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# Review: Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God

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e post-conversion crisis experience(s)
ion. Instead, Hoekema, with Calvin,
of regeneration as the decisive or
of sanctification. Though the termin-
d Walvoord differs somewhat, all of
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perience(s). There is no real distinc-
Keswick teaching, and both Dieter
views also have great affinities with
views of sanctification presented in

voord's and McQuilkin's attempts
espective views in reference to B. B.
*ological Review*. Walvoord argues
man responsibility in his critique of
alvoord inconsistently concludes his
ment, "sanctification is the work of
work for Him" (p. 226). McQuilkin
s have not understood its teaching
ge between his father and Warfield,
rstood Keswick teaching, said "If I
ve included the last chapter in my
miss here, since Warfield's critique
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Warfield seemingly could not have
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anachronism could be clarified.
tion whether there is such a thing as
anctification. Hoekema's approach
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Jewett. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

ation has been a source for debate
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been developed over the centuries.
answer to the subject either, but it



will clarify the issues for contemporary readers. The treatment is well balanced, irenic and very readable. Jewett is honest in identifying his commitment to the Augustinian-Calvinist side of the debate from the beginning. This approach is balanced by Grounds' foreword which treats the subject from the semi-Arminian side of the question.

Jewett's work begins with a useful survey of the historical material in which he carefully traces the various positions and the setting in which the debates took place. He sees more continuity than discontinuity in the Reformed tradition than has been seen by recent scholars (contra R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford, 1980). All readers will find helpful material in this section. Especially informative is his treatment of 20th century theology. His treatment of Barth's position on election is perhaps the finest analysis on the subject that I have read.

The next section of the book deals with the exegetical questions related to election and predestination. Jewett moves easily from historical concerns to biblical exegesis. Especially helpful in this section is the exposition on God's covenant faithfulness. Jewett's covenant theology is readily apparent as he traces the covenant people of God from the descendants of Abraham through the NT community, whether Jew or Gentile.

Jewett tackles the tough questions relating to individual or corporate election. Jewett opts for individual election as the biblical teaching on this difficult question. He rightly refutes Karl Barth's unscriptural corporate concept of election which leads to universalism. For this, Jewett is to be commended. Jewett wrestles with the decrees of God and helps the reader work through the differences between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. He notes the impressive logic of supralapsarianism, but concludes that such a position is not without its ethical problems. It is helpful at this point to be reminded that God's decrees are not the cause of an event. Jewett opts for a balanced infralapsarianism that affirms unconditional election and rejects unconditional reprobation.

Jewett's work is worthy of much praise and deserving of a wide readership by those who agree and disagree with him. For those wrestling with this issue, Jewett will prove to be profitable reading. He has helped the believing community reaffirm that salvation is of God and is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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*Easter in Ordinary: Reflections of Human Experience and the Knowledge of God*, by Nicholas Lash. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1988. Pp. 304. $29.95. Cloth.

This work by the present Norris—Hulse professor of divinity at Cambridge University has as its basis the prestigious Richards Lectures at the University of Virginia, Fall 1986. Professor Lash has had a long standing concern for a proper portrayal of the relationship between human existence

and the mystery of God. In this significant work of theological reflection he apparently brings to final clarification his criticisms of dominant, philosophical/metaphysical perspectives, alternative ways of seeing (and therefore living, before God) and constructive theological expression of the relation between God and man in the course of historical existence.

Modern man's potential loss of himself, whether from the threat of technology, the reductionism of philosophical materialism, or nuclear annihilation, has forced him generally to respond by some form of dualism. Few will deny that we, along with all we see about us, are products. We are products of biological, economic, political, psychological, etc., factors and relationships within the complex network of the world. But, notes Lash, our protest begins when it is asserted that this is all that we are. We refuse the designation mere products. Such is to discount that which we deem precious and unique to our humanity, our inherent personhood. It is to write off the "spiritual" element. Therefore, what has become the dominant "safeguard" for the integrity of the human person is the postulation of man as constituted of two separate elements: the physical and the mental, matter and spirit.

This perspective, one almost taken for granted at both the popular and academic levels, is one which, according to Lash, inevitably distorts mankind, his culture, and his understanding and response to God, especially in what we deem to be "religious experience." In critiquing this dualistic tendency Lash desires to uncover the fact that any special experience of God is not necessarily and specifically "religious" in its character, nor are such "religious" experiences necessarily of God in any true or privileged sense.

In order to come at this question effectively, Lash comes at the dualistic tradition of religious experience, not directly through the Cartesian *ego* (the real, inner me), but through that influential modern exponent William James. James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* reflects the author's dualism and anti-scientism by concluding that "religious experience" is to be classified as a *mental* fact (as opposed to physical). "Religious experience is to be located within the guarded domain of inner safety, the subjective "in here." All external forms of religion, whether intellectual, institutional or ritual, are secondary at best.

Lash has no difficulty with James' emphasis on experience or his attempt at scientific description. For Lash, the basic difficulties with James' account arise when he identifies the "personal" with the "individual." When he insists that "individual" experience is a matter of inner "feeling" in contrast to thought and external inter-activities, and depreciates the intellectual and institutional aspects of religion, Lash takes exception. No one simply feels or simply thinks, etc., and the hardening of distinctions into dichotomies ends up undervaluing and underestimating the "public" aspect of human experience. The reality, notes Lash, is the ever present possibility to seek and engage, critically and responsibly, in the world and thereby transform its structures. It is to make of the world the form and content of personal experience.

But Lash pushes James and the dualistic tradition further. From James' account of religious experience, Lash asks what kind of God is apprehended thereby? Is not wanting to classify the apprehension of God merely within the

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intellectual (mental) side of the boundary, James is trapped into calling such experience "quasi-sensible realities." In this way God has become a "sensed" thing among other things and not the God of classical Christian theology. Had he, in fact, opted for the mental side, as much Western thought has done, James would have made God a kind of mental fact, an idea. In following this line of thought, religious experience has come very close to occult methods and forms. Lash's point is that the God of religious experience as emanating from the currently dominant dualisms is either an idea or a ghost.

What is the way out? The dualistic tendencies to harden distinctions into dichotomies inevitably malforms the religious understanding of man, of God and of the redemptive relationship between them in all aspects of life and daily living. We must risk "coming out," risk acknowledging the whole of life, its pain, its uncontrollable and unharmonious diversity, its irreducibility in event and language and experience. The "truly personal" cannot be restricted to one aspect of human experience.

After criticizing James and dualism, Lash moves to the affirmative and what can be termed the pedagogy of the personal. Rather than defining experience inwardly as a "conscious mental going on," Lash points approvingly to Friedrich von Hügel's definition of experience as made up of "endless contacts, friendly/hostile, give/take, between ourselves and the objects of all kinds which act upon us/upon which we act in some degree or way." Von Hügel refuses to isolate one feature of our experience as though it were the center of either human experience in general or of our relationship to the mystery of God. Of particular significance for Lash, is von Hügel's understanding of the "person" not as that which we inwardly *are* but, in and through *all* of human experience, what we are *becoming*. In the tensions of life, destructive and constructive, we are in the process of the production of the personal. This is the vision of Christianity, for von Hügel, a vision that promises eventual achievement by the ever present grace of God in all human experience.

With von Hügel (and John Henry Newman), Lash also engages Martin Buber as a perspectival conversation partner. Buber's critique of the public-personal dualism that has arisen within the technocratic and bureaucratic structures of modern life is likewise to emphasize a turning of the whole unified self out for active redemptive transformation of surrounding structures.

The Christian faith then is a life of dependence on God, a dependence wherein lies our freedom. In recognizing our creatureliness and dependence on God we live in responsible relationship with each other, other things and with God. Christianity as the "school for the production of the personal" fosters sonship and dependent relatedness in the whole of the human.

This schema leads Lash to conclude his argumentation with a constructive theological description of the Christian experience of God as Triune. The Christian's recognition of his/her own creatureliness, dependence and finitude, and the continual interactive experience of such, leads to the experience of God, not in the esoteric and unusual, but within the limits of the ordinary. It is to experience God as Spirit in the beauty, creativity, love, generosity and vitality of life. But *only* this would be pantheism. It is to experience God in

the recognition of death, chaos, in the perishing of beauty, the unexplainable. It is thus to recognize the utter transcendence and incomprehensibility of God. Yet His absolute qualitative difference *alone* would leave us in agnosticism. But we are reminded that the silence of agnosticism has been broken by a Word once spoken, Word made flesh. He lived and died. He was more than prophet. He was one of eternal and imperishable meaning. It was the divine Christ. But to stop here would be to ascribe absolute significance to the past. So on we go in the dynamic "dance" of Christian pedagogy, never stopping at one point as though it were the all. Finally, says Lash, it is in the stillness of God's unity that all elements are at last reconciled and in our sharing of His stillness there is our peace.

In this work, Nicholas Lash has amply laid open a critical problem in modern, and notably evangelical, views of the Christian life that tend to accentuate the inner to the depreciation of the God ordained whole—the thrilling and extraordinary to the detriment of any recognition of God's intimate relation to the everyday. In my estimation Lash's criticisms are largely true and to the point. In a secondary way, Lash's dialogue partner, William James, while effectively diagnosed, was (as Lash admits in places) caricatured. This tendency toward a caricature-for-emphasis method in Lash does detract at points from his argument, especially where he heavily lands on words and phrases not meant to carry much baggage.

My main complaint regarding *Easter in Ordinary* is its exceedingly dominant phenomenological approach. This descriptive "theology from below" approach tends to set forth a God of strongly pantheistic tendencies despite all of Lash's trinitarian protests to the contrary. If all of life is in some sense a reflection of the imminent "Holy," then all of the real distinctions, which Lash is wont to make, in worship, ethics, etc., are erased. In point of fact Lash's closing trinitarian construction arising from human experience seems quite Hegelian. But it is a Hegelianism as filtered through Karl Rahner with lapses into Schleiermacherian "dependence on the all." As Karl Barth has noted, " . . . there is at least the threat of the unfortunate transition from a divine determining to a human determination . . . the human determination, the experience and attitude of the knowing subject are made the criterion of theological knowledge" (CD, I, 1, p. 19).

Still, this is an important book and ought to be read with keen interest as well as with criticism.

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*Understanding Dispensationalists*, by Vern S. Poythress. Grand Rapids: Academie/Zondervan, 1987. Pp. 137. $7.95. Paper.

The purpose of this book is nicely stated in the title of the first chapter: "Getting Dispensationalists and Nondispensationalists to Listen to Each Other." Poythress, Professor of NT Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary, wishes to explore ways of profitable dialogue between dispensationalism and covenant theology. He writes as a covenant theologian who