

5-1-1988

Devotional Theology: Meditations on Christian Existence

Gottlieb Werner Luetkehoelter

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Luetkehoelter, Gottlieb Werner (1988) "Devotional Theology: Meditations on Christian Existence," *Consensus*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol14/iss1/16>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

his readers that the new covenant has been mediated by the sacrificial blood, the "blood of the covenant" (9:20; 10:29; 13:20) of the Son of God. Evidently the Hebrews did not want to hear such a theology of the cross. The writer warns them that once ears are closed, there no longer is any possibility for communication or for repentance.

This is a brilliantly conceived thesis. Whether it has been convincingly established, however, remains open to question. The reconstruction of supposed confessional formulas and hymns which were then redacted by the author of Hebrews is not always persuasive (see e.g., 66f., 86f.), and in the opinion of this reviewer the polemic against spiritual elitism is not sufficiently pronounced in Hebrews to establish the thesis that Hebrews is intended chiefly to address the problem of spiritual arrogance.

However, Rissi has offered stimulating new possibilities for entering into the "theological meditations" which make up this document. Rissi's book deserves careful attention. If Rissi has reconstructed the situation accurately, Hebrews is yet another document (besides Paul's Corinthian correspondence, the Gospel of Mark and the Johannine literature) which attests to the prevalence of *Schwärmer*-theology in the early church and testifies to the consistency with which such a theology was opposed by the representatives of what has become orthodox Christianity. The implications for theology and ministry today are obvious.

Erwin Buck
Lutheran Theological Seminary

Devotional Theology: Meditations on Christian Existence

Egil Grislis

Bristol, Indiana: Wyndham Hall Press, 1987

Egil Grislis' book is a fine example of the second naiveté (a term coined by Paul Ricoeur of the University of Chicago). Grislis has experienced the hell of war, listened to detractors of the faith, studied the texts with scholarly diligence, examined the history of the church with all its battles, boils, and small bursts of heroic faith, and has emerged as one who confesses "I believe".

In chapter nine "Tragedy and Grace in the Baltic" he recalls the deportation of 470,000 countrymen and women to Siberia, a horrible journey in overcrowded freight cars. Many did not survive the trip and the corpse of a close relative of his was discovered alongside the tracks in Latvia. He recalls a Lutheran pastor who was in solitary confinement for eight years and "kept his faith, sanity and kindness". Some lost their faith like the man who eluded the police but discovered upon his return that his wife

and two daughters had been dragged off to Siberia. He concludes "we have learned to value heaven" (61).

His reflections on conversion (ch. 2) are some of the most valuable in this book. He helps us examine the mountaintop experience of encountering God and holds it up as a genuine possibility for all, a moment that marks the discovery of "heaven in the midst of ordinary days" (10). What is especially helpful is that Grislis proceeds to ask, "Now what?" He suggests that: (1) The converted need to concentrate on active devotion and service. "To concentrate on... retelling cheapens the original encounter and may be no more lofty than any other kiss-and-tell for pay!"; (2) Converts need to pay attention to the Christian community and not allow their intense experience to be a thorn in the flesh of the church. "Force feeding may fatten animals and fowl, but a human community must be slowly persuaded with wisdom and love" (12).

It is also fascinating to feel this theologian nudge Lutherans toward a greater tolerance and a deeper appreciation for other religious traditions. In his chapter on the Reformation (ch. 8) he praises the courage of Luther and the Reformer's steadfast faith in the grace of God. Then he proceeds to tell us about the English Chancellor, Sir Thomas More; the young Menonite girl, Trijntgen, who was tortured on the rack but did not divulge the names of other anabaptists; Menno Simons; and Latimer and Ridley, all of whom displayed courage and deep faith. To celebrate the reformation in self-righteous intolerance is unthinkable. "Unless... love radiates from our confessions of faith, these are but eloquent words without worthy substance" (56).

His chapter on hell (ch. 16) is a classic illustration of the second naiveté. He begins by saying that most have abandoned the Word because "sinful life looks a lot safer without the possibility of hell" (123)! Then he shares what he has experienced, especially at Biberach in Southern Germany, where he had the tragic task of digging out townspeople who had been buried in rubble after two Allied bombers emptied their bomb bays on this little town in April 1945. The faces of the two suffocated children he dug out made hell a living reality. Throughout this piece he emphasizes God's intention to empty hell and fill heaven, but this does not detract from the reality he has experienced. Without the love of Christ the "awfulness is so intense that we may very well employ the traditional term 'hell' to describe it" (128).

Egil Grislis is convinced that "all of one's life has been a mysterious and unending preparation of grace for grace" (preface). The twenty chapters in this slim volume allow us to hear how the professor's experiences have led him to a deeper awareness of God's presence and to the urgent necessity of living out faith in love.

Lee Luetkehoelter
Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod
Winnipeg