

BOOK REVIEWS

The Origins of Latin Christianity, by Jean Danielou. Translated by David Smith and John Austin Baker; edited with postscript by John Austin Baker. London: Barton, Longman and Todd, 1977. Pp. xvi+511. \$27.50.

This massive scholarly work by a well-known Roman Catholic theologian is the third and final in his *A History of Early Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea*. Together with the first two, entitled *The Theology of the Jewish Community* and *The Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, its thesis will keep those interested in the development of the early Christian church busy for decades to come. With meticulous care he has gathered, sifted and analyzed the evidence to demonstrate that, while there was an overarching unity centering in the person and work of Jesus Christ, great and at times glaring differences of emphasis became increasingly apparent.

According to Danielou the Christian faith, as it comes to expression in the believing community through its theology, institutions, daily life and worship, never arises in a vacuum. All these are usually much more deeply affected by the environment in which the gospel takes root than people, including preachers and theologians, realize. At the same time it also acts as a potent leaven to transform society in ways which are not always recognized. Especially with the first of these two aspects Danielou has busied himself for more than seventeen years before his death. The editor expresses regret that now this scholar, who again and again insisted that what he presented was preliminary and even somewhat tentative, can no longer take part in discussions and debates which have already sprung up.

The issue is whether the Christian church with its theology (living, growing, shaping and being shaped by its environment) can remain faithful to its divine origin and

calling in the world. This is the "problem" which all churches and church members must face squarely in every age, not the least in ours.

With the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the outpouring of his Spirit the gospel was sent into all the world, among peoples and nations with their widely diverse cultures, to gather and unite them into one worshipping, witnessing and working community for him as their Lord and Savior. In this task those committed to bring the fulness of God's self-revelation in Christ faced an almost insuperable task. As a result of human limitations and imperfections its appropriation took differing and at times even contradictory shapes. Danielou wrestles with uncovering this process while attempting at the same time to discover some underlying unity of aim on the part of outstanding church fathers.

This he believes was still possible for the days of the church fathers before the Council of Nicaea. They all belonged to one empire. They largely shared one language. They were to a large extent shaped by one pervading culture. But differences of insight were bound to threaten the unity of the church making its way in a rapidly changing world, as each was compelled to face problems in his own time and life-situation.

Danielou has worked largely as a "descriptive" and analytical historian. For us he has gathered materials from many heterogeneous sources. He does not discuss the ever-pressing question of when and where and by whom the gospel was presented and preserved most faithfully in obedience to the accepted norm of Scripture. This would exceed the purpose of the work to which he set himself. Hence that issue will now be heatedly discussed by others making use of his invaluable contributions.

No one who would speak with any knowledge of the early churches and church fathers can afford to neglect these volumes, including the last.

Although Greek was then the universally-known language and exerted its influence wherever the gospel was proclaimed, Danielou demonstrates quite convincingly that very

soon the Latin language and temperament with its own cultural baggage helped to shape the way in which the Christian message was understood and practiced. He uncovers for us many early evidences of a Latin Judaeo-Christianity. Here the Bible in that language, long before the day of Jerome, made an inescapable impact. In the next three sections he deals largely with Tertullian (recognized almost universally as the "father" of Latin and Western theology), Minucius Felix, Novatian, and then Cyprian and his ecclesiology welded in times of persecution and ecclesiastical disputes. With his contribution the churches of the West began to shape their thought and structure and life quite differently from those in the East.

To attempt even a modest discussion of the details which Danielou marshals, together with their significance for churches and the ecumenical movement of the present, goes far beyond the scope of a review. But this needs and deserves doing, lest this work together with the two earlier volumes is left to gather dust on the shelves of seminary libraries.

Here more clearly and demonstrably than in earlier works of which this reviewer is cognizant, the author points to the chief characteristics of Christian ecclesiastical life and practice as we have come to know it. In the main these are four: 1) the order and simplicity of Western theology in contrast with the often speculative and mystical theologies of the East; 2) the sustained stress on the institutional form of the church to preserve a measure of external unity and cohesion in a changing and confusing world; 3) an emphasis on moral conduct rather than on meditation and mystical experiences; 4) a deeper interest in the thought and thought-forms prevalent among the peoples whom the church sought to reach with the gospel. Whether and in how far these concerns--especially of Tertullian and Cyprian--may have "compromised" some of the essentials of the Christian faith as preached by the apostles and laid down definitively in the Holy Scriptures needs to be answered by church leaders in every age including our own. This is the challenge implicit in Danielou's contribution to our understanding of the early

fathers and their times.

The Reformers, notably Calvin, steeped themselves in the writings of those early leaders in so far as sources were at that time available to them. Would that all seminary teachers and students would do the same! Only so can churches learn from those who have gone before, appreciating their valiant efforts while seeking to avoid mistakes into which they did from time to time stumble. This honors the Spirit who has been pledged to lead a faithful and humble church into all truth as it has been once-for-all revealed and delivered in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter Y. De Jong

Founding Fathers: The Puritans in England and America, by John Adair. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986. Pp. xii+302, incl. index.

Of all the movements which have influenced life with its complexities in the United States none, according to this writer, has been more pervasive until this very day than Puritanism. Even after its inexorable decline as a vital religious and theological form of the Christian faith, its stamp on the British and even more on the American soul appears to be almost ineradicable.

In a variety of ways Adair seeks to demonstrate his thesis.

He directs attention to widespread views in our culture--often more instinctive and subconscious than clearly formulated--of work, marriage, family, civil religion, education, the scientific enterprise, government, friendship, etc. which still distinguish this nation from many others. No matter how much Puritanism has been grossly misunderstood and maligned in the popular mind, countless Americans still live on its largely secularized left-overs.

Adair is fully aware that Puritanism was always a complex phenomenon. Rightly, we believe, he sees it as taking its rise and flowering to great strength in Great Britain, then transplanted to grow even more luxuriantly "in the howling

wilderness" on this side of the ocean. When it was tamed by growing prosperity, its passionate faith cooled to make respectability the hallmark of membership in church and society. Even then, when the churches during the past two centuries increasingly lost their hold on the masses and religion became largely a privatized matter, the personal and social values which Puritanism sought to stamp on the soul of these two nations refused to die. All of us, so he argues with a large degree of cogency, are still at heart Puritans whether this be realized or not!

What, then, were the origins and goals of the Puritan movement? Adair sees this in the efforts of many English leaders to wed the fruits of both Reformation and Renaissance in a happy marriage and so "triumph over the inherent superstition, love of pleasure and sports, together with the physical and mental laziness" which they saw as characteristic of the English people. Puritanism, then, was much more than an effort to reform the church; it was determined to reform every aspect of a man's life. It strove heroically to maintain a sense of order and social cohesion, while at the same time insisting on personal liberty of thought, speech and even action in so far as it did not destroy harmony in the political and social order. As long as Scripture served as norm, these two according to leading Puritans could walk hand in hand. In the long run, however, the offspring of a marriage between Reformation convictions and Renaissance ideals proved incompatible. The faith championed by the Reformers and their early followers, especially by Luther whom he lauds at the expense of Calvin about whom he seems to have little good to say, yielded because the "practical godliness" cherished by the Puritans became infected by a stress on reason and reasonableness. Hence the temporary triumph of Unitarianism in both lands and later that of the "social gospel" which were incapable of keeping people united in church commitment. Hence the secularized Puritanism which still haunts many segments of the population of the United States.

Much, much more needs to be said about the rise, decline and abiding influence of some of the "Puritan" ideals. But

whether one agrees with the dominant thesis of this book, it is exceedingly fascinating.

It is much more of a "social" than a theological or even religious (in the restricted sense) study. It supplies detailed information on the attitudes and ideals of the Puritan movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seldom found in such abundance in other works of similar format and length. It abounds in quotations drawn from writers, housewives, preachers, educators, martyrs, merchants and some leading theologians and pastors. Delightfully written, it signalizes much of what went on in the minds of those who sought to make England and New England lands whose inhabitants would seek diligently "to glorify God and enjoy him forever" while living full lives in the present world. In the end the God of Holy Scripture lost out, leaving only according to the writer a disturbed conscience from time to time.

Adair's work is not a seminal treatment of this highly important and complicated movement. For that it is much too brief and ranges far too widely. In its own way, however, it does shed much light on the roots, development and demise of original Puritanism. As such, reading these pages may be rewarding. It does help us to recognize many of the anomalies which characterize the American people today.

Peter Y. De Jong

Great Doctrines of the Bible, Volume 5: Soteriology, by W. A. Criswell. Ministry Resources Library. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985. Pp. 154. \$9.95.

This is the fifth volume in a series on the great doctrines of the church of Jesus Christ. The author is the well-known pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. He has occupied this pulpit for more than forty years and was the successor of the famous Dr. Truett.

This volume is not a treatise in dogmatics, but rather contains fifteen sermons dealing with the various elements of

doctrine which constitute what is called "Soteriology."

The author is a real pastor. He is feeding the flock of God by means of these sermons. A church which seats at least three thousand people had "standing room only" during the services when this man of God preached these "doctrinal" sermons! There is indeed a hunger for the meat of the gospel when presented in the manner of this pulpiteer. He uses the Bible extensively. He is a master at using effective illustrations, many of which are taken from biblical history and others out of his own rich experience. He exegetes faithfully and is not afraid to refer to the original language whenever it enlightens a point he wishes to make.

Although a pastor in a Baptist church, he speaks eloquently of the covenant which God has made with his people. Dr. Criswell emphasizes man's total inability but does run stuck with the doctrines of God's sovereignty (which he believes) and human responsibility (which he also emphasizes). This is not strange, since almost every other theologian has also had great difficulty with these doctrines. But it becomes especially difficult when the preacher calls on man to make a decision for the Christ! Yet, this matter of commitment is too often minimized among Reformed believers.

Criswell speaks of justification, the adoption as sons of God, the perseverance of the saints, and the election of the people of God. No, he does not believe in reprobation.

It is no wonder that this preacher drew tremendous crowds to this huge Baptist church when he delivered this long series of sermons. Although we don't always agree with the author's explanations, we would argue that he has proclaimed the truths of God's Word in a stimulating manner not commonly found in the North American church world today.

H. Vander Kam

Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review, by Robert P. Lightner. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986. Pp. 303, incl. indices.

Here is a book which gives precisely what it promises: a "survey" and "review" of many basic theologies which are current among evangelicals today.

The author, professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, knows his field thoroughly and has done his homework well. Not only has he read widely; he has attempted to state clearly and concisely where evangelicals in these times agree and where they disagree. For him evangelicals are those and those only who are committed to the authority, integrity and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. As background for each of the major Christian doctrines and after some comments on their interrelationships, he provides (again briefly) the historical development of each area in the field of systematic theology.

Frankly he states his aims, so that even the casual reader cannot mistake these. This book is no substitute for major contributions in the field; only an introduction with copious footnotes and bibliographical references to spur the reader to in-depth study. Properly he insists that the theological enterprise is not an end in itself; rather, a means to godly living in obedience to the Word.

All the major tenets of the Christian faith are treated, some at far greater length than others. Lightner also openly acknowledges how difficult it is to represent the views of those evangelicals with whom he differs. But this he has accomplished with an admirable fairness, one worthy of emulation. He does not hesitate to state his own convictions, describing himself as "a moderate Calvinist" and a "pre-millennialist" of the "pre-tribulation dispensationalist" kind. This accounts, of course, for the length of his chapters on angels and especially on eschatology. Sharply he sets off the classic Reformed view of the covenant from the presentation of "the biblical covenants" cherished by premillennialists especially of the dispensational kind.

In the many areas where he presents sharp differences among evangelical theologians, he quotes at length and frequently from recognized representatives. Here we meet Augustine, Boettner, Calvin, Chafer, Geisler, Hodge, Luther, Morris, Murray, Origen, Pinnock, Ramm, Rylie, Strong, Unger, Walvoord, Warfield and Young, to provide only a sample. And no one is mentioned and quoted more often than Louis Berkhof, no less than thirty one times!

Too much polemic among evangelicals is not only superficial and at times sensational; it is and can be misleading. And that is dishonest. This book deserves to be in the hands of every thoughtful theological student, professor and preacher. Highly recommended to serve the purpose for which it was written with such scrupulous care.

Peter Y. De Jong

Biblical Preaching, edited by James W. Cox. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983. Pp. 372. \$19.95.

Complaints about preaching and its comparative powerlessness have been commonplace in almost every age. Today they are more vocal and vigorous than ever before. Ours seems not to be an age of great and glorious preaching. Many people even in evangelical churches seem to have lost their taste for sermons. Too few messages seem to make any lasting impact by changing lives. And while the acids of modernity are indeed corroding the souls of parishioners to make them spiritually insensitive, we as preachers must bear our share of blame for declining church attendance and interest. Sermons no longer seem to be high on the list of our priorities. Hence we are apt to devote far too little time, effort and prayer to sermon-making.

It is more than time to realize that liturgical experimentation has never drawn the negligent back to the pews. Also, apart from vigorous, authoritative and passionate preaching much of what passes for pastoral care is doomed to fall on deaf ears and dead hearts. Unless the sharp two-edged sword of the Word is faithfully and consistently wielded

from the pulpit, the lives of those who still listen will largely remain untouched and untransformed. Not a little that passes for preaching also in evangelical and Reformed churches, if the reports we receive regularly from growing numbers are even half true, is insipid, disorganized and quite beside the point of Holy Scripture. This can only lead to spiritual disaster and death.

These things being so, this volume is worthy of some careful reading and reflection.

It consists of contributions by several preachers and professors of homiletics. Before presenting their sermon "sketches," each one demonstrates how he has attempted to work with and through the biblical passage chosen as text for the sermon. At almost every point, to be sure, we disagree strongly with most of the assumptions and presuppositions which have controlled their study of the texts. All are committed, while professing that the Bible has a vital message for people today, to the historical-critical method of dealing with the sacred page. Here human speculations, often with great show of erudition, can only serve to undermine the authority and efficacy of the Bible. And this we can only bewail.

Yet this volume deserves careful attention and a measure of respect from us.

It reminds us--and how sorely all of us need that reminder from time to time--that without careful study, thoughtful reflection, clear organization and deep commitment no preacher ought dare take his place on a pulpit. Sermons are not crafted in an idle hour. Nor may they be a pot-pourri of pious words, clever stories and a rehearsal of those personal and social problems which haunt our times. Sermons which deserve any hearing at all will be born out of "agony" (in the biblical sense of that term) of soul which wrestles with the Word before the face of the living God. It pleads that he may be truly glorified. It weeps as did the prophets and apostles of old that also in the churches many no longer seem to know what belongs to their true good. And none of this comes casually. This is some of what the

present volume seeks to elucidate. It drives preachers back to their study-rooms.

This volume challenges in another way those who claim to be Reformed.

According to their own convictions, the writers of these pages have done their work thoroughly, much as we may disagree with their approach and fruits. They have taken time to present this to the public. Why haven't we, preachers and professors who claim to hold a much higher and truer view of the Bible and of the urgency of gospel preaching, done the same? This debt we owe to those who may well be looking for such helps and, above all, to the God and Savior who has commissioned us to preach in season and out of season the fulness of his gospel in faithfulness and truth.

Peter Y. De Jong

Essays on Biblical Preaching, by Jay E. Adams. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981. Pp. 135.

Here is a series of chapters, many first given in the form of brief addresses to students and professors and preachers. Many will prove helpful to ministers both old and young. Although not a "textbook" for a course in Homiletics, it does address all the major issues which everyone called to proclaim the unsearchable riches of the Lord Jesus Christ must needs face.

The first section reproduces without alteration his *Truth Apparent*. In it Adams argues for "a new focus on form" without in any way compromising the gospel message by the use of gimmicks and clever speech. He states clearly the clues to sound preaching in the first chapter. It must be *preaching, biblical, interesting, well-organized, and practical*. With all this, of course, we ought to be thoroughly familiar. Yet review and reminder are never out of place no matter how long we have been preaching. Adams always speaks directly to his readers (hearers), anticipating and answering many of the questions which spring to mind.

The second section is a fairly long and moving essay on *Preaching to the Heart*, that is, "preaching that so stirs the listener that he must respond!"

Do not try to read these essays in one or two sittings. Take only a chapter or two at a time. Then reflect carefully and prayerfully as you test also your sermons by what has been read. Soon sermon-making and delivery will not become easier but surely much more pleasant, profitable and God-pleasing.

Peter Y. De Jong

Introducing the Sermon: The Art of Compelling Beginnings, by Michael J. Hostetler. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986. Pp. 89.

Do you as preacher find it difficult to "begin" the sermon? Are your introductions too stereotyped and stale to compel the attention of those who sit in the pews to listen attentively? Are you concerned that through your sermons the living Word will come across clearly and convincingly? Are you willing, no matter how long you have been preaching, to learn a little more about this "art"? Then this is a book for you.

Without a good beginning, so the author insists, much of the battle for men's minds and hearts may well be lost. "No contact, no start!"

In eight short chapters his point comes across with deafening clarity and a large measure of conviction. In the introduction we build our bridges to the text itself which is, of course, the heart of the sermon. A good introduction, he claims, has four ingredients. It is secular, biblical, personal, and the structural contact-point with the message to be proclaimed. Repeatedly the author illustrates what to his mind are both "good" and "bad" introductions.

With the central thesis this reviewer agrees wholeheartedly. Years ago his professor of preaching insisted that while introductions were to be the final step in sermon-making,

they were by no means least in importance and influence. They should be crisp, clear and cogent. Some concern, therefore, needs to be expressed lest the "demands" set forth by Hostetler are followed too rigorously. When that is done, then introductions may well become too long, too artificial and too diffuse with materials of many kinds to arouse and keep the attention of the hearers. Also here "variety is the spice of life." Trying to do too much by way of introductions may well become love's labor lost. Nor may a "good" introduction ever serve to excuse a "poor" sermon.

To many preachers the message of this little book will not be new. But if it helps to put us on track again, it is well worth the pennies we pay to own it.

Peter Y. De Jong

Preaching Biblically, edited by Don W. Wardlaw. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983. Pp. 173.

Here seven writers are searching for new ways to preach their sermons. They are convinced that Scripture has been and is being preached much too intellectualistically, failing to take seriously the forms and shapes in which its many texts (passages) have come down to us. This, according to them, was the result of allowing Hellenistic patterns of thought and its communication to stifle the wealth of literary genres which "witness to God's coming into man's life." Here we find fable and parable, song, story and proverb, dramatic history and doctrinal assertions, together with ethical injunctions. Sermons in their construction and delivery, so runs the argument, should also reflect that variety.

Many of the points made are well-taken. Variety in presenting the message ought not be deprecated or despised. Whether the sermons here presented to elucidate the seven main "types" (shapes and forms of specific texts) are successful is another matter. But as the editor acknowledges frankly, ". . .this book seeks to be more suggestive than definitive." What it does urge is that the preacher first steep himself thoroughly in the text, in its form and shape as well

as its words. And this is done before consulting any helps. Only so will the literary form of the passage help to shape the sermon throughout.

Such variety in structuring and delivering sermons, however, will not guarantee its effectiveness. One of the contributors states this cogently:

Perhaps we put too much emphasis on this one facet of preaching. Some preachers preach well no matter what the structure. Others are poor despite all the right training in exegesis and form. . . .

Perhaps we need to spend more time on sermon content and our belief in it. . . . You want to preach? Then first have something to say, something about which you are passionate. Never let your epitaph be, "That preacher had nothing to say, but said it well."

So we are back again to the challenge of presenting a felicitous marriage of form and content, both of them controlled by Scripture itself. The wrapping has its unique and undeniable importance; the gift of God's own Word which it contains is decisive.

Peter Y. De Jong

Introduction to Pastoral Care, by William V. Arnold. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982. Pp. 229, incl. index. \$10.95.

Arnold, who is professor of Pastoral Counseling at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, demonstrates sensitive insight and skill in this introduction to that broad field of Christian ministry where many seem to find themselves floundering because of its complexities and contradictions. At the outset he states his concerns sharply and succinctly, so that the reader can know why and how and where he aims to go.

First, good pastoral care must be grounded in good theology. Theology without concrete expression is dead. Pastoral care carried out as mere technique without

substantive 'reasons' is shallow and subject to aimless wandering among new fads and approaches. . . .

In addition, he stresses the "community" as "the most frequent locus of pastoral care," i.e., the church and its fellowship. Throughout he urges every pastor to soul-searching and self-reflection, lest the difficulties and disappointments of his calling render him less than effective.

This short treatise is arranged in four sections: 1) the ground of pastoral care; 2) the person of the pastor; 3) the disciplines of support; and 4) the contexts for pastoral care. Each chapter concludes with a call to reflect and a brief bibliography. In the last section he shows how he would deal with problems such as stress, grief, illness, family and marriage situations, as well as sexuality.

While helpful as a reminder of the breadth and depth of this calling, we do take issue with the author on theological grounds. He refers to Scripture repeatedly. Yet far too often he does less than justice to man in his basic relationship to God. While speaking about sin and guilt, he has next to nothing to say about the central importance of our redemption and reconciliation through the Lord Jesus Christ and our renewal by the work of the Holy Spirit. In that respect the section on theological grounding is highly unsatisfactory. All men are assumed to be God's children, only in need of seeing themselves as they really are and can become by a process of "growth." The gospel of God's sovereign and saving grace is strangely muted if not completely silenced here. Such a theology, according to Scripture itself, can only leave hurting people still "without God and without hope in the world." This defect, and we say this with profound sorrow and pain, is the tragedy of what so often passes for pastoral care today. Far to be preferred for anyone interested in this field, to our mind, are the works of G. Brillenburg Wurth (out of print, alas) and Jay E. Adams.

Peter Y. De Jong