

Christ the Reconciler: A Theology for Opposites, Differences, and Enemies, by Peter Schmiechen. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K. 1996. 179 pp. \$16.00. ISBN 0-8026-4178-3.

Schmiechen analyzes the church's situation and proposes a way for the church to be more faithful. Chapter one presents American religion as having the shape of individualism, which grows out of liberty, and the substance of functionalism, which values institutions and individuals to the extent that they do something. Chapter two sets forth a typology of images of the church: sacramental participation, confessing the faith, rebirth in the Spirit, acts of justice, confessing our unity, covenantal community, pilgrims and seekers, and solidarity with those who suffer. Most churches include several of these, often resulting in conflicts. Chapter three shows how four cultural factors (emphases on difference, suffering, anger, and ideological warfare) exacerbate these divisions. Chapter four presents the answer to this situation: the gospel of reconciliation, starting at the cross of Jesus Christ. Schmiechen articulates a crisis-reconciliation motif of atonement from 1 Corinthians 1-2. Chapter five argues that the church must be rebuilt on the basis of reconciliation.

Schmiechen's goal is ambitious, because the gospel is ambitious. "A theology for opposites, differences, and enemies" could be naïve, but this is not. Schmiechen realizes the depths of the problems of alienation. And he has learned that the gospel is intended to answer that question. His insights into American religion help us understand the air we breathe in our churches. One could quibble with the typology, but we have seen them all. To realize how cultural polarizations infect the church is sobering. The heart of his proposal, an understanding of the atonement based on contesting claims of wisdom and power, is a fresh application of the

gospel to his specific analysis of the human condition. While other theories of the atonement address mortality, sinfulness, and meaninglessness, this one addresses alienation. These are not exclusive, but this is precisely the emphasis that needs to be made today. His proposals for the church flow directly from it.

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