



**LIVING FAITH: BELIEF AND DOUBT IN A PERILOUS WORLD**, by Jacques Ellul. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983. Pp. 287. \$19.95.

“This book,” writes Ellul near its end, “is both a cry of lamentation and an appeal.” In the ways that all true prophecy must be, this is an intensely personal book. It moves through three sections, each different from the other two in both developmental style and tone. It is about “faith,” both descriptively and evocatively, and while the subject is familiar territory especially to those who share Ellul’s acknowledged debt to Kierkegaard and Barth, the presentation is crisply direct and timely. From within a perilous world, Ellul sophomorically poses the fundamental question: “Why believe?” Answer: “For nothing!”

Critical to the entire development is the distinction between belief and faith. The average person uses these terms interchangeably, and the very title and subtitle of the book indicate how close they are. That is deliberately ironic on the part of the writer and his editors, of course, because the two notions express nearly discrete dimensions of our human existence. Belief is propositional; while it can admit to some degree of uncertainty, belief governs action in terms of whether some situation or experience is or is not as it appears to be. Ellul’s faith is less easy to articulate; if belief is propositional, then perhaps faith is motivational. But faith has and must have an element of “doubt,” and here the blurring of faith and belief is most thick. In matters of religion, our human tendency is to reduce the element of doubt, leaving us with a certain and believable faith. For Ellul, such a believable faith is not a “living faith.”

Part I (“Monos and Una: A Conversation”) is an extended illustration of the difference between, as well as the confusion of, belief and faith. The form taken is a dialogue between two representative figures who converse and who sometimes pontificate, and the reader who misses the humor and the irony in these exchanges also misses the main point of the development—the interrelation of belief and faith. Una represents a tendency toward seeing belief as an integral and necessary part of all human life and especially of social intercourse. But, since Una insists that confidence is part of this, Monos chides that Una has confused believing what a person says with confidence (trust) in that person. Una denies that we can separate belief from trust. Monos caricatures such belief as rigid and insensitive to detail or feelings or consequences not directly included in the belief system itself; such belief is the foolishness of blind faith: “The believer is a slave.” The debate continues with Una insisting on both the uncertainty of belief and the necessity of belief for providing direction and meaning. Monos contends that belief of the kind Una wants is false and even dishonest because it purports to be a solution in a world in which there are no solutions. Monos is a rationalist whose rationalism seems to end in nihilism; in the name of freedom, Monos must deny certitude. Una, of course, catches Monos in the certitude of such a position, and so it continues. For Una, belief is where our freedom of choice and our responsibility are actualized. When Monos flirts with and stops just short of affirming only two things, death and evil, Una rejoins that what is needed is forgiveness. This brings the matter right

back to the core issue since “Without forgiveness life is impossible. Without belief forgiveness is unacceptable.” That is precisely Monos’ problem, for the belief that would make forgiveness possible is a myth or a legend or a dream but never a certitude. Belief is always vulnerable, and for Monos the risk of that vulnerability is agonizing and crippling. This is the dilemma of the modern world.

Part II (“Belief and Faith”) begins with what is perhaps the most important chap-

ter in the book, appropriately entitled “Traditional Misunderstandings.” In what may be taken as a gloss on Part I, Ellul explains that his key terms are arbitrary and convenient, and are not mutually exclusive. As he uses it, “faith” is what concerns him personally, that is, faith in Jesus Christ, faith as it indicates the “revelatory order of Jesus Christ.” “Belief” means “all the other attitudes referring to a religious or irrational dimension, to a world of non-Christian lived experience.” Further, faith *in* Jesus Christ is distinguished from the Christian religion, which is a belief system; that is, “belief provides answers to people’s questions while faith never does.”

If “Traditional Misunderstandings” is the most important chapter, the next chapter (“Religion and Revelation”) is the most difficult. Ellul is relentless. The distinction indicated in the chapter title entails a conflict which “we can reduce to a maxim: religion goes up, revelation comes down.” On the religion side we find community, organization, identity, certainty, belief, progress, power, stability, answers, humanity. On the revelation side we find oppositions to each of these terms: isolation, individuality, anonymity, doubt, faith, discontinuity, weakness, risk, questions, God. Organized religion is almost by definition an enemy of living faith, a fundamental critique carried forward in the next chapter, “Believing for What?” Repeating again “that there is no reason to believe, and that faith has no ultimate purpose,” the question is asked once more: then why believe? ““Because Jesus...” And that’s all there is to say.” The chapter is full of quotable, even preachable assertions about faith, Bible, and Word of God, and many readers will find themselves asking hard questions about the integrity and particularly the practice of our sacramental theology.

“Critical Faith,” the last chapter in the middle section, culminates this line of thought. Faith is and must be ever critical of faith itself. Such a critical distance on faith also provides a critical distance on the world in which we live, and the result is a dual mode of being both in the world as well as removed from it. Only through faith can we gain enough distance on our humanity to see it for what it is and thus to allow the possibility that we can achieve it. Nevertheless, such an achievement can never be the motive for faith; it can only be a by-product, and a risky one at that.

Through all of this discussion Ellul displays a definite sense of mature tentativeness; one might also describe it as responsible passion. Without once conceding the need to offer fresh thoughts in a new age for a new time, Ellul conveys an impatience with many ideas that have been hanging in the air of our time. His manner of doing this is a calculated play on his own age and professional reputation. His age is his wisdom which, of course, if taken too seriously reveals itself as more age than wisdom but which if taken lightly and yet seriously provides both perspective and license to write what we who are younger in both age and wisdom cannot write. Thus the third unit of the book, “Yet Forty Days...Said Jonah,” is a jeremiad. Despite Ellul’s disclaimers, part III is also at least partly an apology for the faith, for there is deeply felt

disappointment and even bitterness in the chapter title that begins the unit: “We Never Wanted *That...*” *Perhaps* if there had been more living faith in the middle decades of this century, the perilous world of the ’80s would not now be rapidly heading toward self-destruction. *Perhaps*. Ellul’s bitterness will have to be tested against each reader’s own experiences; he may be too specific, too contemporary. That is the risk of a personal witness.

By the end of the book, all the pieces do fit together in the discussion of the linkage between repentance and faith. Faith begins in the acceptance and trust of the one who proclaims the need for repentance. Why believe? Not because the consequences of repentance are desirable but because the Transcendent Other whom we call God expects it. That is the risk of faith which on its own terms is purposeless. Why believe? “For nothing.” But faith is never context-free. It is rather a movement, “a nonstop shuttling back and forth from remembrance to prophecy, from anamnesis to apocalypse.” Ellul’s lament and appeal cannot be buttressed by reason but only

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by faith. He must therefore go through the painful exercise of insisting that faith is for nothing *so that* he can cry from a deep and authentically prophetic passion that he cares about the world in which he lives and which he expects soon to leave to the next generation. That cry expresses the most personal risk of faith: giving up all pretense of control over the future, and trusting wholly on God. In any systematic sense, that leaves no ethic. All that remains is love, the one-word expression for the high-risk venture of living faith.

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**EXPERIENCE AND FAITH: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LUTHER FOR UNDERSTANDING TODAY’S EXPERIENTIAL RELIGION**, by William Hordern. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983. Pp. 160. \$8.95 (paper).

In a time when Christians of all stripes are discussing and disagreeing over the place of experience in Christian life, William Hordern’s book comes as a welcome contribution. This is a book which pastors and church educators should read and discuss thoroughly among themselves. Then they should find ways to share Hordern’s insights with parishioners.

The book begins with a helpful overview of the “age of experience,” that period in American and Canadian history (Hordern, after all, teaches in Canada) which began in the sixties. The author quickly traces the ferment of the sixties and seventies with the “God is dead” movement, the loss of faith in technology, the rise of counterculture, and popularity of the Jesus movement, the born-again phenomenon, and the charismatic movement. Hordern brings these diverse strands together in an attempt to show their connection:

Despite the link that the Jesus movement provides between the counterculture and born again Christianity, it is not my thesis that the two movements are intimately connected. My point is that later development of the counterculture and experiential forms of Christianity are both part of a wider trend of our culture

toward a development of the inner life's experience. (20)

The author then moves to the critical question of this volume, namely, the place of inner religious experience in theology and religious life. With respect to experience in religion, "we are concerned to ask what contribution it can make to religious knowledge" (23). Further, "it is necessary to ask to what degree such experience can be criteria for doctrine and life" (24).

Such questions form the backdrop for Hordern's contribution to the discussion. He begins with a discussion of experience, knowledge, and religious experience and counsels the reader to be skeptical whenever people say they have experienced God. "When we hear that someone has experienced God, we have to ask, 'Which God?' The experience alone cannot answer this question" (31). In fact, there are all kinds of experiences shared by religious and non-religious, believers and unbelievers alike. What makes an experience religious is the viewpoint of the one doing the experiencing. Believers and non-believers may have the same experience but come to differing conclusions.

What makes it religious for the one person is that this person, from out of religious faith, interprets it in a religious framework and thereby is brought nearer to God in and through the experience. The other person interprets the same experience in a non-religious framework and sees no need to bring God into the interpretation. (42)

Thus Hordern neutralizes experience by refusing to make it constitutive of religious life. Experience, then, does not scrutinize doctrine but rather the reverse.

The heart of *Experience and Faith* is, in this reviewer's opinion, a long chapter titled "Luther and Religious Experience." Here Hordern traces Luther's personal pilgrimage which led him to refine his understanding of experience. Out of his experience with the radical reformers in particular, Luther forged the conviction that all experience must be tested by the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. All experience, even religious experience, is tainted by the Fall, and thus open to critical scrutiny by the measuring stick of Scripture. A perspective such as Luther possessed would be enormously helpful in our time.

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Two chapters carry on Luther's perspective—one on faith and experience and the other on Luther's theology of the cross and experience. In the first, Hordern shows that for Luther the primary experience of God is that of *anfechtung*, the sense of one's unworthiness and peril before God's judgment. This leads Luther to contend that faith is the crucial element of Christianity. Hordern then works with the well-known Luther theme of theology of the cross. He shows how Luther is not afraid of religious experience but rather of anything that smacks of "triumphalist confidence in experience as an unmediated way to the 'divine power, wisdom, and glory'" (93).

The author links Luther's understanding of experience within his theology of the cross to the earlier discussion of the meaning of religious experience in chapter two. Luther, contends Hordern, understood "religious experience as any experience of a person who is religious" (104):

Christian experience is not simply some inner, mystical, ecstatic feeling; Christian

experience is any experience (including hauling manure) of a person who has faith in Christ. (105)

Two closing chapters, one on liberation theology and the other on universalism and particularism in the Bible, illustrate the areas where Christians need to struggle for a balance between experience and faith. Hordern is grateful to liberation theology for helping us to understand that inner experience is largely predicated upon years of socioeconomic conditioning. How we think and experience personally depend upon our class and cultural experiences. Hordern also believes that we are best served in our interpretation of Scripture by moving from the particular to the universal as Scripture does itself.

A helpful concluding chapter summarizes Hordern's argument. The author has opened us to Luther's perspective on a most pressing subject. We may be grateful and hope that the debate will continue at all levels of the Church's life.

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**GOD AS THE MYSTERY OF THE WORLD**, by Eberhard Jüngel. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. Pp. 414. \$21.00.

This is the best book on God, if not theology in general, that has appeared for many a year. Eberhard Jüngel is surely one of the most careful, thorough, and profound thinkers on the theological scene today. He is, moreover, thoroughly *theological* even though engaged in penetrating dialogue with the philosophical currents past and present. His thought is centered on revelation, and particularly as it occurs in the cross of Christ. Indeed, in this book Jüngel is really working out what a theology of the cross means for the doctrine of God today. This is done in close conversation with theistic philosophers like Descartes who have tried to secure belief in God for moderns and those on the other hand who have spoken more audaciously of the "death of God." The subtitle specifies the argument more closely: *On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*.

Jüngel wants us to be able to say what we are actually *talking* about when we talk *about God*. The trouble in theology is that God "is silenced by the very words that seek to talk about him" (vii). Theists, driven by the logic of the anthropological grounding of the thought of God, arrive at a God who is unthinkable and unspeakable. God is "that than which no higher can be thought," the absolutely perfect and necessary being, beyond human conceiving, and so on. To use a modern cliché, "you can't put God in a box." It has become virtually modern dogma that no one can speak authoritatively for or about God. God is beyond all thought and speech. The problem with this kind of anthropological approach which tries to think of God as the "beyond" of human existence is that God is reasoned right out of existence. God is silenced by the words that seek to speak about him. Such theism is really the secret and hidden root of modern atheism. Jüngel's analysis lays this bare in relentless fashion in looking at its proponents ancient and modern. Particularly penetrating is the treatment of Descartes' attempt to establish the certainty of

modern thought and the existence of God in the “I think, therefore I am.” Instead of securing certainty of the existence of God, Descartes really destroys it. Human existence is secured through its ability to doubt, whereas God is beyond all that as the infinitely “perfect” being. God is relativized as a being who merely secures the thinking self in its doubt while having no such security in himself. God “exists” only through the thinking and doubting self. Anthropologically grounded thought of God leads methodologically, in Jüngel’s analysis, to atheism.

Over against this Jüngel sets a view in which God becomes thinkable only on the basis of his speakability, i.e., only on the basis of a revelation in which what is meant by the word “God” actually *occurs*. The recurring theme of the book is that God comes from God. God, that is, does not come from man or from nature or whatever, but from himself. Thus God occurs only in his coming, and this can happen only in what Christian theology calls revelation. Since God comes from God, God is not the “necessary being” of theistic metaphysics, the final guarantee of the anthropologically grounded system. Jüngel has a nice section in which he develops the thought that God is not necessary for persons to be human, but rather “more than necessary.” It reinforces and expands the ancient Augustinian dictum that God is not to be used but simply enjoyed. A God who is “necessary” soon becomes an irksome burden. A God who simply comes from himself is a sheer unexpected gift and thus issues in joy.

But if God comes from God, and occurs only in the event of his coming, God differentiates himself from himself in his becoming. Jüngel draws this view from the particularity of the Christian view which identifies God with the crucified man Jesus. Since the crucified man Jesus is identified with God, God is differentiated from God. In Jesus God dies in order to come and to be inescapably present as God for us. Indeed, since the anthropologically grounded approach issues in atheism and the talk of the “death of God,” Jüngel finds it necessary to think through again the tradition of the death of God in its major proponents (Hegel, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, etc.). There are valuable critical treatments of these thinkers in the course of the argument.

Again, since God comes from God and is differentiated from God in the crucified Jesus, death is not alien to God but rather means possibility. Thus for Jüngel, the very union with death and perishability becomes the basis for thinking of God. God is not one who is “beyond” death but is the very occurrence of its defeat—the “death of death” (Luther), perhaps one could say. A large section of the book is given to expounding what this means for the thinkability of God. Thus, like many today, but in much more thorough and radical fashion, Jüngel takes exception to the ancient traditions which thought of God as above and beyond death, immutable, timeless, infinite perfection, etc. God can be thought in Christian fashion only in union with what marks human existence.

What does this mean for the speakability of God? Since God comes from God, and can be thought only in the event of his coming, differentiating himself from God in the crucified one, God can be spoken of only by the telling of his coming, i.e., by narrative. God requires that he be told about. Narrative, for Jüngel, does not mean, however, merely telling stories in which one can play rather fast and loose with the truth question. Narrative is a “powerful kind of talk which should result in past history liberating its most authentic possibilities anew” (305). The humanity of God is a story that can only be told.

Finally, all this opens a new foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity. If God comes from

God and goes to God, God is Triune: The doctrine of the Trinity is the “epitomy of the story of Jesus Christ, because the reality of God’s history with man comes to its truth in the differentiation of the one God into the three persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (344). The speakability of God according to this view culminates in the doctrine of the Trinity. “The doctrine of the Trinity basically has no other function than to make the story of God so true that it can be told in a responsible way. In the doctrine of the Trinity, God’s historicity is thought as truth. In the power of this truth, God can be spoken of in a Christian

way, God’s being can be told as history” (344).

This will have to suffice as an all too hasty and no doubt oversimple sketch of a complex and involved argument. If the book is the best book on God to appear recently, it is perhaps also the most difficult. Jüngel makes no apologies for that, however. He is convinced that Christian theologians have to think through the problem of God in as rigorous a fashion as possible. No doubt he is right. The effort to follow the argument pays high dividends not only for theology, but certainly also for the “speaking” of God, the proclamation itself. Readers should not be discouraged, I think, by inability to follow all the involved philosophical arguments. There are sections discussing questions of love, law, works, parables, faith, and so on, which can stand virtually by themselves as models of lucid and penetrating theological exposition. The book is worth reading for those sections alone. So the reader can only be encouraged to persevere!

The brief sketch of the argument offered here indicates, I expect, much of this review’s “critical” reaction to the book. It is a remarkable achievement and can only be commended as an immensely important work. The translation by Darrel L. Guder also appears to be of extremely high quality and must have been a monumental task. The work should be invaluable in introducing Jüngel to the English reader.

If I have any criticism of the argument as far as I understand it, it would probably come in the form of wondering whether Jüngel, like many who follow in the train of a theology of the cross, does not tend to let his theology about God run ahead of the actual proclamation of the cross. When, for instance, one moves to get rid of immutability and timelessness, etc., by theological fiat, one is in danger of using theology to do what only the proclamation can do. In other words, such things as the immutability and timelessness of God do not go away because theologians say they do. Only God can overcome God. And, as Jüngel surely knows, that can only occur in the speaking *of* God, not in the theology *about* God. It is an extremely subtle point. Perhaps it is simply the problem of how to make the “narrative “happen” when both you and your hearers already know the end of the story. But in a real sense much, if not everything, hinges on that subtle point. The story has to happen again. Jüngel has certainly done monumental work to make it happen. The only question might be whether he has done too much.

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**OLD STORIES FOR A NEW TIME**, by James Limburg. Atlanta: John Knox, 1983. Pp. 130. \$7.95 (paper).

*Old Stories for a New Time* does not investigate the dynamics of story-telling to suggest why some stories have power to change or motivate us, while others simply entertain. Nor does it seek to expose the relationship between biblical stories and biblical faith, and argue whether telling stories is either *a* or *the only* legitimate way to do theology. Nor yet does it describe the *new time*, so that the issues of our time become an agenda for the re-telling of the *old stories*.

All of these are legitimate topics for essays, monographs, and books, but Limburg's book has a different interest. He wishes to help us understand in our new time some of the stories of the Old Testament on the basis of a simplified historical-literary approach.

The preface describes some of the steps leading to the production of this book—classes on the Old Testament in a rural Minnesota parish, classes at a midwestern denominational college and seminary, pastors' conferences, continuing education courses, and so on. Such settings neither demand nor encourage new approaches or new understandings.

After reflecting on the new appreciation of stories in our contemporary society and the centrality of "story" to the Old Testament, Limburg declares that his book has as its purpose the facilitating of a new hearing of what the Old Testament has to say. This purpose is pursued in the following seven chapters.

The stories that are retold include Abraham and his son Isaac (Genesis 22), the finding of a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24), the long Joseph story (Genesis 37-50), Gideon and Samson (Judges 6-8 and 13-16), and the books of Ruth, Esther, and Jonah. In each of the stories we are led to see a God of love and grace at work in the ordinary events of the lives of ordinary people.

In discussing each story Limburg raises the following questions:

1. What is the unit?
2. What is the structure of the story?
3. What are some of the devices of the storyteller?
4. What are the settings for the action of the story and for the composition of the story?
5. What is the intent of the story?
6. What new settings has the story

Since neither the book nor this review pretend to make a contribution to the exegetical literature, most disagreements with his answers to these questions would legitimately be dismissed as quibbles. Still, when the *type* or *genre* of the Joseph story is described as "first of all, a family story" (40) and as "a family story...reshaped into a guidance story" (41) one must notice that *type* and *genre* are not being used in their technical sense, which has more to do with the shape and structure of a literary unit than with its content. And when the 300 warriors remaining to Gideon after several tests in Judges 7 are called "Gideon's crack tactical group," we must remember that the point of the story is to demonstrate that Israel won over the Midianites precisely not because of the superiority of her warriors, but because of Yahweh's action on behalf of his people.

Given the title, one might have hoped that some of the pressing issues of our time would have been reflected on through some of the old stories. The issue of male chauvinism and female oppression could have been the subject of a comparison of the stories of Abraham's son and Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11). The drive for military superiority by leaders of the great powers could have been contrasted with the stories of Gideon and Samson. And so on.



Yet, for its declared audience of “lay readers, Bible study groups, Sunday schools, and for ministers” *Old Stories for a New Time* may offer a useful illustration of critical exegetical methodology in a form that will not generate immediate rejection, as well as many useable exegetical perceptions and comments.

Limburg quotes Elie Wiesel, “God made man because he loves stories” (10). If this book inspires some of that same love in its readers it will have achieved a worthwhile goal.

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**BETWEEN TWO GARDENS: REFLECTIONS ON SEXUALITY AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**, by James G. Nelson. New York: Pilgrim, 1983. Pp. 210. \$7.95 (paper).

*Between Two Gardens* is a companion piece to Nelson’s earlier work: *Embodiment*. *Embodiment* is an approach to sexuality and Christian theology which sees human sexuality not only as a part of God’s creation, but also as one of the clues, perhaps even the central clue, to God’s activity in the world. *Between Two Gardens* expands this basic theological affirmation, reviews selected American religious experience and draws implications for enhancing contemporary spiritual growth.

The first two chapters are foundational explorations of sexuality and spirituality as seen through Nelson’s understanding of the incarnation. Definitions of sexuality and spirituality are expanded:

By spirituality I mean not only the conscious religious disciplines and practices through which human beings relate to God, but more inclusively the whole style and meaning of our relationship to that which we perceive as of ultimate worth and power. (5)

By sexuality I mean not only physiological arousal and genital activity, but also much more...sexuality is our way of being in the world as female or male persons. It involves our appropriation of characteristics socially defined as feminine or masculine. It includes our affectional-sexual orienta-

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tion...it is our attitudes toward ourselves and others as body-selves. It is our capacity for sensuousness. (5-6)

Nelson sees sexist and spiritualistic dualism as the historical root of the alienation which permeates and diminishes our lives. We’ve lived out the story of alienation depicted in the biblical account of Eden; we need to move toward the vision of the erotic garden in the Song of Solomon—a vision of a more healed and wholistic spirituality and sexuality—a vision of spirituality marked by feeling, desire, communion, incarnation and compassion.

Incarnation is a fundamental theological affirmation upon which Nelson builds his vision of spirituality and sexuality. Incarnation means that flesh is important; incarnation means a

compelling, crucial paradigm of the Christ; and incarnation means that God is in our own daily flesh and blood encounters. Nelson speaks of incarnation as personal presence, a voluntary process, paradox of grace, miracle, a relationship not a possession, and as a “particularly luminous moment in our communal history.”

Having laid the groundwork in chapters one and two, Nelson explores the various facets of this incarnational-sexual experience in the nine chapter-length essays which comprise the remainder of the book. These essays reflect the wide range of Nelson’s expertise and the implications of his central theological affirmations. There are chapters on men’s liberation, family, homosexuals, and singleness; there are treatments of sexuality in American Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, the politics of the religious right, and medical care.

*Between Two Gardens* is fresh, lucid, and compelling. It is some of the best of post-Enlightenment, liberal theology with its insistence that the experience of the world is the primary arena of divine activity for us. *Between Two Gardens* will be controversial. Many will argue that Jesus Christ is more than “a compelling incarnation of God,” or that the “Christ in Jesus was a particularly luminous moment in our communal history,” or that our sexual hungers are “experiences of the divine hunger.”

This work is a significant contribution toward integration and balance in Western theology and spirituality which is fragmented and loaded in its worship of the intellect. Yet, I see Nelson stating the case for the place of body in religious experience too one-sidedly. His work needs more of the balance he seeks and the awareness he expresses in response to André Guindon in *The Sexual Language*:

Disintegration...can occur through either side of the body-spirit sexual dualism. Spiritualism would rather that the word not become flesh, while corporealism wants the flesh without the word. (33-34)

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