

# Foreword

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It is a fine thing that a volume of essays appears on the theology of Kathryn Tanner, and that its editors have solicited contributions from superb scholars who know Tanner's work so well. Currently the Frederick Marquand Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School, Kathryn Tanner is, quite simply, the most accomplished theologian of her generation. Her dedication to and love for theology has served as an inspiring example to her colleagues and students, and her prolific scholarship has done much to shape the theological agenda of the past twenty-five years.

Postmodern sensibilities have brought a remarkable and welcome pluralism to the discipline of theology. Few theologians, though, have embraced this pluralism in their work as generously as Tanner. Her writings advance their arguments with a compelling logic that is engagingly interdisciplinary, enlisting cultural, philosophical, feminist, scientific, and economic theory to stir creative insights from the ancient riches of the Christian heritage. The range of theological and ethical concerns addressed in her published work is

extraordinary—from her abiding respect in theological discourse for God’s utter transcendence while yet appreciating God’s gracious immanence, to her attention to the political and social implications of the message of Jesus and its expression in Christian doctrine and action, to her efforts to portray the struggle for Christian identity in a tradition that knows itself to be ever shaped by the diverse voices and perspectives of all believers, to her nuanced accounts of the ways the insidious power of sin takes shape in our prejudices, our politics, our economies, and our theologies. From her writings on creation to her writings on eschatology, and in her treatment of a host of theological *loci* in between, Tanner has made a mark on the practice of theology that may prove to be indelible.

All these themes, and too many more to mention here, find their center in Tanner’s influential theology of grace. In *Christ the Key* (2010), her sixth book, based on her Warfield lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2007, and in her “brief” systematic theology, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity* (2001), Tanner recovers a classical Cappadocian Christology for the profound truth it tells about the mystery of the incarnation—in the person of Christ, God joins the limitations of creatureliness to God’s own self, humanity’s nature to the divine nature. For Tanner, this divine self-giving, which reveals the very being of God’s trinitarian life, is the grace that transforms human persons into the person of Christ, the true image of God. As sheer gift, this grace does not enter into the exchange of created goods that we often idolatrously valorize in our tragically commodified world. God’s grace, Tanner insists, is non-competitive, a free and unconditional giving that stands at odds with the sinful forms of reciprocity ventured at the cost of so much human suffering in our competitive economies. Even though God’s gift of grace cannot be earned or repaid, since no return is possible to God, Christian responsibility calls on believers to return the gift of grace

to the benefit of others, a claim that Tanner develops with attention to social-ethical consequences in ways that enliven the challenge of Christian discipleship. There is a classically Protestant resonance to Tanner's insights on the non-competitive nature of grace that is yet capaciously ecumenical.

The essays in this volume offer detailed analysis of and creative engagements with these broad contours of Tanner's work, and allow us to pause and take thoughtful stock of the theological contributions of one of our very best Christian thinkers. This pause will only be brief, as we turn to tomorrow and await all the ways that Kathryn Tanner will continue in her future work to make a return to us of God's gift of her theological talent that we, no doubt, will gratefully receive.