



be called to account. Today, however, the realities of our globalising age exceed the immediately personal. Lines of accountability between one person's actions (e.g., in earning a salary with pension benefits) and their effects (as mediated through the many and various companies in which pension funds are invested) are difficult to trace. It is amidst these complexities of globalising economics, trade and communications, and not only the actions over which people of privilege have personal control, that the problem of sin and guilt must be faced. What ethic can respond to these realities without collapsing under the weight of truth? What theology of incarnation and redemption is available to people of privilege learning to face this guilt?

Todd Peters's *Solidarity Ethics* starts on the path we need to be taking, but much remains to be done. This relatively short book provokes anyone with money enough to buy or otherwise read it to begin, or to continue, a long journey of lifetime change.

Wesley Vander Lugt, with foreword by Samuel Wells, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics*

Ashgate Studies in Theology, Imagination and the Arts (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). xiv + 241 pp. £65.00. ISBN 978-1-4724-1943-9 (hbk)

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How are we to imagine the task of theological ethics? Can there be an over-arching holistic vision or must we accept the inevitability of sub-divisions, specialisations and separate schools of thought whether relating to subject matter (applied ethics, sexual ethics, business ethics, medical ethics etc.) or different approaches (virtue ethics, biblical ethics, ecclesial ethics, casuistry etc.)? In this book, based on his St Andrew's doctoral thesis under Trevor Hart, Wesley Vander Lugt, now pastor of a church in North Carolina, offers a highly readable, stimulating and creative vision. The dramatic model developed in recent scholarship is deepened, through an inter-disciplinary rooting of it in the literature on theatre. It is also taken to a new level of theological rigour and complexity by his careful combination, revision and extension of earlier, generally more piece-meal articulations, and through his demonstration that 'theology can dialogue with theatre without losing its grounding in divine revelation' (p. 4).

The opening chapter helpfully surveys the literature in terms of nine movements which comprise 'the theatrical turn' he discerns within recent theology, often developing the earlier turn to narrative. It also introduces the key theologians he will interact with throughout his work, notably von Balthasar, Kevin Vanhoozer and Sam Wells. One weakness he identifies and ably rectifies is that 'theologians who promote the theatrical turn draw on a myriad of theatrical terms and concepts but often in an inconsistent and uncritical manner' (p. 14). He therefore clarifies his key terms—drama, script, theatre, performance, improvisation etc.—and his preference for speaking of theatrical theodramatics in order to avoid simply epic or lyric theology (to use von Balthasar's terms). Considering various inter-disciplinary methods, Vander Lugt favours looking to

‘theatrical theory and practice as a model for Christian theology and practice ... that contains many metaphors’ (p. 23) and proposes that this model will prove its value if it is able ‘to explain reality in relation to divine revelation, expand theological knowledge, and exert practical influence’ (p. 24, repeated in epilogue at p. 202).

The heart of Vander Lugt’s model is then set out in chapter 2 and structures each of the following six chapters: that theological ethics can learn from the dynamic, reciprocal interplay of *formation* (‘the preparation, development, and growth of actors towards excellence and a readiness for particular roles and performances’, p. 29) and *performance* (‘what happens on the stage before an audience’, p. 29) that sum up the entire theatrical process. Furthermore, the heart of formation is *disponibility* while the heart of performance is *fittingness*. Theological ethics learns from this by understanding *theodramatic formation* in terms of transformation and conformity to Christ-likeness and of preparation for roles in the theodrama. It views *theodramatic performance* as ‘the entire lives of individuals and the church on the world stage’ (p. 31), and then explores the constant interaction and interweaving of formation (character, virtue etc.) and performance (action, decisions etc.).

The emphasis on disponibility (his English rendition of *disponibilité*) in ethics is one of the book’s most significant contributions. Within theatre, disponibility speaks of the actor’s disposition of openness and receptivity in multiple directions—to playwright, script, other actors etc. This ‘is a condition that creates a readiness to perform, but is also a condition that matures throughout and as a result of performance’ (p. 40). Vander Lugt shows how disponibility has been taken up by a variety of theologians but never in as systematic or multi-dimensional a manner as in this work. His key for doing this is to use the model, in each subsequent chapter, to propose an analogy between a dimension of theatre and theology in which he explores the nature and development of ‘theodramatic disponibility’ in terms of ‘receptivity or availability’ to God and also to Scripture, the church, tradition, mission and context. A similar analysis is offered in relation to fittingness: an improvisational act in which, ‘just as actors in the theatre pursue well-crafted performances that fit with the script or developing story, the director’s guidance, other actors, performance traditions, the audience, and the context, so also actors in the theodrama seek a comparable form of performative wisdom’ (p. 54). His systematic examination of how different aspects of theatre have their analogues within theological ethics is one of the work’s most thought-provoking elements and gives a clear structure to his wide-ranging thesis.

Given that ‘theodrama involves the interaction between God and others on the world stage’ (p. 61), that God’s action is primary, and that our fundamental disponibility and fittingness is to be in relation to God, it is right that Vander Lugt begins the outworking of his model in relation to God as Trinity (chapter 3). Adapting von Balthasar’s triad he suggests Father as playwright, Son as protagonist and Spirit as producer and, taking each in turn, explores the analogy and how we develop disponibility and fittingness to each person and even discover ourselves ‘participating in the disponibility and fitting performance of God the playwright, protagonist, producer’ (p. 63). The chapter is illuminating in many ways, for example in showing Christ’s disponibility to Father and Spirit and Scripture in his ministry/performance, but also confirms that, as Vander Lugt admits and signals in a number of places, the roles are ‘an analogical and by no means perfect model

for God's triune being and action' (p. 62). Not only is there the recognised need to qualify the analogy on the basis that *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, there is the difficulty of having such a predominant protagonist, especially in improvisational theatre which is essentially collaborative (p. 71). Furthermore, the Spirit proves to be not only producer but director and also to enter the drama, while the nature of the Father's role as playwright raises a number of questions: does such authorship cover Scripture, salvation history, or all history, and how does this relate to our freedom as actors? Vander Lugt addresses the latter but his account, although clear, is inevitably brief, as often in a book covering so much ground (pp. 68–69). It also raises a question of the model's limits in terms of substantive theological content: he favours 'fittingness to God as a playwright who continues to be involved in the play in order to provide a paradigm and direction for free and fitting performance' over (a more Calvinist?) 'fittingness to pre-determined roles' or (a deist?) 'jettisoning authorial fittingness in light of an absent playwright' (p. 69). The reasons for this are, however, not set out, and whether and how the model might help in assessing such different theologies—or indeed evaluating competing ethical judgements—is never explored.

The dramatic model has already been given much attention in relation to Scripture. Vander Lugt's fourth chapter explores various approaches, all with significant problems, before developing an alternative in which he describes Scripture not as a script but as a transcript and prescript ('a collection of adapted performance transcriptions serving as prescriptions for further performance', p. 94), also providing a sense of how the play ends. This recognises Scripture is not a script we simply perform verbatim but acknowledges Scripture's authority as part of God's own performance in the theodrama. It also has a place for describing the plot which gives unity to Scripture and the theodrama. In dialogue with Tom Wright, Wells, Bartholomew and Goheen, and others, he proposes a six-act plotment structured around *formation*, *deformation*, *three-stage transformation* and *re-formation*. Here again he provides a good critical account of existing proposals while adding his own creative contribution. This is then related to developing biblical disponibility (drawing on *lectio divina*) and biblical fittingness both to specific texts and to the whole plot through an act of theodramatic imagination (cf. Hays). The proof of the pudding will be in the eating but one weakness is that Vander Lugt doesn't offer a thorough worked example.

Faithful improvisation in relation to Scripture occurs within the church, conceived as 'the company of actors who are witnesses to and participants in the performance of the triune God' (p. 124). Drawing on philosophical and theological accounts of the relational self (e.g., respectively, Marcel and Zizioulas), Vander Lugt's fifth chapter describes how in 'local companies' we interact with fellow Christians and learn disponibility and fittingness. Here we have some of the most detailed examples of how his theatrical model explains reality and provides practical insights: brief but illuminating lessons on status and power plays and on the importance of not 'blocking' what we are offered by other performers but of 'over-accepting' their gifts so they are included in the performance. In one of his most elaborate outworkings of theological lessons from theatrical theory and practice, his discussion of Stanislavski's method of role identification and Brecht's of role distance sheds light on how imagination enables those in Christ 'to keep role identification and role distance in proper balance, living the eschatological tension at the heart of character formation' (p. 139).

All theatre happens in the context of multiple theatrical traditions, and the relation of contemporary performance to these offers an analogy for the role of Christian tradition in theology and ethics. There is less engagement here with the theatre literature, but Vander Lugt helpfully shows how tradition and improvisation relate, before exploring disponibility and fittingness in relation to, in turn, Tradition (understood as the gospel or rule of faith), specific traditions, and particular saints as paradigmatic performers. He argues that ‘disponibility to living tradition guides theodramatic formation and performance between the Scylla of deadly repetition and the Charybdis of rootless innovation’ (p. 159).

Thus far the theatre has appeared as a closed world and the resultant theological ethic would have little relation to ethics more widely. The final two chapters rectify this by introducing the audience, and hence a missional perspective, and the theatrical environment, whose relation to formation and performance is seen as analogous to that of context—specifically of creation and culture—in theological ethics. Particularly in relation to audience, the discussion highlights a tension: the model seeks to work with theatre in as broad a sense as possible, and yet different forms of theatre will yield different theological models. Vander Lugt describes a spectrum from traditional through interactive to experimental theatre and notes how they result in different models of church and mission. Portraying traditional theatre as a fundamentalist church separate from audience and experimental theatre as destroying the distinction between church and world, he explores how interactive theatre provides a more fruitful set of insights with a focus on hospitality. Similarly, in relation to culture, he navigates between accommodation and isolation as, drawing on Brueggemann, he describes how ‘contextual formation and performance can be described in terms of cultural description, counterscription and inscription’ (p. 194). Again, however, a worked example or two would have helped. It would also be interesting to extend his method and consider whether cultures may be seen as performances of an alternative drama to the theodrama and if so how his model would need to adapt.

In conclusion, Vander Lugt’s work offers a rich vision of theological ethics in which ‘theological understanding, holistic formation, and ethical performance are processes occurring in an interconnected matrix of Trinitarian, biblical, ecclesial, traditional, missional and contextual relationships’ (p. 202). The attempt to cover so much ground in a few hundred pages explains the book’s limitations and weaknesses—but these are more than compensated for by the way in which he demonstrates his model’s creativity and gives hints of its fruitfulness. These cry out for further development, and for practical outworking in relation to some of the contemporary challenges Christians face as they seek to become dispoible and faithful performers in the theodrama, and so live lives worthy of their calling (Eph. 4:1).