



**GENESIS: A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING**, by Walter Brueggemann. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982. Pp. 432. \$23.95.

I have frequently pointed out to students that in their task of sermon preparation they will rarely produce model academic exegesis papers which equally work through each and every one of the basic “criticisms” they have learned in their courses in biblical interpretation. Rather, as pastors, they will have the responsibility of hearing the text speak a particular word to a particular people in a specific time and place, a responsibility which may find a sermon through insights regarding genre and structure this week, but one through the study of redaction or tradition history next week. In other words, as preachers they are not called to be authors of standard critical commentaries.

Neither is Walter Brueggemann in this new commentary on Genesis. As the editors point out in the preface, the purpose of the *Interpretation* commentaries is to present “the integrated result of historical and theological work with the biblical text.” Thus, because “biblical books differ in character, content, and arrangement,” there is no single exegetical format for the series or indeed for every text in a given volume. Each author is charged “to create an interpretation which is both faithful to the text and useful to the church.” Essential is that both parts of the effort, critical exegesis and theological interpretation, are “the unified work of one interpreter.”

This is already good news. The methodological monstrosity of *The Interpreter’s Bible*, that line (gulf!) between exegesis and exposition, with all the mischief it has wrought in recent American biblical studies, is deliberately and decisively overcome. At the same time, so is a potential misunderstanding or misuse of the *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament* (or those volumes thereof translated for *Hermeneia*), namely that the “Aim” or theological meaning of a text is something to be considered only after all the critical exegetical work has been completed. In Brueggemann’s work we are, from the beginning, enmeshed in theological questions as well as classical exegetical matters. Both those who have been convinced all along that “what it meant” cannot be sharply divided from “what it means” and those who have been converted to this view by more recent discussions will rejoice in the intent of this series and also in Brueggemann’s rigorous execution of it in this volume.

There is no doubt that the series and this book have been influenced by the methodological concerns of the canonical critics (especially, of course, Brevard Childs), of the new literary critics, and of recent biblical (rather than simply Old Testament or New Testament) theologians (such as Hartmut Gese), with their common concern to find meaning in whole passages, whole books, and the whole Bible, rather than in the smallest original units. At the same time, it ought to be pointed out that, contrary to some assertions, it is not the case that this concern for meaning is a *novum* in biblical studies, not to be found among the historical critics of a generation ago. Most of the proposals of the series editors echo the purpose of the *Altes Testament Deutsch* more than 30 years ago (which undoubtedly explains much of the ongoing

popularity of the *Old Testament Library*, which translates most of the *ATD* volumes).

In presenting his work, Brueggemann divides Genesis into four parts, with four corresponding themes. Striking is his decision to “appeal to” a New Testament

text to “inform” and to “guide” (9) the interpretation of each major section. Thus, his overview of the work looks like this:

- 1:11-11:19 “The Sovereign Call of God” (Eph. 1:9-10)
- 11:30-25:18 “The Embraced Call of God” (Heb. 11:8, 11, 17, 19)
- 25:19-36:43 “The Conflicted Call of God” (I Cor. 1:27-29)
- 37:1-50:26 “The Hidden Call of God” (Rom. 8:28-30).

Although Brueggemann’s use of New Testament guiding texts obviously has something in common with the work of Childs and E. Achtemeier (*The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel*), and although on occasion it shares with them the danger of suppressing the original meaning of the Old Testament text (see below), it seems to be the case that Brueggemann’s methodology is more like that of von Rad’s history of tradition (cf. Brueggemann’s discussion of “trajectories” in *JBL*, June 1979, 161ff); i.e., his question is where does this theme or tradition go in the ongoing interpretation of the people of God.

Brueggemann admits that his purpose is not to advance beyond currently available biblical scholarship, “either in terms of method or in terms of historical-critical understandings” (vii), but rather to serve the intent described by the editors. Thus, unlike recent commentaries, the reader will not find discrete paragraphs on form, situation, redaction, etc., nor verse-by-verse analysis of a particular passage. Instead, although the same structure does not everywhere prevail, the author generally attempts to

- (a) locate the key theological issue, (b) deal with any important exegetical issues or problems, (c) pursue the structure and the movement of the passage with expository comment, and (d) reflect on the connections toward the Christian faith.
- (10)

Despite the obvious positive features of this commentary and the brilliance and passion with which Brueggemann engages the task, several critical implications of its format and intent must also be mentioned.

1) The commentary cannot finally stand on its own. It cannot be *the* commentary on Genesis for anyone’s library. With Brueggemann’s focus only on “important” exegetical issues and with the discarding of the traditional format many issues (which may be “important” for the reader) will go without notice. Other commentaries will need to be used to pursue these. This is clear to the editors (v), but it must be clear to the user as well. Already I have had to criticize student papers which missed some question altogether by relying (unwisely) on this commentary alone for their interpretations.

2) The format requires that the entire section on a given passage be read. The commentary cannot be easily skimmed or referred to for specific questions (genre, parallel passages, etc.). The meaning comes out of the whole, and the whole section hangs together as a unit.

- 3) It must also be pointed out that there is inevitably an idiosyncratic twist to the

interpretation in several cases. What is the “key” theological issue in a text? Who decides? The only answer, of course, is Brueggemann, which is as it must be, but, as he would surely agree, it may be something else for another interpreter (or even for himself on another occasion). This is always true in interpretation and application. The problem comes with the genre attempted by this series. Is it commentary or is it homiletics? It means to bridge the gap, and in doing so is willing to take the risks of unevenness and contextuality that come with the attempt (5).

The clearest example of Brueggemann’s idiosyncratic interpretation is the use of New Testament texts to guide his Old Testament exegesis. Why these New Testament verses and not others? Will they suppress the Old Testament’s original sense? This seems to happen when Abraham and Sarah, in the light of Hebrews 11, are seen as “responsive and receptive” to Yahweh; in faith they “fully embrace” God’s call (106). But what of the lovely tension in the Yahwist’s narrative between God’s promise and Abraham and Sarah’s fumbling anxiety (Pharaoh, Hagar, etc.)? To be sure, Brueggemann recognizes this element in commenting on specific passages (e.g., 126), but when the “embraced call” becomes the dominating theme of the whole section an important feature of the narrative has been overwhelmed.

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In another instance, Brueggemann’s use of canonical critical techniques results in difficulty. In his interpretation the Tower of Babel story (97ff.) is not primarily about humanity’s pride, as has been commonly thought, but rather about its anxiety in refusing to be scattered abroad (as “blessed, sanctioned, and willed” by Yahweh in Gen 1:28, and referred to in 10:18). Brueggemann’s observation is worthy of mention, but to use a P text (Gen 1) and a separate J genealogy (Gen 10) as *the* interpretive principles for an independent J narrative (Gen 11) seems not to add to the work of past generations, but rather to discard it altogether.

4) It will also be obvious that, in any deliberately theological interpretation, the confessional bias of the interpreter becomes an important concern. Brueggemann admits that his Christian orientation will color his work (7), and makes specific use of his own heritage with his references to the Heidelberg Catechism (21) and the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ (1). Might it also be the case that his Reformed tradition shows in making “Call” (beginning with “Sovereign Call”) the theological theme for the whole book (rather than, e.g., “Promise”)? Does this affect even his view of the image of God, which, in Christ, is a “*call to form a new kind of human community*” (35, emphasis added), rather than a re-created given?

It might be argued that the “problems” pointed out here and elsewhere are in fact positives; that at last the illusion of objectivity is set aside, and the realization that all translation and exegesis are already interpretation is made clear. That may be true, but the impetus toward church unity given in this century by common work on Scripture, which deliberately sought to get behind confessionalism, is no illusion, and ought not be overlooked in our enthusiasm to embrace the new. That “old” work needs to continue, even as we recognize the subjectivity of all work.

5) On occasion, there are sentences which give the impression that historical questions and theological questions can be sharply distinguished, and that the more one is concerned with the latter, the less one has to worry about the former (e.g., 5-6, 14). A commentary which is consistent about asking theological questions is a welcome addition to the current literature, but any contribution toward the separation of theology and history is not, nor will it achieve the

editors' goal of integration. Such an approach will not do justice to the literature of a people whose view of God is so radically incarnational.

The criticisms are important, but so is the commentary and the series. Brueggemann's comments are always interesting and readable. His knowledge of the secondary literature and of the biblical material is enviable. His passion to speak meaningfully to the church is no new fad. The book will be a very valuable conversation partner for anyone called regularly to interpret these ancient, yet living, texts.

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**GALATIANS: A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING**, by Charles B. Cousar. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982. Pp. viii + 158. \$13.95.

John Knox Press and members of the biblical faculty at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, who serve as editors of this new series, have once again provided the church with a valuable tool for ministry. At first another commentary series may not appear to be the most fruitful way to contribute to the church's life, but this series does respond in a helpful way to the current state of biblical studies. There is a need to make available the careful work of recent scholarship as integral to the task of interpreting scriptures through "teaching and preaching" today. The series sets out to do just this by "combining historical scholarship with theological purpose" and seeks to revive "expository writing which explains the books of the Bible as the Holy Scriptures of a church active at worship and work."

The first New Testament commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians is done by Charles B. Cousar of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. The

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volume is clearly written with careful attention given to editing. The introductory section of eleven pages deals succinctly with the issues that surround the Galatian letter, the structure of the letter, and the theological issues present in Paul's response. The commentary on the letter itself is divided into three parts. Within each part the author subdivides the material into teaching and preaching units which combine exegetical study and hermeneutical reflection.

Part One, "Grace and the Liberating Authority of the Gospel," covers 1:1-2:21. The section begins with an overview of the opening chapters and moves through the teaching and preaching units (1:1-5, 6-10, 11-24; 2:1-10, 11-21), with more extensive treatments of Paul's call in 1:15-16 and the theme of justification by faith in 2:15-21. The focus on Paul's call represents a fine interpretive section toward understanding the theological importance of this event. His discussion on the Jerusalem visit in 2:1-10 moves carefully through exegetical considerations toward understanding the nature of Christian unity and the implications for the church today. The additional attention given to 2:15-21 provides an understanding of justification not only as gift but the power to live corporately. In a helpful way the reader is drawn into the current discussion on justification in light of the reformation heritage.

Part Two, "Faith, Law, and the People of God," covers 3:1-5:12. Throughout this section

the author draws upon the emerging portrait of Paul as pastor-theologian. Part Two is divided into seven teaching and preaching units with a more extensive treatment of 3:26-29. The beginning point of Paul's use of the term Spirit is nicely developed in 3:1-5 and sets a foundation for understanding the work of the Spirit in the remainder of the letter. Cousar's understanding of faith and law in this section does need to be looked at more closely. He suggests that rabbinic thought in the first century "interpreted Abraham's faith to be a work" and his "faithfulness became the main deposit in a treasury of merit" (73). Rabbinic thought was not as monolithic as Cousar suggests, and, in light of E. P. Sander's work in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, such an interpretation would appear as a basic misunderstanding of Judaism. Along with this critique follows Cousar's expression of Paul's understanding of the Torah. That "Paul is very negative" towards the Mosaic law and has "undeniably devalued the law" is to create an unjustified portrayal of Paul as a first-century Jew. It might be asked if the law was ever intended or understood to be "a wedge to divide people" or that the law can "no longer be a threat" because its curse is gone (80-81). Isn't the Hebraic understanding of the Torah to be seen as God's gracious gift given to his people to reveal how all people—Jew and Gentile—live under the curse of self-centeredness, bent on living apart from God and his covenant of Torah/life. Certainly Paul was not in a position to denigrate the law in his argument in chapter three, but rather to see it as God's revelatory word. It is on this basis that it is not at all surprising that Paul can return to an understanding of the law in a purposeful way in chapters 5-6.

There is much helpful material toward the issue of "unity and equality" in 3:26-29, but the author is less helpful in the highly personal words of Paul in 4:12-20. On 4:21-5:1 there is less attention given to the Hagar and Sarah figures than one would want. The placement of 5:1 as the conclusion to this unit is discussed with insightful responses to Paul's understanding of Christian freedom.

Part Three, "Freedom, Spirit, and the Life of Love," covers 5:13-6:18 and includes four teaching and preaching units. One of the questions over this division would be its beginning at 5:13. It is not only true that Paul summarizes the argument of 3:1-4:31 with his words in 5:1, but that he also inaugurates the movement into the final stages of the argument in 5:2-6:10. The theological connection is found in 5:2-15 where Paul gives two extreme examples of living outside the realm of Christian freedom. In 5:2-12 Paul exposes living under a distorted understanding of the law and in 5:13-15 a distorted understanding of living outside the law. In both examples the consequences are graphically expressed. The interpretive reflections throughout this final section work toward a careful under-

standing of freedom as the basis for human relationships. Paul's understanding of love and the work of the Spirit are well developed as one moves to hearing these themes in a contemporary setting.

The author draws on an understanding of Paul's thought from the undisputed letters; however, citations to other Pauline letters are present. The volume is written without footnotes but with bibliographic citation and more extensive quotations appearing in the main body of the writing. He draws on several articles from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and a selected variety of historic and contemporary Pauline interpreters. The volume concludes with a two-page bibliography which includes one-sentence annotations on those books recommended

for a further study of Galatians.

The commentary is a helpful contribution to an understanding of Galatians and a good beginning to a series that should prove to be an important bridge to teaching and preaching from the Bible today.

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**GENESIS**, by Walter Brueggemann.

**GALATIANS**, by Charles Cousar.

My assignment in this review is to see if these two volumes, reviewed above by members of biblical departments, do in fact inform preachers and teachers in their tasks. As a teacher of preaching, I want to narrow that question to preaching. To what degree and in what way are these books helpful in preparing sermons?

It has been my habit to advise students not to use commentaries until they are quite well along in their exegetical and interpretive work, and then primarily to check to see if they are on the right track. Some of the critical commentaries, however excellent in their scholarship, have tended to reduce the text to its component parts, a reduction which does not always contribute to lively and imaginative preaching. This new series promises more for the preacher. Dealing with “whole portions or sections of text” is a step in the right direction. If the point of the sermon is to recreate the text for the hearer, as I believe it is, then some attention must be given to the drama, the exchange of the total narrative.

These commentaries are to be based on an expository style of writing, an exposition rooted in theological as well as textual insight. This also bodes well for the preacher. Systematic insight is every bit as important for preaching as is exegetical precision. This major advantage in the series, however, may result in the disadvantage of greater unevenness among the separate volumes than would usually be the case. Some expositors will find more in the text than others.

Generally speaking, it seems to me that each of these first volumes does contribute to the homiletical ferment that ends in a good sermon. That may be more true of the Genesis commentary than the Galatians one. About the best way to test each book’s contribution is to look at a specific lectionary text, keeping preaching in mind all the while. I have tried to select a text where the treatment by the author seems solid and typical of the book.

*Genesis 11:1-9 (Pentecost C) The Tower of Babel*

Brueggemann comments on this text by exploring the dialectic of unity and scattering as it relates to society and to the community of faith. In fact, in this case he sees the dialectic to have not two but three sides.

But our exposition requires not a two-sided tension but a three-factioned possibility; a) The unity defined by the people in resistance against God, b) the scattering feared by the people and carried out by God as punishment, but also c) a unity willed by God and based only on loyalty to him.

One can find this sense for the adventure, the tension of the text throughout the book, and it is that sense which suits the preacher so well. Good sermons will most often have some dialectic, some theological and rhetorical struggle within them.

Certainly the homiletical possibilities of this summarizing quote are high:

The issue is whether the world shall be organized for God's purposes of joy, delight, freedom, doxology, and caring. Such a world must partake in the unity God wills and the scattering God envisions. Any one-dimensional understanding of scattering denies God's vision for unity responsive to him. Any one-dimensional view of unity denies God's intent for the whole world as peopled by his many different peoples.

Brueggeman also has a fine discussion of the "gift and task" of language. It is rich in ideas for preaching. He understands how language is the central formative agent in society, but as with all of God's gifts, language can also become a curse. Brueggemann resolves the language dilemma in a typical way when he moves to a discussion of Acts 2. His analysis, however, not typical for the new community, is characterized by "a fresh capacity to listen because the word of God blows over the chaos one more time." Now it is the job of the believing community to "maintain a faithful universe of discourse against the languages around us which may coerce, deceive, manipulate, or mystify." Does this refer to the church's task of speaking the Gospel? If so, it might have been said with greater clarity. Nonetheless this captures the spirit of the conversations that the commentary prompts with both its author and the biblical text.

*Galatians 4:4-7 (1 Christmas A and Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, A-R-C)*

Cousar discusses 4:1-11 under the heading "freedom and adoption," and restates the text in terms of its two main divisions (vs. 1-7, 8-11), with expansion and explanation. One detects a longing for story and narrative where there simply isn't much. Yet, the author does know that there is some adventure in this text, a movement that is vitalized by the language of adoption, of slavery and sonship. He knows that the way that Paul shifts these images is confusing and takes pains to help the reader see through that confusion. Yet, Paul seems to resolve this collage of usage in vs. 7, "You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir." The author counts this problem, as well as such things as the problem of the precise translation of "the elemental spirits of the universe," as exegetical. He is clearly trying to avoid some of those particular, detailed questions which might not produce much for a sermon.

Cousar begins his theological exposition with a discussion of the way that the saving initiative of God is portrayed in this text.

He does not wait on humanity to instigate a reclamation project for itself and then rush in to support it. He does the reclaiming himself and, if that were not enough, sends his spirit to incite in people an awareness of what he has done.

This saving act is accomplished by God sending forth his son to be completely human,

not only “born of a woman” but also “born under the law.” The text already anticipates the cross and the tomb and is appropriate for the first Sunday after Christmas. By then, the joy of Christmas has begun to fade and people may think that they still “ought to be happy.” The author cannot resist concluding his theological exposition by speculating on how this text, with its clear mention of Father, Son, and Spirit, relates to the subsequent development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Even though the theological insights stimulated by this text do not seem as unique or provocative as one might wish, the author is at pains to provide material that can be used rather directly by the preacher. There is a little quote from one of Auden’s poems and the observation that those who return to the elemental spirits are

...like ex-convicts who cannot stand the world of freedom and go back to prison to find security; like heirs who have come to the appointed time to enjoy the benefits of the family estate still long for their childhood and the control of guardians and trustee.

Brueggemann and Cousar are both respected exegetes but it is the intention of the editors of this series that they take the additional and large step of theological exposition. Such exposition is risky and can go wrong, but it can also be of considerable help in stimulating the imagination of the preacher. It is a trained and committed imagination which makes a

good correlation between text and hearer. These books can help with that.

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**ESSAYS ON BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**, by Hartmut Gese. Translated by Keith Crim.  
Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981. Pp. 256. \$12.50 (paper).

This book gathers eight lectures delivered during the mid-seventies by Professor Gese of the University of Tuebingen. The collection is framed by pieces which deal with broad issues: “The Biblical View of Scripture,” and “The Question of a World View.” In between are four essays which focus on Old Testament themes and two which start with New Testament topics and trace their connections back into the Old Testament.

The opening lecture sets forth the author’s view of Scripture. The Bible is a *unity*, the result of “a single process of the development of the biblical tradition.... The New Testament does not stand in contrast to a completed Old Testament, to which it must build artificial bridges” (12). The Bible is the end product of a *history of tradition*, a continuing process of passing on, supplementing, and reshaping. Finally, the Bible presents a *history of revelation*, beginning at Sinai and reaching a goal in the Christ event. Scripture comes to us in such a “lively form” and we should receive it and interpret it as such.

The second lecture, “Death in the Old Testament,” provides a good example of Gese’s



method of interpretation. He begins by sketching some of the attitudes toward death in the ancient world, observing that “The Old Testament did not shove to one side the experience of existence gained by early humans” (40). Then he distinguishes three stages in the Old Testament’s view of death: 1) an individual who has been deathly ill or who has confronted death may experience a *deliverance from death* (I Sam. 2); 2) the wisdom literature and the psalms offer a “transcendent advance,” as we begin to hear about *eternal life* (Job 19, Psalm 73); and 3) apocalyptic literature presents us with the hope of *resurrection* (Isa. 26). This process comes to its completion in the resurrection of Jesus, when the “Easter light of the new creation streams into our darkness, the light of the new Godlike existence” (59).

The lecture on “The Law” argues that “the deeper our understanding of Law in the Old Testament, the more clearly we can see the relationship of the Testaments to each other” (61). “The Atonement” is a particularly illuminating discussion of sacrifice in the Old Testament, concluding by considering the death of Jesus against this background. The essay on “The Messiah” considers the “Davidic Son of God” and the “Son of Man” themes, concluding that “there is a single course of the development, in which the Davidic concepts are expanded to include those of the Son of Man, without making the older form invalid or meaningless” (159). “The Origin of the Lord’s Supper” concludes that the Last Supper was not a Passover celebration, but should rather be connected with another Old Testament sacral meal, the Todah or thank offering. The longest essay is on “The Prologue to John’s Gospel,” translating it back into Hebrew and arguing for its roots in the Old Testament tradition. The concluding piece rejects a program which would attempt to dispense with the “mythical” world view of the Bible and argues that the biblical world view and our own are not as different as we sometimes think.

These essays give evidence of Gese’s conviction that “Christian theology stands or falls by its relation to the biblical tradition” (35). In a time when biblical scholarship is often preoccupied with minutiae, Gese goes after the whole. The themes with which he deals are of central importance. He succeeds in dealing with the Bible as a unity. Every so often he causes the reader to re-examine one of the orthodoxies of modern biblical criticism:

In rejecting outmoded and abandoned idealist philosophy and adopting the modern negation of metaphysics, theology has let itself be led into neglecting this Old Testament spirituality in favor of investigating the “secular” character of the Old Testament. If on the contrary we acknowledge in the Old Testament this transcendent experience of existence in its im-

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mediacy as a stage in revelation, we will not pass over such vital biblical material in the name of alleged modernity.(53)

Or he exposes a modern prejudice:

Herodotus could identify his gods with those of ancient Egypt, while today we have trouble accepting the early Lutheran confessions as our own.... We regard anything from the previous century as out of date. “Traditional” has become a negative concept, and “original” a positive one. (227)

I was puzzled by Gese's statement in the first essay that "no further Old Testament tradition can develop or assert itself alongside that of the New" (12). How are we to understand the continuation of the Old Testament tradition in Judaism? And how ought Christians relate to that tradition?

The translation reads well. At a few points, questions which I had were clarified by checking the German original: The word "animistic" in the last paragraph on page 37 is misleading; read, "The ancient concept of life, however, clearly begins with animal life, life with 'nephesh,' so that the dead world includes..." On page 47, read "national" traditions, rather than "natural." On page 72, read "counterpart" instead of "antithesis," as the translation for the German, "*Gegenstück*."

This was my first encounter with Gese. While the essays are not easy going, they are rewarding, and I've resolved to read more. The book would be an excellent resource for a study group, taking a chapter a week. Judging from the vitality of this work, the reports of the death of biblical theology which we heard a number of years ago are greatly exaggerated.

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**BIBLICAL AUTHORITY OR BIBLICAL TYRANNY? SCRIPTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE**, by William Countryman. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982. Pp. 110. \$5.95 (paper).

Countryman, assistant professor at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, has written a very fine and thoughtful essay on biblical authority. The book grows out of lectures delivered to three congregations in Fort Worth and is marked by a straightforwardness one strives for in addressing a lay audience. Missing is conversation with others who have worked with the question of authority and any notes or bibliography, but because it is such a good book, I urge readers to purchase it and draw their own conclusions on the contribution of the volume.

Chapter 1, "The Authority of the Bible," consists of a brief review of Biblical errors and an argument that the Bible cannot be regarded as infallible in any ordinary sense of that word. Chapter 2, "What is Authority?" discusses authority in general under expectations of it (a sense of identity and hope, a set of norms for belief and behavior, and some external checks on us to tell us how we stand in relation to hopes and norms). Chapter 3, "Authority for Christians," looks at God, the Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Bible, the church and the individual believer as loci of authority. Chapter 4, "Scripture and the Church," documents the interrelationship between these two realities of the Christian life. Chapter 5, "Scripture's World and Ours," calls attention to cultural distances between and continuities with Biblical times and our own. Chapter 6, "Taking the Scriptures on Pilgrimage," advocates reading for conversion (*metanoia*) and suggests this might be accomplished by 1) reading in context, 2) learning from experts, and 3) allowing oneself to be challenged by the text.

This is an important book because its author attempts to move beyond the historical-critical method even while warmly endorsing it. His key is that "*the Bible makes sense to us fully only as we come to be fully transformed by it*" (108, italics added). In other words, its depth and perplexity can only be plumbed by the regular users.

Countryman is by and large a believer in the matter of the Testament (Old) in which he is not trained at the doctoral level. This is typical of modern scholarship. He is uncomfortable (in good Bultmannian fashion) with miracle. Moses worked a “few magic spells” in Egypt (105). But he does believe there *was* a Moses and a burning bush.

Countryman draws no distinction be-

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tween Old and New Testaments in terms of authority. He seems implacably opposed to judgment as a part of God’s nature. At times, he almost reduces the Bible to a second opinion to be solicited about contemporary faith and life.

“Both communities and individuals are apt to become imprisoned in their own times—in cultures and presuppositions that they have developed. The Bible, however, because it stands outside our present, always bears witness against us, showing that we are not all that we might be or that God has prepared us to be.”  
(95)

While this is quite true, it could as well describe our relation to the medieval church. It seems a bit “thin soup” when claimed as the main function of the Bible.

Perhaps my main hesitation about Countryman is his estimate of the distance between biblical times and ours. As is the case with many professional theologians, I believe he is describing the difference between 20th century intelligentsia and biblical perceptions. I feel a growing conviction that the greatest difference between the biblical world and ours is the internal combustion engine. Recently, I preached in an apartment for the elderly. After the service, various residents wanted to discuss their Christian pilgrimage. One man among them experienced poetic inspiration with some regularity, and recited at my prompting one of his poems. In the midst of it I heard the line, “the great shaddai,” a name for God I had not encountered until a college course. “Do you know what that means?” I asked. “I do now,” he said smiling, “I looked it up.” This and many other contacts suggest to me that there is a profound sense in which the Bible is a holy, inspired collection of texts, whose meanings are accessible in a variety of ways and whose depiction of life under God continues to be reflected in contemporary manifestations of faith where Christianity is vital.

Yet even if the “soup” served up by Countryman could be thicker, it is sound nourishment indeed for both a fundamentalism which makes the Bible an idol and a radical criticism which makes it a husk. A really excellent book!

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**AUTHENTIC PREACHING**, by Arndt L. Halvorson. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982. Pp. 188. \$7.95 (paper).

“Oh, to be able to preach a sermon so that God may enter *our* history long enough to

tantalize us with his offer of grace so that we'll be driven to want it!" (101).

If that is your prayer and passion as a preacher, then you will *want* to read *Authentic Preaching*. If that is not your prayer and passion, then you *need* to read *Authentic Preaching*, for that is the prayer and passion of the hearer of sermons.

"...to tantalize us with his offer of grace so that we'll be driven to want it!" That's the passion and the prayer that Arndt Halvorson pours forth in *Authentic Preaching*.

Without that vision, that dream, (that obsession?) who would endure the agony of the encounter which gives birth "to the grace in a sermon that tantalizes?" Without that sermonic vision on the part of the preacher, the hearer bears the agony because there is no encounter.

*Authentic Preaching* invites the preacher to be driven to want to bear the agony of the encounter for the sake of the hearer for the sake of the gospel.

It is clear that Arndt Halvorson regards any preaching that is not gospel proclamation as less than authentic preaching. To be a gospel proclaimer day in and day out, year in and year out, is no mean task as Gritsch and Jenson make clear in *Lutheranism* (134ff.), a helpful text to read in conjunction with *Authentic Preaching*. "No preacher should ever risk preaching under the assumption that people know what the Gospel is" (146) are stern words from the exuberant author of *Authentic Preaching*, a long-time teacher of preachers.

If "God's purpose is to *recreate* us in his image" (46), that will take all that God can give—his Son, "he who knew no sin became sin for us." It is now the preaching of "him who knew no sin" which *recreates* the image of God in us. Without that preaching of Christ a preacher might do much, but s/he would not be recreating the image of God because the wherewithal to do that recreating has been withheld. *Authentic Preaching* does its work under

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the rubrics of The Preacher, The Sermon, The Message in the Message, From Text to Sermon, Our Hidden Resources, Our Theological Tools, and The Structure. It is the creative encounter of these sermonic elements that Halvorson nurtures. He does not just list factors in each category.

While the sermon may be well prepared, Halvorson suggests that the preacher is not always so well prepared. Here he echoes Mitchell's earnest urging, who says it is necessary for a preacher to think a sermon, dream a sermon, live a sermon if s/he wishes the sermon to be more than disembodied voice. The hearer wants to sense a congruence between the person of the preacher and the preacher's words.

Halvorson finds contemporary literature a sound resource for preaching because it has a "felt sensing" of the human condition. "...the good novelist portrays it [life] so we feel it, smell it, ache under the weight of such an empty life" (124). Thus the artist can help the preacher "come at" his/her subject, sermon, hearers in such a way that during the course of the sermon they, too, "feel, smell and ache" rather than just "hear" about those pains.

Hearers are in touch with the world through their senses. When sermons abandon the use of most of the senses or use them only sporadically, it is no wonder that so much preaching is passionless. "Emotion involves passion. Emo-

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tion is the stirring of the heart, not merely the feelings" (129). At that high moment of life with

its worship and adoration, the fullness of response on the part of the preacher as well as the hearer includes the full response of the senses.

It is worthy of note, though a discouraging note, regarding our Lord whose passion and resurrection are at the center of life, worship and adoration, that so much of the preaching of that same passion and resurrection should be so passionless.

When a text speaks of the outlining process, it often invites the reader to bypass the chapter. Not so here. The author shows the difference a progressively more precise outline makes for the preacher and the hearer. The author does so by tracing the outlining process through three successive outlines with appropriate accompanying commentary.

One area I should like to have seen dealt with more directly is that of the preaching moment itself, the moment when all that which is prior to that moment becomes authentic. The text touches on the preaching moment indirectly and by implication. But having done so much so well, the author would have benefited us even more by sharing his thoughts more fully on the preaching moment.

It is possible for the preacher “to have and to be” something on the inside without that inside showing or showing only ineffectively on the outside, as show it must in the preaching action; for “a sermon is a series of sights, sounds and gestures in a continuity of time,” according to Davis. A hearer can only work with what s/he senses on the outside of the preacher.

*Authentic Preaching* will persuade every reader that the author is persuaded that preaching’s goal is as he describes it: “...that God may enter *our* history long enough to tantalize us with his offer of grace so that we’ll be driven to want it.” Preachers are in Halvorson’s debt. We owe him our thanks.

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**THE SACRED JOURNEY**, by Frederick Buechner. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982. Pp. 112. \$9.95.

C. S. Lewis once proposed that the chief measure of a book be the rereading it invites. *The Sacred Journey* is a book which demands repeated visits by reason of its plum-pudding richness.

This book is Buechner’s meditation on his first twenty-seven years, from birth to his decision to enter Union Theological Seminary. Buechner is a novelist with eleven novels published to date and this autobiographical meditation is the result of a feeling which grew upon him as he produced his novels. He sensed that, perhaps beyond hope, life itself had a plot—“that the events of our lives, random and witless as they generally seem, have a shape and duration of their own, are seeking to show us something, lead us somewhere” (95). He came to believe that, hidden in every life, is God’s purpose working itself out in the jumble of events—that there was a kind of incarnation of God’s Word spoken “in the flesh and blood of ourselves and of our footsore and sacred journey” (95).

Buechner’s autobiography is thus a prose-poem which is both the record of events and the means of looking at and listening to those events for the “holy and elusive word that is spoken to us out of their depths” (5). Buechner has trained his gaze to look for, in the images which float on

the surface of the past, that face which is the glory and the terror of the world.

The book begins by evoking his early years when, safe in the enchanted circle of a caring family, he felt time only as a tide moving ceaselessly in and out when like any child he felt “little or no sense of sequence or consequence of measurable time” (39). This idyllic period was cut short by the terrible discovery that time could be rationed out in bits and was ultimately all measured out, by the terrible discovery early one ordinary Saturday morning that his father had committed suicide.

But even before innocence was broken and time began relentlessly to run, Buechner remembers having a sense of longing for a home “even farther away and fuller of mystery still such that until

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[he] found it, [he] would be somehow homeless” (21).

After his father’s suicide, his mother took Frederick and his brother to Bermuda where, as an early adolescent, he experienced the first touch of “the Heavenly Eros.” He again felt that previous yearning, this time for

the upward-reaching and fathomlessly hungering, heart-breaking love for the beauty of the world at its most beautiful, and, beyond that, for that beauty east of the sun and west of the moon which is past the reach of all but our most desperate desiring and is finally the Beauty of Beauty itself, of Being itself and what lies at the heart of Being. (52)

Like St. Augustine and C. S. Lewis, whose autobiographies have close parallels, Buechner was pursued by that sense of longing through his years of prep school, Princeton, the Army, Princeton again, the publication of a well-received and well-selling novel, and five years of teaching.

Two experiences brought Grace to him. Finding himself unwilling to go to the aid of a friend in need, he had the shattering revelation that

to journey for the sake of saving our lives is little by little to cease to live in any sense that really matters...because it is only by journeying for the world’s sake—even when the world bores and sickens and scares you half to death—that little by little we start to come alive. (107)

The second experience (which Buechner says to call being born again is “both too much and too little”) came on hearing George Buttrick preach that Jesus is crowned in the hearts of believers with “confession, and tears, and great laughter” (109).

This book calls forth my deepest enthusiasm; opening any page, I find sentences that sing and cause my heart to dance. It should not be read merely for its chronicle of events but because its author has the eyes of faith and the voice of a poet/seer/sage. It is a work which calls not just for grateful appreciation but for love, that enriches and even magnifies one’s own life and which renews the sense of sacredness of the reader’s as well as the writer’s journey.

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**THE POINT OF CHRISTOLOGY**, by Schubert M. Ogden. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982. Pp. 201. \$14.50 (paper).

*The Point of Christology* is a carefully argued and therefore refreshing enterprise in contemporary christology, offering its framework for appraising christologies at both their foundational and constructive levels. Focusing on christology's "existential point," the book is an integration of concerns dominating Ogden's work: fundamental theology, process metaphysics, re-presentation and myth, human quests for freedom.

The book, in Ogden's terms, seeks not only to be "appropriate to" Christian tradition, but also "credible to" human existence as judged by common experience and reason (4). Intrinsic to the aim of credibility is the book's sustained argument, presented in one part as "talk about" the point of christology and in another part of the book as a constructive "making" of the point.

In both parts Ogden argues for a "revisionary christology" that responds adequately to the several problematics in traditional christology focused after Schleiermacher and Bultmann. Although he considers himself a "revisionist" in this sense (87), Ogden is out to revise the revisionists. His argument can be summarized as (1) a critical "talking about" the shortcomings of his revisionary colleagues, and (2) a constructive "making" of a revisionary alternative.

1. Ogden's fundamental critique of the revisionists is that they treat Jesus in himself rather than who he is "for us." For Ogden, the constitutive assertion in christology is that "Jesus is the Christ." The revisionists have failed at each major point of this assertion. Regarding the *question* this assertion answers, they have asked who Jesus is without exploring who he is as disclosive of our existence and ultimate reality. This ignores the two other questions presupposed by the question, "Who is Jesus?": "Who am I?" and "Who is God?" Regarding the *subject* of the assertion, revisionists have remained preoccupied with a historical Jesus knowable by way of empirical-historical inquiry. This ignores Jesus as the one we "already know" through the apostolic

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witness. Regarding the *conditions* for asserting the predicate "Christ" to Jesus, revisionists also stress how Jesus himself "perfectly actualized the possibility of self-understanding." This ignores our own existential understanding of who Jesus is for us as also a crucial "condition" for asserting the predicate "Christ" of Jesus.

2. Ogden's own revisionary alternative, then, discusses the assertion, "Jesus is the Christ," as answering an existential-historical question, referring to an existential-historical subject, and as conditioned by existential-historical inquiries. The existential-historical *question* is one that asks about the possibility of freedom. The modern quest for freedom is the theoretical and practical question which the christological assertion must answer today, and which the earliest witnesses to Jesus also answered. Building a "christology of liberation," Ogden presents the existential-historical *subject*, Jesus, as "the liberator of God" who decisively represents for us the possibility of the existence of freedom. The existential-historical *conditions* for predicating

“liberator” of Jesus are given by a “metaphysical inquiry into the structure of ultimate reality in itself” and “a moral inquiry into how one is to act in relation to one’s fellow beings” (82-3, 130). Ogden’s metaphysic discloses that the ground of the freedom that Jesus decisively re-presents is the boundless love of God. His moral inquiry reveals that the assertion that Jesus is liberator, “is by strict application the demand to do justice.”

This work is refreshing because of the rigor Ogden applies to study of christological assertions. Ogden’s chapter-length discussions of the assertion’s question, subject and conditions gives an order that is often lacking in contemporary christology. Ogden’s method is not only away for him to develop his argument, but also is a valuable means for organizing the pluralism of positions in christology.

If there is a troubling feature of the book, it lies in Ogden’s tendency to view his *pro nobis* christology as a markedly new corrective. Since Schleiermacher and Bultmann, have christologists really been so unmindful of their assertions’ “existential point?” I am not certain that Ogden establishes who makes up the “usual revisionary christology” that is his foil throughout the book for its alleged missing of the existential point. On occasion, “revisionary christologists” are referred to without citation (e.g. 13, 29). Perhaps it is more accurate to view Ogden’s book not as a groundbreaking announcement of christology’s existential point, but more modestly as a critique of what Ogden takes as some thinkers’ inadequate ways of relating existential and empirical-historical inquiries, and as his own contribution to this relational task.

Readers of his previous work may find particularly interesting Ogden’s following of “Tillich’s lead” in revising the metaphysical project of Hartshorne toward what he calls a “literal” and “transcendental metaphysics” of symbolic language (135-47). Ogden is no longer confident about the possibility of giving a metaphysical account “by generalizing the meanings of our ordinary terms and categories so that they become proper metaphysical analogies” (136). He now limits his metaphysics to making “literal assertions” about the conditions necessarily implied by our symbolic assertions about God. This tends to bring neo-classical, process metaphysics in theology into a closer relation with theology’s hermeneutical and phenomenological explorations in symbol theory, re-presentative myth and in the conditions implied by such myths and symbols.

When setting forth the moral implications of his assertion that Jesus is liberator, readers will find Ogden critically appropriating Reinhold Niebuhr’s thought as a “third alternative” to what Ogden views as the all too frequent polarization of an ideologized Christianity on the one hand, and a Christian “freedom” without political responsibility, on the other. The moral implication of Ogden’s christology of liberation, based on this third alternative, is two-fold: victims have “the right to demand” equality and freedom, and agents of victimization have the “responsibility to help” victims achieve this right (163). This discussion of moral implications cries out for a concrete reference that might suggest any socially

transformative power in Ogden’s “third alternative.” Such a reference—perhaps to Christian communities in Latin America, for example—might show difficulties in practicing a political responsibility as free from “ideology” as Ogden’s third alternative suggests. Such attention might also clarify further, what I think Ogden also intends, that what is morally implied by a christology of liberation concerning “agents” of victimization is not merely a “responsibility to help victims



achieve the right” to freedom and equality, but an active solidarity with victims that is always a direct and particular involvement.

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**SPEAKING OF JESUS: FINDING THE WORDS FOR WITNESS**, by Richard Lischer.  
Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982. Pp. 121. \$6.95 (paper).

According to a 1980 general convention mandate, evangelism is to assume the highest priority in the American Lutheran Church for this decade. While most parishes, Lutheran and others, already officially acknowledge the importance of having an evangelism program, many are uneasy about the whole enterprise. Perhaps this is because of lingering skepticism about evangelism methods modeled after American revivalism or “the five great laws of selling” borrowed from the business community (c.f., p. 58 of D. James Kennedy’s *Evangelism Explosion*, published in 1970 by Tyndale House Publishers of Wheaton, Ill.). More current uneasiness may tend toward suspicions about the so-called “church growth” phenomenon and mainline establishment crusades to cut back door losses in parish membership.

Richard Lischer, in his helpful little book *Speaking of Jesus*, addresses such fears head on and offers valuable insights into recouping evangelism among the gathered people of God. His book, in fact, is written for laity in all the Biblical richness of the term *laos*, as in *laos tou theou*, “people of God.” According to Lischer the church, understood in this way, is the most neglected feature of contemporary evangelism. The parish experience of many, my own included, has certainly borne this out.

Chapter one, entitled “The Charge,” emphasizes the missionary character of the Christian movement from the very beginning. “Whatever the form of its evangelism,” writes Lischer, “the Christian movement was always there, striking against the edge of something that was *not* grace, redemption, love, kingdom, or heaven” (3). The act of transmitting the good news was not a program nor even a policy of the early community, but a necessary expression of the community’s very life in an alien world. The community understood its commission, to proclaim the gracious rule of God, as its stewardship over a mystery. The mystery is the growth which, as the parable of the sower and seed makes clear, is brought about by God alone.

Christians, who consider themselves people under orders with a dominical charge to “go and make disciples of all nations,” are not left without examples and models to emulate, however. Lischer identifies patterns of communication which Christ himself employed, as well as other New Testament models of evangelism. Mercifully, the author does not try to get the reader to play first century Bible land, which uncritically accepts as normative methods of antiquity *ipso facto*. Nor does he turn Jesus and the early church into exemplars *par excellence* of contemporary Rogerian technique or the like. Instead, communication which is consistent with the nature of the good news itself is offered to Christians, who may find themselves drawn to one or the other.

The title of chapter one, “The Charge,” is turned into a military pun in chapter two called, appropriately enough, “The Retreat.” In it the author describes the fears and reluctance that infect us as we draw back from the charge to do evangelism. The root reason for the fears is not

because one lacks technique or is not articulate, as many books on evangelism seem to suggest, but rather for a much more Biblical reason. Lischer's diagnosis: the human propensity toward self-protector-

tion and unbelief. "Instinctively, we know that words make claims both on hearers, and more threateningly, on speakers" (20). The reluctance to share one's self along with his or her beliefs is the fear that one will be exposed to a potential adversary and worse, will be bereft of God's gracious presence in the process.

For this reviewer the greatest strength of Lischer's book and of most help to his readers is the chapter called "The Message: God's Story." Here Lischer attends to what other authors merely assume—that the reader has the story straight or at least has some working knowledge of it. In a way that is neither condescending nor written in seminaryese, he tells the story, taking us from the primordial void of Genesis to the empty tomb and the birth of the church, weaving throughout the major themes of revelation, covenant, faithfulness and grace. At the end of his telling, certain characteristics of the message are identified by which one distinguishes it from other messages and stories. The story is then plundered for "plots and paradigms" so that the evangelist might make *the* story the hearer's story in the telling.

Those who look for some formula or memorized presentation here will be disappointed. What is offered are ways in which the evangelist may identify and interpret the hearer to him or herself in such a way that God's story becomes a good news alternative. This calls for a sustained interest in the hearer as a person with a particular story of his or her own—a story which also needs to be taken seriously. There is no room for ecclesiastical hit and run tactics or body counts here.

Subsequent chapters offer valuable resources and helpful insights. Especially valuable is the grounding of the communication of the gospel in the evangelist's own identity with the church. The evangelist has been baptized into a particular community and has become a part of a long line of witnesses. The resources of Bible, spoken word and prayer are then set within their proper context.

Pastors and lay people intimidated by the word "evangelism" can take heart. *Speaking of Jesus* is a timely and valuable resource for recouping it in a churchly context. I recommend the book for parish study classes or as a companion piece to whatever program is being used by the local parish evangelism committee.

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**THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**, by Gabriel Fackre. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. Pp. 126. \$8.95.

The aim of this helpful book is to provide a theological assessment of the Religious Right from the viewpoint of the classical Christian tradition. Without the shrill polemic or knee-jerk reaction of so many recent critics, the author goes about his task with care, addressing the

Religious Right as partners in the faith, even though partners at one end of the spectrum.

His fundamental criticism is that the Religious Right has fallen prey to its own worst enemy, secular humanism. While espousing historic Christianity, it has imported partisan political judgments and culture-bound mores and given them a Biblical/theological legitimacy based on its own peculiar fundamentalist, apocalyptic and left-wing Reformation hermeneutic. The charge is a serious one and no doubt will be angrily denied. Yet the author, professor of theology at Andover-Newton, has done his homework and in my judgment has shown the basic truth of his charge that on many key theological issues the Right stands on the edge of mainstream Christianity.

The three opening chapters provide the contemporary and historical setting for understanding the Religious Right. While Falwell's *Moral Majority* is the centerpiece, the whole spectrum on the political/religious right is surveyed. Born-again evangelicals form its core; the enemy is secular humanism, advocating a world without God and without absolute values. The result is immorality of all kinds and erosion of liberties, including economic ones. Hence a holy war *against* evils like pornography, abortion, com-

munism and socialism, and *for* law and order, defense, school prayer, capitalism, and country. In an important chapter on sources and norms of authority, the contrast between the fundamentalist and Christocentric approach to Scriptures is clearly set forth.

The remaining eight chapters systematically examine the teaching and practice of the Religious Right on basic doctrines of the faith. Each chapter contains a concise summary of what the Right says it believes, followed by a brief Yes and No assessment from the historic tradition. Two examples: On Creation, the Right advocates teaching creationism in the schools alongside evolution, believing the former to be the proper interpretation of Genesis. Yes, says the author, it is right in seeking to uphold the view of divine creation with humanity as its crown, and in challenging scientific theory as absolute. But No, it is mistaken by relying on a literal reading of Genesis, and by espousing a dualistic view of creation which leads to exploitative attitudes toward the environment. Again on Jesus Christ, it claims to hold orthodox views of the Atonement, yet its reliance on the penal substitutionary view of atonement focuses more on God's holiness than love ("God may be loving, but he must be holy"), and so stresses judgment and righteousness in human activity. Other chapters deal similarly with the Fall, Church, Salvation, Consummation, and God.

In my judgment this book accomplishes its purpose of evaluating the Religious Right theologically, and calling for a dialog with the mainline churches on this level. It also puts its finger on major weaknesses of the Right: its self-righteous identification of its causes with God's causes; the tendency toward a perfectionist impulse that obscures the sin that persists in the life of the redeemed, and divides the world into righteous and unrighteous; the failure to do justice to the whole of Scripture, particularly in its prophetic critique of the rich and powerful and its upholding the cause of the poor and oppressed (thus capitalism emerges untouched); the pervasive dualism which denies the ambiguities of historical life and tends toward a docetic view of life, sin and salvation; an apocalyptic fundamentalism that distorts God's love for his creation and gives up the already/not yet tension of Christian existence and claims to know the pre-determined course of events. Espousing historic Christianity, it in fact teaches a restricted

theology of sin, redemption and Jesus Christ that tends toward God's holiness and wrath rather than his gracious love in Christ. Moreover, by attempting to wed political, economic and moral issues with the faith, a shaky marriage has occurred. Against this marriage, the author quotes the Barmen declaration made in the face of German National Socialism: "We must call ourselves and our brothers and sisters to attend to the one Word, Jesus Christ, and to tell our own tale, the Christian story, without addition or subtraction" (105).

As I said, the criticism rings true. Still, the Right has revived a zeal, a sense of moral outrage, a call to faith in action in the political and social realm, perhaps even a stubborn orthodoxy that is needed today and which the mainstream churches and theologians sometimes lack. At times I found the author's attempt to put heretical labels on the Right stretched thin. His repetitive appeal to ancient Zoroastrian dualism and Manichaeism seemed more like a scare tactic or a historian's private joke. Nevertheless, this book provides a good opportunity to raise the theological questions from which dialog with the Right can and should begin. We too may have some things to hear. After all, there has been a strange silence, if not paralysis, of the church on some of the moral issues at stake. This book can be recommended as an excellent tool for personal reflection and for adult class discussions.

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**PROFILES OF LUTHERANS IN THE U.S.A.**, by Carl F. Reuss. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982. Pp. 122. \$4.95 (paper).

Dr. Carl Reuss, director of research and social action for the American Lutheran

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Church, is an experienced and competent sociologist. *Profiles* reflects both his academic skill and his position in a major church. While *Profiles* will win no prizes for narrative pace or literary style, it deserves praise for its scope, appreciation for its analyses, and attention from those who recognize the importance of religion in American society. While the book is about the members of eight U.S. Lutheran churches, it will be helpful to other denominations and to sociologists generally. Since Lutherans are the most numerous heirs of the continental Reformation and the fourth largest Protestant group in the U.S., the book helps in understanding the persistence of immigrant religious tendencies and patterns of assimilation to the ways of the New World. Reuss's work will be of special value for the three Lutheran bodies which are now moving toward the formation of a new church. The Aid Association for Lutherans is to be commended for funding the study.

On the surface Reuss gives hard evidence for what many have long felt were strengths and weaknesses, vitalities and lethargies among Lutherans. At deeper levels, however, his analyses and modest suggestions present all Lutherans with insights about themselves and challenges for their futures. Churchwide leaders, educators, pastors and congregational officers will soon discover that the study points out key factors which explain their successes and problems as well as areas needing further attention.

Some preliminary comments about the work are in order. A “profile” is neither a detailed examination nor a quick sketch. Instead, a profile “picks out the main features which characterize the form, the shape and the patterns” by which the major features of a subject are arranged and made recognizable (7). Reuss developed a survey instrument in cooperation with the eight participating church bodies and sent it to 4,500 lay and 800 clergy persons. The questionnaire con-

sisted of nearly two hundred core inquiries. Responses analyzed in the book make frequent reference to four geographic areas rather than denominational affiliation. Readers will appreciate the reflections on regional variations in the replies, but might want to know if there also were similarities and differences among and within church bodies. For example, are northeastern Missouri Synod Lutherans more like northeastern LCA members than either is like their counterparts in the upper midwest? Again, are the views of ALC clergy in the west different from those in the south? Fortunately, the churches received more detailed information, so each is able to use the findings for further study.

What did Reuss discover? An “interpretive summary” cites ten dominant features, and the body of the work probes these, occasionally with the author providing perceptive comments. The features are often inter-related. On the basis of the survey, he is able to show that Lutherans are family oriented, form an in-group, are loyal to their general Lutheran identity, and are minimally involved in the wider community. Yet laity are significantly less concerned than clergy about traditional Lutheran doctrinal emphasis, and have differing lifestyles and aspirations, so that there is an increasing gap between what is preached and what is practiced. On the whole, there appears to be a lessening of personal devotions and attention to religious study beyond mealtime prayers and private prayers. Mobility has served to concentrate Lutherans in the north central states and in communities of fewer than 50,000 persons. Demographic factors have intensified the differences between those in the northeast and west in comparison with the central and upper midwestern states.

Reuss’s observations press further. For instance, the family and in-group factors appear to squeeze out younger and older single persons as well as the divorced and widowed. At a time when U.S. society is aging and older widowed individuals are increasing in number, fewer are staying in Lutheran churches. Again, Lutherans strongly desire to belong to a Lutheran congregation but often will move among the various church bodies freely. Yet remaining a Lutheran seems to be based not on theological principles but on a sense that being identified as a Lutheran is important. A finding stressed by Reuss is that family and congregational commitments serve to isolate Lutherans from being active participants in local, regional and national affairs. Social justice issues simply are not given priority or significant support. In proportion to their place in the population, Lutherans are grossly underrepresented in the public sector, and show little inclination to change that situation.

The study raises critical questions about future churchwide and congregational purposes, plans, and programs. Are we taking steps to address ministry to younger and older persons who are not in families? Are official involvements in and statements about social issues likely to be supported by the constituencies of the church? Do regional attitudes forecast different brands of Lutheranism which are at odds with one another? Do theological education patterns emphasize

nurturing the *status quo* or move Lutherans into the future?

*Profiles* raises questions which every Lutheran church needs to face in a rapidly changing and increasingly pluralistic America. This book tells us about the present in order to alert us to the future. It deserves to be read and to be used as Lutherans look ahead.

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