

and initiation. In both cases, the predicate is missing: birth into what? initiation into what? Who and where is the receiving community?

Anne Barstow has told me of seeing a human birth take place in New Delhi on a public street that was home to the baby's impoverished parents. To her astonishment, no sooner was the umbilical cord severed than the father picked up the newborn, held it aloft, and turned in all directions, exhibiting his offspring for the whole world to see. The poverty that abolished the family's privacy had also removed any doubt about the community into which the child was born. Naked in every sense of the word, the child belonged to the streets, and to the streets it was ceremonially offered by its father.

Grimes would be quick to point out that the mother and the act of giving birth seem to disappear from this story, and that is true, even though the mother gave birth in full view of everyone. But the fact that men have taken charge of most rites, have taken ritual possession of their children, and are the guardians of most public and communal activities does not diminish the fact that both the "communal" and the "public" worlds have become vaporous for the middle and upper income groups, if not also the lower, in industrialized societies. Perhaps it will be up to women to change this by using ritual and other means to reinvent community and moral authority in a post-Christian and postmodern world.

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*Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace.* By Serene Jones. Fortress Press, 2000. 214 pages. \$17.00.

In this clearly written and ably argued book, Serene Jones undertakes an ambitious project: bringing classical Protestant theology and feminist theory into potentially transformative dialogue. Along the way, she renders accessible to a lay audience these two very complex fields of study as well as her own constructive project. Jones presents her project to her readers in cartographic metaphors. Tracing points of contiguity and divergence yields a map, she claims, not a simulacrum of the real thing. Her book, she avers modestly, is no substitute for a visit to the actual places described between its covers. However, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* is more guidebook than map—as it must be. We use maps to get us where we have decided we want to go. In addition to guiding her readers to a destination, however, Jones must convince them that the destination is worthwhile. The value that theology and theory offer each other will not necessarily be obvious to specialists within them. Given the gulf between the academy and the church, laity are likely to be skeptical of both theory and theology.

Like any good guidebook, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* invites its readers to undertake the journey by rendering accessible a foreign landscape and its inhabitants. Jones's approach—a blend of academic and personal reflections—is carefully crafted to draw an audience into the world mapped by this book. Jones navigates the complex terrains of theology and theory well and provides helpful

descriptions of the landmark debates and thinkers that people these areas. Her constructive proposals are intriguing and provocative in what they say and what they leave unsaid.

Three traditional loci of Christian theology—sin, justification, and sanctification—in their classically Protestant formulations constitute the theological sites that *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* visits. It may be premature or idiosyncratic to deem “classics” the debates within feminist theory over essentialism and the adequacy of the sex/gender paradigm that dominated the field in the 1980s and 1990s. However, revisiting them with the aid of Jones’s map caused me to wonder whether those of us who work in this field left these issues behind too quickly. I suspect that, like classics, they will return to confront us with their yet unplumbed depths.

Jones’s survey of the complex terrains of theology and feminist theory yields a new map of the landscape on the basis of unexpected and useful points of convergence between these fields. Jones mines fruitfully the common logic of transformation that underlies feminist theory’s concern with women’s “nature” (the terrain of debates over essentialism and the sex/gender paradigm) and oppression and Protestant Christian paradigms of salvation. In her hands, incorporating the insights of feminist theory into theological discourse transforms theology, which, in turn, speaks back to theory. Jones explicates and engages the rich and troubling vocabulary of classical Protestant orthodoxy, but her treatment of sin and redemption is hardly orthodox. She argues that, in their classical form and order, the doctrines of sin and grace, justification and sanctification, recycle the very conditions of oppression that feminism wants to contest—to the point of retraumatizing those who bear the scars of the subjections that our current regime of gender inflicts. On those grounds, she argues forcefully for a reversal in the logic of this central Christian drama. What if, she asks, we were to place sanctification before justification, grace before sin? Jones is not simply rearranging the pieces on the theological chessboard. She understands theology to be more than an intellectual enterprise. To be Christian is to embody the Christian drama, that is, to live as a justified sinner, a sanctified sufferer. Clearly, Jones intends this shift to alter Christian subjectivity—especially for women, for whom the stakes in this drama are high. Jones describes justification *pace* Luther as a radical undoing of the old self in the face of God’s judgment. *Pace* Luce Irigaray, Jones notes that, because their subject positions are always already undone by definition, women undergoing justification as Luther describes it risk real harm. Jones places sanctification before justification to provide women with a metaphorical skin to protect them from justification’s harmful effects. This intriguing proposal raises the question of the project’s relationship to the actual experience of Christian women—an ironic turn of events, perhaps, given the role of Jones’s earlier work in querying the role of women’s experience in feminist theology. Do women narrate their Christian subjectivity in this way? If not, what is it that draws them to and sustains them through the experience of justification?

Jones’s theological commitments to diversity and normativity shape the position she takes vis-à-vis the essentialism versus constructivism debate in feminist theory. Strategic essentialism, she argues, appropriates the strengths of both

positions while avoiding their problems. Giving a strategic essence meaningful content in a pluralistic world requires thick description of diverse women, she asserts. Naming the fruit of this description an essence provides the necessary ground for normative judgments and claims. Jones proposes that strategic essences be evaluated pragmatically according to the effects they produce in the real world. A strategic essence judged by this standard will not remain static, she argues, but will move and change in response to concerns that arise in its practice.

Jones's foregrounding of the need for thick description represents an advance over other deployments of strategic essentialism. However, it is not clear to me that strategic essences are either as permanent or as malleable as they would need to be to work as Jones envisions. Insofar as a strategic essence is flexible, what grants it the ontological status that Jones argues it needs to ground normative claims? What will prevent a strategic essence from becoming frozen in some particular evolutionary stage? What will guarantee that the voices of diverse women will be heard and that they will have the power to shape what goes under the name of "woman"? (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who coined the term *strategic essentialism*, rejected it later, saying that it had done nothing more than provide an alibi for ignoring difference.)

Jones's own sense of accountability to women's diversity is manifest in the strategy she uses to incorporate the personal into the academic. Jones puts meat on the bones of her theological/theoretical position with vignettes from what she calls "the Tuesday night group," an imaginary group of Christian women diverse in ethnic background, economic status, and sexual orientation who meet every Tuesday night for intellectual stimulation and mutual support. Jones depicts the Tuesday night group as adept at negotiating the differences in experience—both positive and problematic—that arise as a result of differences in social location. She acknowledges in the introduction that the individuals who make up the group are not real but, rather, composites of people she has known and characters she has imagined. It is noteworthy, I think, that the characters are so vivid that one must continually remind oneself that they *are* characters. (One trusts that, given some of the experiences attributed to these characters, Jones has been careful to protect any actual acquaintances whose life stories may have inspired these sketches.) The portrait of the group's interactions, however, raises again the question of connection to actual women's experiences. My own experience with attempts to create community among diverse women suggests that such groups are difficult to create and to sustain. We bring with us the baggage of years of history—personal and collective—and history will not leave us alone. Genuine community requires confrontation with those histories; building trust across the scars of accumulated traumas—or lack thereof—is no easy project. "Hearing each other into speech," to borrow Nelle Morton's famous phrase, requires confronting and being confronted with the effects of privilege and pain and our allegiances to them.

It may be that religious groups that attempt such dialogue have an edge over secular groups, in that a common allegiance provides the means and motivation for creating and sustaining such community. Perhaps feminist theology offers feminist theory a concrete example of the effects of what Irigaray calls "the third

term," that which provides a structural release that enables genuine engagement between differences. (Irigaray frequently associates the third term with the divine, after all.) However, it seems to me that, given the anxieties we all feel when we contemplate crossing dividing lines, we need models of community building that allow us to see the wounds—healed and open—of genuine engagement with difference.

That the book prompts deeper inquiry into the issues it treats is a sign of its vitality. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* stages for its readers a thought-provoking, creative, and transformative dialogue between theology and theory. Its blend of the academic and the personal renders the project accessible to laypeople as well as academics. Both audiences will be enriched by traversing its pages.

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*Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great.* By Conrad D. Leyser. Oxford University Press, 2001. 221 pages. \$65.00.

Conrad Leyser's dissertation, published in the Oxford Historical Monographs series fifteen years after its completion, breaks new and important ground in the study of episcopal and monastic authority in late antiquity. Carefully avoiding the standard historical interests in institutional and hierarchical developments, as well as the thorny doctrinal issues that have occupied so much of the interest in the period, Leyser explores the interrelationship of power and asceticism refracted through the lens of the ascetical rhetoric that emerged in the fifth and sixth centuries in the West. Those sixth-century rhetorical strategies hang on the fifth-century dual pegs of Augustine, whose monastic asceticism centered on a community consisting of community members who hold all possessions in common and who are at various levels of ascetic ability under a strong ascetic leader who presents himself rhetorically as vulnerable, and Cassian, whose monastic asceticism centered on the spiritual expertise and moral authority of the ascetic leader (characterized rhetorically as an expert speaking morally pure or holy speech) and communities segregated according to ascetic capacities, abilities, and achievements.

Leyser then explores the manner in which the sixth-century ascetic authors redrew the map of ascetic authority and community structure based on the issues raised by Augustine and Cassian. Pomerius, writing primarily to instruct bishops in the exercise of their pastoral office, applies the spiritual expertise of the contemplative life (Cassian) to the episcopal oversight of communities consisting of mixed levels of monks (Augustine), thereby fusing the Augustinian episcopal authority with Cassian's program of moral reformation. Caesarius of Arles applies the ascetic tradition of Cassian to the lives of the laity: The laity, like the monks, were to contemplate the Scriptural word preached by the pastor and fuse that contemplation with the elements of their daily living. Caesarius's program involved an increment of moral surveillance focused on the instruction



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