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BOOK REVIEW

Bruce Demarest, Bradley Nassif, Scott Hahn, Joseph D. Driskill, and Evan Howard. *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 218 pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9780310329282.

Historically the divides among Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant churches have been deep and hard to bridge. The three traditions have each developed in very distinct ways and, with some exceptions, adherents to each one have little knowledge of the others. This has begun to change in recent years as the walls dividing the three have become increasingly permeable. Perhaps this is because the reality of Western post-Christendom offers an impetus to be less intramural in our disputes and more open to working with those who at least speak a similar language. Whatever the catalyst, spirituality is one area of mutual interest that offers a potentially fruitful field for dialogue among the historic streams of Christianity. Spirituality speaks to the practice of the faith, and is rooted in the experience of Christ that is central to all of the great traditions. Thus, an interest in the spiritual traditions of each movement has developed as people from within each historic stream of Christianity have come to understand the potential benefits that the various strains of Christianity have to offer one another.

Four Views on Christian Spirituality is an attempt to consider how each of the major traditions within Christianity seeks to address the human desire to be connected to God and how we can live in relationship with him. Thus, the book seeks to bring these major traditions into conversation with each other in the hope that this type of engagement will not only benefit readers' spiritual lives but will also provide pathways to a deeper understanding of the rich tradition of Christian spirituality.

The book is part of a Zondervan series called Counterpoints,

which is designed to address topics that are of particular relevance to the contemporary church. The current volume is edited by Bruce Demarest, senior professor of spiritual formation at Denver Seminary, and includes contributions from Bradley Nassif, professor of Biblical and Theological studies at North Park Seminary (Eastern Orthodoxy), Scott Hahn, professor of theology at Franciscan University (Catholicism), Joseph Driskill, former professor of spirituality at Pacific School of Religion (progressive Protestantism), and Evan Howard, founder and director of the Spirituality Shoppe (evangelicalism). The four views represented by the authors constitute the broad scope of Christian tradition and their approaches to relating to God. These various responses to understanding God have resulted in diverse spiritualities that can ultimately inform seekers from all the representative traditions in their quest to know God and practice their faith in a way that brings them into greater communion with the God they are seeking to know.

Following an introduction by Demarest, the book presents four chapters that focus on each of the four streams of Christian tradition included in the book. Each chapter is followed by responses from all of the other contributors, creating a dialogical feel to the book and allowing an engaged discourse among the traditions. Demarest also offers a concluding chapter that seeks to draw together key ideas addressed in the various chapters.

This format contributes a number of strengths. First, the book offers the reader a greater understanding of the different spiritual traditions. For instance, Nassif explores the Orthodox doctrine of “theosis,” the idea that the goal of humanity is to be transformed so that it can participate in the divine nature. Hahn presents the core Catholic idea of the church as divine family. Driskill describes how progressive Protestants are rediscovering spiritual disciplines as a way to enliven their ongoing practice of social justice. Howard offers the core practices of evangelical spirituality as studying Scripture, reading and hearing sermons, and participating in family worship, song, and intercessory prayer. In each case, these basic introductions to the unique emphases of each tradition offer a solid, basic overview of the core of each particular movement. For the reader who is uninitiated in these

traditions the overviews provided in each chapter will prove helpful.

A second strength of the book is the way in which commonalities among the various traditions are explored. As an example, Nassif enthusiastically notes how the evangelical and the Orthodox traditions define the gospel in a similar way. Quoting evangelical scholar Scot McKnight's description of the gospel as "involving the full story of Jesus Christ," he demonstrates how this same idea is present in the Orthodox understanding as well. Nassif emphasizes how evangelicals and Orthodox believers are "gospel centered" in their spirituality (p. 30). He even states, "Orthodox spirituality is thoroughly evangelical" (p. 31). This might come as a surprise to many evangelicals who have different perceptions of the Orthodox tradition and might not have realized some of the common emphases the two traditions share.

Both Hahn and Nassif discuss the importance of the Trinity in Catholic and Orthodox spirituality. These traditions both place a significant emphasis on the concept of the believer participating in Trinitarian life. Catholics understand this as a foundation for the idea of the church as an extension of the divine family, while Orthodox believers root their idea of "theosis" in this doctrine. While the two traditions have different emphases regarding participation in the life of God, both see its significance for Christian spirituality.

Both Driskill and Howard emphasize the importance of the Bible in Protestant tradition. While the evangelical and progressive traditions often have differing hermeneutical approaches to Christian Scripture, they share a foundational commitment in their spirituality to its shaping effect in the life of the believer.

The various connections that are made by the authors in their chapters and in their responses to each other illumine the fact that these Christian traditions share much in common; in fact, they have much more that makes them similar than makes them distinct. In this way the book offers a hopeful vision for forward movement in bringing further unity among the traditions.

In keeping with the ideal of unity, a third area of strength in

the book is the respectful but honest engagement that takes place in the response sections of the book. The authors all treat one another with appropriate respect and are quick to point out the many convergences of their traditions as well as the things that they appreciate about the other traditions. However, this does not mean that genuine engagement over issues of divergence does not take place.

Scott Hahn, who was a Presbyterian before becoming a Catholic, engages progressive Protestantism with deep honesty when he argues that the cultural engagement for which progressives are known has led them to complete “identification and capitulation” to secular culture (p. 149). Nassif addresses the multi-faceted denominationalism apparent in Protestantism. In his comments on Howard’s essay, he critiques the evangelical movement’s lack of emphasis on the role of the church in conversion and discipleship. Nassif writes, “When the Nicene Creed affirms, ‘I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church,’ it was not confessing trust in an invisible group of believers in the universal body of Christ. Rather the Fathers of Nicea were saying that *their* churches are ‘one holy catholic and apostolic’” (pp. 187–88). Driskill notes in his response to Hahn that, at times, perhaps, the hierarchical structures of Catholic tradition have alienated people from God. He notes that the mainline Protestant emphasis on love has stood in contrast to some of the practices of Catholic tradition that takes a hard line on some issues and repels people. These then find a spiritual home in a mainline congregation that is more willing to accept people where they are. In response to Driskill’s chapter on progressive Protestantism, Nassif flatly states, “Although Driskill has skillfully composed a brilliant historical narrative of the tenets of liberal Protestantism, he describes it for what it actually is, namely, a religious movement that knowingly rejects the very heart of the historic Christian gospel” (p. 147).

These honest assessments of the various traditions are couched in an appropriate spirit of charity; however, the places where tough-minded critique occurs make the book relevant to the reality of the dialogue between these traditions and remind the reader that there are serious points of contention among them

and good reasons why the traditions function separately. Although these points of disagreement must be addressed, and it may be that they will never be completely overcome, the overall discourse offered in the book does provide a hopeful pattern for ongoing dialogue.

As can often be the case in this kind of book, there is much to be gained from participating in the conversation. The book offers a good model for how the conversation can be continued and where its points of convergence can provide a way forward. In the realm of Christian spirituality, there is much to be gained in borrowing from the various Christian traditions. Each one offers genuine seekers approaches to God that can be highly beneficial to their spiritual journey. *Four Views on Christian Spirituality* provides a solid introduction to those traditions.

It is important to note that the book is only an introduction to the four traditions. If readers want to understand each one in any depth, they will have to go to other volumes. This book is simply an attempt to offer readers a beginning point for understanding these traditions, their commonalities and differences.

The book ultimately demonstrates the possibilities that spirituality offers for Christian unity and dialogue. Unlike many volumes on the Bible or doctrine, it begins with the common desire of all Christians to know God better and to find practices that will help them to do that. The ground of Christian spirituality is fertile soil for mutual dialogue and experience; sowing into it may bring both a deeper communion of the saints within every stream and a deeper and richer experience of Christ in the life of many believers. Evan Howard notes this when he writes, “We have seen a number of goals presented in this volume—deification, perfection, holiness, sanctification, kingdom of God, love of God and neighbor. I applaud them all! My suspicion is that each goal is interconnected with the others such that our ability to receive from one another in humility is necessary for the fulfillment of any” (p. 157).

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