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Rieger's "No religion but social religion: Liberating Wesleyan theology" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Rieger, J. (2018). *No religion but social religion: Liberating Wesleyan theology*. Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church. 133 pp. \$23.67. ISBN 9781945935169

Joerg Rieger, an ordained United Methodist minister and professor of theology at Vanderbilt University, begins with the oft-quoted John Wesley statement, “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness,” (p. vii) and welcomes the reader into a dialogue between Wesleyan theology and multiple expressions of liberation theology. Rieger highlights the common ground shared by Wesleyan and liberation thought by sharing the voices of a host of theologians from all around the world. The breadth of perspectives Rieger includes enriches the reader’s understanding of both historical and current contexts in which these theologies have developed and continue to deepen. While his primary aim is to highlight the commonalities between Wesleyan and liberation theologies, Rieger is careful to also elucidate the distinctions between liberation theologies and both conservative and liberal doctrines.

For Rieger, theology develops through experiencing the grace of God at work in the midst of life’s struggles. This “grace under pressure” is the shaping influence of theological understanding in both liberation and Wesleyan thought. Wesley’s own theological understanding developed and matured not through abstract study but in practical service ministering to and learning from people as they struggled with the tensions of life. The influence of such pressures is explored through investigations of Wesleyan and liberation understandings of sin, salvation, God, the church, and the Bible.

Rieger directs the dialogue between theologies toward a conclusion which he describes as deep solidarity. Following Rieger’s conclusion, three chapters are presented from guest authors who are Methodist theologians from Brazil: Paulo Ayers Mattos, Helmut Renders, and José Carlos de Souza.

Rieger’s writing is accessible to the general reader without backing away from deeper theological matters. The chapters contributed by other authors have moments of opacity for lay readers, but even non-theologians will be able to follow their central

arguments and see the connections between their work and Reiger's themes. This book is a valuable resource for both general readers and scholars in the discipline interested in deepening their understanding of the common ground between Wesleyan and liberation theology.

Reviewer

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