
***Faith and the Other: A Relational Theology.* By Paul R. Sponheim. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. ISBN 0-8006-2658-3. Pp. viii+237.**

Focusing on some of the issues surrounding our understanding of the "the Other," Paul Sponheim takes up the challenge for faith that encounters us as we attempt to live out our lives with others. Recognizing that we live in a qualitatively different world than did our forebears, he suggests an alternative to viewing "the other" as "threat." This volume is his effort to address the "problem" of diversity.

Contemporary theologians struggle with the legacy of polarities bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment, which has powerfully informed our worldview. We live in a world, however, in which the intellectual boundaries are constantly shifting (both personally and politically). Does this preclude the possibility of an alternate view of our world which would embrace change and difference, or are we limited to a view that sees change and difference as threat? Is it inevitable that the blurring of boundaries results in a mollifying homogeneity in which all difference and distinction is lost? Are we necessarily destined to lose the distinction of particularity in the perduring pursuit of universality? These are some of the issues the author considers. Sponheim writes:

As the world collapses, it is not strange that the people of God will argue among themselves about where God is to be heard and obeyed. In the loss of worldview the communication of the very content of the faith that we believe (the *fides quae creditur*) is at risk (15).

He states that in order for an argument to take place, "a clear sense of reality" is necessary. Our reality suggests that we are summoned by the claim of "the other" upon us.

In part one of his book, Sponheim explores life as experienced in relation to others. Examining our place in nature ("Life within the Other") he consults both scientists and poets. Appropriating the words of science, such as irreversibility, difference and connection in relationship, order and disorder, the asymmetrical, Sponheim sets the Christian squarely in the world. A quote from poet David Ignatow describes the Christian's task as interpreted by the author:

I feel along the edges/of life for a way/that will lead to open land (21).

While his use of this verse expresses his commitment to human experience, he is careful not to reduce it to one experience. He is particularly attentive to "distinction" within nature, human experience and before God. "Connection" and "difference" are words which appear as a refrain throughout the book, describing the on-going dialogue which occurs in relationships. In his examination of human relationships ("Life with the Other") he stresses the "givenness of the other." which "means that the other's reality is neither created nor controlled by me. Not created by me, for I encounter the other already there—over there, sharing space with me" (52). For Sponheim, this has particular ethical implications as we work out our responsibilities toward nature and with each other. While emphasizing respect for the other (might one say with Schweitzer, even "reverence for life"?),

he is at the same time, careful not to dissolve the "self" into the other.

Acknowledging the contribution made by the feminist critique in this area, he writes:

It is easy to confuse the 'turn to the other' with turning against the self, if self and other are juxtaposed in one's mindset. Religious folk—particularly women—have been harmfully called to the alleged ideal of self-sacrifice (70).

He is concerned to recognize the validity of the claim of both self and other in a dialectical transformation as he speaks of the "gift" and "task" of self and other. He reminds us, however, that this is not without risk, because as we are continuously open to new possibilities, we are also open to distortions.

Sponheim is careful to preserve the "otherness" of God in his examination of the relationship between God and human beings (life "before" the Other). He resists the temptation to deny difference on the one hand, by absorbing God in all things and thus eliminating God's transcendence (pantheism), or in the opposite way, by employing the "logic of disjunction" and cursing humankind. He suggests: "We can do better if we honour the categorical difference within the reality of the relationship" and remember that "the one who is first is for us" (88). Sponheim's emphasis upon the openness and action of God, which calls for human response, is evident in his examination of the creation of freedom as God's work of love, God's continuing creation and redemption. Freedom *from* something (sin?) implies also freedom *for* God, including the freedom to act in God's creation.

Part two describes the role of faith as it confronts otherness. Sponheim tries to "make clear that the call is to become other for, with, and through the other" (119). Emphasizing openness and the possibility of transformation, he cautions against a single understanding of the word "other." Just as we are not static, autonomous selves but rather relational selves connected with interdependent others, so the ethical direction, which comes about as a result of the relationship with God, leads us toward others in community:

Faith trusts that somehow Christian hope connect the Christian in opportunity and responsibility with the 'becoming' to which truly human life beckons. In that connection, Christians in faith find themselves meeting many who do not seem to share their faith (145).

This faith calls Christians to be "with" others.

Finally, Sponheim critiques the pluralist and exclusivist positions which, he suggests, prevent dialogue with other faiths. He prefers instead, from the Christian standpoint, "to consider what the claims of Christian faith suggest by way of orientation, as one seeks to discern the differences" (151). This orientation is open to the world, yet the dialogue that occurs involves particular Christians in conversation with others. It is this "conversation with the others in faith [which] is grounded in the rhythm of change, the pulse of the new, [and] which characterizes all life" (174).

By describing his book as an "invitation," Sponheim invites his readers to reflect on both their own experience and the "living" tradition in confronting the future. The tenor of this book is hopeful. Far more comprehensive than can be reflected in a review, the author's synthesis of seemingly disparate source material

is particularly interesting. There is much to consider here which both merits further reflection, and evokes interest in areas once thought to be out of one's field. Indeed, there is considerable dimension and substance for a book of this length.

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***Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection.* By Stephen T. Davis. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993. 0-8028-0126-9. Pp. xii+220.**

The author defends the credibility of two assertions traditionally made by Christians: (1) that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead; and (2) that on some future day all the dead will be bodily raised. In the first four chapters Davis argues in favour of the former claim, discussing various questions: On what grounds is it rational to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead? Do the canons of historical research allow for recognition of events such as the resurrection? Which theory of Jesus' resurrection is most defensible on philosophical and exegetical grounds? Is the empty tomb tradition historically reliable, and if so, what is its significance for belief in the resurrection? In chapters five through seven, Davis defends two different views of the general resurrection, one based on a dualistic understanding of human beings, and the other based on physicalist assumptions. The last three chapters address a range of related issues. In chapter eight Davis presents an argument against universalism, i.e., the doctrine that all human beings will ultimately live eternally with God. Chapter nine is a reprise of themes treated earlier in the first four chapters, and chapter ten poses the question of the relevance for daily life of belief in the resurrection.

Davis distinguishes two sorts of apologetic arguments in favour of the resurrection of Jesus. Hard apologetic arguments intend to prove the irrationality of not believing in the resurrection. They amount to claiming that any rational person who honestly looks at the evidence must be convinced that Jesus was raised from the dead. Soft apologetic arguments, on the other hand, intend to demonstrate only that belief in the resurrection is rational and do not entail the irrationality of unbelief.

Davis's interest is to advance an apologetic argument of the soft type. Religious skeptics, he says, are within their intellectual rights in denying that a resurrection has occurred, for the probability is very high that a person dead for parts of three days stays dead. Hence the evidence that may be adduced in favour of the resurrection is not conclusive. A skeptic can say, "We do not know exactly what happened after the crucifixion—it was, after all, a long time ago—but whatever happened, we can always offer plausible explanations of the evidence that appeal to immanent, natural factors and do not commit us to the proposition that a dead man lived again."

But if the skeptic is within her intellectual rights in denying the resurrection, how can it be rational to affirm it? Davis argues that even if the skeptic and the believer agree that a resurrection is improbable, the believer can still rationally