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Book Review: New Dimensions In Philosophical Theology

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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

common human destiny. Slater does not believe we can reason toward showing that our religious images “correspond” to this dimension, but we can, perhaps, discern its presence in the conversation among the heterogeneous traditions which seek dialectically to express it.

Slater’s rejection of truth as correspondence in theology, his practical/pragmatic emphasis, and the anti-metaphysical highlighting of theology’s dependence on image and narrative are persistent themes in the essays.

The link between theological argumentation and the narrative framework of religious tradition is examined by David Burrell. The Enlightenment search for a rational, philosophical expression of the core of religious belief is bankrupt. The search for foundations and metaphysical elaboration in theology, e.g. Ogden’s translation of revelation as “pure unbounded love,” fails as too vague to elucidate a tradition and too ambiguous to function as a first premise in theological argument. But since all argument is “not grounded in its premises so much as it is warranted by the progress it is able to make in elucidating the point at issue,” we should appreciate the importance of narrative in theology. Key theological terms are ambiguous and recalcitrant to a single conceptual framework but capable of analogous linkage through the power of stories (narrative) to show how their “many uses can be related to one.” Their intelligibility is achieved by the linkage of successive paradigmatic uses in a unifying story. Theology’s ambiguous terms are meaningful, too, in a deeper sense, as pointing to what “transcends our experience, yet translates our aspirations.” Apposite story telling can resonate with another’s experience, and good theological work, nourished by a religious community’s practices, aims both to clarify beliefs and touch common transcendent experience and aspiration.

Robert Johann’s piece begins by articulating a dilemma treated variously in these essays: either there are permanent standards of objectivity and rationality or there is only rhetoric. The dilemma is resolved by tracing its origin to three false conceptions: man as knower, reason as purely cognitive and separate from appetite, and truth as pictorial representation of the antecedently given. Johann’s propaedeutic treats man as an agent, called upon continuously to find solutions to problems which can thus be integrated into his underlying, unrestricted desire for “sense,” for wholeness in his grasp of things.

This conception of practical reason is developed and specified in morality, factual enquiry and religion. The “existence of God” is portrayed, not as an object of theoretical enquiry, but as the practical correlate of the quest for wholeness, the One who must exist, if all our doings are practically unifiable. Johann argues that the relational act of prayer is the appropriate response of a self seeking unity in relation to the One.

The closing essays constitute “deliberately unsystematic reflections on what might be termed theology’s own contemporary ‘deconstruction’.” They seek to

undermine “foundationalist habits of thinking” in theology, agreeing with Foucault that we are at “the end of re-presentative thought in every domain.”

Charles Winquist in “Metaphor and the Accession to Theological Language” reflects hermeneutically on theology as writing. All writing is “repression.” In lifting experience into the referential order of language it transforms it “so that through a dialectic of presence and absence it is no longer identical with itself.” The resultant “text has its own ontological status and can be evaluated as it presents itself.”

Like other writing disciplines, theology is tempted “to get to a source that is more primal than itself.” Winquist provides cryptic but trenchant remarks on recent attempts to do so (Altizer, Ricoeur, *et al*). His conclusion is that “in the restricted space of linguistic presence we soon discover that the fundamental insight that texts refer to texts also means that behind theology there is only more theology”.

Theology’s point, then, is not its content but the work itself. Altizer’s total presence or Anselm’s supreme conceptuality, for example, “are deconstructions of sedimented worlds of language.... We engage ourselves with the theological tradition to make space for more theological thinking.”

To abandon talk of language corresponding to reality is not to suggest that language is a self-enclosed system. This would be to overlook its “metaphoricity,” its capacity to raise the question of what is beyond itself. The apposite notion from Derrida is the “trace,” “a momentary clearing within the work of language where we can pose the question of what lies beyond language.” Mark Taylor crafts an exercise in “GNICART TRACING: Inter Alios.” He blends metaphor, aphorism, and free-standing texts in his effort to undermine the enemy: all dualisms, either-or’s, singular reading of texts, and non-metaphorical understandings of language, in short, the heritage of the Western metaphysical tradition and its influence on theological reflection.

Some one-liners illustrate the ammunition used to explode referential thinking:

- 59. Metaphor is born of that higher logic which shatters the law of noncontradiction....
- 64. Metaphor is blaze, fire—“Apocalypse Now”—realized eschatology....
- 66. ...The parable projects a world into which it attempts to translate the hearer....
- 70. Imagination is the power of life and death—the means by which the absent becomes present and the present becomes absent.

The theological tradition’s underside contains, says Winquist, “images of the apocalypse...and other troped constructions within a semantics of meaning that wrestles with the ordinary uses of language.” Carl Raschke’s finale is a meditation

on the image of the beast, informed by the Western intellectual tradition's trajectory from Hegel to Derrida via Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault. Also defying summarization, its spirit, along with Winqvist's and Taylor's, is caught, perhaps, in this:

The end of re-presentative thought...means...that we no longer speak dualistically of language and reference, or about concept and object, but about "discursive formations" that constitute "uninterrupted movement of totalizations, the return to an ever open source" [Foucault]. This "ever open source" is not the same as the foundation or "beginning" in the sense of the metaphysical *archē*, the theological *revelatum*, the evangelical *vera religio*, the philosophical *a priori*. It is not beginning, but *origin*, which is not re-membered or re-presented, but consists in the ongoing and intimate e-vent ("coming forth") of presence.(p. 119)

The essays are accessible to those with appropriate background. They introduce issues under increasing discussion within the American Academy of Religion.