

is already transformed into prophetic, if not systematic, theology. Combining the merits of history and systematics, Potworowski's top-notch book about Marie-Dominique Chenu's incarnational-contemplative theology should be on everyone's reading list.

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**CHRISTIANITY AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN FAMILY** by Rosemary Radford Ruether SCM Press, London, 2001. Pp. 304, £15.99 pbk.

In its commitment to 'traditional family values', the (American) Christian Right thinks of itself as reasserting the normative model of the family which is found in the bible and in particular in the New Testament. Central to this model are the ideas of the male as the breadwinning head of the family and the female as the house-keeping, child-minding and husband-tendering subordinate. In *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*, Rosemary Radford Ruether sets out to show that the Christian Right is mistaken not only in its claims for the biblical origins of its model of the family (after all, at first glance the New Testament seems to be antifamily!) but also in its claims for the normativity of this model. The book is a work in the history of ideas. It is informed by an impressive sociological scholarship about the history of (Western) forms of domesticity which makes much of its analysis hard to resist. And it is oriented to a conception of the proper role of the church in our domestic lives (as preparer and blesser of those covenants which aim to unify three forms of human love: *eros*, *philia* and *agape*) which deserves serious attention.

Ruether argues that the antifamily messages of the New Testament should be understood as a critique of actual social systems of the day in which the family was seen as the locus of pride, power and possessions by elites that marginalized most poor people and constructed hierarchies of men over women, masters over slaves, the old over the young, the 'clean' over the socially despised, ruling nations over conquered ones. The Christian church defined itself as a contrasting 'new family' that broke down such separations in a fellowship of all of us with Christ. She traces attempts over the new few centuries to reinsert the church into the existing patriarchal, slaveholding family ideologies, to create ascetic communities in the place of the family and to integrate asceticism into the family. In so doing she reveals just how inclusivist was the early Roman notion of *pater familias* in contrast with the late 20th century nuclear family notion of 'father'. She outlines debates about the relative status of marriage and celibacy and the subsequent efforts to celibatize the clergy and to christianize marriage. Ruether thinks that the church's failure to create a positive spirituality of sexuality can be traced back to the internal inconsistency between the first two of Augustine's three 'goods' of marriage (the production of children and the curbing of concupiscence) and the third (the sacramental imaging of the union of

Christ and the church). She goes on to identify the separation of home from work with the development of market economies in the late middle ages — the urban middle class of the sixteenth-century cities of Germany and Italy being a key site of the redefinition of women's 'place' — and finds in the Victorian family the gradual construction of a pattern of family that modern American society has come to imagine as normative and God-given. The product of a number of shifts in the relation of work, family and gender, the first steps in the creation of this model came with an artisan economy which located work in workshops rather than in the home and sought to differentiate the functions assigned to women from those assigned to men. As the predominantly male economic world moved to work places, the home became a predominantly female refuge from that world in which women were to fulfill their wifely and motherly 'duties'. Resistance to the separation of these spheres, and all that went with it (for example, the different educational aspirations of men and women), ultimately generated the (re)birth of feminism in the twentieth century which (together with the civil-rights movement and the antiwar movements) spawned the Christian Right's efforts to reassert the Victorian model of working husband and full-time housewife as the biblical model of the family.

Sometimes it seemed to me that Ruether oversimplifies things. For instance, were not the causes of the split between the Eastern and Western churches more complex than a difference about clerical marriage? And though I would like to agree with her that what children need from their parents is (just) the confidence that the latter will be faithful parents during the children's dependent years and continue in relationship with them for the rest of their lives regardless of whether they themselves remain in relation as a couple, I fear that divorce generally is, at one and the same time, a liberation for (at least one of) the adults and a tragedy for the children. But that said, this is history of ideas of a most informative kind. Ruether invites her reader both to recognize a multitude of ways in which familiar institutions of family life are conditioned by the social and (in particular) economic forces of the day and to evaluate these features of family life against an essentially-Christian conception of faithful friendship between one human being and another. She convinces me that a rethinking of 'family values' by people of faith requires more than a rejection of the claims to biblical authority in support of the Christian Right's views of the family: it requires careful reflection on the relationship between patterns of working and family life on the one hand and the more equitable sharing of wealth and political power within the community on the other.

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