

In fact, Bradshaw himself expounds an evangelical, Anglican theology as a result of his deliberations.

A number of Bradshaw's Christological thoughts are stimulating. Moreover, Bradshaw has excellent insights into the problem of suffering and how to live life as a Christian in practice, including how prayer relates to these. Overall, when Bradshaw includes scriptural references in his discussion, these are usually very helpful. A quite stimulating part of Bradshaw's discussion is his view of predestination and human free will, whether one agrees with his position or not. In this, Bradshaw takes thoughts from process theologians in order to build a suitable model to the question. Bradshaw is against predestination, and emphasizes human free will, yet he thinks that God knows and is in control of the future in a broad sense. In relation to free will, Bradshaw believes that praying is active, something which can change the mind of God, rather than something which wishes to ask for the fulfilment of something predetermined.

On the other hand, there seems to be a certain circularity included in a number of Bradshaw's arguments. One suspects that Bradshaw has evangelical theology and a particular doctrinal position within it in his mind already at the outset, a result which his philosophical arguments subsequently lead to, even though his philosophical arguments also expand the preconceived position. Here one also needs to ask a further methodological question: How should one mesh scriptural and philosophical arguments in order to form as correct a picture of God and theology as possible?

According to the back flap, Bradshaw's book is a part of a series which has been intended especially to 'those engaged in Christian pastoral ministry, whether as ordained ministers or lay leaders in the congregation', and 'hopefully' to committed enough ordinary church members as well. The book fits well to this category. It is not a starter for learning about doctrinal issues. Rather, it is a book which may provide help through introduction to and further reflection especially of, even though not limited to, the philosophical questions which surround prayer and the main doctrinal issues of Christianity for those who already have a reasonably good understanding of Christian doctrine.

Pekka Pitkänen
Cheltenham, England

EuroJTh (1999) 8:2, 193-194

0960-2720

At Eternity's Gate: The Spiritual Vision of Vincent Van Gogh

K. Powers Erickson

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans
1998, xviii+192 pp., \$22, H/B, ISBN
0-8028-3856-1

RÉSUMÉ

On considère habituellement que Van Gogh a abandonné sa foi chrétienne lorsqu'il a cessé son ministère de missionnaire protestant et qu'il est entré en conflit avec les membres du clergé qu'il côtoyait. Le présent ouvrage montre cependant que les racines de sa foi n'étaient pas calvinistes, ni même évangéliques, mais basées sur le modernisme hollandais de Groningue, dans la ligne de la pensée de Schleiermacher, et que ses croyances ultérieures sont demeurées dans cette ligne d'un piétisme subjectif sans contenu doctrinal. L'auteur étudie aussi les diagnostics de la maladie de Van Gogh pour conclure à une forme d'épilepsie qui le laissait parfaitement maître de ses facultés entre les crises. L'ouvrage fait preuve d'un arrière-plan théologique impressionnant et se montre très convaincant.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Von Van Gogh wird normalerweise angenommen, daß er dem christlichen Glauben absagte, als er seine Tätigkeit als protestantischer Missionar einstellte und mit seinen im kirchlichen Dienst stehenden Verwandten brach. Das vorliegende Buch macht jedoch deutlich, daß die Wurzeln seines Glaubens nicht kalvinistischer oder evangelikalischer Art waren, sondern im Modernismus der Groninger Schule sowie im Modell Schleiermachers begründet lagen, und daß seine späteren Überzeugungen durchaus im Einklang standen mit einem nicht an die kirchlichen Doktrinen gebundenen, subjektiven Pietismus. Der Autor setzt sich außerdem mit verschiedenen Diagnosen zu Van Goghs Krankheit auseinander und kommt zu der Schlußfolgerung, daß er unter einer Form von Epilepsie litt, die es ihm gestattete, zwischen den Anfällen uneingeschränkter Gebrauch von seinen Gaben und Fähigkeiten zu machen. Die Beleuchtung des theologischen Hintergrunds ist faszinierend, und die Studie ist im großen und ganzen überzeugend.

This is a book challenging two common 'myths'—that Van Gogh rejected Christianity

to become an artist, and that mental illness contributed to his artistic insight. Whereas Erickson seeks to show that Van Gogh's illness was only an interruption to his art, and that his faith, re-cast in modernist form, informed all his work, especially that of his last two years.

If Erickson is right, classic images will need to be reinterpreted. In particular, the famous 'Crows over a Wheatfield' from his last year, which has usually been read as an overwhelming of life (the wheatfield) by trouble and death (clouds and crows), Erickson sees as a Bunyanesque journey of life (the roads) leading through death (the cornfield ready for reaping) to a restoring eternity (the blue infinite).

This book needs to enter, then, into the debate about Van Gogh's mental troubles, and also to show from his letters that his faith continued to be active after he left the church. On both counts the argument seems to be successful. The original diagnosis was non-convulsive epilepsy, which still makes sense today, though there may have been a depressive condition as well. There is also evidence of his faith recovering, in transmuted form, in his last years, not least from three biblical subjects painted while in hospital. From the letters Erickson also infers that sunshine, wheatfields, olive groves and reapers also have biblical overtones. This may perhaps be debated.

But there is much more to this book than its main argument. For by unpicking the major theological influences on the young Vincent, Erickson goes a long way to explain the core of his art, the appealing combination of charity and zeal, individualism and subjectivism that has made him such an icon of the modern age. Theology, seems to have been translated, very influentially, into paint.

Van Gogh's antecedents, back to the C17, were both artistic and theological. His uncles were art dealers, his father was a protestant missionary to the Catholic peasants of south Holland, not a Calvinist, but a moderniser of the Groningen school. Groningen, formed out of Arminianism and pietism, emphasised experience—'religion resides in feeling'—and replaced a doctrine of atonement with a demanding requirement to emulate Jesus; or as the author puts it, 'Human beings are relieved of the burden of sin by following the example of Christ and trying to imitate his life' (p. 19). This modern, but not particularly merciful doctrine helps account for the rigours of Vincent's self-deprivation when evangelising destitute miners, and perhaps also his sense that any churchmen whose sacrifices were less extreme must be hypocrites. Van Gogh's other

close spiritual guide, the uncle with whom he was to quarrel, took Groningen theology further, rejecting the supernatural, critically investigating the Bible, and reducing the fundamental principle of Christianity, in Opzoomer's words, to 'the oneness of the Divine and the human'.

These were not the only influences on the young Vincent, who seems to have had an evangelical conversion while in London, which alarmed his relations, who feared fundamentalism. Later he became enamoured of the modernising of Renan. But the consistent themes of his faith are those represented in his art; subjective experience, self-sacrifice, devotion to the poor, alienation from institutional religion, and a readiness to encounter God (mystically apprehended) through nature.

Erickson writes with strong empathy for her subject. If there is a weakness, it is that sometimes her argument seems overasserted, tempting her, for example, to use the term 'Christian' for phases of Van Gogh's religion which are scarcely to be distinguished from unbelief. One should perhaps remain cautious about the 'Christian' label. But at the very least she has shown that the trials of faith in the modern age were integral to Van Gogh's being and at the core of his art.

David Thistlethwaite
Leicester, England

EuroJTh (1999) 8:2, 194–196

0960–2720

***Biblical Text and Texture—A
Literary Reading of Selected Texts***
Michael Fishbane

Oxford: Oneworld, 1998, xiv + 142 pp.,
£8.99, pb, ISBN 1-85168151-5

RÉSUMÉ

Fishbane commence par une brève présentation de sa théorie littéraire, dont l'élément clé est la distinction entre la 'réalité littéraire' du texte et la réalité de l'histoire ou de l'expérience qui est extérieure au texte. Cette réalité littéraire s'appréhende le mieux en considérant des procédés stylistiques (comme par exemple la répétition d'un mot thème) qui sont des indications pour le lecteur de ce que l'auteur souhaitait mettre en avant, accentuer et communiquer. Le reste du livre (la plus grande partie) applique, à titre d'exemple, cette théorie à trois types de textes de l'Ancien Testament: le cycle narratif, le discours direct et la