

the very specific background of the “salutary Christian action among the people” formulated by Leo XIII in his encyclical, *Graves de Communi* (1901), in order to nip in the bud all that might run counter to the *Syllabus*.

Léon Harmel had a major impact on his time, and his work has stood the test of time. It is founded on real charity and rests on a true understanding of the spring of human advance. It is to the credit of his biographer that she turns to the best sources so as to give us an exact account of a man of action who engaged in the debates of his time and devoted himself to those undertakings that he knew he could see through.

—Arnaud Pellissier Tanon
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An Unexpected Journey: Reflections on Pastoral Ministry

J. Philip Wogaman

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 (176 pages)

Credo

William Sloane Coffin

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004 (173 pages)

These books about the ministry are by accomplished ministers and are instructive to clergy and laypeople alike. They are examples of how theology can be “incarnated” and applied in people’s workaday lives.

Reverend J. Philip Wogaman was, for many years, Senior Minister at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. During the 1990s, Wogaman served as the pastor to many prominent souls inside the Beltway, including President Bill Clinton and the First Lady. In this role, he was one of the counselors to the President during the notorious Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Reverend William Sloane Coffin served as Chaplain of Yale University, Senior Minister of the Riverside Church, and is immortalized in a popular comic strip, having unwittingly served as the basis for the Rev. Sloan character in the famous *Doonesbury* comics.

Both of these books are more chronicles of their intellectual lives than autobiographies. This is especially true of Coffin’s *Credo*, which is an honest collection of quotations from sermons and unpublished writings. In fact, Coffin’s book, actually compiled by editor Stephanie Egnotovich, assumes that the reader is familiar with Coffin’s background because only the brief five-page foreword gives the biographical context for the nine chapters of quotations, the titles of which include “Social Justice and Economic Rights,” “Nature,” and “War and Peace.”

Wogaman’s *Unexpected Journey* is for this evangelical Christian a surprisingly delightful read. Wogaman is well known as a progressive Methodist minister and a “compassionate liberal.” His book confirms what conservative Christians worried

about: that he opposed welfare reform (contrary to Clinton), opposed the death penalty (contrary to Clinton), opposed language in his own denomination that declared the practice of homosexuality “incompatible with Christian teaching,” and that he supports the “right to choose abortion” (145), and generally opposed Hillary Clinton’s socialist health care prescription because “the changes should have been more sweeping!” (69, exclamation point in original).

In short, when Wogaman disagreed with President Clinton or his wife it was on those points where the Clintons were not liberal enough. He writes: “It was well known that my stance was basically liberal” (93), “I disagree with the theological and political orientation of many evangelicals” (112), and “I have generally voted for Democratic candidates ...” (70).

Though many Catholic and evangelical Christians would disagree with his politics, Wogaman’s pastoral care and love command wide admiration. His humility, his willingness to learn and to grow, and his constant attention to his parishioners are all instructive. Given his rocky relationships with most conservative Christian groups, the many instances in which he allowed himself to be vulnerable display laudable openness and integrity.

There are insightful passages on hospital visitation, sermon preparation, dealing with problematic church members, and ecclesiastical politics. Perhaps of most interest are the passages in which he speaks of applying his faith and not shying from contemporary matters of public concern. If the Bible is to be relevant, he suggests, it will have something to say about the events appearing in today’s newspapers.

This book will hold an important place among the books that first-year seminarians are required to read as they prepare for parish ministry. Furthermore, it will arguably stand among those of importance in the history of American religious thought and politics, if only because of its first-hand account of pastoring a president. Wogaman’s liberal views tint his perspective, but they do not distort his account. His words remind us that we must minister to and pray for all people, including and perhaps especially those serving in high places.

Coffin’s book impresses somewhat less. As a collection of quotations, it has some use. Coffin’s thought is profound and provocative at points, but he is the sort of pastor who would be at home on a university campus populated by liberal Christians, if not agnostics and atheists hostile to religion. Those with more traditional views of Scripture and theology or with more conservative political leanings will need to find inspiration elsewhere.

An example of Coffin’s politics is this: “President Bush Jr. rightly spoke of an ‘axis of evil,’ but it is not Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Here is a more likely trio calling for Herculean efforts to defeat: environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash with weapons” (111).

His economic views also come through, though perhaps more subtly: “Here in America we believe that our ability to make nuclear weapons is tantamount to a right to

make them. We also believe, in this land of Adam Smith, that our ability to make money is also tantamount to a right to make endless amounts of it” (98).

Elsewhere Coffin takes a shot at a particular religious leader: “... the pope was wrong only to flay the rich; he should have followed the lead of liberation theologians and told the poor to organize” (65).

This book is an easy path into the thought of an influential Christian thinker. Coffin is eloquent, artful in his rhetoric, gifted in his application of Scripture to everyday life, and no doubt will be remembered as a key voice of the Christian left. Yet, his thoughts are too conclusory to reason with or provide much material for reflection.

Wogaman’s book, on the other hand, I recommend heartily. His support for increased taxation, legislation, regulation, and growth in government will give market-friendly readers plenty to disagree with, but his sincerity is undeniable, and his sense of humor, his sensitivity, and his love of life come through clearly. To paraphrase Lord Acton, the ignorant person recommends only those books with which he agrees.

—David A. Pendleton
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Moral Theology in an Age of Renewal: A Study of the Catholic Tradition Since Vatican II
Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp.
Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press,
2003 (412 pages)

This book provides an overview of the major themes, questions, and scholars in Catholic moral theology over the past forty years. Beginning with an overview of the Second Vatican Council’s treatment of moral theology and ending with an account of John Paul II’s teaching in *Veritatis splendor* and *Evangelium vitae*, Odozor offers a systematic presentation of virtually all the major debates of recent history.

Odozor notes that the Second Vatican Council contributed to changes in moral theology, not so much by teaching anything explicitly new but by calling for a renewal of the discipline, especially by emphasizing in its very composition a “personalist” orientation.

The author treats the debate over contraception—condemned in affirmation of Catholic tradition by Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*—at length as a sort of lightning rod for a series of other debates. Not without reason does this topic come up repeatedly throughout the book. Both before and, especially, after *Humanae Vitae*, moral theologians focused on this issue as they did no other.

Other topics, not entirely unrelated to contraception, also occupied moral theologians. New approaches in biblical studies as well as Karl Rahner’s concept of “anonymous Christians” were brought into debates about the specificity of Christian ethics. What, if anything, makes Catholic moral theology different from moral philosophy?