

renewed common worship. To continue the North American Lutheran-Reformed dialogue, these are the affirmations. The only admonition is for Lutheran churches to use their new books: do not let the publication dates become the end of the work. Let these resources assist local congregations and the rest of us recover and renew our encounter with the triune God through word and sacrament.

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Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments. By Nathan D. Mitchell.
Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2006. Pages, xvi + 288. Paper, \$20.00.
ISBN: 1-57075-674-0.

Meeting Mystery is the sacramental-liturgical contribution to an ambitious "Theology in Global Perspective" series, for which general editor Peter Phan provides this description: "Books in this series will provide reliable introductions to the major theological topics, tracing their roots in Scripture and their development in later tradition, exploring when possible the implications of the new thinking on gender and sociocultural identities. And they will relate these themes to the challenges confronting the peoples of the world in the wake of globalization, particularly the implications of Christian faith for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation." That is no small order. Mitchell has heroically attempted to cover that entire list of "themes," "challenges," and "implications" for liturgical theology, and one can only sympathize with the organizational challenge it posed. Mitchell has structured the book in two parts; however that seeming symmetry belies the startlingly imbalanced quality of the content.

Mitchell schematizes Part 1, "The Hyper-Reality of Worship," by playing on the letter r: ritual, rhythm, repetition, roots, risks, roles, and realms. This unfortunately ends up producing an incoherent muddle of chapters riddled with questionable appropriations of concepts from various disciplines, resulting in often objectionable and even internally inconsistent claims. A central thesis for Mitchell is that rituals foster connections rather than produce meaning (e.g., 59). As a general principle — which would critically benefit from anthropologists and performance theorists rather than just the philosophers and literary figurers Mitchell largely employs — the concept is valid. The problem lies in what Mitchell does with it, both in terms of the at times insufficiently nuanced connections he makes between ritual/liturgy and other genres (mostly textual) and the methodologically unsubstantiated way he vacillates between descriptive statements and normative claims. For example, he posits an analogous

relationship between the way the worldwide web and the bible function without sufficiently considering the profound differences between the two. The bible is not *only* “rhizomatic” crabgrass (see 22–33) but, rather, when *liturgically performed*, functions within the cohering (albeit not simply univocal) root metaphor of the paschal mystery. To fail to articulate this crucial difference so early in the book seems to allow indulging in sometimes enlightening, other times confounding arguments that risk, ironically, succumbing to the charges regularly leveled against modern academics: abstraction and elitism.

Throughout Part 1 Mitchell employs the terms ritual, liturgy, religion, prayer, and worship interchangeably, a methodological flaw that repeatedly frustrated this reader’s desire to sympathize with the author’s laudable efforts at deconstructing both conservative and liberal totalizing claims about Christian liturgy. Another failed analogy is that between the performed interpretation of a classical musical score and the indeterminate relationship between liturgy and ethics. In a chapter framed in the general terms of worship and ritual, Mitchell eventually claims, “Christian liturgy begins as ritual practice but ends as ethical performance” (38). Nowhere does he distinguish between the terms practice and performance (for which current scholarly literature abounds). That conceptual vagueness results, I would argue, in his overstating his case. I would rather argue, “Christian liturgy begins with ritual performances that may end in ethical practices.” Similarly flawed is a chapter on Jesus’ mission as the source of “Ritual’s Rules.” Mitchell heavily relies on the work of J. D. Crossan, among others, to describe the subversive nature of Jesus’ table fellowship and healings but then correlatively leaps to make normative claims about Christian liturgy that take no account of Crossan’s critical pitting of (Jesus’) magic and meals against (Christianity’s) liturgy and institutions. My best guess for how such a scholarly theologian could have ended up with such a problematic string of ideas is that he might have been doing his best to respond to the general editor’s shopping-list mandate of post-modern issues to be addressed in this book series.

In stunning contrast, Mitchell takes control of his subject in Part 2, “Polyphony: The Languages of Liturgy,” arguing clearly, and overall convincingly, in the voice of a Christian liturgical theologian engaging the best of current sources, especially J.-L. Marion and L.-M. Chauvet. In these three chapters Mitchell cumulatively constructs a theology of liturgy through the key concepts of body, metaphor, assembly, ministry, and sacrament, drawing on a range of interdisciplinary scholarship. Ironically, this includes N. T. Wright’s work on Jesus’ resurrection, which explicitly contests nearly all of Crossan’s conclusions about the origins of Christianity — an issue Mitchell ignores. Space prevents my listing other such inconsistencies between the two parts of the book. For a “reliable intro-

duction" to liturgical theology (the book's claim within the general series) I would recommend Part 2.

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Christ and Empire: Paul to Postcolonial Times. By Joerg Rieger. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2007. Pages, x + 334. Paperback, \$20.00.
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Christ and Empire is a study in theology and politics. According to Joerg Rieger, who teaches at the Perkins School of Theology, this book goes beyond H. Richard Niebuhr's classic *Christ and Culture* (1951) because it analyzes the specific relationship between Christian belief and "empire." By "empire," Rieger means "large and ever-changing conglomerates of power that are aimed at controlling aspects of our lives, from macropolitics to our innermost desires" (p. vii).

Rieger's thesis is that the church's talk about Jesus Christ often functions in one of two ways: *either* it implicitly justifies and supports a society's elite, *or* it nurtures "the seedlings of resistance and alternative living [that] grow in the very soil of empire" (p. 12). In seven chapters, Rieger argues this thesis by examining the social and political origins and implications of titles and concepts that Christians apply to Jesus Christ. In each case, he concludes that an era's talk about Christ can be ambiguous, simultaneously strengthening the powerful while also fueling dissent among the powerless.

In chapter one, Rieger contends that the ancient Christian confession of Jesus Christ as "Lord" (e.g., in Phil 2:11) inadvertently reinforced the centralized, top-down authority of the Roman emperors such as Caligula (A.D. 37-41) and Nero (A.D. 54-68) who saw themselves as divinities, as "lords." However, St Paul (d. 62) deliberately proclaimed a notion of Christ's lordship anchored in Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (1 Cor 1:22-25). Paul also acknowledged the sacred dignity of the oppressed when he declared that "God chose what is low and despised in the world . . . so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor 1:28-29). It was because of Paul's social and political message, Rieger argues, that Roman authorities imprisoned Paul, and eventually executed him. Rieger concludes that early Christians' talk of Jesus Christ as "Lord" unwittingly supported the emperor cult but simultaneously opposed it as well.

In support of his thesis, Rieger also undertakes critical studies of the notion of *homoousios* in the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), the idea of "the God-human" in the theology of St Anselm (d. 1109), the understanding of "the Way" in the thought of Bartholomé de Las Casas (d. 1566), the christological titles of prophet, priest, and king in the theology of Friedrich



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