



2007

# Review of Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology, by Sheila Greeve Davaney

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## Recommended Citation

Review of Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology, by Sheila Greeve Davaney. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 61, no. 4 (October 2007): 456.

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undertaken seriously, it is bound to lead to respect for the way those conclusions have been reached and expressed, and to deeper understanding of the issues under discussion. Readers' own conclusions are likely to be more thoughtful, more circumspect, and more adequate to the complexity of their lives than they might have been without the help of this book.

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### **Historicism: The Once and Future Challenge for Theology**

*by Sheila Greeve Davaney*

Fortress, Minneapolis, 2006 197 pp. \$18 00. ISBN 978-0-8006-3219-9.

SHEILA GREEVE DAVANEY'S study traces over 200 years of historicism, which, broadly defined, is a method that acknowledges the historical character of human existence and of all human activity and institutions. Historicism places all human beings and activity within the context of time and place, emphasizing particularity and contingency over generalities and permanence. Because of its suspicion of any claims for permanent validity or absoluteness, it has been and continues to be, as Davaney's subtitle suggests, a "once and future challenge for theology."

Davaney traces the history of historicism through its origins in the late eighteenth century, its dominance in nineteenth-century Germany and its decline following the First World War, and then its American expression in the early twentieth century, and its resurgence over the past twenty years. Davaney is particularly careful to avoid presenting an artificial, monolithic historicism, offering instead what can best be described as a history of historicisms that are irreducible to a core of shared convictions and assumptions.

A particular strength is Davaney's historicist approach to historicism itself, taking care to place her subjects in their broader social, political, and intellectual contexts. A defining characteristic of historicism is its rejection of permanence and absoluteness, and its insistence on self-criticism and continuing revision of its claims and conclusions. Each representative of historicism discussed in her study is subjected to the same criticism and

the same pragmatic test. Each falls short, according to Davaney, because they either fail to carry out a thorough historicizing of their own method or conclusions, or fail to pass the test of pragmatic value.

In the last chapter, Davaney offers her own proposal for a historicist theology, or what she terms a "pragmatic historicism" (p. 144). A pragmatic historicism combines elements of past historicisms, yet it seeks to move beyond the shortcomings of each by thoroughly historicizing every aspect of its method and its presuppositions and by emphasizing the pragmatic implications of theological claims. Davaney's own proposals on the basis of her historical survey set this study apart from other introductions that often fail to move on to the constructive task.

This introduction is intended for students, clergy, academics, and interested laypersons. It has much to offer anyone interested in the history of modern theology in particular or the history of ideas in general.

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### **Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics**

*by Willard M. Swartley*

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2006 542 pp. \$34.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-2937-5.

WILLARD SWARTLEY'S WORK is informed by two objectives. The first one is constructive, namely, to "focus and honor the contribution that the various NT books and authors make to an understanding of peace" (p. 9) and "peacemaking as the core component of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ" (p. 12). Putting years of teaching and writing to good use, Swartley devotes ten of the fifteen chapters to careful analysis of the distinct ways in which the various writers address peace and peacemaking. He precedes the textual analyses with a broader focus on the relationship of peace to the larger horizon of the reign of God, and also situates the NT understanding(s) of peace in relation to the theme in Hebrew Scripture. The final three chapters, heavily influenced by the thought of René Girard, focus on the importance of peacemaking as the imitation of God.

He does more than mine the text for nuggets