

## BOOK REVIEWS

*New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, by Simon J. Kistemaker. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984. Pp. 464. Price unknown.

Dr. William Hendriksen, author of the *New Testament Commentary* series, finished volumes on the Gospels and on all of the Pauline epistles except 1 and 2 Corinthians before he passed away in 1982. Dr. Simon Kistemaker, Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, has undertaken to continue the series, with this commentary on Hebrews.

The design and purpose remain the same as those of previous volumes. This volume too attempts to be useful to lay people and pastors alike, to the point of separating typographically from the body of the exposition the notes, references and Greek terminology that are of interest to those wishing to trace the author's path to his exposition.

Let's look at the commentary, then, from those two points of view—the lay person and the pastor.

Both will naturally take interest in the exposition which constitutes the focus of the commentary. Dr. Kistemaker provides exposition that is textual (i.e., follows the thought(s) of the verse), smooth, thorough and succinct. Hebrews is an epistle of contrasts, the author reminds us. Making one's way in the epistle of Hebrews through a multitude of Old Testament quotations (most taken from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew) is no easy task. But Dr. Kistemaker avoids the dangers of losing the thread of the biblical writer's argument, of allowing "biblical theology" to replace exegesis, and of diverting too much attention to questions of literary criticism, to name but a few. Refusing the dilemmas interpreters

have invented surrounding the Septuagint quotations, the author repeatedly insists that the text we now have, including those OT citations, is the inspired text.

A new format feature is the addition to most expository sections of either doctrinal or practical considerations arising from the verses explained. This helps the reader to see the still valuable *distinction* between a text's exposition and its application, while avoiding the *separation* of the two. The OT history of Israel and her sacrificial system provide the foundation for the teaching of Hebrews; Dr. Kistemaker sews these into his exposition almost seamlessly, so that we marvel again at the essential unity of the two testaments. Themes of Jesus' superiority—to angels, to Moses and Aaron, to the OT sacrifices—flow into warnings against unbelief and exhortations to hope and perseverance. Patient attention to this movement, embodied in a sentence structure and vocabulary that permit the reader to enjoy following his explanation, constitute Dr. Kistemaker's commentary as a tool that can help all of us listen to the text.

A feature of this commentary that Dr. Kistemaker maintains in common with his predecessor might place it in a specific genre of commentaries. I refer to the sensitive use of the church's confession of joy and faith embodied in her songs and creeds. Stanzas from the *Psalter Hymnal* and selections from the Athanasian Creed and the *Heidelberg Catechism* are dextrously folded into the exposition, so that one who is listening to the text as he reads the commentary is lifted momentarily from study to doxology.

Moreover, this polite commentary is never diverted for long by combat with dogmatians, something likely to be greeted with ambivalence. An example that comes to mind involves the meaning of 2:9, "But we see Jesus, who . . . suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." The "everyone" is simply identified (quite correctly, in my opinion) as referring to the "many sons" being brought to glory (2:10), quietly challenging some current exegesis underlying so-called "biblical universalism." Again, in the thorny passage concerning the apostasy of those who have tasted of the gospel (6:4-6), Dr. Kistemaker avoids running ahead to credal statements about the perseverance of the saints, and encourages us to ask only those questions answered by the text. On the other hand, liturgists (i.e., those who worship the Lord) should find his consideration of 12:22-24 and 12:28-29 engaging.

For use by ministers, several features are worth noting. Ques-

tions of introduction (isagogics) searching out matters of date, authorship and first readers are answered succinctly and adequately. In the section "Revelation and Inspiration" (page 5) the author sets his sails for the breezes of literary and form criticism whose conclusions he doesn't always ignore, but rarely champions. This becomes significant as he navigates a course through Septuagint quotations and Semitic forms of expression. References abound (confined mostly to footnotes) to other commentators of all ages. Should this volume happen to be the minister's only commentary on Hebrews, he will enjoy a balanced mention of the opinions of others. Those owning a variety of commentaries on this epistle will find in this one no unnecessary repetition of, or tiresome debate with, the views of predecessors.

Another item deserving notice here is not at all a criticism of this commentary, but more a reflection on the intention that it be "useful to pastors." Filling *that* need requires an author to decide how much attention he will devote to the phases of grammatical and especially linguistic exegesis. Being sensitive to the skills of his readers, he must often choose between putting forward the conclusions of others or charting his own course by walking through the steps leading to his own conclusions. Today, moreover, the minister's independent grammatical and linguistic exegesis has often been traded in for time-saving adoption of the conclusions of reputable theological dictionaries. Consulting them is not undesirable; dependence on them is, because they tend to be among the less theologically objective tools. When they are within easy reach, and their conclusions are included in a commentary like this one, the minister is tempted to avoid walking these steps of grammatical and linguistic exegesis himself. Therein lies one risk in writing—and using—all commentaries!

Dr. Kistemaker faces the risk competently. Each expository section concludes with attention to "Greek Words, Phrases and Constructions." The footnotes are sprinkled with references to more extensive treatments of points of exegesis, providing bibliography for students who want to strike out on their own.

We conclude our review with a hearty recommendation of this commentary to all Bible students, and with our heartfelt gratitude to Baker Book House for continuing this series of NT commentaries!

Nelson D. Kloosterman

*Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church*, by Henry Vander Goot. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984, 109 pages.

Anyone familiar with the impasse reigning among us these days with regard to biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) may tend to look with a skeptical eye at new publications on the subject. Most simply restate the arguments in other words, or rearrange the rhetorical artillery in nervous anticipation of explosive confrontation. The impasse seems to have born a resignation whose only exercise now is pigeonholing.

Dr. Vander Goot rouses us from that resignation with this little book. His main thesis is

that prior to and outside of the scientific study of the Bible in the Christian community of faith, interpretation is already there and that this existing phenomenon of interpretation and immediate confessional response to the Bible is what should fund the theoretical enterprise of theology and biblical studies. (p. 1)

This contention he expands and illumines in the rest of the book by means of four corollaries involving: 1) how people know and understand the Bible (pre-scientific and scientific understanding); 2) how the meaning of the Bible rises from its own whole, unified, structured *text*; 3) how that meaning is understandable to the believer *as believer*; and 4) how the Christian community's conventional understanding of the Bible serves as the controlling context for both believing use and theological study of the Bible. (pp. 2-3)

*How can we understand unless we believe?*

When Vander Goot works out the distinction between prescientific and scientific knowledge, between *direct* reading and *reflective* reading of the Bible, he does not claim that one is inferior to the other, better than the other, or more true than the other. He claims that the one (direct) *comes before* the other (reflective).

This priority is "there." It is simply a fact of the church's experience of listening to and coming under the Word of God. This prior, direct reading focuses on the text of Scripture as a unified story with a beginning, middle and end. ("Story" here does *not* refer to a make-believe fable with characters crafted to fit its message!) Faith's reading receives the story in its unity and integrity; the literal textual meaning thus yields the canonical (that is, authoritative) context for faith and life. In short, the Bible becomes the believer's/church's context.

In both modes of knowledge (direct and reflective), the Bible is read with glasses. That is, every reader and reflector approaches the Bible within an already established context of understanding. The church's tradition of faith and life forms that context for the believer; it is "the believing community in trusting intercourse with Scripture." (p. 15) Moreover, this relationship must undergird theology if theology is to avoid violating the Scripture.

*What do we understand when we believe?*

The conclusion established thus far is "that the Bible is a single, ongoing, cumulative narrative" that has given shape to the church. Theology too is shaped by the "first order grasp of the whole" of Scripture.

What then is the irreducible content grasped by the intuition of faith, by a believably intuitive reading of the Bible? It is God's storied address to man created (the beginning), fallen, redeemed (the middle), and restored (the end). The Bible's story line is creation-fall-redemption-consummation. Intuited from the structure of the Bible itself, this story is carried along with narratives of history and receives commentary in non-narrative books (legal, wisdom, psalmody and epistolary sections of Scripture).

This single narrative provides the key to the interpretation of its constituent parts. The text offers the clues to its own meaning. Most significant is Vander Goot's insistence that

because the events and their immediate "interpretation" are inseparable in the Bible, the two together become what is interpreted by the reader of the biblical text...The historical-critical distinction between what really happened on the one hand and the mythologizing interpretation of those events by Israel and the New Testament community on the other seems irreconcilable with a conventionally Christian doctrine of Scripture as revelation. (pp. 26-27)

Bible critics have employed a valid distinction—between an event and its interpretation—to drive a wedge between the *text* of Scripture and the *meaning* of the text, between what the Bible writer *says* and what he *intends*. The result has been a highly refined deconstruction of the Bible in modern theology.

*The priority and sovereignty of the text*

Hermeneutics nowadays focuses much attention on the relationship between an author and *his* culture, between the text and its history. Hermeneutics incorporate this attention into their theories, whereby exegesis becomes a dialogue between two

"parties"—reader and text. You have your (cultural, historical) context, and the Bible has its context. Hermeneutical theories imagine how the gap between us and the Bible is to be bridged; theologians and preachers show us. (For an unabashed statement of this, see the article "Bridge Builder" by Daniel L. Bratt in *The Banner* of Feb. 6, 1984.)

Dr. Vander Goot challenges this hermeneutical imagination with a poignant analysis that provides the clarity we so desperately need. Experience, history and creation, according to Vander Goot, don't stand over against the Scripture as an alternative source of revelation and meaning. The horizon of meaning provided in the former doesn't stand independently alongside the latter. The Bible is both message and framework, the story about the world *and* "that *by which* we make our way *in* the world of experience." (p. 34) The Bible is not

one culturally limited and particular expression of the one revelation of God (which) all men, Christian and non-Christian alike, share; as if Christians have *their* way into God's universal revelation and non-Christians their equally valid, alternative avenue . . . there is only one special revelation that befits the general revelation of God in creation. (pp. 35-36)

The believer's history and experience, therefore, form no dialectical counterpoint to those of the Scripture. Indeed, they are envisioned by Scripture. Reverent reading is a listening obedience for which "dialogue" is an improper posture. Because the world and time of the Bible include all times and places, especially that of the believer, ". . . in faith there is no real distantiation. In faith the horizon of the text *is* the horizon of the reader." (p. 40)

#### *A hermeneutic of trust*

Every minister, especially one trained within the last twenty years, will want to read and reread Chapter IV of Dr. Vander Goot's book: "The Priority of the Literal Sense and Its Eclipse in Modern Heremeneutics." God's sovereignty in revelation, he argues, implies the sovereignty of the biblical text. No skills in criticism are needed to understand the Bible's content. In fact it is precisely by applying those skills that higher-critical scholarship has sought to locate the "meaning" of the Bible *behind* the text itself. How that has been done is the subject of Chapter IV.

Wielding the tools of criticism, modern exegetes employ the *distinctions* between text and reader, and text and author, as *separations*. A speculative reconstruction of the original context of

the text then provides the key to unlock the text's meaning. The result is that the Bible is taken out of its own Word-created, Christian framework of understanding. Consequently, historical criticism of the Bible has led to the demise of Christianity.

The alternative, according to Dr. Vander Goot, is a theological understanding which arises out of radical subjection to and belief in the content of the Scripture, and which is nurtured in the community of faith that serves as the context for this understanding. The Bible must be allowed to set its own rules for its interpretation, "rules thus that give priority to the literal and typological sense of Scripture as shared by the Christian community of faith." (p. 63)

### *The storyline*

We spoke earlier of the irreducible content of Scripture, grasped by the intuition of faith. This is that which is yielded in the ordinary, regular experience of Bible reading. Some have called this Christianity's "fundamental motif." This overarching, irreducible "essence" is not one doctrine (for example, justification by faith). Rather, it is derived from both the form and the content of the whole of Scripture. That is, the form of the Bible is narrative or story; the theme, or message of this story is Christianity's "fundamental motif."

The creation-fall-redemption-consummation line is the Bible's storyline. The first pages of Scripture tell us of our beginning, and of our fall from the condition of the beginning. The last pages picture for us the consummation, the "end" that goes on forever. In between we are told of God's provision for redemption in Christ Jesus.

Fall, redemption and consummation are all in terms of the beginning. Sinful rebellion was expressed within the creation; God sent His Son into that fallen creation, He who as man became subject to it. The End will be a restoration of all things to the original.

This "line" of Scripture significantly shapes belief. It informs one's view of history, of truth. The relationships between the beginning, middle and end of the story are all significant for faith and life. These form the church's context for self-understanding.

Scripture's storyline is seen by others as election-reconciliation, by still others as the return to God through the development of history toward "the Christic form." But most agree that the four-fold sequence mentioned above "is phenomenally there in the Bible, . . ." (p. 72) It has received codified form in the church's credal

responses. Dr. Vander Goot explains briefly how that sequence, discerned in direct reading of Scripture, unfolds in the Bible. (pp. 73-78) We shall leave it to the interested reader to review this for himself.

### *The church and theologians*

The final challenge of this little book is issued to those busy in the science of theology. The relationship between the church and theologians that today suffers from alienation and suspicion must be repaired. The arrogance surrounding theologians' attempts to bridge the presumed gap between the Word and the church must be replaced with the humility arising from the mutual subjection of church and theologian to the sovereign text of the Word. Dr. Vander Goot summons his fellow-servants to recognize that

if the Bible's claims and force are not to be undone, the Bible must be investigated by the same mind as it creates in believing affirmation of it. Creation-fall-redemption-consummation as the overall structure of biblical narrative is the object of reflection in theology. But it should also be the epistemological means (beliefs) by which the researcher's activity of investigation is controlled. (p. 84)

Elsewhere he says, "Theology should be the interpretation of the interpretation of the Bible that already exists within the community of faith." (p. 83) Theological enterprise so funded by the Christian church's experience of Bible reading will truly fulfill its serving-office. Theological method is then not so much invented as received.

### *Evaluation*

Several reasons prompted us to write an extensive review of this little book. Its lucid analysis represents progress in the discussion about hermeneutics that has virtually come to a standstill among us. This product of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship is indeed worthy of careful reading and reflection. Dr. Vander Goot's work deserves therefore the extensive treatment we have given it in these pages, pages devoted to the exposition and defense of the Reformed faith.

Most heartwarming is Dr. Vander Goot's plea for acknowledging the sovereignty of the text of Scripture. Salvation, also from dilemmas arising from philosophical wedges driven between text and meaning, between what is said and what is meant, comes in standing under the power (sovereignty) of the text of Scripture. By faith we understand that the circle of the addressed always included us. The cultural relatedness of the text can, thus, never sustain frequent modern appeal to the cultural boundness of its literal meaning.

The author deserves our applause also for his incisive analysis of theology's debt to the community of faith. Theologians don't live by church collections alone; their work is funded by the church in more than one way. It is funded epistemologically, according to Vander Goot. That is, theology knows that it knows, the way it knows it, because of the nurturing faith-community in whose service it works, out of whose womb it was born. What believing theologians know is not different from what believing non-theologians know. They simply work with that knowledge in theology in a way that is different (which is *not* to say a way that is better, fuller or wiser) than the way believing non-theologians do. The confessional context of the church is the canonical, that is, authoritative context for the work of theologians. Not the pursuit of science, but the calling to serve the church authorizes theological inquiry (which does not mean, however, that the inquiry is not scientific).

Having said that, we would like to offer Dr. Vander Goot an invitation to further discussion. Two areas in particular merit that discussion, areas not necessarily obscured by the author as perhaps misunderstood by the reviewer. They are the matters of "storyline" and the relation between Scripture and tradition.

*Storyline—a welcome expansion*

Dr. Vander Goot suggests that the Bible's storyline is that of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. His addition of the fourth component of *consummation* is significant! Contemporary treatments of faith and practice (cf. recent studies on Film Arts and Dancing, as well as the *Contemporary Testimony* of the Christian Reformed Church) are structured according to the theological model of creation-fall-redemption. Although these treatments do mention eschatology, they nevertheless suffer from its omission as a *structural* component. It is an omission that seems to yield a certain moral triumphalism and optimism, one that appears to ignore the present character of this age as an age of pilgrimage and asceticism (an asceticism properly consisting not in a rejection of the creation, but in exercised abstinence for the sake of a future enjoyment).

For Reformed understanding Vander Goot's expansion signals clarity of insight. The Bible's view of history sees the end in its relation to the beginning. The re-capitulation of all things in Christ the Head (Eph. 1:10) cannot be adequately explained by dispensational theories. The Alpha and the Omega is the one Lord God Almighty, "who is, and who was, and who is to come." (Rev. 1:8) Involved

here is not only eschatology, but also the continuing relevance of God's act(s) of creation (and the cultural mandate to be fruitful and multiply, etc.). The divine origin and work of consummation qualified Christian obedience. The righteous existence that fits the kingdom of God will be ensured neither by social revolution nor by human redemption of structures of existence, but through the divine purification of all things. (2 Pet. 3:10-14) Because we eagerly look forward to this, we make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him—also in the fallen creation, according to the revealed norms for creation(al) life.

*But . . . does the experience of faith certify?*

The naive, or pre-scientific, or proto-scientific, direct reading of Scripture yields, says Dr. Vander Goot, the conventional Christian apprehension of the Bible's overall message as a creation-fall-redemption-consummation story. But Karl Barth speaks of the Scripture's election-reconciliation pattern. Pannenberg and Moltmann, on the other hand, like the Hegelian pattern of "return to God through the evolution of the cosmic process toward the Christic form." (p. 72)

The case for the fourfold storyline is strengthened by arguing that it, in contrast to the others, is a phenomenological given. It is simply "there" in the form and message of Scripture. Moreover, the individual parts of Scripture are correctly understood and related to the whole with the aid of this storyline. The eyes of faith simply "see" it; the hands of faith simply "grasp" it. That's how it's always been in the church's experience. This principal experience Dooyeweerd calls knowledge; this storyline he calls "ground motive," "central motive power." It is *the key* to true knowledge. This power impinges on us by the Holy Spirit's working through the Scripture.

But, is this the "conventional Christian apprehension" of the Bible's total message? We agree that when we read the Bible in faith and listen to its whole story, we "naturally construe it in a certain way." (p. 23) And I see little difficulty with that fourfold construction. But how can we certify that the beginning-middle-end *character of the narrative* necessarily yields the creation-fall-redemption-consummation *storyline* to the eyes of faith? What then of the patterns of Barth, Pannenberg and Moltmann? Isn't the fourfold storyline the *product* of faith's reflection, and as such to be distinguished from what is "there," from that upon which faith reflects? If so, doesn't the storyline acquire only derivative authority, certainly not the exalted function of *the key* to true knowledge?

Or, is our construction (faith's construal of the story) the key to true knowledge, rather than the Scripture itself?

In other words, how does one avoid the appearance of subjectivism here in identifying the conventional Christian apprehension? If we should agree with Dooyeweerd that this storyline has "an absolutely central religious significance," wouldn't we merely shift the problem of verifying Scripture's authoritative message from the subjectivity of biblical criticism to that of faith's experience?

*Scripture and tradition*

The way in which Dr. Vander Goot relates Scripture with the believing understanding of Scripture embodied in the church's tradition contains crucial differences from the way in which Roman Catholic theology relates them. Scripture has given birth to the church; the church has not canonized Scripture. The Word of God creates life and faith; tradition has no generative power. Yet, when theology is called to interpret the interpretation of the Scripture given by the Christian community, does not that tradition (confessional, exegetical, etc.) obtain a status beyond that historically accorded it in Reformed theology? Dr. Vander Goot's strong and clear emphasis on the context and funding of theology as being the Christian community is to be welcomed! But do we not move one step further in assigning the church's tradition the place of object of theological study? Or is this a misperception on my part?

*The church under the Word of God*

This book review is indeed rather longer than customary. We've indicated why: the book deserves your reading, your patient reflection. For in this collection of essays we have an attempt to give the Bible back to the church, a Bible that many handle today with an uncertainty and a nervousness induced by theological methods of criticism foreign to both the Bible and the church. Perhaps as you read this little book, you will find answers to the questions briefly sketched above. But more importantly, you will hear a crisp call for all of us to submit to the sovereignty of the Bible's text.

Nelson D. Kloosterman

*Atlas of Medieval Europe*, by Donald Murphy. New York: Facts on File Inc., 1984. Pp. 240.

For anyone interested in the history of Christ's church during the

Middle Ages, including professors and students, this book offers welcome and much-needed assistance. It supplies in relatively brief compass the background necessary to understand that complicated era which gave rise to both Renaissance and Reformation and so has helped to shape the world in which we now live.

By using this volume as a companion several difficulties and dangers to a proper evaluation can be avoided.

For far too long we have spoken of the medieval period as the "dark ages." Men saw almost exclusively a thousand years of illiterate and impoverished peasants held in thrall by kings who fought each other incessantly and ecclesiastical leaders bent on increasing their own power and pleasure. Much of this perspective was inherited from Renaissance scholars who, awakened to the glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome, reacted too sharply against the very world which had given them birth and nurture. Nor did the scholars who followed the Reformation escape such onesidedness. Deeply interested in purging the church of the abuses and corruptions into which it had fallen, they often for polemical reasons had little enthusiasm for those centuries which preceded their own times. It seemed so easy and right to evaluate the medieval period as one characterized by papal domination and popular superstition.

During the last several decades a more balanced view of those long and influential years has begun to prevail. History cannot be told simply in terms of popes and emperors and knights in shining armor together with a few scholars and monks thrown in for good measure. Adventurers, explorers, merchants, craftsmen and farmers also helped to shape, be it quite indirectly, the life of community, church and nation. Bountiful harvests as well as famines, floods and plagues played their role in the all-controlling and directing providence of the Lord of history.

Although entitled an "atlas," this volume offers much more. It provides a running commentary on those long centuries under four heads: Disintegration of the Ancient World, Breaking new ground, Fruits of civilization and Consolidation of the Land, together with no less than nine special features. Each is profusely illustrated together with many excellent maps. Nor must the introductory sections including "The Idea of the Middle Ages" and "Medieval Themes" be glossed over. An excellent bibliography of the most recent books dealing with materials which are only summarized or

alluded to in the commentary will prove helpful to the interested student.

In no sense can this volume be used as a textbook for medieval, much less for church history. That is not its purpose. As preliminary or even better as collateral reading and study for such courses it will prove not only illuminating but also unusually fascinating.

Peter Y. De Jong

*The Reformation of 1834, Essays in commemoration of the 'Act of Secession and Return'*, ed. by P.Y. De Jong and N.D. Kloosterman for the Faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Orange City: Pluim Publ. Co., 1984. Pp.85. Price \$5.00.

*The Reformation of 1834* is an eighty page booklet produced by the faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. It deals with that Secession in the Netherlands and, in a sketchy manner, tracing its history both in the Netherlands and North America.

The booklet comprises six rather brief chapters. The first two are on conditions leading to the Secession and to the Secession itself, written by Dr. Peter Y. De Jong. These chapters provide excellent, interesting and very informative material, compactly and yet meaningfully related. Next is a chapter on the doctrinal significance of 1834 by Prof. Nelson Kloosterman. According to him the central significance of 1834 is the call back to the confessions, specifically the *Canons of Dort*, which provides the basis for a godly life. Then follows an insightful chapter by the Rev. Henry Vander Kam on the expanding influence of the Secession. We get a good glimpse of the early struggles of the Seceders and the wide influence of Abraham Kuyper, particularly his involvement in the Doleantie, and the kinds of differences which were already present in 1886 but which were compromised in 1905 at Utrecht and then later figured strongly in the controversy with and deposition of Klaas Schilder (and others) in 1944. This is worthwhile reading. The booklet concludes with separate chapters by Dr. Timothy Monsma and Prof. Mark Vander Hart on the educational ideals of 1834 in the Michigan col-

onies and the influence in 1834 west of the Mississippi River. Both chapters are helpful in giving a better understanding of the dynamics of the Secession movement as it encountered a new environment in America. Vander Hart's portrayal of the life, thinking and activity of Scholte in Pella is most fascinating and illuminating.

Since this is the first joint publication of that faculty, it is noteworthy that it chose to write about the Secession of 1834. Evidently the faculty sees circumstances today similar to those bringing about the 1834 Secession and hopes to alert God's people to these circumstances and prevent the need for such drastic action today. The editors indicate this in the preface, "While in scope not to be compared with the great Reformation of 1517, its story deserves to be told, so that we with our children and grandchildren in days of spiritual decline and deformation may give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ who continues to gather, defend and preserve for himself in the unity of the true faith a church chosen to eternal life."

It is this concern for the church and its true spirituality that not only gave rise to this publication but to the origin of Mid-America Reformed Seminary itself. Reading this booklet one cannot help but appreciate its tone and spiritual emphasis. The church today will profit from this kind of influence. What must be guarded against is the temptation to see today's problems as being a repeat of 1834: It could come to that stage. However, let us be thankful that there is still widespread appreciation for our confessions, and no minister is free to preach contrary to them. Furthermore, no minister need feel threatened by openly and forcefully defending and expounding the doctrines of the church.

Bernard J. Haan

*Dutch Calvinism in Modern America, a History of a Conservative Subculture*, by James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984. Pp.329.

Here is a book which deserves to be read slowly, thoughtfully and appreciatively. It tells a story which spans decades of perplexity and pain, of struggle to maintain a measure of religious identity,

vigor and cohesion with sometimes too little success. It is the story of Dutch Calvinists coming to a new land since the 1840s and seeking to find there for themselves and their descendants an opportunity to become citizens of a great and to the minds of most of them a grand new land without losing their own identity. And that identity was, for them, shaped at its deepest and most comprehensive level by their religious-theological convictions.

This story is as well told as it possibly could be, given the broad range of time, events and personalities together with institutions they represented which was involved. For this effort the author deserves a large measure of thanks, especially from members of the two main churches whose story is now made available, also with its "warts" which are far from few and inconspicuous, to a wider reading public. He is entitled also to praise for telling such a complex story as fully and fairly as he does. With this not every RCA and CRC member will at once agree, since the author aims at writing this history without an axe to grind even when some of his sympathies begin to shine through.

James D. Bratt is presently Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Graduate Program in Religion at the University of Pittsburgh, Pa. He is a disciple of the well-known historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom from whom he has learned his lessons well. He writes competently, interestingly and cogently. Amid the almost confusing welter of materials which he has researched and evaluated he faithfully pursues the aim which he set for himself. He turns to what are his own religious, ethnic and cultural roots, the Dutch Calvinists who are in this land one of the many "subcultures" and which he rightly defines as basically "conservative." This is the story of the slow and at times very erratic process of adjusting to the American scene. And as he rightly urges, the "problem" for these often strong-willed and at times none too loveable people has been and still is: to which America can and may and should they adjust without so accommodating themselves in thought-patterns and life-style which they profess to hold as to lose their precious heritage.

The story revolves around the two major streams of Dutch Calvinists who arrived during and after the mid-nineteenth century, the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church.

Both, since Bratt deals almost exclusively with the "western" branch of the RCA, root in the reformatory movement of 1834

which stirred up the Netherlands from which those first immigrants came. Both were also engaged in responding and reacting to the second reformatory movement in that country which took shape in 1886 and afterwards, largely under the leadership of Dr. Abraham Kuyper whose influence spread far beyond the narrow confines of the country in which he lived and labored. Between the two main-line Dutch denominations in the United States, separated since 1857, we find striking similarities but also sharp differences of interest in, approach to and aims with respect to this new land in which they sought to take their place. Both took their religious convictions and therefore their theology with a seriousness which often baffled their fellow countrymen. As heirs of the Calvinistic tradition, even with its wide variety of manifestations and expressions, all of life was for them religion, a deeply personal relationship to God and his will for man's life as revealed in Holy Scripture as the only rule for faith and daily practice. Hence family, work, education, society, politics and even cultural expressions in literature, art, etc. were to serve the glory of that God who brought them to this new land. Even those with more pietistic and individualistically-oriented aims never completely escaped the call to become the "salt of the earth and the light of the world." B.B. Warfield, that champion of historic Presbyterianism, has been reported to have said to one of the CRC leaders, "All you Dutch, even to farmers plowing their fields, are born theologians." And something of this insight is effectively demonstrated in this book.

In some respects most of these Dutch made relatively easy adjustments to their new environment. Many old family customs were soon sloughed off. Tense as was the transition from Dutch to English in the churches, often a last bastion for the preservation of past patterns and practices, even this did not produce lasting trauma. If not the parents, then soon their children adapted themselves to American food, dress, speech, sports and newspapers. But on the deeper levels of their lives, on the spiritual and ecclesiastical and theological even when at times quite ill-informed, they (be it in a wide variety of ways) always to this day have demonstrated a striking love/hate attitude to the prevailing American way of life. To borrow a phrase from the story of Dominee Scholte's wife, these Dutch Calvinists even now cannot escape seeing themselves in large part as still "strangers in a strange land."

It is this story which Bratt tells so effectively. He leads the reader into surprising, fascinating and at times very frustrating situations.

Largely we find a rehearsal of what has been written down; what has appeared in print. But those pages made profound impacts on the people who read them. And read them most of the Dutch Calvinists did, especially in the years before World War II. Among the leadership, while springing basically from similar roots, we find no agreement, especially not on how the "principles" which they all claimed to profess were to be put into practice. And if any phrase can somewhat characterize those Dutch Calvinists who took their faith seriously (of course, always there were those who didn't!), it is that they wanted to be known as "a people of principle." The difficulty for them was always how best, how most consistently, most effectively this could be done in a new world which for them was filled with so many complexities and contradictions. Always it seemed to be a struggle within their own camps between the twofold calling of "preservation" and "propagation," of maintaining what they believed would make community and country a better place in which to live to God's glory. In all their discussions and dissensions we find the optimists and the pessimists with perhaps altogether too few inspired by a healthy realism. Yet somehow despite internal disagreements, as the writer demonstrates, they did not lose their identity even though all were to an extent changed in the process. Today, perhaps, the "tensions" in both denominations are deeper and more sharply etched than in previous decades, so that only the future can disclose whether these Dutch Calvinists will remain a conservative subculture or be swallowed in the amorphous American life-stream.

The author has done well, so it appears to the reviewer, to arrange his material not in topical but chronological order. Whether the terms chosen to designate each succeeding period are fully accurate is open to question. "The Consolidated Community" of 1928-1948 demonstrated something more than "a fortress mentality." One also raises eyebrows when reading, "Few periods could better fit the Dutch Calvinistic temperament than the 1930s and '40s. War and economic calamity had always seemed the ultimate mournful measure of humanity. . ." And some hackles will be raised when the author uses words like "harsh" and "strident" and "young Turks," to mention no others. But when speaking about strong personalities involved as deeply in the issues of the day as they were, we have no right to fault him for his personal assessment. History is made by men under the sovereign God. Never is it a pleasing and placid succession of always happy events. Nor can it be assessed impersonally from some secluded ivory tower. Historians have to help us see ourselves, also in the light of the

past, better than often we do. For that the author of this volume serves us well.

What should amaze the reflective reader is the erudition of this historian. He is unusually well read in the sources available to him. Even more he has an almost uncanny ability to penetrate to the "heart" of the many discussions and dissensions which at times have disturbed both the RCA and the CRC. He introduces us again and again to a wide range of individuals who have contributed significantly to the life and activities and hopes of the two churches. Few, very few, inaccuracies mar these pages, so that even to mention them here would be churlish. None in any way impair the value of this work and its message. It may well help us to see ourselves together with our past better than we do and, hopefully, avoid the ramblings and the rancors which have stained many a page.

Those Reformed with a Dutch heritage and history have, indeed, had something of inestimable value to offer the United States and Canada which both had early, strong affinities with the Calvinistic reformation. That often little impact was made may be attributed to several factors: their small numbers, their scattered presence across vast areas, their use of terminology quite foreign to their neighbors, their early but inescapable isolation, and perhaps most of all their talking too much to themselves while uncovering differences which may well have been not quite so dangerous and devastating as some supposed. Their aims indeed were lofty. Their motives none of us, also at this later date, have any right to judge. Above all they wanted to speak "the truth" as they saw and understood it from God's Word. But as the record shows so plainly, they did not always "speak the truth in love," much as they may have earnestly attempted to do this.

This review would be incomplete without at least a passing mention of one of the most fascinating chapters. It deals with the "four renegade novelists." Their story is of one piece with ours, whether we are willing to admit this or not. What they have written over the years for the wider reading public may often be assessed as "caricature," but even caricature has its place without which telling the story of the "Americanization" of the Dutch Calvinists would be deficient. Also these men and many others with them have not been able to rid themselves successfully of their roots. For that Dutch Calvinism with all its failings and frustrations in the new world is as "stubborn" in its grip on the human heart and life as the proverbial Dutch temperament.

The book is enhanced for the studious reader with copious and illuminating notes, covering no less than eighty-four pages. The appended bibliography will prove to be of inestimable value for anyone who wishes to know details of RCA and CRC more thoroughly. None of this should be skipped over lightly.

Much more than a survey of the way in which the Dutch Calvinists have sought to adjust to America while retaining their identity is found in these pages. For not discussing every aspect of this process in detail and depth he may not be faulted by anyone. He gives us what he has promised, and for that he deserves thanks and commendation. No one can claim to know, much less begin to understand Dutch Calvinism in its wrestlings with the American world without a close, careful, discerning reading of these pages which are worth more than ten times the price to be paid for its purchase. It is an invaluable resource which, hopefully, will lead to the production of articles, monographs and perhaps doctoral dissertations on some of the people, problematics and projects which have been here introduced. Also for that stimulus we congratulate the author for a work well done.

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