

5-1-2005

# The angry Christian: a theology for care and counseling

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### Recommended Citation

O'Connor, Thomas (2005) "The angry Christian: a theology for care and counseling," *Consensus*: Vol. 30 : Iss. 1 , Article 20.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol30/iss1/20>

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equation with the scriptures) than that. At points I also wished Ramshaw would have been a bit more critical with her take on the lectionary itself, especially its tendencies to reinscribe some problematic typological readings of Hebrew Bible texts, especially in Advent. Naturally the issue is not so much whether there should be some typological thinking, but *how* to do it in a way that honours both the lectionary tradition and Jewish-Christian relations.

Yet these concerns do not diminish substantially my appreciation for Ramshaw's work. Despite the flaws, preachers and worship planners alike will benefit from her beautify tapestry of lectionary images.

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### **The Angry Christian: A Theology for Care and Counseling**

Andrew D. Lester

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002  
308 pages, \$30.00 Softcover

Andrew Lester is seeking to de-construct the notion of anger-as-sin and co-construct an alternative narrative about anger in the Christian tradition. The alternative narrative views anger as part of God's creation especially rooted in the commandment to love. Anger is not sin but can lead to sin. The terrible misuse of anger that leads to abuse and violence is sin. However, Lester does not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. He wants to affirm that anger is a healthy emotion and to find ways that the expression of anger can lead to life and not death. Lester argues that this alternative narrative is already present in Christianity but it is not the dominant narrative. The dominant narrative is that anger-is-sin and in this view, anger ought to be rooted out like rooting out weeds. In this book, the apt image for the alternative narrative about anger is that of a rose bush that needs to be pruned and gardened and not weeded out. Lester succeeds in presenting a strong argument for the alternative narrative

The book presents mostly a theological argument for seeing anger as part of God's creation, rooted in our biology and an outcome

of the desire to love. Lester presents research from the neurology and the way that the brain processes the emotion of anger. The biology of anger is complicated and there are two nervous systems that process this emotion. The neurological argument does not see anger as an aberration of the human mind and person but rather the human being is wired for anger. Lester also addresses the arguments for the anger-is-sin both from Scripture and the early and later traditions of Christianity. He traces the notion of anger-is-sin back to the Stoics who viewed all emotion as evil. Much of Christianity adopted this Stoic view and believed that emotions at best ought to be tolerated and worst to be avoided and suppressed (rooted out). The book has four parts that include thirteen chapters. Part one is thinking about emotion. Understanding anger is part two. Part three is constructing a pastoral theology of anger and part four is dealing with anger through Christian care and counselling.

The strength of the book is the arguments that Lester provides for the alternative narrative. He advocates that anger be taken off the list of the seven deadly sins and seen as part of the wonderful way that God made human beings. Lester is at his best when he recovers the alternative story of anger from Scripture and from the many theologians who spoke against anger and its consequences. Lester indicates that males like John Calvin, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Aquinas, John Cassian, Pope Benedict also saw some positive aspect to anger that ought not be rooted out. These same males, however, spoke against anger and mostly saw it as sin. The weakness of the book is that I wanted more practical ways of helping parishioners and clients deal with anger and its abuses. Lester does offer some excellent case examples but there is not enough. As a family therapist and specialist in pastoral care and counselling, I wanted more. Anger is a big issue in therapy and care. I would have cut some of the argument about the alternative narrative and included more the praxis of care and counselling on anger.

I like the book and recommend it to others. I rate it 8 out of 10.

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