

Preface

“In Praise of Friendship”

“A friend is someone who likes you.” Thus begins a wonderful children’s poem by Joan Walsh Anglund. And so began the friendship, more than fifty years ago, between Elisabeth and me and Doug and Blair Meeks. Such deep and true friendship, with warm affection and respect, is gained from binding one’s own freedom with others. Out of pleasure in our friendship, I seize the opportunity in this foreword to thank Doug and Blair for their love.

Our friendship began as Elisabeth and I came with our four children to a guest professorship at Duke University in 1967. My unforgettable colleague Fred Herzog asked Doug Meeks to become my student assistant. Doug assisted me not only academically but also by introducing us to American life in the Southern states. He attempted to explain American football two times, but as the Blue Devils lost two times, he was doctoring a headache. We learned to treasure American jazz when the Preservation Hall Jazz Band came to Duke; we heard the protest singer Pete Seeger; and we celebrated American Christmas. At the end of our time, we drove to Blair’s parents near Clifton Forge in the blooming Virginia spring. One year later Doug and Blair were with us in Tübingen, and in 1971 Doug took his doctorate with a well-received dissertation, *Origins of the Theology of Hope* (Fortress, 1975). When I came to lecture in the United States, I visited him, whether he was at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama, or at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, or at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, or at Vanderbilt University, Nashville. Alternately, they came to see us in Tübingen or when Elisabeth and I were in America. I baptized their first son, Douglas, with Neckar River water in the Church of St. Martin in Tübingen and their second son, John, with Mississippi River water in the Eden Seminary Chapel. Doug translated several of my books, including

The Passion for Life (Fortress, 1978), which he also edited. I remember well the day of January 24, 1978. At Candler School of Theology's 43rd annual Minister's Week, in the large church at the gate of Emory University, Doug presented me with the one hundredth copy of this English edition, and I presented him with the 101st. The exchange was grand. In the book there is also a chapter on "Open Friendship," the experiential background for which I thank Doug and Blair. Peter Slade has made a whole book of this topic: *Open Friendship in a Closed Society: Mission Mississippi and a Theology of Friendship* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Thus the experiences and ideas multiplied and spread.

In 1989, Doug published his significant book *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*, with Fortress Press. It soon saw a second edition and was translated into other languages. In my early years, Johann Baptist Metz and I had developed a "political theology," a Christian theology "with its face to the world." The world has changed fundamentally since that time: the political is governed by the economic, which has itself globalized, while the political has remained particular. We need an economic and ecological theology if we are to account for our Christian hope with its face to the world. Doug Meeks helps us to this end. His 1989 book that joined theology and economy gave us, so to speak, an appetizer. We eagerly await the new dish of the main course, his masterwork on theology and economy, on which he has worked for years. When he finally—as we say in Germany—"emeritizes," and with that is free from academic responsibilities, a great and beautiful task waits for him. We wish him the delight of the Holy Spirit in this work. This Festschrift should make him bold.

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