Students Critique Profs'

(Purkiser, W. T., Taylor, Richard S.; and Taylor, Willard H. God, Man & Salvation. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of K.C., 1977.)

This book is one of the most ambitious works to be produced by Nazarene scholars or published by Beacon Hill Press in recent years. In both regards it is refreshing, and hopefully only the beginning. While the book does have many good qualities and represents an advance in Wesleyan scholarship, it also has some serious shortcomings. The purpose of this review is to give the book the scholarly critique that it deserves with the hope that some of the shortcomings can be corrected in subsequent Wesleyan, biblical scholarship. Due to the limitation of space we present herein only our disagreements and frustrations.

Concerning the book as a whole, we must raise the basic question of how to write for laypersons. The authors seem to often avoid controversial points or easily resolve them in their favor without sharing the opposite position with its supports. This betrays a seeming mistrust of the intellectual ability and integrity of the reader, which we do not feel is warranted.

Furthermore, it is highly distressing that a book on biblical theology should devote three times as much room to the NT as to the OT--particularly when the ratio is reversed in the Bible itself. If the ground for NT faith is in the OT, then the OT should be developed much more thoroughly.

Likewise distressing for a biblical theology is the systematic nature of much of the presentation. Even the title hints that the system of classification comes more from H. Orton Wiley than from the implicit system of the Bible itself. In fairness to the authors, we must admit that some sections of the book are more guilty of this than others. This arises no doubt from the fact that only one of the three authors is purely a biblical theologian. This fact is questionable in view of the book's distinction between biblical and systematic theology (19). This fact also helps explain the apparent lack of interchange with the work being done in recent biblical scholarship.

Finally, we are troubled for two reasons that the essays are unsigned. First, it was difficult to find unifying themes in places and it could not be discerned if this was due to inner contradictions in a single author or disagreements between two authors. Second, it appeared to imply that what is contained in the book is the authoritative, Wesleyan viewpoint, rather than the viewpoints of particular, Wesleyan scholars.[1]

OLD TESTAMENT

Concerning the OT section itself, it is much too short. Many important topics are disposed of in little more than a paragraph. To make matters worse, the subjects that are treated often seem to be overly influenced by their NT counterparts, thus distorting the truly OT viewpoint (e.g. the discussions on life after death and the nature of the Messiah). An OT theology should be as true to the OT as possible, thus allowing the similarities and differences in the NT to be more vividly represented.

A frustration experienced in reading this section was that the author often states an extreme position quite strongly. Then in the following discussion he presents a more moderate position, leaving doubt as to which he accepts. This is particularly frustrating in controversial areas such as identifying apocalyptic writing as "prophecy" (195), or the covenant as the "basis of salvation" rather than the response to salvation (95).

The author's classification of the OT materials into the three categories of the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets is more of an oversimplification than he suspects (145). Indeed, it tends to be a distortion in two important areas. First, seeking to show the unity of the parts of the OT, the author does grave injustice to the diversity. Any categorization that groups Joshua with Ezekiel is bound to obscure some of the significant motifs of both. Second, this categorization does not do justice to the OT's use of history. The author refers to history in the OT as simply providing a "chronological framework" and "illustrative material" (48). But as von Rad and others have shown, the OT uses history to formulate some of its most profound theological affirmations.

The OT section is obviously neo-orthodox in its approach to the "philosophical" nature of the OT and reflects the basic weaknesses of that approach. There are extreme overstatements as to what comprises "Jewish thought" (50, 65, etc.) which then cause serious exegetical problems in areas where abstract thought is evident. The author deals with these areas only at the expense of consistency (e.g. 151 on the eternity of God, or 140 where

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he likens the OT to Kant).

Finally, the author's use of Hebrew word studies is often lexicographically inadequate and sometimes absurd. For example compare his discussion of the differences between Ish and Enosh or his detailed meaning for the simple word shub (174) with any good lexicon (68). He should have heeded Barr's warning more seriously (45).

NEW TESTAMENT

The NT section has several difficulties of its own, besides the ones it shares with the OT section. Perhaps the greatest weakness is that it is more Pauline than NT theology. This is not to say that other NT writers are not referred to. It is only to say that Paul is the predominant source (and almost the hermeneutical principle). The NT is not a solo by Paul but a choir by the early Church, and all the parts are necessary for a clearly stated theme.

The rest of the NT section is dominated by the archaic Arminian-Calvinist dual monologs (e.g. 428). In addition, it is far too systematic for a biblical theology (by their definition, 19).

There are two specific statements that are bothersome enough to be noted. The implications in "From Promise to Event" (419) are chilling. If our faith is in a promise that has been fulfilled, is it faith or sight? God has fulfilled promises and therefore we have reason to believe He will in the future. Christ's resurrection is a fulfillment but also a promise (i.e. we who are "in Christ" will also be raised).

The section on the "Son of God" (312-3) presents a weak argument. If the NT was written by the early Church, then we have no record of the sayings of Jesus that we can compare to the early Church's record. If we accept the integrity of the early Church and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we can believe that the meaning of the statements of Jesus have been preserved for us.

The NT section is more fully developed than the OT section and often more biblical. The authors are to be commended for their good work, but chided for their shortcomings.

([1]Authors Randy Maddox & Donald L. Presley shared the writing of the introduction. Maddox wrote the O.T. section & Presley the N.T.)

GOD'S WILL, cont'd

of eternal ideas in the mind of God. Man, of course, has no part in the creation of these ideas or meanings. In a world that is the reflection of an eternal, changeless idea of God, man is left only to perceive reality by the act of intuition. He has no part in shaping his world by the power of his choices, for he is a passive 'reflection' of reality as well.

Conversely, a short, oft-overlooked passage in Genesis 2 supports and encourages a view in which man has a part in actually creating his world. Adam's naming of the animals usually receives little attention, other than as a 'nice' Bible story for the kiddies in Sunday School. It forms the basis of Cox's thesis, nevertheless. Herein can be seen the vital role God expected (and expects) man to play in creation, for the world is not truly complete until its components are named. When one recalls the significance the Hebrew mind attached to a name, this passage is all the more remarkable. "For the Hebrew," writes Cox, "naming did not mean simply attaching an arbitrary label. It meant conferring on something its meaning and significance." Man, then, is meant to play more than just a 'bit part' in the drama of creation. And in this drama--in man's establishment of meaning and value in his world by naming the components of that creation over which he was to have dominion--God flashed him no cue cards.

Many Christians, however, think it a virtue to await cue cards from heaven before facing a decision or grappling with a problem. For example, it is a common belief that God has a particular vocation 'lined up' for each of his children, whose duty it is to discover his 'calling'. But does God in actuality call some Christians to become doctors, others lawyers, and still others Indian chiefs? Those who would assert that he does would be hard pressed to back the assertion with Scripture. Interestingly, among Paul's lists of qualifications for overseers and deacons in I Timothy 3, a definitive 'calling from God' is not given even the slightest mention. Is it possible that God calls the Christian not so much to a particular vocation as to exercise maturity, responsibility and love in whatever he does? The parables in which Jesus speaks of stewards who are given charge of the master's talents, while he goes away, would seem to point in that direction.

Again, life would be considerably easier if God were to make all the decisions one must face in a lifetime. But is ease per se the end of life? Are we pawns, or are we the crown of God's creation, and fully responsible to him for our choices?

--Mike Lodahl (In the next issue Mike will offer "An Alternative: Toward a Theology of Freedom")

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God's Will: What Is It?

In a recent issue of the Herald of Holiness one author wrote, "We pray for direction in life. Nothing happens. God does not seem to direct us. Why? It could be that we have no deep commitment to do what he directs after we learn of His plan."

Is there, however, an alternative answer to this question? Could it be that God's "plan" isn't quite so specific as it is often thought to be? What is bound up in the phrase, "the will of God?"

The assumption that God has a specific direction for each step in the Christian's life--a particular path to be followed at each fork in the road--is an assumption by no means unique to one Nazarene pastor. Indeed, the familiar first of the "Four Spiritual Laws" as outlined by Campus Crusade for Christ states, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." While in this instance the particulars of this "wonderful plan" are ambiguous, it is safe to say that it is ordinarily understood to mean that the Christian's every move is foreordained by God, or at least ought to be.

Certainly there is a good deal of security in such a notion, for the Christian no longer need wrestle with the decisions and problems life flings his direction; they have all been forfeited to God. We've all heard it (and probably said it): "It's not my problem any more. I gave it to the Lord to take care of, and told him it was his problem. I feel so relieved now." And these Christians will be the first to say that their religion is no crutch.

Without doubt, God is in a much better position to make those decisions; the Christian may cease coping with them and simply place them into the hands of the "God (who) knows all the moves on the cosmic chessboard," as Peter Bertocci once described him. Check.

But is this what the will of God means, to forfeit one's humanity in order to become a pawn? Rather than utilizing the wonderful decision-making capacities he possesses as a participant in the imago dei, particularly as those capacities are enlightened by the Spirit of Christ (I Cor. 2:12-16), so often the Christian prefers to rely on "fleece-laying" or some similar, equally magical ritual. Making decisions involves accepting responsibility for those decisions, and such responsibility can be frightening.

One might question, then, whether the belief that God has a particular will for every human situation and decision is rooted in Scripture, or in the desire to escape risk and responsibility in the decision-making process. Has evangelical Christianity gone beyond God's general commands and principles as revealed in the Scriptures to adopt an assumption that he has a specific will in every human decision? And if so, where did such an assumption originate?

A partial answer is suggested by Harvey Cox in his provocative book of the 60's, The Secular City. Cox asserts that many within the Church live with a faulty, unbiblical conception of God and his relation to man and the world. This unbiblical conception posits a sovereign, transcendant God who orders even the smallest details of the world from a position of omnipotent authority. It finds its roots not in Scripture, writes Cox, but in the Platonic concept of God and his universe which the early Christian church assimilated.

For Plato, the world of sensory objects was merely a reflection of the changeless, perfect, eternal 'forms' or ideas, all of which were eventually subordinated under the Idea of the Good. In Christian philosophy this Idea of the Good traditionally has been identified with God, which results in a universe viewed ultimately as a preconceived set

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