



The Bulletin

of the Institute for Reformed Theology

— Dedicated to supporting theological reflection and conversation that enhance the ministry of the church —

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The Artist and the Preacher: Can Both Proclaim the Word?

By William C. Goettler

ASSISTANT DEAN FOR MINISTRY STUDIES, YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL, AND CO-PASTOR, FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NEW HAVEN

A Sunday morning, late in June. The congregation has gathered at the Presbyterian Church, more out of habit than passion, glad that there is at least the hint of a breeze in the air, some possibility of breath. The half dozen voices in the summer choir have a limited repertoire, and the introit is quite familiar. People settle back into the pews. They know how to endure this hour in time. Prayers are spoken that are new, but they sound remarkably like the prayers of last week, of last year. A text is read from the Hebrew Scriptures, and the congregation sings a psalm. Then comes the reading from the gospel.

“A parable, from the Gospel of Matthew,” the preacher announces. There is, in the pews, an almost imperceptible movement. Some cross their legs, silently distancing themselves from what is coming. Some lean forward, ready to hear. A parable is about to be read, after all. And like every congregation, those gathered in these pews on this Sunday morning know a little bit about parables.

These odd tales always seem to turn up during the quiet church days of early summer, at least in churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, grouped together perhaps because of the power of their witness, but perhaps just to get them out of the way. A few of the parables will delight those who are attentive to their ways. Others will perplex, surprise. And several more will cause their listeners to shake their heads in disapproval, shock, or dismay.

Unlike too many sermons, what the parables will not do is bore. These stories tell about common people, about laborers treated unfairly, and unmerited kindness from strangers, about generous widows and prodigal sons. And who is bored by well-told tales? The congregation is more silent than usual, for the notice has gone out. They are to hear a story this day.

And if they are lucky, several think, quite unconsciously, the preacher will set aside the normal homiletic practice of biblical exegesis and historical and literary criticism, and find herself so moved by the simple story that she will go deeper, finding and telling a story of her own. She will discover or invent a story to explain the story, a parable to explore the parable. She will create a bit of art, to explore the parable’s art.

The parable is a muse, after all, a wonder to behold, inspiring speaker and listener alike to consider how they identify with each of the characters presented, to consider their own process of moral decision-making, or judgment, or conclusion. *(continued on page 3)*

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Institute for Reformed Theology News

Astute readers will notice a change in our board of directors. **Louis Weeks**, who helped to found the Institute for Reformed Theology, retired from the presidency of Union-PSCE in July 2007. A distinguished American religious historian, who continues to work on leadership in the American protestant church, Louis retires from his administrative duties but will continue to write and make his valuable contributions to the American Reformed community. We celebrate his role in the making of the IRT. Meanwhile, we welcome Professor **Brian K. Blount**, the new president of Union-PSCE, who began his new post in the Fall of 2007. Brian comes to us from Princeton Theological Seminary where he was the Richard J. Dearborn Professor of New Testament Interpretation. We look forward to his leadership at our Institute.

The Institute for Reformed Theology's 2007-2009 National Colloquy, entitled "Prayer," convened on September 13, 2007 in Richmond, Virginia. This colloquy, led by Union-PSCE professor Dawn Devries, John Newton Thomas Professor of Systematic Theology, will explore different views of prayer through the reading of many classic texts on the theology of prayer that span the centuries. The first meeting addressed "Prayer in the Bible," first with a lecture by Samuel E. Balentine (see page 11), followed the next day by discussions of Balentine's book, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* and David Crump's *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer*. The last day of the colloquy was devoted to wide-ranging discussions of prayer practices and postures, as well as more explicitly theological questions. Another theme repeatedly touched upon was the connection between prayer and ethics or right action. Meeting six times over two years in Richmond, the participants are: **Elizabeth McNair Ayscue**, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Albemarle, NC; **Edna Banes**, Dean of Students and Chaplain, Union-PSCE; **Charles Booker-Hirsch**, Pastor, Northside

Presbyterian Church, Ann Arbor, MI; **Veronica E. Cannon**, Charlotte, NC; **Steven Chase**; Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI; **David Crump**, Professor of Religion, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI; **Sheila C. Gustafson**, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Santa Fe, NM; **Kristine Haig**, Co-Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Morgantown, WV; **Sam Hamilton-Poore**, Director of the Program in Christian Spirituality and Assistant Professor of Christian Spirituality, San Francisco Theological Seminary, San Anselmo, CA; **John E. Harris**, Designated Pastor, North Presbyterian Church of Flushing, Flushing, NY; **Ethel Hornbeck**, Parish Assistant for Spiritual Formation, Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church, Shepherdstown, WV; **Samuel E. Massengill**, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Metuchen, NJ; **Albert G. Peery**, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC; **Robert J. Sherman**, Professor of Christian Theology, Bangor Theological Seminary, Bangor, ME; **Rebecca Harden Weaver**, John Q. Dickinson Professor of Church Theology, Union-PSCE; and Union-PSCE students, **Elizabeth N. Howell**, **Esta M. Jarrett**, **Elizabeth K. Lovell**, **Nelson Reveley**, **Andrew Taylor-Troutman**, **Lindy Smith Vogado**, and **Jennifer Williams**. A list of readings for the colloquy can be found at our website, www.reformedtheology.org.

On November 4–6, 2007, the colloquy, "The Scandal of Particularity: A Jewish-Christian Conversation," continued with a meeting in Richmond, VA on the Union-PSCE campus. This colloquy, a joint project with the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore, MD and in conjunction with First Presbyterian Church and the Temple/Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, both in Atlanta, is being led by **S. Dean McBride**, the Cyrus M. McCormick Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation and **Andreas Scheule**, the Aubrey Lee Brooks Professor of Old Testament, both at Union-PSCE; **Christopher M. Leighton**, Executive Director, and **Rosann Catalano**, Roman Catholic scholar, both of the ICJS; and **Randi Rashkover**, Assistant Professor of Religious studies at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.

The study for the November session focused on the topic, "The People of Israel, the People of God." The session was organized around the following questions: (1) What is the significance of the land of Israel within Jewish self-understanding? (2) What role does the land of Israel play in the Christian understanding of salvation history? (3) Is there consensus among Jews regarding the significance of the land? and (4) Does the incorporation of the meaning of the land into the Christian narrative of salvation history grant continued significance to the land or does it transform the meaning of the land? In a series of ten blocks of study, participants discussed these questions, concluding with four questions: (1) What is your biggest discovery? (2) What do you think is your most pressing question or ideas for your professional colleagues? (3) What might be the most effective way to "translate" these ideas in your professional context? and (4) What one idea do you not want to lose? Visiting scholars for this session were **Yehezkel Landau** of Hartford Seminary's Center for Faith in Practice and **John Pawlikowski**, O.S.M. of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL. ☪

Mission statement of the Institute for Reformed Theology

Our goal is to support theological reflection and conversation that enhance the ministry of the church. In particular, we hope to serve Union-PSCE, Reformed denominations, and the whole body of Christ by

- ☪ Engaging in theological conversation that is informed, committed, reasonable, and mutually respectful;
- ☪ Presenting this model among colloquy members, public audiences, and congregations;
- ☪ Addressing contemporary issues of faith by reflection on basic theological statements; and
- ☪ Providing a forum for pastors, theological students, and scholars to inform each other's work.

The Artist and the Preacher: Can Both Proclaim the Word? *(continued from page 1)*

This Biblical form is well understood by the congregation on this summer morning, well understood by those who expect to be amused, well understood by those who anticipate being shocked. For the parables, writes John Dominic Crossan, *intend* to “shatter the structural security of the hearer’s world.” More than that, in every parable the possibility of good news awaits us, if it can but be uncovered. Parables, Crossan goes on, “render possible the kingdom of God, the act of appropriation in which God touches the human heart and consciousness is brought to final genuflection.”¹ Parables affect us at an emotional level. Parables interrupt the volleys of well-considered argument. Parables interrupt our habits of reflective thought, and bring our thinking to its knees.

That is quite a task, for a worship service late in June. One needs faith to encounter a parable in all of its wonder and awe. And this congregation gathered has a sufficient store of faith. Some sit forward, some withdraw precisely because of that faith, knowing that they are about to be invited to engage in a struggle with the places that theology and art clash. For while the literary form of parable is simply and easily grasped, there will also be present some mystery in the use of words, and the requirement that those who wish to understand will need to refer to more than their Christian faith alone.

By suggesting that dissimilar things are more similar than we had thought, parables offer simple parallel; suddenly, we are aware that the workers who have arrived at different times and labored with different degrees of energy are all due the wage that the master offers. And that the bitterly poor woman with the single coin to offer pleases God immensely. Our eyes are opened to the strange, unsettling economy of God, and we turn the page scandalized at our new awareness.

Parables also seek to teach by providing images that we seldom experience in theological inquiry. We know what it means to sweep the house, to long for an errant child, to ignore the hurting at the side of the road. What we are less prepared for is the element of surprise, imparting some new idea even before we are able to see it coming and offer a bit of resistance.²

That is normally the role of art. But very like the artistic process, parables sneak in between the lines, and the reader, the listener, lowers all defenses. Here is a story that describes something closer to our own experience. Every one knows about tending a garden. Then, out of the blue, the parable shocks us with an unexpected turn, with a quirky take on human and divine relationship.

Will the preacher on this July morning recognize any of this? Perhaps she will go even farther, not just telling a story of her own to accompany the parable’s story, but finding in the parable the inspiration for her meditation, and the Spirit’s prompting. This notion of the Biblical story as muse for the artist is at least as old as the first reformers of the Christian faith. Martin Luther sought to identify just how the grace and the promise of faith could be known among believers. Faith comes, Luther suggested, (quoting one of his favorite texts in Romans 10:17) from what is heard, and what is

heard comes from the word of Christ, the Gospel, the good news. This Gospel, this word of Christ that is Christian faith, is God’s gift, God’s recurring activity. The beginning points of faith are not our own, but entirely God’s.³

If the Gospel is in fact God’s gift to humanity and the beginning point for faith, then people of that word are required to find ever new and inviting ways to tell the Biblical story. Such proclamation and reception can carry power and integrity for the living of faithful lives. So Christians have for all the ages turned to the arts, painting basilica walls and writing sonnets of praise to God. Virtually every art form has been explored for its theological possibilities. But does art achieve the level of theological proclamation? Can story or sonnet, symphony or weaving be God’s proclamation to the people, as sermon seeks to be?

The most accessible starting place is surely parable, a literary form with which church members and clergy alike feel rather cozy. Parables are sometimes the odd aunt, the curious cousin. But they are dependably curious, old friends really. That is why we might be inclined to welcome the artist’s reflection upon the parable. The parable, after all, can stand up for itself. But what are we to make of the artist who challenges and wrestles, laughs at and cries with these stories, in ways that few church folk would dare to do with stories of the annunciation, or the baptism of Christ, or even the healing miracles?

While much of scripture engages with the traditional issues of law and covenantal relationship, parables allow a more open and free engagement with moral issues. That is why people sit forward in the pew (or cross their legs and try to disengage) when parables are read in worship. In parable, Jesus invites us to be involved with the questions of faith and the moral life on a newly creative level. And if correctly heard, that is enough to frighten, or to delight, but certainly not to bore.

A mustard seed is sown in fertile soil. It is the tiniest of seeds, barely visible to the naked eye. It looks vulnerable, easily lost, immediately forgotten. It is a bit like each one of those sitting in the pews of that Presbyterian Church on a Sunday morning in July. Not all that significant, in the scheme of things. But well nurtured, the seed grows into a fragile seedling, into a healthy plant, and from there, a bush, a tree strong and proud for all to see. So strong, in fact, that the weak, the birds of the air, can make in its branches a home of safety and security. Might the church member at the end of the pew, if well nurtured, become such a pillar of strength for all who come with need? Such a hope could prove to be a satisfying conclusion for the one who has paid attention on that summer morning. But only if the artistic form offered by Jesus takes life on this summer morning, only if the preacher is able to draw on her best creative capacities, breathing meaning into a story so often before heard. The question remains. Would leaving behind the homiletic form, and engaging in the creative process of art, invalidate this day’s proclamation?

Art can speak too to those who never open the heavy doors of a church, who are acquainted neither with the Bible’s wisdom

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nor the preacher's theologizing. Because parables stand alone, and do not require a full acquaintance with salvation history, they are far more accessible to the non-believer and to the agnostic. In our society, where there is a great hunger for meaning, though an ever diminishing patience for the institutional church, those who care about the value of scripture need to find ways to communicate

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with those who are not likely to hear a sermon anytime soon. That means that more is possible, and more is required of preachers and theologians than tidy analogies for the confirmed believer. Biblical texts that bear power, complexity, and import, deserve to be introduced to the non-believer in post-modern society with the greatest energy and imaginative art that the church can muster.

But does the artist's response, in fiction or in dance, in music or in painted canvas, serve as a worthy reflection on God's word? Might it even replace the word preached and proclaimed?

John Calvin, in his own sermon on II Timothy 3:16-17, suggests what the written reflection on the Biblical text ought to include.

Let him that speaketh, speak according to the Word of God: that is, let him show that he doth not thrust himself in rashly, nor patch up with any of his own works, but that he holdeth forth the truth of God in its purity; he must make his doctrine edifying to the people, that God may be honoured thereby.⁴

Calvin recognizes that there are dangers inherent in the creative process, and perhaps in all of art. Calvin is concerned with the ways in which the written word, and especially the sermon, can lift up the preacher instead of “the truth of God in its purity.” Here, a sense of suspicion about the artist in service of that which is less than holy.

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin suggests just how it is that the written word holds tremendous value. “It is a singular privilege that God deigns to consecrate to (Godself) the mouths and tongues of human beings in order that God's voice may resound in them.”⁵ If God moves in the mouths and tongues of people, if God speaks through them, then the spoken word, the written word, might aspire to reach the level of the holy.

Calvin's contemporary, the Zurich reformer Heinrich Bullinger, insists that Scripture is the Word of God written and that preaching is the Word of God proclaimed.⁶ The word preached is the Word of God. What of the story written in order to illumine a parable? What of the sculpture shaped, and song sung?

Can we take this reformation notion even farther, and suggest that the word written, even in a creative story based on

the Scriptures, can become the Word of God? Such a claim would require, within the realm of Reformed theology, both a deep and faithful understanding of the Biblical text, and a community who will contextualize that understanding. As we have already seen, Calvin would be concerned about any artistic creation that fails to lift up “the truth of God in its purity.”⁷ But if that is indeed the goal of a work of art, which is based on the Scriptures, then Calvin might not object that the literary form of sermon has been lost, in favor of mere artistic expression.

Perhaps the Biblical word, and parable in particular, can inspire in the artist not just reflection on the faith story as must, but proclamation of the word of God. If so, then this divinely inspired artist might reach not only those who expect to hear that word, in hot churches on summer Sundays, but believers and unbelievers alike who long to be moved by the artist's yearning for truth and meaning. If a painting or a film or a jazz piano piece is able to meet the Christian's longing for meaning and even provide an entrance point into the story of redemption, if the artistic expression is able to suggest both the paradox of human experience and our hope for change that finds possibility in the drama of Christian faith, then such art is surely worthy of the attention of every Christian theologian and pastor.

We might then move into a post-homiletic age, in which we consider parables and indeed all of scripture as art form with theological integrity, and explore the themes and directions the Biblical word suggests to secular society. Such art, directed toward that society, might find not just sustenance but even power and great meaning when well planted and nurtured, and when given the opportunity to be linked with the faith story as so many sermons over so many centuries have done.⁸ Such art would address the longing for meaning so evident in American culture, extending the gospel's hope well beyond church communities.

There is, however, a significant problem with which we must contend. By its very definition, true artistic expression must be quite free from any of the constraints of theological doctrine or contextual pulpit. Sermons gain power and meaning within the context of Christian worship. They are written and delivered to a particular community, a particular congregation, seeking to bring the Biblical text to life in order to engage and strengthen the faith of those gathered. That is really the aim and purpose of the word preached.

While other art forms might well seek to reach those people who sit, Sunday after Sunday, in church pews, the artist also seeks to reach beyond those pews, to those who are not normally included in the horizon of pulpit rhetoric and conversations of Christian theology.

Artistic expression, like parables, stands outside the church door. While the Christian artist will perhaps have little interest in de-authorizing scripture as ultimate story, ultimate reality, that same artist will, quite like the teller of the Gospel parables, find ways to challenge without any need to reassure, ways to question without any desire to answer, ways even to upset and infuriate with no pastoral sensitivity whatsoever.

There is both freedom and theological integrity in the artist's creative process, a freedom and integrity that might well be too

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often missing from the sermon writer's toolbox. There are, at the very least, some elements of the artist's life that would serve the preacher well.

The life stories that I've listened to day after day for two decades of parish ministry are not, after all, constrained by the literary or stylistic forms that most find acceptable for the Christian pulpit. The anguish of real lives is more intense than any congregation wants to endure. And the ecstatic joy of life well lived is generally not spoken on Sunday mornings. We live lives that are at once profane and holy. We are sometimes angry, and work that anger out in hurtful and vengeful ways. Art allows for such emotions. The sermon simply does not.

What preaching can do is proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, in the language and context of the people gathered. Art, be it the creative word or the painted canvas, is less able to do that effectively, contextually, and personally.

Art can invite an audience to draw their own conclusions, answers that sermons seldom dare to leave unsaid. Art can ask more of the engaged participant. And most art is intended to be revisited and considered more than once, giving the artist the freedom to take more risks and make more demands.

It is not too much to say that art expresses truth in a way that sermons fail to do. The unadorned and honest story of people's lives can be represented, even in the midst of a theological reflection, with the artist's voice.

The theologian as artist might well find this process to be tremendously freeing, when allowed to begin the conversations that are generally shushed by a congregation awaiting a sermon—shushed by the homiletic self-editor if not by the congregation themselves. The artist's freedom from staking the claim of the Christian gospel allows that claim even deeper roots. Art is perhaps an exercise more in tilling the soil than in collecting the harvest.

The artist might well discover a willingness to challenge the role of God in human life much more freely than does a preacher or theologian tied to pulpit or academy. Without the weight of pulpit robes or academic discipline, without the duty to represent a particular theological tradition, there begins an honest exploration of the intersection between human experience and the Word of God. The artist can explore just how outrageous it is to be the son who stays home, in the Parable of the Prodigal. The artist can wonder how very difficult it is to decide which of the many lying at the side of the road are worthy of our compassion—and to confess to the mix of motives that causes us to act with kindness when that is our choice.

If Reformed theology in the last century was continually concerned about the human inclination to limit God by our own inadequate words about God, to reduce God to our own theology, our own talk of God, the artistic license invites a very different sort of exploration of the experience of the divine. And if, in the moment that we attempt to tell of that experience in human language we fall short of that holy instance, in art we are able to circumvent the process that causes us to fall short of talking of God with complete integrity. The artist attempts only to give life to the experience of the one who is feeling the touch of the holy.

In speaking the name of God we probably fail to perceive it, to understand it. We claim ownership, and in that very claim we no longer get it. But if instead we paint a scene, offer a character, compose a song, then there is at least the possibility that the one who experiences that artistry will enter that scene too, and join the character in perceiving something of the presence of God, or in becoming poignantly aware of God's absence.

Does art in which the Biblical parables are used as muse reach Calvin's goal of the Word of God itself? For if the Word proclaimed in sermon is itself the Word of God, then perhaps the Word expressed in other art forms can be that Word of God as well, and art reflecting on Biblical texts might serve as a way to reach beyond the pews to people who sit far from any congregation's hospitality, never to open a church door.

It is not. In the Word proclaimed, in the doing of theology through the preaching of the Word, we are the church. We don't stand alone, making up Christian faith from whole cloth. While there might be, while there in fact need be some elements of the writerly craft, some elements of art in the composition of the sermon preached, we preach and live the faith within the context of other believers and within a particular tradition.

The artistic process, of writing, of painting, of sculpting or composing, is a delight for faithful people because it allows the artist to step apart from the tradition, to intentionally turn it aside. That is a valid and probably essential aspect of the artistic process. But it is not in the Word preached.

To say that differently, art must serve the ends of art, in the end, not the Word of God, but the word of one writer, the work of one painter, the song of one composer, expressing the power of human story, and perhaps God's story too.

For the holy work of art, surely that is enough.

“It is not too much to say that art expresses truth in a way that sermons fail to do.”

ENDNOTES

- ¹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Toward a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975), p. 123.
- ² Brian C. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) p. 9.
- ³ Dillenberger, John, ed. *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 212-230.
- ⁴ John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), p. 120.
- ⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 1011-1101.
- ⁶ *Second Helvetic Confession, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, Part I: The Book of Confessions (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1996).
- ⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 979.
- ⁸ Gila Safran Naveh, *Biblical Parables and Their Modern Re-Creations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 7. ❁

Book Reviews

Testimony and Tradition: Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought. By Alan P.F. Sell. Aldershot UK & Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005. 376 pp. \$130.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0754640825.

Collections of essays are like buffets: some are cafeteria lines of predictable steam table food while others display a range of surprising, imaginatively prepared dishes. *Testimony and Tradition* is a rich collection from Alan Sell, composed of papers written during his years in the Chair of Christian Doctrine and Philosophy of Religion at the United Theological College, within the Aberystwyth and Lampeter School of Theology at the University of Wales.

The thirteen essays in the collection range from Sell's inaugural lecture, "Conservation and Exploration in Christian Theology," to the concluding "Reminiscence, Reflection, Reassurance." In between are essays both wide-ranging, such as "Reformed Theology: Whence and Whither?" and restricted, such as "Andrew Fuller and the Socinians." American readers might be tempted to bypass studies of Andrew Fuller, Henry Grove, or even P.T. Forsyth, but avoiding unfamiliar dishes only deprives theological diners of some taste treats. Together with essays of obvious relevance to the current North American theological context, close studies of British figures from previous centuries provide a wide-ranging examination of the Reformed approach to Christian faith and life.

Alan Sell is a theologian from the Congregationalist stream of the Reformed tradition. He "half-jokingly" notes that he would like his gravestone to be inscribed "Minister of the Gospel," followed by the footnote "Of the Dissenting sort." It is his conviction that the Dissenting witness needs to be made because it goes to the heart of "the Gospel of God's free, Church-convoking grace." North American Reformed thought, dominated by Presbyterian sensibilities, can benefit from hearing Sell's sympathetic treatment of free church ecclesiology and social witness.

But satisfaction is not only found in sampling unfamiliar fare. "Conservation and Exploration in Christian Theology," "A Renewed Plea for 'Impractical' Divinity," and "Reformed Theology: Whence and Whither?" are particularly notable contributions to the Reformed conversation. Sell approaches vital issues with erudition, insight, and dry wit. The combination provides the reader with knowledge, a spur to thought, and a bit of fun.

A small taste of Sell's essays may whet the appetite for a more complete repast. In "Reformed Theology: Whence and Whither?"—an address given at a 1999 Reformed Studies Centre conference at Cambridge—Sell offers three positive "whither" declarations coupled with cautionary words.

First, "we should do well to remember that Reformed theology is catholic in intention, but ever at risk of affording hospitality to the sectarian demon." Of all the ecclesial traditions emerging from the 16th century Reformation, the Reformed family of churches is the most fragmented. What has led to this sorry history of serial schisms, and how might we draw on our catholic intentions to overcome our sectarian demons? Alan Sell offers some intriguing insights into the Reformed past and some overtures to a more faithful future.

In this issue (continued from page 1):

- ✧ *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* by Jaroslav Pelikan
- ✧ *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth* by John Yocum
- ✧ *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575* edited by Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi
- ✧ *Theology Today: Reflections on the Bible and Contemporary Life* by Patrick D. Miller
- ✧ *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period* by Richard E. Burnett
- ✧ *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* by John Hick
- ✧ *Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* by Donald K. McKim
- ✧ *Witness Without Parallel: Eight Biblical Texts That Make Us Presbyterian* by Earl S. Johnson, Jr.

Second, "we should remember that Reformed theology has a comprehensive sweep in principle and manifests a certain lacunae in practice." Readers may or may not agree with Sell's identification of lacunae, but his exploration helps to rescue Reformed thought from a kind of ecclesial docetism that substitutes idealization for honest realism.

Third, "the Reformed have a theological method which is integrally related to their pneumatology and to their *completed* ecclesiology, but which is open to abuse in more than one way." Wedges between Spirit, Bible, and Church that spawn both individualistic spirituality and biblicism, and an ecclesiology that fails to embrace both the ministry of the whole people of God and the "priestly" governance of the body, are but two of the abuses that Reformed churches must grapple with.

Perhaps these few notes from one essay will evidence the value of Alan Sell's life-long contribution to Reformed thought. One prime value is found in his inaugural lecture at Aberystwyth: "Theologians may or may not be ministers of the Gospel, but ministers of the Gospel ought to be theologians. They comprise a second category of theological conservationists and explorers." *Testimony and Tradition* is not a mere intra-academic conversation, but an invitation to the whole people of God in Reformed churches to know their tradition well so that their testimony may be faithful and fruitful.

A review of *Testimony and Tradition* would not be true to its subject without an indication of Alan Sell's delightful humor, found on nearly every page. His inaugural lecture begins by quoting W.H. Auden: "A professor is one who talks in someone else's sleep," and noting a possible professorial obituary: "His gifts were not of the popular sort." Sell's "Reminiscence, Reflection, Reassurance" contains the observation that the Westminster Shorter Catechism answers the question, "What is the chief end of man?" with "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." However, Sell goes on to say, "It is not difficult to find examples of those who would utterly repudiate the *Catechism's* answer."

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Alan Sell does not repudiate the *Catechism's* answer, which is one of the reasons he is such a good conversation partner.

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Barth on the Descent into Hell: God, Atonement and the Christian Life. David Lauber. Barth Studies. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004. 186 pp. \$94.95 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0754633419.

Of the second article in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, [God's] only son, our Lord," Karl Barth wrote: "With these words we step into the great centre of the Christian creed" (Karl Barth. *Credo*. New York. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1962. p. 39). Before these words become our confession, they announce a decision that has been made about us, from beyond us, to which our affirmation (or denial) can only be a response. If the second article is the creed's center, the clauses that deal with Christ's death and resurrection are, Barth wrote, "the centre within this centre" (p. 83).

David Lauber takes his readers on a journey into Barth's exposition of the descent into hell. Jesus' death in God-abandonment is, says Lauber, "the culmination of his life and passion . . . lived and endured *pro nobis*—on our behalf and in our place" (p. 1).

The study is enriched by bringing Barth's Basel colleague Hans Urs von Balthasar into the conversation with his perspective on Holy Saturday. Lauber also engages, with commendation and critique, the late Alan Lewis' *Between Cross and Resurrection*.

There are more reasons to appreciate and commend this book than space will allow here. From my perspective as a pastor, I mention but two.

First, Lauber's study clarifies, deepens and, for some, perhaps redeems the doctrine of "substitutionary atonement." Far from being an abstract legal transaction subject to mechanistic demands and obligations, atonement is the profoundest act of God's sovereign love and omnipotent grace. For us, in Jesus Christ, God becomes the Substitute, taking our place and enduring the fullness of his own wrath and judgment. The crucifixion, death, burial, and descent into hell happen within God's own triune life. Christ's passion is neither a symbol of nor a theory about God's way with the world. The passion is itself the very enacted reality of God's reconciling love. The depth of God's love is beyond the capacity of any doctrine to grasp or express. In God's own self-surrender to the human condition and fate—the death of the Son in God-abandonment for us—just so does God love the world and reconcile us to himself.

Second, because God alone is "the Substitute"—because God becomes the "Rejected One"—the work of salvation is complete, perfect, and accomplished once, for all, and forever. Lauber's study

exposes the flaw in that recurring protestant heresy which makes of faith the condition/ "work" necessary to our salvation, as if God's sovereign purpose for us in Jesus Christ is impotent apart from our agreeing to it. In Christ's life and passion God has taken into his triune life the estrangement, the punishment, and the ultimate consequence of evil, has borne them to the fullest extent, and has borne them away. Separation from God can no longer be our destiny. God has not merely offered us a deal, or increased our options. God has determined to give us life—God's own life—with or without our consent, desire or cooperation. Refusing to be without us, God has gathered us into the reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ. There is truly now "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We have no life now, nor have we a future destiny as anything other than God's redeemed children.

This book is filled with grist for the mills of preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and Christian witness in the local congregation. It is a marvelous study in the theological interpretation of scripture, wherein scripture remains paramount, but invites a holistic reading that results in deeper understanding (Chapter 3). It shows how Trinitarian theology nourishes the life of faith (Chapter 4). The descent into hell offers insights into the depth of God's love for the world and for each human being that are nothing less than life-changing, especially for those who live in fear of a wrathful God and do not know that their Judge is their Redeemer. This study also helps us see how God's self-giving love informs our understanding of Christian witness and discipleship in our day (Chapter 5).

Lauber's book is a gift to both church and academy, and a reminder that as the faith of the church seeks understanding, Karl Barth still has much to offer us in our quest.

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Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity. Edited by Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker. Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003. xiv + 449 pp. \$50.00 (paper). ISBN 978-0802847768.

Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity is the product of a consultation of leading Reformed systematic theologians convened by the Center of Theological Inquiry. The main aim of this consultation, which met in March 1999 at the Internationales Wissenschaftsforum in Heidelberg, Germany, was to identify motives in contemporary Reformed thought and to draw from the wells of the Reformed tradition in order to serve the ecumenical church. Containing 28 insightful essays by notable scholars such as Eberhard Busch, Jan Rohls, Bruce McCormack, William Stacy Johnson, Colin Gunton, Daniel Migliore, A. van de Beek, Dirk Smit, Dawn DeVries, George Hunsinger, and Russel Botman, this book offers a helpful overview of the challenges facing Reformed

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theology today. This publication is also enriched by the fact that the consultation wanted to be conscious of the broad spectrum of people, nationalities and rationalities identified within current Reformed scholarship. Consequently contributions are included from scholars from Austria, Canada, China, Czech Republic, England, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Scotland, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland and the USA—thereby representing a more catholic Reformed community. *Reformed Theology* furthermore serves as a good companion volume to an earlier collection of essays entitled *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions* (edited by David Willis and Michael Welker and published by Eerdmans in 1999)—together offering an instructive overview of the state of recent Reformed scholarship.

In a well-crafted introduction, the editors comment that it is “characteristic of Reformed theology to be in constant search for Reformed identity and to define this identity time and again” (p. x). On the other hand, one can also argue that such a constant search for identity may foster an introspective and self-absorbed mentality that conceivably could lead to harmful isolation and a false sense of security. Thankfully most of the essays resist this temptation. While the book indeed seeks to wrestle in diverse, yet overlapping, ways with the nature of Reformed identity, it does this in a manner that attempts to give a renewed account of Reformed theological convictions in the light of the challenges of our rapidly changing societies.

The editors’ introduction also calls attention to the fact that Reformed theology has been “one of the major critical voices which have challenged rationalistic, scientific, moralistic, and political ideologies which claimed to possess the truth, or the only key to it” (p. xi). In addition, the editors emphasize that in issuing this challenge, Reformed theology must also understand itself as a critical and self-critical part of the Christian church as truth-seeking community—therefore the significant reference to identity and ecumenicity in the subtitle of the book. In reaffirming the important link between identity and ecumenicity, the book paves the way for Reformed theology to resist a mindset of enclosed identity as it searches, in communion with others, for truthful speech and embodiment.

Many of the essays use the notions of identity and ecumenicity as interpretive lenses and this gives the book a sense of coherence and structure. Dealing with a range of topics that include the search for Reformed identity in historical continuity and contextual awareness, the shape of Reformed ecclesiology, the different contexts of Reformed pneumatology, the questioning of Reformed doctrines in ecumenical conversation and the ethical profiles of Reformed theology, this collection offers a wealth of insights stemming out of the scholars’ in-depth interaction with the Reformed tradition. Most of the essays offer a perceptive analysis of our cultural contexts and give clear and informative descriptions of the main tenets of the Reformed faith. However, it seems that part of the quest for the revitalization of Reformed theology will require an even greater ability to *relate* in an engaging and vibrant manner the cultural challenges and the logic of the Reformed faith. What is needed is the ability to perform Reformed theology in a

new key that brings Scripture into conversation with our complex cultural constellations in such a way that the liberating voice of Reformed theology is more clearly heard. This said, any future project that strives for the renewal of Reformed theology, and Christian theology as a whole, will gain much from a careful study of this valuable publication.

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Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to the Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition. By Jaroslav Pelikan. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005. liii + 609 pp. \$32.00 (paperback). ISBN 978-0300109740.

In this volume, the late scholar Jaroslav Pelikan accomplishes two purposes: he provides a general historical introduction for his earlier collection *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, which he edited with Valerie Hotchkiss, and he offers a scholarly historical discussion of creeds and confessions that stands on its own (Preface, p. xi). Beginning with definitions and moving through sections on origins, authority, and history of creeds and confessions, he traces continuity and change through twenty centuries of Christian history (p. 34). Pelikan gives equal attention to the themes that abide through the twists and turns of history, and to the peculiar formulations that arise and pass away. Throughout, he argues persuasively that continuity and change are not opposed to one another, but are in fact “mutually supportive and mutually affirming,” and in fact that the continuity of the tradition requires change in particular formulations (p. 29). Early in the volume, he provides luminous discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity and of Christology that illustrate his point about the mutuality of continuity and change.

Pelikan interprets continuity and change in creeds in order to oppose two earlier alternative views: continuity as static and stifling (as he sees in Gibbon), and change as a process of decline that is to be mourned (as he sees in romantic writers like Matthew Arnold). In the face of these negative views of continuity and change, he offers an historical vision that embraces change as the necessary counterpart of living continuity in tradition.

This immense scholarly volume provides a detailed historical survey of creeds and confessions, a reference work that should be required for historical and theological scholars of every Christian tradition. Though most readers will likely use it for reference rather than reading it straight through, *Credo* speaks in accessible, engaging voice that invites sustained reading.

One strength that marked all of Pelikan’s scholarship was his deep knowledge of original languages, from Greek, Hebrew, and Latin to Slavic, Romance, and Germanic languages. This wide-ranging linguistic competence enables him in this work to

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examine the varying roles of creeds and confessions in churches both East and West, opening up the Eastern church traditions in a way that many Western scholars have not been able to do. In this volume, for instance, his discussion of “Affirmations of Faith in Eastern Orthodoxy” (chapter 14) points out that many earlier scholars misunderstood the role of confessions in Eastern orthodoxy, assuming that they function in a way similar to Western Protestant and Catholic formulations. Pelikan explains that for Eastern churches, the liturgy is the “preeminent confession of faith” (p. 405), far exceeding the importance of confessional doctrinal statements. This is particularly helpful for Western traditions to hear, since we have at times regarded doctrinal formulation as more important than liturgical participation.

Another helpful contribution of this volume is Pelikan’s winsome, concise argument for creeds and confessions. He explains that confessions of faith are rooted in what he calls “the twofold Christian imperative, to believe and to confess what one believes” (p. 34). Having faith and articulating faith are not optional for Christians, argues Pelikan; they are at the very center of New Testament witness, and they have characterized the tradition ever since. This argument is particularly helpful in responding to those who wonder why creeds and confessions are important or necessary.

In this work, Pelikan offers his readers the culmination of a lifetime of scholarship on creeds and confessions. He illumines why they are necessary, while attending in detail to the varied ways they have functioned in particular times and places. Reading this volume leaves one with deep appreciation for and excitement about the dynamism of creeds and confessions that have sustained and nurtured Christian faith over 2000 years. He concludes his work with an illuminating analogy: creeds and confessions are like CDs, which can be stacked on a shelf, shipped, preserved for generations without ever being played or heard. “Yet it is their very ‘inertness’ and static quality, their continuity, that enables them . . . to become suddenly dynamic in the sound of a Beethoven quartet or Mozart’s Magic Flute . . . Historically, that is precisely what creeds and confessions have repeatedly done through the centuries. And they can go on doing it” (p. 515). Though Jaroslav Pelikan himself now rests from his labors, his work will continue to nourish and inspire scholars and practitioners of the Christian faith for generations to come.

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Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth. By John Yocum. Barth Studies, vol. 1. John Webster, ed. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004. xxiii + 200 pp. \$99.95 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0754633228.

Scholarship on Karl Barth’s theological method is multiplying, and to the growing corpus comes yet another study: *Ecclesial*

Mediation in Karl Barth, by John Yocum. This book is the first in a series published by Ashgate and edited by John Webster of the University of Aberdeen and by George Hunsinger of Princeton University, both already well-established as leading interpreters in contemporary Barth studies.

Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth takes up one of the central themes in Barth’s theology: the relation between divine and human action. Yocum attempts to analyze Barth’s late rejection of the concept of sacrament (especially in *Church Dogmatics 4/4* and the *Baptism Fragment*) and compares this with Barth’s earlier work as to its relation of the divine and human action. Yocum surveys *CD* from the first three volumes up through volume four, with a close reading of the Baptism Fragment. He notes an increasing tendency to set up human agency and divine agency as rivals to each other, which he argues is not present in the earlier material. It is this that results, according to Yocum, in Barth’s rejection of, for one thing, infant baptism.

Yocum observes that Barth’s late anti-sacramentalism is not necessarily a correction of his earlier theology, but a later subversion of important elements of it. Indeed, Yocum calls the later innovation in *CD* 4.4 “radical,” not only vis-à-vis the Great Tradition but even within the context of Barth’s own theology. Yocum argues that Barth has actually changed his ecclesiology, insofar as Barth’s rejection of the sacraments is not logically consistent nor is it a logical implication of his doctrine of election that emerged in the latter part of the Doctrine of Reconciliation. According to Yocum, in Barth’s ethicizing of the sacraments he makes an affirmation in one theological locus at the price of negation in another.

Yocum wants to take seriously Barth’s polemics against both modern Protestantism and the *analogia entis*, which Barth understood to be the basis of Roman Catholicism. This polemic comes out strongly in the Baptismal Fragment. Thus Yocum claims that Barth’s theology of *Ecclesial Mediation* should be understood in light of “positions or consequences of positions that he wants to oppose, as well as affirmations that he wants to safeguard, or for which he wants to gain a hearing” (p. xix). Yocum’s recognition of Barth’s polemical treatment here sheds light on some of the tensions and reversals within *CD*.

For the most part, Yocum keeps his argument with Barth scholarship in the notes, in order to be able to spend more time exegeting Barth’s text for his own arguments. This is relatively rare in Barth scholarship, and I, for one, am grateful.

One minor criticism I would have for Yocum is his tantalizingly brief references throughout the book to Yves Congar. Yocum suggests Congar and the theologians of the Roman Catholic *ressourcement* as dialogue partners for Barth. These references could have been expounded upon and stretched, yet in the end this might have taken Yocum away from his more specific task. Maybe some day we will see a book from Yocum on Barth and the theologians of the *ressourcement*.

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Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504-1575. Edited by Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi. Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004. 300 pp. \$34.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-0801028991.

Two claims are made in the introduction of this volume of collected essays, gathered together to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Heinrich Bullinger's birth: that Bullinger is "the forgotten reformer of the sixteenth century" (emphasis is in the original) and that he is "the man above all responsible for the construction of the Reformed church in the sixteenth century" (p. 17). These are the sort of claims that make for good hooks, but they are usually not helpful as a real measure of the success of a book. There are simply too many questions that cannot be answered in anything approaching an objective manner; we have here assertions without evidence (and one must ask what kind of evidence would be necessary to substantiate these claims).

But that's okay. Whether or not the book can make a special case for Bullinger being "the" forgotten reformer (out of the hundreds of other possible candidates), and whether or not he can be seen as bearing the responsibility for the construction of the Reformed church (which of several different kinds of measure would one use?), one thing remains: an engaging and illuminating set of essays that examine Bullinger as reformer, pastor, preacher, theologian, etc. One puts down this volume not only knowing more about Bullinger than when one started (in all likelihood), but one also finishes these essays with a greater appreciation for Bullinger. In fact, this volume does a wonderful job of reminding us that, as with many important figures in the history of the sixteenth-century Reformation, Bullinger served well in a variety of roles, highlighting the fact that his talents were many and his dedication to the church was remarkable.

After a well-deserved note of gratitude to the late Edward A. Dowey, Jr., who worked so hard to increase awareness of the work and importance of Bullinger, and an introduction that (caveats notwithstanding) serves well to frame the collection of essays, the work starts with a posthumously edited chapter by Professor Dowey on Bullinger's theology and method, which provides a very helpful overview of Bullinger as a theologian. The essays that follow cover topics in Bullinger's theology (ranging from the Trinity on the one hand, marriage on the other) and ecclesiology (worship, ministry); they examine genres of his writing (the *Decades*, vernacular spiritual writings); and they look at particular kinds of work in which he was engaged (Bullinger as historian, educator, correspondent, and politician).

Almost (though not quite) all of the essays work within a collection such as this one because they elicit (in this reader, anyway) a desire to read more Bullinger, dig deeper into his thought, and compare his life's work with that of the more thoroughly studied reformers. Mark Taplin's essay on the Trinity, for example, is a very instructive case study in how Bullinger helped to develop the Reformed "synthesis of scripture and tradition" (p. 99), one that, while relying upon scripture, understood scripture to

stand under a rule of faith that embodied the Apostolic tradition. Rather than replacing the authority of tradition with the authority of scripture, Bullinger refused to accept this "false dichotomy" (p. 97). Along the way in his analysis, Taplin explores Bullinger's distinction between the words of scripture and the meaning of scripture. The person who emerges from this case study is a careful, thoughtful exegete very much worth further study, among other reasons, for his nuanced approach to biblical and Christian language. This recognition of Bullinger's suppleness with regard to language comes in other essays as well (for example, Peter Opitz's examination of the *Decades*), and not only in terms of theory: Bruce Gordon's presentation of Bullinger's spiritual writings convincingly shows the power of those writings to move the reader to "tears and rage" when focusing upon the wounds of Christ (p. 127).

Other readers will find other touchstones, no doubt, but that is the point: this volume provides the type of reasoned (and seasoned) scholarship that always points beyond itself, back to the source, thereby offering not simply observations, nor even conclusions, but more importantly an invitation to read for oneself the texts that have been so painstakingly examined in the production of these essays. So, even if one cannot come away from this book knowing that Bullinger is *the* forgotten reformer, and even if there is nothing therein that really proves that he was, above all others, responsible for the construction of the Reformed church, that makes little difference. The book makes one want to *read* Bullinger. What could possibly make for a better 500th birthday celebration? At that level, the volume succeeds wonderfully, and its editors and authors are to be warmly commended.

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Theology Today: Reflections on the Bible and Contemporary Life. By Patrick D. Miller. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press. 2006. 137 pp. \$16.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-0664229924.

Editorials are a genre unto themselves. Traditionally, they reflect the values and shared assumptions of their constituency as understood by the writer. In addition, they are usually quite hortatory, summoning readers to get themselves together and to measure up to standard values. Woefully short on specific details and safely tucked within their general principles, they offer much but inform little. They are only as good as the wisdom of their writers, and sometimes their goodness is pretty thin. Wisdom carries a cost that few of us have paid. When an editorial writer knows the issues and provides a new, razor sharp perspective, however, we all feel that wisdom becomes part of our own lives.

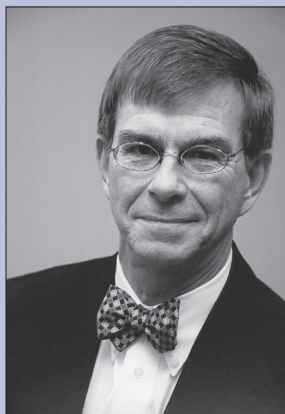
And that is what Patrick Miller did. In a journal like *Theology Today*, where a multiyear conversation among its contributors

IRT Public Lecture Features Samuel E. Balentine

The Institute for Reformed Theology welcomed **Samuel E. Balentine** on September 13, 2007 to Watts Chapel at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education to give the first lecture in a series that will be presented in conjunction with the “Prayer” colloquy.

In his lecture, entitled “Praying East of Eden,” Balentine explored prayer as “the dialogue between God and humans that keeps heaven and earth bound together in mutual commitment.” This dialogue began with a question from God to Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:10a). Balentine depicted prayer as an intimate, honest, and often unvarnished conversation, where God and humans work out their differences in an effort to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. Two convictions generate and sustain this dialogue: first, the Creator of the world is desirous of and responsive to the concerns of human beings; and, second, the contributions of humans are of vital importance, not only for nurturing the relationship with God, but also for preserving and when necessary repairing the world in accord with God’s creational design. On the other side of Genesis 1-2, “East of Eden” in John Steinbeck’s evocative words, the Bible suggests that prayer keeps heaven and earth connected to God’s hopes and expectations for a “very good” world.

Dr. Balentine is Professor of Old Testament at Union-PSCE and is a highly regarded scholar who served on the faculty of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond for 10 years, before joining the Union-PSCE faculty in 2004. He is the author of a major new commentary on the Book of Job as well as numerous other books, including a commentary on Leviticus in the *Interpretation Bible Commentary* series (Westminster John Knox Press) and *The Torah’s Vision of Worship* (Fortress Press, 1999). Before coming to Richmond, Balentine served as a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the general editor of the Smyth and Helwys Bible commentary series, co-editor of *Interpretation*, and a member of the editorial board for *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*. The text of this lecture can be read at our website, www.reformedtheology.org. ☼



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reaches out and snares its readers, we are invited to eavesdrop on the discussions that could change our minds. Miller’s editorials told us what was at stake and explained why we ought to become engaged. This collection, drawn from 1992-2005 issues, re-engages us in their underlying topics.

Miller not only introduced the contents in each issue, his comments went much further. He provided an investigated push. He identified a deeper significance in the articles that we might have overlooked. In the course of this editorial journey, however, Miller did more. The editorials often became miniature essays in themselves. And this is why they remain pungent. Miller’s editorials, we might say, had attitude.

They provoked questions. Should a more attentive reading of the canonical books of scripture lead to new components in the Apostles Creed? Has the traditional theology concerning the church been overrun by sociological studies? Whatever happened to catechisms on our way to theological illiteracy? And more to the point, can we still believe in a God who acts? Miller’s piece written in the fall of 2001 after September 11 is particularly poignant and helpful.

The interrogatory element is obvious. Miller had a way of turning each article into a question. When Miller, for instance, says, “theology is no small part memory . . . sometimes we need to go back to the beginning to see a little more clearly where we are and how we got here,” he helps to ask better questions about our own lives.

The urbane quality of the little pieces belies their pragmatic value. One could use this book as a collection of discussion topics

for a thoughtful adult class. If you did, however, you might let some pedagogical tigers outside of their cages. When Christian education uses material like this it starts conversations that are hard to end.

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Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period. Richard E. Burnett. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004. xv + 312 pp. \$45.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0802809995.

Richard Burnett has given us a careful, reasoned, and documented examination of theological exegesis as Karl Barth’s basic hermeneutical principle. The book’s thesis is that Barth adopted the core of his approach to theological exegesis very early after his break from the dominant liberal Protestantism of his day in 1915. In fact, how Barth had come to believe we are empowered to understand the Bible, Burnett contends, was central to his break. The primary audience for the book is scholars and pastors who want better to understand how and why Barth approaches the Bible as he does.

At the heart of Burnett’s analysis (a revision of his dissertation) is his careful reading and exposition of Barth’s discussion of exegesis and hermeneutical principles in his drafts of the preface to the several editions of his *Römerbrief*. The book includes a forward by Burnett’s dissertation adviser, Bruce McCormack. McCormack

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praises Burnett for helping to show that the basic direction of Barth's exegesis was set by the time of *Römerbrief*.

As is well known, Barth was deeply influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Essentially, Barth saw himself as a follower of Schleiermacher until 1915. Thereafter, Barth did his work more or less consciously in opposition to Schleiermacher (p. 2). Burnett does a strong job of showing how influential Schleiermacher is upon Barth's approach, both in the formation of Barth's earlier liberalism and in his conscious rejection of Schleiermacher's approach after 1915. Essentially, Burnett shows us, Barth's early inheritance from Schleiermacher was an approach to the Bible that was primarily historical and psychological, seeking to understand Paul and other scriptural writers as religious personalities. After 1915, Barth viewed that as exactly the wrong approach to the Bible. It might be interesting, but it did not take seriously, Barth believed, the "subject matter, content, and substance" of the Bible, namely God and God's revelation (pp. 76f). Barth had no problem with the work of historical criticism or other forms of anthropological analysis, but all that was secondary, even incidental, to him. For Barth, exegesis trumps hermeneutics. The reason is that a faithful interpreter seeks to have God address him or her in the course of her reading. Careful attention to the text is of far greater importance to Barth than is concern for the precise nature of a particular text. For example, he once responded to a question whether the serpent in Genesis 3 had "really" spoken. "I would oppose characterizing it as 'myth.' No more can I, on the other hand, characterize it, in the sense of historical science, as 'historical.' . . . But I should like to ask . . . whether it would not be better to hold fast to the fact that 'it is written' and to go on and interest

[our]selves in *what* the serpent said?" (quoted at 262f). This is an example of what Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* calls a "tested, critical naiveté" (quoted at 116).

Burnett also does a good job showing how much Barth's new approach was influenced by his reading of Jean Calvin. When Barth first encountered Calvin's biblical commentaries, he sought to combine the approaches of Calvin and Schleiermacher. After 1915, Barth saw a fundamental inconsistency between them and moved rather consciously to approach the Bible as Calvin did in his commentaries (pp. 250ff). He saw Calvin working patiently, energetically, trusting that the Spirit would permit the wall between the first and sixteenth centuries to become "transparent" (p. 58).

The approaches Barth rejected made any doctrine of inspiration or revelation irrelevant, Barth concluded. He believed that such an approach limited the freedom of God. Burnett argues that Barth's approach, one that focuses on the text of the Bible and awaits the Spirit speaking through that text, is vital for a church and academy that tends to read historically, psychologically, or deconstructively (p. 264).

The book is by no means a quick read. For one who desires to explore deeply an approach to the Bible that emphasizes, first and last, "attention to *the text itself*" (p. 264), the effort to read Burnett will be rewarding.

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The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age. By John Hick. 2d edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. xii + 204 pages. \$24.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-0664230371.

In this revised edition of a book originally published in 1993, John Hick has added a new preface and two new chapters. This book is a concise treatment of the Christology Hick developed out of the "myth of God incarnate" controversy of the 1970's. He argues that no religiously satisfactory literal meaning can be given to the idea of incarnation postulated in the Chalcedonian definition, and that theologians ought to recognize that the idea of the God-man put forward there is, rather, a metaphor that points to the uniquely intense God-consciousness of Jesus that was the source of his extraordinarily faithful living out of the divine rule of love. In the first edition of the book, Hick considered two major strategies that apologists for Chalcedon have taken in order to render the formula meaningful: either by altering the definition of Jesus' humanity through a theory of two minds, or by altering the concept of deity through a theory of divine *kenosis*. After carefully considering several proponents of each of these views, Hick concludes that they both fail to make the Chalcedonian formula intelligible. And precisely because the theologians and philosophers who make these arguments know this to be the case, Hick argues that they

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appeal in the end to a “mystery beyond human comprehension” that is portrayed in the Chalcedonian formula, forgetting that the formula itself is not divine revelation but a humanly devised theological explanation. In this enlarged second edition, Hick adds a chapter considering the Christologies of Anglican theologian John Macquarrie and Roman Catholic theologian Roger Haight. Hick sees Macquarrie as a theologian who has more or less accepted the radical consequences of a view of Jesus based on the best New Testament scholarship, but who still insists on attempting to soften the blows of this view for those who are still attached to the churches’ dogmatic formulas. Writes Hick, “he is more interested in the endless internal churning over of the traditional ideas and language than in attempts to free Jesus and his message from the ecclesiastical wrappings of the past” (p. 160). Although Hick appreciates a great deal of Haight’s attempt to redefine the doctrine of Christ, he thinks that in a “forgivable instance of accommodation to a conservative constituency” Haight unfortunately argued for an ontological incarnation in Jesus based on the idea that Jesus is the historical mediation of God for Christians. For Hick, this is a false move that is not warranted by the sources or by logical reflection on the idea of incarnation. It leads to the further error of attributing to Jesus “worship-worthiness” based on his role as mediator.

Hick has argued consistently that his critical approach to traditional Christology actually opens up the possibility for a more authentic and simpler faith for the man and woman in the pews. He writes, “The ideas of the Trinity and of the two natures of Christ are in fact incomprehensible to most people. In comparison a non-traditional Christian faith can be genuinely simple and yet profound” (p. 187). He anticipates that eventually this simpler, non-traditional faith as commitment to a benign ultimate Reality that is reflected (“incarnated”) in human terms in the lives of great spiritual leaders who reveal a way for living in the face of this Reality is destined to become the common faith of human beings. The worldwide resurgence of fundamentalism in all the great world faiths, however, makes the timetable leading to Hick’s projected future appear to have a distant horizon. This book is an important book for anyone interested in developing a plausible 21st century Christology.

Dawn DeVries

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Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction. By Donald K. McKim. Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2003. xvi + 126 pp. \$14.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-0664502539.

Donald K. McKim is Academic and Reference Editor for Westminster John Knox Press and has authored and edited a number of books on Presbyterianism and the Reformed faith. *Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* presents itself as a study book such as for an adult Sunday school class. Its thirteen chapters, with “Questions for Discussion” at the end of each,

are on revelation, Trinity, creation, providence, humanity, sin, Christology, Holy Spirit, election and predestination, salvation by grace, church, Christian life, and the future life. The book includes ample quotations from the Bible (NRSV), Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and *The Book of Confessions*.

Despite the stated purpose of clarity (p. ix), *Presbyterian Beliefs* deals in an ambiguity. No sooner has McKim written, “My desire is to communicate the major elements of Presbyterian beliefs,” than he also writes, “My goal is to unpack these words and to say as plainly as possible what Presbyterians believe” (p. ix). But there is, of course, a difference between *Presbyterian beliefs* and what *Presbyterians believe*. The first is objective, the second is subjective. The first is official, the second is actual. The first is written, the second often is not. The first is normative, the second experiential. The first is finite, the second is indeterminately large. One can hope that the two are related. But in order to understand that relationship, one must be clear about their distinctiveness as well as their relatedness.

Instead, McKim writes about Presbyterian beliefs and what Presbyterians believe so as to equate them. “This is a book for those interested in Presbyterian beliefs. . . . Perhaps you . . . have wondered what views these people hold” (p. xi). “This book is to introduce Presbyterian beliefs in a simple and straightforward way . . . a concise statement of the major theological viewpoints that Presbyterians hold” (p. xi). It would be helpful to sort this out. Thankfully, the book proceeds by quoting the confessions, not by polling Presbyterians. But once the distinction is blurred, the normative character of the confessions is undercut. They are reduced to the merely descriptive.

Moreover, once McKim has reduced the confessions to being descriptive, it is not difficult for him to regard the Scriptures as merely descriptive and perhaps deficiently so. “Humans are complex persons. We know this now, in our own experience, in ways far different from and beyond what biblical writers envisioned” (p. 38). That is to say, experience trumps revelation, and we now know better than the authors of the Bible.

Given this reductionism, it should not be surprising that the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer, though they are dealt with extensively in the confessions and catechisms, are much neglected in this book. The Apostles’ Creed is mentioned once in the chapter on the Trinity (p. 16). The chapter on Christology quotes question and answer 45 from the Heidelberg Catechism, and the chapter on the future life quotes question and answer 52, which are explications of phrases from the Apostles’ Creed, though this latter is not indicated (pp. 60, 121). The chapter on Christian life mentions, but does not expound upon, the Ten Commandments (pp. 106-107). There is no mention of the Lord’s Prayer in the chapter on worship, because there is no chapter on worship. Preaching and the sacraments are mentioned (pp. 95-102) in the chapter on church, but prayer is not. Worship and prayer are included as aspects of Christian life (pp. 104-106), but the Lord’s Prayer is not. These three documents go far beyond Presbyterianism, but Presbyterian beliefs can hardly be understood apart from them.

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One practical consequence of reducing the confessions and the Scriptures to being descriptive instead of normative and of avoiding the three summary documents of the Christian faith is that while the chapter on Christian life purports to be about sanctification, obedience is mentioned only in general terms. Thus the book avoids dealing with the particular questions vexing the church today.

It is telling that the suggestions “For Further Study” include two books by Shirley C. Guthrie, two by Jack Rogers, and two by Louis B. Weeks, but only one by John Calvin and only one by John H. Leith.

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Witness Without Parallel: Eight Biblical Texts that Make Us Presbyterian. By Earl S. Johnson, Jr. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2003. x + 143 pp. \$14.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-0664502171.

Earl S. Johnson begins his book with a question, “If you were to select passages from the Bible that are the scriptural foundation stones of the Presbyterian Church or the Reformed tradition, which ones would they be?” (p. 1). Within this question is the Reformed understanding of the Bible as central to our life of faith. It is, as the Confession of 1967 states, “a witness without parallel” (*Book of Confessions* 9.27). Scripture is God’s revelation to us and guides our worship, our theology, and our practice of faithful living. Also within Johnson’s opening question is the awareness that all scripture is not equal. Christians, whether they acknowledge their choice or not, choose to assign greater weight to some texts than to others. Johnson finds it both necessary and desirable to give priority to certain biblical texts. Within this work, he demonstrates how eight biblical texts, above others, have been and continue to be central to Presbyterian life and faith.

The eight texts Johnson chooses are not necessarily the most memorized or beloved verses of scripture. Rather, they are texts that form the theological underpinnings of the Reformed tradition

and their implication for faithful Christian life. These eight texts have shaped discussions of the doctrines of the lordship of Christ, justification, creation, predestination, grace, liberation, and Christian hope. Johnson uses these texts to examine the church’s stance on social and moral issues of racial and gender inequality, ecology, homosexuality, and violence.

Johnson examines each text in five different ways. First, he explains what makes the text central to Presbyterian life. He then offers a helpful exegesis of the specific text, placing it in conversation with other biblical texts. The most impressive portion of each chapter is Johnson’s historical research of how each text has been used in the Presbyterian Church and in the Reformed tradition. He outlines the arguments of each side of historical controversies, showing how scripture has been used well and when it has been abused. A broad understanding of how Reformed Christians have used these texts in different contexts throughout history is helpful as Johnson moves into the fourth means of examination: the prospects of using the text rightly in the future. Johnson ends each chapter with several questions for reflection and study.

Johnson’s personal views are obvious within this work, especially in the chapter in which he addresses the question of ordaining gays and lesbians. However, his opinions are not disguised as fact and are supported with his exegetical and historical research. Through this research, Johnson allows readers to draw conclusions that differ from his own. His study questions, in fact, open the door for disagreement and dialogue.

Johnson has created an immensely helpful book. Its subject is timely, and Johnson’s writing is inviting. The format of the book will make it useful in a variety of settings, as it can be easily used by individuals or study group leaders, whether they are clergy or laity. Chapters could be used alone or as part of a larger study of the whole book. Regardless of the format, the book promises to encourage theological reflection and dialogue. As we prepare to live and serve faithfully in a challenging and uncertain future, these biblical texts will undoubtedly continue to ground us, form us, and strengthen us to follow Christ’s call.

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Book Notes

PAUL GALBREATH, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PREACHING AND WORSHIP, UNION-PSCE, RICHMOND, VA

The Companion to the Book of Common Worship. Edited by Peter C. Bower. Louisville, KY: Office of Theology and Worship, 2003. 350 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 978-0664502324.

Ten years after the publication of the Book of Common Worship (BCW), *The Companion to the Book of Common Worship* finally appeared in print. The heart of this book draws from the Supplemental Liturgical Resources (SLR) that led to the development of the BCW. The Companion collects and

reworks much of the SLR material as well as provides additional commentary and insights into ways to understand, apply, and embody the services in both the BCW and the Book of Occasional Services.

In a tradition that holds fast to a directory for worship and eschews a service book approach to worship, the BCW and Companion offer patterns and guides that shape, form, and articulate a Reformed approach to worship. When the Companion is used as a rule-book to close off options, then it loses its unique voice. As a source of consultation *(continued on page 16)*

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THE CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship offers both rigorous scholarship and practical resources to enrich Christian worship in churches throughout North America.

May 20 - 22, 2008: *Philosophy and Liturgy: Ritual, Practice, and Embodied Wisdom* (seminar)

Prince Conference Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan

The renaissance in philosophy of religion has engendered sustained philosophical reflection on a number of key aspects of theology, but there has been a notable paucity of philosophical engagement with a central aspect of religious practice: worship and liturgy. This conference brings together leading scholars in philosophy and theology to investigate key themes in worship with the tools of philosophy, with the ultimate goal of informing practice. There is also the reciprocal goal of letting liturgical practice become a fund for philosophical reflection on classic questions and themes. The conference will thus stage a reciprocal encounter between philosophy and liturgy, with the goal of generating a liturgical philosophy, and a philosophically-informed liturgy. Hosted by James K.A. Smith, John D. Witvliet, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Plenary speakers are: Sarah Coakley, Terence Cuneo, Reinhard Hütter, Peter Ochs, James K.A. Smith, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Call for papers by February 15, 2008. Co-sponsored with Calvin Seminars in Christian Scholarship. For more information, go to: <http://www.calvin.edu/scs/2008/conferences/philosophyandliturgy.htm>.

June 23 - July 18, 2008: *Congregations and Religious Diversity in Contemporary America* (seminar)

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Led by R. Stephen Warner, Professor of Sociology, Emeritus, at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and in collaboration with Seminars in Christian Scholarship, this seminar focuses and capitalizes on the intersection of two recent trends in American religion and American religious studies, the rapidly growing new literature in "congregational studies" and the increasing diversification of local religious institutions in the U.S. Further details can be found at: <http://www.calvin.edu/scs/2008/warner/>.

June 23 - July 3, 2008: *An Overview of Christian Hymnody in Historical Perspective* (seminar)

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

This seminar will offer an historical overview of Christian hymnody with an emphasis on the period since the Reformation and will be led by Edith Blumhofer, of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College. Historical perspective provides a context for thinking about contemporary changes and how other generations have embraced or rejected new styles of Christian song. The seminar will invite participants to understand more deeply the traditions of hymnody that have shaped the church as we know it, with an emphasis on Western hymnody written and sung in the West and what it suggests about larger issues in Christian history and practice, while also considering the use of Western hymns abroad. For more information, go to: <http://www.calvin.edu/scs/2008/hymnody/>.

June 23 - July 2, 2008: *Polyphony Camp: Singing Together for the Fun of It* (workshop)

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Directed by Anne Heider, Roosevelt University, Polyphony Camp is not about rehearsing for a choral performance; it's about sharing the pleasures of singing together. Registration on a first-come-first-served basis; no auditions needed; appropriate for adults and high-schoolers. For details, visit: <http://www.calvin.edu/scs/2008/heider/>.

For more information on these and other events, go to <http://www.calvin.edu/worship/>, call (616) 526-6088, or write the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 1855 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4402.

THE WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

WARC has agreed to unite with the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) to create a new global Reformed body representing more than 80 million Reformed Christians worldwide.

The historic decision was taken at WARC's Executive Committee meeting that was held in Trinidad and Tobago in October 2007. WARC wants the new body to be called the World Communion of Reformed Churches and is calling for a uniting General Council to be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 18-28, 2010.

The key callings of the new Reformed body will be:

- to foster Reformed confessional identity and communion among Reformed churches, and unity in the whole church;
- to promote justice in the economy and the earth, and all of God's creation, and to work for peace and reconciliation in the world;
- to encourage the renewal of Reformed worship and spiritual life as a global family of God's people;
- to strengthen leadership development and the nurture of the covenant community;
- to promote the full participation of women and youth in all aspects of the church's life;

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(continued from page 15)

- to renew a passion among Reformed Christians for God's mission, both witness and service, in a spirit of partnership and unity;
- to interpret Reformed theology for contemporary witness and for the unity of the church.

For more information, go to: http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1327&part_id=0&navi=5. ☼

Booknotes

(continued from page 14)

and exploration it provides a primary starting point for a fuller exploration of the theological images and underpinnings that lie within and beneath the BCW.

This book is an indispensable guide for pastors and worship committees. It is helpful both as a primary resource to discover answers to specific questions (the glossary and index serve as valuable aids in this regard) and as a source for study and conversation for those involved in planning and leading worship services.

Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present. Ed. by Lukas Vischer. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003. 432 pp. \$45.00. ISBN 978-0802805201.

The ambitious title of this collection of essays sets a lofty goal of defining and illuminating Reformed worship in its historical development as well as in its practice in significant areas around the world. The book is the result of a consultation of theological and liturgical scholars from a wide range of countries and a

diverse group of Reformed churches that explored the history of worship in the Reformed church. The resulting collection of essays demonstrates a breadth of knowledge as well as a wealth of perspectives.

After a brief historical background, the authors turn to a series of studies on ways that Reformed congregations express their faith in different geographical settings. These vignettes sketch out contextualized elements of worship practices while pointing to common theological themes that help maintain a sense of Reformed identity. The result is a fascinating glimpse of distinct features that allow one to see new ways that Reformed Christians have embodied practices of form and freedom in their worshipping assemblies. Finally, the volume concludes with a set of essays on major issues facing Reformed churches in the area of worship.

While it falls short of the grandiose claims of the title, this collection is nonetheless a welcome addition that brings together unique voices from different perspectives to explore what worship in Reformed congregations shares in common as well as ways that it may be contextualized. ☼



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