

Nate Devlin

Letter on *Christ Plays*...

A good start, Nate. I'm pleased that you give so much attention to the conversational element in the writing. I don't spend much time writing about "conversation" as such, but I have long been convinced that conversation is the only form suited to spiritual theology. The style in itself goes a long way to preserve spiritual theology from four of the major diseases, quite regardless of the content: the moralistic, the impersonal didactic, the pietistic, and the "inspirational" (spiritual reduced to the level of sentimental).

Your suggestion that these papers be crafted in letters provides the right form—personal and relational. I think this is going to work.

A word about a word. In dealing with the Exodus plagues, exorcism is the word. You use excise as a synonym. Excise is a surgical word, cutting out or removing something. Exorcise is the church's word for casting out evil, or demons—getting rid of the bad spirits.

I was a little disappointed that you didn't comment on the final part in each section: "Cultivating the Fear of the Lord..." As I wrote this I was trying to find a way of providing a biblical way of participating in the Trinitarian energies of the Godhead without "taking over." I avoid the term "spiritual disciplines" that you at one point referenced as allowing us to take charge of our part in living the spiritual life, the Christ life. I also avoid the term "application" as if after God does his work, we take over and apply it.

Fear of the Lord as particularized in Sabbath-keeping (a matter of *not*-doing), baptism (something done to us in which we are passive), and the eucharist in which all we do is receive what is given) are the primary ways in which we are formed in Creation, History, and Community. I'm not the only one who has noticed this, but in contemporary writing on spiritual theology, I am not aware of anyone who has given as much weight to it—made it the "wrap-up" conclusion to each section, an appropriate act of participation that enters into or in which we let ourselves be present to the "presence" but in which we don't comprehend it but are comprehended by it.

I intended this as a major assault on cultural American spirituality.

Your words on Dr Bitar are focused. I am pleased that you are stocking up on poetry.

Penciled check marks in the margins call attention to matters of grammar.

Looking forward to your next letter. (I will be away in England/Scotland from September 1-16).

8.20.09