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Christopraxis: A Theology of Action, by Edmund Arens

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critical perspectives on these sources, M.'s reasoning is weak. The book assumes and asserts rather than argues. It is also marred by spelling errors and poor editing. It will be of interest to those interested in theologies of covenant and sexual complementarity. But it fails to engage the context and complexity of these issues, and replaces argument with rhetoric.

Loyola University, Chicago

SUSAN A. ROSS

CHRISTOPRAXIS: A THEOLOGY OF ACTION. By Edmund Arens. Translated from the German by John F. Hoffmeyer. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995. Pp. viii + 205.

In this unusual, at times frustrating and at times brilliant work, Arens essays a theology of human action informed by the communicative-action theory of Jürgen Habermas. Part 1 gives a brief account of Habermas's ideas. A. is as well qualified as any theologian to provide this outline, and his description of the main lines of thought in communicative-action theory, discourse ethics, and the consensus theory of truth is admirably clear, though unaccountably brief. The fundamental problem here is that A. is concerned not only to represent Habermas's views but also to place them in dialogue with other contemporary German theorists, in particular to suggest ways in which the approaches to ethics and a theory of truth propounded by Karl-Otto Apel may be superior to, or at least instructively different from, those of Habermas. These issues are perhaps too important to be dealt with in 22 pages.

Chapter 1 concludes with an outline of the ways in which A. believes Habermas may be fruitful for the theological task. Habermas's theories provide a useful set of categories and concepts, they encourage theology's development in the direction of a theology of action, and they stimulate fundamental theology to employ elements of these theories in the elucidation of religious reality. Criticizing Habermas's separation of reason and religion, A. argues that religion must be seen as "an element and dimension of an essentially open communicative rationality"; the goal "cannot be to claim for religion a separate sphere of validity beyond communicative reason" (32). While A. is right to chastise Habermas for his weak view of religion, one has to wonder how religion's transcendent truth claims are going to sit comfortably within the realm of communicative reason. And if they are not, then isn't Habermas at least partially right to separate the two?

Chapter 2 seeks to show how the Gospels can be seen as communicative praxis: "To what extent can we say that the gospel is intersubjective, propositional and performative, textual, situational, and oriented toward reaching an understanding" (41)? There then follows a close examination of the gospel-praxis of Jesus, his disciples, and the early Church, in which their actions are described in categories drawn from communicative-action theory. I am not persuaded that this process

much advances our understanding either of the gospel or of communicative action. While there certainly may be secularists, like Habermas himself, or unregenerate biblical literalists, who for various reasons are uninterested in the Gospels as communication, they are not the audience for this work. And the intended readers would be unlikely to find it remarkable that the gospel was an exercise in communicative action, at least once the outline of the Habermasian categories was presented to them.

The objective of the Chapter 2, however, is not so much to explicate the gospel as it is to prepare the ground for the final chapter, in which constructive suggestions are presented about a theological theory of truth that can express the orientation to praxis, in which a fascinating phenomenology of witnessing and confessing is offered, and in which the Church is analyzed as a communication community. I wish the review of other positions were less prominent in this chapter, and that A. had devoted himself more to the constructive task, but where he does so he makes some significant contributions. In particular, he very helpfully argues for a theological theory of truth which takes seriously Apel's call for correspondence, evidence, coherence, and consensus, relating them to the "propositional, revelatory, systematic and practical structure" of theological truth (113). It is this discussion which is the key to the subsequent reflections on the relation of faith and praxis, on solidarity, and on the praxis of the Church as a communication community. A. is to be commended for an insightful book which takes a fruitful, unusual approach to some very significant issues in the Christian churches today.

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PAUL LAKELAND

ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY. By Ad Leys. Translated from the Dutch by A. van Santvoord. *Church and Theology in Context*. Kampen: Kok, 1995. Pp. v + 239. Fl. 44.90.

Catholic social teaching sees the principle of subsidiarity as applicable to the different forms of social organization. Does it apply also to the Church? This question, raised by the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, is answered affirmatively by Leys, a former staff member of the Dutch Bishops' Conference, in this dissertation done at the Catholic University of Nijmegen.

L. finds the roots of Catholic social doctrine in the works of certain early 19th-century Catholic thinkers in France and Germany who stressed social solidarity and the importance of associations in reaction to liberal individualism and state centralism. Especially significant was Wilhelm von Ketteler, later archbishop of Mainz, whose advocacy of the greatest possible self-government for persons and associations established the principle of subsidiarity, without formulating it explicitly. Leo XIII furthered this current of Catholic social thought in his encyclical *Rerum novarum* by arguing that "man is prior to the state"