

A “Lutheran” Spirituality

Colleagues,

Pastor Trevor Faggotter from Australia has been needling me for some time to do a ThTh review of John Kleinig’s book proposing a “Lutheran” spirituality. After temporizing way too long I asked him to do it. He has. Here it is.

Key, says Trevor, for Kleinig is Luther’s understanding of the posture of “faith” being the posture of receptivity. In terms of the madness of American baseball and the World Series here in our town these days, faith is always in the catcher-position, receiving the Spirit-mediated pitches from God-in-Christ. Don’t think that such receptivity is simple laziness or lollygagging inactivity. Ask any catcher! But it’s being on the receiving end and then indeed doing something with what you’ve caught. I imagine that Aussie Kleinig doesn’t use such a baseball imagery—and I don’t know cricket or rugby well enough to try my hand there— but if what Trevor says he says is accurate, then receptivity-spirituality starts by focusing on and then catching what’s coming from “the mound” (aka THE Mount) whence all Gospel-spirited impulses originate.

I’ve asked Trevor to give us some of his biographical specs.

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

The Rev. Trevor Faggotter is a Uniting Church Minister in South Australia. He was formerly a police officer and dairy farmer, and he completed a B.Th. at Flinders University while training at the Uniting Church’s Parkin-Wesley College, in the state of South Australia. He was ordained in 1992. He has served as a

Minister of the Word at Mount Barker and Peterborough in South Australia, and in Ulverstone in Tasmania. He is currently serving in a Churches of Christ congregation-the Northwestern Community Church, near Port Adelaide-where he also assists an Aboriginal congregation on Sunday evenings, and is a Chaplain to SA Police.

He has received the Crossings e-mails for over 10 years-having come across the material while googling words like 'Luther', 'Law' and 'Gospel'. Trevor has engaged periodically with questions, criticisms and comments from Australia, and has often appreciated Ed's corrective words about that which is spoken by pastors and ministers, yet which totally lacks gospel good news.

Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today, by John Kleinig.

St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House. 2008.

287pp. \$15.99 [10.92 Amazon]

John Kleinig has served the church as a lecturer at Luther Seminary in Adelaide, South Australia-specialising in the Old Testament. In an age when everyone is supposedly spiritual, and the trading of spiritual wares is at a premium, his book, 'Grace Upon Grace' serves the church by teaching us to rediscover receptivity spirituality-God's gift in Christ through the gospel.

John's writing style is warm, personal, forthright and very readable. The contents are original-in the sense that we can hear John talking to us. They are also jam-packed with much of Luther's insight and teaching, as well as that of others, concerning the spiritual battle of a Christian. The reader is mildly conscious of the thorough scholarship, which undergirds

and is carefully woven throughout the book.

Foundationally, the reader learns of Luther's receptive spirituality, in which there is a dynamic interplay in Christian meditation between (1) Oratio [prayer] (2) Meditatio [meditation] and (3) Tentatio [temptation]. One prays for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and reads the Scriptures receiving the external Word, pondering the words like rubbing a herb so that it releases its fragrance- 'For God will not give you his Spirit without the external Word'. In meditating, God in Christ is heard to speak to us! Then, as soon as his Word takes root, the devil and his cohorts harry a person with terrible assaults, temptations and attacks-[Luther's term for it] Anfechtung. Strangely enough, this evil aggression has the spin-off of driving a person back to God's Word for fresh wisdom, for the comfort of the gospel, and so equips one for further living. 'Through the attacks of the evil one we are drawn further out of ourselves and deeper into Christ' (p. 22).

John's book makes one conscious of the slim pickings and lack of solid foundation that many scrape by on today, when we note how Luther's receptive spirituality stands in clear contrast to the uncertain patterns of self-promotion-of climbing the ladder of devotion. This is the unsatisfactory introverted spirituality that Luther had learned as a monk, namely that of (1) reading (2) meditation (3) and prayer, ascending upwards to hopefully gain (4) the experience of contemplation, ecstasy, heavenly bliss and spiritual illumination.

Christian spirituality, John shows us, is better likened to being a beggar than what often amounts to little more than play acting. However, John sets the context for our life as spiritual beggars squarely within the liturgical life of the Christian church, amidst the attendance at Divine Service, where Father, Son and Spirit serve the receptive community of faith, and where

God's people participate, through faith in Christ Jesus' merits and ministry, in baptism, the hearing of God's Word in the gospel story, the intercessory prayers, the saying of the creeds, the Lord's Supper, the fellowship and the deeds of mercy and service.

As a steward of the mysteries of God, John really likes to emphasise the matter of mystery, and so we have chapter headings as follows: The Mystery of Christ, The Mystery of Meditation, The Mystery of Prayer, The Hidden Battle and Hidden Holiness. The comfort of the book lies in the continual emphasis of our place in union with Jesus Christ, who 'Unlike us, Jesus is an expert at prayer'. John spells out the matter of access to the Father and of becoming co-workers with Christ.

The book is full of treasures to share, like 'why the Old Testament rarely mentions Satan while the New Testament speaks about him so often. The advent of God's Son, His appearance in the world, discloses the hidden presence and operation of Satan. So wherever Christ appears and speaks, Satan and the demons are unmasked' (p. 238). As one might expect, there is a wonderful section on the dynamics of the conflict we live in, drawn from John's own helpful rather literal translation of Ephesians 6:10-20.

Most of John's stories are simple and personal. However, although we see the point, some of John's illustrations don't quite do the trick as well as we may like. And I don't think John's usage of the word 'borrow' (rather than say 'receive as a gift') is a winner-since inherent are notions of limitation and of returning something, rather than abundance, freedom, and redemptive (albeit contingent) gift.

The book is extremely accessible to Christians of all denominations and persuasions, and for those tangled in the

unsatisfactory D.I.Y. [Do It Yourself] spirituality-which causes bookstore shelves to groan, as well as readers thereof, critics and observers-this volume is a breath of fresh air, a boon and blessing, marked by quality scholarship and gospel clarity. Ideal for a group to read.