

approaches to retelling the old, old story.

Reading these two books in sequence suggests a method for homiletics and preachers to conduct some experiments in Christology. I can imagine a course (or series of sermons) in seminary or the local church that started with Riley's work and then drew on Mailer and other contemporary presentations to explore several important Christological questions: If the early presentations of the Gospel were so thoroughly informed by the surrounding culture, what does that say for who Christ is in our world of multiple cultures? If Jesus inspired many Christianities from the outset, what does that suggest about any group that now claims to be true to the original message? Does Mailer's failure to present a compelling portrait of Christ using first person narrative reveal the inadequacies of a culture that overpersonalizes every story, so that larger dimensions of truth (including transcendence) are no longer allowed to disturb us with their baffling challenges to our common sense understanding of the world? And how do we preach the Gospel in light of these questions? Such matters are worthy of the pulpit and of the living Christ whom we proclaim.

□ Thomas H. Troeger

HUMAN SCIENCES & CULTURE

Editor: John S. McClure, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary

- 28 Nancy Murphy, *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics*. Westview Press, 1997. \$23.00.
- 29 Graham Ward (editor), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, 1997. \$29.95.

Postmodernism represents both a cultural fact and an intellectual trend that raises significant issues for preachers and homiletics. Reading the two books at hand will suffice to ground the reader in various conceptions of and trends within academic postmodernism, interesting applications of postmodern ideas in religion and ethics, as well as some formidable critiques of postmodern writers.

Graham Ward's collection of essays, *The Postmodern God: a Theological Reader* includes essays that epitomize continental postmodernism. The book begins with an excerpt from Georges Bataille's *Theory of Religion*. From there, the reader moves on to Jacques Lacan on "The Death of God," Emmanuel Levinas' essay "God and Philosophy," Roland Barthes' "Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-32," René Girard on "The God of Victims," an excerpt from Jacques Derrida's "How to Avoid Speaking," a small portion of Michel Foucault's "The History of Sexuality," Michel de

Certeau's "How is Christianity Thinkable Today," Luce Irigaray's "Equal to Whom?," and an excerpt from Julia Kristeva's "In the Beginning was Love." Before each essay is a helpful introduction that includes biographical information and a survey of the author's work and ideas by a sympathetic scholar.

In order to provide theological elaboration and critique of the writers he includes, the second half of Ward's book contains essays that unpack the relevance of continental postmodernism for religion. These essays provide a significant critique and re-fashioning of ideas. In an essay entitled "From Patriarchy into Freedom: A Conversation between American Feminist Theology and French Feminism," Rebecca Chopp discovers resources in the work of Julia Kristeva for articulating "the theological possibility of transformation from patriarchy into freedom." (p. 243) In an essay on "Liturgy and Kenosis," Jean-Yves Lacoste develops an imaginative image of the postmodern Christian as the "fool in Christ" (p. 261) acting within a "liturgical act of subversion." (p. 256) Through kenotic gestures, this kerygmatic and liturgical fool erases both consciousness and experience at the threshold where Being opens to its Other. John Milbank, in "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," refashions Derrida's "différance" into a vision of a Christian community of love and forgiveness whose principle task is "making it strange." (p. 268) Roman Catholic phenomenologist and theologian, Jean-Luc Marion articulates a compelling sacramental vision of the postmodern God of phenomenology as neither a ground of being, nor a "donor-being." Instead, God is "the being who is completely given," who "disseminates himself" in "the atonal tonality of dazzlement," a "presence without limit," who "occupies no space, captures no attention, attracts no gaze." (p. 292) In "Asyndeton: Syntax and Insanity. A Study of the Revision of the Nicene Creed," Catherine Pickstock deconstructs the revised Nicene Creed in *The Alternative Service Book* (1980) of the Episcopal Church, highlighting especially the use of asyndeton or "syntax characterized by the absence of explicit conjunctions." (p. 297) She links this stylistic tendency to the modern and capitalist denigration of sacred time which invokes "a violent temporal order" that replicates the mass assembly line's "negative or identical repetition" and the scientific "need to control." (pp. 304-306) In "New Jerusalem, Old Athens," Gillian Rose worries about the postmodern "rediscovery of Judaism at the end of the end of philosophy." (p. 321) In the works of Levinas, Taylor and Milbank, especially, she fears that this rediscovery is resulting in the articulation of a "holy middle," "lovely polity," and "holy play, the holy city, holy nomads" (pp. 322-327) without Judaism's attention to history, revealed law and grace. The final essay in the book, by Edith Wyschogrod, is entitled "Saintliness and Some Aporias of Postmodernism." This essay is rich with implications for rethinking the identity of the postmodern preacher. Wyschogrod argues against the historical amnesia implicit in Alasdair MacIntyre's Aristotelian character ethics, governed as it is by classical virtues. Reflecting on Levinas, she refashions Kristeva's negative sainthood of "abjection"

into a positive vision of sainthood governed by "desire released from the bonds of a unifying consciousness, a desire that is unconstrained and excessive yet guided by the suffering of the Other." (p. 353)

Undergirding Ward's selection of essays is his agreement with Jean-Francois Lyotard that postmodernism is "a site for the questioning and rethinking of the modern," a "return to what was forgotten in the establishment of the modern." (p. xxv) Essentially, modern intellectuals seem to have forgotten that at the "foundation" or "origin" "we find that we have always already begun, we already inhabit a difference." Modernism, then, is essentially "the forgetting of difference." (p. xxvi)

Rather than understanding postmodernism as an exploration of a heterogeneous origin, Murphy sees Anglo-American postmodernism as a decisive break with the foundationalism of modernism. She traces the emergence of a new form of "holistic" (notice, not "relativistic") reason through the works of Wittgenstein, Quine, Kuhn, Lakatos, Meyering, Austin, Searle, and Rorty. Murphy shows the impact of this emerging form of reason on the religious, ethical, and textual critical theories of MacIntyre, McClendon, Lindbeck, Thiemann, Frei, and others. Murphy includes an ongoing critique of her mentors as she develops her own constructive perspective. As an evangelical, she is not content with the postliberalism of Lindbeck because of its lack of adequate criteria for the assessment of the truth of religions. Supplementing his work with MacIntyre's and Bloor's, she constructs her own criteria and approach to religious truth claims.

Reading these two books side by side gives the reader a clear picture of the differences between holists or postliberal postmoderns who claim an Anglo-American heritage, and those who share differist or deconstructivist perspectives that owe more to the continental tradition of postmodernism. By comparison, the Anglo-American crowd appears to be theoretical, disembodied, and fascinated with machinations of logic, language and analysis. The continental group is embodied, sexed, chthonic, romantic, and obsessed with power, desire, and suffering. The Anglo-Americans want to move on and be pragmatic. The continentals want to linger within and learn from modernism's shadow - to chart modernism's forgotten underbelly.

These are two very different results of the announced demise of modernity, each casting forth very different horizons for the homiletical imagination. Anglo-American postmodern preachers will search for "reading strategies" within "interpretive communities" when doing exegesis. They will adopt some version of a coherence theory of the truth of the Gospel message that is preached. When illustrating sermons or drawing forth ethical applications, they will assume a linguistic-constructivist or performative view of human experience and culture. Preachers following in the path of continental postmodernism will acknowledge the indeterminacy of meaning in biblical texts. The moment they speak in the pulpit, they will be aware that they have "unsaid" and "differed" the meaning and truth of the Gospel that they preach. They will assume an iconoclastic view of

human experience and culture in which Christian experience is built on the shifting sands of fool-like inexperience and ethics is built on the crossing (Xing) of the self in saintly compassion for the suffering Other.

□ John McClure

- 30 M. A. Cohen, B. A. Ruble, J. S. Tulchin, A. M. Garland (editors), *Preparing for the Urban Future - Global Pressures and Local Forces*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996. \$19.95.

This volume of 17 articles was part of the preparation phase of the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) which was held in June of 1996 in Istanbul. Although there is a real variation in the usefulness of these articles for urban ministry, in general they afford an excellent occasion to reflect on one's urban context wherever one may be.

Their one weakness is that nowhere can be found an analysis and evaluation of the forces that are advancing and hastening the urbanization of the world. The apparent assumption is that the headlong rush to the cities, with its devastating impact on the infrastructure and environment, must be accepted as a given and transformed into a positive development through improved economic and political systems and informed perspectives on urban planning. Is this incredible migration from the hinterlands to the cities (I'm thinking especially of Latin America and Africa over the last 15 years) simply too complicated or mysterious to explicate, or is it that explanations once given would have no bearing on the future of cities? The publishers promise on the flyleaf that the articles will ask why "more and more of the world's people live in urban areas, which share the same problems of unemployment, corroding infrastructure, deteriorating environment, a collapsing social compact, and weakening institutions." But alas, although the intention may have been otherwise, these articles do not address the question which is particularly important for urban ministry.

That said, this book is good background for reflection on the urban realities of our time. The tension between global and local influences is almost palpable here. There is the point that cities must respond to global pressures or become backwaters accompanied by dire consequences for their citizens. On the other hand, there is Nezar AlSaiyyad's point that "Globalization has made the issues of identity and representation in urbanism very cumbersome and has cast doubt on urbanism's ability to fully represent the peoples, nations, and cultures within which it exists. But since culture has become increasingly placeless, urbanism will become an arena where one can observe the specificity of local cultures and their attempts to mediate global domination." The choice of the word "mediate" is significant because it points to the inherent drama of this volume as encapsulated by its title. Many of these writers want to bolster and encourage local forces - to balance the effects of global pressures. AlSaiyyad, for



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