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# Pro Rege

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Volume 19 | Number 1

Article 4

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September 1990

## Love: The Foundation of Hope: The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (Book Review)

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### Recommended Citation

Hulst, John B. (1990) "Love: The Foundation of Hope: The Theology of Jurgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 19: No. 1, 32 - 33.

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# Book Reviews

*Love: The Foundation of Hope. The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1988. 160 pp. Reviewed by John B. Hulst, President of the college.

The essays contained in this volume were first presented at the 1986 national conference of Trinity Institute—which was a festival arranged in honor of Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, who were celebrating their sixtieth birthdays. The premise of this collection is to show how “God’s self-sacrificing love is . . . the basis for all human hope” (x). The essays are divided into three groups.

*I. Love as God’s Faithfulness Overcoming Death.* In “Love, Death, Eternal Life: Theology of Hope—the Personal Side,” Jürgen Moltmann observes that all human life is moving toward death. Hope in the face of death is to be found in the biblical image of the resurrection of the dead, not in the Greek image of the immortality of the soul. The future will be fulfilled when Christ “destroys death and places the kingdom into the hands of the father (I Cor. 15:28)” (16).

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s essay entitled “Self-Love and Self Acceptance” asks “What can the Christian God offer to women?” She has in mind especially those women who “have turned away completely from theology, the Church, and its secret male patterns” (23). Moltmann-Wendel finds the answer to her question in two sources: first, in wisdom theology and its female image of God; and, second, in Reformation theology and its doctrine of justification. These two emphases should enable women to see themselves as good rather than evil, whole rather than broken, and beautiful rather than weak and unworthy.

*II. Love as the Possibility of Community.* This section begins with a piece by M. Douglas Meeks, titled “Love and the Hope for a Just Society.” According to Meeks, God’s love is the foundation of justice. Justice, in turn, is defined economically, i.e., justice “is finding out how to distribute and retribute according to what people have coming to them” (42).

“Love and Social Transformation in Liberation Theology,” by Jose Miguez Bonino, argues that it is in the base ecclesial communities (BEC) where love has become the foundation for justice. To be in Christ is to be in the community of love. For those seeking liberation the community of love is known as “solidarity,” especially solidarity with the poor.

In the next essay Letty M. Russell calls for a paradigm of authority in community “that allows for multiple authorities to enrich, rather than to outrank, one another” (83). As the title “Authority and Hope

in Feminist Theology” suggests, Russell argues that it is feminist theory or the feminist perspective which has produced the concept of “authority as partnership”—giving hope for the future to both women and men of faith.

When Charles S. McCoy writes about “God’s Faithfulness: Federalism and the Future of Theology,” he explains that the word *federal* is derived from the Latin *foedus*, which means “covenant” (94). Along with Jürgen Moltmann, McCoy finds in the theology of covenant an integrated model for the future of theology which brings together not only Western and Eastern Christianity or Catholic and Protestant Christianity, but also enables us “to relate to the tribal, communal character of human society” (107).

*III. Love as Presence, Power, and Suffering.* In the “Dialectic of Community and Structure” Stephen W. Sykes deals with the relationship between love and power. Love cannot escape the exercise of power and authority; but this power must be exercised “constructively” in the service of the community.

Susan B. Thistlethwaite’s “The Literature of Black Women” returns to the theme of Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s essay. Thistlethwaite indicates that the “making right” that Moltmann-Wendel describes “cannot stop with the individual human psyche, but must embrace a ‘rightness’ in racial relationships, in male/female relationships, in economic and political relationships” (141).

Finally, in “God’s Promise as Presence,” Christopher Morse considers the dichotomy between the present and the future of God’s love, God’s kingdom. It has been suggested that Moltmann’s emphasis on eschatology and promise constituted a denial of God’s present activity. Morse answers by pointing out that God’s love is present “in the universal fulfillment of this promise” (148).

Thus ends a volume which endeavors to show that not only love, but love in community is the wellspring, the foundation of Christian hope.

It is not easy to respond to or evaluate a book composed of essays by several different authors. It would be ideal if all of the writers could be gathered in one place for a question and answer session. In such a meeting I would like to ask each at least one question.

Jürgen Moltmann: Along with others, I would like to know if you really view the reign of Christ as a present reality.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel: Without reliance on the

sacrificial death of Christ, is your notion or "acceptance" not ill-founded?

N. Douglas Meeks: Have you not limited the biblical concept of justice by defining it solely in terms of economics?

Jose Miguez Bonino: What is specifically Christian about solidarity in which "every human being" is involved?

Letty M. Russell: Would it not be preferable to speak about a "biblical" rather than a "feminist" concept of authority?

Charles S. McCoy: Will you explain how "covenant theology" helps us to relate to Khomeini's Iranian Muslims?

Stephen W. Sykes: You oppose Paul's concept of authority. But did he not lovingly exercise authority in the service of the early Christian church?

Susan B. Thistlethwaite: How does the "making right" which you describe relate to the justification provided through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Christopher Morse: Does not the declaration "All authority has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18) mean that God's word of promise was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

By raising these questions, of course, I indicate how I differ with the authors of this significant publication.

*Gracias: A Latin American Journal*, Henri J.M. Nouwen (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1983. 188 pp. \$14.45 Reviewed by Nicholas V. Kroeze, Dean of Students.

Knowing the will of God for one's life, to be able to discern from a multiplicity of influences, experiences, impressions, and emotions those that direct a person to his or her true calling, true witness — this is the motivation for Dutch Catholic priest Henri Nouwen in his six-month trek through Bolivia and Peru. My first impression of this book was that it is for people with a "Spanish" bent. But what initially seems solely a walk through Latin America is truly a walk through the Christian life.

Two main emphases of the book are (1) the importance of prayer and (2) a willingness to associate with the poor. As Nouwen observes the political, economic, and social inconsistencies and conflicts experienced by those with whom he comes into contact, he is led to a deeper conviction that prayer and lowly association provide an environment from which one can correctly view and act in any culture. This is the tying together of divine perspective and true human need.

The insights of Nouwen provide carry-over into the "state-of-the-art" society which many of us enjoy. He would make the reader sensitive to the fact that his points of emphasis are meant not just as observations

nested in Latin culture but as crucial for living a truly Christian life in the midst of peace and plenty:

One of the temptations of upper-middle-class life is to create large gray areas between good and evil. Wealth takes away the sharp edges of our moral sensitivities and allows a comfortable confusion about sin and virtue. The difference between rich and poor is not that the rich sin more than the poor, but that the rich find it easier to call sin a virtue. When the poor sin, they call it sin; when they see holiness, they identify it as such. This intuitive clarity is often absent from the wealthy, and the absence easily leads to the atrophy of the moral sense. (159)

*Gracias* is wonderfully bereft of political and theological bias. Picking up a book by a Catholic priest associating with the poor in Latin America, one might immediately conclude that it would be a book on liberation theology. This is not so. Nouwen presents the basic, simple Christian faith as it might be experienced and expressed by all believers. This book is worthy of recommendation not only as a text for study, but also, by nature of its format and content, as appropriate for personal and family devotions.

*Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church: Toward a Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*. Ada Maria Isasi-Diax and Yolanda Tarango (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1988. 123 pages. \$8.95. Reviewed by Anne C. Kwantes, Ph.D., Christian Reformed missionary to the Philippines.

Openness marks the opinions which are expressed by those who were interviewed and who offered material to support the theses of the authors of this volume. Plain talk also marks the explanations and claims of Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango in *Hispanic Women, Prophetic Voice in the Church*. In their prologue, the authors set the stage with their opening statement, "First and foremost we are activists—Hispanic Women committed to the struggle for justice and peace."

Who are the Hispanic Women of this book, and what is their liberation theology? Hispanic Women (HW) are here represented by a group of women who met for the purpose of discussing and compiling the infor-

mation on which this book is based. They belong to a culture within a culture. Living in the USA, they have their ethnic roots in Amerindian, African, and Spanish cultures and histories; the three main Hispanic groups in the USA are Cubans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans (70). It is the deeply ingrained influence of Spanish culture in their lives which binds these women together. These *mestizas* all share a Hispanic understanding of basic issues and the meaning of life (5). And since Spanish culture of the 16th century centered on Christianity and the church, HW have a common bond of religiosity, even if that religiosity is expressed in various manners.