

BOOK REVIEWS

Genesis: An Expository Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985. Pp. 383. \$16.95.

Second in a series of three volumes of messages on the book of *Genesis*, the preacher attempts to deal with God's special relationship to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is to be commended for acquainting his people with the content of Holy Scripture by dealing carefully with the great events in redemptive history. Much stress is rightly laid on the sovereignty and faithfulness of God to his own. References are frequently made to the fulfillment of the promises in Jesus Christ. The treatment, however, is often too topical; the application made too individualistic. Richer insights into this biblical material are, in our judgment, provided by such works as *Promise and Deliverance* by the late S.G. de Graaf and for those who can read Dutch, by the even more detailed treatment offered by I. de Wolf and G. van Dooren in their volumes entitled *De Geschiedenis der God-sopenbaring*.

Peter Y. De Jong

The Institutes of Christian Religion, by John Calvin; edited and abridged by Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987. Pp. 271. \$7.95.

Few books have made such a lasting impact on our western world as the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes*. Its address to the many questions and issues facing Christians today often seems unusually pertinent and up-to-date. It has molded individuals and peoples for centuries and still captivates many a reader by its unity, thoroughness and clarity in presenting the Christian faith. More than a doctrinal treatise, it is a guide to genuine piety.

For the average reader in our busy times, however, this two-volume work seems too formidable. And, to be sure, there are large sections in it which appealed more directly to his own times than to ours. The editors, therefore, have taken up the challenge of making this work more palatable especially to those uninitiated in Calvin's life and work. Only some fifteen percent of the material is reproduced and that in somewhat more readable English style than that presented in Henry Beveridge's otherwise excellent and precise translation. Nowhere is the flow of Calvin's thought seriously interrupted. The text is arranged by themes into fourteen parts, retaining Calvin's own book and chapter headings. Carefully indicated also are those sections of the original which have been omitted.

For those who know Calvin largely by hearsay, this handy volume is highly recommended. Especially Reformed believers, both young and old, should obtain and read these pages to refresh their hearts with those biblical teachings which they claim to cherish. This book is a bargain at \$7.95.

Peter Y. De Jong

The Church in the Bible and in the World, ed. by D. A. Carson. Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster Press, and Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987. Pp. 359. \$19.95.

More ink seems to have been spilled by professors and preachers in recent years on the subject of Christ's church than on any other. Many of these works treat the material only partially; others seem bent on foisting a peculiarly one-sided and biased view on the reading public. Far too few aim at being comprehensive; still fewer demonstrate a thoroughly Scriptural grounding in their presentation as well as an earnestness in doing justice to the many-sidedness with which the Bible speaks about its nature, calling and destiny in the world.

This volume, therefore, fills a distinct need for evangelical believers everywhere.

It comprises seven essays penned by members of the "Faith and Study" unit of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

In a sense it is a necessary and appropriate sequel to an earlier contribution by that same group, entitled *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*, which probed some of the hermeneutical issues relevant to understanding the church's nature and mission in its address to various cultures. The resources of that volume are now put to use in attempting to formulate biblically informed and hermeneutically sensitive statements on the doctrine of the church.

In their attempt the writers have succeeded admirably.

Here the main subjects and issues dealing with the church in the world are addressed carefully and thoroughly. Clowney opens the discussions with his contribution on "The Biblical Theology of the Church." Instead of beginning with titles assigned to the church and its attributes as developed in dogmatics, he presents the doctrine of the Trinity as the key to a right understanding of the nature and scope, the mission and destiny of the church in today's world. Never can the church be rightly assessed except in the light of its grounding in the Old Testament people of God. Whatever differences obtain between the Old Testament and New Testament presentations--and they are too striking to be ignored--these are due to the fulfillment of God's purposes manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ together with the coming of the Spirit with power on Pentecost.

Space does not permit a thorough survey and review. But each essay is a gem. Here we find much needed antidotes to the horizontalizing of the church in the life of mankind.

A few comments will suffice to indicate both the thoroughness and clarity with which basic issues are addressed. Worship is set in the context of the Christian's high calling to consecrate all of life to the service of God through the Savior-King. Full justice is done to the priesthood of all believers without in any way discounting the necessary and God-willed role of the special ministries within Christ's church. The matter of form versus spontaneity is also adequately addressed. Contrary to those who deprecate "office" with its spiritual authority, one essay

insists and demonstrates that in Scripture function and position are neatly bound together. No less than thirty-three pages of meticulous exegesis deal with the matter of women in ecclesiastical office, which study committees in the Christian Reformed Church and others would do well to consult on what has become for many a thorny issue. The dangers of syncretism are thoroughly exposed. And while the church is seen as an ever-present reality in this age by the will of Christ, its Savior and Lord, its destiny as a heavenly and eschatological entity shines brightly throughout these pages. Every serious reader of this book cannot but be impressed, informed and encouraged. Once taken up for reading, it will not be casually laid aside except by the superficial or the indifferent.

Peter Y. De Jong

Public Knowledge and Christian Education, by Theodore Plantinga. Vol. 1 of Studies in Christian Education. Lewiston, NY; Queenston, ON: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988. Pp. 124. \$30.00.

There are a great many books these days about education. All of them say something, and a good number of them might even be characterized as saying something important about this or that aspect of specifically Christian education. The book before us goes further than most in its examination of Christian education, for it seeks to lay foundations in a Christian worldview for our examination of and discussion about how we carry on this covenant community enterprise. Furthermore, this is a good book. It is written by an expert philosopher who is truly Christian in his worldview and methods. This is demonstrated both in the book before us and in other works, such as his *Learning to Live With Evil* (Eerdmans, 1982).

Theodore Plantinga is professor of Philosophy at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. He grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and has been active in Christian education, having taught at Calvin College and having been involved in the founding of Redeemer College.

His book addresses the need to be conscious of the sources of the content of our Christian education curricula, a need that, Dr. Plantinga convincingly argues, is often neglected. Christian education often imports the content of secular education and then tries to "christianize" it, rather than being critical enough to realize that certain aspects of the "public knowledge" cannot be successfully christianized.

In the first chapters of the book Plantinga works through a theory of knowledge which sees knowledge as information useful in a particular environment. While many might at first find such a theory of knowledge contrary to the usual idea of "universal truth," Plantinga argues that no one really possesses that kind of "knowledge" and that we do better to look at human knowledge as it really is.

Having outlined the realities of human knowledge, our author argues that the sciences and academic disciplines dealt with in education constitute "discourses," areas of discussion in which language peculiar to each is used. The sum of these various discourses is what Plantinga calls "public knowledge."

When one wishes to work in or communicate about a particular science, he is forced by the discourse already in progress to speak the language of that science. Christians must notice that these discourses are already laid out and in progress internationally, before the sciences (hard and soft) are imported into the Christian curriculum. Thus, when the Christian curriculum takes over "public knowledge," it is very often unknowingly secularizing itself.

There are two basic problems with respect to the present situation in Christian education theory. The first is that it is commonly accepted that *any* discipline can be Christianized and legitimately taught in Christian education. Plantinga argues that we ought to be much more selective about what we import from the public knowledge sector of society.

The second major problem our writer finds is that most of our Christian educators today at the college level have obtained advanced degrees from secular institutions and with them, subliminal allegiance to the secular disciplines and

institutions at which they received them.

All of this leads Plantinga to urge a much more critical use of both the academic disciplines and also of the educational facilities of the non-Christian world around us. Plantinga calls us to a pluralistic view of the world in which we live, and uses the Jewish culture as an example of how Christians might maintain their cultural identity in a non-Christian world.

We can be very happy that Plantinga has raised these matters in such an articulate fashion. Hopefully the rest of the covenant community which is committed to Christian education will realize how important these issues are and will continue the discussion. We know that this book, part of a series of studies, is seeking to raise issues rather than have the final say on them. Therefore, we know that neither its author nor his editors will be dismayed to find others seeking clarification and expressing some concern with certain conclusions and recommendations. That is what healthy discussion must have.

We would point out first of all that there is a rather nominalistic cast to the author's analysis of epistemology. Not surprising therefore is his conclusion that we need to work within rather than across the borders of the pluralistic world in which we live. Indeed, he recommends a kind of Jewish insularism as a means of protecting the identity and purity of the Christian community, going so far as to point to the Jewish maintenance of the Hebrew language for prayers, etc., as good methodology.

We find this ideal to be somewhat out of touch with the intercultural requirements of evangelism and missions, particularly as we learn them from the book of Acts. We do live in a pluralistic world, but do we take this as necessary and even ideal, or do we work to bridge and overcome barriers in an attempt to claim all of the universe as our Lord's rightful property (cf. Ps. 2:8ff)?

Plantinga does point out a number of failures in "cultural protestantism," as he terms the modern movement to unify all knowledge under a "Christian" banner. However, the

existence of problems does not warrant abandoning a legitimate enterprise, if indeed it is legitimate. In their hallowing of secularism, the modern "liberals" have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. At the same time, we are convinced that there needs to be a great deal more searching for the baby, before we throw out the water of seeing all of creation as peculiarly Christ's kingdom.

This is a good book; it will make you think. Get it, read it, and join the discussion.

Robert E. Grossmann

Scaling the Secular City, by J.P. Moreland. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1987. Pp. 287 including table of contents and bibliography, no index. \$12.95.

J.P. Moreland is the professor of apologetics at Liberty University's School of Religion (an outgrowth of J. Falwell's ministry). He obtained a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California and has written *Universals, Qualities, and Quality-Instances: A Defense of Realism*.

The title of the work under review at first glance suggests that it is a book on urban missions. However, its subtitle, *A Defense of Christianity*, quickly dispels that notion. *Secular City* is intended to be a comprehensive philosophical apologetic for Christianity. Among its notices on the back cover are quotes in which William Craig of Westmont College calls it "the most sophisticated apologetics book I have read," and Dallas Willard of the University of Southern California says, "No evangelical now writing on apologetics surpasses Moreland in philosophical ability." These are interesting accolades for a book that never raises the question of the pistic nature of philosophical and scientific presuppositions, nor discusses the noetic effects of sin in its defense of Christianity.

This book falls very distinctly into the category of a rationalist-evidentialist approach to apologetics. As such, it is certainly up-to-date and quite sophisticated. Furthermore, it is very well organized and clearly written.

Moreland's purpose is to argue that "theism," that is, belief in the God of the Bible, is not only rational, but that such belief is the best conclusion to rational consideration of the question. After an introduction in which he states this purpose, he gives his readers two chapters in which he deals both historically and philosophically with the traditional "cosmological" and "teleological" arguments for the existence of God, and propounds a form of each which he considers most defensible. Then follows another argument for God's existence based on the existence of the mind as a "substance" separate from the body. Other chapters are devoted to "God and the Meaning of Life," "The Historicity of the New Testament," "The Resurrection of Jesus," "Science and Christianity," and "Four Final Issues." The four final issues include discussions of 1) "The Visibility of God" (in which it is argued that the invisibility of God is not good evidence against his existence); 2) God as a Psychological Projection; 3) Religious Experience as an argument for God's existence; and 4) Moral Relativism.

The seventh chapter on the relationship of science and Christianity is central to Moreland's approach to the whole problem of apologetics and thus is basic to the purpose of the whole book. In it he propounds four usual models of viewing this relationship and then propounds an eclectic view which finds some validity in three of the four and adds to them a "rational realism" view of Christianity. The four usual models view the relationship of science and Christianity as "Difference in Essence," "Difference in Approach," "Theology Foundational for Science," and "Science Delimitative of Theology."

Moreland's "Interactive Approaches to the Same Reality" completely rejects only the last of the four traditional views mentioned above and points to the creation-evolution debate as a valid example of how theology and science do and ought to interact as man searches for the truth about reality. Moreland argues the validity of "creation science" using evidences from creation science itself to argue its claim to being scientific.

While we have indicated what we consider to be an underlying flaw in *Scaling the Secular City*, we must at the same time see the real value of a book such as this. It is indeed fatal to argue rationality without examining the presuppositions of our thinking as well as that of our unbelieving opponents. At the same time, this does not mean that Christianity is irrational or that rational argument and evidences have no place in our apologetics. When rational argument and evidences are seen as being founded upon an honestly chosen, biblical set of presuppositions, they are not only consistent with, but quite necessary to Christian apologetics.

Moreland is either ignorant of or chooses to ignore the "epistemological antithesis" expounded by Abraham Kuyper and worked out in apologetics by Cornelius Van Til. Now, we are not claiming that Moreland should have mentioned either of these worthies, but he certainly should not be ignorant of the insights of continental Reformed scientific encyclopedia if he is to write on apologetics in the twentieth century. We suspect that our author is quite aware of theistic nature of philosophical and scientific presuppositions, since his copious bibliography includes works of Gordon Clark and John Warwick Montgomery, who have taken a classically rationalist position opposing this continental line of thinking.

We are left, then, with an excellent book of rational arguments and evidences which purports to be the sum total of apologetics, while it lacks a truly biblical worldview which is the only rightful foundation for apologetics. This book will be of value to those who can integrate its contents into a biblical worldview that is epistemologically self-conscious, but we believe it will prove confusing and frustrating to those who succumb to its facile claim to prove the rationality of Christianity.

Robert E. Grossmann

Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography, by Iain H. Murray. Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987. Pp. xxxi + 503. \$22.95.

In his introduction, Murray writes, "This present biography offers a popular account of Edwards. One day, we trust, a definitive and theologically dependable Life of Edwards will yet be written." Perhaps Murray is much too modest, because while his work does give us a popular account of Edwards' life without going into burdensome detail, it does provide much of what Murray hopes yet will be done.

Through the years there have been a few thorough biographies of this godly Minister of the Word. In more recent years a number of studies have appeared which, sad to say, have approached Edwards and his works without emphasizing that his calling was actually to preach. Further, some of these works were by writers who neither subscribe to nor understand the basic tenets of Edwards' theology.

Murray's work has improved on all this. First, he has carefully worked through the helpful eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biographies, digested them, and laid before us in today's language the story of Edwards' fifty-four years. Knowing the works of Edwards as he does, the author has woven segments of these writings with the man's history and thus shows the way these writings fit into Edwards' ministry. Second, Murray does this as one who understands and sympathizes with Edwards' position. Yet, he does not heap blind praise upon his subject. While he wants to guard against undue criticism, Murray does recognize Edwards' shortcomings.

Outstanding is Murray's explanation and analysis of the famed communion controversy--the controversy which resulted in Edwards' dismissal from his twenty-three year pastorate at Northampton. Edwards desired to be faithful to the Lord of the church. For this faithfulness as a part of the church militant he paid dearly.

Although he wrote some meaty theological treatises, Edwards was primarily a preacher. Murray never lets the reader forget this. The brief discussion providing insight

into the nature of Puritan preaching is particularly enlightening.

Murray has used his material well. His references to and quotes from Edwards' works are very helpful. The use of material from his daughter's diary and correspondence is enlightening and particularly touching. If there would be any room for improvement in this excellent volume it might come after the scattered correspondence of this great servant of God is gathered and published. Until then we have what we need.

As usual, the Trust has produced a volume which is not only valuable for its content but also very pleasing to the eye. It is well-bound and beautifully illustrated. Although it is unfortunately marred by a few typographical errors, this volume which gives evidence of devout scholarship should replace most of the more recent offerings on Edwards and take a pre-eminent place along-side the others.

Jerome M. Julien

The Sermon on the Mount: A Travel Guide for Christians, by Jakob van Bruggen. Translated by J. P. Elliot. Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1986. Pp. 92. \$6.95.

People looking for a devotional and thought provoking introduction to the Sermon on the Mount will find this book by Dr. Jakob van Bruggen a delightful place to begin. The book is the English translation of van Bruggen's *De Bergrede*. Van Bruggen is professor of New Testament at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches (Liberated), Kampen, the Netherlands.

Since the Sermon on the Mount is often the starting point for "New Testament ethics," van Bruggen inevitably touches upon a wide range of ethical concerns. Topics include "Marriage and Faithfulness," "Honesty," "Anti-Discrimination," and "Worrying About Tomorrow."

Van Bruggen's procedure is to unravel the various pericopes of the Sermon with meticulous care. Every part of the Sermon is always placed within the context of the whole of

the Sermon as well as within the whole of the Scriptures. The opening chapter on faith as obedience sets the tone for all that follows. Jesus' teaching is to disciples who must follow him in absolute obedience and total dedication. Thus, faith is obedience. Van Bruggen's purpose is to set faith once again into the framework of submission to fixed (creation?) norms. Modern society has moved faith into the area of the subjective so that conversion becomes a dialogue.

The chapter on disarmament is particularly well-balanced in that the author does not opt for secular pacifism, while he clearly condemns total war and "the intemperance of total destruction" (p. 47). There is no appeal here to a program of peace that all rational people of good will could support. Rather, peace among men comes when there is reconciliation to God. "The disarmament of the nations demanded the death of the Savior" (p. 46).

Van Bruggen traces how happiness is defined in each of the Beatitudes. His discussion here, as in many of the succeeding chapters, is far too brief. One would have hoped that more could have been said on how the Bible can serve as a building-program, especially in view of recent discussions among Christian reconstructionists and theologians.

Few words are wasted in these short expositions. At several points there are some nice turns of phrase. Some examples: "[T]he Bible certainly comes from the day before yesterday, but it extends beyond the day after tomorrow" (p.28); "[T]he Bible is not a pulp novel for commuters, but a guide to conversion for sinners" (p.30); "A marriage is written with the heart: the script fades when the heart is dishonest" (p. 37); "We cannot ever justify ourselves before God by condemning someone else" (p.75).

The book concludes with some suggested readings from other parts of the Bible, so that this book could serve as a guide for a Bible study and discussion group.

Mistakes are few in number; they include "Anointed" (p. 46), "demand" (p. 74), and a non-idiomatic usage of "underway" (pp. 77,80).

Mark D. Vander Hart

Lest We Forget: A Personal Reflection on the Formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, by Robert King Churchill. Philadelphia: The Committee for the History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986. Pp. 135. \$4.95.

This book appeared as one of several books which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Orthodox Presbyterian denomination. George Haney in the Preface explains, however, that Churchill had been engaged in the writing of a denominational history for some time. Following Churchill's death in 1980, it was left to George Haney to weave together Churchill's notes on both a denominational history and an autobiography. Both elements have been combined to make the book live up to its name as an account of personal reflections of the author's own involvement in the struggles which engaged the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) during the 1920s and 1930s.

In the early chapters Churchill recalls his growth in the Christian faith as a youth in the First Presbyterian Church of Tacoma, Washington. He notes with deep regret how fundamentalism (often of a dispensational flavor) made great inroads among Presbyterians, thus diffusing the efforts of those who sought to keep the PCUSA faithful to its Reformed and evangelical heritage. "Some may think these differences are nonessential, but we view them as absolutely critical" (p.35). Churchill's home church in Tacoma was eventually lost to fundamentalism.

Churchill experienced a "second conversion" to Reformed Christianity while a student at Westminster Seminary in the mid-1930s. He recalls with great appreciation his student days under Dr. J. Gresham Machen and Dr. C. Van Til. The author takes time to explain some of the important elements in the Reformed faith, especially salient points in

Van Til's apologetics.

The chapter "A House Divided" describes the modernist-evangelical struggle among the Presbyterians. Churchill points out that liberals undermine the church and its confessions by pleading for "tolerance" and by branding their critics as being narrow-minded. This puts conservatives into a defensive posture, and their strength is thus dissipated.

The book traces the loss of influence in the PCUSA which conservatives experienced between 1923 and 1934. The spirit of modernist toleration came to pervade the Presbyterian Church, its boards and agencies and many of its missionaries, until Machen and others were put on trial for defying the demands of the denomination's assemblies. All attempts to get the issues of heresy adjudicated were turned back. This led to the eventual establishment in June, 1936, of what would become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

The author tells the story, sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the first person. Occasionally he relates items that he heard and of which he himself was not witness. Yet the book does not become a collection of rumours that narrate the shift of the PCUSA to a liberal position. And the author is of no mean spirit. He relates these events, in which he was personally and spiritually involved, with a sense of sadness and pain, and yet thankfulness that the gospel continued to be preserved in a denomination free from hierarchical constraints.

Mark D. Vander Hart