

Toxic Spirituality: Four Enduring Temptations of Christian Faith, by ERIC W. GRITSCH. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. 199 pp. \$22.00.

The history of Christianity is riddled with traditions or movements that have done more damage than good. Gritsch, understanding this to be true, argues for what he considers four toxic Christian traditions that “ignore, indeed reject, the biblical view of Christian life as shaped by the sin of idolatry and as an interim between the first and second advent of Christ” (4): anti-Semitism, fundamentalism, triumphalism and moralism.

Each “toxic” tradition is given historical analysis, with a focus on how Protestants and Catholics have fallen prey to these traditions. What becomes most helpful is how Gritsch concludes each chapter with a clear and concise summary of a way of thinking that will curtail the dangers of the toxic tradition. In what follows I will briefly highlight the four traditions Gritsch takes to task and mention his anecdote to the toxic waters of each tradition.

Anti-Semitism is the prejudice against a biological heritage, whether it is Jews or Arabs or any other ethnic group. After giving a quick history of the term, anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism are separated. Giving a history of anti-Judaism, Gritsch shows how a theology of supersessionism emerged. To overcome anti-Semitism, Gritsch offers his perspective of what a Pauline theology of the relationship between Jews and Gentiles should be.

Fundamentalism is defined as bibliolatry, an excessive adherence to a literal interpretation of the Bible. Gritsch breaks up fundamentalism into two categories: Protestant and Catholic. Protestant fundamentalism employed the slogan *sola scriptura*, claiming that the Scriptures are timeless truths. Catholic fundamentalism equals ecclesiastical infallibility, which is guided by the drive for spiritual security (77). Both claim to possess unquestionable, infallible truths. To move away from fundamentalist attitudes and perspectives, Gritsch offers a hermeneutic that views Scripture as a collection of testimonies dealing with creation’s experiences with God.

Though never fully defining triumphalism, Gritsch gives a history of how various heritages, both Catholic and Protestant, have sought triumphalist methods to establish themselves as “a” legitimate Christian tradition or “the” legitimate Christian tradition. He argues triumphalism is toxic because the proponents of triumphalistic means have sought to prepare the world for the second advent of Christ through the use of political power, exemplified at times in violence. Over and against triumphalism, Gritsch offers an ecclesiology that sees the church as a “penultimate community, existing in the interim between Christ’s ascension and second coming at the end of time” (126).

Gritsch defines moralism as the institutionalization of moral behavior through prescriptions and modes of confession in the church. Against moralism should be a spiritual formation based upon a Christ-centered faith that is both penultimate and eschatological in nature (149). Gritsch offers a catechumen process for this type of spiritual formation.