

1-1-1986

Book Review: When The Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah And The New Jerusalem

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Recommended Citation

Langerak, Jr., Edward (1986) "Book Review: When The Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah And The New Jerusalem," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol3/iss1/9>

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When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem, by **Richard J. Mouw**. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983, xvi + 77 pages, \$3.95.

Reviewed by EDWARD A. LANGERAK, St. Olaf College.

If “this world is not my home, I’m just passing through” and if, like Pilgrim, my eyes are focused on the celestial city, why should I get deeply involved in the political and social structures of this vale of tears? Even if Marx was wrong in asserting that pie in the sky by and by amounts to an opiate in the present (ignoring the basis on which the sheep and goats will be separated), should not our social action be limited to Red-Cross-type operations that wipe away tears and bandage the wounds? If we *enlist* for the political and cultural battles or, worse, lead the troops, are we not confusing a pilgrimage with defending, even building, a home?

Richard Mouw provides a richly suggestive and biblically-based framework for thinking through such questions in *When the Kings Come Marching In*. He does not answer all my questions, probably because his agenda is not to write a philosophically rigorous treatise on the eschatological implications of the cultural mandate but to mediate on the 60th chapter of Isaiah and related biblical texts. Indeed the heart of the book is what I think of as four very intelligent and inspiring sermons. The questions that they raise for me might be thought of as appropriate for the “sermon discussion period.”

The glorious, peaceful, and righteous city of Zion described in Isaiah 60 shines out with God as its sun and is a magnet for the known world. Kings and nations that formerly despised and oppressed it now serve it and offer it all their riches and cultural artifacts. It is a city whose time God will hasten.

Mouw takes a middle road on whether this is an apocalyptic fore-telling, a promise to believers of what God will do for them at the end of time, or whether it is a prophetic forth-telling, a challenge to believers to get busy building the kingdom. On the one hand, his view of revelation allows him to link it up with the apocalyptic visions of Revelation, whose Holy City comes down from Heaven and whose builder and maker is God. Thus “Nothing that is said in these meditations should be taken as suggesting that we can in any significant way ‘build’ the Holy City here and now” (p. 6). On the other hand, these meditations are meant as the down-payment by a “transformationalist” to those who think the “Christ transforming culture” school is long on philosophy and short of exegesis.

The problem Mouw encounters can be appreciated when we recall that the ideal transformationalist in H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* is F. D. Maurice, who, as Niebuhr puts it, mated the idea of universal salvation with that of eschatological immediacy. He thus developed a “horizontal” emphasis

that motivates Christians to work at transforming culture precisely because this is how God's Holy City gets built. In other words, although this world *is* not our home (contrary to the Christ of culture view), it eventually will (or could) become our home as we work at transforming it. But what motive is offered for serious cultural engagement by the "vertical" emphasis on awaiting the celestial city built by God? Mouw's resolution, as I understand it, is two-fold. First, we must understand that the new city will be built not on the *destruction* but on the *purifying transformation* of the world's culture. Secondly, our awaiting should not be passive but active.

Two related questions arise about the latter point: *How* and *why* should we be active? The verbs Mouw seems comfortable with include "wait," "wait confidently," "wait actively," "imitate," "anticipate," "seek," "actively prepare," and "work diligently." These may all be compatible, but the ambiguity befits a position saying on the one hand that "there is no clear biblical command to Christians to 'transform culture' in any general way" and, on the other, that what the Bible does tell us *perhaps* can be so *construed* (p. 76). This is exegetical honesty, but precisely what should we do—merely engage in Red Cross reactions to the cultural and political battles or aggressively enlist and lead? Perhaps both, depending on circumstances, as seems apparent when we ask *why* we should work. Jesus has already begun a work that will be "completed in the midst of the transformed City" (p. 66), he "has already begun to transform the patterns of human authority" (p. 37). So our hope for heaven, far from making us passive, actually gives us the courage to "work diligently for justice and peace" (p. 23) since we can put failures in a hopeful context. Moreover "we can act politically in assurance that our political deeds will count toward the day of reckoning that will occur in the transformed city" (37). In what sense will they count? The sense Mouw mentions is that "our accusers see our 'good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation'" (38).

Does this mean that our deeds *count* only as examples that shine out, generating grounds for praise and blame in the kingdom that God will bring later, or that they count as contributions to the building of that kingdom? Or is this a false dichotomy in that they count as contributions, so to speak, toward the building fund? In particular, should we get into politics and work for peace simply as an example, knowing that there must be wars and rumors of wars before the Kingdom comes, or should we hope that our work will eliminate the wars and rumors of wars? Should President Reagan work for disarmament simply as an example, believing that Armageddon must come before the Kingdom, or should he genuinely believe that disarmament could enable the Kingdom to come without Armageddon? I think these questions are part of the transformationalist debate, but I'm not convinced the reader will know exactly what are Mouw's answers. However, I'm convinced that reading the book will help Christians focus their

own thinking. Its brevity and exegetical insightfulness make it very rewarding for that purpose. Moreover Mouw's use of examples and his spirited writing make this book a pleasure to read.

New Dimensions in Philosophical Theology, edited by **Carl A. Raschke**. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, pp. 123, Cloth, \$19.95; (members' price \$12.95).

Reviewed by F. MICHAEL McLAIN, Rhodes College.

The editor characterizes these diverse essays as a response to "the need for new discernments" in philosophy of religion. They invite individual attention and a brief statement of shared themes.

David Crownfield's opener considers the possibility of a science of religion. The character of the religious object as disclosed within particular communities and/or to uniquely positioned individuals renders the project problematic, since science requires that an object of study be available to all "competent, open, and disinterested inquirers." Crownfield proposes a phenomenological-hermeneutic method as appropriate. It avoids a procrustean metaphysical treatment of the phenomenon, while challenging the investigator's autonomous interpretation of the phenomena and basic self-interpretation. He believes that we may achieve a description of the phenomena independent of metaphysical interpretation, but, apparently, that we may not use it to adjudicate rival putative metaphysical interpretations of religious experience.

Crownfield provides a brief survey of drug and non-drug induced meditative and mystical states of consciousness and other spiritual experiences which should be further investigated, and proposes a global project of demythologizing of traditional religious texts in the context of this broadly conceived empirical study of contemporary religious experience.

Peter Slater's contribution examines three types of reasoning in philosophy/theology. Only the "teleological" is adequate to religion.

The dominant analytical, deductive model of reasoning ignores the role of paradigmatic images behind all reasoning. The theological use (e.g. Van Harvey, David Kelsey) of informal, nondeductive reasoning recognizes that symbols and stories are not mere illustrations of independently formulated truth, but fails in its lack of eschatological thrust.

Teleological reasoning preserves and transcends the virtues of the other types. It appreciates the aim of all religious thought: transformation of the self. It takes seriously dichotomies and polarities, recognizing "the complication of one term by the other." As Ricoeur's work illustrates, teleological reasoning aims at uncovering an unstated commonality, a hidden presence, in our potentially