Remembered voices: reclaiming the legacy of neo-orthodoxy

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describes *The Twentieth Century*) contains a clear interplay of thought with historical context. Yet there remains a constant tension between these two poles, and none of us escapes coming down more heavily on one or the other, however nuanced we might seek to be. My own interests carry me closer to the social context out of which people speak. For example, when I look at the work of Père Chenu I am drawn immediately to those realities that shaped him so decisively—the growth of the French proletariat outside of the church, the Communist leadership presence in the French working class from the 1930s, the Popular Front, the rise of working-class specialized Catholic Action (J.O.C.) and the collaborationist epoch and post-World War II Pentecost which produced the missionary parishes, the *Mission de France* seminary and the worker-priests. As theologians we are inclined toward a disembodiment of our ideas as if they had an independence apart from our history and locus within class, gender, culture, et. al. If *The Twentieth Century* falls into this trap it does so infinitely less than other works of its type. As ever, Greg Baum underscores the role of context. I am reminded of an article in an earlier work edited by Dr. Baum (*Concilium: Work and Religion*, 1980). In an essay called “Labour and Religion according to Karl Marx,” Latin liberationist Otto Maduro presents to all us who sell our theological labour that we operate in a society of class domination and thus produce our theological products in an alienating context. This sobering thought stands as a challenge to any and all of us who do theology in a privileged context, most often economically and spatially distant from those we might objectify as the poor and oppressed. In such a self-critical context of profound uneasiness, fine books like *The Twentieth Century* offer their richest gifts.

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**Remembered Voices: Reclaiming the Legacy of “Neo-Orthodoxy”**
Douglas John Hall
166 pages, $27.95 Softcover

Christians are not exempt from the effects of the cultural amnesia so characteristic of our society. What we tend to remember from our theological past are the so-called (and in most cases rightly called) “great works,” more often than not in summary, condensed, or excerpted form. In this “dual retrospective” at once of his own theological biography and that of the movement known as “Neo-Orthodoxy,” Douglas John Hall provides an antidote to theological amnesia. He does so not simply by providing his own overview and interpretation
of the legacy of Neo-Orthodoxy, though this he does with splendid scholarship. The achievement of this book is in Hall’s ability to bring the voices of his chosen seven theologians to life. The “legacy” referred to in the title of the book is no crowned set of theological achievements (great and important though these be!) but rather, as Hall puts it, “not to laud and magnify the thoughts of these giants...but to emulate their spirit.” Hall’s voice is present in several dimensions: student, teacher, gifted theologian, and always the Christian seeking to live as a faithful disciple of Christ in today’s world, helped along the way by those whose spirit has inspired him. Indeed, his choice of theological “giants” is based not only on the criteria of excellence in scholarship, but on their modeling of Christian discipleship.

*Remembered Voices* is part theological autobiography, part historical overview of a movement and its leaders, and part theological commentary on the present context of Christian discipleship. It is as well in no small part a treatise on the vocation of the theologian in the church. Accessible and lively in its writings as Hall the teacher is in person, the book provides an engaging introduction to the lives and work of each of the theologians portrayed. Barth, Tillich, Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, and de Diétrich are introduced as through a friend who is unashamedly a fond student and admirer, and who relates the context of their lives and biographical anecdotes with as much care as he brings to a theological analysis of their works. One is introduced not just to the major works of the authors (indeed, in some cases only relatively “minor” works are cited!), but to the heart of the matter for each one. Barth is remembered in friendly comparison to Beethoven for his “unlimited, never resting imagination,” an imagination that was sharply tuned to the radically changed situation of Christians in the world and turned to critique not only post-Enlightenment rationality but the Christian establishment. Making a good case for the argument that the opposition between Tillich and Barth has been exaggerated, Hall welcomes reflection on Tillich’s achievements as an occasion to reflect on systematization in an age skeptical of unified systems. In such an age, how might we follow Tillich in the search for the unity of the truth in faith? Reinhold Niebuhr’s revival of the theology of original sin and the logic of the cross are presented within the context of his “American theology of the tragic.” The student Hall is eager to share what he has learned from each of these theological mentors. Bonhoeffer’s theological critique of ethics simply as ethics, and his argument that there is no non-dangerous theology, have something to teach our churches today, particularly as they struggle to articulate positions on social, ethical, and justice issues. Brunner’s dual critique of both objectivism and subjectivism speak in a lively way to our present-day “secular retreat into the interior.” H. Richard Niebuhr’s Christology reminds us that in Christ we see both the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus*. Finally, Suzanne de Diétrich, in bringing *sola scriptura* alive in the integration of critical biblical studies and congregational Bible study, asks scholars of all ages whether their work is
undertaken for the sake of the scholarship itself, or for the sake of the church.

Hall seems to accept the achievements of postmodern critique and deconstruction with a certain resignation that critique must occur in order for reconstruction to happen, but with annoyance that, to borrow Brunner's language, deconstructive subjectivism has for the most part only led to theological dissolution. He seems eager, if not impatient, for his students to recapture the theological work of integration, construction, even system-building, with the self-critical edge that only faithful discipleship can bring to the task. His conviction that the legacy of Neo-Orthodoxy can serve as a guide in this task is compelling, and borne out in his own (autobiographical) reflections on the theological vocation, and in his occasional commentaries, within this book, on the challenges facing the Canadian churches today. Immensely readable, this book can be enjoyed by the theological specialist for a breath of fresh air, and welcomed by others as an engaging introduction to the theology of "Neo-Orthodoxy."

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The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward A Buddhist-Christian Awareness
Thich Nhat Hanh and Daniel Berrigan
Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001
153 pages, $15.00 US Softcover

Originally published in 1975, just as the horror in Vietnam was coming to its final climax, this book became immediately popular in the peace movement. A series of conversations recorded in Paris between an exiled Vietnamese Buddhist monk and an American Jesuit priest who had spent time in prison for burning draft records, the book is primarily a political piece with strong spiritual dimensions. Republished 25 years later, many of the topics discussed are still relevant to our current world scene, while it remains a fascinating period piece that gives insight into the "spirit of the times."

Conversations are organized as chapters with headings that include Memory, Eucharist, Death; Religion in the World; Exile; Priests and Prisoners; Self-Immolation; Government and Religion; Economics and Religion; Jesus and Buddha; and Communities of Resistance. Each conversation is intensely personal, with the recounting of stories from the lives of both men, as well as ready reference to events reported in the news media at the time. The orientation