

The fifth part, "Repentance and the Practice of Responsibility," has a personal feel to it, but at the same time raises some important questions. Jean Bethke Elshtain's essay, "Freedom and Responsibility in a World Come of Age," begins with an excerpt from her personal journal on the day she visited Dachau—an experience which ultimately led her to Bonhoeffer. Christian Gremmel's essay, "Bonhoeffer, the Churches and Jewish-Christian Relations," contains a lengthy reflection of the author's experience in a church on Christmas eve in Kassel, Germany. Although John de Gruchy's essay, "Christian Witness in South Africa in a Time of Transition," contains no personal anecdote *per se*, his call for responsible acts and critical solidarity, which emerge by confessing guilt and practicing restitution, certainly has a personal tone.

The editors have, in general, done an excellent job positioning the essays in a coherent manner. They also include a helpful introduction to explain the theme of each section, a profile of each contributor, a list of "Works Cited," and a very thorough index.

There are, however, certain deficiencies, although they may not be solely accredited to the editors. First, the contributors are generally white North Americans or Europeans, except for Maduro. Thus, the perspective is decidedly "post-modern"—to echo Maduro's critique. Second, there are no women represented, other than Bethke Elshtain. Third, the essays in this collection offer little critical reflection on Bonhoeffer—again, with the exception of Maduro. The editors were undoubtedly aware of these concerns which may raise the larger issue: Who is working on Bonhoeffer?

In any case, this is a substantial collection of essays. It will be a valuable resource to any student of Bonhoeffer and will also be of great benefit to those interested in the larger discussion of the (post)modern world.

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***Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology.* By Kathleen M. Sands. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994. ISBN 0-8006-2636-2. Pp. xii+212.**

Kathleen M. Sands begins her provocative study, *Escape from Paradise*, with a metaphor from Marilyn Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* (1980), that of the mermaid in the ship's cabin. A woman sits each evening submerged in the dark of her home, refusing to dispel the vast darkness outside by placing lights in the windows. She sits like a mermaid in a ship's cabin, "sunk in the very element it was meant to exclude" (1). This image informs Sands' development of a tragic heuristic as her contribution to the mystical, aesthetic, and moral tasks of theology.

What brings Sands to the deep waters of the tragic? She begins by flooding theology with elements she believes it has perennially excluded: a tragic consciousness and an encounter with the mystery of evil. Thus, the unmooring of the Absolute Good, whether God, nature, or any other transcendent or immanent

ideal, emerges as central to her theological task for a postmodern culture. She contends that "secretly or openly, God is still the subject matter of theology in the mainstream, and protecting God its basic methodological commitment" (36). This theological commitment undermines serious engagement with that which becomes the shadow of the absolute: evil, deviation. In a previous article, Sands refers to the "institutionalization of the prohibited" in its ideological function: deviations are denied the ontological status attributed to ideals yet serve to highlight the brightness and priority of the Good ("Uses of the Thea[o]logian: Sex and Theodicy in Religious Feminism," 1992). Evil functions as the necessary "shadow of the dominant reality"—a function that remains unacknowledged. Relegated to the shadows, evil is tamed for the theological encounter, maintained in Caliban-like servitude to the greater realities.

Sands examines the history of androcentric theology's conception of evil from Augustine to contemporary liberation theologies, and discovers two allied strategies for avoidance of the tragic: rationalism and dualism. Rationalism excludes evil from the realm of being as nothing, or nonsense, in a world where the Good corresponds to Being and intelligibility. Dualism excludes evil as the defiled and defiling Other, completely cut off from the possibility of the innocence and purity of the Good. Both strategies tend to collapse the real and the ideal, so that ontological density is equated with moral density.

Sands discovers a similar denial of the tragic in feminist theologies. She gives a detailed, appreciative critique of Rosemary Radford Ruether's revisionist theology, analysing its considerable contribution to the moral task of theology. She also examines the aesthetic and mystical richness of Carol Christ's Goddess theology while offering suggestions for ways Ruether's and Christ's theologies might "breathe in the deep waters of tragedy" (66).

Having flooded the metaphysical islands inhabited by theologians by unleashing "a world unclouded by spiritual infinitism" (9), Sands herself swims in the deep waters of tragedy. Stories which illuminate the tragic, as Sands defines it, reveal a consciousness of our inevitable entanglement in evil. These stories confront the collision of elemental truths or powers, the plurality of conflicting goods as "vital, integral dimensions of life in a particular context" (10), yet always remain open to questioning. Tragic awareness moves us to the heart of the encounter with evil as an understandable reality, as the deliberate intention to destroy or truncate being. This corrupting awareness (disabusing us of our presumed innocence) provides the site for the continued practice of a practical wisdom. Tragic discernment is created around the rupture of profound loss and deep wounding. Rooted in the elemental ambiguity of human sociality, this practical wisdom enables acceptance and protest, and guides possible action.

In the absence of a metaphysical warrant for protest and ethical action, the particular historical and political context provides a theological warrant for specific theological and ethical claims to be "made good and made true" (67). This tragic venture creates a fragile human good in the absence of the absolute. Such a creation requires the practice of compassion, or theological wonder, as a thoughtful attention and care that extends beyond the bounds of what we affirm and hold to be true. Such compassion regards all suffering and conflict as worthy

of wonder and questioning, thus opening space for protest in the possibility of saying the unspeakable. Such openness bears the vulnerability of memory and longing; "such compassion is a wound, but such a wound is a lure to healing" (16).

Sands sees literature as one of the non-idealizing cultural sites of the practice of compassion, of the negotiation and necessarily messy shaping of meaning. She explores the multicoloured world of the tragic beyond the walls of paradise in four novels: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), and Marilyn Robinson's aforementioned *Housekeeping*. Sands exemplifies the practice of compassion in her evocative writing, in her rigorous argumentation, in the risks she takes by setting her story next to those told by the four novelists, in her attention to the wounds of suffering and evil.

While Sands' book is highly recommended reading, her theology raises some important questions. Sands proposes the obverse of her description of androcentric and feminist theologies. In her theology, the desire for harmony, unity, and wholeness becomes relegated to non-being, to become the shadow of a plurality of goods and values, of elemental dissonance. One might add that perhaps this is a helpful turn of events. Having flooded the metaphysical islands, however, it becomes unclear what foothold might be gained in order to name the tragic. Given the absence of a metaphysical vision of wholeness, how can one say that a tragic event ought to have been otherwise or that it is wrong? Why does any event evoke tragic pathos? We have a tendency to begin with a vision of wholeness, and like Procrustes, cut off parts, or stretch conflicted life experiences, to fit the tidy bed. Sands' theology reminds us of a crucial starting point for creating our visions of metaphysical harmony in the oceanic depths of the tragic with its sublime beauty and chilling pathos.

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Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular. By Stanley Hauerwas. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-8223-1475-4. Pp. 235.

"It is the best of times to be a Christian theologian; it is the best of times to be a Christian theologian" (1). So begins the tale as told by Stanley Hauerwas in his latest offering, *Dispatches From the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular*. The book, however, is not so much concerned with Hauerwas' relative comfort as a theologian. Like the title suggests, these "dispatches" are brief, often random, firsthand accounts of various topics.

Although the book is not exactly a systematic "bombshell in the playground of theologians," Hauerwas does have a knack for lobbing, with impressive accuracy, ethical hand-grenades at a number of issues: from Just War theory to the church and the mentally handicapped, tempered with an enjoyable mix of theol-