

bility to the world—to care for anyone in need. The church's mission, then, was primarily pastoral, existing as “the church for others.”

Baum focuses primarily on the church's pastoral activities and the theology underlying the church's mission. He devotes specific chapters to the theology of the *Kirchenbund*, the pastoral ministry of the church, and the theological background of key figures, such as Schönherr and Heino Falcke. The fifth chapter, “The Humanistic Ideals of Socialism,” is perhaps the most insightful, to-the-point summary to date of the struggles that the *Bund* leadership faced. Baum captures the tension that existed between theologians and pastors within the federation, between Marxists and non-Marxists, and between the BEK and the communist state. As this chapter demonstrates, out of this tension and conflict there arose an innovative, contextual theology that was “critical” of the government. That is, the BEK responded to the government with neither a universal “Yes,” nor a universal “No” (62). The leadership adopted the term “critical solidarity” to express the church's relationship to the state.

For the North American reader, “critical solidarity” and “*Kirche im Sozialismus*” might sound as though the BEK leadership were in collaboration with the communist dictatorship. In refreshing contrast to some recent German interpretations, this book establishes that these expressions are rooted in a unique historical situation, in dialogue with the GDR government and Christian theology—not *beside*, not *against*, but *in socialism* (103-19).

In short, this concise work accomplishes what it sets out to do. It introduces the theology of the East German Church, and at the same time offers an explanation of it to a North American audience that is unfamiliar with the church's history and sources. It is not an intimidating work. All key German terms and quotations are translated into English, and the sections heavy on the theology can be easily understood by the casual reader. However, for the technical reader there are the requisite citations, a lengthy bibliography of primary and secondary sources, and an adequate index.

Because Western images of a cold, darkened, inefficient East Germany have become the norm in our North American consciousness, the richness of the theology in the former GDR has been neglected. Baum's book is a welcome corrective.

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*Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation.* By Miroslav Volf. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. ISBN 0-687-00282-6. Pp. 336.

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The author of this brilliant study is a Croatian Protestant theologian presently teaching at an American university, who has made the violent conflict in the region of his birth the starting point for his theological investigation. Even though reconciliation is a central idea in the New Testament, especially in the

writings of Paul, very few theologians have explored the meaning of this teaching for the reconciliation of peoples with a history of hostility and violence.

Important steps in this direction were recently taken in Donald Shriver's *Ethics for Enemies*, Robert Schreiter's *Reconciliation*, and *The Reconciliation of Peoples*, a collection of essays edited by Gregory Baum and Harold Wells. Miroslav Volf, the author of the present volume, offers the reader a profound and original study of the process of exclusion leading to violence, and the reverse process of acceptance, which he calls "embrace," leading to forgiveness and reconciliation.

The book is a major theological achievement. The author is in creative dialogue with classical theology, ancient and modern philosophy, as well as postmodern thought. He reads the Scriptures in an innovative and brilliant manner, and he argues persuasively that contemporary debates on topics such as exclusion, liberation and peace can actually be clarified by the Christian doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation and the Cross. Contemporary suffering summons Christians to return to the roots of their faith.

The first part of the book deals with exclusion and embrace. The author shows that the manner in which we define our identity as persons and as community determines whether we shall be closed to "others" and exclude them, or whether we shall be open to "others" and welcome them. Collectivities must protect their identity, and boundaries are necessary; yet self-affirmation does not lead to exclusion as long as the collective self-understanding, strengthened by grace, recognizes within itself the presence of the outsiders. The outsiders who have affected our history have an existence within ourselves that can be discovered if we are willing to be converted.

This entire section offers the most profound theological treatment of identity that I have ever read. While the author does not apply his analysis to the concrete case of civil war in the former Yugoslavia, he does make his analysis concrete in an excellent chapter on gender identity. Miroslav Volf is one of the rare male theologians who is thoroughly familiar with feminist theological literature.

Openness to the other calls for a kind of self-giving that Jesus Christ manifested on the cross, forgiving the others, even before they recognize their guilt. Reading the first part of the book might create the impression that the author neglects the issue of justice and the need to denounce oppression and exploitation. The author asks the reader to be patient, for these are the topics treated in the second part of his book.

Here Volf dares to touch upon a delicate subject, hinted at but never explored by Liberation Theology: the tragic fact that victims do not remain innocent. The harm inflicted upon them provokes emotional reactions which their better selves regret. The author analyzes their non-innocence, not to discourage victims from struggling for recognition and justice, but to ask them to remain self-critical, listening to God's Word and trusting in God's mercy.

This book, if I may repeat myself, is a major theological achievement. At the same time, the reader is not likely to agree with all the positions defended by the author. In fact, the author invites dialogue with his readers. My own

difficulty is with Volf's Christology. As a theologian in the Reformed tradition, he points to Jesus Christ and him alone as the solution for all unresolved conflicts. He argues that people will be able to create conditions of peace and justice only if they follow Christ's sacrificial self-giving on the cross.

As a Catholic theologian, I am more inclined to hold that revealed in Jesus Christ is the universality of God's offer of grace; that a certain continuity, even if interrupted by sin, exists between creation and redemption, and that therefore an appropriate creaturely self-love or even self-interest need not be at odds with the *agape* of the New Testament. People are summoned to overcome conflicts and the wounds of the past not only by the example of Christ's self-giving love, but also by the grace-inspired recognition that the way of forgiveness is the road leading to their own spiritual happiness. The great wisdom contained in Volf's wonderful book can therefore also be meaningful to people of good will who are not Christians, and to Christians who do not wish to compare their love and generosity to Christ's supreme sacrifice on the cross.

This splendid work demonstrates that Christian doctrine is relevant to the concrete issues of political life. The book is so well written that it is hard to put down.

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*Christ the Reconciler: A Theology for Opposites, Differences and Enemies.* By Peter Schmiechen. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1996. ISBN 0-8028-4178-3. Pp. 176.

*Reconciliation: Our Greatest Challenge—Our Only Hope.* By Curtiss Paul DeYoung. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8170-1256-7. Pp. 142.

*The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches.* By Gregory Baum and Harold Wells. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997. ISBN 1-57075-107-2. Pp. ix+195.

*Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu.* By Michael Battle. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997. ISBN 0-8298-1158-3. Pp. 181.

A theme that has been emerging in the current Christian discourse is the theology and politics of reconciliation. Recent contributions to this discourse reflect as much diversity as they do thematic unity. Four of these—all representing different publishing houses and traditions—are to be considered in the following essay.

In *Christ the Reconciler*, Peter Schmiechen (President and Professor of Theology, Lancaster Theological Seminary, PA) sets out to address what he sees as the present crisis of the church by drawing on the historical resource of theology, and the inspiration of an envisioned future.