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Civil religion and political theology

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He could also have included Lutheran theologians in that sense of disquiet! My one disappointment in the text came in this section; I would have desired a more comprehensive dialogue with each of these issues. As it is, the author remains true to his central thesis and lets the reader wonder about practical and liturgical application.

Although writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Osborne is sensitive to Protestant struggles with these sacraments; he cites materials from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and the *Book of Common Prayer* and in the last chapter "The Eucharist, An Integral Part of Christian Initiation," he engages, in a constructive and provocative manner, Krister Stendahl at length in his view that "baptism in the NT and in the early church is always an act of *initiation*, and that this in fact should be the point of departure." His contention with Stendahl is that Jesus as primordial sacrament must be taken as the point of departure.

I found it a pleasure to read this book. It's an engaging document, written in easily understood language, which will be of value to many people—to those involved in studies on sacramental theology and practice it will be a helpful reference; to those involved in seminary course studies, it will be a stimulating text or an exciting recommended reading; to pastors and church leaders participating in ministerial associations or local councils of churches, it could be a resourceful study guide; to persons engaged in inter-church dialogues, it will serve as a clarifying partner in dialogue.

"The theology of both baptism and eucharist [and confirmation] is intimately conjoined to ecclesiology and even more fundamentally to christology."

Arnold D. Weigel
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Civil Religion and Political Theology

Leroy S. Rouner, editor

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986

240 pp., U.S. \$24.95 cloth

"Civil Religion" and "Political Theology" are terms which have become common parlance for many of us ever since the American Robert Bellah published his by now famous 1967 essay "Civil Religion in America" and the German Catholic theologian Johannes Baptist Metz began developing a new Political Theology at about the same time. Seldom, however, do we think of these together. Here for the first time a group of distinguished scholars from a variety of disciplines, including Bellah and Metz, discuss these two concepts in relation to each other.

All assume that religion and theology have an important role to play in public political and social life. They disagree, however, on what form that

public responsibility should take. The fundamental disagreement appears to be between those who prefer to talk about "civil religion" in positive terms, as a glue which functions to hold a diverse society together, and those who see any civil religion as an idolatrous and ideological legitimation of the status quo. The former see the need for some shared religious values in a pluralistic and democratic society like America if public life is to be possible at all; the latter call for a theology which is critical of any supportive alliance between religion and existing social and political structures.

Most of the authors in this volume take a position somewhere in between these two extremes. The editor Leroy Rouner, for instance, reflects the view of a number of the essayists when in his comprehensive introduction he writes "I would note only that there can be neither public theology nor public philosophy without common ground. This book is a celebration of that common ground and an expression of the current commitment of Christian thought to engagement with those historical issues which concern the entire human family" (20).

Of all the authors Jürgen Moltmann is clearly the most critical of all civil religion, a direct reaction to his experiences of political religion during the Hitler era and the political theologies of the right, such as that of Carl Schmitt, who developed a theology in support of National Socialism. In contrast to this "old" political theology Moltmann's new political theology concentrates on the confessional responsibility of the church within society: "The new political theology is a theory of the public, critical, and liberative functions of the Christian church in modern society. It is not the theory of a political religion of this society... not affirmative but critical" (43).

On the other end of the spectrum is Richard John Neuhaus, who sees the need for a religiously supported American public philosophy which would be democratic and populist, pluralistic in its recognition of a "community of many communities," "religiously attuned," "critically affirmative" of the American liberal-democratic experiment, modest in its expectations, and view the church as "the community of transcendent hope." Such a public philosophy ought to be distinguished from theocratic civil religion but must take the religious reality of Americans seriously and see particularist religion as providing "a mediating language, a common moral vocabulary to be shared by those who are not of shared religious conviction" (107).

Matthew Lamb, Boston College, seems to assume the need for some shared religious values in a society but stresses the ambiguity of both civil religion and political theology, and the potential for repression in both. They can be either complementary or contradictory to one another, depending on whether they "aim at the healing liberation of human life" or whether "one or the other legitimates or fosters domination" (156). What is needed at the end of the modern era is the collaboration of political theology and civil religion in the overcoming of the pathologies of "sexism, racism, economic oppression or classism, environmental pollution... and militarism" (162) and the moving of "humankind away from the edge of [nuclear] destruction" (159).

Process theologian John B. Cobb concludes the book defending a kind of middle position between civil religion and political theology, capitalism and socialism. Cobb is clearly sympathetic to the various liberation and political theologies, their solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and their call for the deprivatization of religion. He is critical, nevertheless, of theologies that he perceives as doing little more than denouncing every act of government while themselves retaining a distance from all policy formation that might involve them: in imperfect choices. Cobb sees strengths and weaknesses in both capitalism and socialism, and urges Christians to reflect seriously on a political economic theory which recognizes the important insights both of individual freedom and responsibility, and the greater distribution of wealth. His major concern, however, is with the punishment inflicted by both capitalists and socialists on the biosphere through unrestrained industrial growth and modernization, and he challenges Christians to transcend both alternatives in their economic reflection, seeking ways of significantly restricting individual and corporate selfishness for the saving of this planet.

There are many other fine essays in this volume. The first one by Thomas McCarthy, in which the author brilliantly demonstrates the similarity between Kant's argument that religious beliefs are postulates requisite for morality and Helmut Peukert's "political faith in God" in which theology is necessary for universal solidarity with the innocent victims of history, is philosophically the most substantive of the whole book. Yaron Ezrahi laments the erosion of classical epistemological realism and "objective" science which he considers as having been essential for liberal democratic political discourse in the past. Robert Bellah, while questioning the ongoing usefulness of his own earlier term "civil religion," is insistent on the need for a public philosophy and public theology, turning to the Niebuhrian realist model as having ongoing relevance, and seeing the recent Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy as a step in the right direction.

John Wilson maintains that historically what tied Americans together was a "common religion"—first Protestantism and later more broadly the Judeo-Christian tradition—making a civil religion and a political theology possible. In the past few decades, however, we have become religiously pluralistic. In this new context any attempt to reinstate a civil religion tends to be socially reactionary; and an aggressive political theology divisive (122). Metz with his usual creativity identifies three competing paradigms in the present Roman Catholic Church: neo-Marxist, transcendentalist, and his own post-idealist one, which responds to three challenges: Marxism, Auschwitz, and the Third World. He identifies recent interest in civil religion as a neo-conservative "legitimation of politics through religion." Post-idealist political theology, on the contrary, criticizes all such politicization of religion in the light of the Marxist call for universal justice, the Auschwitz demand for anamnestic solidarity with the victims of history, and the Third World challenge to become a "culturally polycentric universal church" (151).

Margaret R. Miles, Harvard Divinity School, in a provocative article on early North African Christianity, shows how "patriarchal order was not, as we have come to think of it, inevitable, God-ordained, and scripturally based" but the gradual ecclesiastical subordination of women "who experienced the freedom of Christ specifically as freedom for the cultivation of a lifestyle and spiritual life undefined by males" (184). Finally, Black theologian James H. Cone characterizes Black religious thought in America as a distinct amalgam of both African and Christian religion "adapted to the life situation of black people's struggle for justice in a nation whose social, political, and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology" (87).

The main problem of the book is also its strength: the diversity of viewpoints. There is no one clear concept of what "civil religion" is, let alone what constitutes the nature of religion. Neither is there one view of political theology. About the only general consensus amongst the authors appears to be, as the editor puts it, "that religion must be relevant to political life without being co-opted by it" (2). Despite this, and the fact that a number of the essays do not directly address the topic of the book, this is an excellent introduction not only to some of the best sociologists of religion and theologians of today but also to the basic issues in the debate between civil religionists and political theologians.

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The Teaching Church—Active in Mission

Paul D. and Katherine A. Gehris

Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press

98 pp.

This book is one of a series of books on The Teaching Church published by Judson Press. The series deals with five "functions" of a teaching church: 1. affirming the foundations of the teaching ministry; 2. planning for an effective teaching ministry; 3. developing leaders for a variety of ministries; 4. nurturing persons in Christian growth; and 5. enabling the church's mission in the world. The term "missioner" is introduced as "persons who are actively engaged in mission, beginning where they are and continuing to the far corners of creation" (5).

The title caught my attention and I picked the book up eagerly but found it was difficult for me to read. Upon the third reading it began to make sense and I realized that it is intended to be a book for study and discussion by people who are interested in enabling the church's mission in the world. People who wish to develop education for mission will find it