
Book Reviews

The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview. Edited by Gregory Baum. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; and Ottawa: Novalis, 1999. ISBN 2-89507-015-6. Pp. viii+263.

Here is a fine collection of essays by nineteen distinguished authors, with concluding reflections by the editor. Some of these authors are themselves major figures of late twentieth century theology. The purpose of the book is not to offer a theological evaluation of the twentieth century as such, but an overview of events and movements that have had theological significance. Part I considers interpretations of the Christian message. Part II presents theological reflections on cultural and religious developments of the twentieth century. The editor acknowledges the incompleteness of this overview, as well as the inevitable omissions and inadequate treatments of significant figures or movements.

Douglas John Hall's contribution deals with "The Great War" and speaks of the disillusionment that fell upon so many early in the century. Under the influence of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, existentialism, Dostoevsky, Marx, and with the appearance of "neo-orthodoxy," Christian theology after World War I abandoned its modern optimism, and signs of the crumbling of Christendom were already appearing, together with the beginning of the collapse of "the religion of progress." James Reimer's essay informs us of theological struggle among theologians responding to Nazism in Germany; we hear of Carl Schmitt and Emanuel Hirsch, as well as Tillich, Barth, and Bonhoeffer. Rosemary Radford Ruether offers a rich reflection on the Holocaust, informing us of both Jewish and Christian responses to that dark event. "The test of adequate language about God has become the burning children of the crematoria. Today...any religious statement that cannot be uttered in the presence of these innocent victims cannot be uttered at all" (79).

Donald Schweitzer analyzes the response of North American theologians to the Great Depression, including the decline of the Social Gospel optimism under the critique of Reinhold Niebuhr. An alternative to Niebuhr's "Christian Realism" appeared in Canada with the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and its radical criticism of capitalism, but without the liberal, optimistic, "organic" vision of the Social Gospel. Gary Dorrien tells us about theology's relationship to "the Golden Years of Welfare Capitalism" and the "twilight years" of the giants of neo-orthodoxy: Niebuhr, Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann. We also hear briefly of the highly diverse post neo-orthodox figures such as

Pannenberg, Moltmann, Gollwitzer, Torrance, Cox, Ogden, et al., who made their contributions in a time of secularization and sharp decline in church membership.

Harvey Cox, himself an originator of the theology of secularization in the 1960s, offers a critique of the "Myth of the Twentieth Century," commenting on the rise and fall of "secularization." Here he points out the survival of "religion" of all kinds, particularly pointing to the extraordinary expansion of Pentecostalism in many parts of the world. He sees, at the end of the century, a religious preference for "equality to hierarchy, participation to submission, experience over abstraction, multiple rather than single meanings, and plasticity rather than fixedness" (143). Michael Scanlon's article on the post-modern debate is in some ways continuous with that of Cox, speaking of theological interactions with postmodernist philosophy, and of postmodern theology's emphasis on "alterity," or sensitivity to the other.

The story of the development of Roman Catholic theology is told by Victor Consemius, beginning with the condemnation of "modernism" in 1907 and the indexing of the world of Loisy. Yet creative work in Catholic theology flourished in the first half of the century in the renewed Thomism of Gilson; Rahner, Ratzinger, von Balthasar, and others are also discussed as preparatory to Vatican II. Joseph Komonchak's article focuses on the end of the "cultural isolation" of Catholic theology in the 1930s through the work of Maritain, Chenu, and de Lubac. The Second Vatican Council is discussed by Robert Schreiter: the leadership of John XXIII and Paul VI; the Catholic Church's new engagement with the modern world; the Council's achievements for the life of the church, for mission, for liturgy; its limitations, and its enduring achievements.

The editor recognizes that one of the regrettable omissions of the book is theology in Eastern Europe, including Eastern Orthodoxy. We have a glimpse of this, however, in a fascinating article by Bernard Dupuis on Orthodox theologians of the Russian diaspora after the Bolshevik revolution. Here we learn of Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Lossky, of a renewal of mystical thought, and of patristic scholarship.

Ulrich Duchrow writes of the ecumenical movement, especially the work of the World Council of Churches, of responses to cold-war welfare capitalism, and of the contributions of liberation theology to the world-wise ecumenical movement. Susan Ross writes of the women's movement, of women's theology in the early part of the century, and of the development of feminist theology. Dwight Hopkins and Linda Thomas tell us about voices from the margins in the United States: black theology, Womanist theology, Native American and Latino-Latina Hispanic theologies. Gregory Baum shows how Marxist ideas have impacted twentieth century theology: Marx inspired Christian theologians to take moral outrage as a starting point for reflection, to see society from the perspective of its victims, to perceive the structural dimension of human sin, and the ideological dimensions of religion. Marxist thought taught theologians to test their truth claims by reference to "praxis" as well as "theory."

Virgilio Elizondo treats us to a story of the broad range of contextual theologies under the heading "Emergence of a World Church and the Irruption of the Poor." He swiftly handles the "decolonization" of the church and the appearance of Latin American, African, and Asian theologies. Bringing all of this to the very end of the century, Lee Cormie tells us of the "Genesis of a New World." This article is a helpful analysis of globalization "from above" and "from below." He describes an "emergent planetary civilization," warns of "social and ecological apocalypse" at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and speaks of renewed faith and hope in history. In a similar vein, Stephen Scharper writes about theological responses to the ecological crisis of the late part of the century. He describes the beginnings of the environmental movement, environmental destruction as a theological concern, and then the theological commingling of social justice and environmental concerns in political-ecological theologies.

Many of these articles are truly masterpieces of theological storytelling and analysis, written with an admirable economy of words. They will be useful seminar material for either basic or advanced degree students of theology, church history, or theological ethics. We can concur with Baum's concluding reflections when he says that this overview of twentieth-century theologies, marked as they are by such creativity, imagination, and passion for the meaning and power of the gospel, offers us hope that the "Spirit will continue to speak to the churches in the coming century" (249).

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The East German Churches and the End of Communism. By John P. Burgess. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-19-511098-6. Pp. xi+185.

Despite the secularization of the industrial societies in Europe and North America, the Churches often continue to play a dramatic role in the efforts of political transformation. This book deals with the role played by the Protestant Church in communist East Germany and the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. The book is a collection of John Burgess's articles, some of which written before 1989 and hence with no knowledge of the approaching collapse, and others written after 1989 when the author, aware of the outcome, looked back to the past.

Burgess does not offer a history of the Church during those years; other authors have done this. Instead, the articles in his book present careful and often imaginative studies of interesting details, such as the evolution of East German Marxist thought in regard to religion and the changing discourse of the State and the Church dealing with the "Day of Liberation," the name given to the 8th of May, the date of Germany's unconditional surrender in 1945. Sev-