

## Reviews

**MORAL DISCERNMENT  
IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE:  
Essays in  
Theological Ethics  
by James M. Gustafson.  
Edited by Theo A. Boer and  
Paul E. Capetz. Library of  
Theological Ethics Series.  
Louisville, KY: Westminster  
John Knox, 2007. Pages, xxii  
+ 261. Paper \$33.00**

Boer and Capetz have selected articles that provide a compilation of one of the most formative ethical figures of our time. In order by date (1965-1998) they show the development of Gustafson's spectrum of work. The reader will come away with an understanding of contemporary ethical dilemmas, their theological underpinnings, as well as Gustafson's own position. Gustafson illuminates complex topics and often repositions the discussion as well. As he explains in the preface, most of the articles were written to clarify "controverted matters" in ethical discussion or frame the ethical conversation going forward.

Chapter 1 provides a survey and critique of the debate between context and principles, then reframes the question using four base points used by ethicists for

Christian moral discourse: situational analysis, theological affirmations, moral principles, and the nature of the Christian life. A definition and exploration of Christian moral discernment is the topic of chapter 2, followed by the role of the gospel in this discernment process in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 applies some of the insights from the previous chapters in a real life situation regarding a couple, their healthcare provider, and the issue of corrective surgery for their child born with Down's Syndrome.

Written in 1980 and 1981, chapters 5 and 6 consider the orientation of life as "theocentric" for Christians (78). It is not enough to understand Christian history, tradition and theology. Living the Christian life means a radical re-orientation of life from human-centered to God-centered. This is a developmental process of human maturation that in many ways is biographical for Gustafson. Here the reader will see the integration of the person with his theology and life work in ethics.

Chapter 7 outlines Gustafson's understanding and positioning of sexual ethics. He considers how ethics determines which behaviors are instinctual or part of natural human behavior, versus behaviors resulting from a moral decision or choice.

Medical ethics from a Protestant and then a Catholic point of view begins the next article in chapter 8. He critiques the historical view, traditionally anthropocentric, in favour of a more integrated view that includes the relationship of human beings to each other, to God and to other species of life on the planet. Medical ethics, thus, must be concerned with all of life, not just human life.

Reflecting on our life's work is the topic of chapter 9. From a Christian perspective, Gustafson notes that pride and competence provide meaning, but it is also important, as Christians, to realize that our work contributes to the health and well-being of all, God's vision — something larger than the work of any individual.

In chapter 10 Gustafson compares the cultural concern with preservation of life at all costs as at odds with the fundamental Christian belief that our life continues beyond our death. Therefore, we need not focus disproportionately on extending life in this world.

Engaging the world while not succumbing to it is the task of Christian theology, Christian communities and those Christians participating in the life of the university. In chapter 11 Gustafson focusses on the temptations of secularism.

Chapter 12 is a concise article written in 1986 defining what makes Christian ethics essentially "Christian". This makes an elegant segue to chapter 13 surveying the interaction of Protestant and Catholic ethics. While this is a historical narrative he also lifts up future trends such as Catholics moving toward more flexibility and Protestants moving to an appreciation of casuistry.

Entering the 90s in chapter 14, the editors revisit the topic of medical ethics with an article examining the narrowing of them to a focus on extreme cases from a legal point of view. Here the author highlights four types of discourse (ethical, prophetic, narrative and policy) and the importance of employing all four in order to more fully develop a comprehensive medical ethic.

Gustafson returns to the touchstone of Scripture, but with a twist in chapter 15. Rather than applying biblical themes to ethics (traditional method) he writes, "I begin with the questions of ethics and inquire how biblical materials might answer them" (199).

The book concludes with an article summarizing 50 years of American religious ethics (1948-1998). Trend development and major shifts in thinking are highlighted allowing the reader to

see how Gustafson's writing contributed to shaping the field of ethics and moving developments in Christian ethics forward.

— Roxanne M. Meshar

**NOAH'S OTHER SON:  
Bridging the Gap Between  
the Bible and the Koran  
by Brian Arthur Brown  
New York: Continuum  
Books, 2007 242 pp, cloth.  
\$26.95**

A "happy" prophecy seems an oxymoron, at least within the biblical definition of the term, but Brian Brown may actually have achieved such an anomaly in this study of the Koran and the Bible. In fact, not only does Brown seem prophetic in both the context and content of his project to illustrate the inherent richness of studying each text in the light of the other — thus enhancing understanding among the three "peoples of the book", Jews, Christians and Muslims — he seems positively prescient. On October 13, 2007, just months after this book was released, 138 Muslim scholars marked the close of Ramadan by sending a letter to Christian leaders appealing for a strategic dialogue between Christianity and Islam. As staid a periodical as *The Economist* noted

that, "as inter-religious initiatives go, (this) was spectacular".

Brown employs the tragedy of 9/11, and the even greater tragedy of the ill-conceived response to the horror of the World Trade Center attack, as his starting point. Setting the stage through an erudite examination of the foundational texts of both the Koran and Bible, and in particular the pre-Abrahamic stories of Noah and Noah's other son — the rebellious Canaan drowned in the flood — Brown strides into the midst of the complex cast of characters as the three great religions know and love them, adding new insight in the correlation of Arabic versions of familiar names and life stories, and details breathing new life and insight for Jew, Christian and Muslim alike.

The result is a sharing of what has been a pilgrimage, leading the author into the country of myth in the Joseph Campbell sense, where Brown has settled down and made it his own. Having pitched his tent, he invites the sojourner to join him, making both the scholar and the serious amateur more than welcome.

His style is engaging, sometimes humorous, but invariably respectful. He wrestles with complex issues of literary and historical criticism, and the vexing field of comparative textual analysis, and succeeds in rendering them accessible but never