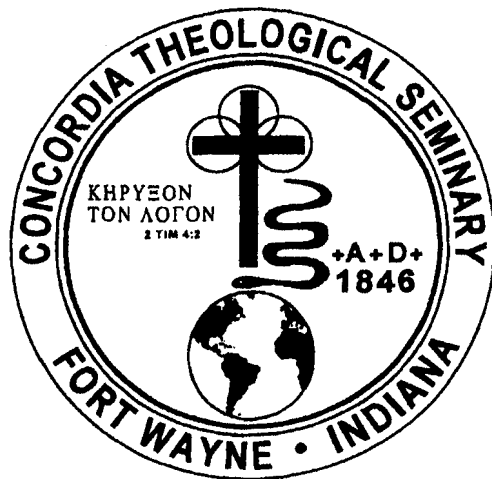


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Book Reviews

***Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* By Jonathan Wells. Washington, District of Columbia: Regnery Publishing, 2000. 338 Pages. \$28.00.**

It is common knowledge that most biology textbooks present the theory of evolution as a well-established fact. This places the Christian student in a difficult position. He is torn between evolution, presented as pure science, and the Scriptures, which speak of creation by a good and gracious God. In recent years, a significant number of well-written books have documented strong evidence of design in nature that clearly points to a creator. *Icons of Evolution* uses a complementary approach as the author analyzes the commonly offered proofs of evolutionary theory.

Jonathan Wells serves a most useful purpose in that he not only critically analyzes the alleged proofs of Darwinism, but he also reveals the enormous bias in favor of evolution that exists in America, a bias solidly in favor of the theory and against anyone rash enough to point out its considerable shortcomings. The author is well qualified to evaluate the alleged evidence for Darwinism. He holds a Ph.D. in molecular biology from the University of California at Berkeley. He also earned a Ph.D. in religious studies from Yale. His book, however, does not enter into religious topics.

The "icons" of evolution that Wells examines are the classical "proofs" of evolution commonly found in biology textbooks. Some of the icons analyzed are the following:

- 1) The 1953 Miller-Urey experiment attempting to demonstrate how lightning acting upon the gases in a primitive atmosphere might have produced the building blocks of living cells.
- 2) The hypothetical evolutionary tree of life constructed from fossil and molecular evidence.
- 3) Haeckel's pictures of young embryos supposedly proving that amphibians, reptiles, birds, and humans descended from a fish-like animal.
- 4) Archaeopteryx, a fossil bird claimed to be the missing link between reptiles and modern birds.

Ten in all, the icons of evolution are the most popular proofs advanced to support Darwin's theory.

Well's thesis is that all of these famous icons "in some way or another misrepresent the truth." He goes on to state that "Some of these icons present assumptions or hypotheses as though they were observed facts. . . . Others conceal raging controversies among biologists that have far-reaching implications for evolutionary theory. Worst of all, some are directly contrary to well-established scientific evidence" (7).

In pointing out the weaknesses of these evolutionary icons, Wells writes in language that the non-scientist can readily understand. However, he undergirds his arguments with hundreds of well-documented sources. One by one, he shows the weakness of proof for evolution based on these famous icons of evolution. The following are samples of his conclusions:

- 1) It is generally admitted today that the Miller-Urey experiment did not really simulate the earth's primitive atmosphere and failed to demonstrate how life's chemical building blocks originated.
- 2) The actual fossil evidence does not support Darwin's expectation that it would reveal a "Tree of Life" with complex life forms springing from simpler ones. Instead, fossils from the Cambrian period (supposedly 500-600 million years old) do the opposite. Wells writes, "Instead of starting with one or a few species that diverged gradually over millions of years into families, then orders, then classes, then phyla, the Cambrian starts with many fully formed phyla and classes of animals. In other words, the highest levels of the biological hierarchy appeared right at the start" (35).
- 3) Haeckel's drawing of vertebrate embryos: Biologists now admit, as does the well-known evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould, that Haeckel's drawings are "characterized by inaccuracies and outright falsification" (92). Nevertheless, some versions of these fakes are still to be found in almost every modern textbook dealing with evolution.

In similar fashion, Wells tells the whole truth about each of the ten icons of evolution. Finally, he comes to the most interesting and important—human fossils. Again, there is no evidence that man arose from a more primitive form of creature. The author introduces an evaluation of the situation by Henry Gee, chief science writer for the highly-respected journal *Nature*. Gee regards each primate fossil as "an isolated point, with no knowable connection with any other given fossil, and all float around in a sea of gaps . . . to take a line of fossils and claim they represent a lineage is not a scientific hypothesis that can be tested, but an assertion that carries the same validity as a bedtime story — amusing, perhaps even instructive, but not scientific" (220).

Among the many other outstanding aspects of this critique is this striking note, "The truth is that a surprising number of biologists quietly doubt or reject some of the grander claims of Darwin's evolution. But—at least in America—they must keep their mouths shut or risk condemnation, marginalization, and eventual expulsion from the scientific community" (239).

One final observation: It is important to realize that change in life forms does not equate with evolution. Change or modification does occur due to mutations. Wells writes, "No rational person denies the reality of change or modification. . . . The question is whether modification accounts for the origin of new species—in fact, of every species" (5). This is exactly in line with the Scriptural doctrine of

creation, which does not rule out change within the created "Kind" (Hebrew "Min").

This is a book that should be read by all pastors and brought to the attention of our young people in high school, college, and university. It provides a welcome and authoritative antidote to evolutionistic propaganda.

Paul A. Zimmerman
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The Task of Theology Today. Edited by Victor Pfitzner and Hilary Regan. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998. 224 Pages. Paper.

The Task of Theology Today is a collection of essays delivered at an initial colloquium in Brisbane, Australia to explore the last frontier of ecumenical theology, namely the doctrine of God. Editors Pfitzner and Regan inform the reader that the overall theme for the lectures was the role of doctrine and dogma in dialogue. However, the most significant issue was, as pointed out by Pfitzner and Regan, the insistence that the dialogue must include both the non-Christian and Christian. Therefore, belief in God was no longer a barrier to ecumenism. Still, in an apparent contradiction, the Australian Theological Forum, organizers of this event, affirmed a belief in the Trinitarian formulas found in the Nicene Creed.

While space does not permit an in-depth treatment of all eight lectures, the work as a whole deals with two major themes. The first theme is for an ever-changing definition of dogma that would be vital for today. Colin E. Gunton argues that while "dogma" is vital to the church, theologians must deal with dogma's inherent position between limitation and freedom without identifying it with either. Carl E. Braaten maintains that the difficulty with dogma comes from a radical pluralism where experience is the source and criterion for theology. Braaten's remedy is to bridge the gap between exegetical theology and dogma by making the former the basis for the latter. Primate Harkianakis of the Orthodox Church of Australia defines the word "dogma" in a three-fold sense, namely "Will of God," teachings of synods of the church, and experience.

The second main theme seeks to identify a true ecumenical philosophy. The role played by such philosophers as Locke, Rousseau, and Kierkegaard is basic to understanding the current attack upon, and ultimate death of, systematic theology. Philosophies and certain dogmas are compared and contrasted. An example of this is Susan Patterson's view that Postmodernism is the possible ally of the dogma of creation. Another example of the interaction of philosophy and dogma is Denis Minns' claim that the theologian of today must be like Justin Martyr, defending dogma, while at the same time understanding its limitation. Such a limitation, for example, would call for the theologian to understand the dogma of the virgin birth in its context as part of Irenaeus' defense against

Gnosticism. Apart from that context, argues Minns, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is not fundamental to his divinity.

The Task of Theology Today initiates an ecumenical effort to bring together theologians and philosophers that seeks to allow each group speak to each other and not around each other. The colloquium from which the book is derived revealed a consensus on the negative, but a lack of any affirmative. Tersely stated, this book does not provide unifying answers to ecumenical pursuits, but rather suggests philosophical questions theologians should pursue. However, such a statement contradicts Luther when he said, "The most important art of a future theologian is to distinguish very carefully between the wisdom of reason and that of the knowledge of God's Word. People who confuse these two things are mixing heaven and earth" (SL 22, 1840, 218).

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Reading the Gospel. By John S. Dunne. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.

The title of Dunne's book creates great anticipation for preachers and teachers of the Christian faith. His literate and personal introduction hints at something profound. The number, breadth, and variety of sources are astounding: the Koran, Tolkein, de Chardin, and still more. He even references composer John Cage, who surprised music lovers in 1952 by sitting at the piano and playing nothing for four minutes and thirty-three seconds! Unfortunately, just as many music lovers left Cage's silent performance bewildered and disappointed, readers of Dunne's book will be disappointed because of its silence about the gospel.

Dunne seeks to make a profound point about the gospel. He wants to introduce readers to the art of *lectio divina*, "divine reading," letting the words speak to the heart" (vii). He journeys through world literature, relates examples of personal insight, and challenges the reader to hear the echoes of spiritual discovery. He attempts to invoke a fresh experience of the mystical love of God proclaimed in the Gospel according to Saint John. However, the book focuses all too little on the gospel itself. The ears strain to hear the voice of Jesus among the numerous quotations. They experience virtual silence.

Readers who desire a taste of *lectio divina* from a learned practitioner will probably enjoy Dunne's book. Preachers and teachers who seek support for their calling should buy a good cup of coffee, find a silent corner, and just read the gospel.

Edward Engelbrecht
Washington, Missouri

Mark. By R. T. France. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002. 719 Pages.

R. T. France's *Mark* does not fit the stereotype of the modern biblical commentary. "I have tried to write the sort of commentary I like to use," France explains. The author has purposefully written a commentary on the Gospel of Mark, rather than "a commentary on commentaries on Mark" (1). He further adds, "I have commented on matters which I regard as needing or deserving comment, and not necessarily on those which have been the traditional concerns of other commentators" (1). To be sure, such an approach has certain appeal. A biblical commentary can become so shaped by scholarly conversation that the voice of the commentator is muted, and the actual text under consideration becomes secondary. France wants the reader to approach the text without distractions. France also takes the same type of focused approach when considering the text of Mark as it relates to Matthew and Luke. Rather than ask how Mark either influences or is influenced by the other Gospels in each pericope, France attempts to treat the text of Mark as it stands. He finds justification for this procedure in the work of J. A. T. Robinson, who held that the Gospels are the products of a complex oral and literary transmission within the church, and therefore cannot be so neatly categorized according to schemes of literary dependence.

That said, readers do want to know where a particular commentator stands within the scholarly tradition. For most, a commentary should serve not only as conduit for one person's particular wisdom, but also as a reference guide and map, which orientates the reader to the biblical book as well as to various lines of interpretation. Given France's fresh approach, the success of his commentary depends greatly upon whether the reader finds France's own interests and insights particularly compelling. Furthermore, one wishes that France would address issues in Mark, especially as they relate to the other Gospels. Sometimes, the question of literary dependence begs to be answered. Why, for instance, does Mark feel content to begin his Gospel without a story of Jesus' birth, and why does he end with such a truncated story of resurrection? Does Mark omit the Sermon on the Mount because he considers such material unimportant, because he did not know it, or because it had already been told and did not fit his theological agenda? France has little to say on such matters.

France, interestingly, outlines Mark as a drama in three acts. Following the Prologue, in which Mark introduces Jesus (1:14-8:21), the book is divided as follows: Act One: Galilee (1:14-8:21); Act Two: On the Way to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52); and Act 3: Jerusalem (11:1-16:8). Whether or not one finds France's outline compelling, it does capture the dramatic nature of the second Gospel, with its sometimes abrupt transitions, and stunning end.

What France misses in his outline, it seems, is the sacramental drama that is played out within the narrative, namely, that Jesus' life begins with baptism and ends with the Supper. France introduces Jesus' baptism under the non-descriptive heading "The Prologue." Again, tellingly, the Last Supper is

subsumed under the more generic heading "Last Hours with the Disciples (14:12-42)." France does a good job of explaining some of the Old Testament background for baptism and the Lord's Supper, but never asks how their prominent place within the early church might have affected the way in which Mark shaped his gospel narrative, or, on the other hand, how Mark's Gospel might have helped reinforce the church's understanding of the sacraments.

Too often France fails to address the deeper meaning of Mark's text, and scarcely considers the churchly significance of the Gospel. As noted above, Mark begins with a concentrated baptismal emphasis, which surely would have been of great interest to his baptized readers. Jesus is preceded by John, whose ministry is distinctively baptismal (1:4, 5, 8). Mark explicitly states that John preached "a baptism of repentance" (1:4). France, however, dismisses the text's clear reference to John's baptismal preaching, "It is clear from all the accounts we have of John both in the NT and in Josephus that his focus was rather on repentance in the face of the threat of divine judgment, and his object was not simply to get people baptized, but to call together the repentant and restored people of God for the imminent eschatological crisis" (65). It may be clear to France, drawing from other documents, that John did not have baptism as the object of his teaching. However, if he were simply commenting on the text of Mark, as he proposed, he could not come to the conclusion that he does.

In sum, there is much to appreciate about France's commentary, which is refreshing in approach and conservative in theology. This commentator will surely consult it in the future. Still, one waits for a commentary that is both conservative and churchly.

Finally, a minor note. France has chosen not to offer an English translation of Mark. While one admires his desire to focus on the Greek text, this reader would have liked a translation, at least for the sake of convenience.

Peter J. Scaer

***Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England.* Edited by John Shinnors and William J. Dohar. Volume 4 in *Notre Dame Texts in Medieval Culture*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998. 331 pages.**

Why would anyone other than an historian want to know what was happening once upon a time in the parishes of medieval England? This book provides the answer. It contains a wealth of insight into an era too often depicted as dark, a darkness that stems largely from our ignorance of them. This book sheds not a little light on that darkness, into the shadows of everyday life in some of the parishes of the Western church before the Reformation. This research benefits more than medieval scholars and students, for, like all compelling historical accounts, it draws the reader out of his own age and into another, thereby freeing us from the prejudices and misconceptions embedded in our own.

What is especially compelling and striking about this book is that it is not written by historians, only translated and compiled by them. John Shinnars and William J. Dohar, both professors at the University of Notre Dame, have not written a history of medieval England. Rather, they have left the interpretation of raw data for the reader, themselves performing only the editorial duty of selection. This duty they have exercised in a most helpful way, in that they have provided ample categorization for the snippets they have uncovered, under chapter headings of "Portraits of the Pastor," "Education," "Ordination and Administration to a Cure," "The Clerical Community," "The Curate's Spiritual Duties," "Management of the Cure," and finally "Life and Manners." Within these chapters one finds only brief translations of various parts of documents, letters, and manuals. Here we find the most intriguing of entries: conciliar excerpts forbidding priests to watch mimes, entertainers, and actors (21); written permission granted for a man to proceed to the orders of deacon and priest, notwithstanding the cutting off of his ring finger by a sword (63); an exposition of the ten commandments not unlike Luther's own, in a thirteenth-century manual of confession (170-174); a selection of fourteenth-century sermons (202-211); the actual written confession of a fifteenth-century priest recanting various "heretical" teachings into which he had fallen (278-280).

There is a certain amusement of the quaint provided by this kind of book, but it is only incidental. By providing a reading of this history as primary material—actual excerpts of historical pieces, which are in some cases rather detailed and private in nature—this book tends, more importantly, to plant the reader directly into the same realm as the first readers of the material, whoever they may have been. One thereby gains the opportunity to get one of the best benefits gleaned from the discipline of historical study, to wit, a certain detachment from one's own biases and the influences latent in one's own culture. After all, freedom to agree or disagree with other theological minds is not truly freedom if it is born only of ignorance. Consideration of the raw data on its own terms is the best defense against the entrenchment of folly.

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The Imaginative World of the Reformation. By Peter Matheson. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001.

This is a different kind of book about the Reformation and one that most readers of this journal are going to find disconcerting, because it is an attempt to explain the significance of the Reformation to modern secularists, for whom the religious issues of the sixteenth century are meaningless. Instead of examining changes in doctrine or ecclesiastical structure, the author explores changes in metaphors used by preachers and teachers, images employed in literature and art, ways of talking and writing about God. The result is interesting, sometimes

insightful, but ultimately unsatisfactory for those of us who still think that religion is about truth.

The author (principal of the Theological Hall of the Uniting Church and fellow in history at the University of Melbourne, Australia) argues that the Reformation amounted to a revolution in the mental constructs by which people organize their world and understand their place within it. Therefore, he presents various "images" from art, literature, song, and rhetoric that he thinks are especially important for understanding the power and impact of the Reformation in its various manifestations.

For example, in his discussion of the Scriptures, Matheson is less concerned with what was said about them or the doctrines derived from them than he is with describing how they were appropriated. He talks about a "situational reading" of the text and a "recovery of the earthy humanity" of the Bible and argues that in the sixteenth century, the Reformers and their followers saw real people being described and addressed by the sacred text. They did not treat it as a book of doctrine or the account of a long-gone past, but as the living word of God that spoke to *them* concretely, "It was by . . . primal, powerful and overwhelmingly biblical images that the Reformation found a purchase on people's minds and hearts. . . . The marginalised [*sic*] of the sixteenth century woke to find themselves central to the message of the prophets, the apostles and Jesus" (47).

Therefore, in his discussion of Christ, Matheson is not interested in Luther's and Zwingli's differences regarding the communication of attributes, but explores instead the "master-images" that reflected sixteenth-century realities. For Count Albrecht of Mansfeld, Christ was "supreme emperor;" for Lazarus Spengler, He was the crucified Savior whom we follow in adversity; and for the peasant and artisan, the human Jesus is one with us in poverty, temptations, and suffering. In a sense, therefore, different groups had different "Christs" and the success of any one image depended on the experiences of those to whom it was presented.

The focus of Matheson's study is the "popular Reformation," how ordinary people experienced the Reformation, not the teachings or reforms of the leaders like Luther or Calvin. In successive chapters, the author deals with the social character of reforming ideals (visions of new and more Christian societies), with the destructive elements of reform (harsh polemic, religious wars and persecutions, apocalypticism), with changes in social relationships (marriage and family), and with spirituality (worship, piety, and life-style). In each case, he employs "images" to argue his case that the Reformation was "an event in the imagination, a shift in the basic paradigms through which people perceived their world" (119).

Clearly, Matheson's sympathies are with the "radical" reformers on account of their willingness to challenge the social hierarchy. He even has kind words for those who took over the city of Münster and tried to create a model community,

polygamy and all! In the spirit of *our* times, Matheson maintains that "historians . . . have a duty to honour the memory of the dreamers, to note that the dreams of some become the nightmares of others, and to take care that we do not perpetuate injustice by adopting uncritically the terminology of the oppressor" (100). I would argue instead that historians have a duty *not* to impose the values of our benighted era on those whom they are studying, but to try and understand them on their own terms.

Nonetheless, the book is interesting and quite readable. The author uses copious illustrations from the period to make his case, so at a certain level, he is convincing. However, not only images but *ideas* have consequences, and it is not adequate to reduce the Reformation to the former. "Modern" audiences, too, need to understand that even if they are not interested in how to get ready for eternity, people in other places or times were. The Reformation was first and foremost about answering this and other "religious" questions and not just a dramatic change in the way people explained the world. Matheson's book supplements older explanations of the Reformation, but cannot replace them.

Cameron MacKenzie

Scripture and Tradition: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX. Edited by Harold C. Skillrud, J. Francis Stafford, and Daniel F. Martensen. Augsburg, Minneapolis: 1995. 62 pages.

This ninth joint statement of the Lutheran and Roman-Catholic dialogue in the United States (since 1965) takes up the central topic of theology, which "has always been a component of this dialogue" (20). The partners in dialogue present their results in five steps or chapters.

The first step is defining what both churches mean when they say: "word of God." Both can identify the word of God in a threefold manner: Jesus Christ Himself is the eternal Word of God. The word of God is also God's message to mankind, proclaimed as judgment and mercy throughout history. Then there is the written word of God in Holy Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, centering in Christ.

The "Evolution of the Problem" of how Scripture and tradition relate is exposed in the second chapter. One refers to the elementary sense of *paradosis/traditio* as "the act of transmitting the divine message from person to person" (25), which in early Christianity took place through the Old Testament, the community's memory of Jesus, the writings of the New Testament, baptism and the eucharist, teachings, disciplines and creedal formulations, ecclesiastical structures and offices, and artistic expressions and liturgical practices. Traditions in the following history "extended the original meaning of Scripture" (26), so the problem of authority and degrees of authority arose – an urgent problem in the Middle Ages. The relationship between Scripture and tradition then became very critical when Luther stressed the *sola Scriptura*. However, since the Reformation also put a

strong emphasis on the *viva vox evangelii*, there was something that can be called a "traditioning activity" in analogy to what Roman Catholics understand as *actus tradendi*, "the handing on of the Word in a given context" (27). Luther's concept of the twofold clarity of Scripture and of Scripture being its own interpreter does not, however, mean a rejection of tradition per se, but "rather that Scripture establishes itself as the final arbiter in matters of faith and life, particularly in cases of dispute" (29). The concept of *sola Scriptura* does not exclude the exegetical and confessing activity of the church, but it points to the ultimate judge of all the church's activities. The Confessions' authority, after all, is not original, but derivative.

In the wake of the Council of Trent a majority of Roman Catholic interpreters advocated two sources of faith, Scripture and tradition. The Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* then opened the door for a "convergence between Catholic and Lutheran understandings" (32; one may compare 38) by presenting "Scripture, tradition, and Teaching office" as "distinct but interrelated elements that contribute to the communication of God's saving grace in Christ" (33).

On this basis the "Theological Considerations" in chapter 3 claim that there is a possibility of convergence because both sides share a positive understanding of the term "tradition" as involving "a process in a community; in this case, it refers to the Word of God precisely as it is handed on in the church: *verbum Dei traditum*" (36). Problems remain, however, since the Vatican Council left "unresolved questions about the necessity of criticism of tradition and the teaching office, and about the critical principle to be followed in conflict" (40).

The ground for further convergence is laid in chapter 4: "The Living Word in the Community of Faith." The partners in dialogue refer to the fact that both churches do accept interpretations of the biblical dogma that go "beyond the express statement of Scripture" (44), like the doctrine of the Trinity or of Mary being the *theotokos*. When Roman Catholics, however, formulate the doctrine of Mary's assumption they do not only refer to Scripture, but also to the *sensus fidelium*, the consensus of the teaching office and of the faithful, which is "considered by Catholics to be a sign of the working of the Holy Spirit, who leads the whole church into the truth of revelation" (46).

Finally "Conclusions" are formulated in chapter 5, stating the "large measure of agreement" and the "remaining differences of doctrine or emphasis" (49). Differences remain on the *sola Scriptura*, on the question of an infallible teaching office, and on the respective understandings of the development of doctrine.

Nevertheless, the conclusion ends hopefully by stressing once more the Lutheran "dynamic understanding of the Word of God that approximates what Catholics often understand as tradition in the active sense: the Spirit-assisted 'handing on' of God's revelation in Christ," by furthermore stressing the fact that Catholics do not any longer speak of tradition as a separate source of doctrine,

“but see it together with Scripture, as the Word of God for the life of the church” (50), and by finally stressing “the joint affirmation of the one faith in Christ alone that is communicated fundamentally and abidingly in Holy Scripture” (51).

The main reason why we cannot be as optimistic as the partners in dialogue is that, from a Lutheran point of view, Scripture in dogmatic terms cannot be submitted to any notion or idea of “tradition.” There is, indeed, a living and very positive relationship between Scripture and the church, with her tradition. But one has the impression that, even when exposing the historic positions, the partners in dialogue already apply their understanding, which is not in compliance with the Lutheran Reformation. Of course, Christ, through His Spirit, is at work in the church, in the formulation of the creeds, in the liturgy, and in theology. Scripture, however, in this setting or context in the post-apostolic age, represents the authority of Jesus Christ Himself, of the Triune God over against His church. This means that in the process of the tradition or *paradosis* of the word of God through Scripture, the church, its preaching, teaching and confessing, is first of all passive, receiving, and not active or even creative. Interestingly enough, the supporters of the ordination of women in Lutheran churches are arguing exactly like the Roman Catholics: If consensus is achieved between the church leaders and the faithful this can be considered as a work of the Holy Spirit, since we all have the Holy Spirit and the Spirit is working also in church history and, of course, in present church life, leading the church into the truth of revelation.

The Lutheran emphasis on the *viva vox*, however, has always meant the public doctrine has to flow from and be judged by Scripture. The Spirit’s working and proclamation of the word of God cannot be identified with the living community of Christians as such and as a whole. There has been false teaching, false preaching, false confessing in the history of the church – even from its beginnings. If Scripture is only part of the church’s tradition one indeed needs an infallible teaching office in order to ascertain what is God’s will for His church.

The problem can also be located in the fact that the present statement talks about the material sufficiency of Scripture only (37). But the sufficiency of Scripture does also include its efficacy, which means that, theologically speaking, it is Christ through the Scriptures Who creates faith and the church, Who continues to proclaim the law and the gospel. It is not the tradition of the church or the living community that is in charge of keeping the word of God alive. But the word of God in Scripture keeps the church, the tradition, the faith, and the believer alive. The *sola Scriptura* principle is nothing else than the confession that Christ is the ruling subject, the head of the church. A church, however, that cannot discern the word of Christ from its own word any longer has become what the Lutheran confession calls “antichristian.” Even though the partners in dialogue see the problem of ambiguity in public opinion, (47) and therefore make a difference between public opinion in the church and the “sense of the faithful,” one cannot see how this dilemma can be avoided when the church in this joint

statement is seen as the active subject rather than the receiving object of the traditioning process of the word through Scripture.

But perhaps the mistake lies even at another point. After all in the "Theological Considerations" and in the "Conclusion" there is no mention of the eschatological "context" or setting in which Luther and the Reformation wanted to rely on Christ alone—and therefore on Scripture alone. The aim of the Reformation was to consent with Christ, with His eternal judgment, and not in the first place with this or that Christian tradition. Consensus with the Christ and the Spirit of Holy Scripture was of highest importance for the Reformation, which even made a clear dissensus within the visible church necessary for Christ's sake and for the sake of the believers' and the church's salvation. The understandable aim of reaching visible Christian unity should never obscure this.

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On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518. By Gerhard Forde. William B. Eerdmanns, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, 1997. 121 Pages. \$20.00

In his preface, the author (professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota) gives three reasons for writing this book. First, he sees an urgent need for it because "there is increasing talk about the theology of the cross but little specific knowledge of what exactly it is" (viii). Second, he wants to refute the sentimentalism that very often determines the present discussion on the theology of the cross in our "age that is so concerned about victimization" (viii). Finally, Forde sees Luther's theology of the cross as providing "the theological courage and conceptual framework to hold the language in place" (x); this takes a close look at an urgent need, since the present sentimentalisms in theology have caused "a serious erosion . . . in the language of theology today" (ix); it has become "therapeutic rather than evangelical" (x).

Before getting into the text of the Heidelberg Disputation, Forde introduces the subject to the reader in four steps ("Introductory Matters"), which can also be read as a summary of what follows later. What does it mean, when Luther says "Crux sola est nostra theologia"? Forde gets to the point right away: "The cross is in the first instance God's attack on human sin" (1). The cross culminates in the dying of Jesus for God's sinful world, but at the same time, the cross is the "character" of how God is dealing with human beings. He makes an end to each and every sort of human glory or even the striving for glory when it comes to the relation between mankind and God. The theology of the cross, therefore, is an offensive, polemical theology that attacks what man considers to be his best in religious terms. The cross shows what true theology is about: it is not about ideas of men, but about God's deeds, God's killing and God's making alive.

To talk about the theology of the cross—or better, to be, act, and talk as a theologian of the cross—means to refute the theology of glory, which is omnipresent in the hearts of mankind. Forde locates this fight on two levels. First, there is the level of the “narratives,” of the Glory Story and the Cross Story. Whereas man wants to be in control on his (gnostic) way back to God in the Glory Story, the Cross Story makes man the object that needs to be drawn into the event. The Cross Story leads us back to God when it—presented to us in the whole biblical story of the Old and New Testament—becomes our story.

This is the presupposition for the fight on the second level, the level of “Being a Theologian.” The difference between the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross as exposed by Luther is the following: The theologian of glory is very optimistic about his abilities. He realizes that he needs the help of God’s grace (thus he seems to integrate the cross), but just for filling the gaps of his own efforts by his will or his good works. Nevertheless, he looks tolerant and sensitive, for he seems to combine the human thirst for glory with God’s gracious help. The theologian of the cross, on the other side, surrenders before God and allows himself to be drawn into the biblical story. He stays in front of the reality of the cross, he suffers passively God’s killing and God’s making alive, but he does not try to get behind this reality like the theologian of glory. He knows that only in the cross can God be found, not in a reality behind it, construed by the human mind.

Therefore, the theologian of the cross is a very intolerant being: His whole effort is to refute the theology of glory, to rule out all loopholes that root in the hallmark of glory: that divine grace is nothing but a supplement of human will and power. The theologian of the cross has learned that the only cure for man’s deadly desire for glory is not satisfying it, but extinguishing it. The truth that it is not only mortal for mankind to follow the path of glory, but also no longer necessary, is revealed to us in the resurrection of Christ, which cannot be separated from the cross. Dying and being made alive with Christ makes a theologian of the cross—the only way that the trap of superficial optimism and despair on the road of glory can be overcome.

Forde finishes his “Introductory Matters” by giving some historical information on the Heidelberg Disputation and by sketching the outline. He also stresses that he does not want to present a comprehensive commentary, but just reflections on the text.

He then considers Luther’s text thesis by thesis in four major parts. Each thesis is quoted, sometimes with the author’s own English translation when he is not satisfied with the translation in the American Edition of *Luther’s Works*. He follows Luther as he refutes the theology of glory in each and every respect by examining the legalistic (Good Works, chapter I: Theses 1-12) and the voluntaristic (The Problem of the Will, chapter II: Theses 13-18) paths to “glory.” These paths are doomed to fail because they misunderstand and misuse God’s law as way of salvation and they underestimate the thoroughness of man’s sin

and the thoroughness of man's dependency on his creator even before the fall. The focus of these two parts is to extinguish any false optimism, to reveal mankind's trapped situation under the law. Forde very often uses the "story" of alcohol addicts as an analogy. The law forces us to bottom out, it causes us to surrender, to despair of our own abilities, to admit that we are lost sinners. In other words: the law reveals to us that we can find life only when God comes to intervene and help us totally from without.

Chapter III "The Great Divide" deals with the famous theses 19-24, where Luther explicitly confronts the way of the cross with the way of glory, thus also showing how the way of the cross arrives at a true and biblical understanding of God's law, making an end to its abuse in the hand of glory-obsessed man. Forde here clearly marks that the legalistic way to glory finally ends up watering down the law, making it less demanding. The theologian of the cross, however, is no antinomian: he has understood the role of the law in God's story: *lex semper accusat* – the law destroys everything that is not in Christ. So the theologian of the cross does not cancel the law or take away its terror, but in the law he meets the force that compels him to surrender before God, to flee to God's grace in Christ.

The discovery of the theology of the cross is the discovery of justification by faith. "God's Work in us: The Righteousness of Faith" therefore is the title under which Forde contemplates Theses 25-28. The theologian of the cross sees God as He is God, as his savior. The theologian of the cross is the one who receives God's works – his alien work in the law, and his proper work: forgiveness of sins through the gospel of Christ. Good works will flow from faith – works, however, that the believer will always understand as God's good works, which Christ, living in him, accomplishes. Thus, God brings life out of death; he even can make theologians of glory into theologians of the cross – nothing less than a *creatio ex nihilo*.

This is a praiseworthy little book. It is written in a very contemplative, even *seelsorglich* style. There is a constant dialogue going on between the theologian of the cross and the theologian of glory. This dialogue takes place on several different levels, which the author refers to: Between Luther and his theological opponents; between the author (Forde) and mainstream theology (ecologists, feminists, and others) of the late twentieth century, even between the author and his students, the pastor and his people. But, the most important dialogue is going on inside the author, the reader, the theologian: the dialogue between the theologian of glory in us and the theologian of the cross in us, which is a constant struggle.

Therefore this book should have a place in every pastor's library (and more so on his desk). It will be of help for sermon preparation because it gives very fitting comments on many important questions that arise in the parish. Forde also very nicely shows how the theology of the cross is not only the key to scripture in theory, but it indeed helps to understand many of the so-called difficult scripture passages and reveals that their "difficulty" rather often has its origin in the

sentimentalized theologian of glory. Because Forde does not only refer to many typical "Christian" questions, but does so in a very pleasant style and easy-to-read language, his book can also be recommended to lay persons.

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