

discovered in eastern Syria, contains a detailed prescription for the ritual of the ordination of the NIN.DINGIR. Klingbeil presents a comprehensive list of parallels and differences between this text and Lev 8. The book concludes with several recommendations for future studies in the rituals of the OT and the ANE. An appendix follows, which contains a transcription of Emar 369, a complete bibliographical list, and no fewer than four indexes.

Even a casual reader who considers the number of pages in this book must conclude that Klingbeil's study is rather encyclopedic in scope. The author is a meticulous scholar, whose study provides many valuable insights into the biblical as well as extrabiblical texts. No serious future study on Lev 8 can afford to ignore the data or the conclusions presented in this study.

A couple of minor constructive suggestions: While I fully agree with Klingbeil's interpretation of the expression "a pleasing aroma" (282-285), it would be good in the discussion on this particular term to consider the recurring expression in Lev 21, "the food of (their or his) God," which does lead to a conclusion that both of the above expressions should be considered as anthropomorphic metaphors. Second, one could pay more attention to the outstanding gender difference between the ordained parties in the two texts that are being compared. Whereas in Lev 8 we read about the ordination of Aaron, the high priest in Israel, and his sons the priests, Emar prescribes the details of the ordination of the NIN.DINGIR, a high priestess. Any reader who might be interested in a cross-gender comparison between two rituals of ordination is assured to have good company nowadays. Lastly, there are a good number of untranslated quotations in German throughout the book, and these are generally accurate, with the exception of "iraelitisch" (61). This valuable book is highly recommended.

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Lash, Nicholas L. A. *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion.'* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 296 pp. Paper, \$19.95.

In this collection, England's most brilliant contemporary Roman Catholic theologian reflects insightfully on the nature of religion and its place in contemporary culture. The disparate essays are united by several concerns: the socially embodied character of religion, the doctrine of God's Trinity as a safeguard against idolatry, the link between inadequate understandings of the personal and inadequate understandings of religion, and the significance of scientific inquiry for religious belief and the limits of such inquiry.

Lash begins by sketching a Trinitarian account of the nature of religion in dialogue with South Asian sources. The three chapters in which he does so were originally presented as Teape Lectures in India, and he peppers them with often humorous references to relatives who served church and state in South Asia. He reflects engagingly on all manner of topics, but he seeks throughout to criticize accounts of religion that conceive of it as a generic category. Religion is not in any simple sense one thing, he insists; not all religions are identical "deep down." Indeed, the whole category of "religion," a creation of the Enlightenment, serves

as much as anything to privatize faith and isolate its influence.

Because there is one God, the creator of one humanity, commonalities are to be expected. But the particularity of each tradition must be taken seriously. Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism are not in any straightforward sense variants on an identifiable common theme. Thus—though Lash does not make the connection explicit—positions like those of John Hick, for whom an analysis of religious experience leads to a reductive account of religious belief as the thematization of what are all, in fact, experiences of the same thing, are suspect. Christians and persons of other faiths must indeed seek “a meeting place for truth,” but not at the price of pretending that they are all saying the same thing.

Lash is just as hard on individualistic and privatistic understandings of religion that relegate it to a concern, not with truth but with pleasant—and publicly irrelevant—feeling. The consequence of such privatization, he insists, is not that modern society has become irreligious, but that the religion our culture practices is quite different from the Christian faith it replaces—one in which “[b]anks, bureaucracies, and stock exchanges might turn out to be temples, in which all power and honour, all agency and possibility, is ascribed ‘not to us, Lord, not to us,’ but to the market or the system of the world” (21). Not only is our culture idolatrous; but, even more dangerously, its rhetorical privatization of Christian faith conceals the fact that the public square is not naked, but rather occupied by the shrines of a false god.

At the heart of Lash’s theology is the conviction that our greatest temptation is idolatry—whether focused on ourselves or on features of the world outside us. He argues that the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity is best understood as a defense against this temptation. Despite the arcane and speculative character of much Trinitarian theology, the doctrine of the Trinity should not be understood, he suggests, to imply that we have, or could have, some sort of privileged access to the inner life of God. Rather, the doctrine directs our attention to moments in our understanding and experience of God: the created order, the story of Jesus, the vibrant freedom and life that pulse within the world. On its own, the created order might seem indifferent, unfriendly, the source of a grim and overmastering necessity. Attending only to the surge of vitality that animates all things might lead to some sort of anarchy or a celebration of feeling isolated from critical reflection, as well as social and relational responsibility. Each of these moments, like the story of Jesus, is best understood in relation to the others. The limitations of each are corrected in an ongoing back-and-forth movement.

Lash has spelled out this Trinitarian vision in “Believing Three Ways in One God,” and has displayed its significance for “religious experience” in “Easter in Ordinary.” Within these chapters, he works out the details of his position in painstaking and eloquent reflections on a range of contemporary problems and in conversation with a variety of thinkers.

Science is a regular conversation partner: Lash asserts the importance of truth and refuses to let physicists or biologists determine what theology can and cannot say. He is particularly skeptical of the arrogant claims of some scientists that seem, he believes, to portend Promethean attempts to claim divine power. He also doubts whether scientific attempts to assess and describe “religious experience” are

adequate in light of the Christian understanding of God, since they seem to isolate experience of God to strange districts populated by astrology, clairvoyance, and unidentified flying objects. The experience of God, he insists, is not the experience of the uncanny, while much of the contemporary writing on spirituality “does not stretch the mind or challenge our behaviour. It tends to soothe rather than subvert our well-heeled complacency” (174).

For such complacency, Lash has little time and less patience. Christians, he maintains, are called to bear witness to a divine grace and peace that stand in stark contrast to the prevailing violence of our world. If secularity is a cultural tradition (a religion, if you will) that urges the worship of coercive power and impersonal social processes, then it is the church’s task to call for the exercise of another kind of power, for the operation of different kinds of institutions. “In the beginning, according to Nietzsche, there is violence, the struggle for mastery, the will to power. Christianity announces and enacts another tale, according to which in the beginning, and in the end, is peace, pure donated peacefulness which, in the times between, makes its appearance in the endless uphill labour of transfigurative harmony” (232). Because we all live—whether we recognize it or not—in dependence on God, we should resist and reject those accounts of selfhood as independent and autonomous that undergird the callous cruelty of our culture and that, ironically, make us all more vulnerable to domination.

Christians must understand that dependence need not mean oppression, that relationship need not mean abuse. We are called to accept the limits imposed by our finitude and dependence; to acknowledge that our freedom is not and cannot be absolute. Rather than worshipping at the shrine of possessive and controlling individualism, we must acknowledge that we are creatures. “The necessity of the task of adulthood is the choice of finitude before God. Adulthood, thus construed, would be a matter of discovering that it is possible, without diminution of dignity, abdication of rationality, or loss of freedom, to yield to what we know and be commanded by it” (243). Such a stance of submission to truth and rejection of idolatry obviously has implications for science as well as for spirituality narrowly construed: The scientist is always in the business of submitting to reality and being challenged by it. Equally, it matters for ethics and politics, insofar as it underwrites a choice for communion and community, and against rugged individualism.

The engagement with society, which such a countercultural understanding of freedom and relation inspires, must be grounded in hope. Lash insists that such hope is not to be confused with facile optimism. “Concerning the details of the outcome of the world, in God,” he argues, “we have no information now that Jesus lacked in Gethsemane.” But “[w]hat we do have, in the gift of the Spirit of the risen Christ, is the ability to ‘keep awake and pray’” (257). Sustained by the love and the peace of God, we may face suffering; certainly we will face uncertainty and darkness, and we must always be aware of our own capacity for infidelity to God. “Now,” he observes, “as in the time of the Gospel’s first appearing, it is always and only along the *via dolorosa* that . . . [the offer of God’s peace] is enacted, this peace outpoured. None of us, however—no individual and no social form, especially the form we call ‘the Church’—knows the extent to which, along that road, we are companions of the Crucified or collaborators in his crucifixion” (263).

It is a delight to see a truly gifted thinker at work. It is doubly delightful when the thinker, such as Nicholas Lash, is obviously a person of deep spiritual sensitivity committed to good theology precisely because bad theology leads to deformed Christian practice. Thus it is, he suggests in dialogue with those who study religious questions using the techniques of physical science, "an implication of the Christian doctrine of God"—which emphasizes the unity of divine action and God's presence everywhere—"that we are as close to the heart of the sense of creation in considering and responding to an act of human kindness as in attending to the fundamental physical structures and initial conditions of the world" (92).

Nicholas Lash is a passionate man of faith who is at least as critical of his own Roman Catholic community as of any other, a prodigiously learned and erudite scholar, a determined advocate of God's peace and justice, and a consummate craftsman of beautiful and lucid prose. While I do not always agree with Lash, I do find that he is always interesting and stimulating. I have found new opportunities to deepen one's understanding of God's way with the world. In addition, I have discovered that to learn from him, even to wrestle with him, is always to engage with an amazingly lively mind and heart and to be engaged in a conversation about the things that matter most with a committed herald of the Gospel.

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Lockerbie, D. Bruce. *Dismissing God: Modern Writers' Struggle Against Religion*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. 254 pp. \$15.99.

Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." A central tenet of the "new criticism," the dominant approach to literary study from the thirties through the seventies, was that an author's life is not to be considered when analyzing that author's work. The literary work (or fruit) speaks for the author, not the author for the work. However, Jesus also said, "A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit," and there is, today, more openness to admitting biography as evidence in literary analysis. D. Bruce Lockerbie's *Dismissing God* is an outstanding example of this, exploring the dismissal of God by a collection of major literary figures and its effect on their work. The book, thought-provoking and illuminating, deserves a reading by any theologian interested in how religion influences literature and how literature influences popular religious beliefs.

There has long been, among many English teachers at Christian colleges, a covert and perhaps unexamined assumption that art exists for art's sake, that literary beauty is good in itself and justifies to a great extent the study of works inimical to holy living and submission to God. Teachers may avoid assigning works containing profanity or pornography, yet teach with easy conscience, and without exploration or comment, works that present rebellion against God in an attractive light.

Lockerbie does not suggest that these works should not be taught. He shows, rather, the extent to which the full or partial rejection of God has influenced the work of various authors. He shows that this is a fertile and valid area of study, indeed crucial to understanding this literature. If his method were adopted in Christian colleges, students would receive great benefit.