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The Word of Life: Systematic Theology, 2

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completely convincing (e.g., head seems clearly at times to mean "source" or "origin", 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-12; Colossians 1:15-18; 2:19 etc). Ellis stresses that the primary purpose of ministry according to Paul is not to serve or change society but to call and then build people up in their new identity in Christ. This seems well grounded as far as it goes but questions arise when he goes on to fire barbs of criticism at liberation theology. This is too sweeping. If there is misconception of the gospel in versions of liberation theology, surely it is also true that salvation concretely involves liberation (cf. Exodus 15; Romans 8).

The book deals with questions directly; one may disagree at key points and still find the work illuminating. This is at once an important and strongly argued contribution addressing many of the critical questions and casting light at many points on ministry as presented in Pauline theology.

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The Word of Life. Systematic Theology: Volume Two

Thomas C. Oden

San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989

xxi + 583 pp. U.S. \$32.95

This second volume of Oden's projected three-volume *Systematic Theology* carries forward the method and approach of its predecessor, *The Living God. Systematic Theology: Volume One*. Oden approaches Christian doctrine from a biblical-traditional perspective that enables his readers to encounter the riches of the church's teaching and to grasp the significance of traditionary formulations. He demonstrates a sound grasp of the tradition and an ability to state its message clearly for his readers. Readers can only admire his exploration and exposition of patristic, medieval, and classic Protestant theologies—and readers ought also to appreciate the broadly ecumenical character of Oden's doctrinal statements. In his own words, Oden offers here a "systematic statement of the meaning of Jesus' authority, life and work that ... attends to classic Christian exegesis (especially of the first five centuries) without getting embroiled in ever-extending modern historical interpretations and debates" (xi). On this fundamental level, the work continues to be one of the best contemporary efforts at presenting the traditional message of Christianity to a more or less conservative audience.

This is not, however, to say that there are no problems resident in Oden's approach—and, indeed, Christology is precisely the place where the problems become evident. A few substantive encounters with "modern historical interpretations and debates" would be salutary. For although he reflects some of the results of modern New Testament exegesis and theology,

there are crucial places in the work where Oden abandons the conclusions of modern historical study in the name of the "postmodern, postcritical situation, wherein the assumptions of modernity are no longer credible apart from tiny, introverted elites"—and, at least to the mind of this reviewer, only demonstrates the necessity of recognizing the opposite, that theology is no more capable of abandoning the results of the "modern" historical-critical method today than it was in 1918 when Barth attempted to do so in his *Epistle to the Romans*. The place where this problem is most apparent is Oden's proposal that "the premise of theandric union" be "entertained as a serious hypothesis by historians" (527). He moves from discussion of the "history of Jesus" to the declaration that "Christ was a historical person, not merely an idea" without clear recognition that his very usage symbolizes the christological problem—and he speaks of the "recovery of classic [i.e., patristic and traditional] Christological exegesis on its own terms" (533), while nonetheless declaiming only two pages later that "classic Christology . . . is not exegesis". The exegetical and historical problem is perhaps most clearly evidenced in Oden's use of Johannine Jesus-sayings (e.g., 509, 511) as possessing the same historical value as sayings belonging, for example, to the Sayings Source ("Q") underlying Matthew and Luke. This homogenization of christological issues neither supports the traditional approach—which, if it is to be reconstructed and defended, must come to terms with critical exegesis—nor offers a genuine alternative to critical exegesis itself. Indeed, the inherent problematic of Oden's approach indicates only that, if historical-critical thinking has become the property of a "tiny, introverted elite", the task of teachers of theology is not to abandon it, but to bring its results to bear on Christian teaching clearly enough that its credibility will be obvious to a larger audience.

By way of summary—Oden's *Word of Life*, like its predecessor, *The Living God*, represents an important attempt to recover the church's great tradition for contemporary students of theology and, as such, it is a significant and readable text. It is also a genuinely "catholic" text that will often be able to address an audience that would have difficulty with the older orthodox manuals of theology, like Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* or J.T. Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics*. But it will have to be used in conjunction with works that present the critical problems raised by modern theology and exegesis. Much of the difficulty faced by conservative theology today is that orthodox systems like Oden's fail to recognize that exegesis and hermeneutics are not only at the heart of theological formulation but also that traditional formulations become less than convincing when grounded solely on exegetical and hermeneutical approaches that are no longer practiced.

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