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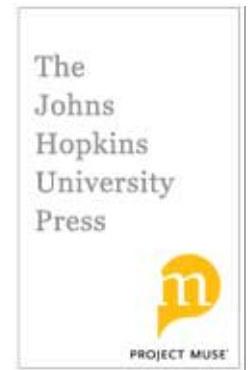
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*Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English: The Poetics of All Believers* by Gregory Kneidel (review)

William Gentrup

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(Review)

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but does not account either for that absence or the success of those works. In *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara fails to find redeeming love, but Davis does not argue that Rhett Butler's famous parting line gives the novel any "fearful power." And in his examination of four postcolonial texts, Davis also concedes that meaningful redemption is virtually absent (though readers may be surprised when he makes this concession regarding Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*). Finally, Davis concludes that, based on his reading of these four works, "the popularity of this new kind of novel may indicate a cultural shift of tremendous significance, perhaps indicating that many readers no longer expect or hope for any final redemption in their lives" (97). Davis relates this shift to "the move of western society away from religion, and from Christianity in particular." But how this shift relates to these non-western, postcolonial texts is never established. And given Davis' thesis that "the pattern of creation, fall, and redemption is the foundation of *all* literature" (emphasis mine), these exceptions, without being adequately accounted for, undermine the book's central argument.

In establishing his basic premises in the first chapter, Davis does bring into the discussion theorists and philosophers as varied as Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov, and Terry Eagleton. But he does not present his theory in relation to the work of other scholars exploring the intersection of the Christian faith and the study of literature. Rather, mention of scholars such as Leland Ryken, Ralph Wood, David Lyle Jeffries, Roger Lundin, and Susan Gallagher occurs only in the book's appendix. While Davis acknowledges that Ryken's work contains significant parallels to his own, the other scholars function primarily as foils. Deeper engagement with work already done in this area of scholarship is needed to lend credibility to Davis' views.

*Reading for Redemption* embraces an ambitious goal, seeking to establish that creation, fall, and redemption are the mono-myth upon which all literature is based. And while the argument that Davis presents is not entirely convincing, it does leave me to wonder if and hope that the idea is provable in some way. There is much in the book that is reasonable and persuasive, and the book points toward a theory of practical criticism that could be embraced by a wide and diverse group of Christian writers. It is a good direction in which to point.

Charles Pastoor  
John Brown University

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***Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English: The Poetics of All Believers.*** By Gregory Kneidel. *Early Modern Literature in History*. Eds. Cedric C. Brown and Andrew Hadfield. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. ISBN 978-0230573680. Pp. viii + 203. \$85.00.

I was first asked by the *Sixteenth Century Journal* book review editor to review this volume. Extra duties and pressures at work caused me to miss his deadline. A year and a half later, *Christianity and Literature* asked for a review of the same book (after the first reviewer chosen returned it). In the end, this seems a more suitable venue because an alternative view of Paul would probably be more appreciated by *C&L* readers.

This densely-written study has a promising thesis. It attempts to approach Christian literature of the English Renaissance, so heavily influenced by Reformation subjectivism, from a different theological angle. Instead of the traditional focus on individual sin, guilt, angst, and salvation representative of the Augustinian-Lutheran interpretation of Paul's theology, it looks for the influence that Paul's other scriptural teachings had on early modern English literature, particularly the concept of the "poetics of *all* believers," by which Professor Kneidel primarily means Pauline teachings about the church, communal life, and even universal salvation. In the history of Western thought Reformation theology is viewed as having been a chief cause of modern introspection, anxiety, subjectivity, and individualism. Kneidel wishes to draw attention to how "major writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries struggled to conceptualize an enduring, collective, public ethic of all believers" based on other scriptural *topoi* in the writings of Paul that emphasize "corporate Christianity," "a Christian identity based in communal life ... threatened by a growing spiritual individualism" (3). He attempts to examine this thesis in very specific places in the works of Spenser, Daniel, Donne, Herbert, and Milton, who, he claims "reformulated corporate Christianity using a scriptural vocabulary that has been overlooked by literary critics more interested in inwardness, subjectivity, and selfhood" (3).

In practice, applying this focus of "Paul's complex ecclesiology" (4) to English Renaissance literature amounts to giving attention to such matters as church continuity and unity, communal order and coherence, messianic rhetoric with its inherent dichotomy between fulfillment and delay, and humanist rhetoric deployed (as Paul did) in the defense of his teachings and controversies in the church, among others (5). While some of these issues seem directly related to ecclesiology, others do not, and hence there is sometimes a disconnect created by Kneidel's exegesis of Renaissance literature as it branches away from his main thesis of alternative communalism versus mainstream individualism.

The bases of these ideas are the following scriptures in which Paul emphasizes a more universalized gospel identity: "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22); "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28); Rom. 9-11, especially 10:2 ("there is no difference between the Jew and the Greeke"), in which Paul deals with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles while expecting the fulfillment of a universalizing providence (10). This Paul is "our contemporary" (13), a multiculturalist if you will. He does not advocate

the abolition of all identities of race, religion, gender, etc., but the harmonization of them; he does not annihilate all Jewish traditions in his gospel but shows how there is continuity between the old covenant and the new.

As with the scriptural sources, only a few literary passages are employed to illustrate this thesis. Sections of Cantos 1, 10, and 12 of Book I of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, *Musophilus* by Samuel Daniel, four sermons on the conversion of Saint Paul by John Donne, two poems and a few paragraphs from *The Country Parson* by George Herbert, and, in two separate chapters, some passages of *The Reason of Church Government* and Adam's soliloquy in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton comprise the lot. For such a big idea one would expect more manifestation in less obscure places. To be fair, the author admits that this particular view of Paul did not prevail in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and that only "traces" of it "influenced the period's scriptural poetics" (8). Much close reading and ingenious exegesis is required to elucidate the topic. The "universalist vocabulary of expecting, anticipating, fulfilling, repeating, waiting, remaining, and delaying" (17) is deployed by these poets for the purpose of advocating, like Paul, "common norms among the many forms of communal life and cultural identity" (19) within the English church. At least that is the plan. The resulting analysis sometimes seems only remotely related.

For example, the chapter "Spenser and Messianism" begins by allegorizing the "old dints" on Redcrosse's shield as the wounds of Christ, and then, via St. Bonaventure, St. Francis, and Calvin on Gal. 6:17 ("I bear the marks of Christ"), these stigmata are interpreted as related to the "continuity" of Christ's warfare (33), and hence, I suppose, church continuity (the main theme). The rest of the chapter is determined to associate Redcrosse with messianism (instead of apocalypticism) in Canto 10, through his "recommissioning" as a "saintly aristocrat" by the hermit Contemplation, and in Canto 12 through connecting him to Moses. Messianic time takes over in Canto 12: Eden's fulfillment is "suspended" because Redcrosse leaves to serve Gloriana. These disparate elements, along with numerous digressions, do not cohere and do not say much that is significant about Spenser's use of Paul's concepts of corporate belief. I think Kneidel wants us to learn that Spenser consciously imitates Paul's notion of the fulfillment/delay dichotomy of messianic prophecy to say something about the English church, but the discussion of the idea does not persuade and, indeed, loses the reader.

As another example, in the last chapter, "Milton and Delay," Kneidel argues that the delay of punishment of Adam in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* can be compared to Paul's "messianic, 'already and not yet' rhetoric" (147). Yet, we are told, Adam's questions about the delay of God's justice are based on Milton's use of two classical sources: Plutarch's "On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance" and the "feminine laments of Ovid's *Heroides*"(!). Kneidel justifies the detailed exposition of these works because they were part of Paul's Greco-Roman world. And yet again, we are told that "Paul was not preoccupied by the delay in divine punishment" (156); he

was more concerned about the delay in the Second Coming. And so the exegesis of Adam, Plutarch, and Ovid are only *analogous* to Paul's teaching: "If Adam's soliloquy means anything, it shows that Milton, like other post-Reformation writers, had to rely on secular, Greco-Roman, and non-Pauline themes in order to give literary life to their version of Paul's theology" (160). This is typical of Kneidel's methodology. The literature chosen for explication is analyzed according to some framework (neo-Stoicism, property contracts, humanist rhetoric) that is only tangentially or analogously related to the universalist theology of Paul. Heterogeneous elements seem yoked together. The persuasiveness of the argument does not go much further than the following abstraction: "Thus English verse is to humanist poetics and the English nation is to human civilization as diverse members are to the mystical body of Christ" (73).

*Rethinking the Turn to Religion* might be considered a learned book. There are excursions and diversions into many theological, cultural, and literary byways, but the overall argument of the book just does not cohere.

William Gentrup

Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies

***The Fullness of Knowing: Modernity and Postmodernity from Defoe to Gadamer.***

By Daniel E. Ritchie. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-1-932792-17-1. Pp. ix + 281. \$54.95.

Daniel E. Ritchie's *The Fullness of Knowing: Modernity and Postmodernity from Defoe to Gadamer* attempts to connect epistemological questions raised by postmodernism to similar questions asked by eighteenth-century figures in response to the rise of the Enlightenment. Chapter five is an exception, however, as it compares the worst excesses of the French Revolution to what Ritchie believes are the worst excesses of the political correctness movement in U.S. universities. Ritchie's *Fullness of Knowing* is strongest in its treatment of eighteenth-century material and in exploring confluences between his eighteenth-century material and his twentieth, but weakest with his twentieth-century material, especially when he is engaged in polemic against it.

Chapter one juxtaposes the epistemological conflicts surrounding Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* with Lyotard's claims about knowledge in *The Postmodern Condition* and Rorty's later extension of these claims. The epistemological question considered in this chapter is about the nature of the truth provided by narrative. According to Ritchie, Enlightenment thinkers assume that each narrative's veracity is determined by its ability to contribute to and be understood within the confines of a metanarrative. This view is, of course, contradicted by Lyotard's and Rorty's