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Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck, edited by Bruce D. Marshall

John E. Thiel
Fairfield University, jethiel@fairfield.edu

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learned book; and, in many respects, they were fulfilled. Still it probably will have little impact on the very debates C. wishes to influence. The neglect of the many postmodernisms is part of the problem. He also fails to locate the postmodernism he criticizes within the debate about modernity. The result is that the book stands as a confrontation between postmodernism and premodernism without much attention to modernism itself. Furthermore, even in the refutation of postmodernism, C. gives remarkably little attention to the very people, Derrida and Rorty, who have come to represent it. The genealogy squeezed them almost completely out. Lastly, in the constructive part, C. chooses to stress metaphysics instead of epistemology because he sees epistemology as moving in a hopeless circle. I understand that decision, and yet the decision does in many ways put his final argument outside the conversation which involves Derrida's *Grammatologie* and Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. To be effective, a critique has to be part of the conversation it criticizes. A difficult task in this murky conversation, almost as hard as deciphering rock music.

La Salle University, Philadelphia MICHAEL J. KERLIN

THEOLOGY AND DIALOGUE: ESSAYS IN CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE LINDBECK. Edited by Bruce D. Marshall. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990. Pp. xii + 302. $29.95.

This collection of essays contains contributions by D. Kelsey, D. Tracy, B. Marshall, D. Burrell, N. Lash, H. Frei, M. Root, S. Sykes, P. Ochs, and J. DiNoia. The collection celebrates the theological achievement of George Lindbeck. Of the several theological loci explored here, ecclesiology, particularly the relationship between church and culture, is the most prominent. Several of the essays focus this issue by attempting to name the criteria by which postliberal theological judgments are made.

How, Marshall asks, can one judge theological adequacy in light of Lindbeck's ascription of primary normativeness to the plain sense of Scripture? It is in L.'s claim for the "assimilative power" of the plain sense, its capacity to describe the world in its own scriptural terms so that its secular vision can be absorbed into the Church's message of salvation, that Marshall finds a functional criterion by which theologies can be measured and Christian belief and practice judged.

Marshall admits that this functional criterion might be more of a negative than a positive test of theological adequacy. I think he is largely correct in his judgment that the only evidence available for the assessment of theological adequacy is the actual success or failure of the plain sense's "assimilative power" in particular instances of inter-

pretation. The failure of such power would, no doubt, be more easily recognized than an act of successful theological redescription. While I would agree with Marshall that "there is no general standard of assimilative power" (82), I would be reluctant to conclude with him that foundational theologies as a matter of course aspire to such a general standard and evince, by virtue of their indifference to the postliberal approach, a failure of ecclesial assimilation.

Marshall recognizes that the ecclesiology suggested by such a functional criterion runs the risk of isolationism. He believes, however, that the charge of sectarianism against L.'s postliberal understanding of normativeness is groundless. The very strength of the postliberal approach is that it is committed to the utter inclusivity of Scripture in its encounter with the world. The isolationism that some critics see in a postliberal fideism is, Marshall argues, the very plight of Scripture in the modern world that postliberalism seeks to address.

The problem of sectarianism is explored more closely in Kelsey's essay. Like Marshall, Kelsey insists that the fairest reading of L. would conclude that he understands the Church to be engaged in an ongoing dialogue with culture. Yet Kelsey is more willing to notice the susceptibility of the cultural-linguistic model of doctrine to the charge of sectarianism. He concedes that there is at least a "sound intuition" (29) in the charge, and argues that this grain of critical legitimacy points to the limitations of the metaphors of "culture" and "language" for describing the Church. To the degree that Lindbeck portrays the Church as a public or cultural (and not a private) realm with its own rules or grammar, he gives the impression that the Church's relationship with the public realm at large, its host culture, must be one either of hostility or in which the host culture is expected to capitulate utterly to the Church. Kelsey also wonders whether the cultural-linguistic model of Church encourages too sanguine a regard for the integrity of its grammar. Can a church be so ideologically captive to its own doctrinal metaphors that the reform of the ecclesial community is never even recognized as a need?

This last concern of Kelsey's is, I believe, the most pressing problem for a postliberal theology. While the concern by no means invalidates the value of the postliberal perspective, it does articulate the particular temptation to theological faithlessness that it faces. Kelsey's question might be put critically to Marshall's defense of L.'s notion of "absorbing the world," and receives an answer in Root's interesting analysis of ecumenical dialogue from a cultural-linguistic point of view.

In his efforts to articulate the boundaries of ecclesial identity and difference in ecumenical dialogue, Root defines a church-dividing difference as "one that threatens the identity of the church as church"

(174). Root notes that a church-dividing difference will always be about the right preaching and administration of the sacraments, but this fact in church history does not establish an objective criterion for authentic ecclesial practice. The only criterion available, Root argues, is a functional one: consensus between parties in ecumenical conversation about what counts as a legitimate rule for ecclesial practice. This criterion which seems to be sublated in the dialogue between church and culture, manifests itself plainly in the dialogue between church and church. The objectivity of this criterion, however functional, seems to suggest that the fear about the postliberal ability to hear the call for reform can be calmed by the multiple voices of faith engaged in a dialogue about what the faith means. The reforming vision of the churches, in other words, depends on their ability to engage each other meaningfully in dialogue.

It should be no surprise that the integrity of postliberalism is so clearly visible in the setting of ecumenical issues since it was in this context that George Lindbeck conceived of its value for theology. These essays are a fitting tribute to his important contribution to the discipline.

Fairfield University JOHN E. THIEL

RELIGION IN THE NEW WORLD: THE SHAPING OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN THE UNITED STATES. By Richard E. Wentz. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Pp. xiii + 370.

This introduction to religion in the U.S. and colonial background follows the recent tendency of scholars once again to concentrate on particular religions, traditions, and denominational groups in survey interpretations of American religious history. Wentz acknowledges the influence of such historians as Mead, Handy, Hudson, Gaustad, Marty, and others who have produced integrative approaches to religion in America organized according to themes and historical development (rather than denominations or traditions), and then he sets out to present an "American history of religions for the general reader" who may know little or nothing about either religions or American history.

Overall, the book fulfills W.'s goal in grand fashion. Any thoughtful reader will learn a great deal about most of the religious traditions that have thrived within the American experience. Readers will come to understand religious traditions as defined historically by beliefs, ideas, and practices; verbal, practical, and social expressions; formal theologies, sacred texts, and (in a few cases) myths and legends. Though some traditions receive brief historical overviews, W.'s concern is not with social or intellectual history, institutions, or persons.