

comes from her ability to put herself in the position of a biblical character, I found myself wanting her to give us the voices of Peter, Pilate, the rich young ruler, and so on, rather than her reports of their reactions.

Each poem in this collection lists the gospel selection for her rendering of the scene, along with a couple other biblical sources that have sparked her imagination. For instance, in Sonnet 179 on the return of the “Seventy Disciples” in Luke 10, she refers to Exodus 24:9-11 and Revelation 21:10-14. The poem ends thus:

Jesus saw Satan tumbling from
paradise,
The seventy with Moses, the sapphire
floor
Shimmering in the bright cerulean
skies,
All of us feasting together, an open
door,
Glimpses of God’s eternity come
clear,
Bringing the rim of heaven’s portals
near.

This is yet another example of how Grindal’s faithful imagination connects scriptural themes in new, provocative, and fulfilling ways: the feast—stretching from the vision of Moses in Exodus through the gospels and on to the Apocalypse; the open door; the merging of floor and sky in the work of Christ and the Revelation of John. All of these have changed the way I’ll read Luke 10. I can hardly expect a fuller insight until I, too, join in that heavenly feast.

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CALLED: RECOVERING LUTHERAN PRINCIPLES FOR MINISTRY AND VOCATION, by Christopher J. Richmann, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022. 198 pages. \$21.00 (paper).

As I finished Christopher Richmann’s fine book on ministry and vocation, I recalled the scene from Sinclair Lewis’s masterful novel *Elmer Gantry*. The title character thinks he has a calling to ministry but lacks an experience of revelation that would validate his hunch. Finally, he shares a bottle of whiskey with a friend and in the midst of a drunken stupor believes the Holy Spirit has certified his ministerial vocation. Lewis’s cynicism aside, the episode points to a tendency increasingly enforced by a therapeutic culture: something isn’t real unless it has been authenticated by a feeling or experience. As Richmann points out, this tendency toward subjectivism is alive and well in the theology of call in many quarters of Christianity.

Lutherans should know better. Richmann devotes two chapters to showing how historical developments within Lutheranism have spun away from the way in which Luther and the confessions understood “call” as an external call extended by the church and motivated by the needs of the neighbor. Richmann roots this emphasis in Luther’s sacramental theology, but it probably is ultimately grounded in Luther’s Christology. But let’s not quibble here. Most important, the notion of an *inner* call, unmediated by anything in the creaturely realm, goes back to those whom Luther derided as “enthusiasts.” Andreas Karlstadt is the first in a long line of figures (many of them fine theologians) who succumbed to this tendency in their

view of ministry. Pietism, as one might expect, bears a special responsibility, but the guilt is widely shared (including in the present understanding and practice of the ELCA).

Why should we care? Richmann is convincing on two fronts. First, he notes how the emphasis on some type of inner call dilutes the rich Lutheran understanding of vocation. If the call to ordained ministry needs to be validated by some sort of “spiritual experience,” then the suggestion is that God values the pastorate above all other vocations. After all, we don’t ask a carpenter, midwife, or stockbroker to justify their vocations by some sort of experience of God. The stress on the inner call for clergy undercuts the crucial idea that all vocations in life are valuable because they respond to a need in God’s creation. The inevitable result is that the world becomes “secular” and our callings in the world tend to simply be means of self-enhancement. This truncated theology of call buries the neighbor’s needs in the scramble to the top of the economic pile.

The second issue deals with the ability of clergy to cope with the inevitable frustrations and struggles of ministry. As Richmann underlines, if some sort of subjective standard is used to sustain a call to ministry, then we are in trouble. Being a pastor is hard work. I tell my

students that my ten years as a parish pastor were the best and hardest years of my life. If I had continually asked myself if I had a “passion” for ministry (which can be just another way, as Richmann notes, of talking about an inner call), I would have left the congregation. Rather, my sense of call came from the claim on me of my parishioners. They needed to hear the law and gospel. They needed to hear a word of absolution. They needed their children to be baptized. Of course, this can be taken too far. A pastor in genuine and prolonged despair should probably move on. But seeking constant validation from within is dangerous as well. Richmann’s book does a nice job of making this clear.

Overall, this text would make a fine addition to the libraries of pastors and church leaders. Candidacy committees and others involved in the approval process for pastors and deacons would also benefit from a close reading of Richmann’s work. It is rare to have such an accessible book. Christopher Richmann has written something both practical and deeply informed by the history and teaching of the church.

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