Reviews

A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals. By DON S. BROWNING. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. 324 pages. $30.

Don Browning's impressive *A Fundamental Practical Theology* is an important work for anyone concerned with either moral reasoning and the place of science (especially social science) in it or the relation of theology to religious life. Browning's task is monumental. He attempts nothing less than the reconceptualization of both practical moral thinking and core of theology and its relation to nontheological disciplines. The whole of responsible thought, Browning suggests, is underlain by—and has its end in—practical moral thinking. For the discipline of theology, this means that, far from being the capstone of theology, the disciplines of systematic, historical, and dogmatic theology mediate their proper origin and end, namely practical theology. Similarly, insofar as theology must deal with cultural and scientific question—and it must at every turn—these too are of value for the sake of the practical questions that stimulate scientific inquiry in the first place and to which it must return if it is to be efficacious.

Browning thus represents an American mainline Protestant tradition with two fundamental convictions. One is that cultural and scientific resources not only can, but must, be employed in theology. Second, theology itself is finally valuable so far as—and perhaps *only* as far as—it can alter the world it understands. In the twentieth century, this coronation of the practical has been reflected even among the deadliest of opponents, from the social gospel to fundamentalism. Browning is at one with this common understanding that "the speculative reason, which has asked about what has been done and why, or what will happen and why, must yield to the practical reasoner, who asks, 'What ought I to do now?' " (H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* [New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1951], p. 246).

A Fundamental Practical Theology is not, however, mere reiteration of a cultural tendency. On the contrary, it is marvelously distinctive on at least two grounds. The first is that Browning systematizes this pragmatic impulse in American thought. Perhaps because such a conceptual task seems not immediately practical, the pragmatic drive is often expressed in occasional and unsystematic statements. Browning instead produces a broader vision, a road map of the interrelations between theoretic and practical disciplines, between religious and cultural studies. In this respect, Browning's effort more closely resembles European efforts to arrange the disciplines of thought.

The second triumph of *A Fundamental Practical Theology*—perhaps its most engaging element—is its own concreteness. In addition to producing thoughtful proposals for the reform of theological education, Browning

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describes and analyzes three vastly different congregational lives: a troubled Eastern congregation, a mainline Midwestern church struggling with social activism, and an inner-city black congregation. It is surprising that this aspect of the book should be so unique. Despite the overwhelming theological emphasis on "practical value," theologians have seemed curiously blind to exactly that specificity upon which they insist, namely, the concreteness of the Christian church and its congregations. In part this may be due to the increasing segregation—and contempt—between inhabitants of theology's academic and congregational homes. Neither venture very much into the other's neighborhood. If *A Fundamental Practical Theology* did nothing else, it should at least give pause to those on both sides that they not only *should*, but in fact *do*, drink of the same water; that they not only *do* share practical origins and purposes as well as sophisticated theological reflection but also that they *should* unite with each other more fully.

Even prior to academic/congregational ghettoization, however, too few theologians made explicit and sustained connections between "theology" and "practice." Why? Browning maintains that the model of the relation between theology and practice (or between systematic and practical theology) has been prone to a specious division and organization. In contrast to what Browning claims is the usual "*theory-to-practice* model of theology," he substitutes a model that "goes from practice to theory and back to practice. Or more accurately, it goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices" (p. 7).

This is the point at which specific analyses of congregational practice and the systematization of theology as practical theology coincide. Past descriptions of theology understood practical theology as a subdiscipline within the theological enterprise. Even in Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* (trans. Terrence N. Tice, Atlanta: John Knox Press, [1811] 1966), practical theology remains a "technology" that is "conceived with regard to the immediate applicability of [philosophical theology's] results within a particular moment in life" (§25, §257). This model is, of course, not only the idiosyncratic property of theology but is common in social and natural science as well.

This tendency to take concepts or "theories" and then apply them in "practice" is beset by insurmountable difficulties. In the first place, it is existentially indefensible. It assumes that theoretic performance—whether of social science, natural science, or systematic theology—arises from nowhere, or at least nowhere in history. If an enterprise seems exclusively theoretical, "it is only because we have abstracted it from its practical context" (p. 9). One of the consequences of such an ethereal assumption is the grant (or self-exaltation) of the theoretician to be free from presupposition or agenda. Against this, Browning employs both Gadamerian hermeneutics and the "visional dimension" of moral thinking advanced especially by narrative theologians. Consistent attention to one's own hermeneutic horizon provides at least a check on the tendency of social scientists to view themselves as detached observers who see the truth more clearly precisely because their attitudes sufficiently distance them from any presuppositions. Indeed, Browning convincingly shows the distortions in analysis that arose from such myopia in the case of one congregation studied—and, more important, why the social scientific analysis was of less practical value than

it should have been. What is true of social science is, of course, no less true of systematic or historical theology. The theologian does not produce manna from heaven by sheer miracle. Particular theological doctrines and historical analyses are not thoroughly disinterested but arise from a ground of practical concern.

Finally, the "theory-to-practice model" assumes that those within religious communities do not engage in practical moral *thinking*, at least not adequately. On the contrary, congregations and individuals within those communities are constantly engaged in constructive practical moral decision making, with differing degrees of adequacy. One of the tasks of even description of a community is to discern how it engages in such a process, over what issues, and with what consequences. If one presumes, however, that adequate practice follows only upon a full-blown theory, rather than that practice is always theory-laden and that theory is practically concerned, this dimension of description is *a priori* impossible.

Choices *between* theoretical reason or practical reason, moral reasoning or its absence, are, therefore, false ones. The questions are rather: (1) how one is to engage responsibly in practical theology; and (2) how the traditional theological disciplines can be reconceived along the model of "fully practical theology." To be sure, even Browning's ambitious answers to these queries vastly understate the significance of the book. The model of practical reason presented is not limited to theology but is intended as an account of *human* practical moral thinking. And Browning's disciplinary reorganization applies as well to the social sciences and the humanities as to theology alone.

It is within the first phase of such fully practical theology, descriptive theology, that Browning's multidimensional model of moral reasoning appears in its fullness. The "visional" dimension is that narrative informs and forms one's moral choices and those of one's community. While narrative theologians properly emphasize this ground of moral thinking, they have failed to recognize that in a pluralistic society each of us is probably informed by a variety of structuring narratives that are often in tension or conflict with each other (p. 45). This conflict is desirable, however, since a single narrative standing alone provides no self-criticism. The narrative itself does not and cannot argue for its *legitimacy* or speak in a common language that enables it to persuade or be persuaded of its correctness or error. Thus, the visional dimension must be transcended. We require an obligational dimension of moral thinking to extract general principles with "common structures" from the narrative and allow conversation about and beyond the narratives that gave those principles birth. The potential Babel of narratives is both transcended and retained by this common language.

The extraction of general rules of obligation, however, is not fully practical. It does not and cannot tell one what one should do *now*. Nor does it tell one much about those things upon which decisions must be made or about those who must make them. The world must be organized morally, but the things of the world are extant prior to this organization, that is, they are "premoral goods." The arrangement of these goods into a moral framework is the task of the third and fourth dimensions of practical moral thinking, the "tendency/need" and "environmental/social" dimensions. These are also the dimensions in which the significance of scientific and social scientific investigation is most evident. Psychology above all, but also sociology, biology, theology, philosophy, and others unearth what human

beings need, their motivations, desires, and so on. All of this helps to frame the context into which narrative and obligation must fit as well as providing a source for new narratives and altered obligation. The environmental/social dimension, for its part, focuses on natural and social constraints upon and possibilities for moral action. Among other things, it prevents utopian idealism by providing a detailed analysis of barriers and limiting conditions to moral action. Again, the social and natural sciences are crucial contributors to this dimension of moral thinking. Finitude becomes concrete in this dimension. Finally, what Browning calls rule/role, the final dimension of practical thinking, makes concrete the dialectic and interrelation between the preceding dimensions so that "the rules and roles of life are the settled results of reflection" on narrative, obligation, need, and environmental constraint (p. 107).

This structure serves two purposes. It indicates, on the one hand, what people actually do in moral reflection and why they act as they do. Browning follows this structure throughout his own descriptions of three congregations, noting not only the adequacy of the analysis but also the blind spots in description when one or another dimension is not taken seriously. But in addition to describing what people actually do, Browning's position is also normative. It is what people should do to think practically better than they do. There are tendencies to dispense with narrative that result in bloodless moralism, countervailing tendencies to righteously enshrine one's own narrative and insulate it from criticism, to live in a moral netherworld without attention to real constraint, or perhaps most common, to deny the need for moral reflection at all—to "know what's right" by pure instinct or because "we've always done it this way," or worse, to relegate moral thinking to a pure subjectivism of "opinion" on moral issues.

Thus, in addition to being components in descriptive theology, Browning's model of practical moral thinking is also the *task* of a fully practical theology. Descriptive theology alone cannot fulfill this demand. Practical theology requires, as did the visional dimension of moral thinking, a temporary distancing from the immediate situation. It requires supplement from historical theology, which puts "the questions emerging from theory-laden practices to the central texts and monuments of the Christian faith" (p. 49). There is also need for careful reflection on the answers of historical theology and their relation to the preliminary answers and concerns with which practical thinking began. This reflection is the principal task of systematic theology, which claims validity and truth for its reflections. Systematic theology is, therefore, central to the process of transcending the mere confessionalism that is the pitfall of narrative theology. Systematic theology provides norms for theological ethics and is therefore the necessary mediation for a self-critical practical theology.

Finally, one returns to the proximate situation and the apex of "fully practical theology." Now possessed of a multidimensional understanding of the situation as well as the resources of generations past and the norms of theological ethics mediated through systematic theology, one is finally in a position to answer responsibly several questions. First, are the norms to be defended *here* and if so how; second, what should our moral practice be in light of the results of description and historical and systematic theology; and, finally, what strategies are available to us? The last, Browning notes, was historically the province of practical theology. It is so no longer.

Instead, practical theology neatly encapsulates the entire movement of theology from start to finish, including a dizzying array of disciplines as "submoments" in the overall motion of fully practical theology.

The fruitfulness of this approach is evident. It provides a way to conceive the relation between theory and practice that even a general American love affair with pragmatic import has failed to produce. It conceives a clear relation between ethics and disciplines not immediately concerned with ethics. And it is capable of providing the impetus to fuller understandings of congregations, a reformulation of theological education, and, not least of all, to Browning's own Religion, Culture and Family project, which proceeds from social-scientific, economic, and cultural analyses of the fragmentation of the family to the available alternatives for church and culture for reversing the decline.

If there is a criticism to be made of a work as provocative as *A Fundamental Practical Theology,* it is perhaps that it is arranged too neatly. The tendency to encapsulate all disciplines within an origin and end in *moral* practice tends to limit the significance of theoretical inquiry to its immediate moral "cash value." This, too, is broadly American but it is no better for that. Art is not usually practical in any way that can be immediately defended, but it remains valuable for the "impractical" task of defining who we are as individuals, communities, and nations. The doctrines of the Christian church are sometimes not obviously useful for practical moral thinking, but the resources of historical and systematic theology, whether conceived with a practical moral objective in mind or not, are among the deposits Browning maintains are the lifeblood of practical theology. The recent debate over the supercollider took the social demand for immediate and clear practical value to its ultimate conclusion as its opponents defined as "pork barrel" a project that may give insight into the physical origins of the universe. Its supporters could not answer the charge by demonstrating a practical payoff. As is typical of new directions in thought and knowledge, they did not and could not specify a "concrete" value in advance. And if Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* or Einstein's theory of relativity could have been dismissed as impractical, it is well to remember that for better and worse these "purely theoretical" concepts became dominant metaphors for an entire civilization.

Thinkers and artists are, of course, engaged in practices but these are not exclusively *moral* practices or practices with immediately concrete intention. They are primarily theoretical and aesthetic practices; it is too narrow a view to restrict the category of the "practical" so that it excludes these. The practical concern from which theory and art spring is practical but not necessarily in the sense that they intend from the start to solve a pressing problem of ethics or technology or should consider themselves a failure if they do not do so.

There is, then, a danger in Browning's model of practical theology if "practical" is defined so restrictively that some transcendence and independence is not granted to more theoretic disciplines. Our finitude does not permit us to see far beyond the horizon, to map out a history of concepts in advance. But a good deal of the greatness and the tragedy—and even the moral thinking—of civilization might not have occurred had theoretical and aesthetic practice not been given a certain freedom from concrete and moral practice. Even Browning's own metaphor of a five-dimensional model owes its life to the investigations of theoretical mathematics. It would, of course,

strengthen the case for theory were it possible to know the final outcome of theoretical investigations, but as a universal demand it is surely unfair and counterproductive.

It is not that Browning's notion of practical theology is invalid. Far from it; the model of practical theology is innovative and brilliantly conceived. That model's best intentions, however, are fulfilled when the submoments of the theoretical disciplines of the sciences and theology are not *merely* submoments of practical theology (understood as moral practical theology) but also transcendent of it, lest the self-critical impulse Browning wants to include in practical theology be strangled. It is true that practical theology cannot be understood in its glory as a sharecropper on the land of theoretic disciplines. Rather, *as practical theology*, it is the origin and end of systematic and historical theology, just as for the architect, physics has its end in architecture. But this is not the only statement to be made. The vitality of theory depends on its *both* being given release from the pressures of immediate practical significance and retaining a vital connection to practical disciplines. These are not, however, necessarily simultaneous tasks. The model of theology Browning produces is a stunning accomplishment for practical theology, but it may be too much to say that *all* theology is practical. The historical theologian, the systematician and the dogmatician—and by extension the theoretical physicist and mathematician—should not be bound by the immediate demand for concrete moral value. It is a large world; there is room for more than one model of theology. Indeed, if various types of thought are to come into relation with the other, to enrich and transform the other, a variety of models may be not optional but necessary.

Too much should not be made of this. To begin with, it is not clear that Browning intends to confine theory within moral practice so tightly. There are hints that he is on the verge of noting the mutual transcendence of practical and theoretical disciplines (for example, his sympathetic reading of the Rev. Hal Roberts's attempt to stay "above the fray" [p. 234] of the moral question of becoming a sanctuary church as well as Browning's insistence on the value of the distance attained in historical and systematic theology). The difficulty may simply be one of phrasing. Moreover, it is surely too much to expect an author to do everything, especially when he has already done so much and has produced a model that promises to do considerably more. It is nonetheless worth noting the danger of too heavy an emphasis on practice in a culture already obsessed with a narrow view of the practical and deeply distrustful of anything that smacks of being "theoretical." Of course, even this partial critique is a truncated exercise in practical theology and would be performed better were it to follow more completely Browning's own outline of practical moral thinking—and that is perhaps the greatest compliment to an imposing work.

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The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. to A.D. 1450. By DAVID C. LINDBERG. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992. xviii + 455 pages. $57.00 ($19.95 paper).

David C. Lindberg teaches the history of science at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He is one of our leading historians of medieval science and has previously written on special topics like medieval theories of vision and the natural philosophy of Roger Bacon. He now offers this text to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of Western science from the ancient world to the eve of the scientific revolution. It is aimed at upper-level students and scholars from other fields who need a good introduction to the subject of medieval science.

The most important features to look for in a text like this are comprehensiveness and accuracy, and Lindberg's offering has both. He gives helpful historical surveys of prehistoric cultures, ancient Near Eastern civilizations, archaic Greece, classical Greece, the Hellenistic world, Roman society, Islamic civilization, and medieval Christendom. And he covers not only the mathematical sciences (physics, optics, astronomy, and cosmology), but also more practical ones like meteorology, medicine, astrology, and alchemy.

In each of these areas, Lindberg's treatment is reasonably complete, refreshingly accurate, and delightfully judicious in its negotiating controversial issues. For example, special attention is given to the reasonableness of astrology within the medieval world of thought (pp. 274–80, 339). Modern readers accustomed to viewing the Middle Ages as a time of uninformed credulity will be helped by Lindberg's sympathetic treatments of the medieval *mappa mundi* and bestiaries (pp. 255–56, 351–53).

There is also refreshing realism in Lindberg's skepticism about the traditional argument (particularly among Protestants) that the late medieval stress on divine omnipotence was responsible for the rise of the experimental method. The usual reasoning has been that since it was believed that humans could not figure out how nature works by reason alone, they were somehow forced to observe nature for themselves. As Lindberg points out, the meager efforts at experimental science prior to the seventeenth century calls this kind of rational history into serious question (pp. 243–44).

For those who encounter Lindberg's book as a basic text, the main point will certainly be that medieval Europeans were not inimical to natural science even if they did not entirely anticipate the results of modern science. Lindberg shows in some detail how the West was graced with scholars like William of Conches and Albert the Great, who pressed their rational abilities as far as they could in an attempt to understand the processes of nature.

Another contribution of the book is the attention given to the institutional settings of science. For example, Lindberg stresses the importance of the achievement of a relatively uniform curriculum in medieval universities. This standardization enabled the interaction of scholars in diverse settings and differentiated early Western science from that of the ancient Greeks and the Islamic world (pp. 174–75, 212).

These positive features are all enhanced by excellent bibliographic notes,

a thirty-four-page bibliography, and a helpful set of maps and illustrations. Not only do the figures aid the reader, but they often make points more dramatically and memorably than the words alone (for example, the monk in his study in figure 7.6 or the astronomer using an astrolabe in figure 11.12).

In spite of the comprehensiveness of Lindberg's text, there are some limitations. These are partly the result of Lindberg's intent to treat science primarily as knowledge (p. 159). Reference is made to the transmission of classical knowledge (or learning) and subsequent additions to it as though these were the only kinds of contributions that could be made to the history of science (pp. 157, 165). There is a brief treatment of the theological value placed on the practice of medicine (pp. 323, 346), but the contributions of medieval Christian writers are generally truncated by the neglect of meta-scientific concerns like belief in the existence of universal natural laws or the value placed on new technologies and the consequent interest in the development of the mechanical arts. (For the importance of figures like Isidore of Seville and Hugh of Saint Victor in this regard, see Elspeth Whitney, *Paradise Restored: The Mechanical Arts from Antiquity through the Thirteenth Century* [Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1990]). Greater attention to these areas of faith and value would perhaps have shown continuities between medieval and early modern science that Lindberg does not consider (cf., pp. 360–68).

A body of material to which Lindberg does not attempt to do justice is the teachings of the church fathers on natural philosophy. Basil and Augustine, for example, are mentioned in passing, but mostly in the later sections of the book, where Lindberg has to refer back to important contributions that were not covered in their proper context in earlier chapters (pp. 198, 321).

Anachronisms also occur at times when Lindberg assumes a modern polarization of natural and supernatural or secular and sacred (pp. 26, 115, 156). To his credit, he recognizes that many of the individuals he treats cannot easily be categorized in these terms (pp. 119, 130, 320). But the categories are assumed to be valid and no attention is given to the historical changes that led to the emergence of semantic fields in which such oppositions became commonplace.

Even with these limitations in mind, I can only feel grateful for the publication of such a valuable resource, obviously the fruit of many years of labor and a deep love for the subject.

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Rediscovering the Sacred: Perspectives on Religion in Contemporary Society. By ROBERT WUTHNOW. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992. 178 pages. $18.95 (paper).

Religion has become increasingly prominent in current events. The underlying assumption of this stimulating analysis is that this worldwide upsurge does not represent a religious revival so much as a rediscovery. Rather than rising and falling like the gross national product, "The sacred is always there, like the divine spirit that moved before the Israelites on their journey to the promised land" (p. 4). Religious sentiment is all around us, but we usually are not trained to recognize the changes in its manifestations. Robert Wuthnow, sociologist and director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University, presents theoretical tools to help us rediscover ways in which the sacred pervades our social existence.

"Sacredness and Everyday Life" (chapter 1) explicates Peter Berger's highly influential but often inadequately understood work on religion in *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967). The reality we experience is socially constructed through a selective process using symbolic categories. These may vary in our respective spheres of everyday activity, but to be whole persons we must have some means of integration, the broader context of a "symbolic universe" that provides meaning and legitimation for reality. This is a major function of religion via externalized symbols and social interactions and via the internalizations that become part of an individual's subjective identity.

Wuthnow provides research evidence showing that people do search for meaning and purpose, that in a pluralistic culture they do this by drawing eclectically upon several sacred and secular symbolic universes, and that their meaning systems are good predictors of life-styles. He then critiques Berger's "ingenious blend of social science and theological philosophy" (p. 28) with special emphasis upon biases that account for its strengths and weaknesses. Berger views plausibility structures as prior to or more basic than the religious beliefs they make plausible; this raises the question of their source and diminishes the importance of other resources that maintain religion. His emphasis on subjective symbolism leads to more attention to perceptions of institutions than to institutional relations themselves and also minimizes the development of testable hypotheses. His stress upon rational cognition in religion intimates that people approach life experiences like amateur philosophers raising abstract questions rather than by acting, grieving, suffering, or seeing the sacred canopy in any other way than as a rational or cognitive philosophy of life. Nevertheless, his highlighting the abiding relevance of the sacred in contemporary life is a significant rediscovery.

Chapter 2, "The Cultural Dimension," builds upon Clifford Geertz's work on religion as a cultural system in which symbols have subjective functions such as creating moods and supplying meaning and motivation. This suggests that the content of religion, not just its context, deserves attention. The "new cultural sociology" can do this by focusing on the internal structure of the culture itself, identifying ways in which social relations are symbolically and ritually dramatized, and raising questions about institutions and institutionalization.

"Religious Discourse as Public Rhetoric" is the topic of chapter 3. Increasing recognition of the importance of communicative action comes from ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and literary studies of the Bible, other literature, and sermons. Metaphor and narrative, contrasts and parallels, centripetal and centrifugal meaning, and other structural features of discourse provide a basis for rhetorical style and clearer appreciation of the current role of the sacred.

"Perspectives on Religious Evolution" (chapter 4) critiques theories about qualitative changes in religion. Robert Bellah's five stages from early societies to the present, Jürgen Habermas's four stages of cultural evolution, and Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (that modern societies differ from traditional ones mainly by having more differentiated social spheres or subsystems) actually are "speculative frameworks, based as much on stylized notions of intellectual currents as on factual evidence about either the past or the present" (p. 83). They are a useful starting point for thinking about changes in contemporary religion. Theological and sociological evidence both supports and questions the theories; so we need concrete historical comparisons in order to determine what kinds of environmental factors and internal institutional responses result in religious restructuring.

Themes stimulated by Max Weber's work on the importance of ideas in public life, especially several analyses of English and American Puritanism, are discussed in chapter 5. The puzzle of why particular ideas become operative in certain situations but not in others, with similar ideologies having different outcomes in different settings, leads to Wuthnow's conclusion that environmental conditions (social-structural, technical, and cultural variables), institutional contexts, and action sequences (stimuli, compromises or syntheses, crises or triggering events, competing ideologies) are all significant and can be investigated empirically.

Relationships between religious institutions and political powers are changing in much of the world, often with verbal or physical fighting among movements and alliances that advocate change or defend the status quo. "The Shifting Location of Public Religion" (chapter 6) deals with modernization and secularization theories; Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory on the global linkage of societies through social, economic, and political relations, structural contingency models; and a "life-world colonization" perspective that views emerging religious movements as protests against the growing bureaucratization and monetarization of people's life-worlds. Each theory calls attention to different assumptions and perspectives on what has and has not changed and especially to symbolic boundaries that divide and subvert institutions.

Wuthnow finally deals with the "International Realities" (chapter 7) of modern religion, a topic given scant attention in the social sciences and in most denominations. A world-system view focuses on general dynamics of modern life that are global in origin and scope (secularization, modernization, emphasis upon rationality, individualism, and organizational models taken from business and government). It throws light upon sectarian schisms, styles of religious commitment, and the effects of government actions on church membership, thereby forcing a reinterpretation of religious phenomena.

The above sketch merely hints at the richness of Wuthnow's analyses and syntheses. Without presenting a unitary theory covering all religion (an

impossible task?), he consistently emphasizes ways in which diverse theories interrelate and call attention to significant features the others overlook. To treat them either as alternatives or as applicable only in a positivistic model in which hypotheses are empirically tested can mislead, much as many other studies have in the past. His work is an excellent example of *theoretical triangulation*, the use of diverse theories on a given subject. Implications of the theories for further scientific, theological, and philosophical research, especially on topics that grow out of their implicit assumptions, receive considerable attention as well.

Yet the book does not ignore practical applications. Perceptive insights and illustrations of how the various theories relate to such topics as the human search for meaning, the rising tide of fundamentalism, understandings of God, clashes between liberals and conservatives, and civil religion are sprinkled throughout the text. Unfortunately, its usefulness as a reference tool is reduced by the lack of a subject index and the incompleteness of the index of names.

This is a mind-stretching study in the best traditions of interpretive (*verstehende*) sociology. It provides excellent summaries of prominent but difficult theories while also helping scientists and others studying religion to rediscover or recognize important issues that often are overlooked or seen only with seriously biased eyes. The critiques and extensions of the theories help greatly to clarify and extend our knowledge of the place of the sacred in contemporary society.

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