

BOOK REVIEWS

Christian England (Volume Three): From the Eighteenth Century To the First World War, by David L. Edwards. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984. Pp. 387, incl. index. \$10.95.

According to the author's preface, this is the last of three volumes written to provide an "ecumenical history of English Christianity." After reading these volumes the reader wishes that Edwards would be able to bring this history up to date. However, he stands too close to the last three-quarters of a century to be able to do it the same justice. He has done a masterful job of weaving countless facts into a smooth-flowing and interesting history. You never feel that he has collected facts, wadded them up in a ball and thrown them at you. If sometimes you wonder why he doesn't say something which you think is important, just wait. He will say it and in a very unobtrusive way. The pages abound with names of English church history greats and their unique contributions to church life. It seems as if none of the great leaders are omitted. Whitefield, the Wesleys, Spurgeon, Parker, Dale and Newman are all found on these pages, along with many more.

You become aware immediately that Edward's purpose is not just to write an English church history. His purpose is to write about English Christianity. Therefore, besides writing about the developments in the church, he refers to the impact of Christianity and movements within it on the lifestyle of the people, on their art, literature, and politics. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Wilberforce, among others, receive generous treatment.

Obviously, much more detail could have been given in these pages. The period covered (from 1700 to 1914) seethes with activity in the English church; the evangelical revival takes place; Noncon-

formity develops; Rome is again allowed to have a presence in England; liberalism makes inroads; missionary activity blossoms. To deal with all of this and more in less than 400 pages is no small task. Yet, amazingly the detail is here. Anyone who wishes to do further study in any aspect of this history will find helpful bibliographical footnotes on most of the pages. Between pages 40 and 50, for example, there are no less than 20 references!

It is good that Edwards prepared these volumes for us. We ought to know about English Christianity. My only regret is that when Eerdmans took over the publication of this set on this side of the Atlantic, the volumes were made available in paperback. Oxford, publisher of the first volume, had begun the set in hard cover. Contributions such as these should be in a more permanent form.

Jerome M. Julien

The Pastor As Evangelist, by Richard S. Armstrong. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984. Pp. 204. \$9.95.

"There is no valid excuse for any pastor to deny or refuse his or her own ministry of evangelism. That conviction is the reason for this book, which is an appeal and a challenge to look at their ministry through evangelistic glasses" (page 13).

Having opened with this conviction, the author seeks to define his terms, or better excuse himself from using the terms strictly. He agrees that, speaking strictly, evangelism is preaching the Gospel. He agrees that evangelism should be defined solely in terms of its message, not its target or results. But he then proceeds to give a broad theoretic base which in effect negates the true meaning of the words he uses.

The book offers some twenty definitions of evangelism. The book gives us the strictly technical and then offers a practical use that is indifferent to the technical. The book uses this dualism

often. "There is only one Gospel, *but* (underlining mine) each person incorporates and applies that Gospel according to a personal faith commitment and understanding" (page 47).

After giving a theoretical base, the book focuses its attention upon the pastor as evangelist. "Evangelist" is neither an office nor a function, but a matter of perspective and style. The pastor as evangelist views himself in relation to persons. The book proceeds to examine the barriers, the pastor's personal faith relationships. The factors concerning the persons who are being evangelized are considered, such as age, number, the medium, circumstances, receptivity and culture. In most of the considerations, several rules, principles, or "plug-in, come-in, take-on, and take-off points" are presented for thought and action. The conclusion gives hints for the pastor's evangelistic style and its rewards.

The book is full of practical considerations, some perhaps helpful to the naive, some not so helpful, even questionable. It is true, as the author states, that "a pastor should do the work of an evangelist" and that such work is "not debatable." The question is what does that mean? The answer to how to do evangelism depends on what evangelism is. If evangelism, speaking Biblically, is as Luke says in describing Paul's ministry, "preaching" the Gospel (1 Cor 1:17), teaching (Col 1:28), disputing (Acts 9:29), reasoning or arguing (*dialegomai*, Acts 17:2,17, 18:4, 19:8f, 24:25), we must be obedient to the Word of God. If evangelism is proclaiming the Gospel, then of course, a pastor should do the work of an evangelist, and this cannot be debatable! It is our commission! Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel. This book fails to build on this Biblical foundation, as it seeks to challenge pastors to be what God calls them to be, preachers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

C. Eric Fennema

The Grandeur of God: A Theological and Doctrinal Study of the Divine Attributes, by C. Samuel Storms. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Pp. 180. N. p.

The subject which Mr. Storms treats is a truly glorious and most deservedly exalted doctrine. It is the first locus in systematic theology, or dogmatics: the sovereign, Almighty God in his essence and nature.

Unfortunately, as the author indicates in his preface, doctrine and God do not receive much attention or interest in our age. Our generation is more interested in man than God. Books on "how to" multiply and sell. The author should be commended for refusing to pen a justification for writing on the doctrine of God.

"What for many passes as the knowledge of God is in fact a mindless, contentless, self-generated feeling of spiritual exultation," the author deplores, commenting that "for such people theological ignorance is heavenly bliss!" However, such ignorance is not his motivation for writing this book. His motivation is the inexhaustible grandeur of God. A personal knowledge of God is the only knowledge worthy of him.

Following basically the regular order in theology, Storms treats the knowability of God; God's being and nature, or as he prefers, God's essence and excellencies; the Trinity; God's omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence; God's immutability, grace and love; and concludes with a brief look at true beauty. There are also two appendices. The first is a good brief review of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the second addresses the threat of "process theism" upon God's sovereignty.

This is a valuable handbook and guide concerning the doctrine of God. It is well-written and well-documented, though at times the quotes from other scholars do not seem to shed any light upon the subject. Because the book is a summary, it deals with problems in a sketchy manner, and lacks thorough exegesis. In a few instances, the problems presented do not seem even to be worthy of refutation.

If this book helps laymen and pastors to look again at the teaching of Scripture concerning God and at the prolific works of scholars like Bavinck, Berkhof, Calvin, Kuyper, Hoeksema, Warfield, Murray, etc., it is well worth the study. It should stimulate all Christians to reflect on the grandeur of our sovereign Lord in a man-centered age.

The Cultural Subversion of the Biblical Faith, Life in the Twentieth Century Under the Sign of the Cross, by James D. Smart. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977. Pp. 128. \$4.95.

This book is an indictment of Christian citizenship in 20th century America: Christianity has merged with civil religion and the American way of life. The author argues that the Christian church of the 20th century in general (in fact, this book suffers from generalizations) has suffered and still suffers from a blindness that has led to a cultural subversion of the Biblical faith, a blindness caused by a traditionalism that finds its roots in 16th century Great Britain. The founding fathers of the United States are accused of identifying themselves with the Israel of the Scriptures. This "illusion" has dominated the life and destiny of the United States down to the present day.

In the first chapter we are given a critical survey of the phenomenon of "civil religion," what it is and why it has flourished so well in America. In the second chapter, we look at what the Scriptures say to us (or do we?), while the third chapter asks for a Biblical perspective on love of God and love of neighbor, showing perhaps the most balanced approach of the four chapters. In the concluding chapter, the present dilemma is examined, though we probably miss the real dilemma: the way the author uses the Scripture as a "political" book.

Here we have a treatment of some very crucial issues for any serious Christian wanting to live a life worthy of God's call. The theme of Christ and culture has occupied the minds of many throughout the history of Christianity. One can appreciate the author's critique of the present view concerning the separation of church and state; it is dangerous to a true Christian life. One would be foolish to maintain that our founding fathers were perfect in all their words and actions. Certainly the call to a careful interpretation and use of the Scriptures is essential to true faith. In fact, this book shows how essential it is by its poor example.

Mr. Smart condemns American Christianity for its traditionalism, its pietism and literalism, its spiritualizing the message into simply saving souls. At the same time, he reads the Scriptures solely from a political perspective. He tells us to look to the cross as a "political device." The aim of Jesus' mission, he says, was to

transform the political nation of Israel, and the cross "was the instrument of a political execution" before all else. "The modern parallel would be a firing squad or a hangman's noose or an electric chair. We translate everything else in Scripture. Why not translate the cross" (page 74). Christ's cross becomes one of many. Old Testament prophets are held up as political revolutionaries. Judas betrayed because he was afraid of the political implications. One wonders at this point: if we disagree, are we Judases? All crosses have this in common: they are political in character. Nationalism has become the number one temptation (enemy) for the Christian today.

Why does Smart view the cross in this way? The answer is found in the way he views the Scriptures. They are from long ago and different times, filled with folktales and the like. To read the Bible with profit, we must recreate the situation. We cannot interpret the Scripture with Scripture, but we need 20th century experience. In fact, what is revelation but "the opening of the eyes of human beings to see the truth about themselves . . . !" (page 125) With such a view of revelation it is no wonder that he can say, "God is sovereign in the event, *not in making it happen*, but in determining its meaning for the world" (page 124; emphasis mine). We are given a powerful example of how the Scriptures can be misused.

This book certainly calls us to consider seriously our responsibility as Christian citizens, who are called not to be of the world, but to live in the world. The Scriptures deal with our whole life. We have a cultural task in following Jesus Christ. The concerns are legitimate and important. But without any Biblical foundation to help us, how can we be faithful and obedient in fulfilling our office as Christian citizens? The cross is not first of all a political instrument. The cross for Paul is the Gospel of grace, bringing salvation from sin (1 Cor 1). Christ hung on the tree because it was cursed by God! He could not have been hung by a rope, nor stoned to death. If we are to find and fight for justice as citizens, we must begin by doing justice to the Word of the Judge of all the earth. *The Cultural Subversion of the Biblical Faith* fails in this respect, and does a disservice to the serious Christian citizen who wants to be faithful to his Lord in culture.

C. Eric Fennema

Worship: a Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience, by John E. Burkhardt. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982. Pp. 168. \$8.95.

Christian worship as a communal exercise and experience has been receiving increased attention in recent years. An avalanche of articles, monographs and books pour from the presses in the hope of revitalizing what so often seems to many an exercise in futility and fruitlessness. But far too much deals almost exclusively with how worship was done, is being done and/or should be done. Too little attention is clearly directed to theological convictions which should provide direction in a day when liturgical experimentation aims at pleasing preachers and people rather than God.

This brief volume seeks somewhat to redress this situation fraught with many an unhappy consequence for Christian congregations. The author begins by urging that all "human questions" including also those of worship "are not basically those of practice but of meaning." Here follow theological essays written in a simple but stimulating style, so that the thoughtful reader will not soon lay the book aside.

His understanding of the essential character of Christian worship sets the tone. With it few will disagree.

Christian worship is a response to God's grace. As a response it is not cultic . . . Christianity is not cultic. Christians do not cultivate God. Rather, they know themselves as cultivated by God . . . Whatever we give God has already been given us. Whatever we designate as holy as already been hallowed by God. Whatever language, gestures, or patterns of worship we choose, they have been granted to us in our time and place by a culture formed with God's care. In everything we have to do with the living God. Such convictions are the matrix of worship; without them, worship is meaningless. Therefore, as response, acts of worship are believing celebrations of what God is about in the world.

This description explains in large measure why Burkhardt reviews Christian worship not only with repeated appeal to Scripture but also to man's cultural expressions. And an evangelical does well to remember that all worship is deeply imbedded in man's humanity. The use of water and wine, of music and prayers, as well as much else is not restricted to the Christian faith. In how far and on what

basis such parallels can and should be drawn is an altogether different matter. Yet the Gospel together with the worship which it seeks to elicit as an appropriate response to God's grace in Jesus Christ does not address men, even those professing other religions, in a vacuum. Nor are its forms totally alien even though their significance is at a far remove. What the author does not do with any clarity is draw sharp lines between true and false worship.

Much of what he writes demonstrates a sensitive understanding of Christian worship and the many perils which beset it. Again and again he calls attention to Holy Scripture to shed light on what worship is intended to mean for all who engage in it. Often there are striking statements, also in the form of warning, which will not be quickly forgotten.

On the "togetherness" of the Lord's assembly he warns sternly against those who "seek a 'faith that satisfies,' join 'the church of their choice,' and evaluate worship by whether they 'get anything out of it.'" Rightly he insists that "in the biblical reading of reality, individualism is demonic. It is literally diabolic, breaking covenants, rupturing relations, and sundering humanity from itself."

We are reminded that the role of worship is to recognize, rehearse and proclaim the God who is at work in the world which suffers from distance and distress. Hence the essays on the Lord's day and its significance for an understanding and use of time; the Lord's Supper as a banquet rather than merely a prescribed form; baptism as the Lord's welcome into the fellowship which he creates and maintains. Far too much that passes for congregational worship is a shallow routine, easily neglected when it seems to inconvenience a person because its meaning (and this is Burkhardt's point) no longer is understood and appreciated.

The volume makes no claim to being exhaustive. It may serve the busy and at times frustrated pastor well as a "reminder" of much that he and his congregation take for granted or have too much forgotten.

Liturgy which is not responsive to man's life in all its dimensions soon degenerates into an empty form, alienated from the daily involvements in joys and sorrows, in work and play and rest; it shows itself unable to offer to God in humble adoration what he by grace in Christ has first given. Unless congregations catch more

than a passing glimpse of this solemn purpose in the light of Scripture, our solemn assemblies will be an abomination to the One whom we claim to know and love and worship.

Peter Y. De Jong

Can You Help Us?

While our library has grown phenomenally with God's blessing, there are certain gaps which we find difficult to fill. If you have any of the following which you no longer need and would like to see put to good use, please communicate with the Librarian of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

The Banner (issues before 1948)

Westminster Theological Journal (especially the earlier issues)

The Standard Bearer (issues before 1974)

Theology Today (Volumes 19 to 36)

Journal of Presbyterian History (any issues)

Christian Century (issues before July, 1935)

Free University Quarterly (any issues)

Biblical Repertory (Vol. 1, 1825)

Princeton Seminary Bulletin (any issues before 1964)

Union Seminary Quarterly Review (any issues)

Union Seminary Review (any issues)

Acts of Synod—Christian Reformed Church (very early dates, especially those before 1920)

Yearbooks of the Christian Reformed Church (before 1910)