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# Review: 'The Creed in the Gospels'

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sively on historiography in general, and who thus understands the role of assumptions and personal agenda in recreating the past, are significant.

The history that follows is clearly a product of the post-Vatican II era. While not written for an academic audience and thus without footnotes and the like, the narrative is critical, interesting, and revealing, especially the sections on the post-Vatican II Church. The promised sensitivity to lay involvement and initiative and aid to the poor is delivered, especially in the contemporary period when the ideals and behavior of the Syracuse Church came to conform more or less to the author's stated ideals. Few dioceses have good written histories, much less histories that attempt to portray the Church as it is understood since the council, and this book admirably provides both. When one puts this book down one walks away with the conviction, clearly intended by the author, that the Church community of Syracuse is made up of its laity, and not just the clergy, and that it has a mission to the world, especially the poor.

While this history is a significant advance on earlier works, the author's own definition of the community as a worshipping and witnessing community is not developed except in the sphere of social action. Reflecting a major lacuna in American Catholic historiography in general, and continuing an old theological assumption that there are no changes in the worship and faith of the Catholic community and thus no history of them, this book does not project the Church in Syracuse as primarily a worshipping and witnessing community. The history of its rituals and how they were interpreted, its myths, the ways in which the Catholic faith was believed or the meaning of life perceived, as expressed in prayers, hymns, catechisms, sermons and the many other forms of faith expression, are not traced.

American Catholic historiography has yet to digest fully the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, especially its recognition of other Christian ecclesial communions as also the Church, and in its isolation has settled on a few in-house Catholic issues dealing with structure such as how decisions are made in the Church, rather than on the central identity of the Church, the community as a religious community. This "organizational" focus of the historiographic tradition, unlike that of American Protestant historiography, has tended to inhibit the usefulness of Catholic historiography in a humane liberal arts curriculum, as well as theology, religious education and pastoral ministry programs.

Boston College

THOMAS E. WANGLER

*The Creed in the Gospels.* By Alfons Kemmer. Translated by Urban Schnaus, O.S.B. New York: Paulist, 1986. 134 pages. \$7.95 (paper).

*The Creed.* By Berard L. Marthaler, O.F.M.Conv. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third, 1987. xviii + 439 pages. \$7.95 (paper).

During the past few decades questions have been raised from a number of sources about the relevancy of the wording of the traditional creeds. Does their antiquated language speak to the contemporary Christian? Before such a question can be adequately addressed it is indispensable that there be a serious study of the historical, biblical and theological backgrounds of the development of the

creeds. It is to this study that the recent books of Alfons Kemmer and Berard Marthaler have made an important contribution.

In his small work, *The Creed in the Gospels*, Swiss Benedictine Alfons Kemmer, professor at Einsiedeln Theological School, presents an introduction to the biblical sources of the Apostles' Creed. The author makes a two-fold effort. First, he sets out to show that texts can be found in the Gospels which served as sources of the statements of faith that were later put together to form the Creed. He then explains the texts exegetically.

Perhaps the structure of Kemmer's book will become more apparent if we look, by way of example, at his treatment of the second article of the Apostles' Creed, "And in Jesus Christ His only-begotten Son, Our Lord." The author divides his treatment of this article into two main parts. In the first part he demonstrates that all the evangelists give strong witness to their conviction that Jesus was truly a man. He supports his thesis by examining Mark's report and Matthew's account of the temptations of Jesus. These narratives, Kemmer concludes, show that Jesus was genuinely human. He was in the words of Hebrews one "who was tempted in every way we are, though he is without sin."

The author proceeds to bring out further the humanness of Jesus by reflecting at some length on the Gospel treatment of the agony in the garden and the death of Jesus on the cross. These events reveal in a special way Jesus' identity with human vulnerability.

In the remainder of the chapter Kemmer discusses the divine sonship of Jesus. Two principal biblical sources are analyzed: the prologue of John's Gospel, and the synoptic narratives of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. In the prologue Jesus is revealed as the Logos of God, the only-begotten of God. The story of the theophany on the occasion of Jesus' baptism gives evidence of the unique dignity of Jesus.

Each of the articles of the Apostles' Creed is treated by Kemmer in a similar manner. He opens the eyes of the reader to the diversity and richness of the Creed's biblical sources.

Berard Marthaler, professor of religion and religious education at the Catholic University of America, undertook a much more ambitious task. He presents in this sizable volume his explication of the two great confessional statements of Western Christendom, the Ecumenical Creed promulgated by the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 (as Chalcedon said)—popularly known as the Nicene Creed—and the Apostles' Creed which came into common use around the sixth century.

The author complains that too many Christian issues in contemporary theology seem very removed from the basic doctrines of the Church, and farther still from the teachings of the New Testament. He strives to show that Scripture, the Creed, and contemporary theology constitute a package, and cannot be separated without the danger of being misunderstood.

Two major purposes control the writing of this book. The author sets out to provide fresh insight and clarity into the classic creeds so that they may be more appreciated. He also wishes to contribute to ecumenical discussion by showing how Roman Catholics bring the Creed into dialogue with Scripture and contemporary theological issues.

Marthaler presents a lengthy, two-part introduction to his book. In part one he traces the development from kerygma to creed, and describes the various

functions of a creed as profession of faith, as narrative, as doxology, and as theological statement. Part two of the introduction discusses the topic "The Creed in Ecumenical Dialogue." The author addresses three issues that demand attention as the churches attempt to come to some agreement on a common confession of the apostolic faith: (1) the general suspicion of creeds in some traditions; (2) the language of the Nicene Creed; and (3) the relation of baptism, eucharist, and ministry to the Creed.

The author groups the twenty-four chapters that constitute the body of the book under the headings of three articles; Father, creator; Son, redeemer; and Spirit, sanctifier. This is done "in an effort to bring the central purpose of the Creed to the fore, that is, to emphasize its dual function as a profession of faith and doxology" (p. 16).

The comprehensiveness of this book is manifest in a brief overview of some of the topics treated in association with each article. Under the first article the author discusses God-talk and the limits of language. He then presents various approaches to understanding creation, including the Genesis accounts, Gnostic dualism, the position of Marcion, and the teaching of Irenaeus.

About half the book is dedicated to the second article, Son and Redeemer. A discourse on the names and titles of Jesus is followed by an account of the early Christological disputes and the Councils that addressed them. The author's treatment of salvation, Christology "from above" and "from below," and of the quest for the historical Jesus are interesting and insightful. Particularly striking in the chapters on the death and resurrection is the author's explanation of Jesus' descent into the "nether world."

The third article leads Marthaler to an examination of the biblical texts relating to God's Spirit and to a discussion of the "filioque" dispute. He also includes in this final part of the book a reflection on that creation of the Spirit which is the church, along with its "marks" and its sacraments. His treatment of "the communion of saints" as "holy things for holy people" is innovative.

Both Kemmer's book and that of Marthaler are worthy of study. They constitute part of the essential background for any college teacher of Catholic and Christian dogma. Kemmer's work could be used on the undergraduate level. The volume by Marthaler may best be reserved for graduate students and undergraduate honors programs.

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WILLIAM P. ROBERTS

*Fire and Light: The Saints and Theology: On Consulting the Saints, Mystics, and Martyrs.* By William M. Thompson. New York: Paulist, 1987. v + 201 pages. \$8.95 (paper).

William Thompson's latest book suggestively thematizes what he has already practiced in his own theologizing. His "consultation" of the Christian spiritual tradition had enriched and added depth to his Christological investigations in *Jesus: Lord and Savior* and the recent *The Jesus Debate*. In this new book, an extended "essay," Thompson exhibits the same qualities of generous interpretation and informed judgment, which so singularly characterized his earlier work. *Fire and Light* is an exciting and original probing of the venerable adage: *lex orandi legem statuit credendi*.