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Christian ethics: a historical introduction

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the powerful in North America. He aptly addresses how Christian Stewardship is a needed call to discipleship, especially in our society. I highly recommend this book.

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Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction

J. Philip Wogaman

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993

xi + 340 pp. \$19.99 U.S.

A Senior Minister of Foundry United Methodist Church and Professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., J. Philip Wogaman has been an important voice in Protestant ethics. An author of books on Christian moral judgment and economic ethics, Wogaman now turns his attention to the legacy of Christian ethics, a legacy that is neither monolithic nor altogether positive. The conviction driving this work is compelling: "... if Christians are to accept the responsibilities of their own era, they need to know something of the mistakes as well as the insights and triumphs of Christian witness in previous generations" (p. ix).

Six tensions frame Wogaman's discussion of this ambiguous history. In the biblical legacy of Christian ethics as well as in its modern context, Wogaman finds tensions between revelation and reason, materialism and the life of the spirit, universalism and group identity, grace and law, love and force, status and equality. That Christians have made no better headway in resolving these tensions might discourage the reader interested in happy endings. But Wogaman offers these six tensions not as conflicts demanding resolution but rather as enduring compass markings in the rugged terrain of Christian discipleship.

Relying on primary texts, Wogaman traces the history of these tensions throughout the history of Christianity: early Christianity through St. Augustine, medieval Christianity, Reformation and Enlightenment, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalism and evangelicalism, and the twentieth century. Nor is Wogaman's primary focus Protestant ethics. Chapters on Catholic humanism and reformation in the sixteenth century and on papal social encyclicals, Vatican II, liberation theology, and ecumenical social ethics in the twentieth century enrich his text. Wogaman attends to contemporary questions throughout: war and peace, the status of women and slaves, the question of poverty, thus gleaned the wisdom of centuries past for present generations of Christians.

Wogaman's survey of the broad scope of Christian ethics is an impressive and important addition to the libraries of any student of the faith, lay,

commissioned, or ordained. At the same time, it suffers from the problems of any single volume commentary on such a diverse history. Three short paragraphs on Aristotle do not really prepare the reader to appreciate his enormous impact on medieval theology. Later, Wogaman notes the significance of "the recovery of the Augustinian doctrine of grace" to Reformation theology and ethics (p. 109); yet, his discussion of Augustine does not allude to grace at all. Wogaman's reduction of the rich and troubling diversity of the biblical materials into the aforementioned six tensions flattens an important source for Christian ethics—and a source whose authority is increasingly debated, particularly in Protestant circles presently fixated on what the Bible says and does not say about sexuality. An historian lies awake at night wondering: are *our* questions really *their* questions? At times, Wogaman's six tensions get lost in his analysis as he looks at one period topically, at another period in terms of great thinkers and great ideas, and at another attending to the "spirit of the times".

These criticisms should in no way deter one from purchase and careful perusal of this volume; they are rather markings for an icy bridge or a slippery road. No single volume could begin to present comprehensively the breadth of Christian teachings on ethics, but must be used in conversation with a few other partners: H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, George Forell's *History of Christian Ethics*, John Mahoney's *The Making of Moral Theology*, David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, Thomas Ogletree's *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*, William C. Spohn's *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?*

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Spiritual Quest: An Inter-Religious Dimension

Hasan Askari

West Yorkshire, England: Seven Mirrors Publishing House
Limited, 1991

139 pp.

The author is a Shi'ite Muslim who grew up in the context of the pluralistic society of India. His acquaintanceship with other religions prompted him to find out more about the other religions, and in seeking a place for himself in this context, he became a spokesperson for dialogue among the peoples of the Abramitic faiths. He, then, became a teacher and lecturer in several universities in India, Lebanon, Germany, Holland, Britain and the United States. As a result he has been one of the Muslim respondents