

REVIEWS

Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*. New York: Basic Books, 2005. ix + 292 pp. Hbk. \$26.00. ISBN 0-465-04415-8.

The interface between religion and American political life is receiving considerable attention today in the academy, the media, and the public square. This explains in part the significance of *The Beloved Community*, a rich and provocative work by Charles Marsh, who teaches religion at the University of Virginia. Marsh explores the ways in which Judeo-Christian values have motivated and inspired the quest for social justice in the United States from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s up to contemporary times.

The Beloved Community is an excellent companion volume to Marsh's earlier work, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton University Press, 1997), which also treats religion as a vital yet protean force in the crusade for social justice in this country. But *The Beloved Community* highlights the twofold goal of the civil rights movement; namely, (1) to eliminate the structures of Jim Crow or *de jure* segregation, and (2) to establish what Martin Luther King, Jr. and other movement leaders called the ideal of "the beloved community," a completely integrated society based on justice, love, mutual acceptance, interpersonal and intergroup living, and shared power. This vision of "the beloved community," rooted in *agape* love and in a philosophical tradition represented by Josiah Royce, became the ethical equivalent of the theological principle of the Kingdom of God on Earth, which came out of the Social Gospel ethos. Marsh skillfully makes these connections while stressing the political dimensions of what was essentially a church-centered and faith-based quest for social justice.

The first three chapters of the book treat the civil rights movement in various contexts, offering powerful examples of how it interfaced with broader efforts to create "the beloved community." The topics covered include Martin Luther King, Jr.'s activities as preacher, pastor, and civil rights leader in Montgomery, Alabama in the mid and late 1950s; the ways in which "the beloved community" vision found practical expression in the work of Clarence Jordan and his experiential community called Koinonia Farm near Americus, Georgia; and the rise and decline of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) with its radical Christian influences and theology. Major activities that characterized the general strategy of nonviolent direct action and constructive Christian radicalism are highlighted, beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott and extending to the sit-ins, the

freedom rides, and practical experiments in communitarian living. Marsh explores these developments with considerable insight and analytical depth.

Chapters 4 and 5 explain how the noble and inclusive vision of “the beloved community” had disintegrated by the late 1960s “amidst shattered dreams and moral torpor” (127). Marsh contends that “the utopian dream of the 1960s counterculture offered little to hold on to in a universe of disenchanting options” (127). He further notes that, as disillusionment and secular radicalism emerged, even Martin Luther King, Jr.’s utopian vision and Christian hope “endured an eschatological intensification that unsettled his worldly confidences and left him finally at wit’s end” (127). Marsh ends Chapter 5 with a call for the renewal of the search for the beloved community, noting that this cannot occur without a return of forces wedded to the principles of nonviolence.

Chapters 6 and 7 look at faith-based community-building and social justice initiatives since the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, especially as embodied in Eugene Rivers’ Azusa Christian Community in Boston and John Perkins’ racial reconciliation ministries in Mendenhall, Mississippi and southern California. Here the emphasis is on how “the beloved community” vision was carried over from the civil rights activism of the fifties and sixties to intentional communities founded by religious leaders and church groups since those periods.

The eighth and final chapter is a fitting climax for the book. Marsh describes what he terms “the contours of an activist faith for the twenty-first century.” He speaks of the rise of a fresh generation of Christian leaders and activists, including college students, who, “fueled by religious conviction and inspired by the social movements of the past,” are addressing the needs of workers, single mothers and abused children, HIV/AIDS sufferers, and others among the outcast and neglected (216). Marsh’s optimism is commendable but certainly not easy to share in contemporary times, when Christian values, as proclaimed by powerful voices on the religious and political right, too often justify the materialism of the “haves” while ignoring or neglecting the needs of the “have nots.” One might also question Marsh’s insistence that “The pursuit of the beloved community is not finally about the redemption of America’s soul, nor even about the achievement of interracial community,” but, rather, “about bearing witness to the Prince of peace in a violent and suffering world” (207). The quest for the beloved community is indeed about prophetic social witness grounded in a recognition of Jesus Christ as the Prince of peace, but it is also about redeeming America’s soul and achieving the type of communitarian ideal that not only embraces people across the boundaries of race, but also across the spectrums of class, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, political persuasion, sexual orientation, and national origin.

Interestingly enough, Marsh does not devote serious attention to some of the most significant civil rights campaigns of the 1960s, such as those in Albany, Georgia, Birmingham, St. Augustine, Florida, Selma, Chicago, and Memphis. His failure to include these in his analysis limits somewhat the appeal of *The Beloved Community* as an exploration of the powerful religious impetus behind the civil rights movement. All of the civil rights campaigns were aimed at the creation of “the beloved community.”

Generally speaking, Marsh has written a very interesting and prophetic work. It is also very timely, for it appears in an age when debate over church–state boundaries and the role of religion in politics has reached fever pitch in many circles. Academics, church leaders, politicians, and ordinary people at all levels of society can benefit immensely from the rich information and insights Marsh shares.

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Carol Rittner, John K. Roth and Wendy Whitworth, eds, *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?* (Saint Paul, MN: Aegis/Paragon House, 2004). 319 pp. Pbk. \$18.95. ISBN 1-55778-837-5.

Hotel Rwanda, directed by Terry George, written by Terry George and Keir Pearson, 2004.

“Complicity is not a welcome word,” says John K. Roth, one of the editors of this volume. It “refers to partnership in wrongdoing” (209). This book’s title (despite its well-placed question mark) suggests that it intends to accuse the Christian churches, to hold them accountable for the genocide in Rwanda. Indeed, this is part of the book’s intention, but it “accuses” as part of a broader Christian purpose. These essays serve as calls to repentance: the kind of repentance that is necessary for the hope of justice and reconciliation.

In 1994, Hutu extremists murdered more than 800,000 of their fellow Rwandans: mostly members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group. This extraordinary “genocide by popular consent” occurred in a nation whose population was almost ninety percent Christian (Stephen D. Smith, Introduction, 1). This was not a case of adherents of one religion persecuting those of another, but of Christians killing Christians: often members of their own parishes and congregations. The churches held no sanctuary for the victims. In fact, more were killed in church buildings than anywhere else. These facts alone should trouble any Christian conscience, but the authors of these essays press beyond these generalities to ask specific questions concerning the churches’ guilt, and to press for specific answers.

The essays in this book originated as papers for an international seminar, *The Church and Genocide in Rwanda, 1994* (London, 2003). Many of the authors—“scholars and practitioners, clergy, nuns and lay people, Rwandans, Europeans, and Americans” (Preface, xii)—witnessed the Rwandan genocide directly, or were close to others who did. Most contributors to this volume address the issues from a specifically Catholic perspective, as the majority of Rwandan Christians are Catholic. The book also includes some important Protestant contributions. None of these writers blame the church entirely for the genocide. Many acknowledge the heroic self-sacrifice of Rwandan Christians who resisted it. However, all acknowledge a degree of culpability within the churches.

The authors do not speak with one voice, but they share some broad agreements about the Rwandan churches' failures. They unite in criticizing certain deeply rooted institutional habits, which were inculcated by European and American missionaries and adopted by native clergy and laity. Most importantly, the authors criticize the churches for accepting and perpetuating the colonial myth that distinguished the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa peoples.

Apparently, German and Belgian colonizers, making use of western racial concepts and social Darwinist anthropology, reconstrued three relatively fluid social "clans" (who shared the same language and territory, and who occasionally intermarried) as three essentially different human groups or "races." Belgian colonial authorities accented these distinctions by issuing racial identity cards and by favoring one group over the others: first the Tutsi, then (on the eve of Rwandan independence in 1962), the Hutu. Western Catholic and Protestant missionaries also institutionalized this racial mythology in their teaching, their mission strategies, and their promotion of local leadership. Though native Rwandans adopted this "racialization" of their society, it was originally a western import (Octave Ugirashobura, "The Church and Genocide in Rwanda," 49–50).

An important facet of this racial myth was the theory that the "tall dignified Batutsi" (as one Anglican missionary described them) invaded Rwandan territory from Ethiopia centuries ago. This mythology helped to foster resentment among the Hutu majority against the Tutsi and fueled decades of ethnic conflict. It found its way into the rhetoric of Hutu radio announcers in 1994, who incited their listeners to cut down the "tall trees" and "send the Tutsi back to Ethiopia by the Nyabarongo River" (Roger Bowen, "Genocide in Rwanda—an Anglican Perspective," 39).

Despite their uniting in certain broad criticisms, the authors of these essays at times disagree when assessing the specific actions of church leaders—especially just before, during, and after the 1994 genocide. Some go further than others in blaming church leaders for failing to condemn racism, failing to denounce the genocide, failing to protect the victims, and failing to acknowledge guilt afterwards. For example, some writers point to statements made in the 1990s by Rwandan Catholic bishops, the ecumenical *Comite de Contacts*, and Pope John Paul II as genuine efforts by church leaders to stem the tide of ethnic violence. Others criticize these same statements as weak and ineffective. Some writers draw attention to church leaders (including Seventh Day Adventist pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana and others) who allegedly turned over their congregants to be murdered by Hutu militia. Others emphasize the heroic actions of some clergy and laity in protecting Tutsis from the "génocidaires." One author actually gives disturbing evidence that a Belgian court's conviction (in 2001) of two Rwandan nuns for acts of genocide may have been an unjust case of scapegoating (Martin Neyt, "Two Convicted Rwandan Nuns," 251–58).

These tensions and disagreements among the essays remind us that the situation in Rwanda was complicated and ambivalent. However, these essays challenge the reader not to be put off by complexity, but to probe this complicated situation for the purpose of finding the truth—especially the truth about the responsibility of the Christian churches. Many of these authors write from the perspective of a

professed Christian faith and with the hope that the search for truth can help reconcile and reform the church in Rwanda.

In front of the Catholic Church in Kibuye, where several thousand Tutsis were killed in 1994, is an outdoor chapel, built in 2001. Its walls encase a glass reliquary that exhibits bones of genocide victims. On those walls is written, "Let us remember that this horror of killing trampled humanity underfoot," and "We lacked brotherhood" (James Smith and Carol Rittner, "Churches as Memorial Sites: A Photo Essay," 187). Prisoners awaiting trial for crimes of genocide offered to work on the memorial building as a kind of penance. These essays, like this memorial, serve as symbols of the importance of truth-telling, and perhaps also, the hope for healing.

Another vivid remembrance of the 1994 genocide is the celebrated film, *Hotel Rwanda*, based on the true story of hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina (played by Don Cheadle). Rusesabagina, a Hutu, managed to shelter his Tutsi wife (Tatiana, played by Sophie Okonedo), their children, and over a thousand Tutsi refugees in the Mille Collines, a luxury hotel in Kigali owned by Sabena airlines. He protects them from the Hutu militia with a web of lies, bribes, and vague threats. Most of all, he relies constantly on the hotel's phone and fax machine to call in favors from his and other hotel staff members' influential international connections. Rusesabagina's is one of the stories told in Philip Gourevitch's award-winning history, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families* (New York: Picador USA, 1998). While the film appears to make use of some composite events and characters, it is an essentially truthful account of Rusesabagina's story and his character. In many ways, this film helps to illuminate the religious and moral issues addressed in the essays in Rittner *et al.*, *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?*, reviewed above.

The film acknowledges the church's presence in Rwanda, but the church itself is not a major character. On the eve of the genocide, Paul's family watches as their Tutsi neighbor, Victor, is beaten and abducted by the police. Tatiana is shocked that Victor is targeted, saying he had "no politics" and is "a Catholic." Priests and nuns have very small parts in the film, and are usually presented in either a sympathetic or a neutral light.

The film is not lacking in religious symbols, however. The cross on Tatiana's necklace is conspicuous in many scenes. At one point, her children clutch it, apparently for comfort and protection. Considering how bloody the genocide actually was, the film uses blood, an important religious symbol, in a restrained but effective way. On the night the genocide begins, Paul finds his son, Roger, hiding in a hedge, covered in blood. His parents quickly discover that the blood is actually someone else's. While Paul and Tatiana are overjoyed to find that Roger is not wounded, a Tutsi neighbor asks "Where did the blood come from?" Intentionally or not, the film evokes the Christian idea of blood sacrifice, the idea that one person's life is ransomed by someone else's blood. For every individual who was "saved" in Rwanda, many others were killed.

The film excels in evoking what one eye-witness describes in *Genocide in Rwanda* as the pervasive "smell of fear" (Marie Julianne Farrington, "Rwanda—100 Days—

1994,” 99). The viewer is constantly aware of the vulnerability of the refugees. Rusesabagina’s story also highlights the moral complexity of the situation. In order to save his charges, Paul must bargain with officials and militia, bribing them with liquor and money. More than once he is presented with the option of letting some die so that others may live. While Paul never succumbs to this temptation, these scenes may give insight into the minds of others who did, including some of the pastors mentioned in *Genocide in Rwanda*.

The film is also the story of the broadening of one man’s community of concern. Early in the film, he turns away while his neighbor Victor is being beaten, saying “There is nothing we can do.” When his wife encourages him to use his influential contacts to save Victor, Paul insists that he must save his influence because he will need it to protect his own family. Later, he does not set such limits. A Red Cross worker brings a busload of refugees to the hotel, saying, “They said that there wasn’t any room.” Paul tells her “There is always room.”

However, as Paul’s circle of concern broadens, that of the international community (and also, according to *Genocide in Rwanda*, the Christian churches) apparently becomes more narrow. The film makes use of what sounds like the real voices of political figures, whom the refugees listen to on the radio. We hear Bill Clinton promising to protect “our citizens there.” We hear a US state department spokeswoman hedging on the unqualified use of the term “genocide” to describe the slaughter, apparently not wishing to entangle the US in obligations delineated in the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (which is included in *Genocide in Rwanda* as an appendix).

Hotel Rwanda is also a hopeful story about the amount of good that can be done through the limited efforts of a few people. Many people wonder what kind of massive international resistance to the genocide would have been possible in Rwanda, and what good such resistance would have done. Another question to consider is: how many lives were saved by small, individual efforts at resistance—like Rusesabagina’s? A number of these small acts of heroism are also described in *Genocide in Rwanda*. Yet another question to ask is: could there have been even more? And could the international community (or the international Christian denominations) have done more to encourage these small efforts?

Hotel Rwanda, like *Genocide in Rwanda*, illustrates the moral complexity of this or any other genocide. At the same time, *Hotel Rwanda*, like *Genocide in Rwanda*, warns us against the temptation of using moral complexity as an excuse for apathy. One might argue this is basically what the international community (and perhaps, the universal church) did regarding Rwanda in 1994. Indeed, one might argue that such international apathy is a common theme of genocides in the twentieth century. In the face of bloody ethnic conflict, the right course of action is not always clear. But to stop paying attention or looking for answers is never right. This is certainly one lesson for the international community (and the Christian churches) to remember in the light of present genocidal conflicts, especially in Sudan.

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Gordon D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning...Creativity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004. 150 pp. Pbk. \$19.00. ISBN 0-8006-3684-8.

Gordon Kaufman is known primarily as a daring philosophical theologian. In this latest offering, in which he clarifies and advances his most recent innovations on the idea of God, he demonstrates with particular forcefulness that he is also very much a *moral* theologian. As always, *In the Beginning...Creativity* bodies forth Kaufman's conviction that the proper purpose of theology is not objectively to *describe* the realities with which we humans have to do, but practically to *orient* persons and communities in a morally appropriate way of life. In this book, the rigorous philosophical work for which Kaufman has become famous is extended for the expressed purpose of dealing creatively with the looming ecological crisis. The growing environmental threat, he urges, not only invites us to rethink our habitual ways of conceptualizing God's relation to the world—it *requires* us to do so.

Those who have followed Kaufman through the years will recognize a familiar pattern of reasoning behind this claim. In his 1981 book, *Theology for a Nuclear Age*, he argues that the advance of human power has brought us to the point of being capable of destroying the conditions on which our very existence is based. It no longer makes sense, therefore, to think of the fate of the earth as entirely in the hands of God. Theology must be thoroughly reconceived in order to help us deal realistically with this dramatically new situation. The argument of *In the Beginning...Creativity* extends the point, referring now to our growing capacity to wreak devastation upon the ecological conditions of human life by means of industry, sprawl, and other "ordinary" features of modern life.

The book begins with a rather lengthy Prologue, originally co-authored with Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, which tracks several features of talk about "God" through the centuries and across several theistic traditions. However, unlike some classical liberal investigations of this sort (one thinks of Schleiermacher's Introduction to *The Christian Faith*, for example), their account turns up no abiding "essence" of theism. Rather, Kaufman and Schüssler Fiorenza uncover plural emphases pushing in several directions. In this situation, the theologian must make choices—and assume responsibility for them.

The three chapters of *In the Beginning...Creativity* embody an effort to draw from the theistic traditions, and from other sources of insight, in order to fashion a "fresh" interpretation of God's relation to the world which is capable of providing the moral and political guidance required to meet the particular challenges of our epoch. The first two chapters may be seen as preparatory for Kaufman's systematic reconstruction of theism in chapter 3. Among the points made in these two chapters, particularly noteworthy is his claim that the central issue that theology must address is no longer the "existential" problem of our relation to God as anxious "subjects." This "existential" emphasis, characteristic of Western theology from Augustine to Niebuhr, has of course helped to orient human moral and political life in powerfully self-critical ways. But the confluence of naturalistic modes of understanding our world and the ecological crisis renders the anthropocentrism of the Western tradition which is expressed in this emphasis at best irrelevant to

contemporary concerns—and, at worst, positively misleading. Kaufman therefore urges that theology must be concerned with constructing a concept of God that pays attention to the significance of *nature* for the human situation.

Key to his own proposal for doing so are the concepts of human life as “bio-historical,” and especially of God as the cosmic “creativity” (rather than personal “creator”) which is characterized in part (but only in part) by trends which support sustainable human flourishing. The third and culminating chapter employs recent scientific knowledge to refine Kaufman’s interpretation of “God” as “creativity” and to highlight some of its important implications. One of these is that the certainty about where the universe is headed (i.e., about what God/creativity has in store for human beings) that characterized classical Western religious traditions is no longer credible. If the idea of God once served as a kind of reassurance that somewhere there is a plan for world history (and, correlatively, that we might be made privy to it), the concept of “creativity” explains nothing. Rather, it points to the “mystery” at bottom of every feature of life in the world: a mystery which can neither explain nor stand in as a theological placeholder for some unknown force that operates within the “gaps” of scientific explanation. Verifiable, empirical knowledge about the world does all the explaining.

Modern cosmology, evolutionary biology, and complexity theory are not just restrictive, however: they are appropriated here both as warrants for continuing to affirm some hope for the human project and as ways to “fill in” the void left by his dismissal of the traditional notion of “providence.” Some of classical theistic faith is preserved and recast—but not all of it. Instead of comforting reassurances, Kaufman’s theology offers a striking portrait of the peril of the human situation in face of environmental catastrophe and social meltdown. Faith in God/creativity is not certainty that everything will be all right in the end, but an Abrahamic courage to go out into the unknown with a chastened confidence that can support political and environmental responsibility.

In the Beginning... Creativity concludes with an illuminating intellectual autobiography in which Kaufman portrays the development of his thought as driven simultaneously by two overriding concerns: public morality and the concept of God. It is a fitting conclusion. Indeed, Kaufman’s most recent constructive efforts show rather brilliantly that a fundamental task involved in addressing moral issues from a theological point of view is to articulate a serviceable idea of God. His project is not immune to criticism, of course. “Realists” will likely balk at his claim that talk about God is a matter of the “imaginative construction” of images which are adjudicated on pragmatic grounds. Still, Kaufman seems to have met these critics half-way in this book. There is an ecological objectivity that yields the “imperatives” (49) to which humanity must respond. Even though “God” is an imaginative construct, the only versions of it that will “work” are those which respond adequately to real circumstances which bear down upon us. In this sense, Kaufman’s constructivist theology carries on the legacy of Realism in American religious thought.

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Donna Yarri, *The Ethics of Animal Experimentation: A Critical Analysis and Constructive Christian Proposal*. American Academy of Religion Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 220 pp. Hbk. \$45.00. ISBN 0195181794.

Both experimentation on animals and ethical concerns about their use for such purposes date back to the time of ancient Greece. Today, animal research is a multi-billion dollar industry, an estimated 17 to 100 million animals in the U.S. alone are used in animal research, and debates about the proper relationship between humans and animals have moved into the scholarly realm. Donna Yarri offers an interdisciplinary approach to the ethics of animal experimentation by drawing upon the fields of cognitive ethology (i.e., “the discipline that studies cognitive processes in animals within the context of evolutionary theory”), science, philosophy, and theology (x, 26). She ultimately provides a set of guidelines for weighing the benefits to humans against the burdens to animals and concludes that only *benign* forms of animal experimentation should be allowed to continue.

Yarri’s call for significant reform in much of what goes on today in the name of science or consumerism (i.e., product-testing) is premised upon a conviction that animals themselves have moral rights that we, as humans, must respect and ideally even codify into law (e.g., by amending the Animal Welfare Act). A good portion of her book is accordingly spent in defense of the view that animals have moral standing and intrinsic, not merely instrumental, value. She attempts this demonstration in two separate, but ultimately complementary, ways.

Yarri’s first set of warrants for animal rights arises from the nature of the animals themselves. Put simply, since animals possess both mental faculties and sentience in ways that are *comparable* to humans (e.g., beliefs, desires, preferences, language if understood in terms of communication, the capacity to feel pain and even suffer), they ought to merit moral consideration as well. This approach greatly turns on the “argument from marginal cases” (hereafter AMC), or the challenge posed to any attempt to distinguish humans from animals in any clear-cut ontological sense, since no morally relevant distinction can be found between all humans as a species and all animals as a class. To be sure, Yarri’s use of the AMC and its related charge of speciesism is not intended to demote “marginal” humans (e.g., infants, the comatose, the mentally retarded, and others who do not possess the cognitive faculties of normal adult human beings) below the threshold of moral concern, but to elevate many of the animals we use above it. At minimum, we must refrain from “perform[ing] experimentation on animals whose cognitive capacities are equal to or greater than that of marginal humans if we are not willing to so use marginal humans” (52).

Even before turning to her second set of considerations to ground animal rights, Yarri provides the book’s most novel—and to this reader, most interesting—constructive proposal. It is to use “pet-keeping” as a model for appropriate behavior. As a thought-experiment, we should imagine—and then work to insure—that experiments on animals were conducted in such a way that we would be willing to volunteer our own pets as experimental subjects. As a practical suggestion, Yarri not only encourages us to volunteer our own pets, but also would require experi-

menters at the conclusion of each study to put their subjects up for pet-adoption (as opposed to the standard practice of simply killing them). If actualized, Yarri's pet-keeping model would lead to significant changes in animal experimentation, reduce the total numbers of animals either purposely bred for or otherwise sold into a lifetime of captivity in a laboratory, and encourage humans to stop ontologizing animals into one of two categories: those we *use* (and thereby exploit or abuse) and those we *love* (and accordingly cherish and protect).

It is not until the second to last chapter that Yarri offers her second set of arguments for animal rights and thereby turns to the specifically *Christian* portion of her "constructive Christian proposal." Her aim in this sole chapter on Christian theology is not to provide a completely different ethic, but (1) to mine resources within the Christian tradition supportive of a more positive assessment of animals, and accordingly (2) provide a "stronger foundation for the arguments already made on the subject in previous chapters" (108). This is to say that faith and reason for Yarri, at least when deliberating about animal experimentation, are ultimately allied: one can either advocate on behalf of animals out of a systematic theological reflection on basic Christian doctrines such as creation, sin, redemption, and eschatology, or reach virtually the same practical conclusions from non-explicitly theological considerations.

My own concern with the manner in which Yarri organizes and defends the arguments of her book is not so much her decision to concentrate on "secular" materials, but several missed opportunities for extended theological reflection that come as result. To take one such example, Yarri expresses some misgivings about the way in which scientists commonly refer to the death or deliberate killing of the animals used in experimentation as a "sacrifice" (83). Yet Yarri nowhere provides a theological analysis or critique of this religiously-loaded term, not even when she contends in her chapter on Christian theology that both animal sacrifice and meat-eating only come as a result of the Fall. To take another example, Yarri's constructive proposal appears to be a modified version of the Golden Rule in at least two senses, although Yarri does not present it as such (n.b., it also resonates well with a "care" approach in ethics, but Yarri has deliberately excluded feminist moral reasoning in her analysis). According to the first formulation, we are to treat other animals as we would like our own animals (i.e., our pets) to be treated. In the second, we are to put *ourselves* (not just our pets) directly in the place of the non-human *Other* that is to be experimented upon, by examining "whether [we] would be willing to allow such treatment to be accorded to [our]selves, if it would result in a comparable level of suffering" (105). Ironically, Yarri's guiding principle even has all the same assumptions of the Golden Rule and its attendant problems: it presumes that the moral agent is neither a masochist, nor an abusive pet-owner, and that she is truly capable of taking care of either herself or her pet. This is to say that Yarri had at her disposal not only some key doctrines of systematic theology, but also the Christian ethical principle of neighbor-love itself.

In sum, Yarri's somewhat *ad hoc* treatment of theology will not pose a problem for those among her readership who contend—whether for theoretical, pragmatic, or political reasons—that discussions of the ethics of animal experimentation as

well as any public-policy proposals that emerge from them should remain free of any necessary recourse to religion. However, those looking for either theology's unique contribution to this topic or for an ethic that is inextricably grounded upon a more theocentric or even Christological orientation would be advised to look elsewhere.

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Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. 256 pp. \$23.00. Hbk. ISBN 0374153892.

The National Book Critics Circle selected Marilynne Robinson's novel, *Gilead*, for the top fiction prize for 2004. They will not get an argument from me. This is as intelligent and sensitive a novel as I have ever read. The prose at times takes my breath away with its beauty, simplicity, and preciseness. This book comes close to fulfilling a cliché in that not a single word seems wasted.

What amazed me most about this wonderful novel is that it is written from the perspective of a pastor named John Ames, whose father was a preacher as well as both grandfathers. Pastors are among the most caricatured figures in literature, and it is rare to find one who is as real and complex and wise and observant as the narrator of this novel. The seventy-four-year-old Reverend John Ames is dying and, while doing so, writing a long diary—the pages of *Gilead*—addressed to his seven-year-old son whom he will soon leave behind. He wants to pass on his wisdom, family history, and even his theology. “One great benefit of a religious vocation is that it helps you concentrate” (7), Ames muses early on, and he looks at his life as one who has paid close attention. Indeed, Ames wants to try “to say what is true” for his son to read when he is grown.

As is true of any life well lived, there are many themes that run through Ames' reflections: brokenness, reconciliation, anger and grief, and the ways we hurt and heal and bless each other, to name but a few. Of interest to readers of this journal, Ames also explores the relation between politics and religion, particularly in an inter-generational conflict over the use of force to try to bring about good. John Ames' paternal grandfather was a fiery preacher who had visions from God and even conversations with God in the parlor that led him to become an abolitionist with a Bible in one hand and a pistol in the other. John Ames later watched his father throw that same pistol into a river. An avowed pacifist, his father's favorite scripture was Isaiah 9:5, “For all the armor of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall be for burning, for fuel of fire” (80).

This is, of course, an argument that goes back in the church to the time of Constantine and as current as the debate over the war in Iraq. The narrator of *Gilead* holds both these perspectives in compassionate tension and, in doing so, challenges those who would make religion into a political weapon. Robinson

herself has said, "I think people have drawn battle lines and fetishized elements of one religion or another in a way that distorts everything and makes religion look like an awfully odd thing, viewed from the outside. Oddly enough, even when there's so much talk about religion, there's a very profound loss of what has been the best heritage that we can draw from. People have forgotten that religion has been the great generator of art and music and literature and philosophy. It's now treated as if it were just some sort of cranky obscurantism" (Teresa K. Weaver, "Novelist of Precise Observation Sees Grace in Smallest Details," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, March 6, 2005).

There is much happening in our culture and our world that serves to give religion a bad name. In a delightful way, *Gilead* reminds us that religion is also a source of healing and hope. As Ames says, "There were two further points I felt I should have made in our earlier conversations, one of them being that doctrine is not belief, it is only one way of talking about belief, and the other being that the Greek word *sozo*, which is usually translated "saved," can also mean healed, restored, that sort of thing. So the conventional translation narrows the meaning of the word in a way that can create false expectations. I thought he should be aware that grace is not so poor a thing that it cannot present itself in any number of ways" (249–50).

Among its many rich themes, this book serves to remind us that dialogue about vital religious issues such as "just war," in homes or churches or halls of congress are likely to be divisive and politicized and ultimately futile unless they are somehow imbued with grace.

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Carol P. Christ, *She Who Changes: Reimagining the Divine in the World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. x + 277 pp. £16.99. Hbk. ISBN 1-4039-6083-6.

Carol P. Christ is one of the pioneers of women's studies in religion and her writings have remained influential over three decades. She was one of the first feminist theologians and one of the founders of the theological goddess movement, which employs female imagery for the divine. In *She Who Changes*, Christ offers the most fully developed articulation of her feminist process theology in order to reimagine the divine and consider afresh humankind's responsibilities towards the world and one another. In this sense, the book is as concerned with political theology and offering an inclusive ethical manifesto as it is about philosophy of religion.

Throughout her distinguished career, Christ has remained open and questioning, never believing she has arrived at an end-point of intellectual inquiry. This openness to ideas has allowed her to further resource her theological vision through her deep empathy with Charles Hartshorne's process thought, whose insights she lovingly integrates into her feminist theology to create a new mutually enriching synthesis. What makes these approaches so compatible is their common rejection of traditional theological thinking about God:

Like many feminist theologies and theologues, process philosophy affirms change and embodiment, touch and relationship, power with, not power over, the world as co-created, this life rather than hope for another, and the fragmentariness of all knowledge (44).

Bringing together her feminist standpoint and process sympathies into conversation with one another provides an excellent opportunity for those who wish to learn more about either of these influential worldviews. Christ's writing style is effortlessly inviting. She is an accomplished communicator and teacher and the narrative is clear and engaging, punctuated by the occasional autobiographical illustration. Her passionate commitment to an eco-feminist spirituality and ethic is much in evidence in this positive and life-affirming study.

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