

Reviews



PASTORAL MINISTRY ACCORDING TO PAUL: A BIBLICAL VISION, by James W. Thompson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. Pp. 176. \$17.99 (paper).

There is a dearth of good books that comprise both solid historical-critical interpretation and a concern for issues in the contemporary church. Even fewer are those that carry out both tasks well. James Thompson's book *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Vision* is one of these gems, and he does this in a non-intimidating, clear, and manageable way.

Thompson writes out of two main concerns: first, there is no clear vision of what pastoral ministry is. Second, there exists "no systematic, scripturally grounded pastoral theology" (9). He also contends that the contemporary church seems to be more directed by "the marketplace of consumer religion" (11), where pastoral ministry is governed and defined by the whims of culture more than by Scripture.

Paul's "pastoral" theology is described in terms of his "pastoral ambition" (20–21). This pastoral ambition is rooted in the "eschatological horizon" of the awaited "day" of Christ. In this time, marked by the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul morally exhorts his *communities* toward conformity to Christ. In essence Paul's pastoral ambition is community formation in the light of the eschatological age marked by Christ, the center of which is a "pastoral theology of transformation" (20). "Ministry" is defined as "*participation in God's work of transforming the community of faith until it is 'blameless' at the coming of Christ*" (19–20). Significantly, Thompson notes that justification by faith is not the center of Paul's theology. Rather, "the center of Paul's thought is a

theology of transformation, which provides the basis for Paul's pastoral theology" (19). Arguing on the shoulders of the "new perspective," he faults justification by faith because of its individualized focus, a less than adequate reading of Galatians and Romans (esp. Rom 7), and because "it ignores Paul's consistent call for transformation and his paraenetic instructions according to which he insists that Christians walk 'worthily of the gospel'" (18).

After the introduction, Thompson walks through six of Paul's letters, demonstrating how the framework of Paul's "pastoral ambition" is present. He offers general outlines of the letters, and his exegesis effectively brings out Paul's theology. In addition, each chapter offers a brief note that "transfer(s) Paul's pastoral vision" from its situations to the present church. For example, Paul's theology in the Corinthian correspondence reckons with a threatened community. In this situation, Paul calls the "building" to remain on its proper foundation and exhorts the community toward moral transformation in light of the eschatological age. Transferring this to the present, he writes, "The eschatological vision of a blameless community remains the goal of pastoral ministry." He continues, "Because our work is continually threatened by the cultural forces of individualism, materialism, and ethnic and national pride, the pastoral task remains unfinished" (148).

Chapter 2, on Philippians and 1 Thessalonians, emphasizes the aspects of looking ahead to the coming of Christ and seeking to live worthily of the gospel in the interim. This is done as believers live in continual transformation to the image of the crucified Christ. In chapter 3, on Galatians, the emphasis falls on reckoning with the transfor-

mative aspect of the Spirit. In chapter 4, on Romans, Thompson shows how the overall framework of Paul's "pastoral ambition" is present in Romans. In Romans, the community is part of a grand "unfinished narrative" (116) and Paul calls the community to remain within this narrative through participating in God's work in Christ of establishing a new creation. He writes, "only a community 'transformed' morally will be transformed into the image of Christ at the eschaton" (116). In chapter 5, on the Corinthian letters, the emphasis lies on ecclesiology and building the community upon Christ in the midst of threats to the community. In a concluding chapter, Thompson draws together his exegesis and offers a more sustained application to and critique of the contemporary church. Paul's pastoral theology (1) places before the church its real goal by placing the community in the narrative of God's work in Christ; (2) challenges individualism by emphasizing "community formation"; and (3) more than just accepting the sinner, it challenges the community toward ethical transformation as it moves toward conformity to Christ (155–158).

There are, I am sure, many particular exegetical questions readers will have, and some will find themselves wrestling with Thompson's "new perspective" reading of Paul. There are two issues I wish to address. The first concerns speaking of Paul as "pastor" or "minister." When one reads Paul's letters, there is little in terms of "pastoral" language by which Paul identifies himself. The dominant way Paul introduces himself in his letters is "slave" (*doulos*) (Rom 1:1; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; interestingly the term "minister" [*diakonos*] as a self-reference is found only in the Corinthian letters). On the other hand, Thompson employs the adjective "pastoral" in reference to Paul's theological argumentation and thought multiple times in each chapter. Thompson does not address Paul's use of *doulos*, and I would have been interested in how Paul's use of the term "slave" impinges on what one may call Paul's "pastoral" theology, or better yet, on what we can glean

from Paul's letters about "pastoral" theology and ministry.

The second issue is a related one that concerns speaking of Paul's theology as "pastoral." If one were to suggest key terms for Thompson's reading of Paul, they would be: eschatology, community, and participation or conformity to Christ (in his own words: "ecclesial, cruciform, and eschatological," 148). It is interesting that Paul's "pastoral ambition" contains the same main components as Richard Hays's reading of Paul in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne, 1996, 19–36), which provides the "theological framework for Pauline ethics" (19) and not "pastoral" theology. The question arises: How exactly is Paul's theology itself "pastoral"? Though Thompson is clear that he is attempting to discern a pastoral theology based on the *goals* of Paul's ministry, I think Thompson goes a bit further. In the end, Thompson's book provides significant and timely insights for Christian communities—useful for pastors or any Christian, and pastors who lead these communities should pay close attention. I remain uncertain, however, in what sense we can call Paul's theology itself "pastoral."

James Thompson has provided a splendid exegesis of Paul's theology with an eye on the present situation of the church, challenging Christians to a closer, more sensitive and attentive reading of Paul's letters. The emphasis on moral transformation may be troublesome for some readers, as we are not accustomed to hearing that Paul emphasizes the moral life fitting to a Christian. I highly recommend this book for pastors, laypersons, and scholars. If one does not entirely agree with Thompson, one should at least wrestle with the issues he raises in relation to ministry, and the less-than-common interpretation of Paul he presents as a challenge to the entrenched interpretations of the contemporary church.

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LIKE CATCHING WATER IN A NET: HUMAN EFFORTS TO DESCRIBE THE DIVINE, by Val Webb. New York: Continuum, 2007. Pp. 256. \$24.95 (cloth).

Regular *Word & World* book review readers will recognize the name of this highly productive PhD graduate of Luther Seminary. *In Defense of Doubt* (1995), *Why We're Equal* (1999), and 363-page *Florence Nightingale: The Making of a Theologian* (2002) have been reviewed in these pages. *Like Catching Water in a Net*, the winner of the 2007 USA Best Books award for "Religion: general," carries forward the concerns animating those earlier books. There is ample recognition here of the necessary service doubt can render. Feminist insights are richly mined. The unconventional reclaiming of Florence Nightingale as a theologian—an emphatically radical one—represents the range of authors drawn into this conversation about human efforts to describe the divine.

Webb, who divides her teaching time between Australia and the USA, is not trapped in the specializing narrowness of much post-Enlightenment writing. Her earlier professional work in microbiology figures in this writing, and her artistic interests find expression in the presence of her own poetry (66, 135, 221). Her own Christian tradition is richly present (we find classic figures [e.g., Karl Barth, Keith Ward, and Jaroslav Pelikan], but also voices of challenge [Carol Christ, Elizabeth Johnson, and Marcus Borg]). She is in conversation with other "children of Abraham" (Jewish, Islamic) and beyond that with Buddhist, Hindu, and Australian aboriginal sources.

Readers of Terence Fretheim will be familiar with language about the "Yes" and the "No" of metaphor. The "No" side is dominant here, yielding the summation "Ultimate truth about GOD is never found—the message of this book" (211). (She reminds us of how "even the confident theologian Karl Barth said they would be laughing in heaven over the volumes of inadequate theological tomes in his wheelbarrow" [211]). She is responding to

"significant challenges in the last fifty years that have necessitated rethinking Divine images" and "claims of the literal nature and infallibility of the Bible would be at the top of my list" (175). This trenchant criticism is carried out also in chapters dealing with divine power, divine attributes, the *imago dei*, and issues of Christology and soteriology. The widely quoted missionary author Lesslie Newbigin wrote of how our concepts function as "lenses": "the Christian story provides us with such a set of lenses, not something for us to look at, but for us to look through" (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 38). Similarly, Webb appropriates Frederick Buechner's statement that "The Bible is like a window—looking through it you see the world" (190).

As Webb looks at the world of traditional efforts to describe the divine, she sees "parts that no longer make sense or, worse still, are harmful and violent" (190). Her examples are not trivial: "a trouble-shooter Divine Being acting from outside the world" (47), "ecological disregard...[as] a 'sin' against the Holy Spirit" (90), and soteriology (citing "feminist scholars [who] challenge atonement doctrines that glorify killing, suffering, torture and punishment, abuses against which we now legislate," 205).

The absolutizing exclusivism Webb is attacking is an ever-present danger, and it is not only the fundamentalist that may well be challenged by the sharp edge of the razor Webb is wielding. But as the book's argument builds, one finds oneself hungering for the "Yes" in our undeniably human efforts to describe the divine. Webb is not going to settle for a wholly apophatic theology, reaching rather for a positive alternative to the problematic pieties she so emphatically critiques (66). She celebrates the fact that "a new Christianity is evolving, uncovering the human Jesus so long buried under centuries of dogma" (206). There seems to be, after all, a deep anthropological basis for this religious quest (211, 227). Citing Deuteronomy's prohibition of images (4:15–19), she writes: "I propose formlessness...[which can] take any form" (66–67). She presses herself to go further, to identify

“mega-characteristics” (111) in a reformed way. Thus she will speak of “the Divine, the world and ourselves as ‘good’ in aesthetic rather than moral terms” (115), calling upon Thomas Aquinas, Alfred North Whitehead, Dag Hammarskjöld and the Turkish poet Fazil for explication. Or she will have us employ “the image of GOD as Communication (NOT Communicator, because that returns to an ‘idol’ like us that we create)” (76). More materially, she will speak of “Love as a unifying, reconciling Force within this universe” (120).

In her closing (one hopes not “final”) chapter, “What Is Truth,” she moves toward a somewhat more fulsome identification of the orientation she is proposing. She speaks of process theology as “One of the most useful theologies for accommodating the Divine in a contemporary world” (218). Thus she will claim both God’s immanence and God’s transcendence in a “pantheistic” framework. Thus her discussion of Spirit that “blows where it wills” (John 3:8) is a deeply relational one, emphasizing mutuality, while recognizing that “of course, friendship with the Divine will necessarily be asymmetric in some respects, as we are dependent on the Divine differently from Divine dependence on us” (170). Process theology is itself much more a widely diversified movement than a “position”—witness the appointments of Philip Clayton and Roland Faber at Claremont, as John Cobb, David Griffin, and Marjorie Suchocki retired. It thus exemplifies this book’s constant emphasis on believing “more in the journey and the questions, not always knowing where one is headed but going anyway because of who we are” (226). Accordingly, the reader is appropriately invited in an almost Kierkegaardian way (55) to join the journey (209).

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THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS: SCIENCE AND RELIGION, by Hans Küng. Translated by John Bowden. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. xiv + 220. \$22.00 (cloth).

In this newly translated volume, Swiss theologian Hans Küng brings decades of theological reflection to bear on this highly accessible yet academically rigorous project concerning the dialogue between religion and science. This book reads like an introduction to the science/religion discussion and is an indispensable resource for church leaders facing the increasing barrage of questions and uncertainties that are fueled by the media-propagated belief that science is effecting the demise of Christianity. Küng attempts to defuse the notion that science and theology are in opposition to one another and ultimately lead to contradictory conclusions. In response, he offers a solid corrective to both theological and scientific reductionists whose absolutism creates a deceptively construed “either-or” option. Küng proposes a move beyond “confrontation or integration” and constructs a model of “complementarity” (41) that accounts for the multidimensionality of reality.

Beginning with the paradigm shift initiated by Copernicus and ending with the disappointed expectations of the once optimistic Stephen Hawking, chapter 1 critiques both the dogmatism of the church (e.g., the 1632 condemnation of Galileo) and the optimistic efforts of physicists to discover a “grand unifying theory.” The failure of both institutions, however, is not justification for rejecting their respective methods, but rather elicits reflection on the multidimensional nature of reality itself, which requires variegated methodological perspectives.

In chapter 2, Küng discusses the “absolute first beginning” (45), the “time 0” moment before the Big Bang. Küng uses this cosmological conundrum to assert that both theology and science must heed the limitations of their methods of inquiry. Physicists, whose methods correspond to their objects of inquiry (time, energy, matter), may not expand their “judgment be-

yond the horizon of experience” (52), nor should religious convictions be used “as a basis for scientific theses” (70). Concerning absolute beginnings, these questions cannot be answered via rational proofs or pure reason alone, but by the human choice to take “Pascal’s Wager” and to live beneath God’s reality in a trusting manner (“a decision of the whole person” [58]). The result of this kind of reasoning is a concrete experience upon which one can build a reasoned faith in God.

Chapter 3 deals with the knotty relationship between belief in both a creator and an evolving world. Darwin’s theory of evolution became a “Second Galileo case” (91), in which, according to Küng, religious fundamentalists blundered by insisting on the normative nature of theology for scientific inquiry. After reviewing past attempts to integrate God into an evolutionary matrix, Küng forwards his own proposal for belief in both a creator and evolutionary theory. For Küng, the two are not incompatible, for God is dialectically related to the cosmos; “God is the absolute in the relative” (107). Chapter 3 ends with a discussion of the biblical creation accounts, which he concludes are not interested in empirical data, but are interested in “elementary existential questions” (122). He writes: “Belief in creation...does not offer any scientific information....it allows people to discover a meaning in life and in the process of evolution” (123).

Chapter 4 investigates the primal cause of life in the cosmos (biogenesis) and whether, in light of our current understanding of life’s development, a creator is even necessary. In response, Küng forwards a panentheistic view of God wherein God is “in the world and the world in God” (157). In this view, the in-dwelling of God in the finite allows both God and the creation to maintain their distinct “otherness.”

Chapter 5 deals with the historical and psychological development of humans. For instance, “Are humans and their will simply the product of chemical processes, as some neurophysiologists would have us believe?” Küng answers negatively and points to the limits of scientific inquiry, which, though

helpful in answering some questions, cannot account for the aspects of humanity that transcend the boundaries of empirical measurability. For example, though tools such as magnetic resonance imagery can tell us the location of brain activity, these tools come up short when it comes to the question of the relationship between the brain and consciousness.

Overall, Küng’s work is highly recommended and would be a pragmatic resource for church leaders facing these critical issues. Youth leaders whose students are daily confronted with the message that science and religion are mutually exclusive will also find it helpful. However, some readers may take issue with Küng’s discussion of “miracles” (“special divine action”). He writes: “Most miracles take place for believers not in the cosmos but in the human heart, where God’s spirit is at work” (158). For Küng, God’s spirit provides creativity and support “in the system of law and chance” (156). Küng’s statements are problematic for several reasons. First, they make an awkward distinction between the Spirit’s work in the heart and in the cosmos. Second, they reveal problematic commitments to a naturalistic worldview that stands in tension with the biblical authors’ testimony that God acts beyond the strictures of natural law. For example, the promise of resurrection presupposes that God, though not in opposition to the natural world, can act beyond its laws.

Overall, Küng’s discussion provides a helpful framework within which both scientists and religious believers can dialogue in a way that is respectful of methodological limitations. The plethora of topics covered (cosmology, biology, neuroscience, physics, etc.) offers a diversity of contexts within which Küng effectively makes his argument for “complementarity.” His model, then, has the advantage of bringing together what many have considered to be irreconcilable conversation partners.

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PERSON, GRACE, AND GOD, by Philip A. Rolnick. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. 207. \$28.00 (paper).

Philip A. Rolnick, professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, has presented a rich and thorough examination of the personhood of God and humanity in his book *Person, Grace, and God*. The book is the fifth in the *Sacra Doctrina* series, living up to its objective of examining issues of Christian theology in a postmodern age. The overall purpose of this text is to examine how grace, person, and nature are related in God, believing that such reflection may provide a significant understanding of our own personhood. Therefore, Rolnick's project knits together theological thoughts about God's being (from the medieval period and back), scientific perspectives from evolutionary theory, and postmodern philosophical positions on the self or subject. Overall, the author contends that personhood, both divine and human, is constituted in the gift or grace of moving away from oneself toward the other. Rolnick believes this very action is the movement of the trinity in its interrelation and the trinity's agency in the world. The author takes up the challenge of showing that such a perspective is not only honest to the long tradition of Christian theology, but is also complementary (and not oppositional) to evolution and postmodern philosophy.

Chapter 1 covers a good deal of ground with agility and precision as it seeks to lay out a history of the person. The objective of this long chapter is to mine historical perspectives on the person in search of what is distinct in the position of Christian theology. Therefore, the chapter gives attention to the person in ancient Greek and Latin cultures. However, it is early Christianity, asserts Rolnick, that stumbled upon the concept of person as it sought to articulate God's Trinitarian life. The author gives the Cappadocians the credit for germinating the seeds that would grow into the concept of the person. The new growth of the person would be nurtured by Augustine and his focus on differentiating the person from na-

ture. Augustine not only gives unique attention to his own person in the *Confessions*, but uses the concept of person as a way into thinking about God's personhood. Rolnick ends this long chapter by discussing how the concept of person was pruned and cared for by Chalcedon and then medieval thinkers like Boethius, Richard of St. Victor, and Aquinas.

Having established the significance of the concept of the person within the Christian tradition, Rolnick confronts challenges to this concept. Chapter 2 enters into dialogue with science. Providing a very helpful overview of Darwin and his theory of the survival of the fittest, the author explains that even Darwin saw dimensions in the creature (like self-sacrifice and interspecies altruism) that show that there is something more than self-interest at play. Turning to genetics, we see a self-interest directed toward the other—for instance, in willingness to sacrifice for the survival of genes (kin altruism) or in the reciprocal principal, where a species risks its own life with the belief that another will help it when in need. Rolnick does not see this self-interest, highlighted by genetics, as a problem. Rather, a self-interest that is open to act for the other connects theology and neo-Darwinism in his mind. Self-love is love for the other; consider the biblical injunctions about loving neighbor as self.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 seek to address the challenges of postmodernity. Rolnick explains that a major emphasis in postmodern thought is the discussion of the subject (or the self). Due to modernity's fascination with the self, springing from Descartes, postmodern thought has sought to push beyond perspectives of the self. Turning to Nietzsche, Lyotard, Rorty, and Derrida, the author provides a nice overview of postmodern thought and shows how the problem of the self has been central to its work. Chapter 3 is mainly about raising the questions; in chapter 4 Rolnick addresses them. Giving a great amount of attention to Derrida, the author shows that in the end Derrida could not deconstruct the self, seen powerfully in his *Adieu to Emmanuel Levi-*

nas. Gift is the focus of chapter 5, looking again at Derrida's assertion that gift is impossible for it comes with obligatory expectations. This is of vital importance to the author, for without gift there is no grace. Turning directly to Levinas, Rolnick addresses the issue of gift and the self philosophically, but also theologically, arguing that creation itself is gift; it is about soteriology, but also ontology.

Part three (chapters 6 and 7) discusses how grace is a person constituting reality. Rolnick articulates beautifully how grace (gift) is the very interaction of the Trinity with regard to each other; therefore in God nature and grace are unified. Chapter 7 picks up a number of interesting conversations that round out the author's argument of the whole of the text, discussing how person is relational, how the Spirit is the infinite energy of relationship, and finally the marks of personhood, which leads to a deep exploration of the soul in recent theological discussion.

Overall, this reviewer found *Person, Grace, and God* a significant scholarly piece that offers the reader a wonderful entry into the questions facing the self in relation to science, postmodern theory, and the history of Christianity. That said, at times it felt as though the articulation of the critique and problems facing the concept of person were more engaging than the solutions that the author presented. In the end what still seemed missing was an understanding of how the person of God and human persons concretely encounter each other. Rolnick has clearly shown that they do relate; but this reviewer yearned to hear more on how human to human and God to human relationships happen, and how they are an experience both of God's unveiling (revelation) and God's transformation (soteriology).

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TWO REFORMERS: MARTIN LUTHER AND MARY DALY AS POLITICAL THEOLOGIANS, by Caryn D. Riswold. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2007. Pp. 206. \$24.00 (paper).

Upon first glance one might wonder that Caryn D. Riswold found enough parallels between sixteenth-century Christian reformer Martin Luther and twentieth-century feminist philosopher Mary Daly to author an entire book. Riswold argues, however, that there are more similarities between the two, both in terms of biography and legacy, than one might initially consider. Concentrating on how their theological contributions affected the political climate of their respective times, Riswold suggests that study of Luther and Daly gives insight into how individuals and their legacies have the capacity to contribute to changes in societal, cultural, and political behavior.

Riswold begins with short biographies of each, suggesting that both Luther and Daly might be described as "Disaffected Catholic Youth." Both spent their childhoods, youth, and young adulthoods as active participants in the Roman Catholic Church and later became professors within the theological or biblical fields. Both eventually find themselves estranged from the Roman Catholic Church, Luther after being excommunicated and Daly after renouncing Christianity.

In a section entitled "Substantive Connections," Riswold looks at several themes that run throughout the work of both reformers. Daly and Luther each renounce an institution, instead imagining an alternative community based in relationship. For instance, Daly attacks patriarchy, which she names an institution, based on its widespread power. As an alternative she describes a place called "Otherworld," which features a community consisting solely of women who live in harmony with one another, fully in tune with their needs, and without the top-to-bottom power structure that she observes in the male-dominated world. Luther attacks the institution of the Roman Catholic Church for holding the

gospel captive and abusing sinners in need of salvation. His alternative community of the "Priesthood of All Believers," while it may exist theologically and intellectually, does not fully exist in real time and place.

Riswold also notes the ways in which Luther and Daly use language and the role that their use of language plays in their interactions with the political world. Luther is creative in his slurs against his opponents, often using puns and wordplays to caricature them. Paying careful attention to the etymological roots of words and the current definitions of such words, Daly creates her own words and redefines existing words to both bolster the cause of feminism and to deride anything she views as patriarchal.

In her third section, Riswold notes the limitations and problematic legacy that each reformer has left. In their work, each reformer alienates a specific group of people. Daly seemingly refuses to acknowledge contributions that men have made, lumping the entire male gender into one evil, institutional category, while Luther's writings

concerning the Jewish people betray intolerance and aggression.

The section in which Riswold directly addresses the political impact of the reformers' theology is remarkably short, considering the title of the book. Riswold notes that both Daly and Luther pay attention to the "social and cultural reality" of their respective time periods and that those around them seek to interpret their writings in political ways even when that is not the reformer's primary intention. In his writings Luther addresses the Emperor, the electors, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy, among other officials. Daly addresses those who have power due to their privileged positions within patriarchy as well as those with the ability to rise up in opposition. The utopic visions of community, which these two reformers describe, are political in nature. If Luther's vision of the priesthood of all believers were to be fully realized in the present time, the way in which political nation-states, as well as individuals, interact with one another would be dramatically al-

tered. The political structure within the institutional church would likely also take another form. Daly's vision of "Other-world" suggests a power structure that is unattainable in this time and place, in no small part because she omits nearly half of the world's population from participation, but also because it requires human ability to resist defining community members according to rank.

In the final pages of the book, Riswold acknowledges that a complete comparison between the two and their legacies is impossible. The time since Luther's death has given scholars much time to study his writings and observe the theological and political applications of his teachings. Daly is still living, and the feminist movement, not yet historic in nature, cannot be studied in the same way. Whether Daly will have an influence on the church and world similar in size to Luther's impact remains to be seen.

The book reads fairly quickly and is accessible to those without far-reaching knowledge of the work of either Luther or Daly. Riswold adequately shows that Luther and Daly can be considered political theologians who have each impacted the larger society in a substantial way, and while she shows many parallels between the two, the comparison seems a bit forced, especially when one considers that Daly's legacy is yet to be fully determined. The book's greatest strength, perhaps, is that it encourages the reader to consider two case studies in which a theologian's work interacted with the political sphere in a very concrete way, thus opening the way for study of others who may be considered political theologians.

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RECLAIMING THE LUTHERAN LITURGICAL HERITAGE, by Oliver K. Olson.
Minneapolis: ReClaim Resources, 2007.
Pp. 89. \$12.00 (paper).

In the sixteenth century—from about 1537 well into the 1560s—theological con-

troversies bubbled and troubled the land of the Lutheran Reformation. One of the most insistent voices in many of those confessional disputes was Matthias Flacius, perhaps the most ardent of Martin Luther's disciples. Flacius and his fellow Gnesio-Lutherans staunchly defended what they held to be the fundamental truths of the Lutheran Confessions; and they fought hammer and tongs against all whom they believed had compromised basic doctrinal truths.

If there is a voice in the contemporary worship disputes that reflects and embodies Flacius's style and substance it is unarguably that of Oliver K. Olson. Some years ago he crafted a definitive work about this reformer, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform*. Now, in this current work on liturgical theology, Olson writes in a vigorous manner that reflects the reformer's rhetorical spirit. Gracia Grindal, in the introduction to this book, acknowledges Olson's pedigree and credentials. "What you hold in your hand is...a book about Lutheran liturgical practices seen in the light of Lutheran theology by a learned scholar who loves and values the insights of the Reformation, especially Matthias Flacius" (11).

The book fairly sizzles as Olson turns up the heat with respect to current worship studies and practices. He takes issue with and stands against a whole range of liturgical and theological personalities such as Gregory Dix, Luther D. Reed, Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Eugene Brand, Thomas Schattauer, and Gordon Lathrop, among many others. Moreover, Olson stokes and fans the fire in a way that will likely singe anyone who has used any or all of the Lutheran hymnals of the last half century: *Service Book and Hymnal*, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and the current *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. The chief irritant in Olson's taxonomy of liturgical ills is the Eucharistic Prayer, a nettlesome practice he traces back to *SBH*. As the practice has expanded and become the norm in the present worship resource, Olson's displeasure has increased.

Olson argues that current communion

(i.e., eucharistic) practices have acceded to the “ecumenical consensus.” And by incorporating the backward-looking practices of epiclesis and anamnesis (74), the shape of the liturgy, he contends, has turned the sacrament upside down into a work we do rather than something God does. This argument, of course, is not new; but Olson presses his case with hammer-like force. For example, he reproduces a text box listing five synonyms (Canon of the mass, Mass canon, Eucharistic Prayer, Great Thanksgiving, and The Prayer of Thanksgiving) to assert his point. Olson’s distaste for the Prayer of Thanksgiving (equating it with the Canon of the mass) is obvious in his forceful argument. So that no one will miss the point he reproduces his text box of synonyms four times (on pages 30, 44, 66, and 80).

This kind of argument will appear heavy-handed and wearisome to many readers, for Olson pounds his view home on this and many other issues with the force and frequency of a trip hammer. He takes issue with many liturgical matters in *ELW*, perceiving them to be deviations from genuine Lutheran practice, arguing, in Gnesio fashion, for the pure Reformation understanding from which *ELW* has deviated. The emphasis on “the” is deliberate, as is evident in the book’s title: *Reclaiming the Lutheran Liturgical Heritage*.

Reading the book is like holding a hot potato. So much is called into question that it is tempting either to mash the potato or drop it altogether. Citing the “Nihil Rule,” which may not be familiar to many readers (14), Olson declares many things (in addition to the Eucharistic Prayer) to be out of bounds. Thus he argues against “liturgical novelties” such as Reservation of the “Host” (23) and the Offertory procession (26). He inveighs against unneeded rituals, or anything that compromises the biblical mandate in favor of a wrongheaded ecumenical consensus. “There is no biblical mandate for ‘sprinkling with water’ or for the ‘lighting of a new fire.’ And there is just as little mandate for foot washing as there is for a ceremony of cursing fig trees” (58).

Olson’s arguments are so encompassing as to make one wonder if anything in current worship practices is untainted. He answers that question, to his satisfaction, near the end of his prickly narrative. “After fifty years of shadowy ecumenical consensus, Anglican four-action shape, and the vague unexplained *ELW* process, we need a faithful hymnal. *ReClaim* is that book....Not wordy, it defers to the Word” (85).

Reading this book is not for the faint of heart. The argument of this latter-day Flacius will annoy and intimidate many. And most readers who are content with *ELW* will find it easy to dismiss this liturgical jeremiad. On the other hand, the book could be regarded as a bracing tonic, perhaps a purgative, for those who wish to probe issues that come with current liturgical practices. At the very least the book may cause worship leaders to clarify what, how, and why they do what they do. Reading and discussing Olson’s book should sharpen liturgical thinking and practice.

In Yellowstone Park, one observes geysers and learns that a geyser is a hot spring that erupts intermittently because water is boiling within the confined space of a plumbing system below the earth’s surface. Of course, one is cautioned to stand away from the eruption to avoid being scalded. That same advice is good when one is in the presence of a Gnesio-Lutheran such as Oliver Olson. The eruptions are fascinating to behold; but they are also potentially fearsome. One must remember, though, that the plumbing of Olson’s arguments reaches far back to the controversies of the Reformation. As we observe the eruptions and think about the plumbing system, we might become uncomfortably warm; but at the same time our experience should be enriched and our practice enlivened.

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REVISITING RELATIONAL YOUTH MINISTRY: FROM STRATEGY OF INFLUENCE TO THEOLOGY OF INCARNATION, by Andrew Root. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007. Pp. 221. \$19.95 (paper).

In his book, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*, Andrew Root, assistant professor of youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, challenges the reigning paradigm in American youth ministry. Drawing from his extensive background in youth ministry, both inside and outside the church, Root offers a fresh and theologically robust vision for a “truly relational relational youth ministry” of place-sharing (17).

In part two, Root will draw on Bonhoeffer’s theology of incarnation, revealing the shallowness of much of contemporary youth ministry’s utilitarian approach, where relationships serve as a means of strategic influence. In part one, Root shows where this idea of incarnational ministry comes from. Here he sketches the ascendancy of relational youth ministry in the twentieth century, from the development of the denominationally based youth societies of the early half of the century, to the advent of parachurch organizations in the latter half, to the current program-centered approaches commonplace in many contemporary church youth groups. Root accurately reveals that the driving motivation for relational ministry has been an “incarnational pattern of ministry,” not extended theological focus on Jesus Christ (53). As a result, relationships with young people have become a strategic means of influence. No matter how noble the end, Root shows how relational strategies of influence ultimately belie the incarnation of a God who reveals Godself as with and for humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

Not all readers will feel compelled to read part one, preferring instead to skip this historical, sociological, and deconstructive section in favor of Root’s reconstructive work in part two. In terms of grasping Root’s theological argument in part two,

nothing of considerable importance is lost. What is lost, however, is the chance for the reader to find herself in the historic trajectory of relational youth ministry, and allow Root to read and critique her own ministry. This reason alone makes this section indispensable, and gives the historical and sociological treatment considerably more weight. One can more easily see the truly necessary revision Root puts forth if one finds oneself in his critique.

The first three chapters of part two alone are worth the price of the book. They offer a rich theological framework from which to engage in relational youth ministry. Following Bonhoeffer, Root conceives of relational ministry as place-sharing because of who Jesus Christ is, where Christ is present, and what that means for our ministry with young people. Since Christ is the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected place-sharer for all humanity, the task of relational ministry is to conform to Christ’s life by entering into the place of the adolescent in relational encounter. This relational nexus is the concrete presence of Christ in the world. There is, then, no desired end to which the relationship is a means.

This is crucial, for it relieves the youth worker from being driven by measures of effectiveness, and rather frees her to be relationally present with an adolescent in the transforming power of Christ’s presence. This does not make relational ministry easy, for it necessarily means sharing in the suffering of an adolescent, and sometimes suffering from that adolescent, for the sake of bearing faithful witness to the suffering God in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 7 and 8 explore the complex factors of person, culture, and transcendence, all of which inevitably affect the relational encounter between place-sharer and adolescent. Root explains that in encountering the reality of a person through “partaking in the concrete mystery of the other” we consequently “partake in the transcendence of God” by conforming to Christ “who is the place-sharer to all humanity” (174). In place-sharing we take responsibility for the personal and cultural factors,

good or bad, that influence the adolescent's person, and bring them into the transforming presence of Christ, through which both youth worker and adolescent are "given a new look (a true look) at reality in connection to an other" (175). Root illustrates this brilliantly by providing the reader with case studies, which vibrantly paint a picture of transformative place-sharing in action.

These chapters are needed reminders to the youth worker that a range of factors are at work whenever the youth worker shares the place of an adolescent, and one needs to recognize and attend to these varying personal and cultural influences to truly share the place of the adolescent. This complicates relational ministry, but not needlessly, for as anyone involved in the lives of young people could tell you, they are complex persons. In fact, these chapters were a reminder to remain faithful to the true humanity of even the most difficult of students, for transformation to one's true humanity in Jesus Christ is no quick fix. Quick fixes are the work of influence, not transformation.

By recognizing the difficulty of relational ministry as place-sharing, let me lodge a brief complaint. Root would have done well to consider the way in which youth workers could act as place-sharers for one another in the difficult task of place-sharing with adolescents. He hints at this in his final chapter, "Rules of Art for Place-Sharing," but a more explicit treatment would have been helpful. This complaint notwithstanding, Root has established himself as a leader in a theological renewal for the practice of youth ministry. He has set the bar high for himself and all of us who are engaged in thinking through the practice of youth ministry in the local church. Engagement with this book will prove fruitful in rethinking your ministry with young people wherever it is. It already has for me.

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