

rejoinder that God would get bored even more quickly contemplating Descartes? Well done!

*Boston College*

HARVEY D. EGAN, S.J.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGY. By Steven D. Paulson. *Doing Theology*. New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2011. Pp. vii + 293. \$80; \$24.95.

In this intriguing study, Paulson, professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, frames in eloquent rhetoric his approach to Lutheran theology. Grounded not only in the writings of Martin Luther but also in those of the generation of theologians immediately post-Luther (Nikolaus von Amsdorf, Matthias Flacius Illyricus, and other “Gnesio-Lutherans”), P. presents Lutheran theology as a countervoice, a counter-argument to the dominant theological stream, found in both Calvinism and Catholicism, that always seeks to reestablish the law as God’s primary arena of operation and humankind’s striving. The theological task begins, according to P., with radically distinguishing and outright separating law from gospel. The question of theology is what the human person can do or not do, whether it is free or not (20, 23). The first task of theology is the destruction of everything that is good in human life (1). The second task “is to make way for the declaration of a completely foreign, new righteousness that has no law in it at all” (2). The entire book then develops these two perspectives as they were formulated by the early reformers, particularly the Gnesio-Lutherans.

P. uses Paul’s letter to the Romans as the organizing principle for his argument, following the internal development of the epistle from chapter to chapter, for all of Lutheran theology (including its “unfinished business”) “is a commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans” (15). The preacher (the one who, through the sermon, frees from the law) is introduced as Paul introduces himself. Then the major tenets of a Pauline/Lutheran theology are presented: God present in the flesh (*communicatio idiomatum*), faith as gift and the certainty of the promise (that is the foundation of faith), baptism as the framing of life (freedom from sin, from law, from an angry God, from death), and finally what the promise (gospel) means in life for us both as individuals and as communally—the “good fruits” of faith and the role of authority in society.

The book has a polemical framework. First, it wishes to establish the Lutheran voice as one over and against both religious and cultural voices that claim a role for the human will. P. opens the door to the Lutheran “way” of conceiving the human being who is not free as a creature but free only through faith—but this freedom is far more extensive and profound than any paltry form of freedom found within the created order or guaranteed by the law. Second, the book lifts up a characteristic of Lutheran

rhetoric—its penchant for polar opposites (law over and against gospel, bondage over and against freedom). In so doing, it retrieves theology as a confessional act (rather than as doctrinal statements). This is most strongly expressed toward the end of the book where resistance to authority is raised as a core Lutheran characteristic (and not simply submission to authority). Flacius, in particular, is crowned as the Lutheran hero and epitome of Lutheranism (as a resistor of authority but in other ways throughout the book). Third, the book makes other obvious choices in its language, maintaining the gender-specific “man” and masculine pronouns for God.

This presentation of Lutheran theology is deeply implicated in an agenda. I note this not so much as a critique—if only all theology were rhetorical in this creative sense!—but as a caution to the reader. We find here more than a simple rendition of theology as found in Luther; we also find an interpretation of 16th-century Lutheran theological polemics translated into 21st-century polemical discourse.

One should contest specific statements—e.g., does Lutheran theology really advocate the destruction of “all that is good, right and beautiful in human life” (1)? How does this square with P.’s later acknowledgment that reason is God’s greatest gift to humankind (246)? The reader might be helped if the radical opening statement (the assault on all that is good) were set in context: such a pessimistic vision of the created order is true when that order attempts to either play the role of God or be a means to reach God (when we trust in the good, right, and beautiful in human life rather than rely on faith).

On a practical level, the volume could have benefitted from more documentation. Many times P. paraphrases Luther but neglects to reference the paraphrase, thus making it very difficult for the reader to pursue the thought in Luther’s writings. It is perhaps also unfortunate that this connoisseur of Martin Luther (as I know P. to be) has not woven his vast grasp of Luther’s extensive writing more fully into the fabric of this book. P.’s primary sources seem to be Luther’s commentary on Romans and the *Bondage of the Will*.

P. confidently provides an outline of Lutheran theology and what it means to be a theologian, whether or not one agrees with his rhetorical framework.

*Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN*

DIRK G. LANGE

THE TRINITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF THE TRIUNE GOD. By Gilles Emery, O.P. Translated from the French by Matthew Levering. Thomistic Ressourcement 1, Washington: Catholic University of America, 2011. Pp. xvi + 218. \$24.95.