Paul A. Lewis. *Faithful Innovation: The Rule of God and a Christian Practical Wisdom*. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing. 179pp. ISBN-10: 1641732377, ISBN-13: 978-1641732376.

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Paul Lewis has written a helpful book in response to a major problem of our time, namely the difficulty of resolving moral problems without reverting to either relativism or dogmatic absolutism. It is primarily aimed at Christians, though there is much of value for all readers. He sets out to formulate a "Christian practical wisdom" that follows Aristotle's model, while also incorporating contemporary insights from, among other sources, recent brain science and the philosophy of Michael Polanyi. The latter is not always explicit, but Lewis's articulation of the expertise that comes with practical wisdom is expressed by the Polanyian phrase "we know more than we can say." Readers familiar with Polanyi's thought will recognize his influence throughout *Faithful Innovation*.

The book covers so much ground that a simple summary of the argument is difficult. It is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Plowing the Ground." makes the case that practical wisdom is especially important at this historical juncture and outlines the author's conceptions of Christian ethics and practical wisdom. What rises to the surface is the importance of exercising discernment amid changing circumstances in order to remain faithful to the pursuit of an unchanging good. Part 2, "Sowing Seeds," provides the distinctly *Christian* contribution to the book. Lewis finds in the life and teachings of Jesus the fundamental good at which Christian practical wisdom must aim: the rule of God. This is nothing less than God's ultimate will for the cosmos and is characterized by "inclusivity, egalitarianism, commitment to justice (economic, political, and social), and non-violent ways of resisting evil—all in the service of beginning to bring about a world in which everything works as God intended it to work" (92). Part 3, "Harvesting the Crop," puts the pieces together to show how careful attention to particular circumstances allows us to faithfully innovate in our attempts to pursue the rule of God. Lewis does not shy away from tackling difficult questions, addressing the moral-political issues of gun control, genetic engineering, and capital punishment. The upshot is that by following his method (I use that word hesitatingly, given its connotations of rigidity, whereas Lewis counsels a wise flexibility), we can remain faithful to the Christian tradition while taking the

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peculiarities of time and place into account. This, Lewis contends, will help us to avoid the Scylla of relativism and the Charybdis of absolutism.

The book presents an intriguing approach with an impressive incorporation of insights from multiple disciplines and perspectives. It covers a lot of ground and has something for everyone: theology, history, natural and social science, and philosophy, yet it is written in non-specialist language that will be accessible to the intellectually curious general reader. Moreover, I appreciate that each chapter ends with a summary of key points and questions for discussion. This proves quite helpful for the reader and would be tremendously useful in the classroom.

The above notwithstanding, this review has two points of modest criticism. First, the wide-ranging scope of the book is such that it could be criticized for not exhaustively treating of the issues it raises. For example, Lewis takes a mere five pages setting out the relevant context of the Greco-Roman world of Jesus's day before spending ten pages explaining what Jesus meant by the enigmatic phrase "the rule [or kingdom, in most translations] of God." This is tantalizingly brief and cannot truly be said to have provided enough of a foundation upon which the practice of Christian practical wisdom can rest. Historians and Bible scholars naturally disagree about the interpretation of these phenomena, yet Lewis skips over controversies or alternative views before arriving at his conclusion. To give one example, the author unproblematically adopts the dualistic framing of shame vs. honour cultures without so much as a mention that not all classical scholars share that conception (see Cairns 1993, 27-47, for a direct argument against this view). Expanding some of the discussions and guiding the reader through the relevant scholarly debates would have made for a more compelling presentation of the book's claims.

Second, Lewis frames the relation between Aristotelian and Christian practical wisdom as one of method and content. That is, Aristotle provides us with a helpful model of practical reasoning—the ability to "innovate in the face of circumstances to achieve a noble goal," and Christianity provides us with a unique conception of the noble goal, namely the rule of God (described in ch. 5). This is good as far as it goes, but the Christian tradition not only gives us an alternative noble goal but also an authoritative set of texts and a tradition of interpretation of them (scripture, creeds, denominational confessions of faith). The tradition to which Christians must remain faithful is not simply the rule of God as explained and exemplified by Jesus but a commitment to the authority of these texts and creedal statements. I do not suggest that there can be no overlap or significant common ground between classical philosophy and the Christian tradition, but as this is at least a potential area of difference, it might have been

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helpful to make it more explicit and explore its implications. Does an Aristotelian-inspired approach lose something by being wedded to an authoritative text? Perhaps something is gained with the addition of a tradition of interpretation of these texts to guide our own faithful innovation. These and similar explorations would have been most welcome.

In sum, *Faithful Innovation: The Rule of God and a Christian Practical Wisdom* sets forth a clear approach to thinking about difficult ethical issues, which is especially important in our post-truth age torn between relativism and absolutism. The author is adept at making complicated scientific and philosophical material accessible to the non-specialist. This book will be of use to all who are interested in Christian ethics, as well as many readers with an interest in ethics more broadly. The brevity may leave advanced readers wanting more, but that is also what will make it a useful text in undergraduate ethics courses.

Work Cited

Cairns, Douglas L. 1993. *Aidōs: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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