

BOOK REVIEW

Randi Rashkover and C. C. Pecknold, eds, *Liturgy, Time, and the Politics of Redemption. Radical Traditions: Theology in a Postcritical Key*. London: SCM Press, 2006. ix + 254 pp. Pbk. £35. ISBN 0-334-04033-7.

This important collection of essays represents an engagement with (at least) two ambitious and timely tasks. The first, as signalled in the title, is the place of liturgy in the relationship between the political and the theological, building on studies of liturgy and ethics that have emerged in recent years. The second, as indicated in the editorial collaboration, is undertaking theology in self-conscious dialogue between religious traditions, in this case Judaism and Christianity.

Any reflection on the place of liturgy in relation to politics involves consideration of just what it is that liturgy “does.” The contributions of Magid and Kepnes both grapple with the paradoxical character of this question in the light of anthropological approaches to ritual, in that it would seem that ritual finds its work in human societies by creating a liminal, even fictional, space somehow apart from the “ordinary” workings of those societies. In a concluding chapter, Pecknold summarizes “three main stages of this book’s implicit argument” under the headings “Liturgy teaches,” “Liturgy locates the kingdom of God” and “Liturgy performs a politics of redemption” (230–32). One could map the different contributions in terms of their relative emphasis on each of these areas. For Ochs, for instance, liturgy gives us a way of thinking—it expresses a logic of relations that contrasts with the dominant logic of propositions in our culture. Bader-Saye stresses that through liturgy we not only come to understand but also “enact... God’s presence in history” (110). In her introductory essay, Rashkover describes Judaism and Christianity “as effective agents of redemptive repair in the world now rather than as prophetic anticipations of ‘not-yet’ messianic fulfilment” (1). There are certainly broad parameters that frame the various contributions, not least in the pervasive affirmation of “alternative models of liturgical temporality” (23)—i.e. alternative to the dominant models of temporality in (late) modernity. There is not much evidence of debate, however, as to how those models might relate to theological accounts of redemption on the one hand and practical politics on the other. Bader-Saye, Quash and Wells all deploy a critique of time as commodity as part of their analysis, with Quash being the most direct in his assessment: the Church formed by liturgy must resist the idolatry of the global market that is absorbing contemporary culture. Gibbs, describing how the yearly cycle of Torah readings “breaks the spell of our present moment, and so makes us free due to the discontinuity between our own moment and the moment of which we read” (136) might find

some common cause with Quash's assertion that the *Trisagion* in Christian worship makes the worshipper "ready to resist premature attempts at the consummation or arresting of time which are the mark of a certain godless political ambition" (162). Still, one might ask whether faith in divine redemption enacted in liturgy means something more in political terms than sustaining resistance to all forms of politics that make counterfeit theological claims.

If liturgy involves the enacting of text (in the most general sense of predictable sequences of words and actions), a liturgical community is always one partner in such enactment. The formation and dynamics of liturgical communities, caught up as they inevitably are in the political sphere, do not receive very much attention here, however. There is no dialogue with sociology, for instance, and perhaps more surprisingly not a great deal of engagement with liturgical history (Quash's chapter excepted)—how the texts and practices that are being analysed have come to be the way they are and how they have shaped and been shaped by their political context as part of that. Exploration of such matters might prompt questions about the extent to which traditional liturgy (and there is no explicit consideration of other kinds) expresses alternative models of temporality in that it carries the marks of earlier forms of political life and hence their own attendant models of temporality; one thinks of the pervasiveness of pre-modern court ceremonial in forms of both Jewish and Christian liturgy with their origins in late antiquity and the early middle ages. There are perhaps more general lessons to be learnt for the enterprise represented by this book from the body of writing on liturgical theology that has grown steadily in Christian liturgical studies over the last thirty years, where what looked like a growing consensus has recently been under sustained attack for (amongst other things) a lack of accountability to the complex realities of actual liturgical development.

The dimension of Jewish-Christian theological dialogue is reflected in the volume's careful organization into four pairs of essays by Jewish and Christian contributors on key themes (liturgical action, liturgical time, liturgical scrolling, liturgical improvisation); Davies alone contributes to Part V, "Liturgical Silence." Wells is perhaps the most creative author in drawing on the liturgy of the other faith in order to inform the treatment of his own, in terms of both the feast of Purim in relation to Christian liturgical reading of the book of Esther (and indeed its absence), and in the connection of Jewish Passover to Christian Eucharist, about which he makes some brief but insightful suggestions (182–83). All the Christian contributors make the Eucharist their primary liturgical focus, whereas Jewish essayists cover a much broader canvass—Ochs writes on morning prayer, Kepnes on the recitation of psalms, Gibbs on the liturgical year and Magid on the marriage ceremony. More conscious parallelism in the liturgies considered might have been illuminating. Kepnes compares Rosenzweig with Augustine on liturgical psalm saying, but no Christian contributor engages with Rosenzweig's thought on time, liturgy and politics, despite its obvious relevance and decisive influence for contemporary Judaism. In this area, the greatest value of the book may be in stimulating further studies which venture to engage more deeply with both the liturgies and the liturgical theology of the other in the light of one's own.

This is a book that as a collection deserves to be widely read by students and academics in liturgical studies as well as political theology. Many of the chapters, such as Ward on the Christian act, Wells on improvisation and Davies on silence, are significant theological essays in their own right. Tackling a vital but potentially diffuse area of concern, thoughtful organization and a measure of shared values among the contributors gives the book coherence as well as a stimulating diversity in perspectives. It frames and opens an agenda that ought to receive growing attention and will be best addressed through extending the kind of dialogue—of faiths and disciplines—that is so well modelled here.

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