

## Book Reviews

Garth Baker-Fletcher, *Somebodyness: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Theory of Dignity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 193pp.

Until now no King scholar has attempted a systematic study of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s theory of dignity. This is the task of Garth Baker-Fletcher, and he has admirably filled a long-standing void in the literature on King. The book is comprised of seven chapters through which the author traces the familial, social, philosophical, and theological roots of King's emerging view of dignity and somebodyness.

Baker-Fletcher shows how a youthful King received his first lessons in the ethics of somebodyness from the teachings of his parents and grandparents. His inclusion of the contributions of King's mother and grandmothers is one of the distinctives of this book. We learn that King was influenced by the "protest tradition" exhibited by his father and maternal grandfather. He learned the necessity of standing up in the face of injustice and dehumanizing treatment. He was also influenced by the "wisdom tradition" exhibited by his mother and grandmothers. From this he learned the importance of affirming his own sense of somebodyness.

Chapter two discusses the view of dignity King held during the early period of his work in the civil rights struggle. King introduced the term *somebodyness* as a way of naming the new sense of self-respect and dignity Blacks were gaining through nonviolent protest (48). Dignity had multiple meanings for King, who stressed both its theologico-metaphysical and social aspects.

In chapters three to five the author undertakes the mammoth task of uncovering the major *formal* philosophical and theological roots of King's thought, showing skillfully how seminary and

graduate school helped him develop an intellectual framework for the early familial and church teachings he received on dignity. Chapter three focuses on the influence of "Boston Personalism." Against recent King scholars like David Garrow and Keith D. Miller, the author does not degrade the personalistic influence on King. Instead he shows that King never tried to refute the claims of personalism or his affiliation with it (61).

Chapter four provides a thorough discussion on Kant's theory of the moral nature, the principle of humanity, dignity, and how chief Personalists and King responded to these. We learn that King did not appropriate Kant's ideas uncritically. He particularly rejected Kant's view of freedom, concluding that it was too abstract and impersonal (85).

King was also influenced by Hegel's dialectical method. Implicit in this method is the idea that growth comes through struggle, a principle King frequently appealed to and related to his idea that enhanced dignity comes through struggle. He first heard the latter expressed by his maternal grandfather when he was a child (7, 26, 90). In addition, King was influenced by Hegel's adage, "the true is the whole," and his philosophy of history.

Baker-Fletcher then weaves in the influence of nonviolence, contending that the synthesis of this with his training in personalism "distinguishes" King's thought (93). King moves from thinking about nonviolence as a mere strategy for social change to viewing it as a way of life. Nonviolence is seen as the most reasonable way an oppressed people can both defend and increase their sense of somebodyness.

Chapter five reveals the foundations of King's theological anthropology and his doctrine of love. The two chief concepts that undergird his doctrine of human nature are the *image of God* and *agape*. King rejected one-sided claims to persons' essential goodness or essential badness, opting for the view that persons have the potential for both. He focused on the care of the entire person, for

both soul and body are sacred.

The next chapter reveals how King synthesized all that he learned into his mature view of dignity. The term he believed best captured his meaning is *somebodyness*. Baker-Fletcher examines King's use of historico-political documents, various phrases and symbolic metaphors in order to give us a clear picture of King's later view of dignity.

The final chapter endeavors to answer the question of whether King's theory of dignity provides a resource for developing a contemporary theory of dignity. The author maintains that "The normative criterion for determining the adequacy of King's thought for contemporary times will be that of *inclusiveness*, particularly gender inclusion" (165). A basic limitation of King's view of dignity was his blindness to patriarchy (172).

The author wonders whether King's focus on persons as ends in themselves precludes the idea of the dignity of nonhuman life. Although King's view of dignity could provide a theoretical basis for ecological ethics, King did not develop this explicitly. His emphasis was on helping his people regain and increase their sense of dignity. Indeed, Baker-Fletcher is disturbed that so much attention is given the dignity of nonhuman existence when African Americans and other people of color are forced into "undignified living conditions" (171).

The author hopes this study will be the basis for a liberating theory of dignity for African American males. Any adequate view of dignity must be able to help Black males recapture their lost sense of self-affirmation and self-appreciation. Both this and the countering of the daily violence Black males experience can best be accomplished through nonviolence and dignity workshops.

Baker-Fletcher does an outstanding job of focusing on both the formative socio-religious and familial influences on King derived from the Black church, and European and European American philosophical and theological influences. His skillful use

of the both-and approach in this regard is commendable. This is different from the either-or approach of those who belittle the significance of European and European American influences on King's thought.

Another strength of this book is that Baker-Fletcher, unlike many recent King scholars, has at least read some of the significant literature on Personalism. He does not depend solely on secondary sources and hearsay. In addition, he includes a discussion of the contributions of the women in King's life, and encourages a more in-depth look at this neglected area of King's scholarship.

This book is not only a significant addition to theological ethics and Black theology, but to the literature on the philosophy and ethics of Personalism. It is an excellent resource for both the academic classroom and church study groups. I strongly recommend the study of this text and serious efforts to apply the theory of dignity that emerges from these pages.

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Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 306pp., Acknowledgments, Index, Notes.

Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has made a tremendous contribution to American, African American, women's, and general and religious history in her recently published account of the rise, development, and accomplishments of the Black women's movement among African American Baptist women. It has only been recently that increased attention has focused upon the historical study of Black Baptists. Even less scholarly examination has fallen

upon Black women religious history and Black women in particular. This has been unfortunate from a number of perspectives, including the simple fact that Black Baptists have constituted by far the largest form of Christianity or religion among African Americans. Unlike the study of the Methodists, and even more work needs to be done on them as well, the research and writing of Black Baptist history pose an additional challenge of identifying various bodies of Baptists, many of which are now defunct, and chronicling and analyzing their origins, growth, and impacts. To my knowledge, no comprehensive work has hitherto been done on Black Baptist women. Thus, Dr. Higginbotham has not only illumined a huge area that hitherto has been vastly untreated, she has admirably and superbly done so in a pioneering fashion.

*Righteous Discontent* is composed of seven clearly-written, finely organized, and well-documented chapters. Chapter 1 examines the need for a study of the Black women's movement among the Baptists. Higginbotham reminds us that African American women during this era had to deal not only with racial, but also gender questions. In Chapter 2 the author states the Black female's counterpart to W. E. B. Du Bois's understanding of the Talented Tenth. Higginbotham specifies women who called upon those of more fortunate means and education to assume the burden of uplifting the masses of African American womenfolk. In Chapter 3 we learn of the "separate leanings" of Black churches during the post-Reconstruction era. Not only did Black churches serve a spiritual function for the Black community, but they were also important vehicles of racial pride, self-help, and self-determination. Black women, we are informed, played crucial roles in establishing separate enclaves of Black Baptist groups. In addition to their racial solidarity with Black males, Black women also formed associations of "unlikely sisterhood" with White Baptist women, especially those from the North, as related in Chapter 4. We must not romanticize this relationship by imagining that northern White Baptist women

were devoid of racial prejudice, stereotypical understanding of certain aspects of Black religious and cultural life, and their own "mixed motives." Still, Higginbotham insists, there existed genuine interracial cooperation or sisterhood between these two groups of Baptist women and they labored jointly to uplift the masses of poor Black women in the South.

Chapter 5 puts forth the thesis that Black women, whether formally or informally, advocated a "feminist theology." They examined the biblical and religious traditions to highlight the achievements of sacred heroines and the principle of spiritual equality of the two genders. These women, however, did not challenge the traditional proscription against ordained ministry for women. For some time there had been successful efforts to establish separate women's conventions affiliated with state Baptist conventions. By 1900 that movement had succeeded on a national scale with the founding of the Woman's Convention as an auxiliary group of the recently created National Baptist Convention, but independent of its control. Chapter 6 chronicles this success and demonstrates the significance the Convention had for providing women with a national voice to address racial and gender issues. Chapter 7 examines the 1900-1920 years and "The Politics of Respectability." Focusing on the work and philosophy of the Woman's Convention, Higginbotham shows the varied means that Black Baptist women employed to deal with the still deteriorating socio-economic and political conditions of African Americans in general and women in particular. The Convention and its leaders preached a theology or philosophy of good morals and manners; acquisition of education (especially vocational or domestic training) as exemplified in the National Training School for Women and Girls, established in Washington, D. C. by Nannie Helen Burroughs; and racial self-help and enterprise. But the Woman's Convention also passed resolutions demanding equal rights and justice for African Americans.

As with practically any scholarly work, there are concerns that

might be expressed regarding its inclusions, omissions, or interpretations. First, while Dr. Higginbotham elected to focus upon the activity of black women within the U.S., I believe that her fine work would have been additionally augmented by a more complete examination of women in the foreign, and especially African, missions work. Women made tremendous contributions as organizers, fundraisers, and missionaries. Second, I question if the author has inadvertently overdrawn, if only by implicit suggestion, the solidarity between Northern White and Southern Black Baptist women. Third, it appears to this reviewer that her designation of these Black Baptist women leaders as proponents of "feminist theology" is too bold an appellation. As Dr. Higginbotham herself indicates in clear terms, these women by and large did not insist upon absolute gender equality in the Baptist circles of leadership; most notably they did not push for the ordination of women as ministers or pastors. Perhaps a term such as "protofeminist" or "feminine theology" might reflect better precision. Finally, and related to the preceding point, even should one argue that based upon the historical context these women's theologizing might be regarded as feminist in nature, why not employ the term "womanist," a scholarly term that deals most specifically with *Black* women and their commitment to end both gender *and* racial discrimination? The author certainly makes the point that this dual goal characterized Baptist women leaders during the 1880-1920 era. It also characterizes a number of women religion academics and religious leaders during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

These critical reservations notwithstanding, Dr. Higginbotham has presented us with a very solid piece of scholarship. As stated previously, the book is well-organized and clearly written with fine documentation and some impressive contemporary photographs. She employs a vast collection of primary and secondary sources and uses them creatively and insightfully. Basically, Dr. Higginbotham does not attempt to betray her sources by taking

the reader where research materials will not permit. She avoids making grandiose claims and engaging in sloganeering. To say that we should appreciate this book is a vast understatement. We must treasure it. Where else can we learn of the contributions of Nannie Helen Burroughs, Virginia Broughton, Mary V. Parrish Cook, Emma De LaMotta, Emma B. Delaney, Sarah Willie Layten, or of the assistance to women of Black male ministers such as William J. Simmons and White females such as Sophia Packard? Not many places. I have no hesitancy whatsoever in encouraging everyone to purchase this important text, read it, and use it in research, classrooms, churches, and discussion groups. I believe it will become a standard by which all future research in Baptist and women religious history will be measured.

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Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 169 pp. + xv.

Bauckham, N.T. professor at St. Andrew's University in Scotland, has written an outstanding theological interpretation of Revelation. This volume is one of the first in the New Testament Theology series under the general editorship of James D.G. Dunn. Bauckham's *Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* contains much of this in more detail; however, some arguments are new and stimulating.

The first chapter discusses the relationship between early Christian prophecy and worship. He argues that early Christian prophecy took place normally within worship as the word of God reported to the people of God at worship. Bauckham also is sensitive to the fact that Revelation is also a well-crafted, complex liter-



ary work. He defines it as a prophetic apocalypse which expands its readers' worldview by disclosing the transcendent, divine plan. In this way, it calls its readers to an uncompromising faithfulness to God (pp. 1-22).

Chapter 2 examines the theological and political dimensions of the phrase "the One who is and who was and who is to come." John's trinitarian theology (1:4b-5A) is unique among early Christian writings (p. 24) and has value as a demonstration of Christian trinitarianism free from hellenistic philosophical influence (see p. 164). The author notes that what applies to God also applies to Christ (pp. 25-28; cf. 54-58). He painstakingly examines the references to God, articulates their religious background and demonstrates their respective roles and functions in Revelation. His most important insights, I believe, concern Revelation's critique of Roman power (pp. 35-39) and the role of worship in Revelation's doctrine of God (pp. 40-51). The latter discussion is one of many examples of Bauckham's skillfulness as a theologian.

In chapters 3 and 4, Bauckham discusses the role of christology. He argues that God the Father and Christ Jesus are both divine beings and what defines one defines the other also. The Christ-Lamb is God's primary means of relating to the world (pp. 54-65). Thus, conquering through suffering is a major motif in Revelation. In chapter 5, he states that the expressions "the word of God," "the witness of Jesus" and "the witnesses of Jesus" connect God, Christ and the Christian community on earth: just as Jesus was faithful to the word of God, so too the witnesses of Jesus must be faithful to the witness of Jesus. Central to this concern for faithful witness are three themes: (1) the messianic war; (2) the eschatological exodus; (3) witness.

Pneumatology is the focus of chapter 5. Revelation's pneumatology is expressed in two phrases. "The seven spirits of God" symbolize the completeness of God's Spirit active in the world. "The Spirit" refers to prophetic activity among Christians. "Both

are the witness of Jesus and the word of God" (p. 121).

The New Jerusalem (chapter 6) examines the role of cities in general and the New Jerusalem in particular. While the New Jerusalem and Babylon/Rome are polar opposites spiritually, they share outward splendor and political dominion. Both the contrasts and the similarities are intentional. While Babylon gained its splendor from the exploitation of human beings, the New Jerusalem gained its splendor from the Godhead and the righteousness of its citizenry (pp. 126-43).

Chapter 7 discusses the contemporary relevance of Revelation as a prophetic book (see esp. pp. 148-56) and lists 11 contributions which Revelation can make to contemporary theological issues and concerns (see esp. 165-69).

Though at points I disagree with Bauckham (e.g., his position that the sealed scroll in Rev. 5:1-8:1 and the little scroll in Rev. 11 are the same scroll [pp. 80-84]), overall I found this book well worth reading. It is well written, rigorously argued, ably supported, stimulating and insightful to the point of making the Book of Revelation intelligible. Also, Bauckham is an able biblical scholar who understands theological nuances and communicates them clearly and logically.

What Leonard Thompson has done for our understanding of the literary composition and socio-historical context of Revelation, Bauckham has done for a better theological understanding of Revelation. This is a book which must be taken into consideration in any future theological discussions of the Book of Revelation.

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Cain Hope Felder, ed., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 260 pp., xi.

My comments about the book *Stony the Road We Trod* will address three issues: 1) the claims made by the book and how they are met; 2) the methods employed; 3) the role played by social location.

1. The claims made by the book and how they are met. "The presupposition of this book is that we must engage the new challenge to recapture the ancient biblical vision of racial and ethnic pluralism as shaped by the Bible's own universalism" (Preface p. ix). This statement itself presumes that the conventional way of understanding the biblical tradition has lost or blurred the Bible's vision of racial and ethnic pluralism. This prior presupposition is one which I share with the authors of the articles that comprise this collection. In my judgment, each article, in its own way, demonstrates the limitations of a Eurocentric world view and thus succeeds in: (1) uncovering racial and ethnic pluralism where customarily it has been overlooked by biblical interpretation; (2) unmasking the inadequacy of a world view and/or interpretive approach that overlooked or concealed such pluralism.

2. The methods employed. For the most part, the methods employed in the articles are contemporary and critical. They include both historical- and literary-critical approaches. When traditional African American ways of hearing and reading are described (e.g., Shannon's analysis of an ante-bellum sermon or Wimbush's examination of different ways of reading), or when technical methods are criticized (e.g., Myers), it is done from a critical point of view. However, there is a distinctiveness to these critical approaches that stems from the social location of the interpreters and the particular values, concerns, and insights that they bring to their work.

Each article is well documented. This not only represents

the depth and extent of the scholarship exemplified in the volume, but it is invaluable to readers who, like the present writer, are unfamiliar with aspects of African American religious history and current scholarship.

3. The role played by social location. While I am quite interested in sociological methods of biblical interpretation, it is primarily insights into the role played by the social location of the interpreters that most excites me. I believe that such insights are significant because they provide new ways of understanding the text, of understanding interpretation itself, of recognizing the limitations of one's own world view, and of appreciating the world view of another. Therefore, my evaluation of the merits of the book are made against this backdrop.

Issues of social location are taken quite seriously by each of the authors. Accordingly, several interpretive shifts take place. Regarding the first shift, there is a movement away from the prevailing Eurocentric perspective to one that reflects African American concerns. This movement has been prompted by the dilemma facing African American interpreters who, on the one hand, engage in critical investigation that presumes a Eurocentric world view and interpretive approach and, on the other hand, belong to believing communities that regard sources other than the biblical tradition as near-canonical (Myers). Critical analysis of the role played by social location helps one to realize that reading (which is always a form of interpreting) is itself a social convention, and one's interpretive community regulates which reading strategies are authoritative and which are not (Weems). Because of its own distinctive way of understanding color when it is used to define people, critical African American reading has perceived Black presence throughout ancient Israel's history where traditional reading has not (Copher, Bailey). Throughout the history of the African American community, the Bible has acted as a kind of language-world analogous to its own world, and the biblical message has been understood

accordingly (Wimbush). I find these hermeneutical claims and approaches quite compatible with the dynamics of tradition development and the principles of canonical criticism and, because of my own interest in these areas, I hope to pursue some of these ideas.

Regarding a second interpretive shift, the historical-critical insistence on the primacy of authorial intent yields to the interpretive role played by pressing contemporary issues such as racism or intercultural dialogue. While technical scholarship, traditional methods of interpretation, and Black experience all contribute to African American hermeneutics, it seems that here the question of biblical authority rests less in the answers given than in the questions asked, and these questions relate to issues of culture and imagination (Hoyt). The advantage of this cultural perception and imagination is illustrated in analyses of selected passages (Waters, Martin, and Lewis), where a corrective to the Eurocentric tendency of reading its own racial and ethnic bias into the biblical accounts thus distorting the meaning of the text is provided. The African-American experience of oppression and bondage gave birth to a culture and imagination which in turn shaped unique hermeneutical principles. I think that principles such as of contextuality, correlation, confrontation, and consolation (Shannon) offer creative possibilities for constructing a contemporary focus of interpretation. It suggests that their applicability be tested.

Finally, the foundational theological proposition upon which African American biblical hermeneutics rests is neither creation nor liberation nor eschatology, as is found in other theological paradigms, but the universal parenthood of God from which flows the universal kinship of humankind. Accordingly, the authors disavow all interpretation of Scripture that attempt to legitimate any form of human bondage. The theme of the universal parenthood of God challenges both the sacralization of any ideological concept which serves the vested interests of a particular ethnic/racial group, and the secularization of a concept that is fun-

damentally religious yet not universally held (Felder).

All of this praise notwithstanding, I found myself wondering what Myers meant when he discussed the roles played by non-biblical sources and different normative canonical stances. While I agree both on the importance of such sources and stances and the limitation and distortion of the dominant stance, I do believe that we still have to deal with the parameters of the canon, whether we find its contents inclusive enough or not. I further believe that even within its canonical limitations, the biblical testimonies are multivalent. The primary task of interpretation is precisely to uncover dimensions of this multivalence. If Myers is suggesting something otherwise, when he claims that the control of the final form is broken by other sources and stances, or if any of the other authors hold that position, we would be somewhat at variance on that point.

Finally, in addition to all that has been said above, I am particularly grateful for Wimbush's summary of the history of African American biblical reading, the womanist insights of Weems and Martin, Copher's summary of Black presence in the Bible (I have already used this article in both my Introduction and my Pentateuch courses), and the superb footnotes that every author included. All of this has provided me with opportunities to move beyond my own limited world view.

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Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite 1880-1920* (Indiana University Press, 1990), 450 pp.

Every racial or ethnic or religious group, no matter how oppressed has an elite. Afro-Americans are no exception. Since

ante-bellum times, Black folk have had a small aristocracy that has attempted to exert leadership and influence over the race. The Black elite in the ante-bellum era was extremely small and consisted of free Blacks in the North who had prospered through the provision of personal services to Whites, such as catering, barbering, livery services, etc. In the ante-bellum South there was an even tinier free Black elite, some of whom were slaveowners, concentrated in and around Charleston and New Orleans. Many members of the ante-bellum Black elite North and South descended from slaveowners who bequeathed cash or property to them. Consequently many had a quite fair complexion.

With the coming of freedom, the Black elites in the North and South expanded as Reconstruction opened up numerous opportunities for Black politicians, officeholders, and businessmen in the South. With the end of Reconstruction and the erosion of Black upward mobility in the South and elsewhere, the Black aristocracy in the last quarter of the 19th and first quarter of the twentieth century hunkered down in various Southern and Northern urban areas, especially in Washington D.C. With their elite status based on education, white collar and professional jobs, and family background (including White ancestry) the late 19th and early 20th century Black elite tried to set the tone for the entire race. It is their story that Willard B. Gatewood, a noted historian of the Black experience and a professor at the University of Arkansas, tells.

Gatewood organizes his work into four parts, each with a prologue describing the changes that Blanche K. Bruce, a leading Black Reconstruction era politician and aristocrat, and his family went through over the years. Part One gives the background and antecedents of the Black aristocracy. Parts Two and Three describe the Black elites of Washington D.C., "the Capital of the Colored Aristocracy", then the Black elites of the Midwest, Northeast and the South. In his examination of these Black folk, Gatewood describes their exclusiveness, emphasis on proper, upper class

behavior, pride in their ancestry, and preoccupation with skin color. Most of the Black aristocrats described were ministers, doctors, lawyers, educators, businessmen, journalists, and federal office holders. Their numbers were extremely small in relation to the rest of the Black community. As a result they were isolated from the masses of blacks and considered insignificant by Whites. Not helping matters was the Black aristocracy's tendency to shun the denominations favored by rank and file Blacks such as the Black Baptist and AME and AME Zion denominations. Instead the Black elite and their ministers favored more elitist denominations such as the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches.

Despite the social distance between the Black elite and the rest of the race, they still suffered from racism as did their less fortunate brethren. Barred from the country clubs, theaters, restaurants, opera houses and first class travel accommodations their income and status entitled them to, the Black elite were in the forefront of the efforts roll back the spread of Jim Crow in the early 1900s and formed the main source of opposition to Booker T. Washington's policies of racial accommodation. According to Gatewood many of Black aristocrats believed that if Black working class and poor folk adopted their genteel culture and habits then Blacks in general would be held in higher esteem by Whites, thereby mitigating or ending White racism.

With that in mind the Black elite at the turn of the century through their church and social club activities attempted to "uplift" the Black masses. Various charitable and educational activities were extended to poor Black folk to help lift them out of their misery and despair. These activities could go but so far given the limited resources available to the Black elite and the suspicion in which they were held by the rest of the Black community because of their snobbery and color consciousness.

Gatewood concludes his book with an examination of the changes undergone by the Black elite down through the 1920s.



Changes in the economy and the great migration of Blacks from the South to Northern cities changed the character of the Black aristocracy. Status among this group now more depended on wealth rather than family background, education, or skin color, though these were still important factors. The mushroom growth of Northern urban Black populations provided new opportunities for Black entrepreneurs, ministers, educators, and politicians. Consequently a new Black elite developed during the 1920s, gradually supplanting the older, more genteel elite.

*Aristocrats of Color* is an extremely useful study of a neglected topic in Afro-American history. The Black elite has rarely been studied and there are few works on them as comprehensive as this. In evaluating the Black elite, Gatewood properly takes them to task for their snobbery, color consciousness, and unrealistic belief that if all Blacks acted like them racism would abate. Yet he points out, and rightfully so, that the Black elite in the period studied took a far greater interest in the overall Black community than the White elite did in its community. Linked more closely to the Black community by White racism than than now, the Black elite described by Gatewood did in its way try to provide leadership, role models, and moral and social tone to their community. Not so with today's Black aristocrats who seem unable to provide clear vision, leadership or social standards to the African American community.

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Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel *The Women Around Jesus*, Trans. by John Bowden. (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 148 pp.

I found this book interesting, enlightening, persuasive and sensitive to women's struggle for equality in the Christian commu-

nity. Moltmann-Wendel's style of writing is clear and her concept of imagination in biblical interpretation compelling.

Moltmann-Wendel argues that the Bible, written and basically interpreted from the male perspective, is more "his story" than a story of and for both men and women. Christian history actually began as a history of men and women but was not recorded from that perspective. Recognizing that women have been largely ignored in the writing and interpreting of history, the author seeks to remove the burden of the past which is recorded from the patriarchal perspective and to shed some light on the significance of some of the women in the New Testament.

According to the author, the Bible hands down men's thoughts about God and about liberation through Jesus; however, she asks if the Bible had been written from the female perspective, what would the story be like? She responds that it would be quite different and believes that, according to the early Christian witness, women have not been given a fair deal. Moltmann-Wendel notes that the writers of the Bible give women roles as the weaker sex, servants, sisters, wives, and often associate them with sexual sinfulness. These traditions about women, she argues, are oppressive rather than liberating. They make total freedom and self-awareness hard to realize for some women. This causes some women to experience alienation from the Bible and regard it as an instrument of their suppression.

The author seems very much aware of the fact that overcoming centuries of biased interpretations within and concerning the Bible will not be an easy task; nor will this problem be solved easily. Nevertheless, it is important and necessary for women to rediscover themselves within the early Christian witness as having vital roles within the early Christian community. She calls for a rediscovery of the art of imagination in theology and lists eight ways in which this might be done in hermeneutics: (1) rediscover the matriarchal traditions through the use of art and culture; (2)

attempt to reintegrate into the contemporary church and society women of the Old Testament who have been recognized in literature and have not gained their recognition in the church; (3) take a new look at women in the Bible considering their biographies, human features, and personalities; (4) through the aforementioned stories work out an evolving understanding of Christian society, asking how these stories strike us now; (5) be courageous enough to be subjective and open to rejecting any passages in the Bible that are oppressive to women; (6) change patriarchal metaphors to feminine ones; (7) interpret the Bible as a whole, i.e., being sensitive to the feminine perspective and avoiding passages that alienate; (8) re-tell history with new narrative forms, giving life to the stories so that they can stand alongside our own lives. "Where God is experienced as a liberating force the Bible discloses countless new possibilities" (p. 11). I found numbers two through four most striking because they provide means to make the positive roles and contributions of women in the Bible meaningful to all persons in the contemporary church.

Moltmann-Wendel uses creative imagination and perception, combined with her knowledge of Scripture, to present the roles of some of the women around Jesus in a new light. She also takes a look at the differing ways in which women have been portrayed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Finally, she looks at ways in which these women have been re-presented in literature and art.

Her use of imagination in theology is a definite strength of this book. Imagination, as defined here by Moltmann-Wendel, helps the reader to attain a different understanding of women's role in the early Christian community. Her careful exploration of the New Testament and comparisons of the Gospel writers give new insight into interpretation.

One weakness of the book is that it does not explore in greater depth the social background that might have influenced the writers of Scripture. The book does this to some degree in dis-

cussing Luke. Had this been done more thoroughly with each Gospel writer, perhaps the book would have been even richer and might help us to understand better the evangelists' views of women around Jesus.

Despite the above criticism, this book makes a significant contribution into the role of women in the New Testament. By demonstrating the significant contributions of women, Moltmann-Wendel enables the reader to identify with these women and to use them as role-models. Having done so, women may be able to gain courage and to fulfill roles within the Christian community. This book presents New Testament women as female role-models, ones with whom contemporary women can identify.

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