

Raising these issues does not deprecate the enormous amount of work that went into assembling this collection. This reviewer, however, yearns for a conversation developed by church historians and biblical scholars which pays attention to both historic and contemporary contexts.

LUTHER SEMINARY
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

Richard Nysse

Divine Complexity. The Rise of Creedal Christianity. By Paul R. Hinlicky. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011. 264 pp.

Even as theological educators and church leaders struggle with what seems to be a “dumbing down” even in those who claim to have a cultivated theological orientation, and at a time when “quick fix” and short “sound bite” theological responses to all kinds of questions, issues, and themes, fly across social media, it’s encouraging to have a solid, comprehensive, and substantial book of the quality of this one.

The author sets out clearly and unambiguously to unpack what the doctrine of the gospel, indeed what the primacy of the gospel in its multifariousness, means, and locates this within the rich complexity of the biblical witness, the struggles of the early teachers of faith to articulate the nature and meaning of Christian belief, and the outcomes of the great conciliar meetings that wrestled with the appropriate way to express the gospel and the being of God in Christ. Hinlicky peels back the layers of the competing formulae that claimed to encapsulate what the gospel really was all about, and deftly interweaves his analysis by moving through the challenges and vicissitudes of the Reformation, without overlooking the urgent questions of the contemporary theological enterprise. His conviction that this is not an antiquarian exercise, or the treatise of someone interested in the history of ideas, but rather a necessary and vital exercise in the recovery of the centrality of God’s gospel promise amidst the messiness of everyday life today, is palpable.

Hinlicky interacts with and interrogates a vast stream of witnesses and writers. His formidable erudition is evident, not in any overwhelming sense, but in the spirit of distilling and offering to a discerning audience what some of the finest minds in the history of

the church have struggled with and attempted to understand faithfully, minds ranging from Athanasius to Melanchthon, from Augustine to Barth, from Origen to Tom Torrance, from Ignatius to Robert Jenson. Beginning with the resurrection kerygma, he offers a clearly delineated manner of understanding how the proclamation of God's love for all humankind is manifested in and through the inextricable interlinking of Creator and creature in Jesus Christ. What is noteworthy is the manner in which biblical exegesis is carried out in conversation with writers and thinkers, crisscrossing opinions and concepts across time and space, something that leads to a creative fertilization of ideas and an enriching demonstration of the enlivening and salvific nature of the gospel of God. Again, all this is not meant to offer a dazzling display of scholarship, but is suffused by the urgent reminder that the church today and contemporary society would do well to recognize that the first four centuries of the emergence of Christianity, and the crisis brought about because of events in Rome at the beginning of the fifth century, offer instructive parallels to what we face around us right now. Taking this reminder seriously, and wrestling with this, cannot but empower us to respond thoughtfully, imaginatively, and constructively to the opportunities and challenges of the present.

Hinlicky does not shy away from analyzing the diversity of opinions and teachings that the person and work of Christ generated in the early church and beyond. This is tempered with a thorough inquiry regarding where all this led, namely, to different ways of understanding Christ, different ways of living in this world, and different perceptions of what salvation was all about. Is this then a "defense" of Nicean-Constantinopolitan creedal Christianity and its affirmation in and beyond the Protestant Reformation? To offer a simple "yes" to this question would be to oversimplify the reality of divine complexity. Rather, an answer would involve the celebration that what Hinlicky so richly and so profoundly offers is a complex yes, a yes to the reality of the resurrection as testified to, in, and through the gospel narratives and the ongoing life of the church; through the emergence and nuancing of a dynamic Trinitarian faith; through the simplicity of recognizing that God in Christ is also God for us; through the revitalization of eucharistic worship; and through

the risky venture of asserting what the cross meant and means to us, then, now, and always.

THE LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

J. Jayakiran Sebastian

Lutheran Theology. By Steven D. Paulson. London: T & T Clark, 2011. 293 pp.

This book introduces readers to the Lutheran theological tradition and its distinctive approach to theological reflection. One can imagine that readers will be disturbed, even shocked by many sentences, such as its very first ones: “Lutheran theology begins perversely by advocating the destruction of all that is good, right, and beautiful in human life. It attacks the lowest and the highest goals of life, especially morality, no matter how sincere are its practitioners” (1). Accordingly, the first task of theology is to magnify the realities of sin, death, and the wrath of God through the proclamation of the divine law, and to reveal the radical divide between faith in the crucified Christ and all notions of virtue. “Morality, aesthetics, and all knowledge on earth is [sic] destroyed” (4). This initial destructive theological work makes way for the second, proper task, namely, to declare a completely foreign and external righteousness in Jesus Christ alone, which “has no law in it at all” (2). Christian theology is for the sake of such proclaiming and declaring.

How different this understanding is from other traditions also found in the “Doing Theology” series (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist)! It is as if one is traversing an altogether different world. What other Christian theology *attacks* virtue and argues that the pursuit of it is our basic *problem*? What other Christian theology begins by proclaiming absolute divine freedom, divine predestination, the bondage of the human will, and the wrath of God over all things human, let alone continues to magnify these realities to the point that they result only in the destruction and damnation of all things? Can it be that humans are really as bad off as Paulson presents? More pointedly, can a crucified Jesus really accomplish all that Paulson asserts? His argument is all about God’s actions of killing sinners and raising them anew by faith in a dead