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Meditating on the Word and Ways of Imperfection

Robert A. Kelly

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Donders writes in an oral format that turns his "reflections" into a kind of poetry. And he has the observant eye of the prophet-poet. Jesus means different things in different eras. I believe Donders is right in holding up Jesus as liberator in our era. We can learn much of what that means from these Gospel interpretations.

One hermeneutical question occurs: Donders' portrait of Jesus seems more appropriate to Luke (ie C-cycle) than to Mark, for in Luke Jesus is the prophet-herald of the New Age who dies the prophet's death, to be vindicated by God in the resurrection.

Eduard R. Riegert
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Meditating on the Word

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Edited and translated by David McI. Gracie

Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1986

154 pp., \$9.50 paperback.

Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality

Simon Tugwell, O.P.

Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1985

232 pp. plus index, \$12.95 U.S.

If for no other reason, David Gracie is to be thanked for adding to the writings of Bonhoeffer available in English. *Meditating on the Word* is a collection of eleven occasional writings on meditation and the place of Scripture in the Christian life, the longest of which is the beginning of a meditation on Psalm 119 written in 1939 and 1940. None has been previously translated into English.

As with so much of Bonhoeffer's work, these meditations and sermons tend to raise more questions than they answer. This is partially because of the unfinished nature of so much that we have from Bonhoeffer and partly because he was attempting to find his way theologically and ethically in the midst of continuous crisis. While there is little sense of ambiguity in any particular writing—Why does Bonhoeffer always seem so sure of himself?—the sense of ambiguity in the entire corpus is almost overwhelming.

If Bonhoeffer the spiritual writer has some value for us today it is primarily to link us to the positive Pietist tradition within Lutheranism

which is based in study of Scripture and expresses itself in worship, prayer, and service of neighbor.

Ways of Imperfection demonstrates that such a spirituality is far older than Luther. It is hard not to like a book which begins by defining spirituality as "not just concerned with prayer and contemplation and spiritual exercises, . . . [but] with people's ways of viewing things, the ways in which they try to make sense of the practicalities of Christian living and to illuminate Christian hopes and Christian muddles" (p.viii).

It is even harder not to swoon when Tugwell begins the opening chapter: "Christianity *has* to be disappointing, precisely because it is not a mechanism for accomplishing all our human ambitions and aspirations, it is a mechanism for subjecting all things to the will of God" (p. 1). All one can say is Hallelujah and Amen! Tugwell's work is externally a series of essays on various "spiritual" writers from the Apostolic Fathers to Thérèse of Lisieux, but it is in fact much more. His historical surveys are quite good, but this book is really a manifesto for a spirituality of sinner/saints living out Christian faith in daily life. It should be recommended to anyone and everyone who wants to live the Christian life.

Robert A. Kelly
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary