
Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Silent Fire: An Invitation to Western Mysticism* by Walter Holden Capps and Wendy M. Wright

Review by: Robert A. Segal

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Doers of the Word: Toward a Foundational Theology Based on the Thought of Michael Polanyi (American Academy of Religion Dissertation Series, 18.) By John V. Apczynski. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977. xii+202 pages. \$6.00. ISBN 0-89130-128-3.

The subtitle of Apczynski's dissertation provides a clear indication of his twofold aim. That is, first, to seek grounds for understanding the meaning and affirming the truth of religious belief in a Polanyian analysis of human cognitional activity, and, then, to construct on these grounds an account of the methods operative in theological understanding.

After a brief introduction (chapter 1) in which he avers theology's problematic status and the need for a resolution at the foundational level of cognitional theory, Apczynski devotes the major part of his work to a detailed exposition of Polanyi's contribution to this foundational enterprise. He gives a lucid interpretation and an engaging, if basically positive, appraisal of Polanyi's achievement: (chapter 2) the critique of critical reason and an ideal of total objectivity, positivistically conceived; (chapter 3) the discovery of the tacit dimension of knowledge and the personal participation—"indwelling"—of the knower in the known; and (chapter 4) the explication of the dynamic and isomorphic structures of knowing and being, in terms of a "logic of emergence."

The second part (chapter 5) moves beyond a consideration of Polanyi's cognitional theory to explore its implications for understanding faith, theology, and their relationship. According to Apczynski, the structure of tacit knowing discloses a "dimension of ultimacy" constitutive of every intentional act. Religious faith, then, is understood as that "form of indwelling" which "breaks out" towards the transcendent source of this experience of ultimacy. This means that faith itself is a form of understanding and the primary source of meaning for theology. Theological understanding, accordingly, is seen to unfold through two complementary phases: a historical moment which grasps the meaning of faith as expressed in the past, and a systematic moment which reformulates that meaning in terms of contemporary cultural frameworks.

All in all, this account of the relationship of faith and theology as forms of understanding is suggestive but not as clearly or fully developed as one might expect on the basis of Apczynski's earlier discussion of Polanyi's significance. Nevertheless, if, as Polanyi holds, an important token of the truth-value of a given piece of scientific research lies in its heuristic power—the ability to suggest further questions and intimate further insights—then Apczynski's proposed outline of the task of theology is a valuable contribution to an on-going discussion of Polanyi's importance for theological self-understanding.

Joseph Kroger
St. Michael's College

Silent Fire: An Invitation to Western Mysticism. Edited by Walter Holden Capps and Wendy M. Wright. New York: Harper Forum Books, 1978. x+262 pages, index. \$5.95. L.C. No. 78-03366.

This anthology of mystical writings is the latest of several recent anthologies on the subject, of which Walter Stace's *The Teachings of the Mystics* is the best known.

Unlike Stace, Capps and Wright limit themselves to Western—and, more specifically, Christian—mystics, but in so doing they are able to include various lesser-known mystics. The thirty-one mystics they have chosen range chronologically from Augustine to Ernesto Cardenal, with an understandable concentration on medieval mystics. For each selection, which is brief but representative, they provide an equally brief but pithy introduction.

In their introduction to the book as a whole Capps and Wright note several distinctive aspects of Christian mysticism but, unlike more parochial writers, apparently see no overarching differences between it and non-Christian or even non-Western mysticism. Indeed, they see mysticism itself as a strain in all religions—a break with the common view of it as only an advanced stage of religion, one presupposing the emergence of a gap between man and god. Because they see mysticism as universal, they dispense with explaining its origin in Christianity and seek instead to explain its changing appeal over the centuries. Their explanations are at times intellectual—for example, the influence of Jewish and Platonic beliefs on early Christian mysticism—and at times social and political—for example, the impact of the radicalism of the sixties on contemporary Christian mysticism.

Intended as a sourcebook, this work is most useful.

Robert A. Segal
Reed College

Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion. Edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow. New York: Harper & Row, 1979. ix+287 pages. \$5.95. ISBN 0-06-061385.

The twenty-four essays in *Womanspirit Rising* introduce a sampling of the authors and themes constitutive of the past decade's discussion of women and religion. Characteristic of its portrayal of feminist theology is an emphasis on women's experience as the starting point with which theology must be correlated. This experience manifests itself in women's finding or creating meaningful stories as a significant mode of doing theology. And theology itself, in whatever form it takes, is shown to have an essentially communal character for feminist theologians.

The anthology is organized and motivated by the "creative tension" between feminists and the Western, Judeo-Christian tradition, as evidenced by its four thematic sections. (1) The first section rehearses the now familiar observation of the inherently sexist roots of this cultural/theological tradition in order "not to jettison it, but to transform it." (2) The second begins to reexamine the tradition from a reformist feminist perspective, which reinterprets the tradition as it explores the "hidden history of women in religion." (3) The third section offers an alternative view of the reformist position which reconstructs the tradition. That is, it assumes the more radical criticisms of the writers of the first section and responds not by rediscovering hidden elements, but by creating new rituals within the traditional framework. (4) The final section rejects the biblical traditions and offers revolutionary alternatives which ground theology and ritual "primarily in women's lives."

This anthology is representative not only in its authors and themes but in the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of feminist theological endeavors which it evidences. As an introduction to several feminist classics as well as some of the most