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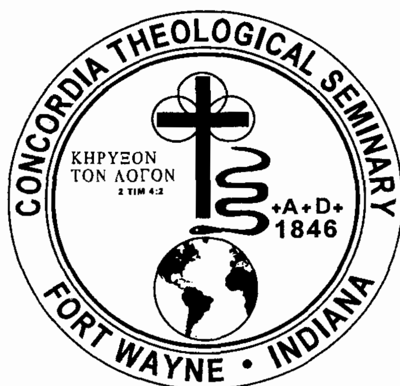

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Book Reviews

***New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817.* By John R. Fitzmier. Religion in North America Series, edited by Catherine L. Albanese and Stephen J. Stein. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998. xii+261 Pages.**

John R. Fitzmier long-time professor of American religious history at Vanderbilt Divinity School and now Dean of the School of Theology at Claremont provided a model of historical narrative and interpretation in his study of Timothy Dwight. Dwight is not a particularly well known figure to confessional Lutheran pastors—but he should be. President of Yale from 1795-1817, Dwight and his institution wielded a significant influence on American culture generally and American Protestantism specifically during the early national period (about 1790-1840). It was during this period of American history that a distinctive form of Lutheranism, the "American Lutheranism" of Samuel Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz, began to emerge, and Timothy Dwight's distinctive theological themes found their way into this expression of Lutheranism. Fitzmier's biography outlines Dwight's life and thought and provides an outstanding entry point for understanding the multifaceted and nuanced thought and experience of Timothy Dwight.

Fitzmier divides the work into five chapters. Following an introduction that introduces the reader to the issue of Dwight's functional blindness—a theme that reappears throughout the book—Fitzmier provides an extended overview of Dwight as the "Light of Yale." Chapters two and three consider Dwight's work as a preacher and theologian respectively, while chapters four and five examine his work as a poet/historian and moralist. The picture that Fitzmier paints illustrates a remarkably insightful and productive theologian who simultaneously embraced and resisted, shaped and rejected, the emerging American culture.

Dwight envisioned an American Protestant church that embodied what he called "Godly Federalism." But more than a articulating a mere abstract theology, Dwight crafted "a distinctively American homiletic" (103). This homiletic "resisted theological precisionism" and sought to overcome the threat of infidelity and immorality. It emphasized the life of sanctification in the hearer—"'ought' and 'should' framed Dwight's homiletics" (104), and was based on Holy Scripture and common sense.

In other words, Dwight shaped American Christianity through his preaching, as well as the preaching of his students. The content of this preaching would have significant effects, reaching also to the field of American Lutheranism. Fitzmier shows that Dwight was in many ways instrumental in the growing dominance of moral government theology in American Christianity. Dwight's doctrine of the atonement did not include any notion of objective or general justification and the doctrine of imputation. Rather, Christ's death vindicates or fulfills God's law so that the possibility for the salvation of individuals exists. As Dwight writes: "The atonement of Christ in no sense makes it necessary that God should accept the

sinner on the ground of justice; but only renders his forgiveness not inconsistent with the divine character. Before the atonement, he could not be forgiven. After the atonement, this impossibility ceases" (118). Thus Christ's work merely fulfills the law for the law's own sake—not for the sake of sinners. The righteousness of Christ is not applied to the sinner through the means of grace. Rather the sinner now has the opportunity to be justified—such justification being inseparably bound up with the moral life of the person who willingly takes the burden of obedience to the law upon himself. This, of course, is very close to the theology of Schmucker and Kurtz, and Dwight's influence is apparent in the work of both of these Lutherans. Above all, the American Lutherans were concerned with the sanctified life interpreted in a strictly moral fashion. Scripture and common sense were the means for instructing and engendering the Christian life. That life would express itself, in the case of the American Lutherans, in advocacy for social reform, such as temperance and abolitionism.

Which is all to say that this is an excellent exercise in theological biography whose implications reach into the area of American Lutheranism. Still, several typographical errors mar the text—careful editing should have excised these. Also, the word "eschew" appears far too often. A fine index and outstanding notes show the breadth of Fitzmier's command of the sources. Fitzmier has produced a model of theological biography. It weaves together compelling narrative and careful theological definition, all the while engaging the existing historiography, in both a supplementary and corrective sense.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

***When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms.* By Ingvar Fløysvik. Saint Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997.**

This book, one of the first publications of Concordia Academic Press, is a revision of Ingvar Fløysvik's doctoral dissertation at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. As the title indicates, the book is a detailed study of the Old Testament complaint psalms, the theme of which may well be summarized as *When God Becomes My Enemy*. Since this group of psalms has consistently challenged—and oftentimes frustrated—those who teach and pray the psalter, Fløysvik's punctilious examination and explanation of them is a welcome, though not wholly adequate, theological treatment.

The 206-page work is divided into three sections. The first section defines and delineates those psalms that fall into the category of complaint, explains the rationale behind Fløysvik's helpful structural analysis which accompanies his exegesis, and provides a series of questions one ought to ask regarding each psalm to ascertain the theological assumptions of the author. Drawing upon the work of E. S. Gerstenberg and C. C. Broyles, Fløysvik defines complaint psalms as "psalms in which God is partly or totally blamed for the distress the people or the individual are currently experiencing" (17). Using this definition, one finds nineteen such psalms in the psalter.

The second and major section contains a thorough exegetical treatment of five complaint psalms (Psalms 6, 44, 74, 88, and 90), which exemplify the characteristics of the corpus. Each psalm is analyzed according to the same pattern: translation, translation notes, structure, stanzas, progression in content and mood, the problem, the prayer, and the appeal. Fløysvik's scrupulous dissection of and concise commentary on these texts provides the reader with a wealth of very helpful material.

The final section explicates the theological assumptions and implications of the complaint psalms. In particular, Fløysvik seeks to address the cause of God's wrath in these psalms, how the psalmist responded to this wrath in the language of prayer, and what kinds of appeals were used by the psalmist in his attempt to escape from the divine anger under which he suffered. In the conclusion, Fløysvik observes:

> The psalmists do not explain away their suffering either by pretending that it is not real or by seeing it as what one simply has to expect in this world. They do not grant that anything is beyond their God's control. Still, they do not accept the affliction as God's will in a fatalistic manner or in such a way that one has to submit to it as good, just, and inescapable. They also do not assume that God's wrath in their cases is provoked by some unknown sin of which they need to repent. They protest God's work of wrath and pray that he may work according to his character . . . Faith sticks to God's self-revelation in the midst of conflicting evidence. That is the contribution of these psalms (175-176).

In the introduction, Fløysvik notes that he has restricted his study to deal only with the "theological assumptions of the ancient Israelite believers" (14). Thus he does not attempt to view the complaint psalms from a christological perspective, even though, for example, Psalm 22 falls into this category (one may see page 14, note 3). One wonders, however, how adequate a theological assessment can be given of psalms that have been stripped of their christological import. The lack of any attempt to fill out the skeletal framework of the complaint psalms with messianic "flesh and blood" constitutes the only real weakness of this otherwise fine piece of scholarship.

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***The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth.* By Uwe Siemon-Netto, with foreword by Peter L. Berger. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994. 186 Pages.**

This book is an important corrective to the distortion of the story of Confessional Lutheranism during the Third Reich. In spite of the immense number of books dealing with the *Kirchenkampf*, or "church struggle," under

Hitler, the role of Confessional Lutherans has not been properly treated. Rather, historians biased in favor of the theology of Karl Barth, the Barmen Declaration, and the Union churches have seriously distorted it. An impartial history of the Lutheran churches and their leading theologians since 1933 is urgently needed.

Netto left a career in journalism to study theology. In analyzing the unwarranted intrusion of clichés in the understanding of recent history, he follows his teacher, Peter L. Berger, as well as Anton Zijderveld. Several dominant ones that he confronts include the cliché that Martin Luther taught unquestioning civil obedience and quietism and thereby contributed to the rise of Hitler and National Socialism, and the cliché that Marxism in eastern Germany could never be overcome with the reunion of East and West, a notion that has been conclusively disproved.

Chapter 2, "Luther: The Villain," brings the reader *in medias res.* Netto lists writers who have thus distorted Luther: Thomas Müntzer, Richard Marius, Friedrich Engels, Alexander Abusch, William Temple, William R. Inge, Peter F. Wiener, William L. Shirer, Thomas Mann, Ernst Troeltsch, and Reinhold Niebuhr. For some unknown reason, he omits Karl Barth, and he writes his book as though he were unconscious of the fact that the things he is writing are a refutation of the theology of Barth.

In chapter 3, "Luther: No Villain after All?" Netto draws upon the work of the late Luther scholar, Franz Lau, as well as the writings of the Reformer himself, to overthrow the notion that Luther taught political quietism and unconditional submission to the demands of an evil government. He rightly shows that there were two periods in Luther's writings, and that after the Diet of Augsburg (1530), Luther taught the need of the lower political authorities to resist the emperor if he suppressed the gospel. Netto further strengthens his case by showing how the Gnesio-Lutherans, the strictest interpreters of the Reformer, taught the right to resist the imperial government when it turned against the evangelical estates. Here he cites the work of Oliver Olson on the Magdeburg Confession, the document that also served as the forerunner for the teachings of resistance of Calvin's followers.

> A key paragraph of this Magdeburg Confession states clearly that subjects of authority and even children and servants do not owe obedience to those rulers, parents or employers 'who want to lead them away from true fear of God and honorable living.' For those authorities and parents 'will become an ordinance of the devil instead of God, an ordinance which everyone can and ought to resist with a good conscience' (86).

Netto points out that Bonhoeffer drew inspiration from the precedent of Flacius and the Magdeburg Confession.

In chapter 4, we find "Luther vindicated" by reference to Carl Goerdeler, a notable leader in the resistance movement. Goerdeler sturdily resisted the Nazis while mayor of Leipzig. Later, he resigned to protest their removal of the

monument to Felix Mendelssohn from the front of the famous concert hall, the *Gewandhaus* (110). Goerdeler, who advocated nonviolent resistance, did not favor a bloody uprising against Hitler, but worked instead to unseat him by peaceful means: by political opposition within Germany and by international pressure from without. He made several trips abroad to enlist the aid of Roosevelt, Churchill, and other foreign leaders in overthrowing Hitler and stopping the Nazi outrages, such as persecution of the Jews. Unfortunately, these world leaders were not interested in working with the German opponents of Hitler and actually foiled the resistance movement in order to advance other interests.

In this context, Netto uncovers the racism inherent in the Germanophobia of Vansittart, Churchill, and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. In a section on "cliché thinking in the White House," Netto tells how the Roosevelts regarded the Germans as incurable "militarists," and how the president, "craving for Stalin's approval and friendship," could not see the close similarity between Hitlerite Germany and the Soviet Union. Roosevelt "thought Stalin behaved like a Christian gentlemen" (135). Therein, the American president refused to listen to the seasoned advice of Louis B. Lochner, Allen W. Dulles, and A. P. Young, who represented the position of Goerdeler. The leaders of the German resistance were shunned, and, in the end, men such as Bonhoeffer and Goerdeler were executed by the Nazis.

In chapter 5, Netto establishes that Luther was vindicated by "Leipzig 1989." It was a Lutheran political ethos that guided the nonviolent resistance movement, going out from Leipzig and leading to the peaceful overthrow of the communist regime in each Germany. He relates interesting anecdotes about the resistance movement, the prayer vigils, and other actions by Lutherans. The overthrow of communism, led by Lutherans, explodes the cliché that Lutherans are quietists who teach only submission to an evil regime.

Chapter 6 is an epilog, pleading for Lutherans to return to the two-realm teaching of Luther and thereby to rejuvenate the political and social scene of our day. Netto finds it tragic that some Lutherans have adopted political and social activism, which is self-defeating. He asserts that the political principles taught by Luther and his followers hold the true solution and stresses that the kairos for Lutheran teaching has arrived. In view of the disillusionment in America with theocratic notions during the Viet Nam War, one can only agree with Netto, and wonder why American Lutherans generally have not pressed their point, but have followed a wrong agenda.

There are several places where I take issue with the author. In citing Luther, Netto follows the translation by Alfred von Rohr Sauer of Psalm 101 in the American Edition, which refers to the spiritual government as "vertical" and the secular government as "horizontal." These words were not used by Luther, and their use might mislead one into thinking of the secular power as autonomous from God. Since God works also in the secular power, the horizontal versus

vertical paradigm is not appropriate here. The reference is from American Edition of Luther's Works, 13:197.

The dualistic paradigm of finite/infinite by Netto is questionable: "The spiritual realm is infinite. It is the realm of the *Deus revelatus*, the God who revealed himself in Christ..." (66); after all, it was in the flesh of the incarnate Son that the hidden God chose to reveal Himself. See also the correlated statement, "The secular realm is finite. It is the realm of the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God..." Unacceptable! After all, the spiritual realm is present in material things, word and sacrament. As I have insisted in my *Adventures in Law and Gospel*, the means of grace are neither finite nor infinite. The pairing of finite/infinite, which is characteristic of Reformed thought, was used neither by Lau, whom he is citing, nor in Luther's exposition of Psalm 101, as referred to by Netto (AE 13:197; one may compare WA 51:13; 21). When Netto calls the spiritual realm "infinite," he jeopardizes the doctrine of the two realms.

Netto errs when he writes that Luther "took the revolutionary step of liberating the church and the state from the medieval chains binding them together" (71). The term "state" in this sense was unknown to Luther, and the concept of separation of church and state belongs to a later period. I also disagree when Netto follows Carter Lindberg's claim: "Luther's fundamental doctrinal commitment to justification by grace alone informed his rejection of all expressions of the *corpus Christianum*..." (page 690 in Lindberg, erroneously cited as page 691 by Netto, note 50). Few scholars would accept the proposition that Luther rejected the mediaeval concept of one unified Christian body, the *corpus Christianum*, and taught the separation of church and state; the burden of proof rests here with Lindberg and Netto. It seems that what they really intend to say is that Luther rejected all expressions of theocracy, which, of course, is correct. Moreover, Luther's three estates—the secular power, the spiritual authority, and the family—overlapped at times in the same individual.

Unfortunately, this book follows the practice of relegating the notes to a clump at the end of each chapter, which makes the book difficult to read; once regarded as an economy, the modern computer can now place the notes at the bottom of each page easily and inexpensively. The book should have been provided with indices, or at least an index of names, which would enhance the usability of the book.

The widespread practice, followed here also, of referring to the "American Edition" translation of Luther as LW or "Luther's Works," deserves criticism. For hundreds of years, Luther's works have been cited by the place of publication or the name of the editor (Jena edition, Walch edition, Saint Louis edition, Lenker, Philadelphia, Clemen or Bonn edition). Not even the magisterial set published by Böhlau is cited as "LW" but as WA, Weimarer Ausgabe. These translated works should therefore be referred to more modestly as "AE" (since a Philadelphia and a Saint Louis edition already exist), if only to remind ourselves that they do not present the original text, but only translations.

The Fabricated Luther, which first appeared in German, is an important book, and Concordia Publishing House is to be commended for its publication. The book is a powerful vindication of Luther's doctrine of the two realms and Lutheran political ethics. It deserves to be read by all clergy and lay people who are concerned with correcting the misrepresentations of Luther and the Lutheran church, not the least being the false statements about Luther given at the holocaust museum in Washington. Netto's book is recommended for use in college and seminary courses in history and theological ethics. The time has come for the real Luther to be heard.

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***Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*. By Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. 373 Pages. Paper. $22.00.**

The standard formula for gaining prominence in homiletical circles these days is to invent or advance a new sermonic form. With true respect to Craddock, Lowry, Jensen, Buttrick, and others, one name has come to the fore by another route. Sidney Greidanus, of Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, may have become the most helpful current homiletician in North America simply by being thorough, thoughtful, and practical.

Thorough research characterized Greidanus' last book, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. Readers of the present work will again find no stone unturned and his discoveries developed into another tightly-organized volume, which follows its thesis and does what it sets out to do. "The primary aim of this book," Greidanus writes, "is to provide seminary students and preachers with a responsible, contemporary method for preaching Christ from the Old Testament. A secondary, but no less important, aim is to challenge Old Testament scholars to broaden their focus and to understand the Old Testament not only in its own historical context but also in the context of the New Testament" (xii).

That challenge is indeed raised when Greidanus argues that the Old Testament is, by character, "Christian" (44), and is to be understood from the reality of Christ (183 and following). "The whole Old Testament," in fact, "bears witness to Jesus" (56), and "we are faithful preachers only when we do justice to this dimension in our interpretation and preaching of the Old Testament" (62). Obviously, then, he staunchly upholds predictive prophecy against destructive criticism, particularly with his lengthy defense of the traditional, christological interpretation of the "seed of the woman" (245-248).

Greidanus' primary aim, though, is to enable actual preaching of Christ, specifically Christ incarnate (54), from the Old Testament. His contemporary method is undergirded by an excellent historical survey, including Origen's

allegorizing, Antioch's typology, and what he calls Luther's christological and Calvin's theocentric approaches to Old Testament preaching. Greidanus then proposes his own "redemptive-historical christocentric method," "somewhere between" Luther and Calvin (227). The method seeks to honor both the text's own historical context and its place in the full canon and redemptive history. Taking its cues from New Testament uses of the Old, the method offers seven "roads" to preaching Christ from the Old Testament: the ways of redemptive-historical progression, of promise-fulfillment, of typology, of analogy, of longitudinal themes, of New Testament references, and of contrast.

These seven options, it seems, should offer the preacher a legitimate move from virtually any Old Testament text to proclaiming Christ, in whom alone, Greidanus reminds, is eternal life (12). Incidentally, as he demonstrates the possibilities in the last two chapters, Greidanus spells out the ten-step homiletical process he recommends for all texts. Not a bad bonus.

The book, then, is well researched and the material is effectively presented. This is a book readers can use.

Carl C. Fickenscher II