
This book is the third in a series, the second of which was reviewed in *CHRC* 88 (2008), 302–305. The two parts of this volume deal with “Experience through Metaphor” and “Experience through Drama.”

David Brown first discusses Logos and Mystery, making comparisons and contrasts between Logos and Kabbalah. He comes to the conclusion that “it is the Kabbalah’s sense of the mystery in words that theology most needs to hear today” (p. 33). He compares this with a trend in the medieval church to be preoccupied with the precise words used in the sacraments, as if the very words of institution or absolution effected the transubstantiation or absolution. In chapter Two Brown argues for a more extensive use of metaphor to enrich our understanding and experience of God. So, instead of being content with a single meaning of any one metaphor, we should recognize that they are “multivalent; that is, they allow our imaginations the possibility of moving in more than one direction” (p. 68). This is commendable, but nothing new. Good teachers have always sought to encourage a range of possible interpretations. As in the previous volume, there are times when Brown states what seem to be commonplaces. He seems to be aware of that, at least occasionally, when he writes of one such instance, “That thought is hardly new” (p. 21).

The day before the Inauguration of Barack Obama, I had to smile as I read footnote 83 (p. 96), where Brown claims, “American democracy is essentially a plutocracy, where only the wealthy can get elected, which makes it scarcely surprising that there has never been a president from any of the minority races.” Obama was not born rich, nor did he take the best-paying jobs that were available to him, but he did know how to raise money. He is now the first African-American President. Brown makes this comment discussing how governments can be exclusive rather than inclusive. If he were to look closely at the Obama administration he would be surprised at how inclusive it is, in comparison with recent times.

Chapter Three is devoted to hymns and psalms. Here he echoes what many people may feel on the subject. Brown urges us to consider what will aid people’s experience of God and what will not. He discusses different styles of psalms and hymns and songs, as well as the music they are set to. He makes rather a strong statement that Calvin was “adamantly opposed” to hymns. It is true that Calvin thought that the Psalms of David were the most appropriate to be sung. But his general requirements were that the songs be “not only
honourable but also holy, which are to be like needles to arouse us to pray and praise God, to meditate on his works, in order to love him, hear, honour and glorify him.” What greater work of God could we meditate on than that of the life and death and resurrection of our Lord? We do not find these narrated in the Psalms! Calvin approved of the *Strasbourg Psalter* of 1545. The hymn, “I greet Thee who my sure Redeemer art” (*Je te salue mon certain Redempteur*) is ascribed to Calvin, and although we cannot be certain that it came from his pen, the contents sound very Calvinian. Calvin also recommended the singing of Simeon’s Song, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles’ Creed. So he certainly opened the way to hymn singing, even if he did not compose any hymns himself.

At the beginning of chapter Four Brown asserts that “the traditional Protestant contrast between words and images cannot be allowed to stand. Words are potentially just as seductive as images, and so inherently in just as much danger of misleading the worshipper into idolatry as any visual image” (p. 110). Brown devotes some pages to the history of preaching including the role played in it by rhetoric. Over against those who would elevate the Word over any visual representations he points out that the Bible is full of visual imagery and therefore we should not be afraid of using visuals in our places of worship. He complains that “not uncommonly” Scripture passages are read without any form of introduction, even failing to clarify who the “he” or “she” in a particular passage is (p. 115). If that is indeed as common as Brown implies, it may not be for the reasons that he provides, namely, the “superstitious reverence” of the Bible, which, if it were applied to statues or relics of saints would border on idolatry. Another reason could simply be that people are expected to be so familiar with the Word, that they would know who was referred to by pronoun in any given passage. That is not to say that there should not be introductory remarks prior to the reading of Scripture, just that there may be other reasons for not doing so.

Brown’s comments about verbal and visual images centre around the question of whether the visual ones pose a greater threat to belief than the verbal ones. He concludes the chapter with a plea for a “more rounded view of the totality of the types of senses that contribute to the reception of divine revelation” (p. 143). In other words, we should use the visual no less than the verbal.

In Part II, “Experience through Drama” Brown explores the function of drama in the ordinary and in worship. Sometimes it is difficult to determine where Brown’s own convictions lie, as when he asserts, “Both Händel and Goethe were concerned to portray human life as no mere plaything of the