

Making God Talk Make Sense, by Vernon G. Goff

(Lincoln, Nebraska: Dageforde Publishing), 2001, xiv + 292 pp., softcover \$17.95

Reviewed by Nelson Stringer

Easy to read, direct, and candid describes "Making God Talk Make Sense--a common sense approach to religion." In this book, the author, Dr. Vernon Goff, applies Process theology to religion from a Christian perspective. Using non-academic language, the author insightfully and concretely demonstrates a grounding in sound thinking that lures the process novice to the "Ah,ha!" exclamation, "So, this is what process is about! It now makes sense to me!"

Dr. Goff has designed this book to stimulate thought and encourage faith in those readers "...who value the Judeo-Christian tradition, but who find much of the belief system in this tradition out of harmony with the knowledge and technological explosion of the past several decades... Persons who are in the church but whose intellect is insulted by much that the church preaches and teaches may find this book helpful. It may be equally helpful to those who value the functional goals of the tradition but who, for the same reasons as those just mentioned, elect not to be aligned with institutional religion. It may also be helpful for those who think progressively and are searching for a bridge of theological communication with their fundamentalist peers. Clergy who know more than they teach or preach may also find it helpful." (xii)

Through more than fifty years of ministry, thirty five as the founding pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska, Dr. Goff's "tell it like it is" style of process preaching, teaching, and writing, clarifies what is too often otherwise seen as an overly abstract and complex belief system.

The clarification begins in the first five chapters as the author addresses the formidable challenge of bringing religion up to date. Drawing on personal experience, science, history, and biblical understanding, Goff leads the reader to an understanding of the need for evolutionary change moving beyond the current theological platitudes in the church and the world.

Goff next invites the reader to join him in applying the process perspective to basic Christian beliefs. "What a thrill it is to be loosened from the shackles of inhibiting biblical (or church) authority! We need not be harnessed by *God Talk* of long ago. We do need to add a sense of the sacred and an attitude of reverence to much that, too often we view as secular or natural", says Goff.(58) To this end, in as many chapters, the author applies process theology to ritual, the scriptures, sin, morality, forgiveness, spirit/body, society, salvation, faith, prayer, Jesus, suffering, and virtually every other major Christian tenet!

"I am not suggesting that all traditional beliefs be discarded. I am suggesting that they

be viewed as a point of beginning from which we are always seeking to move on to something more truthful and therefore better”, says Goff. (256) That “seeking to move on”, in the process view, is described by Goff in the book’s concluding chapter: “Life today does seem to indicate a challenge to work in partnership with a loving and powerful God. The human family is ‘nudged’, not ‘controlled’ by God. In some way, not fully understood by us, human beings are challenged to grow in understanding of what it means to be in such partnership and in an ability to express life in that spirit. Meaningful God Talk can assist the spiritual evolvment of human beings toward that end. In addition, life can thus take on a whole new and wonderful sense of excitement and fulfillment.” (279)

An excellent “thumbnail” description of Process Thought is provided in an appendix. (282) This distillation, from several process writers, in itself may serve as a good introduction to process for those interested in more in depth study.

Finally, a word about the book’s cover. The first visual impression of the attractive cover photo of Dr. Goff in his ministerial robe set against the backdrop of a church steeple, may mislead some potential readers into thinking that this is just another ecclesiastical indoctrination into traditional beliefs. Wrong! “ Making God Talk Make Sense” is a fresh stimulus to have process theology become a dominant force for the Common Good.