

Scholarly Commons @ UNLV Boyd Law

Scholarly Works

Faculty Scholarship

1987

Review of J. Philip Wogaman, Faith and Fragmentation (1985)

Leslie C. Griffin

University of Nevada, Las Vegas – William S. Boyd School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/facpub>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Griffin, Leslie C., "Review of J. Philip Wogaman, Faith and Fragmentation (1985)" (1987). *Scholarly Works*. 714.

<https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/facpub/714>

This Book Review is brought to you by the Scholarly Commons @ UNLV Boyd Law, an institutional repository administered by the Wiener-Rogers Law Library at the William S. Boyd School of Law. For more information, please contact youngwoo.ban@unlv.edu.

jewels of anticipatory insight that sparkle no less today. They are diverse in source and format, ranging from the quite formal presentation, through book reports and prefaces to books, to fascinating transcripts of conversations and interviews. All well illustrate Tillich's probing mind; some will appeal to a given reader more than others depending upon particular interests. I can but illustrate from the many gems which I appreciated finding as a pastoral counselor. In the very first two pages, referring to his major theme of modern man's estrangement from self and others, and his need for reunion and wholeness (salvation), Tillich (1944) speaks to contemporary object relations theory and places it in a theological context, anticipating the work of John McDargh (*Psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory and the Study of Religion* [University Press of America, 1983]). Similarly, in a 1956 address on pastoral care, he anticipates the hermeneutical mode of pastoral counseling in the work of Charles Gerkin (*The Living Human Document* [Abingdon, 1984]) by pointing out the need of theology to emerge always from the concrete human situation, and particularly to locate God's reconciling healing via the acceptance (ultimately, of God) in the very midst of pastoral care. Elsewhere Tillich speaks with illuminating clarity to such contemporary issues as the difference and similarities between secular and pastoral counselors, of the "split" between psychiatry and religion and its potential reconciliation, of the centrality of God's salvation to the existential conditions which psychology and theology each explore, and even of feminism in theology.

My only complaint about this timely and refreshing recollection of Paul Tillich is in the inconsistent print size and quality, apparently the result of reproducing original copies without resetting. Nevertheless, for anyone who would join with Tillich in recognizing the universal and mutual features of any caring process toward health, for anyone who would affirm with him that healing is "... a continually interrupted process of reunion with oneself . . . not possible without relationship with the ultimate," this is a book I heartily commend.

John F. Messerschmitt
The Counseling Center in the Berkshires

Faith and Fragmentation: Christianity for a New Age. By J. Philip Wogaman. Fortress Press, 1985. 196 pages. \$10.95.

J. Philip Wogaman, professor of Christian Social Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary, has undertaken in *Faith and Fragmentation* a book, addressed to a general audience, which seeks to provide *foundations* for Christian ethics. Wogaman attempts to answer the question "whether Christian faith makes sense in light of the sweeping changes of our age" (ix), and does so primarily by demanding "whether it brings all aspects of life into focus" (ix).

Throughout the book, Wogaman uses an image taken from Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* to portray his concern for the fragmentation of contemporary Christian faith. It is a cup referred to by an Indian chief, who believes that God has given to every people a different clay cup, but laments that: "Our cup has broken now. It has passed away" (3). In *Faith and Frag-*

mentation, Wogaman wonders if the Christian cup—i.e., the “organizing religious perspective on the basis of which human experience is interpreted and evaluated” (3)—is now broken, “fatally disintegrated” (3).

Wogaman’s conclusion is that “Christian faith does exactly what a ‘cup’ is supposed to do. It *contains* the ongoing stream of our experience” (173). In support of that conclusion, he first lists the weaknesses of current Christian belief, next identifies the serious challenges posed to it by contemporary experience, and finally, shows how he thinks Christianity can nonetheless provide a meaningful interpretive framework in this era.

In chapter two, Wogaman explains some of the “wreckage” (12) of faith which prevents true faith and provides limited meaning. Among these are: religious nostalgia; religious feeling; liturgical formalism; institutional activism; fundamentalism; religious nationalism; religious rationalism; and social activism. Wogaman understands that some persons may find these shards better than no cup at all, but worries that fragments may obscure the brokenness of our true condition. His fear is that “almost every aspect of the contemporary religious scene can be held as a fragment of faith, expressing, ironically, a denial of the wholeness of faith” (27).

In chapter three, Wogaman concludes that religious language can be meaningful, even if we do not possess the “whole truth” (33). Wogaman employs A. J. Ayer’s distinction between “practical verifiability” and “verifiability in principle” (36) to argue that even if statements cannot be proven true or false, they can still be meaningful. We should not prescind from the quest for meaning, therefore, but should glean clues from our knowledge of reality, clues which will aid us to construct a “metaphorical approach to ultimate reality” (38)—a cup which provides a viable interpretation of experience. To do this, Wogaman introduces a general test for revelation—“Does revelation in fact bring reality into focus for us?” (44). For if revelation contradicts our experience, if we cannot *live* according to it, then we have fragmented faith, a broken cup.

In the remaining chapters of the book, Wogaman confronts the challenges posed to Christianity by contemporary culture. These problems include: the anthropomorphic metaphor; conflicting cosmologies; Christian perspectives on the self and on society; the problem of evil; the church; and the relationship of Christianity to other religions. In each of these chapters, Wogaman demonstrates how twentieth century knowledge—scientific dismissals of obsolete cosmologies, psychological insights into the human person and into religion; cultural relativism; and the strength of other religions—seems to undermine Christian faith. Then, chapter by chapter, Wogaman attempts to show how Christianity can still be meaningful.

An example is provided by Wogaman’s treatment of the problem of evil in chapter eight. The Holocaust and persistent racism are identified as serious contemporary challenges to traditional Christian resolutions of this problem. Wogaman’s response to one type of evil—moral evil—is to insist on the “relationship between God’s love and human freedom” (129). That is, “to be capable of freely pursuing good purposes, people must also be capable of freely pursuing evil ones” (129). Christianity can respond to this problem in a mean-

ingful way, therefore, because “trusting love,” “to trust the goodness of the power beyond ourselves” is the “enduring antidote for evil,” “the only escape from the morass of anxious motivation” (132).

Chapter eight illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of the book. Wogaman is at his best in identifying and acknowledging the sources of brokenness in contemporary Christian faith. Yet his response to these “fragments” is frequently disappointing. That is, Wogaman seems to move rather quickly to affirming or asserting the relevance and appropriateness of the Christian interpretation of reality; but his arguments in support of Christianity are not sufficiently detailed, and therefore not always persuasive. Such detail might provide even stronger evidence for an acceptance of the possibilities of Christian faith in an age of fragmentation.

Leslie Griffin
University of Notre Dame