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### Review Of "The Hermeneutics Of Postmodernity: Figures And Themes" By G.B. Madison

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## The Journal of Religion

GONZÁLEZ, JUSTO L. *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. 256 pp. \$15.95 (paper).

As the subtitle indicates, this book is concerned to develop a typology of Christian thought. Justo González begins by focusing on the early (pre-Constantinian) church and finds there three distinct theological approaches, each located in a particular region of the ancient Mediterranean and each of which finds expression primarily in the work of one author: type A, noted for its emphasis on law, is represented by Tertullian; type B, noted for its emphasis on timeless, unhistorical truth, is represented by Origen; type C, noted for its interest in history, is represented by Irenaeus.

Chapters 1–4 describe the different ways in which each of the types deals with specific theological topics: God, creation, sin, salvation, and the Bible. González is aware of the limitations of such typologies, and he rightly reminds his readers not to take the divisions too literally (p. 32). What emerges in these early chapters, however, is a fairly helpful overview of the different styles of theological thinking in the early church.

Unfortunately, the book does not end there. González proceeds to try to interpret the entire history of Western theology within the three-type paradigm. The result is a rather one-dimensional reading of the later theological tradition, particularly in the Middle Ages. González treats Augustine, medieval theologians, and the reformed tradition all in three brief chapters and finds a preponderance of type A thinking. The limitation of González's approach becomes most apparent at this point. He focuses on those aspects of medieval piety most compatible with his thesis (e.g., the penitential system) and ignores other rich and diverse currents of medieval thought, such as the mystical tradition. No one, for example, who has read Gregory the Great's *Moralia* (595) or the *Homilies on Ezekiel* (593) can accept González's view that "order and authority, and the fear of their breakdown, were Gregory's paramount concerns" (pp. 110–11).

But ultimately, and ironically, González's concern is not with history. González is really writing an apology for type C theology. Both type A and type B theologies, he argues, were developed by an "elite" and could be used to serve the purposes of wealthy and prominent people, particularly in the post-Constantinian church. But Irenaeus (type C), González suggests unpersuasively, was not interested in making Christianity respectable; his approach was forgotten because its "social and political implications stood in the way of a church and a society that wished to make the gospel more acceptable to the established order" (pp. 89–90).

Finally, González sees a revival of type C theology in modern figures and movements as diverse as Karl Barth, Luthersian Lutheranism, Vatican II, and liberation theologies. The common denominator is a serious belief that God's action takes place in human history. At this point one can only wonder whether the millennialist hopes of Irenaeus are truly mirrored in the modern struggles for justice and peace, which González believes lie at the heart of Christianity.

DAVID G. HUNTER, *College of Saint Thomas*.

MADISON, G. B. *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. 206 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

This anthology of some of G. B. Madison's previously published writings (all but two have appeared elsewhere) is a vigorous discussion of the main figures (Husserl,

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, and Rorty) and themes (metaphor, imagination, interpretation, epistemology, and the mind-body problem) that make up the current debates in postmodern philosophy.

Madison's thesis is that the sterile either/or between pure objectivist philosophy and the new Nietzschean opposition to meaning and truth can be overcome through a hermeneutical recovery of the power of figurative language to shape and define our understanding of the world. In an insightful article on the mind-body problem, for example, he argues that the self is neither a fabrication of discourse (Foucault) nor a metaphysical substance (Descartes) but that which is created on a daily basis through the magic of shared communication with other persons. Madison's contribution emerges at the interstices between deconstruction and foundationalism, and yet I do not think he is always successful at negotiating the territory between these two options. In opposition to Ricoeur's claim that metaphorical discourse refers (albeit indirectly) to reality, Madison at one point maintains that figurative language does not discern patterns in reality but rather invents such patterns and then seeks to persuade the reader that such patterns are objectively real. And yet later in the volume he also argues that poetic discourse is a clue to how the productive imagination synthesizes experience into a creative whole. At this point Madison offers the reader the very "claims about reality" that he earlier denied were possible: to understand the synthetic powers of the imagination is to understand, in large part, how reality works, how it is creatively constituted by the mind. I, for one, agree with Madison's epistemology at this point (namely, that the mind constitutes, rather than creates or discovers, reality). But for Madison to deny that language can discern features of reality and then to valorize figurative discourse as an index to what reality is (namely, that which is constituted by the creative imagination) is a self-contradiction.

I think this problem in part stems from Madison's own unexamined assumptions, but I also wonder if the author might have been better served by his or an editor's more careful organization of this volume so that his differing presuppositions could have been resolved in the book's final redaction. The papers collected here are somewhat uneven in style, length, and intellectual content; they were composed over a period of fifteen years, for diverse audiences with different interests, and it is not clear how the essays cohere with one another. But in spite of the book's lack of general coherence, Madison's thesis that human understanding creatively refigures reality has the benefit for religion scholars of providing intellectual footing (but never a foundation!) for their recovery of myths and symbols as mediums for the way reality signifies itself to the interpreting community.

MARK I. WALLACE, *Swarthmore College*.

CUPITT, DON. *The Sea of Faith: Christianity in Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 268 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).

The ingredients that go into the making of Don Cupitt's narrative about the transforming effects of "the modern age" on Christianity are not unfamiliar—"the slow process of secularization, the impact of science and then of biblical and historical criticism, the shift to an ever more man-centered outlook, the encounter with other faiths, and . . . the awesome and still incomplete transition to modernity" (p. 7). The thrust of Cupitt's argument is that these developments generated a new worldview, one that was rationalistic and empiricist and, there-