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Reviews

Nicola Slee, *Faith and Feminism: An Introduction to Christian Feminist Theology*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003. 131 pp. Pbk. £8.95. ISBN 0232524866.

The recent discussion in *The Independent* newspaper sparked off by the assertion of Professor Carol Black, President of the Royal College of Physicians, that too many women are becoming doctors, causing a crisis in particular specialisms because women are unwilling to put in the inhuman hours required to become cardiologists and gastroenterologists, illustrates the need for a continued feminist critique that attends not only to equal opportunities, but to structural questions that not only disadvantage women in employment but also question professions that rely on inhuman working hours.

Similarly the far-reaching questions raised in the Anglican Communion by the consecration of women bishops has generated new interest in broad questions of the nature of authority and how power is exercised within the Church.

In a theological environment where in many educational institutions feminist theology is regarded as marginal, passé and a soft option for women students, Nicola Slee's book is welcome as a clear overview of some key areas of Christian feminist engagement: the Bible; religious language; sin and salvation; the holy spirit; ecclesiology and spirituality—the titles of the chapters themselves indicating that this is not a subject sealed off from the central concerns of Christian theology.

There is a good introduction which orients the reader within the movements of twentieth-century theology, feminism as a wider movement and the diversity of feminist theologies in a world context. Some key terms, such as androcentrism and patriarchy, are defined in the text, while other terms and key figures are listed in the helpful glossary.

Each chapter offers exercises for reflection on the reader's own experience and uses this to draw the reader into more general questions and explore further reading, thus illustrating the theological method being introduced which is grounded in the experience of women, develops critical skills in thinking about language, structures and the dynamics of relationships, broadens conversation in relation to key texts and on occasions suggests creative exercises such as the writing of a personal Magnificat or painting an image of redemption. Attention to the embodied and relational and holistic nature of much Christian feminist work which is handled well in the text might have been taken further in the exercises, asking readers to share their experience with others in a sustained way or to pray or dance or sing rather than just to write prayers or critique the language of hymns. The level, structure and accessibility

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of the book makes it ideal for using in serious local church groups as well as offering an orientation to work at level 1.

The concluding chapter on the future of feminist theology outlines some recent developments and makes the point to which the question of women bishops alludes, that a feminist critique of Christianity is a fundamental one, but one which has power and energy to renew Christian faith for women and men. As feminist theology matures, a more constructive, confident and inclusive vision for humankind could have been a stronger thread in the book, using contemporary examples to emphasize the potential transformation, not just of Church structures, practices and relationships, but of the medical profession, secular politics and global economics—a transfiguration of the whole creation to which a relational, holistic, ecologically and politically committed Christian faith points.

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Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism—Which Way Now? An Evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell Church and Other Contemporary Strategies for Evangelism*. London: Church House Publishing, 2003. xiii + 207. Pbk. £10.95. ISBN 0715140086.

For most people, becoming a Christian is like a journey. Therefore the work of evangelism is about accompanying people on that journey. Therefore a book that helps us think about the directions we should take in accompanying others is a book that could be of great value, not least because many churches have not really engaged with the insights and rediscoveries that have been associated with the renewal of catechumenal evangelism, typified by the all-conquering Alpha course, and the quietly-not-so-far-behind Emmaus programme. If all the book does is encourage churches who have not yet attempted something like this to have a go, then it will have achieved a great deal.

I must declare an interest here: I am one of the authors of Emmaus. Nevertheless, it is a remarkable fact that in the past ten years thousands of churches have effectively engaged in evangelism by establishing nurture groups in their churches. Here people can come and explore faith and make the journey. Whatever your personal view about the content of these courses, the process—a kind of late-twentieth-century re-working of the catechumenates of the early church—is a hugely significant development in the way we do evangelism. Many people who have become Christians and joined the church in recent years have done so through a course such as Alpha or Emmaus. This book pays tribute to this work, evaluates the relative merits of the different courses that are available, and provides a practical critique of what they offer and how to use them effectively. It also has interesting and readable assessments of other evangelism strategies that have been developed in recent years.

But, herein also lies the problem. Alpha and Emmaus (and, remember, I write as one of the authors) and much else that is found in these pages seem like a

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twentieth-century approach in a twenty-first-century world. Alpha and Emmaus are both doctrine led, inviting people to explore the content of faith. But we live in a world which is increasingly interested in exploring the experience of faith. In certain respects this book has been overtaken by the mission-shaped church report that encourages us to think how we can give fresh expression to our faith through giving people experience of community, and through happenings which give experience of a lived, embodied faith. (Surely it is no co-incidence that the most effective part of the Alpha course is not the *content* but the *context:* the meals, the sharing together.) Although there are good chapters on planting new forms of church and engaging with the search for spirituality, it too often tells me what path I have taken rather than help me discover what path to take next. An evangelism which is spirituality led and a church with a generosity of space to experience as well as explore are surely two of the ways forward for evangelism in the next ten years. In this respect it is interesting to see how some of the Emmaus growth courses on spirituality and identity are now being used as evangelism courses for those wanting a way in that is more experiential. This may well mean that Emmaus will be around for a few years to come. This book also notes our culture's fascination with all things spiritual, and also takes note of the Essence course, which is a specifically spirituality-led approach to evangelism and nurture.

There is one other significant omission. And this seems to me to be the case with almost all books about evangelism. Much is made of clothing the gospel in culturally appropriate forms so that it is relevant and engaging to our context, but very little is made of whether we should dare look afresh at the gospel itself. Those writing about evangelism tend to speak of an unchanging gospel re-clothed in an ever-changing set of cultural outfits. But surely the slightly more uncomfortable witness of scripture and tradition is that the context in which we proclaim the gospel compels us to examine the content of our proclamation, as well as our methods. Peter's vision at Joppa, for instance, affects more than his methods in preaching to the Gentiles; the content of the gospel itself is radically changed by the revelation that God has made all things clean. Likewise the discussion over whether gentile converts should be circumcised. Likewise in our own day the ongoing discussion about human sexuality. How we resolve these issues affect not only our methods, but the content of the gospel itself. We are dealing with the same issue: what are the legitimate boundaries of inclusivity? Here the conclusions of our discussion on content will be of much greater significance to the way we evangelize in the twenty-first century than any new course, however savvy its packaging.

But perhaps I am being a bit too hard on this book. What we believe the gospel to proclaim will affect the way we proclaim it just as much as the context of the culture in which we are set. It will also have a powerful bearing upon our motivation (or lack of it!) to evangelize. But this book does not set out to address these more theological questions about the ministry of evangelism. It's just a pity that no other seems to either. Evangelism is a vital ministry, a commission to make disciples that are given us by Christ. We are in danger of impoverishing this ministry by allowing its practice to be shaped only by those whose static understanding of the gospel is

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often failing to address the theological questions that our culture is posing. *The gospel—which way now?*, is the book that is waiting to be written.

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T. J. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. 283 pp. Pbk. £17.99. ISBN 0-7546-4042-9.

Marx reminds us that we study the world not to understand it but to change it. However, those of us who regard ourselves as agents for change require some understanding of this world with which we are trying to engage. Cyclical models of theology require us to do as much social analysis as theologizing and many of us have become quite fluent in the jargon and the methodologies of the social sciences. However, we can often be rather vague on how we make the connections between social analysis and theology. For me, as for many practitioners, these linkages have drawn heavily on the typology which Niebuhr developed in the mid twentieth century in *Christ and Culture*. Indeed, so influential has his thinking been that it is often absorbed at second or third hand, and usually without recognition, let alone attribution. A version of his "Christ the transformer of culture" is often the option which is preferred, his other four types being fashioned into convenient sticks with which to beat alternatives which are regarded as less radical or less innovative.

It is not a revelation to assert that both cultural and theological studies have moved on somewhat during the last fifty years. Yet many of us continue to draw explicitly or implicitly on Niebuhr's analysis because, as field workers, we find it difficult to penetrate the seemingly endless jungle of theories and publications which might offer what Timothy Gorringe describes as a "richer understanding of the engagement of Church and culture than Niebuhr's typology allows" (15). It is because of these constraints that an enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Gorringe. In this, as in his previous work, he opens up difficult terrain to the non-specialist by providing a map and a guidebook which, when followed, can lead to the acquisition of the skills and the confidence to journey on in new ways.

However, this book is no "easy read," the breadth and the depth of the author's scholarship ensuring that there are more than enough challenging ideas to stretch the reader. Quoting the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, "culture" is visualized as the "webs of significance" which humans spin and in which we are suspended. Encompassing body, mind and spirit, culture is of fundamental theological concern. Gorringe borrows from Raymond Williams his description of social, economic and political change in the modern age as "the long revolution," but he then draws on the work of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder to translate this into "a way of viewing human history as a whole…the furthering of humanity." This process, of course, provides the title of the book; but taking place in the first chapter, alongside references to Luther, Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher, Barth and numerous others, it makes for a demanding beginning.

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The twelve chapters are divided into three parts plus a conclusion. Having begun his first chapter by defining his terms, Gorringe concludes it by setting out the shape of his theological exploration in three fundamental points, drawing on Barth. The incarnation will have a continuing significance, because the Word became flesh and "flesh means culture—food, the world of symbols, the way in which we cherish bodies." It also means that there is no need to justify the inclusion of the economic or political dimensions of culture. Secondly, because there is no culture that embodies the kingdom there is a need to address both the ideals and the realities—in theological terms the problem of sin and redemption. Yet scepticism is not the last word, because God is at work within the creation, and culture can be a place of continuing revelation. This leads on to a third point, the consideration of eschatology: of culture as a process of becoming and the Church's response as a theology of hope grounded in the resurrection.

Part I of the book is subtitled Culture and the remaining three chapters continue the exploration with the same intensity. I found the examination of religion and culture through the work of S. T. Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot hard going but was rewarded by the following chapters on the Quality of Culture and Cultural Imperialism. These move the argument on into considerations of "high," "folk," "popular" and "mass" culture and to questions of value; then into globalization, the market, universal and particular cultures. Each Part ends with a brief and helpful review which summarizes progress and bridges to the next chapters.

Part II tackles Power, "the thread which stitches the seams of the cultural garment" (105), and it is explored in the guises of ideology, hegemony and cultural politics. It is through this analysis that Gorringe begins to reveal his understanding of the role which religion can continue to play in the cultural debate. The Church, through the revelation of God in the scriptures, is able to challenge the "taken for granted pieties" of culture. But the prophetic word alone is not sufficient, action is required as well: "the construction of counter hegemonies, alternatives to the global dominance of the market, which is the true meta narrative of our age" (173). The place of the Church within culture is clarified by liberation theology; it is not to represent the poor and the marginalized but to stand in solidarity with them. "Power is redefined by the gospel from the base upwards" (173).

This leads directly to questions about Mission which comprise Part III. Historically, mission and colonialism are inseparable and religion has been responsible for enormous cultural destruction. Nevertheless, religion is part of the "long revolution;" Christians believe that the gospel has something to offer which is of unique value to all; culture is the locus of God's engagement, so mission is an imperative. What is offered is "the possibility of a new type of human community not marked by class, race and gender divides" (256). The consideration of issues of translation and inculturation also explores ways in which increasing cultural awareness and sensitivity to cultural difference have enhanced our understanding of God. In the penultimate chapter of Part III, Gorringe brings the full force of his argument to bear on the "clash of civilizations" analysis of the modern world. Represented by the work of Samuel Huntington, this concludes that the Western identity is under threat and survival depends upon preserving it from the challenges of "non-Western societies."

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These late-twentieth-century ideas seem even more disturbing, post 9/11 and in the midst of continuing war in Iraq. But as well as countering the arguments for cultural apartheid, a more grounded view of global culture is developed which concludes that meeting God in my neighbour and continuing the process of dialogue are aspects of a multicultural approach which is at the same time a struggle for truth, often a scarce commodity in this kind of debate.

Having skilfully teased out and disentangled so many fibres, Gorringe concludes by fashioning them into a rope for the continuing journey. As Christian theology continues to reflect upon the culture of which it is part, it must do so critically by calling for repentance and new ways of doing things. Having identified free market capitalism and the global economy as the touchstones of contemporary culture, it is around these themes that the debates about values and the action for justice, peace and sustainability must take place. And beyond this must lie the telling and the retelling of stories, both of the hope and of the reality, taking place in the context of a liturgy which celebrates the joy of living and is a response to grace, which is praise of the Triune God. This represents the working out of a truly incarnational faith in the God who calls the dead to life. Thus what begins as a theology of culture becomes also a manifesto for the Church. We are not allowed to rest content amidst the analysis and the reflection of the pastoral cycle; rather we find ourselves moved on into action.

I arrived at the end of the book almost overwhelmed by the volume and the complexity of the arguments. I say this not to deter the prospective reader but to encourage you. For the material which is dealt with here is essential for any thoughtful engagement with the twenty-first century and is probably unavailable anywhere else in such a critically accessible form. I really do welcome this book; I will revisit it regularly and (hopefully) adopt the methodology which is used in my own work. The text is well referenced and indexed and there is a comprehensive bibliography to encourage further study. This is the kind of book that practitioners and field-workers want academic theologians to write as a resource for our engagement with culture, and it is a task which Gorringe has undertaken several times already. For if we are to be involved in the process of changing the world we also need to begin to understand it and this book is a significant contribution to that endeavour.

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Tim McKenzie, *Vocation in the Poetry of the Priest-Poets George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins and R. S. Thomas*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004. 273 pp. Hardback. £64.95. ISBN 0773465707.

This latest volume in the series of Studies in Art and Religious Interpretation is an ambitious interdisciplinary engagement between literary criticism and theology. It sets out, through sustained analysis of Herbert, Hopkins and Thomas, to explore how the poet-priest's dual vocations are held in creative tension.

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The book quickly develops the premise that such a creative vocational tension forms an integral part of the three poets' self-identity; the resulting admixture of priest-poet gives them a special role to play in the affairs of the Church and the secular sphere. Ultimately, the priest-poet is identified with the holy fool—one who stands outside worldly structures and hierarchies to provide an alternative view, and, by weaving together the threads of language and sacrament, offers a window onto the absolute otherness and ineffability of God.

McKenzie is a skilful weaver, too: his study of the rich conceptual and theological world of the texts reveals a dynamic interplay of symbolism, metaphor and imagery at the heart of his project, despite a somewhat self-conscious structure to the book. A more interventionist publisher may well have advised McKenzie to introduce a more freeform approach, where resonances between the three poets could be made more explicit without upsetting a rigid thematic balance.

Nonetheless, McKenzie's immaculate arrangement of his material and rigorous analysis does allow sophisticated literary portraits of his three subjects to emerge against a backdrop of their respective poetic and theological traditions. In turn, these traditions are contextualized against an undercurrent of ever-increasing alienation: the Christian worldview largely assumed in Herbert's time has all but vanished from Thomas's era, and the relentless tide of secularization demolishes with it the clear vocational purpose of priest, so that he is "condemned as a fool, a 'crippled soul… limping through life / On his prayers' " (239).

Herbert's poetic vision is seen centred upon the proclamation of Christ as the saving Word with whom humankind enjoys personal relationship, a relationship shared in the eucharist which expresses the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice and in ritualized form provides the exemplar of God's loving generosity, to be imitated by the disciple. For Herbert, being a true priest and being a true Christian are one and the same calling. In following a principle of joyful submission to God, a Christian will direct all his gifts towards God. Herbert's poetry, then, defined as his gift of sacrificial praise, is only in danger of conflicting with his priestly vocation if elevated rather than surrendered.

The contrast with Hopkins, born into an age of doubt—a doubt partially assuaged by the sacramental certainties of the Catholic faith—is clear. While his nature poems and theopoetic theory of inscape and instress express the place everything has in a divinely organized universe and its capacity for reflecting back the glory of God, the mature Hopkins, seen in the desperation of the terrible sonnets and so vividly drawn by McKenzie, is forced to recognize the ever-present reality of Christ's sacrifice and own it. His priestly role, therefore, served out as a broken vessel through which Christ is made manifest to the world in the eucharist, can never be wholly reconciled with his status as poet. In fact, it is in Hopkins where we encounter most painfully the conflict between the roles of priest and poet—a conflict that threatens to fragment the inner unity of the self.

By the time Thomas is required to live out his dual vocation, science and technology have rendered the universe so vast that human faith seems to be "decidedly provincial, revelation improbable and knowledge of God virtually impossible" (35). While clear about the capacity for poetry to tell something of the mystery of God in the face of scientific empiricism, Thomas is unsure whether his priestcraft has any-

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thing to offer the Welsh farming communities to which he ministers. He is drawn as a prophet railing against materialism and falling back upon the eucharistic sacrament as a counterweight to the reductionism of the age. The Cross remains as a confounding mystery that provides a link between contemporary human suffering and the death of the Godhead.

McKenzie's sense of order sometimes seems to be in danger of compelling him to associate each figure with a particular "vocational orientation" rather too enthusiastically—Herbert, word-focused Protestant poet-pastor; Hopkins, sacramental priest; Thomas, disenchanted prophet. It would be unfair to accuse McKenzie of sacrificing the ambiguities and contradictions of vocation to a tripartite interpretation, since he is at pains to point out how the vocational dimensions he explores blur and overlap. Nevertheless, a broader, more fluid interpretation of vocation may have served the writer well. Although exploring a contemporary vision of vocation, it is interesting to note how Brown and Cocksworth (*Being a Priest Today* [Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002]) use Herbert, Hopkins and Thomas to consider the full spectrum of vocational possibilities. Certainly, the role of prayer, which figures prominently in the works of all three poets, seems to be significantly underplayed in McKenzie's study.

Priests and poets have always been liminal creatures, outsiders whose place on the edge of the community, on the edge between earth and heaven, has given them the chance to develop a different vision of the world around them. It is an aspect of the prophetic calling of ministry and, while it is true that this might be heightened in the dual role of priest-poet, it has always been there in its constituent parts. Whether or not we would wish to accord these priest-poets special status among the panoply of "holy fools," McKenzie's book is a scholarly and beautifully written appraisal of their work that goes a long way towards enriching our appreciation of their literary and theological voices.

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David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 272 pp. Hbk. $34.95. ISBN 080782819X.

This new study of the American civil rights movement by University of Arkansas historian David L. Chappell has generated quite a bit of excitement since its publication. The *Atlantic Monthly* called *A Stone of Hope* "one of the three or four most important books on the civil rights movement," and the *Los Angeles Times* praised it as "a stunning reinterpretation." What excites these and other historians most is Chappell's claim to be breaking new ground in exploring the role of religion in the civil rights movement. He argues that the movement's vitality was a result of "the prophetic religious tradition" out of which it grew, rather than the secular liberal tradition, which floundered on civil rights. Chappell writes, "There are many books about the civil rights protesters that ignore their prophetic qualities…but yield solid, significant knowledge. I claim not to overthrow but to add something crucial to that

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knowledge. My argument is that the prophetic content of the protesters' minds is illuminating, though it has been all but ignored in books and articles about the movement." Throughout the book, Chappell makes similar remarks about the uniqueness of his argument, as when he says, "The prophetic theme came to appear as the missing link that made all existing books on civil rights seem incomplete" (187). Thus, the first question that must be asked is why Chappell takes credit for discovering an idea which numerous scholars and theologians before him have ably explored, often in greater detail.

Chappell's claim to originality illustrates the perils that befall historians who write on faith and "prophetic religion" without sufficient attention to theology and religious scholarship. In the past decade, a body of scholarly and theological literature has emerged with a focus on the religious dimension of the civil rights movement. This literature is largely ignored by Chappell.

In his book, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford University Press, 1995), Richard Lischer, a professor at Duke Divinity School, placed the event of prophetic preaching and religious performance at the centre of the civil rights narrative. Lischer described the mass meetings and demonstrations as symbolic re-enactments of biblical narratives, which the movement's antagonists had hoped to banish from politics and secular affairs. It was not liberal notions of historical progress and transnational community that gave the movement meaning and momentum; Lischer shows rather that it was the church as the body of Christ or, as King liked to say, as the "colony of heaven," where the costly demands of the prophets and Jesus were preached with concrete application for the social order and without compromise (*Preacher King*, 239). No doubt, King could skilfully recite liberalism's noble achievements and praise its commitments to human freedom and flourishing; but he never found a home there. As Lischer says, "[Liberalism's] Enlightenment vision of the harmony of humanity, nature, and God skips a step that is essential to the development of black identity. It has little experience of the evil and suffering borne by enslaved and segregated people in America" (*Preacher King*, 53).

The Preacher King illuminated a paradigm for civil rights research that enables closer attention to the religious sources of organizing and action as well as to the theological detail and content of those sources. I kept waiting in *A Stone of Hope* for an appreciative nod toward Lischer's book and the new vistas opened up in its pages, but instead I found only a single mention of Lischer's thesis deep in the volume's endnotes. (*A Stone of Hope*'s notes, along with its "Bibliographical Essay" and index, run to more than 150 pages in length, almost half of the entire manuscript, or more than half given the smaller type. In their scope and execution, the massive notes and flamboyant asides—in one note Chappell calls King's devotion to the Kingdom of God "muddled" and "sentimental"—have the effect of crushing the main body of the book beneath their weight.)

Another work germane to the argument of *A Stone of Hope* is Carol Polsgrove's *Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement* (Norton, 2001), in particular her account of Reinhold Niebuhr's condescending view of the Montgomery bus boycott. Chappell's portrayal of Niebuhr is not uncommon among a certain coterie

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of secular historians and journalists who appreciate the American theologian's political realism and support of progressive social movements—Niebuhr's reputation as a robust Christian critic. But Chappell goes further than most admirers in calling Niebuhr a prophetic thinker in the company of Luther, Augustine and Isaiah. In fact, Chappell claims the great Cold War theologian as the best contemporary representative of "the tradition of prophetic resistance to the corrupt tendencies of this world," a more reliable guide to negotiating political realities than that other great neo-orthodox theologian, Karl Barth, who gives us only "pessimism" and an "Augustinian rejection of this world" (*Stone of Hope*, 47). (Timothy Gorringe's excellent book, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, puts to rest once and for all this simplistic and inaccurate view of Barth, which Chappell blithely restates.) While Lischer recognizes the limits of Niebuhr's influence on King—"King was chastened by his encounter with Niebuhr but he never converted"—Chappell claims deep affinities between the two. He writes, "King's striving to reconcile prophetic elements from his peculiar tradition with the best of the rest of American Protestantism, and with the best of the American civil tradition, made his thought converge with Niebuhr's" (*Stone of Hope*, 48).

The historical record suggests otherwise. In *Divided Minds*, Polsgrove unmasks Niebuhr's liberal condescension on the race issue and exposes his troubling equivocations on emerging black protest. Her account further highlights the dramatic differences between black southern dissidents and northern liberals with much more force than Chappell. By the time the United States Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools in its 1954 decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, Niebuhr was widely regarded as one of the nation's most influential public intellectuals and theologians, a major contributor to the construction of Cold War liberalism. Although he supported the Supreme Court decision, Niebuhr nonetheless believed that the nation should be patient with the white South and give it some time to adjust to the landmark ruling. Although Niebuhr offered kind words for King's leadership in a 1956 editorial in *Christianity and Crisis* magazine, Niebuhr, at the same time, was endorsing Adlai Stevenson's plan to propose a one-year moratorium on civil rights activities. Gradualism, or as Niebuhr put it, "the organic processes of persuasion," was the most prudent course to racial change. "Niebuhr came out at a place not all that distant from William Faulkner's," Polsgrove writes.

I might say even more: I might say that Niebuhr's claim in 1956 that the "slow erosion of racial prejudice" was well underway in the South because there exists a "general tendency of increasing social intelligence to withdraw its support from the claims of social privilege" and to give it to the oppressed is the most ludicrous remark ever uttered by a white liberal about southern race relations. He might have shared this opinion with the founders of the Citizen's Council for a good laugh, who in two short years since *Brown v. Board* had grown to an organization of 80,000 members in Mississippi alone. "Surely one might expect something a little more forthright—a little more moral—from the foremost exponent in the United States of the Protestant 'crisis theology'," wrote Irving Howe in his magazine, *Dissent*.

Chappell's use of Niebuhr's term "prophetic faith" could have also benefited from some consideration of the recent work of Stanley Hauerwas. The most

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important of all contemporary post-liberal theologians, Hauerwas has made the case that Niebuhr's theology remains but an exemplification of Ludwig Feuerbach's argument that Christian language about God, when critically analysed, is an other-worldly projection of humanity's own infinite value. Jesus has meaning in the modern world only as a symbol that reminds human beings of their complexity, finitude and fallibility and that dramatizes the tragic distance between divine love and sinful humanity. "The Cross," wrote Niebuhr, "symbolizes the perfection of *agape* which transcends all particular norms of justice and mutuality in history." Although the Cross as a symbol may teach men and women important lessons about harsh realities of human experience and the necessity of living in historical conflict, it remains a symbol and brings salvation to no one. According to Hauerwas in his book, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (originally delivered as the 2001 Gifford Lectures at the University of St. Andrews), anyone who would put Niebuhr on the side of the angels must first come to terms with "the extraordinary 'thinness'" of his theology. Niebuhr's deity saves no one and redeems nothing. "Changed self-understanding or attitude is no substitute for the existence of a church capable of offering an alternative to the world," Hauerwas says. Yet Niebuhr has no interest in the church as a counter-culture or prophetic community; therefore, as Hauerwas concludes, Niebuhr "could not help but become the theologian of domesticated god capable of doing no more than providing comfort to the anxious conscience of the bourgeoisie." In the end, Niebuhr's theological liberalism finally undermines any possibility of prophetic critique or action.

But long before Carol Polsgrove or Stanley Hauerwas, King himself criticized Niebuhr for failing to take seriously the political implications of the Gospel and the social costs of Christian discipleship—for his thin Christology. King's commitment to a civil rights ministry took as its point of departure his conviction that "the availability of the divine Agape is an essential affirmation of the Christian religion," that, contra Niebuhr, "the immanence of *agape*" can be "concretely conceived in human nature and history"; in other words, from a resounding "Nein" to Niebuhr's "domesticated god." Niebuhr's Jesus is "pure abstraction," King wrote in a graduate student paper, not "the Jesus of history who walked in Jerusalem." Turgid discussions of "the general tendency of increasing social intelligence" ultimately proved unhelpful to the black Baptist preacher struggling to take the Bible seriously on the streets of ordinary southern towns. (No wonder King stopped reading theology.) King concluded that the only moral precept the Christian knows is the one incarnate in Jesus Christ, and that precept fashions a life devoted to incarnate love—"an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return." This was the theological realism that King came to embrace; the decisive turning point of history in the event of the Cross and Resurrection. Abstractions cannot empower acts of compassion and self-sacrifice, or sustain the practice of non-nonviolence.

Other studies and popular books which emphasize the civil rights movement's religious or prophetic origins and were published before *A Stone of Hope* include: James Cone's seminal *Malcolm and Martin*; Andrew Mannis, *A Fire You Can't Put Out*; Lewis Baldwin's *There is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.*; Michael Eric Dyson's *I May Not Get there With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.*;

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James McClendon's *Theology as Biography*; John Howard Yoder's *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical*; John Perkins's *A Quiet Revolution*; as well as numerous columns by Stephen Carter in *Christianity Today*. Not to be overlooked are the foundational histories of both Taylor Branch and David Garrow, which call attention to the power of religious conviction in shaping the movement and respect the movement's religious impulses.

In the interests of full disclosure, I also need to acknowledge that these studies include my own book, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton University Press, 1997). *God's Long Summer* is a theological study of five religious persons whose lives converged during the most violent years of the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Chappell accuses me of holding up the notorious leader of the Ku Klux Klan named Sam Bowers as a "representative segregationist." Bowers orchestrated the 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner and appears in *God's Long Summer* as the "high priest of the anti-civil rights movement." Chappell says, "My research indicates that Bowers and his ilk were atypical [segregationists]." For the record, my research indicates that too. Bowers defended his mission to "eliminate the heretics" on the basis of an idiosyncratic cosmology called "The Five Tiered Crystallized Logos of Western Civilization," which located his terrorist campaign in south Mississippi at the epicenter of a world-historical struggle between the "agents of Baal" and the "followers of Jesus the Galilean." There was certainly nothing typical about a man who saluted his dog with a "Heil Hitler," wore a rubber mask of President Kennedy and lectured his semi-illiterate sycophants on nineteenth-century race theory. *God's Long Summer* further included a lengthy theological profile of a prominent Southern Baptist minister named Douglas Hudgins, who presided over the most politically and culturally influential congregation in the state of Mississippi and gave voice to a theology of racial quietism. I refer to Hudgins as "the premier theologian of the closed society." Chappell's claim that I regard the seething Klan terrorist as the typical segregationist is preposterous; but the caricature allows him to dismiss my theological analysis of the white segregationist mind without theological clarification.

But by the time Chappell gets to his account of white segregationists and the mainline Protestant churches, it is easy to have grown suspicious of his judgments. His claim that segregationists in the South *failed* in their efforts to enlist their churches in opposition to integration strikes me as lacking in common sense. More probing research outside of archives would have confirmed the widely repeated charge that the white mainline church thoroughly accommodated the Christian faith to the southern way of life and endorsed racial segregation by means of an intricately dissiminated theology of purity. Numerous writers in the South have noted this theology's pervasive influence in the flow of everyday life (none more eloquently than Lillian Smith in *Killers of the Dream* (Norton, 1949), and it is, in my experience, a theological influence to which most men and women who came of age in the white southern church can attest in considerable detail. These voices are silent in Chappell's study.

At the same time, too much is made of the 1954 Southern Baptist Convention's vote in support of *Brown v. Board*. The Southern Baptist "resolution" lacked any

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policy mandates in the churches; and conversations with Southern Baptist clergy who supported the denomination's endorsement at the St. Louis convention but kept quiet at home would have clarified the inability of the resolution to translate into concrete changes in congregation life. To be sure, most white pastors tried to remain neutral on the race issue as far as proclamations from the pulpit were concerned. Even so, the decision to refrain from preaching about racial justice when racial justice was the one decisive and concrete commandment of the ecclesial moment signalled a theological position, which stemmed from a coherent theological system. Clarence Jordan considered this system to be the Docetic heresy. In any case, we should not forget that most closed-door policies in white congregations were implemented in the decade after *Brown v. Board* and that a closed church door is a theological position unmistakable to no one.

Finally, Chappell's reminder that the civil rights movement was won with relatively few casualties offers little hope to those whose dreams were crushed by southern apartheid, or to those whose lives continue to be governed by born-again conservatives in the re-segregated spaces of the twenty-first-century South.

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