
Book Reviews

Tensions in Contemporary Theology, edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Alan F. Johnson, Chicago: Moody Press.

Tensions in Contemporary Theology, edited by Stanley Gundry and Alan F. Johnson, is an ambitious project. The editors have gathered an all-star set of evangelical writers (including Asbury Theological Seminary's own Dr. Harold B. Kuhn) for the purpose of summarizing and evaluating trends in contemporary theology. They are writing for the late-college or early seminary student. Given the wild and woolly nature of modern theology, this is no easy task.

The main strength of the book lies in the generally perceptive summaries and evaluations of the major movements in theology since World War II. Vernon Grounds' essay on Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and Bonhoeffer offers in 60 pages a concise and useful analysis of these four men. David Wells, Harold Kuhn, and David Scaer do similarly competent essays on "Recent Roman Catholic Theology," "Secular Theology," and "Theology of Hope." If you do not know much about these theological movements then these articles will identify the major proponents of each, summarize their work, and evaluate each movement both positively and negatively.

The weaknesses of the book may result from the staggering diversity of modern theology. Bernard Ramm's article on theology from Schliermacher to Barth simply tries to cover too much ground. What he says is too vague and too general to help the beginner, and too simplistic to help anyone else. Stanley Obitts' article on linguistic analysis suffers from the complexity of the topic he is covering. I doubt seriously that the novice theological student with little or no background in linguistic analysis could follow this article at all. The essay drips with the specialized vocabulary of the subject, and uses an abundance of quotes from primary sources without helping the reader clear the fog caused by the specialized vocabulary. Geisler's article on process theology handles an equally difficult assignment with greater clarity, but this article might still be beyond a new seminarian. Somewhere before the end of one's seminary career, however, the evangelical student ought to be exposed to process thought; Geisler's article would be a fair place to begin.

Harold Brown's article on "The Conservative Option" is in one sense

very good, and in another sense a disappointment. As a restatement of evangelical theology and a critique of liberal theology, Brown's article is well written and well presented. However, I admit to some disappointment at finding such a traditionally stated evangelical polemic at the end of this book. The theologies presented in this book, however "sub-Christian" they may be, were still developed to meet some need or crisis in the world. This reviewer could have hoped that the final article of this excellent book would be an attempt by orthodoxy to speak concerning some of these problems. It is my firm conviction that the Biblical faith we espouse is a much more relevant answer to the needs of modern man than any of the modern liberal theologies reviewed in this book. One must appreciate a book such as this, which reviews and critiques the liberal "answers" to the world's needs. But, it would be well also to see a presentation of positive evangelical theological essays which address the needs of the modern world without surrendering Biblical revelation and the Gospel, as the liberal theologian has so often done.

Melvin E. Dieter
Associate Professor of Church History

The Gospel of John, An Expository Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976. 410 pp. \$9.95.

This is Volume II of a projected five-volume exposition of the Gospel according to St. John. The author is pastor of the famous Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and successor to Donald Gray Barnhouse on the coast-to-coast Bible Study Hour. This young author, pastor and radio preacher has degrees from Harvard, Princeton and Basel.

Three elements in the author's background reappear continually in the exposition: his theological training, his Reformed Theology, and his evangelistic concern. The commentary consists of a series of over 50 homilies based on portions of Scripture from John's Gospel, chapters 5-8. Nearly every message closes with an effective evangelistic appeal for a decision. The text bears out the comment in the preface that the author was influenced by Calvinistic doctrine and the sermons of Charles Spurgeon. The influence of Dallas Theological Seminary and the Scofield Reference Bible, which constitutes the text of the commentary, is reflected in the discussion at numerous points. Several es-

says are devoted to justifying the changing of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week for most Christians.

Students of this Gospel are frequently impressed with the element of determinism. Several passages speak as if salvation is all the work of God. Other passages in equal number stress man's responsibility in coming to God for grace.

Boice finds texts in John that support the five doctrines of classical Calvinism, including total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and preservation of the saints. The author is careful to point out that salvation is all of grace, and therefore, all of God. He observes that "God calls men to himself irresistibly by means of a miracle." He notes also that salvation is not for everyone but only for those whom God has chosen from the beginning to accept salvation and that God's election is irresistible. Without pausing to explain the theological problems here he also in the same discourse urges his readers to come to God because, "whosoever will may come" and that if we do not come we are held guilty. Boice holds that man "is guilty for his inability to believe" (p. 167). The logical absurdity of God making it impossible for one to believe and yet holding him guilty for not believing does not deter him from urgent pleas for repentance and faith.

The author shows a good acquaintance with history, especially theological history. Perhaps the greatest value of the volume is the clear call to repentance and faith. The reader may be thankful that the author's commitment to unconditional election and irresistible grace does not deter him from inconsistently calling all readers to repent and have faith and holding them responsible if they fail to do so.

The value of the text is enhanced by a subject index and a Scripture index at the close of the volume. Readers will find the book easy to read, challenging, and practical, and many will look forward to receiving from this author the concluding three volumes of the projected series.

George A. Turner
Professor of Biblical Literature

In The Beginning God . . . Answers to Questions on Genesis, by Clifford A. Wilson. Revised edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975. \$2.50.

One of the most unusual features of this little book is its format.

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The content was originally prepared as a series of questions and answers presented over radio station HCJB in Quito, Ecuador, and has been left in this format. The chapters are thus either seven or fourteen pages in length. The question and answer sequence provides some occasion for distraction and repetition, as some issues are considered from slightly different perspectives.

The intent of the book is the harmonizing of the first eleven chapters of Genesis with the discoveries of modern science. Dr. Clifford is an Australian archaeologist who readily recognizes the limits of his own authority and interprets quite flexibly outside his area of expertise. His perspective is literalistic wherever this seems permissible to account for the facts. But this basic commitment to literalism does not lead into as speculative and questionable an exegesis as this kind of literature is often susceptible to.

Dr. Clifford considers the usual questions: the meaning of "day," the problem of species, the problem of dating, evolution, creation myths, long lives, the flood and its universality, and the Tower of Babel. No striking new evidence, and no research of an original sort have gone into these studies. Various conservative perspectives are considered, and while Clifford is a literalist, he is open to changing position on many interpretations, should future evidence warrant it. One could wish that some of his consideration of the views of others were better documented. Also, by covering so many topics, the depth of argumentation is not great. An occasional logical non-sequitur also mars the work.

All in all, however, this is a book that a pastor can conscientiously place in the hands of a parishioner as an introduction to key issues in interpreting Genesis. While one may not agree at every point, there is a typical British (Australian in this case) breadth of perspective that is so frequently lacking in books of the same type in the United States. Clifford is much less defensive and more spiritually stimulating without being "preachy" like others. Thus, in general, this is a usable book.

The continued appearance of works of this type does raise one further question, however, that thinking Christians must eventually consider. The whole "science and religion" movement, as it is presently centered in California and Illinois, is encapsulated. Christians are addressing (and sometimes only bickering among) themselves. Debates center around differences in perspective among Christians, often with surprising acrimony. Fellow Christians of different beliefs are regarded as the most dangerous threats to the faith, which is patently fallacious in

the face of the Church's difficulty in confronting social issues and general Christian apathy.

An even more serious internal problem than this bickering is the failure to adequately keep in touch with developments in the sciences. Darwin is still the enemy, and Christians are ignorantly thinking themselves allied with recent attacks upon older forms of evolution from certain well-known scientists, completely missing the point that such scientists are merely seeking to improve the generally accepted evolutionary "paradigm" rather than to revolutionize it. Failure to keep in touch leads to failure to criticize "secular" scientific literature adequately. In sum, Christians still are not effectively breaking the barrier between Christian and scientific circles.

A final problem, for which this book is symbolic, is that attacks upon the geological column and the theory of evolution are piecemeal and are forms of special "case pleading." Too much Christian criticism is based upon the accumulation of exceptions to the evolutionary rules. The effort is to overwhelm the theory by the accumulation of tiny problems. Christians seem unable to discover any additional criteria of disproof acceptable to science itself. An effective attack will have to shake the foundations of scientific methodology, and find a Christian thinker to compete with Karl Popper, Thomas S. Kuhn, and other philosophers of science. Disproof will have to become more philosophical and comprehensive, and less devoted to minutia. Otherwise, Christians will continue to write good books, like this one, only for their own encouragement. If we settle for that alone, and abandon the effort to influence the antagonistic world, we abandon our Christian heritage of presenting comprehensive, Biblically-based philosophical foundations for understanding ourselves and our world.

Ivan L. Zabilka

Former ATS Registrar, Ph.D. Candidate

A History of Preaching, by Ralph G. Turnbull, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974. 586 pp.

The continuation of Edwin C. Dargan's monumental work on the history of preaching in two volumes, volume three is the product of years of research and active interest. This reviewer knows the author personally and is aware of the research investment. The Christian world can be grateful for a major reference work of this caliber.

Hundreds of preachers from many nations find their way into this

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volume. Indexes and bibliographies add to the usefulness of the book.

History, secular and sacred, are frames of reference, and both literature and theology provide resource.

The scholar of Puritan thought will appreciate this work, as other works by Dr. Turnbull who is something of an authority in that field, too.

Exegesis and exposition, theology and life, the varieties of preaching — all are related to man and their peculiar talents. Actually, we have here a remarkable study in gifts. The novice will see preachers as preachers; but preachers themselves know very well that talents and creativities and contributions are as different as faces.

Denominational perspectives reveal themselves too, as do the various lifestyles, theological and homiletical, from the pietist to the modernist.

Altogether, here is a reference tool no library can be without, and which most ministers will want to keep as a ready information resource.

Donald E. Demaray
Professor of Preaching

The Horizontal Line Synopsis of the Gospels, by Reuben J. Swanson, Dillsboro, NC: Western North Carolina Press, 1975. 597 pp. \$23.95.

In this remarkable volume, the author, the Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Western Carolina University, undertakes to facilitate the task of students of the New Testament. The result is a unique harmony of the four Gospels. Most harmonies arrange the text of the Gospels in parallel columns. The disadvantage of this arrangement is that the natural order is disturbed, "since no gospel is followed consecutively in its natural sequence without interruption. Furthermore, gospel materials in current Synopses are juxtaposed only approximately, for frequently the organization of materials varies within the pericopes themselves." Thus, the author describes the situation for which this volume seeks a remedy.

The result is a synopsis which uses horizontal rather than vertical lines. There are four parts, each of which is a synopsis in itself. In the first synopsis, Matthew is the "lead Gospel" and its text is on the top line with Mark, Luke and John in matching parallel lines below. In the second, Mark is the lead Gospel with Matthew, Luke and John below. The third section is headed by Luke with Matthew, Mark and John below; the fourth is headed by John.

The words which match are underscored. Exact parallels are so arranged that they are aligned vertically to facilitate comparison. Secondary comparisons are printed in light italic. This format also permits parallels outside of the four Gospels, such as the inclusion of Paul's words about the Eucharist. This makes it possible "for the first time to see all the similarities and differences in synoptic form."

This is a very painstaking work and is expertly accomplished. It presents the student of the Gospels with an invaluable study tool that should greatly simplify the task of comparing one account with each of the others. Available also is the same synopsis in Greek. Both author and publisher are to be commended for the vision, the courage and the patience which produced this result. It should find a warm welcome and extensive use by students of the New Testament.

George Allen Turner
Professor of Biblical Literature

William Barclay: A Spiritual Autobiography, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975. 122 pp.

This work is at once delightful and provocative. The sources of delight are many: high interest, an oral style, and some sense of intimate acquaintance with perhaps the best known popular Bible commentator of our time. Moreover, advancing one's own knowledge of the man, his method and message, along with fresh facts about any number of subjects, only add to the dimension of joy in the reading of this little autobiography.

The provocative side of the book is in its challenge to orthodoxy. William Barclay refuses to be pressed into anyone's mold. He is Barclay and never lets his readers forget that. If he disagrees with parts of the Apostles' Creed (and he does), he lets you know. If he refuses to embrace the orthodox doctrine of the omnipotence of God (and he does — pp. 112-115) he says so.

This leads one to say Barclay is not a traditional evangelical. He calls himself a "liberal evangelical." He believes his sins are forgiven; he loves Jesus Christ and follows Him; he identifies with the Church and says the Apostles' Creed. But he is humanistic in much of what he believes personally. This reviewer appreciates the spirit in which Dr. Barclay makes his liberal confessions, but Christians at once evangelical and orthodox will take issue with him, and rightly so.

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On the positive side, it is refreshing to see a man of his influence herald the family so enthusiastically! In more than one place he speaks with loving concern about the family, and his lovely words of gratitude to his wife, Kate (pp. 17-18) are as touching as anything he says in the book.

One also appreciates his beautiful humility ("I am a second rate mind"), his discipline (he never wrote a sermon after Thursday), his passion to speak and write so ordinary people can understand him, and the flowing beauty of his prose.

Donald E. Demaray
Professor of Preaching