

Fowler's work raises at least two questions: (1) Despite denials to the contrary by the author, is there a danger in categorizing the evangelicals into compartments that are too rigid, as Fowler may be doing with his four groupings? (2) Does there come a time when the diversity which Fowler commends ceases to be a religious strength and becomes a religious weakness? These criticisms do not detract from the validity of Fowler's basic conclusion that during the years 1966-1976 consensus within the United States in general "slipped away . . . to be replaced by a world of factions, sometimes warring, sometimes co-existing" (p. 241). The evangelical community did not stand outside this process but participated in it as fully as did the rest of the country.

C. Allyn Russell
 Department of Religion
 College of Liberal Arts
 Boston University

THE PROMISE OF NARRATIVE THEOLOGY, George Stroup; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981, 288 pages, \$8.50.

The twentieth century has been the setting for the development of two important and interdependent movements: the emergence of narratology in literary criticism and the subsequent rise of narrative theology in religious studies. In the course of my review of George Stroup's book *The Promise of Narrative Theology* I shall argue that the diverse literary critical and theological work focussed on the amorphous category "narrative" is noteworthy not because it constitutes the beginning of a new breakthrough nor because it sheds new light on old problems. Rather this work deserves our attention primarily because it clearly exemplifies and amplifies the content and character of the present crisis in contemporary philosophical, literary critical and theological thought and practice. In other words, narratology and narrative theology, though aspiring to overcome the present crisis, is (in its dominant professional form) itself a paradigmatic symptom of this crisis.

For our purposes, an insightful genealogy of narratology should begin neither with the Russian Formalism of Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky, the Prefaces of Henry James, nor the linguistic acrobatics of French structuralists. We must start with the unpopular defenses of literary realism advanced by Georg Lukács and Erich Auerbach against the rising tide of high modernist literature. This tide was promoted and encouraged by the New Criticism of I.A. Richards, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom and, above all, T.S. Eliot. The realism of Lukács and Auerbach can be characterized by the following claim made by Lukács in his famous 1936 essay "Narrate or Describe?"

Only through deeds do people become interesting to one another. Only through deeds do they become worthy of poetic portrayal. The basic features of the human character can be revealed only through deeds and actions in human practice. (*Marxism and Human Liberation*, p. 119)

Similarly, both supported Auerbach's depiction of literary realism in his powerful chapter on Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert in his magisterial work, *Mimesis*:

The serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject-matter for problematic-existential representation, on the one hand; on the other, the embedding of random persons and events in the general course of contemporary history, the fluid historical background. . . . (p. 491)

Lukács and Auerbach are appropriate starting points for our inquiry because they defend precisely what the category of "narrative" connotes in Anglo-American narratology and narrative theology: the primacy of intentional human agency (be it radical choice for Kierkegaardians, nuanced confession for Barthians or praxis for Marxists and liberation theologians), the centrality of community, and the quest for historical and personal intelligibility. Yet, like Lukács and Auerbach in decades past, contemporary Anglo-American narratologists and narrative theologians are put on the defensive in our culture owing to persistent assaults on those three central theses by modernist and postmodern literature, theory and ethics.

Strategies of play, silence and performance, as developed within contemporary literature, call into question intentional human agency, the possibility of nourishing human relationships and the value of historical and personal continuity. In philosophy and literary criticism, epistemological holism, linguistic contextualism and textual idealism—all formidable attacks on the referential power of language—transform quests for intelligibility into either local linguistic affairs or elusive rhetorical operations. In fact, for Jacques Derrida, the late Paul de Man and other deconstructionists, narratives are the opium of the people. They are rhetorical operations of conventional codes which not only sustain illusory sequences of linguistic constructs (such as selves or agents) and rhetorical effects (such as actions and events) but also conceal the linguistic play of differences that make possible these illusory sequences, agents and events.

In regard to ethics, the breakdown of political liberalism has made suspect its two major pillars: utilitarianism and Kantianism. As Alasdair MacIntyre has persuasively argued in his provocative book *After Virtue*, the secular pleasure-centered teleology of utilitarianism and the universal categorical status of Kantian-supported norms have been unmasked by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. The fiction of utility which regulates our bureaucracies and the fiction of rights which guides out political behavior have been disclosed as disguised wills to power.

In light of this crude and sketchy picture of the modernist and postmodern malaise, the emergence of narratology and narrative theology is to be understood as a barricade against the onslaught of critical attacks on human agency, history, meaning, intelligibility, community, virtue, character and, most importantly, narrative. In this sense, narratology and narrative theology are first and foremost nostalgic attempts to revive lost traditions (Aristotelian, Christian, *Gemeinschaften*) and recover waning values. Such attempts are similar to the sophisticated nostalgic anti-modernist responses in the later W.H. Auden (of *About the House* and *City Without Walls*), Hannah Arendt's longing for classical public intercourse in *The Human Condition*, Heidegger's obsession for Pre-Socratic conceptions of Being and the later Lionel Trilling's veneration of the small-scale intimacy of Jane Austen's world.

If my sketch is plausible, then it should appear as no accident that narratology and narrative theology arise in staunchly anti-modernist camps: that of humanists marginalized by a scientific, technocentric culture, of religious humanists even more marginalized by a post-Christian academy as well as alienated from middlebrow religious constituencies, and of intellectuals of the downtrodden on the edges of modernity. To put it crudely, the emergence of narratology and narrative theology is symptomatic of contemporary humanist, religious and/or political resistance to the processes that have resulted in the fragmented communities, lives and discourses—the ruins of the West—that we inhabit: the Weberian processes of rationalization (e.g., bureaucratization, impersonalization) and the Marxian processes of commodification (e.g., dehumanization, thingification).

Yet each form of resistance bears the mark of the context from which its specific version of narratology and narrative theology arises. Humanist narratology and narrative theology arises. Humanist narratology (over which hovers the ghost of Auerbach) is pre-eminently Kantian in its major structuralist and Anglo-American forms; this Kantian foundation is evidenced by its search for the fundamental nature of necessary and sufficient conditions for narrative. Religious narratology (or narrative theology) is primarily Barthian with Wittgensteinian and metaphysical realist poles; it attempts to defend the rendering of the revealed Word of God, i.e., Jesus Christ, in the biblical narratives of the Christian tradition. Narratives of the downtrodden (over which hovers the ghost of Lukács) are basically Marxist, although they may have feminist and racial additions in modern contexts and some religious manifestations in Third World contexts. The Marxian influence is easily recognizable in their concern to organize and mobilize newly industrialized peoples against prevailing structures of domination.

George Stroup's *The Promise of Narrative Theology* is an exemplary text of the second sort, of narrative theology with a Barthian slant. What is distinctive about this text is not its smooth hypnotic prose which is palpable to a general readership nor its Barthian reformulations in a narrative mode. Rather its distinctiveness lies in its professed provincialism, in both its content and scope. It not only speaks to church people; it also speaks exclusively about the church and its practices. Its central problematic is the crisis in Christian identity.

The crucial theological issue of our day is . . . whether the Church can rediscover the sense in which it stands in and lives out of a tradition, reinterpret that tradition so that it is intelligible in the contemporary world, and offer a clear description of Christian faith which makes it relevant to the urgent questions and issues of modern society. (p. 24)

As a Christian and one who takes the life of the church seriously, I view this project as notable and desirable. It has been the task of Christian theology since the advent of modernity. Surely, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, Barth, Brunner and Tillich would assent to such a task. Yet Stroup's prejudices, prejudgments and presuppositions become apparent in his characterization of the four central symptoms of this crisis in Christian identity: the silence of Scripture in the life of the church, the church's loss of its theological tradition, the absence of theological reflection at all levels of the church's life and the inability of many Christians to make sense out of their personal identity by means of Christian faith. Even if these symptoms are widespread in most middle class and ruling class American churches, this conception of the present theological crisis leads one to suspect that it may be self-serving. This suspicion grows from the fact that this conception constitutes a central portion of the Barthian problematic, with glib liberal moralism and captivity to modernity as its major culprits, and is confirmed when a few pages later we read,

The attack on neo-orthodox interpretations of revelation reflect at the level of the Church's intellectual life the crisis in identity which Christians were experiencing at the more primordial level of lived experience. (p. 40)

My point here is not to diminish the monumental theological achievement of Barth nor to downplay Stroup's ingenious recasting of Barthian insights and doctrine in narrative terms. Rather I want to accent the degree to which the attempt to understand our present postmodern crisis as roughly the same as Barth's problematic is itself indicative of a much deeper and more profound crisis of Christian identity in religious narratologies of the second sort. In agreement with Stroup I should also add that Ebeling's naturalization of revelation in human words or Pannenberg's warmed-over Hegelian notions of universal history do not suffice in such matters.

Although the external manifestations of many characteristics of postmodern industrial societies may appear to resemble similar phenomena in times past, these characteristics, e.g., the biblical illiteracy, historical amnesia, ecclesiastical obsession with finance and public image and the congestion of narratives in the marketplace of identity-formation, have different roots roles and functions than their predecessors. As Guy Debord has argued in his influential *Society of the Spectacle* and Jean Baudrillard in his *Toward a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, we live in amnesiac societies saturated with flashing images, quick informa-

tion and consumer sensibilities. Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas writes in his notable essay "Story and Theology,"

In our everyday life we are often impatient with the storyteller. . . . Stores were for slower times when we did not need to get things done. (*Truthfulness and Tragedy*, p. 77)

And Walter Benjamin adds in his masterful piece "The Storyteller,"

Every morning brings us the news of the globe and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling. Almost everything benefits information. (*Illuminations*, p. 89)

In other words, the very processes which inform consumer societies render problematic the authority of the story—communal, familial, religious or personal forms of memory—and leave us with nothing more than a series of random experiences organized according to no "hierarchy of significance." Such fractured living constitutes the content and character of what Alan Wilde has called the suspensive irony of postmodern literature, the radical vision of multiplicity, randomness and contingency in a world with no hope of coherence, continuity and community. "With a true sense of the randomness of life's moments, man is at peace with himself—and that peace is happiness" (Jerzy Kosinski, *Contemporary Literature*, 1978, p. 142).

The theological response to this situation is not simply to reinvolve Barthian conceptions of scripture and faith in narrative modes. Rather it may be to envision a mode of theological discourse which no longer assumes a position of privilege, which preserves its distinctiveness while immersing itself into the personal and collective struggles of the day. A ritualistic gesture of asserting the authoritative status of biblical narratives without an elaborate defense of such narratives over against the major competing narratives in the culture will only further frustrate the formation of Christian identities. In this regard, Christian students of contemporary literature are far ahead of Christian theologians.

On the philosophical front, two problems continue to plague any sophisticated Barthian formulation of narrative theology: an allegiance to metaphysical realism and a maintenance of a version of the Myth of the Given, the appeal to interpretation-free events and experiences. Wittgensteinian and functional perspectives (like those of Charles Wood and Hans Frei) in narrative theology sidestep metaphysical realist claims about the referential character of biblical narratives yet tend to obscure the divine self-disclosive character of these narratives.

In contrast to such perspectives, Stroup is open to nonreferential claims about the creation and patriarchal stories (p. 233), yet he holds strongly to the referential claims of the crucial New Testament narratives. In cautioning narrative theologians about reducing truth into meaning, he writes,

There may be other narratives, even religious narratives, in which the question of truth and meaning can be collapsed, but such is not the case with Christian narrative, for at its center it makes claims about what has taken place in history and those truth claims are historical assertions. (p. 236)

Given his admittance that metaphysical speculation about the reality and nature of God "is a necessary theological task" (p. 245), it is quite plausible to hold that Stroup subscribes to some version of metaphysical realism. Lastly, Stroup's crucial distinctions between chronicle and history (p. 114) and history and narrative (p. 236) are confusing. On the one hand, he is cautious against any form of the Myth of the Given. On the other hand, if chronicles are interpretation-laden, then history is an interpretation of a primitive interpretation and narrative is an interpretation of an interpretation of a primitive interpretation. It then becomes unclear how this latter claim is to be reconciled with his referential or metaphysical realist claims about certain gospel narratives.

In conclusion, narratology and narrative theology will continue to flourish primarily because their very existence is rooted in fundamental symptoms of and noteworthy responses to the contemporary crisis. There are good reasons to believe that the nostalgia upon which they feed will grow. And the talent they have attracted ensures development. Yet they will prosper and progress when—like their political counterparts on the edges and margins of modernity—they confront more fully the realities of postmodern culture, consumer society and post-Barthian Christian thought and practice.

Cornel West
 Union Theological Seminary
 New York City

ANGELS AND PRINCIPALITIES: THE BACKGROUND, MEANING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAULINE PHRASE *HAI ARCHAI KAI HAI EXOUSIAI*, Wesley Carr; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, xxii + 242 pages, \$27.95.

There are two schools of thought on the role of hypotheses in investigation. One holds that the scholar has a moral obligation to test and judge his or her own hypothesis in the light of the evidence and, if it does not stand up, to abandon it without publication. The other holds that any hypothesis for which a case can be made is publishable; it then becomes the task of other scholars to confirm or disconfirm its correctness.

Wesley Carr's *Angels and Principalities* is an example of the latter mode of investigation. The author is capable of exceptional research. His historical sense is