

BOOK REVIEWS

Chilton, Bruce. *Redeeming Time: The Wisdom of Ancient Jewish and Christian Festal Calendars*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. viii + 132 pp. Hardcover, \$19.95.

Bruce Chilton, a noted scholar of early Christianity and Judaism, attempts to analyze time philosophically and aesthetically through the eyes of the ancient Jewish and Christian festal calendars. He begins in chapters 1 and 2 with a discussion of two aspects of time in our contemporary world: constraint and rhythm. The constraint of time results in a feeling of busyness and emptiness, and is a profoundly disturbing feature of our lives. Time as rhythm is more enjoyable and involves recurring, patterned expressions of events. Rhythm is dichotomized into recurrence (cyclical time) and interval (linear time). The problem facing today's society is the sense of growing constraint and decreasing rhythm, which results in a feeling that time crushes us rather than develops who we are. The solution to this dilemma, according to Chilton, is found in the sacrificial systems as expressed in the ancient Jewish and Christian calendars with their explanations of time's rhythms of festal joy and intervals of communal memories. In this context, the author's purpose is to help human beings better understand themselves in time.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze respectively festal Judaism (with emphasis on *Pesach*, *Shavuoth*, and *Sukkoth*) and festal Christianity (in the context of the Gospels, Acts, and Pauline thought). In reading through these pages, one will encounter historical-critical methodology and fairly technical issues of NT interpretation. Furthermore, one will notice somewhat of a disconnect in these chapters from the main purpose of the book. Just how the Jewish feasts in the OT relate to our experience of time today is unclear. Neither does the discussion on the NT shed any light on our contemporary experience of time.

In chapter 5, the conclusion, Chilton shows how Judaism and Christianity responded differently to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Each found ways to protect the holiness of time, rescuing the eternal interval from the destruction left by Rome. "For the Mishnah, the interval of eternity is a matter of infinite extension; for the Epistle to the Hebrews, that interval is a single moment consuming all other moments" (90). And it is here that the book finally provides several profound insights concerning the Christian's relationship to time. For example, the death of Christ "is the eternal pivot of all time" (*ibid.*). This being the case, Christ's entry into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 9:11-12) "becomes the only time there is, an eternal moment: aorist eternity" (93). This aorist eternity, the author maintains, is accessible to the believer through the experience of baptism and the act of prayer. Furthermore, aspects of this aorist eternity are conveyed through the Christian calendar with its three anchors: Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany. Those interested in the origin of the liturgical year will find this discussion noteworthy.

At several points throughout the book, Chilton engages various scholars such as Thorleif Boman, James Barr, and René Girard. One wonders why he left out engagement with such scholars of theological time as John Wilch, Simon DeVries, Robert Banks, and Oscar Cullman. This would have enriched the book's discussion of theological time. Another weak point is the lack of practical application. As a scholarly book attempting to reach a wider audience, the author needed to discuss more thoroughly how a redemptive understanding of time can impact every facet of human life. Again, this is where much of the discussion is disconnected from the main purpose of the book.

In spite of these shortcomings, this book delivers a redemptive view of time and eternity that will stimulate theological reflection. Specialists will find much to discuss and debate, while all will appreciate the moments of profound insight in the conclusion.

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JUD LAKE

Davis, James Calvin. *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams: Christian Conviction and Public Ethics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. 178 pp. Hardcover, \$24.95.

Roger Williams, in modern times, has been alienated from the Reformed tradition and fashioned into a secular libertarian fighting the Puritanical influences of colonial America. Although living a century prior to the Bill of Rights, he has been molded into a Jeffersonian democrat. It has been forgotten that this voice in the wilderness for religious liberty was a separatist who had a dogma as personal and vehement as any other New Englander of his time. As many already know, Williams did promulgate freedom of conscience. However, James Calvin Davis in *The Moral Theology of Roger Williams* points out that this political theory arose out of the same Reformed tradition that the Massachusetts brethren used to stifle liberties. Williams, and those influenced by him, saw himself more as a John Calvin than a James Madison. A restoration of this Reformed portrait is what Davis of Middlebury College, Vermont, exhumes for us. *The Moral Theology*, which began as a dissertation under ethicist James F. Childress, is an exploration of Williams's synthesis between private Christian conviction and public ethics.

How is it possible that a theological particularist could preach and live the values of a liberal universalist? *The Moral Theology* proposes an alternative found in the scant yet potent writings of Williams. Davis believes—after rummaging through the archaic English—that Williams saw in the Christian moral tradition, particularly Calvinism, “the theological resources necessary to explore bases of morality shared with people outside the faith community” (xiv).

The Moral Theology of Roger Williams is not a biography; nor is it intended to be chronological. Theological ethics is the focus of this work, and it is organized thus. Part 1 develops the narrative of Williams's association with the Puritans in the Old World and the reasons for his subsequent immigration to the New. The sectarian hostility characteristic of the reign of James I placed a separatist imprint upon young Roger. His separatism was not evident at first. In fact, Williams had the good fortune to serve under Sir Edward Coke, the foremost legal mind of England at the time, who would become an influence upon the early Federalists. Already at an early age, Williams was fusing morality and public ethics.

Davis briefly outlines the well-known story of Williams's eventual departure for his new home in the nascent New England colonies. However, this proponent of religious freedom was unable to be cordial to his fellow Puritans. He was intolerant toward the fallacies in religion and government that the Puritan leaders were committing in their settlements. After involuntarily (or at times out of his own volition) moving to a number of established colonies, he was forced to found Providence, Rhode Island.

Rhode Island would become a haven for separatists, dissenters, agnostics, and pagans alike. The liberties that Williams espoused arose out of his correspondence with John Cotton, the spokesman for religious compulsion, for which New England would become known. Anticipating James Madison's views against religious assessments, Williams outlined for Cotton that religious compulsion was counterproductive to civil peace as well as evidently contrary to the gospel. Drawing from the same Reformed