



# THE LIVING LIGHT

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## SPECIAL FEATURE

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inescapably contextual nature has its dangers ("openness to the world" in the Germany of the 1930s was at least ambiguous!), a theology of eternal truths impervious to historical change is finally impossible. Baum also notices the differing trajectories of Catholic and Protestant theologies at mid-century: "While Protestant theology acquired a new sobriety after the war, Catholic theologians were becoming more hopeful, confidently affirming the church's humanizing mission and thus its universal relevance" (242). This book manifests inevitable lacunae (Niebuhr rates extended discussion in two different essays, whereas Rahner gets only one very brief mention and Bernard Lonergan is absent). In spite of these inevitable limitations, the volume provides valuable information, explores neglected subjects, and furnishes useful historical outlines. It is a valuable resource for all students of the recent history of theology.

Naturally, the last forty years or so receive less historical attention simply because the period is so recent; many sources are as yet unavailable, and we are presently living through its immediate context. ■

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1. Gregory Baum, ed., *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999). Subsequent references are given in the text.
2. Cf. "The Enlightenment and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," *CCICA* (1985): 31-59; or "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," *Cristianismo nella Storia* 18 (1997): 353-85.
3. Cf. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, eds., *Moral Theology No. 5: Official Catholic Social Teaching*, especially "Part I: Historical Development" (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).
4. The only source to indicate that the Catholics wrote positive things about National Socialism in the 1930s is a secondary work by Gary Lease. For a fuller understanding of Karl Adam, one must turn to Robert Krieg, "Karl Adam, National Socialism, and Christian Tradition," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999): 432-456.
5. For a recent work that vividly accentuates the transformative value of doctrines, cf. Robert Barron, *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

## Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millennium

edited by James Michael Lee

Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 2000

298 pages, paper, \$24.95.

This will be the final book published by Religious Education Press (REP), whose demise is sad and unfortunate for scholars of religious education and their profession. James Michael Lee, founder of the press and editor of this final volume, has performed a valuable service as publisher to the profession during the past twenty-five years. One does not have to agree with the various positions espoused in this particular text to appreciate its focused attention on the future shape of the field of religious education.

*Forging* is a collection of eleven essays by prominent U.S. Christian religious educators, who represent three major groups within the Christian tradition: Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangelical Protestants. The essays are wide-ranging and offer a diverse intellectual banquet on the critical issues facing the field at the turn of the millennium. However, if the essays in this volume, as a whole, are any indication of the emerging shape of religious education, then its future seems diffuse, without any organizing center or coherent comprehensive theory. The question asked in the title of John Westerhoff's edited collection *Who Are We? The Quest for a Religious Education* (REP, 1978) still remains unanswered. Or maybe in the twenty-first century, there are multiple answers.

As in many volumes published by REP, in *Forging* Lee gets both the first and last word. His first word (introduction) has a ring of evangelical zeal and a claim that the avowed purpose of the book is to renew the face of religious education. Lee's last word (ch. 11) is a veiled *apologia pro vita sua*, that is, his defense of religious instruction as a form of social science.

Some of the volume's authors deal with themes so general as to be ineffectual (Norma C. Everist and Kenneth O. Gagel). Others restrict their vision to Christian imperatives and claims, which limit authentic inter-religious discourse (Robert W. Pazmino and Ronnie Prevost). A third set, however, offer rich resources for teaching that mediate the holy (Mary Elizabeth Moore) and a pedagogy of hope in which the *griot* (storyteller) recalls past stories that can act as catalysts of hopeful transformation (Anne Steady Wimberly).

Charles Foster and Gabriel Moran contribute two of the most interesting and creative essays. Foster attends to the overall context of congregational education (ch. 4). Congregations, he claims, must counter the loss of institutional and intergenerational reinforcements by nurturing a lively and vital consensual conversational infrastructure. Moran's essay links religious education's past and its future (ch. 6). We cannot forge a better future, he notes, without reclaiming the original vision. Yet this vision must itself be reshaped in light of our current religious outlook and diverse educational forms. Moran concludes by proposing four characteristics of what religious education could and should mean in the twenty-first century.

Finally, two of the most engaging and yet, in my judgment, most problematic essays (in terms of the future direction of the field) are by Barbara J. Fleischer and Richard R. Osmer. Fleischer insightfully and skillfully links practical theology and transformative learning as project partners for Christian religious education. Richard Osmer equally illuminates the need for cross-disciplinary thinking as the "new clue" to bridge the age-old gap between integrity and intelligibility in Protestant Christian education. Fleischer and Osmer wish to direct religious education into the emerging field of practical theology. Some prominent colleagues would agree with them. I do not. Practical theology will not be the savior of religious education. It offers neither the framework, processes, nor institutional forms adequate to embrace its life. If it acquires a hegemony, however, practical theology may very well lead to religious education's near extinction as a distinctive field and profession. Each needs the other as equal, dialogic conversational partners.

Lee regards each essay in the volume as "firmly planting the banner of the Lord on the beach of the new millennium" (26). Our task, he claims, is "to ransom the time for Christ over the next hundred years and over the next thousand years" (1). Forging a future for religious education requires genuine religious pluralism. We might start humbly by inviting Jews and Muslims into the conversation. Their voices are sadly silent in this volume.

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## Iglesia en camino

by Genaro Sáenz, GSC, and Beatriz Casiello, HMA

Rosario, Argentina: Ediciones Didascalía, 1998

167 pages, paper, price unknown (must be ordered from Latin America).

Catechists—especially the lay ministers who have chosen this vocation as a career in the Church—find themselves at the confluence of all of the cross currents in Catholic ecclesial life, with all of the opportunities and burdens this responsibility entails. This brief volume provides an analysis of the present conflicts and prospects in the Church—from the perspective of two seasoned catechists with international experience—and includes pastoral suggestions for lay catechetical leadership. For this reason, it provides a useful resource even beyond the Latino/Hispanic community.

In the first chapter, in typical Latin American fashion, the present-day context is explicated: the emerging individualism, the weakness of ecclesial identity among many of the baptized, the proliferation of religious movements, the ideologization of the Christian faith, a certain lack of confidence in the hierarchical magisterium, and widespread anti-institutionalism. The authors outline the diversity of approaches to ecclesiology common in Catholic life and discuss the tensions these create especially for laity in a Church still quite clericalized. The authors emphasize the importance of adult lay formation—a formation that is more spiritual than moralist and ritualist—and the central role of the Scripture in formation.

The first chapter is followed by chapters on the understanding of the Church today, renewed ways of understanding clergy and lay relationships in the Church, current distorted attitudes about the Church, emerging new roles and lines of thought in the Church, risks attendant on polarization in the Church, and approaches to ministry. The chapters present the issues realistically, while also offering a deeply spiritual perspective. In addition, the chapters offer concrete ways of dealing with the conflicts and contradictions in church life, providing a hope-filled vision for the future.

The volume ends with a chapter on the authors' witness and experience in catechetical ministry since the Second Vatican Council: one chapter on a vision of the Church for catechetical ministers and a postscript with some voices from lay catechists about their vision and ministry.

The book is well grounded, both in theological developments and institutional sensitivity, and in practical experience and surveys of the attitudes of youth. It is both a concrete resource for the reader and a foundation for