

Reviews

Theology for a Nuclear Age. By GORDON D. KAUFMAN. Philadelphia: Westminster Press (also Manchester, England: Manchester University Press), 1985. 63 pages. \$7.95 (paper).

Most theologians have responded to nuclear war by applying to it a set of ethical principles, such as "just war" theory or pacifism, which have a long history in the Christian tradition. By contrast, Gordon Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School holds that the power of nuclear weapons presents us with a new situation which demands a much more radical reformulation of central theological ideas. He argues that the scale of human technological power represented by a nuclear holocaust—which might bring human history to an end—requires that we give up the idea of divine sovereignty. Kaufman is critical of personalistic ideas of God. He proposes that God is a symbol for the unity of the creative world-process. "Though we understand ourselves to have been brought into being by a complex configuration of factors, powers and processes (physical, vital and historico-cultural), it is appropriate to symbolize and hold all this together in the symbol or concept, *God*" (p. 42).

This short but significant book was given as the Ferguson Lectures at the University of Manchester, England, in 1984. The first chapter, "Nuclear Eschatology," draws from Jonathan Schell's *Fate of the Earth* and the more recent "nuclear winter" scenarios to portray the possibility that climate effects caused by smoke and dust from a nuclear exchange could lead to the extinction of the human species—cutting off not only the living but the unborn of all future generations. The responses of some traditional Christians are then described: God is working out his purposes, and we should increase our nuclear arms in preparation for the final Armageddon. God is sovereign and his purposes will not be defeated; he would not allow the final extinction of humanity. These responses, says Kaufman, undercut human responsibility. In the face of our enormous technological power we must assert total human responsibility, which requires that we question both divine sovereignty and the idea of an afterlife.

In Chapter 2, "The Reconception of Theology," Kaufman argues that the theological task is not the transmission of a revealed tradition but a reformulation which must be carried out today in an unprecedented historical situation. Theology has always been a work of human imagination which creates a framework for unifying and organizing experience and for seeing human life in a wider context. Today, the central Christian theological symbols God and Christ must be reconceived in the light of our radically new technological knowledge and power. "A supreme test, one might say, of the ultimate viability, and thus finally of the truth, of Christian symbols—or of any other symbolic frame of orientation for human life, for that matter—is their capacity to provide insight and guidance for our situation today, a situation in which humankind has come up against its own limits in a most decisive and paradoxical way: through gaining the power utterly to obliterate itself" (p. 28).

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Chapter 3, "Towards the Reconciliation of God," starts with a strong indictment of traditional Christian doctrines for having encouraged Western imperialism, racism, sexism, and environmental exploitation. The idea of God as King has been taken to legitimate authoritarian institutions, male domination, and religious coercion. Kaufman says that if God is "that which creates and sustains us," we must today identify God with the evolutionary, biological, and cultural systems which have produced human life. God is the unified ecological order, the creative cosmic process extending into human history. "God should today be conceived in terms of the complex of physical, biological, and historico-cultural conditions which have made human existence possible, which continue to sustain it, and which may draw it out to a fuller humanity and humaneness" (p. 42). Nuclear holocaust would be a disaster for all life, and thus a disaster for God. "Our fate on earth has become God's" (p. 45).

In the final chapter Kaufman presents his "reconciliation of Christ and salvation." He points to two divergent motifs in Christianity: the cross and the resurrection. The cross presents the ideal of self-denial and self-sacrifice. But when resurrection and heavenly rewards are emphasized, they lead to triumphalism, intolerance, and Christian imperialism which are dangerous in a nuclear world. Today the self-sacrificial Jesus must be our model. Rather than giving him an exclusive role in salvation, we can see saving activity wherever healing and reconciliation are at work. The qualities of love and liberation are "epitomized in the story of Jesus," but other religious and secular visions have their contributions to make to our common task. We all come from and belong to God, "that wider stream of self-giving creativity and life which has brought us into being and of which we are a part" (p. 60).

This is certainly a powerful and original essay responding to modern technology in general, and to nuclear weapons in particular, at the level of theology rather than ethics. It is a clear and readable presentation concentrated into only sixty-three pages. We can hope that Kaufman will develop its thesis at greater length, for it leaves many questions unexplored. For example, some fundamentalist views of divine power do indeed cut the nerve of human responsibility. The idea that we should build up nuclear arms in preparation for Armageddon is a dangerous distortion of the gospel message. But divine sovereignty and human responsibility have not always been seen as mutually exclusive. The Calvinist tradition has asserted both ideas, and it produced an impressive dedication to hard work and ethical action in society. Again, the Old Testament prophets described looming national catastrophes both as divine judgment on social injustice and idolatry and, at the same time, as the inexorable historical consequence of human folly which a nation brings on itself. Could not a nuclear holocaust be similarly viewed in both ways, so that we do not have to choose between affirming divine judgment and human responsibility?

To be sure, belief in divine sovereignty combined with exclusivist claims of revelation has led to intolerance and religious and political imperialism. But a sense of divine transcendence can be an important source of humility; it can bring us to acknowledge human limitations, and can provide a corrective for the arrogance of technological omnipotence. Kaufman ends with an immanent God identified with the creative process. The recognition of ecological interdependence can of course itself encourage humility and caution in the use of technology. However I would suggest that, like Kaufman, the process theologians reject divine omnipotence and emphasize interdependence, but they do so without abandoning transcendence or giving up all personalistic symbols of the divine. In particular, Alfred North Whitehead's God has purposes and

exerts a persuasive influence on the world without intervening coercively, so human freedom and responsibility are upheld. Would not such a qualification of divine power meet Kaufman's objections to traditional theism, while maintaining greater continuity with the historical tradition? Such a theology can lay stronger claim to being a reinterpretation rather than a rejection of classical Christianity.

Since Kaufman's presentation is so brief, it would be helpful to be able to relate it to the thought of other authors who have developed their ideas in greater detail. Yes, we are in a radically new historical context, and theology is a work of creative imagination. But other theologians and philosophers have responded to the growing power of science and technology, have wrestled with the problem of God's role in an evolutionary cosmos, and have seen the dangers of religious exclusivism in a global society. In one of the few footnotes referring to other writers, Henry Nelson Wieman is cited, but only for "realizing the religious novelty of the advent of the nuclear age." Are there parallels between Kaufman's view of God and Wieman's? What about the writings of Ralph Burhoe, Karl Peters, and others associated with *Zygon*, or in a different mode the recent writing of James Gustafson? Is Kaufman's recognition of salvation as the power of reconciliation and healing wherever it occurs similar to Paul Tillich's universalistic view of the Christ? In short, this is a provocative and fascinating volume which deserves more detailed elaboration in relation to basic theological ideas as well as to the crisis of human history in which we live.

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Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding. By MARY GERHART and ALLAN MELVIN RUSSELL. Fort Wayne: Texas University Press, 1984. 217 pages. \$16.95.

Metaphoric Process is a very provocative book although it attempts a level of synthesis which it does not fully realize. The authors' general aim is to "construct an argument to show that religion and science are not only compatible but cooperative and complementary fields of intellectual endeavor" (p. xv). This argument turns on a theory about how metaphor, in both fields, injects dynamism into human thought and facilitates the shifting of horizons. Mary Gerhart, a professor of religious studies, and Allan Melvin Russell, a physics professor, thus focus discussion on the strategic role of metaphor in discovering meanings; they thereby hope to enlarge appreciation for what they term "knowledge-in-process."

The ten chapters of this book are orchestrated as balanced critical and constructive moments. Although the architectonic of the book is clear, a reader easily becomes disoriented because such a wide array of subsidiary topics are treated. The first four chapters are "a revisionary analysis of conventional meanings in science and religion" (p. 81). Introductory comments sharply

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criticize perspectives which argue that science and religion are chiefly different forms of interpretation rooted in particular languages; a more penetrating analysis of the process of understanding in science and religion, the authors contend, is necessary.

Such an analysis begins in the second chapter ("Experience") whose objective is to dispel the notion that science bases understanding on direct experience of external reality while religion works with internal experience. In what is perhaps the best-written chapter in the book, the discussion of the nature of experience artfully unfolds within the framework of a general question: If Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler were on a hill watching the sun "rise," would they have the same experience? The same question is posed by N. R. Hanson in his *Patterns of Discovery* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Gerhart and Russell, unlike Hanson, argue for an affirmative answer. They make a good case showing how mature sciences rely on instrumentally mediated experience much more than direct experience. From a broader philosophical stance, the authors sketch, with reliance on Bernard Lonergan, a phenomenological model of human experience which emphasizes the priority of consciousness over the reports of the senses.

Gerhart and Russell next turn to an analysis of method and meaning in science and religion. In a discussion oriented around several concrete examples, the authors persuasively show that so-called scientific method is not univocal; procedures leading to scientific understanding are many and are lined with pitfalls. Religious understanding is not irrational but is rooted in theoretical frameworks. These preliminary conclusions about scientific and religious understanding launch a philosophical discussion seeking to ground the conclusions in transcendental analysis. Using Karl Rahner and David Tracy, the authors try briefly to discuss human transcendence and the necessity of adopting a transcendental and hermeneutical method; such a method, they argue, is a way to grasp the intellectual processes at the heart of scientific and religious understanding. It is never quite clear why it is necessary to inject here such a heavy dose of currently fashionable philosophical theology. Those tempted to put aside *Metaphoric Process* in the midst of this dense and rarified discussion should persevere: Chapter four ("Knowledge-in-Process") is a relatively lucid account of how meanings emerge and break up in science and religion. Gerhart and Russell argue that change in meaning (rather than permanence) is the norm. As the horizons in a field shift, new questions become meaningful and, with such questions, new forms of self-awareness become definitive.

The second section ("New Understandings Through Metaphor") shifts from critical analysis to theory construction. By examining the operation of metaphor in science and religion, it is possible, the authors contend, to grasp how knowledge is created and to see the complementarity of science and religion. Science and religion are fields of meaning; they have "themata" or "recurrent cognitive structures" (p. 89) which provide stability. Metaphor, from an epistemic perspective, is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; metaphor, seen in the context of the process of understanding, plays an inventive and constructive role in reformulating old themata. Metaphor is a device of thought; metaphors are the "nascent moments" (p. 96) in science and religion.

Although Gerhart and Russell insist they are forging an epistemological (rather than linguistic) theory of metaphor, they see their perspective as an amplification of earlier views. After devoting brief attention to ideas about

metaphor put forth by several historical and contemporary figures, the sixth chapter (“A Theory of Metaphor”) focuses upon the relationship between analogy and metaphor. Analogy arranges or rearranges concepts in a given field of meaning by introducing elements from another field of meaning; analogies enlarge knowledge by application of that which is already known to a new situation. Analogy establishes a link between two fields without distorting the original field. Metaphor, unlike analogy, posits a link between well-established fields of meaning; it insists upon an analogical relationship between the “already understoods” (p. 114). There is tension in metaphor; it often discloses in a flash and inspires. What is especially interesting about Gerhart and Russell’s articulation of these claims is how much their plausibility rests upon the spatial idiom and elaborate diagrams used to explain them. The authors seem to appreciate the rather ironic quality of this analogical (or perhaps metaphorical) discussion of analogy and metaphor. But those for whom the visual imagination is an unsteady guide may have difficulty negotiating the discussion and assessing just how persuasive the argument is. Metaphor is distinguished from analogy but is not very clearly distinguished from anything else which causes human understanding to be transformed.

The final chapters supplement the general theory of metaphor outlined above. The seventh chapter (“Two Metaphors”) analyzes the religious image of life-after-death and the special theory of relativity as metaphors. The treatment of these examples is sensitive and helpful. The analysis of Albert Einstein’s work makes clear the authors’ ideas about how metaphor reforms fields of meaning by distorting the context. Chapter eight (“Ontologies”) attempts to draw out the link between that which is known and the various ways of knowing in both science and religion. In science, Gerhart and Russell suggest, there are “four routes to being” (p. 151): these are postures of the scientist toward phenomena; the posture of the maker of metaphor is the most radical. Each posture is subject to an “ontological flash that creates the sense of presence before that which is” (p. 151). Religions and theologies, like science, the authors argue, manifest themselves as different ways of creating presence. Metaphors are integral elements of religious texts and traditions; theological ontology serves the vital role of creating new metaphors to revive the tension in original root metaphors now conventionalized. The ninth chapter (“Truth and Theories”) tries to show how questions about truth in science and religion ultimately point back to elements, structures, relations, and limitations that are characteristics of human understanding. Science, Gerhart and Russell argue, is complemented by theology because theology “gives theoretical status to our experience of limit and transcendence” (p. 176). Theology, in turn, is complemented by science because science gives “a theoretical status to our determinate understanding of specifiable data” (p. 176).

The final chapter (“New Worlds—New Meanings”) asserts the worlds of science and religion are in fact one world. Apparently, this chapter is intended as an embodiment of the analysis of the theory of metaphor which the book has set forth: the authors attempt metaphorically to fuse the idioms of science and religion as they draw together certain of the book’s themes. The book ends with a reading of the Genesis Garden-of-God story presented as an allegory about human knowing. At least to this reviewer, the last chapter does not work very well. Material is artfully handled but meaning is not very clear. In fact the final three chapters of *Metaphoric Process* become progressively more abstract. The basic theory of metaphor articulated by Gerhart and Russell is a provocative

one; the attempt to amplify this theory as a more comprehensive ontological vision is problematic.

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Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Approach. By GERD THEISSEN. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. xiii + 194 pages. \$8.95 (paper).

"Gerd Theissen is the most exciting of contemporary German theologians." So we read on the cover of Theissen's *Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Approach*. We go on to hear that this book "could well prove to be for the 1980s what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* was for the 1960s." Such statements naturally arouse our curiosity about Theissen's book.

Theissen, New Testament professor at the University of Heidelberg, West Germany, describes the goal of this book as "partly to analyze and partly to interpret biblical faith with the help of evolutionary categories" (p. xi). A central thesis of the book is "that human culture is and calls for a 'diminution of selection,' thus going against the tendencies of organic life" (p. xii). Theissen neither opts for a coalition between science and religion nor an opposition of religion against science but is convinced that "in a technological society religion should be the constructive opposition of a cognitive minority which is aware of its share of responsibility, even if it is not actually in power" (p. 2).

In a first part Theissen poses three contradictions between scientific thought and faith: first, science is based on hypotheses while faith is apodeictic; second, scientific thought is subject to falsification while faith goes against the facts; and third, scientific thought delights in dissension while faith is based on a consensus. Given these differences, Theissen looks for a theory which can bring scientific thought and faith under the same "denominator," as expressions of human life.

Theissen chooses evolutionary epistemology to "interpret science and faith as different structures for adapting to reality and derive its character as adaptation from the interplay of variability and processes of selection" (p. 8). Knowledge and faith are considered "as two different patterns of behavior in culture and evolution, both of which underlie the specific forms of the process of cultural evolution" (p. 17). Both science and faith are illuminated by the basic categories of the theory of evolution. They are processes of adaptation, selection, and mutation. Therefore the initially stated contradictions can be relativized as follows:

1. Hypothetical scientific thought and apodeictic faith are different forms of adapting to an unknown reality.
2. Science controlled by falsification and faith which goes against the facts are different forms of coping with the pressure of selection exercised by reality.
3. Science which delights in dissent and faith which depends on consensus are different forms of the openness of our spiritual life to mutations (p. 18).

In a second part Theissen moves to his explicitly theological theme starting with the first article of the Apostles' Creed: Faith in the one and only God

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(Biblical monotheism in an evolutionary perspective). Theissen makes it clear that he is not dealing with a dispute between creationism and evolution. In his view, all reality has a theological dimension from two perspectives:

(a) The basic conditions of reality, the structure of matter and the natural laws are perceived as wonder by any unprejudiced person. Behind everything we detect a unitary "programme" which directs everything.

(b) The latent possibilities of structure have been realized in increasingly complex forms, in an infinite evolution. We also experience this dynamic as wonder (p. 181).

Having made these affirmations Theissen attempts to show that biblical monotheism is a project "within the history of human trial and error aimed at achieving an adequate adaptation to the ultimate reality. My hypothesis is that it plays an important role in the transition from biological to cultural evolution (a process in which we are still involved). In it is formulated a resistance against the principles of selection, which, whether consciously or not, is characteristic of all culture" (p. 50).

Working within the evolutionary paradigm we learn that "during the monarchy Israel was polytheistic" (p. 52); or that "Yahweh, too, originally had a wife by his side, like all gods, the Asherah" (p. 79). Drawing three conclusions from such evidence, Theissen attempts to show that "1. Monotheism is not the result of a continuous development. 2. Monotheism is the expression of a protest against selection. 3. Compared with other religious convictions, monotheism represents a structure of adaptation which better corresponds both to the central reality and to humanity" (p. 64). "Thus the breakthrough of biblical monotheism is an 'evolution of evolution.' In it is manifested the fact that the ultimate reality supports groups which would have vanished from history had the usual processes of selection prevailed. At the same time evolution hitherto is transcended in a second respect: from the perspective of the living being adaptation means better use of the environment for its own chances of survival and propagation" (pp. 80-81).

The third major part is devoted to faith in Jesus of Nazareth (New Testament Christology in an evolutionary perspective). According to Theissen the Christian faith claims that the monotheistic God has revealed himself finally in Jesus Christ. "In the midst of history there has been a valid demonstration of the necessary direction any change of behaviour has to take if it is to correspond to the ultimate reality. In the midst of history a possible 'goal' of evolution is revealed: complete adaptation to the reality of God. This very assertion of a final revelation in the midst of history becomes a problem for modern awareness" (p. 83). Theissen first deals with the correlation of revelation in history. Then he delves into the proclamation and mission of Jesus of Nazareth describing Jesus as prophet, teacher of wisdom, poet, and martyr. Finally he considers faith in Jesus in the context of the theory of evolution. Jesus is portrayed as a "mutation" of human life, a protest against the principle of selection and as a successful "adaptation" to the central reality. According to Theissen Jesus describes the central reality to which all life must adapt itself through the images of king and father. "Modern consciousness often regards the statements bound up with these metaphors as illusionary, but in the light of an evolutionary approach it reveals a truth: man is on the verge of passing over to a new phase of evolution" (p. 128).

In the fourth and final part of his book, "Faith in the Holy Spirit" (the experience of the Spirit in an evolutionary perspective), Theissen rightly claims that this third article of the Creed is the most difficult of all. Attacking the issues

head on, he asks whether the new life which the Christian faith proposes can be realized. He finds himself confronted with the basic question of Christian anthropology: "The tension between biological nature and social tradition on the one hand and the 'anti-selectionist' spirit on the other" (p. 131). Examining the experience of the Holy Spirit in early Christendom, Theissen states that the Spirit is always transcending the bounds of human life. "The Spirit is opposed to fundamental 'fleshly' tendencies of behaviour; it goes against the general tendency to social delimitation and extends the boundaries of the human world by new cosmic dimensions" (p. 139). This means that the Spirit aims at an inner transformation of humanity. Again Theissen perceives the experience of the Spirit in an evolutionary perspective. He considers the Spirit as generating a mutation of humanity, providing a motivation against selection, and serving as an adaptation to the ultimate reality. He concludes that "today the three observable tendencies of evolution toward greater solidarity, responsibility and sensitivity to suffering are all coming together. We have the responsibility to see that a minimal solidarity between all human beings prevents the great catastrophe. The course of further evolution on our planet lies in our hands. We are responsible for it" (p. 170).

Theissen understands the Christian faith as a threefold mutation. "The first 'mutation' was faith in the one and only God who helped fugitives from slavery to survive. The second 'mutation' took place in Jesus of Nazareth as the protest against the harshness of the principle of selection. The third 'mutation' is the constant transformation of human beings as disciples of Jesus" (p. 129). There is no question that Theissen has written a most stimulating book which allows us to see old things in a new, unexpected, and different light. Applying the evolutionary matrix certainly bears merit. If it is true that the ultimate reality disclosed itself within space and time and within the Judeo-Christian tradition, such "progression vocabulary" is certainly appropriate. Moreover, if matter and Spirit are indeed complementary, then each should be able to help interpret the other.

Since evolution is not synonymous with the transformation of matter, the theory of evolution is an abstraction which elucidates many but not all facets of organized matter's temporal existence. Thus it is not fully adequate to do justice to our spiritual journey. One gets the impression that to a large degree Theissen forces the Judeo-Christian faith into the straitjacket of evolutionary conceptuality. Since monotheism must appear late, no reference is made to Moses, the Decalogue (First Commandment!), or to early prophecy in its stand against polytheistic idolatry. Since Jesus is interpreted as protest against the harshness of the principle of selection, no mention is made of his divine agency nor his announcement of judgment. The only serious reference to eschatology exhausts itself in the claim that Jesus' idea of the impending eschaton was a mistake. Other material more compatible to Theissen's evolutionary framework, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity or of the sacraments, is, moreover, left out of consideration.

In conclusion it must be said that methodologically Theissen's stated aim has been carried out consistently, however, with varying degrees of congeniality to the content of the Judeo-Christian faith. Those facets which can be incorporated without inherent loss do indeed sparkle in new light.

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Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Approach. By GERD THEISSEN. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985. xiii + 194 pages. \$8.95 (paper).

In 1980, Ralph Wendell Burhoe, the founder of *Zygon*, was honored with the Templeton Prize for his pioneering work at the interface of science and religion. This was a portent that the voice of this crier in the wilderness at last had registered in the hearing of a wider circle than the amiable but sparse fellowship that Burhoe had established in the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science. Now in Gerd Theissen's *Biblical Faith: An Evolutionary Approach*, Burhoe's life's work has found a worthy advocate, one who not only comprehends Burhoe's themes but advances the discussion brilliantly.

Theissen is a New Testament scholar who has already cut a fresh swath by his sociological analysis of Biblical texts. That this study should have come from, of all places, Germany, where the work of Burhoe and others like-minded is virtually unknown, and from the hand not of a scientist or systematic theologian but of a Biblical scholar is an irony fit for a tale of paradigm shifts by Thomas Kuhn.

There are three teacherous land mines that Theissen deftly sidesteps in presenting his case. First, he does not make evolutionary theory his real "canon" (literally, "yardstick") of truth and merely fit the Bible into it. A God fashioned solely on the basis of random mutation and natural selection would never have been perceived as gracious, nor would religion have arisen as a protest against the pressures of selection. Theissen's point is that faith goes against the facts, against entropy, against death and suffering, and seeks to adapt to the ultimate reality it knows as God by modifying behavior, just as science attempts to do so by modifying ideas. He foreswears all biologisms (the naive transference of biology to human culture) and sees culture itself as humanity's attempt to ameliorate the terrible judgments of selection. Through "conversion," that is, successful adaptation, we can deprive the laws of selection of their force.

The second land mine he avoids is related to the first: he does not collapse religion into a justification of science. While he sees considerable complementarity between knowledge and faith, he stoutly maintains their irreducibility to each other. Science is based on hypotheses, is subject to falsification, and delights in dissension. Religion, on the contrary, is apodeictic, goes against the evidence, and is based on a consensus. As two discrete modes for apprehending reality, science and religion need each other for human life to flourish in the face of selective forces. Theissen's even-handed treatment of his theme will, I believe, prove a rich feast to reflective specialists and practitioners in both fields.

The third hazard he successfully eludes is the temptation to reduce God to random mutation and natural selection. This is a tendency that Burhoe himself does not successfully avoid on every occasion. (See, for example, his "Natural Selection and God," *Zygon* 7 [1972], p. 60; elsewhere he is more circumspect—see his "The Human Prospect and the Lord of History," *Zygon* 10 [1975], p. 365). The danger here is that a subspect of reality (what the New Testament calls an "element of the universe" [Col. 2:8]) is made the ultimate principle of all things. Natural selection certainly does "judge" what adapts to the system of reality, but it is scarcely the ultimate principle of the universe. It is but a special

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case of the second law of thermodynamics and applies only to self-reproducing systems. Theissen is clear that the God revealed preeminently by Jesus is not only a ruthless judge but a gracious father. God is not identical with the imminent principle of selection within the created order, but is also the unknown goal of all attempts at adaptation. "In the midst of history a possible 'goal' of evolution is revealed: complete adaptation to the reality of God" (p. 83). As such God transcends biological evolution and requires of us something completely other than evolution hitherto: to take a step beyond the principle of selection to solidarity with all of life, even rival, weaker life. Thus Theissen condemns in advance all tendencies toward social Darwinism or the theological legitimation of natural evils.

The core of his positive contribution lies in sections which he has developed along trinitarian lines. In the first he argues that monotheism is a spiritual mutation that makes possible the revolt against blind selection. If Yahweh is the one and only God, who rules over all peoples, even over the victors, and if Yahweh offers the possibility of repentance, then radical behavioral change is possible for both individuals and whole societies that might prevent their being selected out as ill-adapted to ultimate reality.

In Jesus, Theissen's second "trinitarian" theme, the transformed human existence promised by the prophets has become reality. Jesus is a new mutation in the direction of love, through solidarity with the weak. In his person and teaching, both biologically preprogrammed conduct and culturally prescribed behavior are overcome. Jesus already reveals what humanity can become (1 John 3:2). As such he is the clue to the meaning of the evolutionary process and reveals to us the mystery of human existence: *we* are the missing link, the transition from animals to true human beings. The third "mutation" then is the constant transformation of human beings through the power of the third figure of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

I will quibble with Theissen here on only one issue, that of monotheism in Israel. By Theissen's account, monotheism (the belief that there is only one God, and none other exists) evolved in three stages in Israel. In the first, Yahweh alone had to be worshiped, but the existence of other gods was not denied (1200-586 B.C.E.). In the second, Yahweh was regarded as the only God (586-332 B.C.E.). In the third, Yahweh was recognized as the God of all humanity (332 B.C.E. on). The author acknowledges that only a minority held these beliefs in any period in Israel; the masses continued in various forms of polytheism or syncretism. One wonders then how accurate such a typology really is. There seems to me to be a tendency here to impose an evolutionary development seen as progress, when in fact the issue is far more complex. Monotheism as we know it, filtered as it is through the monism of Greek philosophy, was surely almost unknown in Israel—perhaps only Jeremiah and Second Isaiah even approached it. For the rest, a form of henotheism seems to have been the dominant belief: Yahweh as the one high God, with lesser gods making up the heavenly council. This vision allowed realism in assessing the inner spirituality of the nations (their "gods") and provided a kind of systems view of divinity. Monotheism, on the other hand, is intrinsically intolerant (it does not lead to a God who exhibits "an unconditional tolerance of variations" [p. 49]). All monotheistic religions have tended toward intolerance, holy wars, pogroms, and genocide. Only when the one high God came to be reconceived in terms of the graciousness of a parent and the weakness of the cross were some of these tendencies checked, though any religion that gains temporal

power quickly reverts to a mania for power. And the fact that the female partner of God was suppressed is not the unmitigated gain Theissen suggests; in fact, it led to both the suppression of the feminine aspects of God and the oppression of women in Israel. Canaanite, Babylonian, Greek, and Roman women all experienced greater freedom than did Israelite women. Yahweh the liberator was the oppressor of women.

I have argued in a volume just published (*Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986]) that the gods must once again be accorded a place in the heavenly council, though they still must be subordinated to the unitive principle of ultimate reality. But these criticisms do not invalidate the fundamental thesis that Theissen is arguing. They merely appeal for an even wider "tolerance."

This is the kind of book I could have wished myself capable of writing. It is surely one of the seminal works of our time.

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