

apocalypticism as that found in the Branch Davidians, the Christian Identity Movement, and the New Age and Third Wave movements. Chapter 2 examines the theological implications of Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism in Christian thought, with an extended treatment of themes at the heart of traditional Dispensational Premillennialism.

Chapter 3 provides a helpful historical survey of the development of millennial themes from the early church up through modern times, with, as in the previous chapter, a disproportionate amount of space being devoted to Dispensationalism. The fourth chapter deals with the Christian date-setting tradition in such movements as Millerite Adventism and the Jehovah's Witnesses. As might be expected by this time in the book, especially lengthy treatments are provided for the views of such modern new evangelical date setters as Hal Lindsay and Pat Robertson.

The fifth chapter samples a wide variety of millennial traditions, such as that found in American civil religion, Nazism, Marxism, Rastafarianism, Islam, the cargo cults, pyramid numerology, Nostradamus, the Bible Codes, and the widespread millenarian speculation in the Roman Catholic Church related to the Virgin Mary. In many ways this is the most helpful chapter to those who may be bringing to their study a fairly good understanding of Protestant Millenarianism but lack a broader perspective.

The final chapter examines the meaning of the millennium with a special emphasis on avoiding emotionalism on the topic. In addition, it advocates an occupy-in-social-justice stance until the end finally arrives. The authors go out of their way to caution readers to avoid theories that attribute most-favored-nation status to either the United States or Israel and least-favored-nation status to their enemies, such as the Arab Nations and the late Soviet Union.

The New Millennium Manual should not be thought of as a contribution to knowledge but rather as a handbook on the topic that provides a rather cautious framework for theological interpretation and application. As a survey it seems to perform an adequate descriptive reporting for the movements treated. Likewise, given the cautionary stance of the authors, the survey is generally evenhanded in the treatment of its topics. The one exception, of course, is the disproportionate amount of space given to Dispensationalism, but that is quite understandable given the interests of the authors and the orientation of the publisher.

While *The New Millennium Manual* is not groundbreaking in terms of scholarship, it does provide a very helpful and up-to-date survey of its topic. Of special value to many readers is its helpful bibliography.

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Cobb, John B. Jr. *Reclaiming the Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997. 110 pp. Paperback, \$12.00.

It is ironic that America's mainline churches have lost momentum at a time when interest in religion generally is increasing across the country and conservative religious communities and movements are growing by leaps and bounds. What has happened to the religious bodies that shaped the American psyche from the very beginning, set much of the nation's moral and social agenda,

and for decades provided a powerful motivation for people to live the gospel in their personal and communal lives?

In *Reclaiming the Church*, John Cobb Jr. diagnoses the malaise that has settled on mainline Protestantism and proposes a regimen for its recovery. During the past half century, he observes, the groups that once dominated America's religious landscape have "moved from being mainline churches with some confidence in [their] message to being oldline churches or perhaps better, sidelined churches, unclear about [their] calling" (110).

As Cobb sees it, the root problem of the present predicament is a lack of theological vigor. "Mainline Christians" have lost the interest and the energy to think seriously about their beliefs and practices. Accordingly, the solution is to revitalize and renovate their theology. Unless Christians take the gospel seriously enough to reflect long and hard about its claims on their thinking and acting, Cobb argues, there is no end in sight to the current decline.

Cobb develops his response to the churches' current problem in terms of renewal and transformation. As he describes them, both involve drawing on the resources of the past to face the challenges of the present, and both are needed by the church. Yet there are significant differences between them, and at times one may be more important to the life of the church than the other (55).

For renewal, the theological task is to articulate traditional Christian claims, in a form, to be sure, that makes them accessible today. Proponents of renewal believe that the Christian tradition, the Bible in particular—its generative and for many its authoritative expression—is perfectly adequate for the challenges Christians face today, if provided opportunities to do so. The collapse of Enlightenment rationality is an opportunity to reassert traditional claims, without having to justify them within some universal scheme of meaning and truth. For transformation, current developments are not merely challenges to the church to restate its message clearly, but imperatives for reinterpreting the message. In other words, contemporary social developments and discoveries have intratheological significance. The church needs to revise, even reshape, its message in order to incorporate insights that were not available to our forebears, not even those who authored the biblical texts.

Cobb argues that transformation is the only strategy for responding adequately to the current situation. For all its benefits, renewal is not enough. In contrast, he is convinced that the message must change as it discovers new ideas, encounters new challenges, and meets with new opportunities, especially those accompanying the end of the "modern" world. To meet the current challenge facing mainline churches, he argues, their members must not be content with restating traditional views. They must commit themselves to more radical renovation.

Cobb's proposal touches on a pressing concern for any Christian community that takes its past seriously, including some he excepts from the problems he mentions, like Seventh-day Adventists (6). But his proposed solution raises several questions.

One concerns his confidence that theological reflection will solve the churches' basic problem. As a theologian myself, I appreciate Cobb's emphasis on beliefs and the importance of thinking them through. But there is more to

religious vitality than intellectual activity, and the other elements need attention, too. In fact, some people will argue that the problem with mainline churches is not their theology, but their lack of fervor and commitment. To achieve the sweeping changes Cobb calls for, therefore, the church must attend to its inner life as well as the challenges of the world around it. Cobb mentions spirituality only briefly, and has little to say about liturgical renewal or transformation. Yet these are precisely the areas of religion where increasing numbers of people in American culture feel deep personal needs.

Another question concerns Cobb's concept of transformation. Whenever we talk about transformation, someone is bound to ask, how much? Or how far? How much change can a movement or a message undergo and still remain in essence what it was to start with? Cobb concedes that classical liberal theology did too much changing, too much accommodating to the prevailing culture (41). But what prevents the transformation he calls for from doing the same?

What, then, are the defining characteristics of Christianity? What cannot change if Christianity's future is to retain its continuity with Christianity's past? Cobb raises this question clearly (80). He refers briefly to Christ as one element and more extensively to God as another (chap. 5). But he spends more time on the changes that churches need to make than on what it is that does the changing. So, we need to know what elements of continuity will accompany the changes he calls for.

I also question Cobb's preference for transformation. To be sure, in a time of turbulent change, the church must do more than reassert its traditional beliefs. Christians must respond to contemporary challenges creatively and constructively. And they must be willing to examine time-honored beliefs and practices. But I am not sure this calls for transformation rather than renewal. It all depends on our view of the church's historic resources. Are they adequate for the needs of the day? Or must we not only reassess them, but materially alter them as well? My conviction is that the church can effectively meet the challenges it faces by renewing its heritage and that renewing its heritage is the most effective way to meet them.

One evidence for this is the recent recovery, or rediscovery, of some of the church's ancient resources. Consider, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity. Though neglected by a good deal of contemporary theology, during the past few years this aspect of the church's historic faith has inspired a great deal of creative theological reflection. And more significant for our present concern, people have found in it a picture of God that speaks to our contemporary needs—a portrait that emphasizes relationship and inclusiveness. It is noteworthy that feminist theologians have found ways of thinking helpfully along Trinitarian lines (cf. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*). So renewal seems more likely than transformation to put us in touch with some of the neglected resources of the past.

In addition, renewal can provide the strongest possible means for fulfilling the concern that seems uppermost in Cobb's mind, viz., helping the church to meet the social and ethical challenges it faces in our changing world. One need not go outside the historic resources of the faith to accomplish this. Relevant here is Schubert Ogden's assertion that any attempt to carry out the church's apologetic task "must serve equally well to carry out out theology's first and equally essential dogmatic task." Commenting on Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza's insistence on placing biblical

texts under the authority of feminist experience, Ogden argues, "If a feminist interpretation of the Bible is justified, it is so, not only or primarily because the experience and struggle of women demand it, but also and first of all because it is a demand of faith itself" (*Doing Theology Today*, 239). Only if we can show that a feminist interpretation of the Bible is a demand of faith itself do we give this development the support it needs. For these reasons renewal, appropriately conceived and thoroughly carried out, is the best means to achieve the goals that Cobb pursues.

But whether or not we agree with the specifics of his proposal, this slim volume exemplifies the religious scholarship for which John Cobb is well-known. It examines an issue of theological and ethical importance from a perspective that exhibits philosophical sophistication and great personal concern. We must thank him for frankly confronting a pressing need in the church today and helping us to think more carefully about it.

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Crossan, John Dominic, William F. Buckley, William Lane Craig. *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*. Ed. Paul Copan. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999. 208 pp. Paperback, \$14.99.

Several years ago, a rather extraordinary debate took place at Moody Memorial Church in Chicago between evangelical philosopher-theologian William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan, the cofounder of the Jesus Seminar. It became a rare exchange: a conservative Christian apologist versus a radically liberal revisionist, the face-off moderated by William F. Buckley Jr., who clearly sided with Craig. The topic was the Jesus of history: Was he or was he not the same as the Christ of faith? Are the scriptural reports of his words and deeds to be interpreted literally or metaphorically?

Craig led off with a spirited defense of traditional creedal Christianity, with particular focus on Jesus' resurrection. While stressing the identity of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, he defended two main contentions:

- I. The real Jesus rose from the dead in confirmation of his radical personal claims to divinity.
- II. If Contention I is false—that is, if Jesus did not rise—then Christianity is a fairy tale which no rational person should believe (25).

Crossan, however, identified "the real Jesus" as the Christ of faith and larger than the historical version, whose written records have been expanded in layers of creative tradition, so that the language of the Gospels must be understood metaphorically or symbolically rather than literally.

Throughout the debate, Crossan, who loves to rattle conservative cages, seemed strangely subdued, dropping none of his trademark bombshells, such as: After the crucifixion, Jesus' body was most likely eaten by dogs. Craig was prepared to take on Crossan's other idiosyncratic notions as well, such as the priority (to the four Gospels) of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*. Crossan, however,