

JAMES LODER'S *THE LOGIC OF THE SPIRIT* IN HUMAN THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE



Dana R. Wright and Keith J. White, eds. *The Logic of the Spirit in Human Thought and Experience: Exploring the Vision of James E. Loder, Jr.* Foreword by John S. McClure. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014. Pp. xxv + 357. ISBN-13: 978-1625646897. \$42.00 (hb).

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This anthology is the production of former students of the late James Loder and other professionals committed to Loder's visionary proposals and to expanding them into a research program far-reaching in impact. It represents the results of a 2012 conference sponsored by the Child Theology Movement (of which coeditor Keith White is the Director). Conference presentations have been carefully compiled by Loder's former student, Dr. Dana Wright, and are included in this volume along with Wright's short intellectual biography of Loder and his to-date complete bibliography of all works by and about Loder.¹ The conference, and the publication of this anthology, may well prove to have been especially timely for the future of Loder's scholarly impact, given the suddenness of his death in 2001.

Dr. Loder was Professor of Practical Theology at Princeton for four decades. His expertise was multidisciplinary, spanning theology, psychology, Christian education, philosophy and science. But especially remarkable and significant to his work and legacy were two personal spiritual encounters that transformed him and led him to explain it and to render transformation the *sine qua non* of his scholarly proposals in all areas, including his pedagogy and counseling. His life and work became the steady endeavor to bear witness to the reality of the Holy Spirit's transformative involvement in human development, Christian education, and practical theology, presenting such transformation in a way that it accords fundamentally with science.

Loder's major works are *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (1982; rev. ed. 1989); *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit*

in *Theology and Science* (1992; co-authored with personal friend, physicist, W. Jim Neidhardt); and *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (1998). Just prior to Loder's death, he sent for publication a manuscript entitled, *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit*. At that point, Loder told Wright, "This is to be my legacy!" An additional valuable contribution that Wright makes to *The Logic of the Spirit in Human Thought and Experience* (hereafter *Logic*) is a detailed summary of that manuscript.²

These four works represent the key loci of Loder's scholarly vision, which is explored in this collection of essays. Thus, my brief description of each will double as a summary of this book's central concerns. *The Transforming Moment* is Loder's highly creative, sophisticated, and dense account of "convictional experiences"—that is, of an individual person's actual experience of the convicting presence of God the Holy Spirit.³ In it he offers his "logic of transformation," or the five-fold knowing event: 1) conflict-in-context, 2) interlude for scanning, 3) insight felt with intuitive force, 4) release and repatterning, and 5) interpretation. Readers familiar with Polanyi will easily recognize the similarity of this to Polanyi's subsidiary-focal integration, as did I. Indeed, Loder cites Polanyi's work in that discussion, and he concurs that this, and not the Deweyan scientific method, describes scientific discovery.⁴

Also in *Transforming Moment*, Loder offers his account of the four dimensions of humanness: 1) the lived world, 2) the ego, 3) the Void, and 4) the Holy. Loder argues that standard accounts of human development fail because they take into account only the first two dimensions. The Void, which is the threat of nonbeing, and the Holy, which is the gracious intrusion of the possibility of new being, are essential to fully developed humanness. Loder shows that the driving dynamism of all knowing is rooted in this developing structure. He shows that transformation is essential to human development to maturity and flourishing. And for the purposes of his case for convictional knowing, he argues that this transformative dynamic of knowing and of human being becomes the "grammar" the Holy Spirit "commandeers" in any instance of encounter with God. These analyses of Loder's are evident and further employed throughout the Wright and White anthology.

In *The Knight's Move*, Loder and Neidhardt seek to articulate how theology and science share fundamental accord because the Spirit of God prompts every scientific discovery, even as She prompts every convictional encounter.⁵ It was critically important to Loder to reconcile his logic of transformation with science, and he felt that apart from such an account of knowing and being, science itself falls short of the mark. That is because underlying both theology and science is a reality that is relationally structured.⁶ The relational structure of reality is evidenced most clearly in the Chalcedonian understanding of Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human (13).

According to Wright, Loder “took his analysis of the power of convictional experience and the ground of conviction in the Spirit of Christ to develop a theological and interdisciplinary scientific explanation of human development” (15). As mentioned above, Loder has offered an account of human development through four dimensions. These four dimensions may be diagrammed using a horizontal and a vertical axis: the world and the ego occupy the horizontal axis, and the Void and the Holy anchor the vertical axis at bottom and at top, respectively. Now Loder expounds on “socialization”—what I take to be the horizontal axis—and “transformation”—the vertical. Transformation is “a patterned process whereby in any given frame of knowledge or experience, a hidden order of meaning emerges with the power to redefine and/or reconstruct the original frame of reference” (17). This is “the logic of the Spirit,” as well as the transformative relationality of reality that is central to Loder’s vision. Apart from this redemptive transformation, socialization is entropic, such that death dominates and haunts life. This entropy may be observed on the psychic level, the social, and the cultural—even in macroeconomics and among nation-states. The fourth book, the unpublished manuscript, *Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit*, would have fleshed out the implications of this thesis for education and for educational ministry.

Even this severely brief representation of the argument easily suggests the critical importance, and at the same time the courageous riskiness, of Loder’s frontal challenge to modern Western thought and culture. And it is easy to imagine the concerns and creative possibilities that would occupy a collection of contributors committed to furthering Loder’s vision. Indeed, the Wright and White anthology never departs from these commitments. Loder needed no help to render his proposals interdisciplinary; the anthology only reflects and works to continue the extension and to deepen it. With this background regarding Loder and his work, specifically, now, we can appreciate the distinctive contributions of the anthology.

First, consider the Child Theology Movement, and contributions that link it to Loder’s ideas. The vision of Director Keith White, also coeditor of this anthology and convener of the 2012 conference, was directly influenced by Loder’s work. CTM is not about theology for children, as one might suppose. Rather, it is committed to taking seriously the significance of Jesus’ iconic gesture to respond, in a theological dispute, by setting a child among his disciples (Matthew 18). The gesture suggests that the adults’ theological debate is wrongheaded when it comes to understanding reality and truth. The child holds a key to the nature of the kingdom of God, and to relating to Jesus (xx). The kingdom of God is not, “*pace* Harvey Cox,” human progress, or a Babel-like, adult, totalization of system. Rather, reality comes graciously to those in the posture of a child in simple, direct, intimate, humble, anticipation of its (and His) coming.

Obviously this has implications for children and child development and education. But it must have implications for adults equally. CTM associate Haddon Wilmer

contributes the proposal that links forgiveness with Loder's description of a child's uncanny capacity to construct the world, to create a future that is indebted to but not controlled by the past, in which the past is totally reworked and reconstructed as new forms of relating self and environment emerge.⁷ (It is easy for a Polanyian to see that this is subsidiary-focal integration.) Wilmer concludes that forgiveness is not the verbal, contractual, speech act we commonly suppose, so much as it is *this* reconstruction of relationship. Thus, it constitutes the person, and it is the distinctively childlike thing the Savior had in mind.

Also notable is New Testament theologian Elizabeth Waldron Barnett's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 13, "the love chapter."⁸ She argues that when the Apostle Paul says, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me," (v. 11) he is contrasting childlike behavior to the defective behavior described at the beginning of the chapter as deficient because it has nothing to do with love. Thus—surprise—he is not calling us to turn away from childlike behavior, but rather to return to it. This brings 1 Corinthians 13 directly in line with Jesus' injunction in Matthew 18. Barnett explicitly values Paul's—and Loder's—and CTM's—stance as a much-needed, direct challenge to the individualist, rationalist, progressivist, chauvinist, developmentalism of Western modernity.

Another key emphasis in this anthology, closely related to the Child Theology Movement, is the implication of the logic of the Spirit for psychological human development. Both emphases hold important implications also for education, for childhood education, for Christian education. Various essays address these implications.⁹ One very helpful application is that of Lutheran pastor and former Loder student Mark Koonz, regarding "the healing of memory as a pathway to transformation."¹⁰ Koonz relates, verbatim, Loder's personal guidance of him through Koonz's encounter with a young male delinquent. He shows that a person may experience real healing of tragically haunting personal memories by inviting Christ into them. This is a specific way in which the logic of the Spirit may be tapped for real psychic healing and human flourishing.

Finally, Dana Wright wraps up the book with a comprehensive essay that has application to nothing short of life itself, and which sounds a last-ditch, clarion call regarding the critical value of Loder's vision for the future of everything. In "A Tactical Child-Like Way of Being Human Together: Implications from James Loder's Thought for Post-Colonial Witness," Wright contrasts the devastating "burden" of Jack Burden, from Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, to engage in the aggressive, dominating, ultimately self- and other-destructive "strategic defense initiatives" typical of modern Western imperialist progressivism, with what he calls "tactical" engagement, a kind non-acquisitive engagement with life that is only possible from the stance of "holy

insecurity,” a radical vulnerability only possible as a result of redemptive transformation: the gracious, person-constituting, freeing love of God, which therein no longer retains any crippling “place” to defend. “Christ calls us to participate existentially in a relational Reality that cannot be ‘possessed’ or ‘secured’ to our own advantage, even as we come to ourselves in that relationality and receive our life over and over again as gift. We live in and through the ‘no-place’ of Face-to-face relationality through which we are ‘taught of God’ . . .” (313). This alone makes full human flourishing, necessary to love, possible—where love is, according to Loder, “non-possessive delight in the particularity of the other” (1). Indeed, to quote the essay’s epigraph from Irenaeus, “The glory of God is humanity fully alive” (291).

Thus, what appears at first glance to be a stodgy exercise typical of academics, self-absorbed enough to produce a book of their humble convening, turns out to overflow with healing, vibrant, and valuable application, as well as hope. I commend the work of James Loder to the reader, along with Wright and White’s collection, for existential transformation that far outstrips academic curiosity.

ENDNOTES

¹Dana R. Wright, “*Homo Testans*: The Life, Work, and Witness of James E. Loder, Jr.,” 1-30; “Loder Bibliography,” 333-57. Up to the time of Loder’s sudden death, Wright was in regular professional conversation with him. Wright also produced Loder’s festschrift: *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology* (Eerdmans, 2004). Dr. Wright contacted me last year at the point that he discovered that my work appropriates Loder’s (*Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011)). Subsequently he invited me to speak at the church in Everett, WA where he serves as Director of Christian Education.

²Dana R. Wright, “*Educational Ministry in the Logic of the Spirit: A Loder Legacy?*” in *Logic*, 155-203.

³I found and engaged *The Transforming Moment* entirely without the benefit of commentary from other scholars; now reading Wright and White’s collection of essays brings me satisfying confirmation of the importance of Loder’s work and it expands my insight as I continue to work with his ideas. And since his proposals involve transformation, I myself have firsthand experience of that transformational dynamic, both in my own life and pedagogy, as well as in the lives of the majority of my students. I must also note that I have appropriated portions of Loder’s argument to support my own proposal of covenant epistemology, which it emphatically underscores; but that is not to say that covenant epistemology fully represents Loder’s own agenda.

⁴Wright notes that Loder references Polanyi’s saying that good science requires fiduciary passions and “prolepsis,” or anticipatory glimpse, in an essay called “The Place of Science in Practical Theology: The Human Factor” (*International Journal of Practical Theology* 4 (2000), 22-44). See *Logic*, 6.

⁵I confess that I have yet to read these later books of Loder’s.

⁶It appears that Loder drew on the work of Polanyian T. F. Torrance to build this argument—see *Logic*, 2.

⁷Haddon Wilmer, “Forgiving Constitutes the Person,” in *Logic*, 58-77.

⁸Elizabeth Waldron Barnett, “James E. Loder and Paul in Conversation; Discourses of Development and Disruption” in *Logic*, 78-102.

⁹Keith J. White, “Child Theology, Loder, and Holistic Child Development,” 33-57; Jerome W. Berryman, “*The Transforming Moment* and Godly Play,” 105-30; Lauren Sempstott Foster, “Pedagogical Implications of Loder’s Theory of Transformation,” 143-54; Wendy Hinrichs Sanders, “Walking Alongside Children as They Form Compassion: Loder and Lerner in the Role of Relationships and Experience as Interactive Developmental Process,” 268-89; all in *Logic*. One essay I have not noted elsewhere in my review is Ajit A Prasad’s “Transformation of the Ego; A Study via Sudhir Kakar and James E. Loder,” *Logic*, 243-67. Prasad, an expert in both Loder and in Hinduism, shows by means of this positive comparison the value of Loder’s work for understanding other faith traditions.

¹⁰Mark Koonz, “The Healing of Memory as a Pathway to Transformation: A Case Study Presenting James Loder’s Counsel,” in *Logic*, 205-42.