

for that reason alone, be trusted not to be mistaken.

The weakest chapter is that devoted to the theory of religion. Setting out from the announcement that 'religions can be compared with each other in terms of their propositional truth, their symbolic efficacy, or their categorical adequacy' (p. 47), we are soon told that Lindbeck has distinguished 'three senses of "true"' and has shown that 'notions of truth' may be 'incommensurable' (p. 49). Perhaps. But if three (or more) notions of truth are *simply* 'incommensurable', how does one decide, and from where, that they are all truly characterized as notions of truth?

In terms of intellectual style and temper, Professor Lindbeck's strengths are close cousin to his limitations. Admirably impatient with the mistiness of the 'meaningful', he wants to sort things out. It is not perhaps surprising that, in a *formal* study, there should be little sense of the unmanageable richness of our histories. Nevertheless, skilled taxonomists rarely make good story-tellers. He is, I think it fair to say, closer in spirit to Cano than to Congar. But, in our present confusion, we have cause to be very grateful for the kind of skills which, in this essay, he brings to bear—with such intelligence and integrity—on a cluster of quite central issues.

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**GOSPEL LOVE, A NARRATIVE THEOLOGY** by John Navone, SJ. *Michael Glazier, Delaware, 1984, 169 pp. \$7.95*

The Cree Indians of Northern Sakatchewan are renowned as a story-telling people. Asked to explain the importance of telling stories one elderly Cree grandmother pointed out that this practice is essential for keeping a right balance in life. If someone is afflicted in mind, by grief or depression, telling a funny story will help the person because it will enable the troubles that are trapped inside him to escape. It will enable him to alter his perspective, to see things through other eyes with a different perspective from his own. A similar conviction has led to the writing of this book. "We may know and understand the Gospel narratives; we are blessed only if we are transformed by them in our basic self-others-world-God relationship" (p. 47). According to the *Introduction* narrative theology is "the sustained reflection of the theologian on the way we react to and appropriate the story of Jesus in our own lives" (p. 15). "It aims to provide a wealth of new insights into what it means to be human" (p. 16).

To demonstrate this thesis the author provides an initial chapter of general remarks, highlighting some of the characteristics of the four Gospels as narratives, and indicating what he takes to be the dominant quality each seeks to arouse in the reader. This is followed by a chapter in which the pattern of "Living in God's Love" is traced in the Synoptics, and in St. John. The much longer chapter 3 is the heart of the book. It discusses the pattern of "Dying in God's Love" by a treatment of each of the four passion narratives, analysed separately in considerable detail, in order to find the distinctive motif of each. Two final chapters resume the theme of the *Introduction* in a paraenetic manner, drawing out more fully the kind of transformation that ought to take place in a serious and 'open' reader of the Gospels.

The central portion of the book is undoubtedly the strongest. The highlighting of a desired dominant quality produces some interesting and stimulating insights: "Commitment to the Father's will for ourselves and others entails the suffering of over-coming self-will.... The sacrifice is worthwhile because we shall never know what God's love is like without it" (p. 30). The author believes that "the evangelists were not just writing biography nor were they concerned with the purely historical. They were writing from the resurrection faith, from which stems all the theology of the New Testament. They narrate the death of Jesus from this perspective; consequently the meaning of his death, rather than physical detail is their central concern" (p. 48). A

dramatic analysis of the timetable of Mark's passion narrative illustrates the deliberately schematised presentation of the material, and structural analysis of the use of the Old Testament framework is very illuminating. The corresponding presentation of Matthew's passion narrative is good, but the treatment of Jesus' public ministry is here rather better done. The interior characterisation of Luke's Gospel is intensely moving, and the relating of the temptations of Christ, especially the last—to come down from the cross, to the temptations of the Church is striking and useful. In his treatment of John the author again gives some useful material on the Old Testament allusions in the Gospel. A fascinating section utilises particular psalms to interpret the significance of the Gospel story, and a section on the Trinity is brief but valuable.

The tag that the Gospel is a passion narrative with an introduction attached has here been fully exploited with great profit. The main part of this book would provide searching and provoking Lenten reading, the point of which is further emphasised in the last two chapters of reflection. "Prayer is a form of enjoying God's time and transcending our own. Some seldom find time to pray because they are living in their own time and do not want to lose it for life in God's time. Ironically, they know that their time is limited or running out. Prayer is learning to live in God's time" (p. 119). This also involves communitarian consequences. The *lex narrandi* joins the principle of *lex orandi lex credendi*. "Our listening and telling relationship to God's speaking and acting constitutes our life and identity as a covenant people" (p. 125). "The prayerful telling of the story reflects the mature love of the friends of God in their accepting responsibility for the life of the community" (p. 124). This is perhaps most obvious in the celebration of the Eucharist, for "the Lord's Supper is a form of the *lex narrandi*" (p. 137). "We proclaim the life-story of God's own flesh and blood as ours" (p. 139).

It must be admitted however that such good material is dearly bought in this book. The main text runs only to 142 pages and is throughout intolerably repetitive. All the chief assertions are repeated not merely twice, but three times or more. The author felt the need to set out his approach to narrative theology in an *Introduction* of nine pages, but this is liable to put the reader off, for it detracts from, rather than adding to, the attraction of the book. Its language is contorted and obscure making the whole exercise seem something very much more sophisticated than it really is. The significance of narrative theology as illustrated in this book would seem to be a direct consequence of the fact that Judaism and Christianity profess belief in an historical revelation, rather than in a cyclic one. "Learning to listen to the word of God within our own life-story as a people is at the heart of Israel's spiritual pedagogy ... Memories make the future. Israel looked forward to redemption because it recalled its redemption ... God is actively present in our historical experience, allowing us to celebrate the marvels that he is accomplishing for us" (pp. 128–9).

The decision to read each Gospel from a particular point of view involves a somewhat arbitrary categorisation of various elements within them, and quite quickly degenerates to the level of pointless generalities where the three Synoptics are, in fact, indistinguishable. Interpretation tends to become over elaborate and at times actually self-contradictory, being contorted to fit the writer's predetermined theory; thus Jesus "stern" warning to the blind men not to publish their cure, in Mark's Gospel, is interpreted in terms of righteous wrath! Symbolic interpretation is also sometimes carried to excess, as in the treatment of Mark's Roman centurion, but the book packs a powerful punch, if you want it conveyed in this form: "There is no truly Christian story of God that does not entail the costly commitment of compassionate love for the world, for all, for enemies, for strangers, for all "the others". No true friend of God is indifferent to them ... If we have never willingly undergone inconvenience or suffering in our commitment to God and neighbour, we probably have never taken either seriously" (p. 141–2).

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