregations in the United States and Canada that were judged as being "missional" according to specific "patterns."

A research team of seven was put together in 1998 to look at diverse congregational models of the missional church. This ecumenical team included scholars, consultants, pastors, and church administrators. Twelve "indicators" of a missional church were devised by the team, drawing heavily from the book *Missional Church* and from the research team's own experience. The twelve "indicators" were later transformed into eight "patterns." The shift reflects a major component of the research. Nominations of congregations were then collected from around North America from a wide range of people. The final eight congregations and one cluster of congregations studied for this book were among those nominated. It is important to note that the authors make no claims that these congregations are the most missional in North America. Nor did they discover in their research a one-size-fits-all approach to reviv-

ing congregations. The congregations studied were diverse in terms of geography, tradition, ethnicity, and size. The authors do claim, however, that each of these congregations "exhibits some missional characteristics and is seeking to move in a missional direction" (x). The hope of the book is to encourage congregations in their journey to become missional.

The reader will discover at least two fascinating dimensions of this book that could be used for private reflection, seminary instruction, and/or congregational study; that is, the rich congregational sketches and the description and application of the eight patterns of missional faithfulness. The congregational sketches, although not exhaustive, are detailed and skillfully written. Stories from these congregations pepper every chapter. These congregations include Mennonite, non-denominational, two Presbyterian, two Baptist, a cluster of Reformed congregations, United Methodist, and Roman Catholic.

The eight patterns of missional faithfulness around which the book is organized include:

Pattern 1: Mission Vocation

The congregation is discovering together the missional vocation of the community. It redefines "success" and "vitality" in terms of faithful to God's calling and sending. It is seeking to discern God's specific missional vocation ("charism") for the entire community and for all of its members.

Pattern 2: Biblical Formation and Discipleship

The missional church is a community in which all members are involved in learning what it means to be disciples of Jesus. The Bible is normative in this church's life. Biblical formation and discipline are essential for members of the congregation.

Pattern 3: Taking Risks as a Contrast Community

The missional church is learning to take risks for the sake of the gospel. It understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord. It is raising questions, often threatening ones, about

the church's cultural captivity, and it is grappling with the ethical and structural implications of its mission vocation.

Pattern 4: Practices that Demonstrate God's Intent for the World

The pattern of the church's life as community is a demonstration of what God intends for the life of the whole world. The practices of the church embody mutual care, reconciliation, loving accountability, and hospitality. A missional church is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.

Pattern 5: Worship as Public Witness

Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future. The community's vital public witness flows out of its worship.

Pattern 6: Dependence on the Holy Spirit

The missional community confesses its dependence upon the Holy Spirit, shown in particular in its practices of corporate prayer.

Pattern 7: Pointing toward the Reign of God

The missional church understands its calling as witness to the gospel of the in-breaking reign of God, and strives to be an instrument, agent, and sign of that reign.

Pattern 8: Missional Authority

The Holy Spirit gives the missional church a community of persons who, in a variety of ways and with a diversity of functional roles and titles, together practice the missional authority that cultivates within the community the discernment of missional vocation and is intentional about the practices that embed that vocation in the community's life.

The authors are: George R. Hunsberger, Darrell Guder, Lois Barrett, Dale Ziemer, Linford Stutzman, Walter Hobbs, and Jeff Van Kooten. Their work represents more than a sociological study of congregations. Their purpose is to allow a specific theology of mission to penetrate every dimension of the book itself and help create a grid for understanding healthy congregations. Readers will want to compare the missiological thrust of this book, and the development of the eight missional patterns, with similar vocabularies that are emerging in a lot of

theological literature today; for example, "marks of discipleship," "congregational patterns of faithfulness," "indicators of healthy congregations," "signs of organic church development," and "Christian practices" in vital congregations.

Treasure in Clay Jars is a book about the stories of real congregations, stories that witness to the missional character of these communities. The book is well written, provocative, concrete, and will certainly be useful for real communities around North America as they struggle with their own calls to missional faithfulness.

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LA LUCHA CONTINUES: MUJERISTA THEOLOGY, by Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004. Pp. 270. \$24.00 (paper).

This past year has blessed us with both a ten-year anniversary edition of Ada María Isasi-Díaz's seminal work, *En la Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Fortress, 2004), and a new collection of articles more recently written by Isasi-Díaz. In the latter, the struggle to raise up the hopes and voices of Hispanas/Latinas has continued to unfold. Readers familiar with Isasi-Díaz's style of theo-ethics will recognize the themes that she raises in this volume. Yet this book has a personal tone that was not as pronounced in her early work. In *En la Lucha* she laid out a methodology for her ethnographic conversations with grassroots Latinas. In the middle of that volume a record of the actual voices of those women bubbled up, providing the readers with direct contact with the witness of these reflective women. In her commitment to raise up the experiences of these other women, she said little about her own narrative. She never denied that it was present, but she refused to allow her story to overshadow that of the others.

A compelling element in this new book is her autobiographical reflection. One learns

of how her early struggles as a woman in the Roman Catholic Church shaped her enduring commitments to liberation. She speaks of her own sense of spirituality, forged while she was on a picket line. She talks about her longing for the place she had left in her youth but also of how *La Habana* still inhabits her. She shares the experience of weariness in the movement for justice, and how the poetry of Julia de Burgos brought the passion back to her life in *la lucha*. She reflects on her “anguish, pain, fright and loss” as one who lives and works in the place most impacted by 9/11; she laments the attempt to co-opt these emotions and transform them into anger and vengeance by those in our nation who had already decided on war. These personal reflections were deeply moving and left me hoping that Isasi-Díaz might find the time to write an autobiography. These personal elements helped me to hear the connections between her narrative and those of the other women she has helped us to hear in the past.

Isasi-Díaz has several themes that run throughout the essays. She draws upon her community to envision the *proyecto histórico*, or historical project that most likely will offer them hope. Unlike many liberationists who make a clear distinction between reflection and action, she insists that gathering women together to reflect on their lives and their desired futures is itself a praxis. In a world where the thought and experiences of these women are consistently discounted or ignored, to gather and respectfully find their voices together is in and of itself a practice of resistance, not a prelude or postlude to resistance. Speaking and listening to each other in a respectful setting enhances their own sense of agency in the world and offers those of us wise enough to listen a more expansive way of understanding the world we share.

What I missed most in this book were the concrete voices that inhabited the center of her earlier work. There is no doubt that the communities with whom she gathers have definitively shaped her own ethical-theological claims. Yet their actual voices in the earlier work functioned well in many

ways. First of all, they helped the readers see the multiple dimensions from which Hispanas/Latinas approach a particular concern. One could note similarities in the ways that Julieta, Caridad, and Marta exercised moral agency, but one could also see the specific diversity that exists in their testimonies and approaches. Since in this book we only hear these voices through the analytic filter of Isasi-Díaz, no way to explore this diversity through primary sources is possible within the confines of the book.

The concrete voices and narratives of the particular women also might have clarified the breadth and limitations of this work. Isasi-Díaz is well aware that neither she nor her groups speak for all Hispanas/Latinas. She warns the reader of this. Yet as one reads statement after statement that begins with “Hispanas/Latinas’ sense of *familia*,” or other such generalizations, one may forget the confession of limitations that begins the book. I found myself asking which Latina voices do not appear in this book? In particular I wonder about the presence or absence of the growing number of Protestant or Evangelical Hispanas/Latinas. Would they be comfortable with formulating their *proyecto histórico* with such scant reference to the Bible? Would they conceive of *Jesucristo* as one among many christs in the search for justice? Would they see the ethical dimensions of spiritual life as the most appropriate place to begin each discussion?

Of course, no book can do everything. Isasi-Díaz and the people she represents cannot speak for everyone, not even for all Hispana/Latina women. Yet they will speak a fundamentally important word for everyone with ears to hear. And given the sense of hospitality that pervades this book, one would expect Isasi-Díaz herself to respond to the above concern, “*Verdad!* It’s true! So go and listen to those other important voices, identify with them, and next time we get together, you be sure to bring them along!”

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