

order to explain how the mechanisms of religious discourse can manipulate individuals as social subjects.

My opinion is that it is very helpful to learn from the strategy and research approach that Heather follows. The Critical discourse analysis method could become a highly productive tool for practical theologians involved in reflection on social issues. In recent years, there has been a shift in the function of language in social life. Discourse has become a "site of struggle" in every day life, where various economic, political, and institutional forces attempt to control and shape us. Forces such as consumerism are often at work influencing religious language, just as in any other discursive domain of human activity. Critical discourse analysis can help the Church to be more reflexive in its discursive practices of worship, religious instruction, and pastoral ministry.

Warren Kappeler

McGill University

---

*Niebuhr, Hromadka, Troeltsch, and Barth: The Significance of Theology of History for Christian Social Ethics.* By Kosuke Nishitani. New York: Peter Lang, 1999. Pp. xvii + 400.

---

Kosuke Nishitani, a professor of Christian social ethics at Tohokugakuin University in Japan, expanded his dissertation to create this work. Though it does indeed read like a dissertation at times, there are some interesting elements to this book. Originally entitled *Hromadka and Niebuhr on the Theology of History. The Significance of Theology of History for Christian Social Ethics*, this work was expanded by the addition of a third section to chapter two, and fourth section to chapter seven (x). One of the most important sections of this book is chapter 2, "Theological Dialogues of Hromadka and Niebuhr with Barth." Though Nishitani is careful to note that both Hromadka and Niebuhr were considerably influenced by Barth, and were sympathetic to his theology, they were both quite aware of Barth's shortcomings and pose important historical and political questions for Barth. For the purposes of this review I will concentrate on Niebuhr.

Niebuhr criticized Barth for trying to create an absolute character for revelation, and thus to escape relativism through dogmatism. Niebuhr identified Barth's theological stance as "dogmatic" or as a "terrifying subjectivism" (31). In his essay, "Barthianism and the Kingdom" he also criticized Barth's social ethics for being ruled by "ethical and religious perfectionism" (33). Soon after Nazism arose, Niebuhr wrote an essay entitled, "Barthianism and Political Reaction" where he criticizes Barth for being undialectical. "If the two poles of this dialectic are 'God who transcends history' and 'God who acts in history' [then] calling Barth's theology undialectical means, in the one case, that this theology emphasizes only the pole of 'God who transcends history' and in the other, that it forgets the distance and the tension between the two poles, thus

strengthening the tendency to unite them too closely and precariously" (33-34).

Niebuhr criticized the Christian liberalism (moral liberalism) of his time as an attitude which is convinced of a final solution to social and political problems through human rationality and love, however complicated and critical those problems may be. Niebuhr summarised the basic propositions of liberalism as follows (208):

- a. That injustice is caused by ignorance and will yield to education and greater intelligence.
- b. That civilization is becoming gradually more moral and that it is a sin to challenge either the inevitability or the efficacy of the gradualness.
- c. That the character of individuals rather than social systems and arrangements is the guarantee of justice in society.
- d. That appeals to love, justice, goodwill, and brotherhood are bound to be efficacious in the end. If they have not been so to date, we must have more appeals to love, justice, goodwill, and brotherhood.
- e. That goodness makes for happiness and that increasing knowledge of fact will overcome human selfishness and greed.
- f. That wars are stupid and can therefore only be caused by people who are more stupid than those who recognize the stupidity of wars.

This is the intellectual climate under which Niebuhr grew up, and he later criticized it as too intellectual and too little emotional to be an efficient force in history: "We need something less circumspect than liberalism to save the world" (209, from "The Twilight of Liberalism," *The New Republic* [June 14, 1919], 218).

Nishitani also illustrates that while Barth had a theology of revelation, due to his view of the utter transcendence of God, Hromadka and Niebuhr had theologies of history. For one to see the theological differences between Barth and Niebuhr, it is perhaps wise to study their respective christologies.

Nishitani never loses sight of the fact that Reinhold Niebuhr remained concerned with the social situation in politics and in ethics. Barth on the other hand, did admit that he was a mere will-o'-the-wisp when it came to political matters (xvi). It seems to be popular these days to accept poorly thought-out critiques of Niebuhr, which claim he was an individualist, and it is refreshing to read this more circumspect understanding of Niebuhr. The author intended each chapter as a stand-alone monograph; and they do work as such, though one wonders whether a chapter such as 7, "The Influence of Troeltsch on Hromadka and Niebuhr" might have been integrated into the others. Nishitani is wise to include Troeltsch, but the separate chapter gives

the book a disjointed feeling. The section on Troeltsch, while necessary to the study of these theologians, may have been better if integrated into other parts of the book. In short, *Niebuhr, Hromadka, Troeltsch, and Barth* is a thorough study of only Hromadka, Niebuhr and Barth.

While this book does contain several misspelled names, including one in the title, and this is hard to overlook, I would recommend this book as a resource, even if not as an addition to one's private collection. Nishitani does have a good grasp of the relevant issues and admirably weighs these three theologians.

Harold Penner

McGill University

---

*Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness.* By Robert K. C. Forman. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. ISBN 0-7914-4170-9. Pp.x+214.

---

For those interested in the academic study of mysticism this is a significant book. It invites a re-examination of both the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the field, and this in at least five ways. Most importantly, it constitutes a rare attempt to challenge what has become the received view that mystical experience is necessarily "constructed" or "contextual" in nature. The author's aim is clear: "to finally close the door on the possibility that one can assume without further justification that mysticism is constructed and...open the door to much broader and more far-reaching debates on both the deeper character of mysticism, and on what mysticism has to show us about the nature of human consciousness and life" (ix-x). With this book Robert Forman makes a strong case against constructivism. Secondly, this book is also unusual in attempting to integrate both eastern and western philosophical approaches into the investigation of the nature of mystical experiences. In this Forman proves overly ambitious. More successfully, this book incorporates the author's first person testimony in tracing out the nature of mystical experience. Careful not to overstep the bounds of reason in citing his own experiences, the author effectively expands the boundaries of academic writing in this area. Equally bold, but inconclusive, is Forman's proposal for a new epistemological category which he calls "knowledge by identity," to account for the alleged noetic quality of mystical experience. Finally, with this book the author announces a new and useful twofold taxonomy of mystical experience: the "Pure Consciousness Event" and the "Dualistic Mystical State,"

Forman is at his strongest when comparing and analyzing the experiential accounts of diverse mystics. He begins by providing some persuasive parallel descriptions of experiences described in the *Upanishads*, the writings of Meister Eckhart, a Zen abbot, a young novice of Siddha yoga, and in his own personal history. All seem to have undergone a peculiar kind of transient event that is simultaneously without content and yet also wakeful or conscious. The subjects are unable to recall anything about the occurrence except, perhaps, that