

What I miss, then, is what the subject displayed: the shaping hand of the artist. Eliade was a writer as well as a scholar, one whose work, creative as well as scholarly, deserves such a wholistic consideration as David Cave intends. Cave's work enhances our understanding of Eliade, but it falls considerably short of the consideration Eliade has earned.

Grace Is Where I Live: Writing As a Christian Vocation.

By John Leax. Baker Book House, 149 pp., \$12.99.

WHERE DOES a writer get the right to write? The self-authorization implicit in any answer offers problems even to well-established writers, and particularly so to those who wrestle with the tensions of twin callings—service to the church and service to art. In such a case, self-authorization suggests God-authorization, but no imprimatur exists to make that claim less than audacious. We ordain our preachers and bureaucrats, therapists and musicians, but not our poets.

John Leax came to terms with this long ago, while still an undergraduate. Raised in a church context that provided him “neither a tradition that could comprehend an artistic vocation nor a spiritual leader,” he teetered between a longing to write and a longing for the approval bestowed on those who claimed a call to parish ministry. Irony finally determined his course. He showed his poetry to his pastor, whose advice was to put “that nonsense” behind him and “get on with what’s important.” Leax walked away with “a cold determination to go without approval, to be an artist and not a minister.”

Still, it would be years before he could articulate a rationale for the vocation that his “act of rebellion” had elected. The calculation of his young daughter some time later carried the bite of accuracy. It did no good to “put Christ” in his poems, she said, because nobody read them anyway. Not

Reviewed by Shirley Nelson, author of Fair Clear and Terrible: The Story of Shiloh, Maine.

only was the readership limited, as Leax knew very well, so was the recognition of poetic truth. A message must fall into the well-nurtured soil of the language and die before it could be “born into a poem.” Like so much else, “we must give up even our truth to keep it.”

Then why give one's life to such a seemingly fruitless endeavor? Leax gathers up 30 years of addressing that sticky question. But theorizing is not his real bent. This is the book of an active person: professor of English and poet-in-residence at Houghton College in New York, woodsman, gardener and environmentalist. These concerns move through his six previously published books, including three collections of poetry, as well as the essays and journal entries that constitute this account.

While Leax belongs by commitment and heritage to the evangelical community (both his “primary audience” and his “most troubling” one), he echoes the work of no other writer in the stables of evangelical publishing. “I am less and less sure of what I have to say,” he muses. One thing he knows is that “language and reality are inextricably bound.” With that as a given, he sees three possible “strategies.” He can “choose silence . . . the way of the mystic and my late dog, Poon.” He can accept “the language of [his] culture group as final, and . . . speak clichés and platitudes.” Or he can “consciously choose the creative responsibility of language.” The latter is clearly his choice.

Body Theology.

By James B. Nelson. Westminster/John Knox, 216 pp., \$12.99 paperback.

IN OUR body-obsessed and yet body-denigrating society, the steady attention that James B. Nelson, professor of Christian ethics at United Theological Seminary, gives to the meanings of human embodiment is always welcome. *Body Theology* treats three distinct interests—sexual theology, men's issues and biomedical ethics—and adds two related sermons. Elaborating on the concerns of “body theology,” Nelson con-

siders such diverse topics as male aging, medical care, and the seven sins of traditional sexual theology.

Body theology examines “body experience as revelatory of God.” The book does not explore this claim phenomenologically or systematically; it offers intriguing instances, as in a discussion of the revelatory meanings of “penile softness.” Nor does Nelson present hypotheses that he progressively supports, or draw extensively on research in the field by such writers as Naomi Goldenberg and Carter Heyward. Instead, the book weaves a variety of lectures, essays, sermons and articles, some previously published, into 13 chapters, some of which recapitulate Nelson's well-known views. It would be nice to see his next book take up the fresh content of this one, particularly that of “body theology,” and develop it into a longer book that also attends to some of the dangers and abuses of embodied love. Nonetheless, the collection provides vintage Nelson: concise, experience-based explorations of powerful dilemmas in Christian sexual ethics.

Nelson's body ethics is grounded in an incarnational theology that argues against the idea of Christ as a one-time, past event and seeks the “christic presence” of God wherever love becomes flesh and flesh becomes love. God continues to move among us, and Nelson sees God moving particularly in the midst of a “sexual revolution” that is not over. He remains committed to a fundamental paradigm shift that contradicts a religious tradition too often negative about the embodied self and that opens up new ways of understanding the connection between body and spirit, men and women, and homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Not only must theology take body experience seriously, churches must speak more forthrightly about a wide range of urgent sexual issues. Throughout the book Nelson makes clear his hopes for the future: an end to homophobia, patriarchy and the sexual hegemony of a narrow norm for families; the

Reviewed by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, associate professor of religion, personality and culture at Chicago Theological Seminary.

proclamation of the primary purpose of human sexuality as love, intimacy and mutuality rather than procreation; and the establishment of a more just and inclusive community that values the sexual integrity of every human being in the service of God's reign. Nelson's endorsement of love as the "one standard for evaluating sexual expressions," however, still leaves us with a characteristic problem of Protestant ethics: Does love offer sufficient criteria for moral reasoning in a time of sexual confusion and conflict, when many people desire clearer guidelines?

God continues to move in Nelson's own life. Chapter nine tells the autobiographical story of his and his wife's own procreational plans and presuppositions (related, oddly enough, in third-person to avoid what seems like the minor problem of repeating their names). Elsewhere he shares his awakening to his sexist, homophobic quests for a false masculinity and talks about his experience of physical and emotional abuse and therapy. Although he

sometimes uses these experiences as segues to discuss what he sees as more important ideas, it is extremely refreshing to read a theological ethicist willing to name his own fears, premonitions, mistakes and learnings. For pastors, students and others eager to know more about the nature of an embodied theology and the work of Nelson, this book is an excellent place to begin.

The Hymnology Annual: An International Forum on the Hymn and Worship. Edited by Vernon Wicker. *Vande Vere*, 203 pp., \$45 00

■ Wicker annually gathers an assortment of articles from magazines, chapters from books and published lectures from symposia that give notice to the basic (after the Psalms) songs of the church, the hymns. The Hymn Societies that stand behind the product represent an international constituency, and Wicker's choice of essays pro-

motes it. Several of the authors pay useful attention to the theology of hymnody, and a few expound simply one hymn (including "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"). These are important annual updates; church musicians will find them of greatest interest, but the Christian world will be better off when pastors and lay leaders of worship pay heed to what is being sung, by whom, why and to what end. Wicker's collection will help those who care.

Holy Women of Russia. By Brenda Meehan Harper. *San Francisco*, 182 pp., \$17 00

■ It is difficult for many feminists to believe that patriarchal religious traditions can empower women. And it is difficult for modern readers, in general, to accept that traditions can be a path of creativity and a source of liberation. Meehan is a feminist and a modern, so she faces two challenges on the way to the reader's heart and mind. She



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