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## Sin As Addiction

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Several criticisms of the book are in order. The chapter on Henry Mitchell's "Narrative in the Black Tradition", will unfortunately, not be perceived as particularly useful to most Canadian Lutheran preachers! And the chapter on David Buttrick's phenomenological method does not give one an adequate coverage or grasp of his theory. Eslinger acknowledges the total uniqueness of Buttrick's style, and, given the sheer size of Buttrick's recent publication on *Homiletic*, it is perhaps not surprising that Eslinger is unable to summarize it adequately in one chapter!

Finally, one cannot help but wonder if these "new homileticians" have been over-zealous and hasty in passing a death sentence on the so-called "old homiletics". Despite the rise of newer styles of proclamation, the Word of God is still offered in the traditional discursive style week after week in most churches of our tradition around the world. Millions of Lutherans avoid falling asleep, and still attest that for them this is the high point of their worship experience, the place where they encounter and wrestle with the Word of God. Why and how do these new homileticians claim that "The old rational homiletics is obsolete" (133)? By all means, let us give these living options a hearing. But to claim that all past styles are dead is inaccurate and unfair.

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## Sin As Addiction

Patrick McCormick

New York: Paulist Press, 1989

200 pp.

Patrick McCormick, who is a professor of moral theology at Mary Immaculate Seminary in Northampton, Pennsylvania, has written a book on *sin* to be considered supplemental to and with others like Karl Menninger's *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973) or M. Scott Peck's *People of the Lie* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

In the first chapter "The Mystery of Sin: A Crisis", McCormick contends that "we are in the midst of a storm over sin. In a place where there used to be clear and evident terms, precise definitions and rather universal consensus we now find ourselves confronted with confusion, ambivalence and, often enough, a puzzling silence" (1). He is as concerned about the "puzzling silence" as he is about what is happening to the whole "sense of sin", especially within the Roman Catholic Church. The author contends that while priests in their preaching are often attacking "a new breed of sin like racism, consumerism, militarism, neo-colonialism, and of late, sexism" (2) and while "bishops write letters speaking about 'sin-of-the-world',

'structural sin', and 'social sin' (2), there exists today much turmoil and confusion about sin, particularly within the Roman Catholic Church but also in much of Protestantism, primarily because "we find ourselves in a crisis of models" (3). "Our understanding of the reality of sin in our lives, our community and our world can no longer be adequately expressed with traditional models... We need new models" (5).

Whether the author presents new models, or whether he explores anew models already extant is debatable. However to debate this issue would be to miss out on the material McCormick has assembled on six specific, yet interrelated, models for understanding human sinfulness. These models are: 1) Sin as stain; 2) Sin as crime; 3) Sin as personal; 4) Sin as spiral; 5) Sin as disease; 6) Sin as addiction. One chapter is devoted to each model, which is described, appraised and critically analyzed. McCormick guides the reader theologically, practically and pastorally through the models; a sense of movement occurs from considering sin primarily in individualistic terms to communal and societal embodiments, from regarding sin chiefly in a frame of condemnation to a realization that God offers graceful forgiveness, from a "stance of holy judgment within moral theology" to a more wholistic perspective which seeks to do justice to God's grace within the whole of human experience.

1) *Sin as stain*: This is referred to as "the defilement model". Using Leviticus 11-16, McCormick identifies this model as one in which sin is a stain and the sinner is tainted. "According to the stain model the defilement of sin is contaminative" (41). Frequently, notes the author, this model is associated "with sexual taboos" (51). There is here little "sense of the interiority of sin, the power of grace, the mercy of God, or the transforming reality of forgiveness" (52).

2) *Sin as crime*: This is regarded as "a cry for punishment". McCormick states: "the notion of sin as a crime and the sinner as a criminal has, until the very recent past, clearly constituted the most dominant understanding of human sinfulness" (55). The author finds this model suffering from "arid legalism and juridicism" which expresses itself often as "a violence of the innocent" (64).

3) *Sin as personal*: In this model there is an emphasis on "agency" and on the "alienating consequences of sin". "Sin causes a rift in the relationships and covenants in which persons find themselves. Sin alienates us from God and our neighbor" (76). Frequently, this model leads to a "privatized" and/or a "personalistic understanding of sin" (80).

4) *Sin as spiral*: This is referred to as "a sense of the dragon". Sin is experienced as "habit, as some sort of a disorder of the will, as a power or a demon with a will and plan of its own" (102). Sin is like a virus, attacking where it wills and getting worse in the process. "We live in a world in which sin is a deadly and contagious virus which threatens, saps and debilitates our moral and spiritual health and lives" (113).

5) *Sin as disease*: In this model, sin and sickness get correlated at the level of disease, which is regarded as an invasion of the body by evil. In

ascertaining whether this model has something constructive to offer to our understanding of human sinfulness, he draws on the wisdom in "the twelve steps" of the Alcoholics Anonymous program (137).

6 *Sin as addiction*: This is described as the model of idolatry. "In sin we struggle to supplant God, aspiring, as the addict does, to an impossible perfection and driven by delusions of grandiosity" (161). "This idolatry is an action to that which is neither God nor life giving" (161). In an exemplary manner, McCormick explores four particular sins which thrive on this addictive energy: consumerism, neo-colonialism, militarism and sexism.

As a first step in responding to a crisis of models in understanding sin, McCormick is suggesting "that an excellent corrective and contribution might be made by shifting toward a model of addiction and recovery as a way of explaining sin and grace" (190).

While the identification and exploration of each of these models has merit in moral theology and in theological reflection, I was disappointed that the author did so little biblical work for each model, provided few practical examples and helps and devoted but one chapter—the final one—to "grace and hope". Perhaps the strength of this volume is in its delineation of the six specific and interrelated models—each of which offers important dimensions and dynamics for the "doing of theology".

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## **The Word In and Out of Season: Homilies for the Sundays of Ordinary Time, Cycle B**

Richard Viladesau

New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990.

\$7.95

The author is both a professional theologian (Immaculate Conception Seminary, Fordham University) and administrator of a parish in Long Island. In a succinct Introduction he sketches a way to hold together these two ministries of the Word. Accepting St. Augustine's goals for preaching (teach, please, persuade) and Tillich's method of correlating ultimate existential questions and God's self-revelation, he finds in Bernard Lonergan's transcendental method the means whereby the scriptural readings and the human situations can so interact that affirmations about God become "conditions of possibility" in people. This enables "foundational" preaching, i.e., preaching which at basic levels connects faith and life for today's pluralistic and secularized hearers. It is, admittedly, not a new homiletic (it is essentially thematic) but his concern is to undergird and deepen homiletical