



KEEPING THE FAITH: A GUIDE TO THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE, by David G. Truemper and Frederick A. Niedner, Jr. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981. Pp. 144. \$5.95 (paper).

This is a fine, fine book. In eleven well-written chapters the authors have covered the basic teachings of the Christian faith in a way which is at once fresh and traditional. Probably aimed at college and first-year seminary students, it is suitable for most laypersons who have done some reflecting on the meaning of their faith. It may be too demanding for a new-member class, but it would be an excellent aid for the pastor or teacher preparing for such a class.

The authors are Lutherans, professors at Valparaiso University, who aim to be both catholic and evangelical. They write of Christianity's major doctrines out of the explicit concern that what the church says will be heard as gospel. Two criteria guide all their statements: (1) that Christ's death is not "wasted" (i.e., that a statement does not make an assertion about God or faith that could have been made without Christ's death) and (2) that good news is brought to sinners. They succeed admirably in integrating the major parts of the historic catechism (Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Sacraments) in light of these criteria.

The book stresses not so much new information as deeper understanding. It is good in guiding us in *how* better to think about the faith. There is also some new information, however, in the use of the insights of recent biblical scholarship to illuminate areas such as the doctrine of God, the Commandments, prayer, and the sacraments. Here is one example on the Lord's Supper:

To drink a toast together, to share a cup of wine, was a particularly significant gesture. In the Old Testament, covenants were often ratified by raising a cup of wine in order to say to one another, "May your fate be my fate, for we are now linked by a treaty." A covenant cup (Jesus spoke of the cup as a "new covenant") was away of enacting a shared fate" (138).

I think the best chapters in the book are on Faith (6) and Prayer (8). Faith is depicted as "promise-trusting"—our participation in the story and fate of the promiser, Jesus Christ. This, in turn, is helpfully related to and distinguished from "the Christian faith" as a body of doctrine. Prayer is set by the authors in the struggle within each believer between the Spirit and the flesh (our Adamic survival instinct); their discussion of the Lord's Prayer is most enlightening.

Other strengths of the book include the fact that it is almost always interesting and that it uses non-sexist language, including feminine imagery for God. I mention this despite the authors' (rightful, I think) emphasis on the name Abba ("Daddy") for God, which Jesus' prayer makes prominent, and with some doubts that we should still use Mother imagery for the church, as they do in some places.

My only criticism is that despite the clearly progressive approach they have to the Bible, the authors nevertheless discuss Creation in Chapter 3 without dealing with what sort of literature

the Genesis narratives are. I think all Christians need to be given ways of seeing that such stories must be taken “seriously but not literally” (as Reinhold Niebuhr puts it); we do people no favor by ignoring such questions.

I hope that this book is widely read, for it succeeds in its attempt to “keep the good news good.”

Marc Kolden
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

THE BEING OF GOD: THEOLOGY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF TRUTH, by Robert P. Scharlemann. New York: Seabury, 1981. Pp. 204, \$14.95.

This is an argument for how the truth of “God is” enters experience and can be verified. The execution of the argument is clean, proficient and lean; at times too lean. The line of thought is almost always under control and the reader’s faculties directed on the “line of thought that is being drawn” (ix). The reader, in most cases, need not belong to any particular school in order to understand the argument since specialized language is introduced with considerable definition and example. The argument draws on several philosophical traditions (Anglo-American analytical, the Continental phenomenological, and speculative) and on several major theological figures (Aquinas, Altizer, Barth, Ebeling, and Tillich) without requiring a vast knowledge of anyone tradition or figure. In short, the argument as a whole, with one major exception, is available to any intelligent and *patient* reader. The impatient will not be rewarded.

The argument takes shape in four steps. First, the “experience of truth” is identified as “*given to thought*.” Second, the experience of truth is understood as seeing a certain kind of “identity in difference.” Third, the act of seeing identity in difference has a “reflective” rather than a direct object. Fourth, the argument conceives that “identity in difference” as either the identity of substance in a difference in time or the identity of time in a difference in subjects. Finally, the entire argument is written from the point of view of reflection itself, though the concern is with truth in theology. All of this is accomplished without extensive rehashing of previous historic arguments but is informed by them; the effect is powerful.

The text argues that “God is” is open to three distinct readings:

- (1) There exists an entity that possesses the properties designated by the name “God.”
- (2) There is a being whose essential act is to be.
- (3) Someone can be pointed out who can show us how or as what God is.

It tests each of the possibilities from the point of view of reflection and finds difficulties in each of them. This testing, in the third sense, recognizes that reflection regarding the assertion “God is” is split: some persons experience this sense as clearly true and others as clearly false.

This split in reflection demands the move to reflection upon reflection or reflexivity. Reflexivity concerns a separate category of reflection, specifically the reflection on such objects as the “truth about truth” and “the goodness about goodness.” Reflexive reflection takes the linguistic turn by examining the character of language itself and its relationship to reality. In the case of “God is” reflexivity takes the shape of reflection upon the word “God” as the unity of thinking and being which is perceptible only in the word that names it. Even this level of

reflexivity does not yield an unqualified verification of “God is.” Quite to the contrary, the depth of truth experience on the level of reflexivity is elucidated by the symbol of the cross. This discovery gives to experience the truth of both the true and the false.

The book’s argument makes many contributions to the question of truth, especially as it applies to theological truth claims. Two moments are particularly insightful and illustrative. First, Scharlemann, in a magisterial manner, makes intelligible the claims of the “new realism” (ix) by clearly distinguishing two orders of referentiality. “Direct experience involves objects that can be given to the mind through the physical senses (trees, stones, etc.) and reflective experience involves second-order objects, such as truth, that are given in and through those objects” (ix, 81ff.). Second, in an equally proficient manner, he develops Gadamer’s discussion of play and the experience of truth of God. Gadamer had argued that “what meets us in the experience of the beautiful and in the understanding of the meaning of a tradition does actually have something of the truth of play” in it. By developing Gadamer’s notion of play the argument provides access “to what is meant by a language in which one speaks of the one subject and action underlying the many.” “Such a hermeneutical theory makes clear how particular subjects (players) are related to an underlying subject (the game) by being

drawn into it; in so doing the theory prepares the ground for taking the further step of showing how all events are related to the one underlying event ‘God is’” (72).

The argument is quite clear and lean until the point where reflection is split against itself and the necessity of reflexivity arises. The argument is too lean when it moves from the necessity of reflexivity, to reflection regarding the word “God” and to the elucidation of the split in reflexivity itself; more argument is needed. This elucidation of the split in reflexivity takes the shape of Tillich’s discussion of the symbol of the cross. Though I appreciate the importance of this move in relativizing all symbols and quite agree regarding the appearance of both the true and the false in the cross, I was unable to follow the move from reflexivity regarding the word “God” to this elucidation. Perhaps the elucidation of the cross as symbol might be given greater precision if the cross were understood as a metaphor. This is especially suggestive since all lively metaphors elucidate the depth of truth; that is, they make present both what is and is not the case.

Be that as it may, this argument is an outstanding contribution to the discussion of the truth of theology. Scharlemann’s refusal to reduce theological claims to meaning claims can only be admired and applauded.

Patrick R. Keifert
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

THE SMALL TOWN CHURCH, by Peter J. Surrey. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. Pp. 128. \$4.95 (paper).

PREACHING AND WORSHIP IN THE SMALL CHURCH, by William H. Willimon and Robert L. Wilson. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980. Pp. 126. \$4.95 (paper).

Pastors are the products of 20 years or more of education in generally controlled

environments. During our time in this controlled setting we learn to think and to express ourselves in a certain way. We come to value objectivity and logical, abstract language above all things. And we begin to think that the world thinks the way the educational system taught us to think.

But it doesn't. The world is much more concrete. There we encounter conflicts and noise and odors and touches. There we taste things and experience visual surprises. Life is passionate. It is not logical, reasonable, or abstract. It is lived, not thought.

The two books under consideration in this review are perhaps profound enough. They probably say all the right things about the small church and preaching and worship in it. They perhaps correctly analyze the situation and raise the proper questions that arise for ordained laborers in small settings.

But they didn't speak to me. And they didn't seem to have much to do with the small churches I have served out on the plains of Western North Dakota. People out here don't think like those books are written. The people out here belong to the land, and their thinking is molded by mining, the wind, dust, basketball games, whiskey, and pulling calves.

Peter Surrey's *The Small Church* flirts with such concreteness, but in the end, if pastors were to follow his model, I think they would still seem isolated and insulated from the world of their parishioners. They would like to "convert" them to their way of thinking and to their "idea" of the church, replete with female acolytes to match the liberated mood of the age, but they keep running into walls. Perhaps that's because the educational system which produced them taught them how to operate with their heads so well that they can no longer relate to people who operate primarily out of the more concrete world of the heart. Pastors can carry on an intellectual conversation with their people; they can involve themselves in an intellectual conflict using reason and logic to try to change them; they can conform to them by fitting into the place waiting for them out there in the kingdom of their hearts; or they can attempt to move into that stubborn kingdom and concentrate on rearranging it a bit so that Christ Jesus can sit in the middle where he belongs.

The Small Church touched on the first

three approaches. I prefer the fourth. The book is excessively concerned with pastoral manners and congregational morality.

Preaching and Worship in the Small Church seems to lack concrete moorings altogether. All the right things they say about "Pelagian busyness," Sunday schools, small churches, and preaching are lost in the abstract, logical, reasonable woods. I could not see, hear, taste, touch, or smell much of anything as I read the book. The words of the book seemed to hide life rather than expose it. Of course "faithfulness to the Word is the mark of good preaching." But "What does that mean?" my catechetical heart replied. It received no answer. Of course, "the pastor who still devotes a major portion of time to the preparation of sermons is a rare breed." But "What does that mean?" my catechetical heart replied and again it received no answer. Of course, "for people in the pews of Protestant churches the sermon is the most important event, and whether the clergy believe it or not, what they say has an impact on the lives of the listeners." But "What does that mean?" my catechetical heart asked. And the book was silent.

These books raise the correct questions. But they do not struggle very hard with

answering any of them. It is one thing to raise questions about salvation—and that is indeed what these books are about—the salvation of the pastor in the small church. But it is quite another thing to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

I prefer “fear and trembling” books to question raising ones like these. I think my reading time is too precious to waste reading books that raise questions I’m already asking and books that tell me what I already know. Ten years from now nobody will remember that these books were ever written or published or read. And pastors in small churches will still be wondering how they’re supposed to be pastors in small churches, how they can devote more time to their preaching, how they can be faithful to the Word, and what they can say.

Lyle Schaller, in his Foreword to *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, praises it because “It is an affirming book....It affirms the role of a pastor in a small congregation.” I am a pastor in a small congregation and have been for some years, and I don’t need affirmation. I need help; help with my theology, help with my preaching, and help with my exegesis. I need help understanding the world I live in, the people I live in it with, and help for understanding myself. These books did not give much of that help to me.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things will be yours as well,” Jesus said. These two books are mainly about “other things.” They are centered in the problems of ecclesiological organization instead of in the power of Christ. Perhaps that’s why I found them so barren and unhelpful.

G. Keith Gunderson
Reeder Lutheran Parish
Reeder, North Dakota

THE COMMUNITY AND MESSAGE OF ISAIAH 56-66, by Elizabeth Achtemeier.
Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982. Pp. 159. \$7.95 (paper).

A bold venture this: to write a detailed exegetical commentary on a dark and disputed area of Scripture for a general audience.

The last eleven chapters of the book of Isaiah, like much of prophetic literature, consist of undated oracles with no historical context and little cohesion. Add to those literary problems the current scholarly disarray concerning their interpretation and you have a difficult task for a popular book to undertake.

But the author manages it all really quite well. Paralleling Paul Hanson’s treatment of the same material in *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, Achtemeier sets the Third Isaiah right in the middle of a post-exilic power struggle. If indeed written by a Levitical-reform-Deuteronomic-prophetic school in the tradition of the Isaiahs as a running polemic against the priestly-exclusivistic-Zadokite party, the oracles take on a contextual significance which the unguided reader could easily bypass.

The benefit gained from this contextualizing is clear: One feels much better acquainted with the post-exilic protagonists and their causes. The problems are two-

fold. The one, that of pitting one part of the canon against another (Isaiah 56-66 vs. Ezekiel 40-

48, Haggai and Zechariah) is dealt with in the epilogue, “Trito-Isaiah and the Problem of the Canon,” by enjoining us moderns to live with the same sort of tensions the ancients accepted. “We should emulate the Priestly writers and preserve all the traditions, keeping them and pondering them in our hearts” (155).

The other is that the case of the rival factions and their identity is built entirely on circumstantial evidence. One is tempted to ask why the context is so important if those who were aware of it neglected to relay it?

These two concerns aside, the book is eminently readable and clearly Christocentric. Her arguments for the theological unity of the material in the order as delivered are both satisfying and welcome. I myself prefer thinking about why a verse or section should be where it is rather than why it should not be there. Likewise welcome are the author’s many hints as to how a given oracle may serve as a preaching text. Since the Lectionary assigns eighteen texts from these chapters, this commentary will serve as a useful reference for the preacher.

Mark Hillmer
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

INTRODUCTION TO PASTORAL CARE, by William V. Arnold. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982. Pp. 221. \$10.95 (paper).

Anyone who assumes the effort of writing an “introduction” to pastoral care undertakes an enormous task. The plethora of theological positions, the multiplicity of therapeutic methodologies, the scope of pastoral involvement coupled with the complexity of the contemporary ecclesiological and social scene confronts the writer with a veritable maze of material. William V. Arnold has done a masterful job of condensing the most pertinent issues in the field into a manageable and readable volume without sacrificing the integrity and depth of the issues addressed. The author is to be commended for his careful delineation of the field in a coherent and systematic format. A fundamental premise is that each pastor’s assumptions and presuppositions (theologically, psychologically and socially) ultimately determine how she or he will respond pastorally to a given situation. An investigation of such assumptions is crucial.

Such reflection, in community as well as individually, will help us to evaluate our approaches to see if they are consistent with our assumptions. (16)

The book is divided into four major sections with the first entitled, “The Ground of Pastoral Care.” This is an explication of the fundamental questions oriented around anthropology and theology. Creation and fall constitute the twin foci of theological anthropology. The developmental process provides the psychological and social matrix for the understanding of the human personality. The pastoral perception of God’s interaction with people in tandem with the pastor’s anthropological assumptions determine his or her understanding and delivery of pastoral care. Arnold discusses the principles of pastoral care under the twin rubrics of initiative and faithfulness with repentance, prayer and hope being primary theological resources exercised under grace.

The second major section dealing with the “Person of the Pastor” focuses on the question

of personal and professional identity as understood from a developmental perspective. Identity is determined by commitment to a theological belief system as well as self understanding which in turn informs the praxis of pastoral care. The functional dimension of pastoral care singles out the pastor as representative of God, as servant of God and as carrier of tradition.

Section three concerns itself with “The Disciplines of Support” which the pastor has in executing the pastoral ministry. Arnold explores the assumptions of the human potentials movement and critiques its value and limitations accordingly. He points to a wholistic view of human nature as being normative. He draws on the Eriksonian epigenetic schema for understanding psycho-sexual development, Kohlberg’s theory for understanding moral development and Duvall as a

page 85

guide for understanding family development. A cursory overview of contemporary psychotherapeutic specialties and schools of thought, “community” resources available to the pastor and the “when” and “how” of referral concludes this section.

The final section, “Contexts for Pastoral Care,” considers stress, grief, illness, family and marriage (including the pastor’s family) and human sexuality as being principal problem areas for pastoral care. The nature of various approaches and resources is considered with a special section devoted to the issue of homosexuality.

A work of such comprehensive scope invites some criticism as being cursory at some points. A more extensive theological critique of therapeutic assumptions and methodologies would have been helpful in evaluating their usefulness for pastoral care. Arnold’s acknowledged Calvinistic perspective may have influenced his omission of the Sacraments as a rich resource for the pastor in the provision of pastoral care for the community of faith. Suggestions for specialized concerns are provided as a brief adjunct to the final section dealing with the “contexts” of pastoral care. A principal criticism at this juncture is the failure to mention chemical dependency as a major issue in pastoral care and counseling. It ranks as equal with illness and grief in terms of its pervasiveness and exacts a devastating toll on the family system, social relationships and the community at large. Having articulated these concerns, the positive dimensions of the book far outweigh its limitations.

Methodologically Arnold affirms the theological perspective as being foundational for the praxis of pastoral care. This is a refreshing shift from “how to” books and those works which employ only psychotherapeutic jargon with “lip service” to the theological dimension. Practically, his concern for a wholistic and integrative approach to pastoral care is most commendable. The value and limitations of the social sciences are fairly treated. He lends credibility and encouragement to the pastor to be part of a team which ministers to the total person. As such there is no trichotomization of the person into body, mind and spirit; but an affirmation of persons as being whole and that the healing power of God’s grace is operative in all professions.

There is a comprehensive treatment of major problems, potential resources and possibilities for pastoral care in this book. Arnold’s theological sensitivity provides a firm foundation for translating the dynamics of the human situation into effective action without imposing parameters predicated on the basis of what is within or outside of the pastoral purview.

Finally, one is enthralled with another’s work which parallels one’s own. The major

sections with their constituent chapters are closely akin to my own basic outline for teaching the basic principles of pastoral care and counseling. Affirming the primacy of a theology of grace, confirming the wholistic nature of the human personality, reaffirming the individual as apart of the larger community and reconfirming the importance of the pastor in dealing with the problems and potential of the human race are solid premises for the theory and practice of pastoral care. Personally I hold this work in high regard and, despite its rather prohibitive price as a paperback, view it as an invaluable asset for students, pastors and professors who are attempting to systematically shape their own theology and praxis of pastoral care.

Robert H. Albers
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

FULLNESS OF LIFE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW ASCETICISM, by Margaret R. Miles. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981. Pp. 186. \$11.95 (paper).

A fourth century eucharistic prayer concluded, “We beg you, make us truly alive.” Dr. Miles, associate professor of Historical Theology at Harvard Divinity School, explores the release from deadness into life through the medium of the body in historical Christian thought and practice. She has one major negative and one major positive argument. First, she attempts to correct the current popular assumption that historical Christian authors were overwhelmingly negative concerning the human body. Second and

page 86

positively, she finds in a more careful reading of history clues for a new asceticism which affirms the discipline of the body and its integration into the soul over against the life-denying compulsions of our contemporary society. Miles readily admits the legitimate body concerns of liberation theology, feminist theology, gay-lesbian theology, and wholistic health emphases, but she contends that these groups usually accept uncritically a distorted reading of Christian history about the body.

True, the author argues, the “old asceticism” will not serve us, marked as it was by an exaggerated body-soul dualism and frequently counseling the rape of the body for the benefit of the soul. However, there is an “underground asceticism” in our time which has similar results. Alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, overeating, overwork, frantic pace of life, and environmental pollution—are these not but the soul’s misguided attempts to assert its life, even at the expense of the body? And such addictions do not make us feel truly alive.

Miles’ historical investigation is careful, painstaking, and true to her announced intent—to treat historic figures in their own contexts. Thus, Tertullian and Irenaeus, as they deal with human embodiment in light of the incarnation, are seen against the backdrop of Gnosticism and of the threat of martyrdom. Clement and Origen are seen in their own ambivalences, yet affirming the body as medium of entrance into salvation. Augustine is treated sympathetically—thwarted by cultural assumptions and a personal preoccupation with sex, he yet achieved a considerable understanding of the integrity of bodily experience. In him emerged a new emphasis upon the natural world and upon the body as location of God’s direct activity.

Particularly illuminated is the struggle between classical philosophy's hierarchical view (wherein the activity of God is found in escape from the material world through contemplation) and the Christian incarnational view (wherein divine activity is experienced precisely in the material world). Miles' treatments of this struggle in the iconoclastic controversies, in the contrasts between Eastern and Western understandings, and in the medieval synthesis between the two views are particularly insightful.

Looking back over the centuries of Christian history, the author sees three attitudes about the body (often overlapping): the body as foil for the soul, the body as problem, and the body as intimate partner of the soul (its "spouse") in learning, suffering, and salvation. It is in this latter connectedness that Miles finds clues for a "new asceticism." Those clues can be seen in certain body practices for purifying the soul (e.g., in Evagrius); in the control of the deadening agenda of power, sex, and possession (e.g., in St. Benedict's rules of poverty, chastity, and obedience); the focusing of energy (e.g., in St. Augustine); and the concentration of one's consciousness for mission (e.g., in St. Ignatius Loyola). All of these ways, she argues, eschew the twin problems of the old asceticism—the dualistic assumptions of a closed energy system with the soul gathering energy at the expense of the body, and the punitive orientation wherein the body is punished that the self might be spared divine punishment. "Neither discipline nor punishment is the goal of asceticism, but rather freeing of the body from the stranglehold of the flesh so that it can come to share in the life and energy of the spirit" (158).

The new asceticism, valid for our time, will take clues from earlier Christian generations which have too often been misunderstood. It will affirm the permanent and integral connection of body and soul. It will affirm only those practices concretely designed to contend with specific problems of addiction. And it will affirm certain practices which are perennially useful, such as meditation, temporary celibacy and fasting, and disciplines of physical exercise, breathing patterns and body postures. "The immediate goals of asceticism, once again, include self-understanding, overcoming of habituation and addiction, gathering and focusing of energy, ability to change our cultural conditioning, and intensification or expansion of consciousness" (162). These are aspects of the purity of heart which point to the goal of the Kingdom.

This is an extraordinarily enlightening book. Miles does a real service in correcting the one-sided perceptions of blanket anti-body attitudes in the Christian tradi-

tion. She builds an impressive case for the need for a new asceticism—one which embraces the marriage of body and spirit and which has disciplines to counter the alienating addictions of our time. Further, by her focus on the body theme she brings fresh insights into the interpretation of both major and less well-known figures of our Christian past.

Having said all of this, I will have some nagging questions. If Christian tradition has been as incarnationalist as the author argues, why is it that docetism is still so strong among us? Why are Hellenistic (spirit/body) dualism and patriarchal (man/woman) dualism so pervasive within the church? Why is it that we commonly pit supernature over against nature, heaven against earth, the historical against the natural, the spiritual against the sensual, the individual against the society, the intellectual against the effective? I would argue that Miles' own careful research still, by and large, shows major Christian figures embracing certain dualistic assumptions, even if somewhat subtly. In them, at best, the body is still experienced as a *means* to the purification of

the soul and the integration of life. Granted, this is a considerable step beyond raw anti-body dualism, and for that we should give thanks. But the radical incarnationalism of the Gospel would press us still further.

James B. Nelson
United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities
New Brighton, Minnesota

ENCOUNTERING EVIL: LIVE OPTIONS IN THEODICY, ed. by Stephen T. Davis.
Atlanta: John Knox, 1982. Pp. 182. \$7.95 (paper).

This excellent book is neither an encounter with the Prince of Darkness nor a monumental achievement in Christian thought. I am not even sure it offers religious believers hope. These extravagant claims, made on the back cover blurb to lure buyers and readers (who, if they are looking for such things, ought to be reading Wiesel's *Night*, Augustine's *City of God* and Isaiah), obscure its true nature and value. Rather than records of encounters with evil, these essays are academic in the best sense, written at varying distances from terror and rage with an awareness of distinctions, alternate positions and theological consequences. Hardly monumental, the book is *handy*; it is short and clear, and the several authors keep each other honest. And it offers not hope but insight into theological and pastoral strategies.

What makes this book peculiarly attractive is the way it weaves its essays into a sustained dialogue. Each of five thinkers offers his own reflections on God and evil. After each essay, the others write short responses and the essayist replies in a concluding reflection. John Cobb adds a postscript which views the debate as a whole from yet another perspective and tries to relate it to pastoral ministry. If you have ever been mesmerized by one book's conceptual apparatus, or been irritated by it without being able to find your way around it, you will rejoice in the responses that follow the essays. And you will not have to wonder, "well now, how would old X meet that objection?" All of this is placed before you.

As a technical philosophical or theological issue, theodicy has a marvellous clarity which has endeared it to logicians. It turns on three premisses: God is omnipotent; God is good; evil exists. These almost have the childlike elegance of a table-prayer ("God is great, God is good..."). But the complexity of the issue appears in the different questions these premisses generate: Is God, then, not good? Is God powerless? Is evil less than we ignorant humans think? Does such a God not even exist, given that evil does? And, as these essays show, these questions seem to involve almost every other theological and philosophical question you can think of: creation, eschatology, human nature, the nature of the world, value, fact, scriptural interpretation, revelation and authority, culture and revolution. As the essays also show, one finds oneself pondering the problem of God and evil for a variety of reasons: clinging to God's goodness at any cost, trying to read the nature of a magnificent deity, raging at the hell of the world.

These various considerations shape the major essays in various ways. Put crudely, some try to find a way around evil (Davis, Griffin, Hick), some a way to God

through evil (Roth, Sontag). Stephen Davis comes closest to representing the standard position of

Christian rationalism: the premisses are all true and consistent; one day we will understand. Griffin offers the most subtle discussion of the origin of evil, Hick of its purpose. (There is excellent critical work: in Roth's major essay when he picks apart the claim that evil is an inevitable consequence of freedom; in Sontag's response to Griffin when he lists just how many elements of Christianity Griffin's position must reject.)

But it is the essays of John Roth and Frederick Sontag which really take theodicy in an interesting direction. They are obsessed by the *amount* of evil found in the world and are driven by it to raise a question not of consistency but of the very nature of God: given what we know of evil, *who is God* and what is he doing? The sheer *waste* of the world and its maddening mixture of blessedness and slaughter are used by Roth and Sontag as richer poles for this issue to vibrate round than the bare logical premisses listed above.

Sontag sees evil as the most ready modern avenue through which to ponder the mystery of God. Roth is more interested in probing how we are to respond to a God who has given us the world we have. (And Griffin is probably right that both positions require strong claims about God's omnipotence and weakened claims about his benevolence.) It seems to me that Roth has uncovered a critical nerve of this problem in asking how faith is to orient itself in a world of evil and answering that it must rage against God for hot stopping meaningless slaughter, that faith must be God's conscience, that we must be against the design of the world as it is *on the basis of* the promises given to faith. (The common response, shaped by the ordinary theodicy, that we must trust and one day understand seems to Roth, and to me, rather thin.)

It is interesting to note that only Roth and Sontag meditate on Christ in any significant way, though the crucifixion and resurrection contribute little to their position. (A parenthetical complaint: there is no index, which makes crosschecking a little hard.) Davis, most vociferous about his own orthodoxy, mentions Christ as the one example of a sinless life. Now, it may come as a relief to some of us to find one problem for which Jesus is not "the answer," but when the problem is the problem of evil it ought to give a Christian pause that five thinkers writing within the Christian tradition find very little to say about Christ when dealing with evil.

What this reveals, I think, is that discussions of evil still turn in the orbit of deism, that the way the issue is conceived and argued is structured primarily by views of *creation*, something intimately related to modern science (cf. Eugene Klaaren's *Religious Origins of Modern Science*) and to

theologies that have been in serious dialogue with science. But this is scarcely enough for a Christian to be satisfied with and it is another value of the kind of questioning Roth displays that it breaks somewhat out of this orbit.

Yet, if this is true of discussions of evil, it is probably also true that outrage at the waste of the world has a less than prominent place in the ordinary life of the church. Roth is correct in arguing that the furious cries of the psalms and the prophets deserve a place in the life of faith, something that is increasingly not being found for them in our liturgies, our Bible schools and our smiling faces.

Cordell Strug
Minneapolis, Minnesota

JEWISH LITERATURE BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND THE MISHNAH, by George W. E. Nickelsburg. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981. Pp. 332. \$19.95.

New Testament studies in this country has suffered considerably from a lack of attention to historical context, despite the alleged triumph of the historical-critical method. In some respects the rise of “canonical criticism” has made matters worse. Scholars and students have tended to assume that the Old Testament is a sufficient background for studying the New. Those who have paid attention to “Jewish backgrounds,” acknowledging the difference between the religion of ancient Israel and Judaism of the first century, have tended to work with dated stereotypes. In the last decades, our picture of intertestamental Judaism has been altered considerably. One of the major differences between the first century and biblical times was due to the impact of hellenization, as Martin Hengel, Henry Fischel, Morton Smith and others have demonstrated. The language of diaspora Judaism, its basic questions, even its interpretive methods used to read the scriptures were part of the legacy of Alexander the Great. The remarkable diversity of Judaism in the first century of the common era has likewise become apparent as archaeological data have been processed and literary finds like the Qumran Scrolls interpreted. George Foote Moore’s classic study of Judaism may serve as a useful portrait of rabbinic communities from the third century on, but it can no longer suffice as a sketch of the first century.

The critical period for understanding the background of the New Testament is the intertestamental era, roughly from the time of Alexander the Great to the revolt against Rome in 66-70. Yet there is hardly a university or seminary where basic courses are offered in the religion of this era, and many of the standard reference works used in classes are dated. It is therefore a distinct pleasure to acknowledge the publication of George Nickelsburg’s *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, authored by a scholar who has devoted much of his academic career to apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings.

The book is a survey. It offers a brief sketch of intertestamental literature, including apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works, Daniel, a few canonical psalms, and the Qumran writings. When possible, the writings are arranged in chronological order. Each chapter begins with a brief sketch of a particular historical period, followed by a description of the literature that focuses primarily on content. More complex works, like Enoch, are broken down into component parts that seem to have preceded the final form of the work. Particularly helpful is a chapter devoted to scriptural exposition, a matter of special significance for those interested in Christian use of the Old Testament. The chapter on literature written in response to the revolt against Rome (66-70) includes a page on the Gospel of Matthew, illustrating in a small way the relevance of such historical context for interpretation of the Gospels.

The volume intends to be less scholarly than, for example, Hengel’s *Judaism and Hellenism*. Readers may thus miss the considerable scholarship that lies behind the readable, informative survey. For those interested in further study, the author has included a solid bibliography—though it is interesting how many citations include the note “soon to be published.” Study of intertestamental Judaism is experiencing a rebirth, and it is early in the process. There is no single work that can pretend to be comprehensive, and it may be decades before such a work is even conceivable. In the meantime, we can be

grateful for works like Nickelsburg's that open the door at least a crack on a world few of us have glimpsed.

Donald Juel
Luther Northwestern Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota

THE DIVERSITY OF SCRIPTURE, by Paul D. Hanson. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982. Pp. xviii and 157. \$8.95 (paper).

This celebration of biblical diversity does not mean that the Scriptures have no controlling center or that anything goes. Indeed, Hanson, a Lutheran and a professor at Harvard, builds on the salvation history parts of the Bible rather than its sapiential traditions, and he sees the significance of the canon in several dynamically-related polarities.

Form and reform. With form are associated order and security; it is illustrated by the monarchy. With reform are associated freedom and change; it is illustrated by the prophetic movement. If the polarity between form and reform dissolves, the result will be a monolithic system (absolutized form) or chaos (absolutized reform). The prophets sought a wedding of order and righteousness and so maintained the appropriate polarity.

Visionary and pragmatic. Here Hanson popularizes the insights of his doctoral dissertation (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 1975), in which he traced a polarity between the vision of God's will and decision for the world *and* the pragmatic realities of applying this to day-to-day life. The two Isaiahs were perhaps best at this polarity but in post-exilic times it was dissolved into apocalypticism (only vision, unable or unwilling to relate the faith to the concrete problems of life without escapism) or pragmatism (in which the priestly party accommodated itself to the status quo). A related polarity is *vision/revision*. Not only did the prophets relate their vision of God to the realities of life, but in the process their hope was revised eschatologically. The vision side of the polarity too is not to be expressed in static categories.

Hanson is fighting against the rigidity of fundamentalism and the secularism of certain forms of liberalism. "Dynamic Transcendence" is another way he expresses his theological agenda. God transcends the human and the mundane and can be glimpsed only in the heavenly vision (via revelation), but God is also dynamically involved in the movement of history. We are called, therefore, constantly to study the interaction of our vision of God's purposes and the realities of the world.

The polarity between king and prophet (form and reform) was transformed in the Bible by a deferring or eschatologizing of the prophetic ideal of kingship (vision/revision). The messianic promises are good examples of this (e.g. Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-9), but its greatest actualization comes with Jesus, who is a radical new embodiment of the king/prophet polarity. By identifying Jesus with the Suffering Servant the church preserved the long *praeparatio* for the messiah in the Old Testament and cast all that preceded Jesus in a new light because of this new act of God.

In the final two chapters Hanson discusses how the church needs to appropriate the vision of its confessional heritage and reformulate it in creative new metaphors (chap. 5), and how it might translate the vision of God's kingdom into the needs and challenges of this world, in

imitation of Christ, that is, by the way of the cross (chap. 6).

There are a number of reasons to recommend this book. Hanson discusses recent insights into the dynamic of the biblical faith in such a way that they can be understood by pastors and laity and used for the church's mission. He deals sensitively with the agenda of issues that confront contemporary Christians without turning theology into the ideology of a particular social or political party. As a member of the committee revising the RSV, he refuses to rewrite the Bible by saying that God's promises were made to Sarah and Abraham if the text only says Abraham, or by expunging male metaphors for the deity. He rightly insists that the Bible must be studied in its historical particularity. Yet he calls the church to transcend sexist imagery in its theology and worship because it understands the dynamic and living character of the Word of Scripture.

Sometimes his style is a bit too sweeping, as if all theological ideas could be neatly assigned to form or reform, etc. At

times the reader may not be sure whether form or reform is necessary in the issues he or she faces. But this book's insistence on the dynamic of the biblical message requires the thoughtful reader to respond and to react as part of an on-going confessional trajectory. The new polarities presented by Hanson may well give new life to discussion jaded by references to two kingdoms and law-gospel. This is not just a book to read. One must wrestle with it as it responds in kind.

Ralph W. Klein
Christ Seminary-Seminex
St. Louis, Missouri

LITERARY INTERPRETATIONS OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVES, VOLUME II, ed. by Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982. Pp. 320. \$10.95 (paper).

For at least a decade, the incessant conversation among biblical scholars concerning the proper means of interpreting scripture has been further complicated by the new voices of literary critics. Experts in poetry and fiction have been applying their skills to biblical texts and, to the dismay of many biblical scholars, have often disregarded the discoveries of the past century's archaeology, both literal and figurative; source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism have been ignored in favor of a "close reading" of the received text. Literary critics have also offended proponents of biblical inerrancy by suggesting that the Word of God is shaped by the same kind of conscious literary artistry as the works of Shakespeare and Homer. Thus, literary criticism has often been discredited by liberals as unscholarly, by conservatives as irreverent, and by both groups as excessively subjective.

Such attitudes have been exacerbated by a misconception in the popular mind that imaginative literature is easily distinguished from historical and theological writing, and that, consequently, they require different methods of interpretation. Consider this segment of Archibald MacLeish's "Ars Poetica," a favorite piece from the canon of popular literary theory:

A poem should be equal to:

Not true.
For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.
For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—
A poem should not mean
But be

If literary scholars hone their tools on works that are said to neither “mean” nor be “true,” thought biblical scholars, how can they interpret texts with claims to truth and meaning as profound as those of the Bible? The problem is that literary and biblical scholars have often defined truth and meaning differently; here, as elsewhere in theological discourse, semantics is crucial. Thus, Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis writes in his opening chapter of *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, Vol. II*, “the gap between literary critics and biblical scholars, even scholars who say they are endorsing this new approach to the study of the Bible, remains very great” (13).

Nevertheless, several important books have closed this gap in recent years and made believers of many sceptical biblical scholars. Phyllis Tribble’s *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978), Frank Kermode’s *Genesis of Secrecy* (1979), and Robert Alter’s *Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) have demonstrated how richly literary methodology can contribute to biblical interpretation without disregarding historical studies or denying the Bible’s special claims as history and scripture. Now this volume further enlivens the conversation by bringing together nineteen essays on specific biblical texts by thirteen authors.

The lead essay on methodology and six of the textual studies are by Gros Louis, the volume’s editor. Several of these essays, along with those by James Ackerman (on Genesis 37-50) and Michael Fishbane (1 Samuel 3), contain superb insights. Let me offer just two examples from Gros Louis’ examination of Genesis 12-20.

The destinies of Abraham and Lot are moving in different directions because of the values on which they base their lives. Lot, concerned primarily for himself, is shrinking as an individual, being reduced to the narrowness of his vision. His life

page 96

fulfills his being, as he moves away from Abraham’s grand vision to the Jordan valley, to the city of Sodom, to the little city of Zoar, to the cave in the hills, to the smallness of his own family and the inbreeding of his own descendants through his daughters. The space within which he lives literally gets smaller as the narrative progresses until he literally disappears; we never hear of his actual death. (64)

Abraham, on the other hand, is expanding:

The Lord tells Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars.
Earlier, he had told Abram that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust

of the earth. The very metaphors, so carefully chosen, bridge the gap between the divine and the human, merging heaven and earth in images rich with echoes from the earlier chapters of Genesis. (63)

Unfortunately, few of these essays move beyond formal observations to the difficult hermeneutical questions: what does this text reveal about the relationship between us and God? How do these texts become accessible to the contemporary reader or listener? Or, to use the language of the MacLeish poem, In what ways are they true? What do they mean for us? Gros Louis avoids such questions by insisting on an artificial distinction between theological, historical, and literary writings. Speaking rather presumptuously for “literary critics,” he writes, “The text to us is not sacred, and whether the events it describes are historical is not relevant to our purposes” (14). “Literary criticism is not biblical scholarship...; the two are complementary” (15). This distinction prevents Gros Louis from studying how literary technique informs theology and interprets history; his essays, insightful as they are, remain the raw material to which believers must bring their own hermeneutical tools.

The three essays most helpful for the student of scripture assume the inseparability of literary, theological, and historical writing. The first is a structuralist analysis of the Samson stories in Judges 13-16, written by James Freeman without one word of jargon; I commend it to anyone interested in structuralist methodology. The second is a study by Jonathan Bishop of the blind man (in John 9) as one who encounters Jesus, and of Nicodemus as one who turns away short of true encounter; the essay exemplifies a literary interpretation that applies its observations to the lives of its readers.

The jewel of this collection is Phyllis Trible’s essay on Ruth, a chapter from *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. With meticulous care she examines the comic pattern, the movement from death to life, that characterizes the whole of Ruth and each of its chapters. Using what she calls “rhetorical” critical methodology (to distinguish it from Old Testament “literary,” or “source,” criticism) and a feminist hermeneutic, she makes a series of fine observations about the power of Ruth and Naomi “in a man’s world,” always supporting her points with such thorough analysis as to make them virtually indisputable. Having noted that Ruth, in her first meeting with Boaz, has taken the initiative while appearing deferential, whereas Boaz’s apparent initiative is primarily a reaction, Trible concludes:

[Boaz] has patriarchal power, but he does not have narrative power. He has authority within the story but no control over it. The story belongs to Ruth and Naomi—and to chance, that code for the divine. (173)

Trible consistently demonstrates, as in this passage, the compatibility of scholarly “close reading” and feminist interpretation.

Students of the Bible can be thankful for this addition to the very short shelf of biblical analyses using literary methodology. They should also hope that soon Dr. Gros Louis, and others like him trained in literary criticism, will enter more fully into the conversation with those who view the Bible as scripture and offer their perceptions with a sympathetic understanding of the truth-claims made by such believers. Then historians, theologians, and literary scholars can begin to enrich their studies with one another’s insights, exploring together the meaning and truth disclosed by the language of scripture.

TEACHING FAITH AND MORALS: TOWARD PERSONAL AND PARISH RENEWAL,
by Suzanne M. De Benedittis. Minneapolis: Winston, 1981. Pp. 218. \$8.95 (paper).

“The very fact that we are Christian means that we are called to educate one another” (xiv). Suzanne De Benedittis captures the essence of Christian community and the task of educational ministry in that community. She seeks to show us that we are already involved in one another’s religious socialization; through becoming conscious of the influence we have on one another and by recognizing and sharing our own gifts we can more effectively minister to each other.

De Benedittis proceeds to try to integrate a catalog of theories, including Assagiolo, Maslow, Piaget, Fowler, Kohlberg, Groome, Beyer, Erikson, Frazer and Weathersby. Her premise is that there is healing and holiness in wholeness. Like Maria Harris in her 1981 volume, *Portrait of Youth Ministry* (Paulist, 1981), she brings a Roman Catholic contribution to the heavily cognitive structural theory of knowing and developmental stage theory of current religious education, reminding us that one must add an emphasis on fantasy, feelings, the senses and the mystical.

Actually De Benedittis is at her best when she departs from the charts and theories of others. Although we might admire her ability to synthesize so many theories, the very inclusion of this number may be more distracting than helpful unless one is well acquainted with each. Rather than putting them together for the reader, itself a highly cognitive task, she might simply put forth ideas which the readers could synthesize in response to their own questions.

One of De Benedittis’ central questions concerns the distinction between catechesis and catechetis, the former being used more broadly to throw light on the whole of human existence as God’s saving action by witnessing to the mystery of Christ through the word to awaken and foster faith that people might live in accord with that faith. Catechetis is a more technical term referring to a systematic presentation of the study of the nature, goals and principles of catechesis. The book describes characteristics of “holistic catechesis” which include understanding the message, the development of morals, the development of virtues and the development of wholeness.

Although she (in contrast to Harris) does not show us the sexual bias of Erikson and Kohlberg, De Benedittis does make good use of Erikson in particular, drawing helpful application for educational ministry. For example, even at the age of industry vs. inferiority (upper elementary school children), the time when most religious education programs are highly cognitive because the child responds positively to a work-oriented classroom, the author reminds the reader of the need for the mystical and the communal:

When the class gathers, this is indeed a reunion, and this community has cause to celebrate...a communal effort is needed, that is, there need to be initially at least two or three people foolish enough to believe that if they gather together in the Lord’s name and open themselves, the Holy Spirit will show them the way. The

alternative, too frequently resorted to, is engaging in this ministry as if it were nothing more than programming persons for patterned performances—a process which in effect violates their mystery while it abuses salvation history. (145-146)

The author warns against a religious education program where children are schooled on the Word of God in a manner too heavily dependent on reading, recitation and writing. “When they are developmentally ready for deeper cognition, many children will chalk it off with ‘I’ve had that already’” (146). She calls for “exorcising ourselves from the Protestant work ethic, reinstating the rhythm of working and playing, which is the basis for (the balance of) serving and praying” (147).

Indeed De Benedittis, a psychotherapist, educator, consultant and spiritual counselor gives us a glimpse of herself which displays this union of healing and holiness in educational ministry, this integrated ministry embracing *didache*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. Having integrated the experts, we could hope that her next book would simply show us her concepts

at work in the communities among which she has served.

Norma J. Everist
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, Iowa

THE KINGDOM REVISITED: AN ESSAY ON CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS, by Charles L. Kammer. Washington: University Press of America, 1981. Pp. 175. \$10.25 (paper).

It has become commonplace to read about the “corporate” nature of life in Ancient Israel and the (often idealized) Early Church. But apart from paying lip service to this solidarity, we probably would all wistfully admit that it has little impact upon our religious lives or our ethical decision-making. Most of us in Western industrial societies, at least, lack a strong sense of community. Kammer, in his published dissertation, attempts to restore the corporate perspective, relying on the sociological insights of Emile Durkheim and renewed appropriation of the Kingdom of God.

The problem with Western culture, argues Kammer, is that it promotes unlimited self-realization. This goal is always frustrated because “others” inevitably present a limit to fulfillment. And “others” are necessary, for “...a healthy, constructive individualism can only grow in the nurturing context of a social milieu which affirms and perpetuates human values and development” (15). What is needed, then, is a way of looking at the world which simultaneously fosters personality and community—a sociological perspective.

Durkheim’s sociology has been enjoying a “small awakening” in the last decade—witness recent books by Robert Bellah, Robert Nisbet, and biblical scholar Paul Hanson. The appeal is clear: as a sociologist Durkheim is dissatisfied with both collectivism and individualism. Collectivism is no more than an attempt to return to more primitive forms of social existence, forms that are too rigid for the modern world. Individualism proves a mirror image: all fluid adaptability with little social integration.

To be effective, modern society must be dialectically based upon a dynamic interdependence between person and social order. Kammer uses two statements of Durkheim to illustrate this connection:

Thus very far from there being the antagonism between the individual and society which is often claimed, moral individualism, the cult of the individual, is in fact the product of society itself.

The co-operative society, on the contrary, develops in the measure that individual personality becomes stronger. (84)

Only in society can an individual realize himself or herself, and only as persons internalize social norms can a social order work.

One might wonder whether this would lead to a naive optimism about the role of the state in directing social development. But Durkheim was too careful a student of the French Revolution to ignore this hazard. He looked to “intermediate groups” to provide a buffer between society-state and citizen. Kammer explains: “These small groups both integrate individuals into the larger society and prevent the state from tyrannizing individuals” (87). Further, these “intermediate groups” would serve as cradles of value formation.

But as any sociologist would claim, social science is value-free. Even if a Durkheim can see the need for social integration based on religious values, sociology cannot make preferences. But if we are to move beyond the pitfalls of individualism and collectivism to a new society, we must realize that “...such motivation and commitment can only come from some form of religious faith and religious revival” (90). For Kammer, that faith is a Christianity refocused upon the Kingdom of God.

Kammer reveals his intentions this way:

It is my contention that the results of contemporary Biblical studies when coupled with Durkheim’s conceptions of society and morality do indeed provide a way of uniting the Kingdom of God with our human and Christian struggles, and of providing a way of maintaining the strenuousness of Jesus’ teachings while also retaining a modicum of social effectiveness. (105)

How does Kammer “couple” Durkheim and the Kingdom of God? Briefly examining the Old Testament, Kammer concludes:

Here is a clear apprehension that the individual...cannot be separated from the society in which he/she lives. If the people are to be saved they must be saved in their social as well as personal lives. To do one is to do both. (112)

No one, it seems, understood this connection between individual and society better than Jesus. Kammer writes: “It is this conception of the Kingdom of God that is central to Jesus’ thought. Jesus recognized as those who came later did not, that we cannot be totally saved in an unredeemed world” (112).

Here is where the problem lies for Kammer. He insists upon speaking of “Jesus’ thought” or “Jesus’ teaching” as if the content were as clear as Weil’s thought or Freud’s teaching. And he does this even after announcing his intention of sharing the results of contemporary biblical studies! If “contemporary biblical studies” have taught us anything, it is that we cannot speak about a body of “Jesus’ thought.” Instead, we must carefully examine each gospel to determine how the author(s) used traditional elements to create distinctive literary works, aimed at particular communities with concrete problems. This is a slippery task at best, but it does convince us that a “gospel harmony” from which we could extract “Jesus’ teachings” is impossible. Kammer’s method becomes less surprising when one notes that the New Testament studies cited include only introductory textbooks by Spivey and Smith; Kee, Young, and Froelich; John Bright’s, *The Kingdom of God*; and Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*.

But Kammer opens the door to an important perspective on social life. His section on corporate sin is particularly suggestive. Kammer argues; “Durkheim’s concept of the social personality declares that our sin is society’s sin and that society’s sin is our own” (121). Looking at the prominent dilemmas of the day, from economic injustice and institutional racism to the nuclear arms race, we can see this is true. Because of the intricate interdependence of mass society, as Dostoevsky wrote, “Each is responsible for all.”

However, there may be varying degrees of responsibility. To blame the Amish for energy waste or the Quakers for the arms race will not do. One must be careful about what sociologists call “levels of analysis.” To speak from a sociological perspective does not mean that we must always deal with whole societies, as Kammer tends to do. Better to follow Durkheim’s suggestion of concentrating on strengthening the “intermediate structures.” They alone have the potential for both shielding individuals from the anomie of mass existence and providing avenues for working toward the solution of our problems.

Thomas Wood Mundahl
Faith Lutheran Church
St. Charles, Minnesota

THE DYNAMIC WORD: NEW TESTAMENT INSIGHTS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS, by Karl Paul Donfried. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981. Pp. 224. \$12.95.

Donfried traces an active energetic element in the Scriptures which he terms the “dynamic actualization” of the Word of God. By this phrase he means “that there is not the passing on of static, rigid principles in the New Testament, but rather a rich comprehension of the centrality of God’s revelation in Jesus as the Christ and the application of that event to the actual and changing problems of the first communities of faith” (2). He states that all twenty-seven books of the New Testament were shaped and written in the context of definite communities and addressed to the actual needs of these communities. This is the critical point. Donfried’s work is a study in “audience criticism.” During the last forty years there has been a growing awareness that the theological spectrum in the Bible is quite broad, that each Gospel tells the story differently. Donfried’s modest contribution adds to our understanding of the strikingly diverse situations of the early church which the New Testament writers sought to address.

The book contains eight chapters. Two chapters are centered on Paul (I Corinthians and

the apostle's understanding of salvation). A very brief chapter is concerned with certain developments after Paul (Christian gnosticism and its relation to the deutero-Pauline epistles, the letter

of James, and Luke's portrayal of Paul in Acts). Three chapters are devoted to the synoptic gospels. The final two chapters are concerned with the Johannine literature, including Revelation.

Most of what we read in *The Dynamic Word* we have read before in other books. Donfried masterfully brings together in a succinct and informative manner numerous insights from recent New Testament scholarship. One of the clear assets of this volume is that Donfried accomplishes this without being dull or haphazard in the arrangement of his material. His brief exegetical examinations of key pericopes in each chapter, coupled with pertinent quotations from leading biblical scholars, are the real strength of this book. Readers are aided in understanding the concrete situation to which a New Testament author is writing. As a representative statement of Donfried's concern, here is a quotation from his concluding remarks on the Gospel of Matthew:

I hope we have caught some of this theological sophistication and dynamic creativity as he attempts to apply the gospel to the complex situation of his audience and his environment. For Matthew to simply have repeated the Gospel of Mark would have forced him to ignore some of the burning issues with which his congregation was confronted....It is to that kind of dynamic rather than static theological process that the entire New Testament invites and challenges the contemporary church. (138)

It is clear that Donfried has a spirited concern for the living congregation and the church's present task of proclaiming the gospel in today's world. He believes that the recognition of the distinctiveness of each New Testament writing can definitely aid the preacher and the congregation to greater clarity and sharpness in its proclamation. *The Dynamic Word* helps us take a fresh look at the New Testament and the various contexts in which it was written; it also has an eye and an ear toward the present task of preaching in the congregation. For theology to remain the handmaiden of the living Word, it must remain alert to its churchly context. Donfried understands that all theological labor—even the work done in academic institutions—is accomplished for the “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” of the church of Jesus Christ. He views the biblical scholar not as standing aloof or apart from the concrete communities of faith, but as a co-laborer in the vineyard. Scholarship and the study of Scripture by both professors and pastors is done precisely to assist the whole people of God to blow the trumpet more distinctly so that its present sound will be heard in the rich fullness of the gospel.

I enjoyed this book. It is a decent piece of scholarship. It also presents a needed reminder that we are also involved in the “dynamic actualization” of the Word as we seek to speak to the different realities and circumstances in our own situations. Donfried's volume will help us take seriously the various contexts of the written Word so that we will also take seriously the various contexts of the proclaimed Word when we preach the Gospel in our own time. A question always persists and accompanies us. What shall we say and do? Smith does not answer this question for

us. Instead, he directs us to Jesus Christ, the living Word, who can and will answer this question.

Michael J. Lockerby
Holden-Dale Lutheran Parish
Kenyon, Minnesota

CONFESSING ONE FAITH, ed. by George W. Forell and James F. McCue. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982. Pp. 344. \$15.00 (paper).

It is nothing short of amazing to observe how Roman Catholicism has transformed itself during the last quarter of a century. So also this *very* transformation has made for powerful and energetic ecumenical conversations. None perhaps has been more seriously pursued than that with the Lutherans. Given that fact it is not surprising that the *Augsburg Confession*, as the unavoidable Lutheran confessional document, has received major attention. Some have seriously proposed its “recognition” by the Catholic Church. It would appear improbable that such an official recognition will occur. Yet it is also the case that without such a hope the serious “commentary” under consideration would never have been written. The goal of the writers was “to determine through

page 102

scholarly investigation to what extent a common Catholic-Lutheran understanding of the CA is possible” (14).

The volume contains twelve chapters, each written jointly by a Catholic and a Lutheran. The quality of scholarship is consistently high. Unfortunately, several chapters suffer from a ponderousness of style and an employment of untranslated Latin technical terms. The notable exceptions are the two chapters written by Americans. George Forell and James McCue contributed an extremely helpful essay on “Political Order and Vocations” which deserves wide circulation even if the issue has not been at the center of confessional disunity. The chapter on “Bishops and the Ministry of the Gospel,” by George Lindbeck and Avery Dulles is extraordinarily helpful. The tone is conciliatory, the style is simple and, best of all, neither author glosses over the real differences. Together with Lindbeck’s previous work on “The Lutheran Doctrine of the Ministry” (*Theological Studies*, December, 1969) the issues have been precisely laid out, and the Lindbeck-Dulles chapter is a model for ecumenical conversations.

The crucial question is whether, given the purposely irenic tone of the essays and the general ecumenical commitment, the authors, aside from those already noted, have dealt in a sufficiently pointed manner with the impasse occasioned by the original Lutheran protest. That protest was not only against late medieval corruptions nor can it be explained away by the unhappy influence of nominalist theology. Rather the charge from the Lutheran side was that Catholicism, even in its best expression, had turned the gospel upside down. Or, to use the language of Barth or Bonhoeffer, religion and gospel—had gotten all mixed up with religion triumphing. From this perspective modern Roman Catholicism in liberalizing itself, even if radically, does not necessarily overcome what to Luther was its apostasy. Somewhere Karl Barth charged that modern liberalism and old Roman Catholicism were in essence identical but with very different appearances. Thus, for instance, Karl Rahner has overcome the narrowness of

traditional particularity by introducing the concept of “anonymous Christian.” It would appear that grace is now far more accessible, but yet grace remains a gift that allows us to open ourselves to become “truly human” and *thus* to find God and achieve sufficient goodness for salvation. Even if often expressed in very secularized terms, this remains precisely what the Lutherans were protesting.

By no means do I mean to imply that these essays are failures. I do mean, however, that exactly where they appear least clear is in those areas most seriously in dispute; the relationship between grace and faith, justification and sanctification, original sin, and a forthright dealing with the old Lutheran concept of “forensic justification” (which emphasis I do not take to be a distortion of Luther’s doctrine). The question is not then whether or not Roman Catholicism has reformed itself but whether or not the reform is compatible with the *Augsburg Confession*’s emphasis on radical grace and divine monergism and its assessment of the human predicament.

The chapter on “Justification-Faith-Works” should be, from a Lutheran point of view, the really critical chapter. Perhaps it is, but yet it is also not sufficiently clear. It moves back and forth in a manner that appears somewhat ambiguous and finally leaves me confused as to what has been accomplished. The other critical chapter is that on “the Sacraments.” Again I was frustrated by what appears to be a too easy glossing over of the major arguments about offering and sacrifice. Although no one would any, more defend the late medieval tendency to see the Lord’s Supper as a good work meriting favor from God, it yet appears that the emphasis is excessively on Lord’s Supper as doxological thanksgiving. The *Augsburg Confession* cannot, in any event, be made compatible with the favorably quoted statement of Karl Rahner:

In the Eucharistic sacrifice and through it, man turns to God, offers him in the mystery of the church Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as his own oblation. God therefore turns to him with the whole love He bears to man because of Christ’s act of atonement. Man receives the effect of this reconciling, forgiving and helping love of God in the finite measure of his inner readiness and openness. (220)

The volume deserves high commenda-

tion. Also just because of its ambiguity at certain points it will put the reader on the alert to the very difficult task of commitment to Christian reunion joined with solid theological reflection. The volume is not easy reading but deserves to be studied carefully by pastors and lay people concerned about confessing the faith of the “one holy, catholic and apostolic Church,” which the Lutheran reformers did not mean to think in anything like narrow denominational boundaries, but exactly in unity with all others who confessed the name of Christ.

Leigh D. Jordahl
Luther College
Decorah, Iowa