

Consensus

Volume 13

Issue 2 *Canadian Lutheranism, Yesterday and Tomorrow*

Article 13

11-1-1987

What are They Saying about the Grace of Christ

Robert A. Kelly

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert A. (1987) "What are They Saying about the Grace of Christ," *Consensus*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol13/iss2/13>

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.

become the official Catholic doctrine" (p. 79). The clash with Luther follows chiefly from the "ambiguity of the conciliar concern for both living faith and intellectual belief" (*ibid.*). Had the Council realized "that the fruits of justification are implicitly given in justification itself, then the difference with Luther would have remained minimal" (*ibid.*).

Among Protestants, Tavard says that the Wesleyan movement has broken the unanimity of Protestantism (p. 92). Though moved at first by Luther's Preface to the letter to the Romans (the so-called Aldersgate experience), he later commented on Luther's commentary on Galatians that he was utterly ashamed of this book because, in his eyes, "Luther speaks blasphemously of good works and the law of God" (p. 88). Actually, Wesley restored the scholastic teaching of *facere quod in se est* as "a condition for faith and thereby for justification" (p. 89).

In conclusion, the author says, seemingly Luther's doctrine of justification by grace through faith has had little impact on the church whether Lutheran or Catholic. Yet "the time may have come in the contemporary ecumenical dialogue... for making a new effort to understand the meaning of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith and its right place at the heart of Christian life and thought" (p. 113).

Otto W. Heick
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

What Are They Saying About the Grace of Christ?

Brian O. McDermott, S.J.

Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984

65 pp. with bibliography, \$3.95 U.S.

Someone looking for an introduction to contemporary Catholic theology would not go far wrong with Paulist Press's *What Are They Saying About...?* series, and Brian O. McDermott's contribution is no exception. The book will introduce the reader to what recent Catholic theologians (especially Küng, Rahner, and Schillebeeckx) have to say about grace. Yet this small book is more than an introduction; it is itself a contribution toward the development of an ecumenical theology of grace that is both Catholic and Protestant.

In McDermott's explorations of grace in the process of growth into eschatological completion, he is most assuredly Catholic in foundation and expression. Since his catholicism is solidly Augustinian in orientation, theologians who are descendants of Luther or Calvin will not be uncomfortable with his basic points. This is seen both in the friendly attitude toward Karl Barth and in the use of the work of Ernest Becker, whose psychology owes much to Kierkegaard and, therefore, Luther.

The final chapter of the book points toward the future as McDermott suggests "Prospects for the Theology of Grace" in the areas of religious experience, liberation, and the relation of humanity to the rest of God's creation. Here the strengths and weaknesses of the Augustinian/Thomistic tradition show through. McDermott handles well the areas where grace relates to human development but ignores those points where God's grace challenges human values. The revolutionary nature of the cross gets a bit lost.

Given the price of books these days, you will get good value for your money in *What Are They Saying About the Grace of Christ?* It is excellent.

Robert A. Kelly
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

The Living God. Systematic Theology: Volume One Thomas C. Oden

San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987
xv plus 430 pp., \$41.95

Numerous systematic theologies appear and, often, fortunately disappear in every decade. A few remain as standard text books not because of brilliance or originality and not even because they succeed in grasping and addressing the crucial questions of an age—but primarily because they have none of these qualities and can, therefore, serve equally well (or poorly) in a wide variety of classroom situations. *The Living God*, by Thomas Oden of Drew University Theological School, is an important exception to these generalizations: we have here the first volume of a projected three-volume systematic theology in which the presentation of doctrine is normative without being antiquated, contemporary without being time-bound, catholic in breadth without being platitudinous. Oden comments in his preface (p. x) that "This book is especially for those who have become wearied with ever-changing modern theologies and who now hunger for a plausible restatement of classical Christian teaching of God". More specifically, the system is developed at an introductory level, suitable for use by beginning theology students, but directed (as the author indicates) primarily at pastors. Its intention, moreover, is not to be an ultimate or definitive statement of theology in and of itself but rather to be a point of entry for Christians into the great insights of the tradition of the church.

It is certainly in this underlying attitude and direction that the strength of Oden's work lies. He argues from the outset that theology cannot be a matter of personal preference or of idiosyncrasy. His discussions bear continuous and consistent witness to the resources of scripture and tradition