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Crossing the divide: Luther, feminism, and the cross

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Accessibility: This book is perfect for a rather wide-ranging audience from laity who want brain and heart engaged in a deeper way, to an undergraduate and finally to a graduate text (seminary). In this sense, my initial reaction to the early pages was hasty, for the audience here suggested deserves to have the methodology for such a study spelled out clearly. Herzog does just that.

Scholarship & Faith: The genius of this book emerges in its dialectic of faith and scholarship. I see this also in the work of Horsley and Crossan, but I find that Herzog blends the two better than any other scholar in the field. I cannot read him without encountering the flesh-and-blood Jesus and finding myself pulled into the dangerous waters of discipleship. My scholarly hunger is satisfied and my heart is troubled and stirred to follow the one Herzog describes. When he speaks of the resurrection faith he describes it well: “it is clear that God’s redemption includes justice; the gospel includes the social gospel. No realm of human life is left untouched from the rulers to the beggars. It is also true that the ‘good news’ does not mean one thing for all. The good news is bad news when announced to the ruling elites’ but good news to the healed, women, the marginalized” (232).

I find it interesting that William Herzog teaches at the seminary where Walter Rauschenbusch taught almost a century ago. Thank you, Bill, for a life-transforming book. Thank you, Walter Rauschenbusch *redivivus!*

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Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism and the Cross

Deanna A. Thompson

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004

184 pages, \$21.50 softcover

For Lutherans, immersed in the theology of the cross while insisting upon radical gender equality under the rubric of the Gospel, Deanna A. Thompson’s *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism and the Cross* is a must. Having pursued my spiritual journey as a “justification by

grace alone through faith alone” Lutheran for the last fifty years, I find her book that breath of fresh air for which I have searched for at least three of those five decades. I deem Thompson’s volume to be profoundly honest, profoundly engaging, profoundly challenging and profoundly faithful to both the Biblical and core traditions of our faith. My explanations follow.

Profoundly honest: I am saddened to have to say that I find most books that deal with Luther’s theology of the cross to be disturbing by their refusal to deal with Luther’s failures beyond the wearying dollop of “well, he was a man of his time.” Not so Thompson! She exposes boldly his rabid anti-Semitism, his blind sexism, and his class indifference to the peasants’ perception of the Gospel and without the standard Lutheran defensiveness. Further, she acknowledges her own class and ethnic/racial privilege, not as a “throw away” sidebar but as part of the essential limitations under which she operates. In these clear expressions of honesty (the like of which I see so rarely in Lutheran academics) I perceive the fresh air of the Spirit.

Profoundly engaging and profoundly challenging: *Crossing the Divide* is an easy book to read, not because it is simplistic but rather because it is so well-written, clear, inspiring in its style and demanding in its challenge to think and live under the cross in radical Gospel equality.

Profoundly faithful to the Bible & Luther’s Core Theology: To be true to both the Bible and Luther’s perceptions involves a deep wrestling that moves beyond the assumptions of Lutheran theology for the last almost five hundred years. In my seminary days we found it rather easy to interlink Luther’s cross and grace theology with the intoxicating brand of existentialism expressed so profoundly by Rudolf Bultmann and his school: gender played no part, subtle and not-so-subtle anti-Semitism remained, and the individualism of Bultmannians and Luther was a marriage made in heaven. Thompson explodes all that. Willy-nilly she returns to the collective and social impact of New Testament “grace” by moving Luther beyond the narrow framework of the inwardly spiritual and outwardly status quo. She demands of Luther the kind of Biblical incarnation of radical grace that screams “in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.”

I am convinced with all my heart that this book emerges as so important that it should not be consigned to a “feminist” optional text

in systematic theology, as a recommended read after the required reading of the fine work by Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context*, or similar works by authors like Gerhard Forde, *et al.* It is time to relegate them to optional readings and make Deanna Thompson's *Crossing the Divide* the seminal text in Lutheran courses on systematic theology. This book shines like a beacon and finally helps us articulate a "justification by grace alone through faith alone" theology that has flesh and blood.

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