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## Book Reviews

*Perspectives on Religion and American Culture*. Edited by Peter W. Williams. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. xii+418 pages. Paper. \$29.95.

Editor Peter W. Williams, of Miami University (Ohio), has compiled a very helpful collection of articles by a distinguished group of scholars, as well as including strong representation from those making significant new contributions to the study of religion in America. Williams assembles articles that treat both historical and contemporary issues. However, the pieces are not arranged chronologically, but thematically. Stephen Stein ("Religious Innovations at the Edges"), William R. Hutchison ("Diversity and the Pluralist Ideal"), and Charles Lippy ("Pluralism and American Religious Life in the Later Twentieth Century") are all distinguished contributors to the section on diversity and pluralism.

As the title indicates, Williams pays particular attention to the interaction of religion and culture in the American setting in three sections titled the "Religious Roots of American Culture," "Religious Cultures in Transition," and "Popular and Material Culture." In this last section Jeanne Halgren Kilde's "Architecture and Urban Revivalism in Nineteenth-century America" shines. Kilde notes that "the religious revivals of the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries owed much of their success to the powerful, emotion-packed, mostly extemporaneous preaching of extraordinary speakers." However, over time the architecture of the traditional churches undermined revivalists' attempts to heighten the immediacy and emotional impact of their preaching" (175). The solution? Adopt the form of the theater or auditorium. The application to the contemporary megachurch is obvious, as Kilde rightly notes: "Although most religious practices-including the investment of special status in a priestly or clerical class, liturgies and other rituals, and preaching-have always addressed the needs of the laity to some extent, the development and use of the amphitheater space in the nineteenth century represents a dramatic change, both in the religious needs being met and the means developed to meet them. Physical, not spiritual, needs attained great influence during the 1830s revival period and perhaps predominance by the late nineteenth century. Surely in the late twentieth century, physical and psychic comfort guide the megachurches' success" (185). Apparently there is a relationship between style and substance!

Other sections treat race and ethnicity, gender and family issues, and, finally, intellectual and literary culture. Most contributions feature a brief, but helpful, bibliography for those interested in pursuing a particular topic.

*Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* is a fine collection of articles treating the history of religion in America and its place in the formation and ongoing development of culture. To that end, it is an excellent contribution to the history of American Christianity.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

*Lutheran Catechesis-Catechumen Edition: A Guide to Catechesis for the Lutheran Catechumen and Family.* By Peter C. Bender. Sussex, Wisconsin: Concordia Catechetical Academy, 1999. 279 Pages.

Wilhelm Löhe warned against the tendency to interject another book between the *Small Catechism* and the catechumen. In the last century, dozens of manuals, workbooks, and explanations of the *Small Catechism* have been published, often obscuring the simplicity of the catechism, sometimes contradicting Luther's intention for its use or clouding the clarity of the text with complex dogmatic expositions or psychological applications. *Lutheran Catechesis* is not just another manual to be used along side of or in place of the catechism. Rather *Lutheran Catechesis* is transparent to the structure and theology of the catechism that it seeks to serve.

The author of *Lutheran Catechesis* is a seasoned pastor/catechist whose daily life and work breathes with the spirit of Luther's catechism. Now he has given the church a gift that is harvested from scholarly study and the ongoing pastoral work of teaching children and adults the chief articles of the Christian faith. Pastor Peter Bender provides us with a model for catechesis drawn from three books: the Holy Scriptures, the *Small Catechism*, and the hymnal. Doctrine is drawn from the Scriptures, confessed in the *Small Catechism*, and expressed doxologically in the hymnal. All three books are essential for *Lutheran Catechesis*. This is expressed in each of the twenty-four lessons as each unit is divided into three parts: (1) The Word of Faith; (2) The Catechism in Detail; (3) A Look at the Divine Liturgy.

*Lutheran Catechesis* faithfully follows Luther's own ground plan, laid out in the Preface to the *Small Catechism*, for teaching the Catechism as Bender begins with teaching the text (learning the Catechism "by heart"), moves on to "teaching what the words mean," and culminates in taking up the *Large Catechism* to "impart to them a richer and fuller understanding." In good Lutheran fashion, Bender sees catechesis as geared toward repentance, faith, and holy living. Therefore catechesis is not to be equated with education but with shaping the life of one who lives by dying. Such catechesis is not limited to "confirmation instruction" but embraces the whole life of the believer from font to grave. One of the many side benefits for the pastor using *Lutheran Catechesis* is the insightful commentary for the preaching of repentance and faith found in Bender's exposition of "The Word of Faith." Rather than using multiple "proof texts" Bender aptly uses larger biblical narratives to demonstrate how the truth of each article of faith in relationship to the "chief article" of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Each unit contains additional biblical texts for meditation and study.

Like the *Small Catechism* itself, *Lutheran Catechesis* circles back to build on and expand themes covered in earlier lessons. Bender rightly recognizes that the *Small Catechism* is actually a prayer book and so provides tips drawn from

Luther's letter to his barber for how to pray the Catechism. The volume concludes with a concise, but complete, glossary of "catechism terms."

*Lutheran Catechesis* has much promise both for the pastor as well as "the head of the household" that Luther envisioned as the primary catechist. *Lutheran Catechesis* offers a comprehensive approach to the use of the Catechism in the congregation, school, and home. In addition to the catechumen's edition, a catechist edition is available. It contains additional material for the catechesis of the Old and New Testaments (Bible history), examinations, reproducible certificates, a graded approach for the teaching of hymns and learning the parts of the Catechism by heart, and other teaching helps. Both the catechumen and the catechist edition may be purchased from the Concordia Catechetical Academy, PO Box 123, Sussex, Wisconsin 53089.

John T. Pless

***The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics.* By John Breck. Crestwood, New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998. Paper. 288 Pages.**

John Breck, formerly professor of New Testament and Ethics at Saint Vladimir's Seminary, brings his considerable knowledge of the Scriptures and of patristic writers to address bioethical topics of current issue. After giving a concise and helpful overview of how Orthodox theologians approach the task of *theological* ethics from the perspective of human life as a sacred gift, Breck goes on to address typical themes raised by contemporary ethical discourse: the distinction between "personhood" and the "individual," sanctity of life versus quality of life, and freedom and responsibility. Breck outlines a trinitarian approach to ethics that is grounded in the self-giving love of God. He skillfully shows how the eastern understanding of original sin, revelation, incarnation, and church shapes ethical reflection in this tradition in ways that are fundamentally divergent from the path taken by western Christendom.

The bulk of the volume is devoted to ethical issues related to sexuality, marriage, procreation, and the sacredness of life both at its beginning and its end. For the most part, Breck engages himself in conversation with other Orthodox theologians. He does demonstrate an awareness of contemporary Christian ethicists from the Roman Catholic Church (especially Thomas Shannon, Allan Wolter, and Richard McCormick as they attempt to defend the "pre-embryo" as "pre-human," a concept that Breck denies) and the Lutheran ethicist Gilbert Meilaender (quoted approvingly for the most part). Generally, Breck's conclusions come as no surprise. From his understanding of marriage as the embodiment of "covenant responsibility," he sees some freedom for the use of contraceptives but views abortion as murder. He denounces Oregon's Measure 16 and similar proposals that give legal standing to assisted suicide. He provides a forceful argument against the use of fetal tissue and cloning from the basis of the Apostle's assertion that we may not do evil that good may

come (Romans 3:8). However, when it comes to the case of a woman who has been severely traumatized by rape, Breck cautiously concedes that abortion "may be the lesser of two evils" (261).

Lutheran readers will note that Breck's anthropological stance rules out *simul iustus et peccator* as a meaningful construct for theological ethics (34-38). Although he uses different terminology, Breck's ethical reflections do show an understanding that human life is lived *coram Deo* and is brought under judgment by the First Commandment. Thus the starting point for bioethics is not man's morality but God Himself. Breck is careful to explain medical terminology and technical procedures. His writing is punctuated with references to the life of liturgy and prayer, often pointing out how the liturgy itself gives direction to the contours for ethical thought and action. Implications for pastoral and diaconal care are woven into the fabric of the discussion. *The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics* is a rich and thoughtful exposition of Orthodox ethics applied to a culture that defines itself in terms of autonomy. There is much in this book that the Lutheran pastor will find genuinely helpful both in terms of ethics and pastoral care.

John T. Pless

***Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman. Anchor Bible 24E. New York: Doubleday, 2000. 637 Pages. \$42.50.**

This volume marks the third collaboration between Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman in the Anchor Bible series, and it may well be the best they have yet produced. (The other volumes are Hosea [24] and Amos [24A].) Andersen and Freedman profess to be "primarily interested in the Hebrew version of Micah, the complete text of which is available now only in the Masoretic recension," which they include for each pericope in transliteration and translation (5).

A translation of the Greek text of Micah is provided. After treating the text and ancient translations of Micah, Andersen and Freedman divide the book into three major literary sections: The Book of Doom (1:2-3:12); The Book of Visions (4:1-5:14); and The Book of Contention and Conciliation (6:1-7:20).

The authors also include a survey of critical scholarship on Micah. They offer a negative critique of form and redaction critical approaches that tend to find a multiplicity of sources from perceived authors or redactors. In contrast, Andersen and Freedman favor the literary approaches that have become popular in the last twenty years. Such approaches view the text as a coherent whole instead of atomizing the text.

The commentary portion of this book is a literary analysis of the book. It contains many defenses of the integrity of the Masoretic Text of Micah that find their support in Andersen and Freedman's careful literary analysis of the

text. Repeatedly they reject the emendations of earlier critical scholars who sought to make the text conform to their own ideas of what they believed the text ought to have been. The one weakness in Andersen and Freedman's approach is that they at times claim to observe literary patterns in the text that are difficult or impossible to defend. For instance, Micah 4-5 is claimed to be a coherent section based on the use of the word *'attâ* (392-393). Unfortunately, *'attâ* is not used prominently enough in these chapters to make a strong argument that Micah intended it to be an organizing principle. Andersen and Freedman seem to sense this weakness because their discussion is far too concerned with explaining why *'attâ* is an organizing principle despite its less-than-prominent use in these chapters.

This flaw aside, we can rejoice that at least one wing of critical scholarship is defending the MT text as it stands without resorting to the destructive cut-and-paste methods of earlier generations. Yet, we should not mistake this commentary as completely friendly to the confessional Lutheran understanding of Scripture and its purpose. It does not mount a defense of the book as actually originating with a historical Micah of Moresheth, does not seek to bring to the fore the beautiful gospel which points to Christ throughout the book, nor does it understand the law and gospel dynamic that is essential for correctly grappling with the issues the prophet addresses. Moreover, it does not offer many insights into the meaning of the text that will be useful for preparing a sermon or Bible class on Micah. This is probably due to the minimal theological interests of the authors (an unfortunate consequence of mildly higher-critical scholarship that has reacted to the more strident critical scholarship that seeks to inject into the text whatever human-based theology is popular at the moment). Andersen and Freedman wrote for an academic audience that is interested in questions of text and literary analysis. We can be grateful for their conservative approach to the text, even though we find little theological analysis in their commentary.

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