MJT 7/2 (1991) 255-281

BOOK REVIEWS

Portraits of Creation, by Howard Van Till, Robert E. Snow, John H. Stek and Davis A. Young. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990. Pp. 285. $14.95.

This book, the sub-title of which is, *Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation*, was produced by the authors who at the time for its research and writing were Fellows of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship (CCCS) of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan (vi). They are hardly identified beyond this but the reader can be fairly certain that Van Till writes as an astronomer, Young as a geologist, and Snow and Stek as theologians.

The book's thesis is stated by Snow on page 25:

> [T]his book is part of a sustained effort to develop and apply a conceptual framework that is capable of enabling us both to appreciate the way in which the Judeo-Christian theology of creation has shaped modern natural science and to critique the numerous and varied claims of twentieth-century proponents of "scientific creationism" and evolutionary naturalism.

The authors develop this thesis in eight chapters. Van Till has contributed chapters 4 and 5, "The Scientific Investigation of Cosmic History" and "The Character of Contemporary Natural Science"; together with chapter 8, the epilogue, "Where Do We Go From Here?" Young has contributed chapter 1, "Where Are We?" (which presents the perceived tensions between biblical and scientific cosmogonies); and chapter 3, "The Discovery of Terrestrial History," an extended essay on the development of geology as an aspect of modern science. Snow's two chapters are: chapter 2, "How Did We Get here" (a brief sketch of the historical background of the science—theology tension); and chapter 6, "A Critique of the Creation-Science Movement." Stek, as an Old Testament theologian, has contributed chapter 7, "What Says the Scripture?," in which he focuses on five related matters: 1) the biblical concept of creation, 2) the nature and purpose of Genesis 1:1-2:3, 3) the creation decrees and providence, 4) creation

as divine kingdom; man as God's royal steward, and 5) contemporary scientific cosmogony and the biblical doctrine of creation (206).

A detailed analysis of the contents of this book is not possible in a review of this nature. But some account of the authors' positions and presentations, even if brief, will be made.

The writers obviously, while seeking to remain true to Scripture as a divine revelation, also believe that the world which God has created and continues to sustain by his providential activity is likewise in equal manner revelational. While the traditional Christian position has been to accept both sources as revelational, it has also asserted that the data of general revelation (nature), if it is to be interpreted properly, must be seen in the light of special revelation, or Scripture (cf. *Belgic Confession* II, *Westminster Confession of Faith* I,1).

The question this book raises is, do the authors recognize this principle and do justice to it in their interpretation of nature's data? Or do they regard the latter as revelatory in its own right and, where they feel that interpretation of such data differs from Scripture, are they willing to modify Scripture accordingly and even dislocate it from general revelation, so that the two revelatory sources are made to convey their own and not even necessarily related messages? It is this reviewer's considered judgment that the latter is undeniably the case for the authors of this book.

In the first chapter, Young delineates the tensions, as he perceives them, which exist between the biblical and scientific cosmogonies. The former presents the world and man as created by God by means of a series of supernatural fiats; whereas the latter sees the cosmos evolving to its present state (with or without God) by means of a long process of development from the simple to the complex, with this process continuing to the present. The implications of these two views are crucial, for they have a direct bearing upon such important things as: a literal or figurative interpretation of Scripture, a good creation, a fall and paradise lost, the entrance of death into the world as the consequence of sin and the fall, the nature of redemption, paradise restored, including the supernatural or miracles, all of which are affirmed by the traditional view, while being denied or re-interpreted by those who no longer recognize the supremacy of Scripture's revelation and authority. Young does little more than present these two basically different cosmogonies and adds, "Precisely because of the complex and tense situation within the evangelical community, we humbly offer this volume with the prayer that it may help to point the way toward a resolution of our difficulties" (10).

Does Young help to do this in his later chapter, "The Discovery of Terrestrial History"? While in this chapter he gives a detailed presentation of geology's development, in doing so he also makes it clear that there has been a progressive divorce by geology from the literal historical view which the Bible gives concerning creation, the fall, the flood, etc. Young unequivocally sides with geology, for he says,

> Two and a half centuries of vigorous research into God's world have uncovered a plethora of data that are totally incompatible with the notion that the world's stratified rocks were deposited by a single deluge (46).

He then goes on to develop his thesis that a study of the rocks must lead to the conclusion that the earth is very old. The only alternative to this would be to assert "that the rocks must be the product of pure miracle" (81). Young therefore does not agree with a literal understanding of the biblical record that God created a mature earth with soil, water, vegetation, etc., to accommodate life and the existence of man whom Scripture also states was created as a fully-grown person.

Van Till's position is no different, either. So committed is he to the evolutionary origin and development of the cosmos (including the "big bang" theory (106), which scientists are abandoning because of the recent discovery that the universe is too "lumpy"), that he writes,

> To deny that stellar evolution has occurred throughout a multi-billion year history is to demand that stars appear to have experienced a history very different from their actual history. It is to demand that the evidence for their history is mere illusion, that their apparent history is not authentic history (96).

But why, we ask, should the acceptance of supernatural creation make science more illusory than naturalistic presuppositions that lead to a discredited "big bang" origin of the universe? In fact, the present state of the galaxies seems to indicate an activity of running down rather than of winding up.

Snow, after an initial chapter on the background of the science-theology tensions, devotes a chapter to an extensive critique of the Creation-Science Movement. He finds astounding the central claim of this movement that there is convincing scientific evidence for the universe's having been brought into recent existence (166). While it is true that some of this movement's claims are questionable (a shrinking sun), they are no more so than modern science's often-shifting assumptions. Also, Snow criticizes this movement for not participating

"in the working craft life of the existing research specialties of professional science" (179), but he makes no mention of the rebuffs this movement receives whenever they seek to do this very thing. Snow admits that creation science arose in explicit rejection of. . .the evolutionary world picture (177). What he should likewise see is that this movement, for all of its limitations, at least seeks to ground its conclusions in the teaching of Scripture rather than in the changing theories of science. And we might add, shouldn't this be the starting point of all Christians as well, including Christian scientists?

The thesis of Stek's chapter, which is to show that God's work of creation cannot be regarded as distinct from his present providential activity (203), falls into line with the theistic evolution positions of the other three authors. Stek believes that the human race existed for "tens of thousands of years" before the beginning of civilization after 8000 B.C. (224). But we ask, is this based upon facts or upon the evolutionistic assumptions of naturalistic anthropologists? For his position certainly does not agree with Genesis 4:17 which tells us that Cain, Adam's son, already founded a city. Stek also sees an affinity between the Bible's cosmology and pagan Near Eastern cosmologies (226), where other Old Testament scholars (cf. Prof. Oosterhof's *Hoe Lezen Wij Genesis 2 en 3*?) see in the same data convincing dissimilarities. Stek quotes Warfield whom he maintains ascribed a form of theistic evolution to Calvin (245). But he seems to be unaware of those who see in Calvin's teaching a distinguishing of two forms of creation, immediate and mediate. The former refers to God's creation of the universe *ex nihilo*, while the latter refers to God's supernatural activity upon the "stuff" of creation such as, for example, his molding of a body for the first man from the dust of the earth and then vivifying it with the breath of life. Some, like Hodge and Warfield, have confused this mediate creating activity by God with his subsequent providential activity but the difference between the two should be clear. Stek, however, finds the identification of mediate creation with providence convenient for his advocacy of yet presently occurring theistic evolution (249).

Van Till concludes the book with the epilogue, "Where Do We Go From Here?" and in it delineates five guidelines as to how the Christian and scientific community are to proceed together. Summarizing them, they are: 1) we should not make the authenticity of the Christian faith to be dependent on one specific view of creation; 2) we should do away with the "warfare metaphor" between science and the Christian faith; 3) the same applies between biblical scholarship and the

Christian faith; 4) we should not regard the traditional view as infallible; and 5) we should encourage continuing study of these things (274-276).

Evaluating a book such as this creates a fair degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, it should be recognized that the book reflects competent scholarship by men whose sincerity should not be questioned (cf. 262, where Stek gives his testimonial). But on the other hand, we are left wondering whether the authors have thought through what the consequences will be for the Christian faith, were their views to be adopted? For, not only have they dislocated God's Word from history in matters connected with science, but (whether they realize it or not) they have made it less than authoritative with regard to God's activity in the history of salvation process, for Scripture firmly roots "the great deeds of God" (Acts 2:11) in the acts and facts of biblical history. Moreover, history also shows that where today Scripture's account of the creation-fall-redemption scheme is no longer accepted but modified; tomorrow the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection of Christ will also be re-interpreted to mean something other than what Scripture actually teaches.

Christians should always be willing to take a serious look at history in order to learn from its lessons lest they be doomed to repeat its mistakes.

Raymond O. Zorn

The Covenantal Gospel, by C. Van der Waal. Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990. Pp. 192, including bibliography and an index of Scriptural references. $16.20.

Dr. C. Van der Waal is a well-known author, who has written a number of books in the areas of ecumenism, exegesis and church history. This work, *The Covenantal Gospel*, is a revised translation of an earlier work written in Dutch.

As the title of this study suggests, Van der Waal deals with the subject of the "covenant of grace" and argues that the covenant is not only the great, unifying theme of the Scriptures but also characteristic of the structure of the gospel. The "good news" of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is, in both the Old and New Testaments, covenantal. It proclaims the gracious covenant which the Lord establishes, maintains and confirms in the life of his chosen people.

After setting forth his thesis in an opening chapter—that the gospel is covenantal "through and through"—Van der Waal traces out the way

in which various "covenants" are described in the Old Testament and the distinctive structure of the Lord's covenant with his people.

According to Van der Waal, the covenant between the Lord and his people is not a covenant between equals but a covenant between the Lord who is King and his people whom he calls to be his servants (vassals). Furthermore, though the covenant is one which the Lord sovereignly and graciously establishes with his people, it always is administered in terms of mutual promises and obligations, as well as sanctions. Those with whom the Lord covenants are obliged to faith and repentance, to a life of faithful conformity to the covenant's stipulations. Such faithfulness confirms the covenant blessing in the way of continued communion with God and life in obedience to his commandments; unfaithfulness, however, confirms the covenant curse in the way of the Lord's judgment and condemnation. Thus, the Lord who establishes his gracious covenant with his people always confirms the covenant either in the way of blessing or cursing (covenant vengeance).

Within the setting of this broad sketch of the covenant, Van der Waal deals with a number of important and difficult questions. Each of these questions, he argues, finds its answer in a proper view of the covenant. I will mention only a few examples to whet the readers appetite.

Van der Waal maintains, for example, that we ought not to speak of a "covenant of works" (the covenant with Adam even before the fall into sin was an expression of God's favor and blessing) in contrast to the "covenant of grace." He suggests that the "covenant of grace" was a gracious and merciful re-establishment of that covenant favor and relationship in which God originally placed his servant at creation. Since God's covenant always includes promises and obligations, and is administered through sanctions (blessing or cursing), Van der Waal also rejects the view which limits the covenant to the elect.

Furthermore, Van der Waal argues that the covenant in both the Old and New Testaments places the law (expressing the duties, obligations, stipulations of obedience) *within the framework of God's prior gracious promise.* This is as true in the "old" covenant as in the "new." There is in this respect no contradiction between the New Testament and the law of Moses (covenant at Sinai); nor is there any place for a "dispensationalist" pitting of the law against the gospel. This integral place of the law in the covenant of grace also reminds us that we ought not to speak of the covenant as though it were in no respect whatever "conditional." Though it is "unconditional" in its

origin and establishment, it is "conditional" in its administration (those with whom God covenants are obliged to faithfulness; a covenant always "contains two parts").

Van der Waal also argues that the New Testament displays a clear covenant structure. This helps to explain the prominence in the New Testament of the theme of "covenant vengeance"; not only in the "old" covenant but also in the "new" the Lord executes judgment firstly upon those with whom he has covenanted but who have been unfaithful (1 Pet. 4:17).

One of the interesting sections of Van der Waal's study is his treatment of "neo-Pentecostalism." The problem with "neo-Pentecostalism," Van der Waal maintains, is that it has no eye for the history of redemption. The "neo-Pentecostal" treats those singular acts of the Lord's mercy in the establishment and confirmation of his covenant, particularly the "new" covenant in Christ, as though they were a part of the regular pattern of covenantal life. But this is to treat the history of redemption in a non-covenantal, non-historical way.

It is not possible in a review such as this to summarize all of the various positions and arguments that characterize this stimulating study of Van der Waal. I believe that Van der Waal makes a persuasive and compelling case that the *whole* gospel must be understood in terms of the covenant. One significant weakness of his study is his failure to provide anywhere a summary statement of the biblical view of the covenant. This prevents his study from being as unified as it might otherwise have been. Some readers may also be put off by Van der Waal's tendency at times to be too brief in his exegetical comments and conclusions (some of which are rather striking and controversial; 2 Thess. 2 and the book of Revelation, for example, are said to refer exclusively to God's covenant judgment upon Israel).

Nonetheless, Van der Waal presents a persuasive case for the main thesis of his book—that the gospel is covenantal through and through. Considering the absence even among many Reformed people today of any sustained attention to the doctrine of the covenant, this little book will prove to be an excellent source for instruction in the "covenantal gospel."

Cornelis P. Venema

Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism, by David K. Clark and Norman L. Geisler. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. Pp. 254, including suggesting reading list and index. $15.95.

As the title of this book indicates, Clark and Geisler are interested in the challenges of the New Age movement to the defense of the Christian faith. Consistent with their philosophical training and interests, they are especially concerned to evaluate the pantheistic world-view and philosophy which underlie the various forms of New Age thinking and Eastern religions that are having a significant impact in the West in recent years, particularly in North America. Unlike the studies of the New Age by authors like Douglas Groothuis (*Unmasking the New Age*) which focus upon the whole range of emphases and characteristics of the New Age movement in general, this book is an exercise in apologetics in the more narrow sense of a philosophical defense of the Christian faith and rebuttal of contrary world-views. Though the authors acknowledge the legitimacy of other approaches to their subject—for example, the sociological or psychological—they are self-consciously oriented to the philosophical implications of a pantheistic world-view that constitutes the soil in which grows the thinking and practice of the New Age.

Clark and Geisler provide in the first part of their study a review of five major examples of pantheism. In their first chapter, they discuss the Zen Buddhism of D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966) which they term a "*permeational pantheism* in which a oneness like a Life Force underlies and permeates all that is real" (13). The second example of pantheism, "*absolute pantheism*," is treated in chapter 2, which considers the thought of the ancient Indian philosopher Shankara (c. 788-c. 820). In this pantheism God alone is real, and all else is unreal. Chapter 3 then addresses the philosophy of Sarvepali Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), an Indian statesman who reinterpreted and updated Shankara for the modern world. Clark and Geisler identify Radhakrishnan's pantheism as a kind of "*multilevel pantheism*," that argues that God is the ultimate reality and all other things exist only at a lower level of reality.

The next two chapters do not address ancient or more recent forms of Eastern pantheism, the predominant source of the pantheistic background of the New Age movement. Rather, they are addressed to two forms of pantheism developed in the Western philosophical tradition. Chapter 4 treats the ancient philosophy of Plotinus (205?-270?), a neo-Platonist scholar of the last period of ancient Greek philosophy. The authors identify Plotinus' pantheism as an "*emanational pantheism*," a pantheism in which God's being overflows into the world much as a flower would grow from a bud or a plant from a seed. Chapter 5, which concludes the author's survey of a variety of ancient and modern pantheisms, considers the metaphysics of the

modern rationalist Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677). Spinoza's pantheism is termed a "*modal pantheism*," since it considers the finite world to be a necessary moment or "mode" of God's infinite being.

After having delineated these examples of pantheism, the authors take up more directly in the second part of their study the phenomenon known as the New Age, exposing the philosophical roots of this movement in the world-view of pantheism and critiquing it from a Christian-theistic standpoint. This part of their study is specifically addressed to the apologetical tasks of defending the Christian world-view and refuting the alternative which the New Age represents.

In a helpful chapter, opening this section of their study, the authors provide a synopsis of "Common New Age Themes." Among those cited, the following are especially important—the oneness of reality, the impersonality of God, the divinity of humans, the world as a lower level of reality, the abandonment of the senses as reliable, the self-certifying nature of mystical intuition, the inadequacy of logic and language to describe reality, knowledge as salvation, the mystical ascent to union with the divine, and the illusory nature of sin and evil. Recognizing the vast range of themes and emphases within the New Age movement, Clark and Geisler identify these themes as the intellectual content of the New Age movement. Many of the features of the New Age movement—"channeling" or consulting mediums, various occult practices, crystals (rocks with cosmic power), "harmonic convergences," reincarnation, deifying the self—are expressions or fruits of this intellectual environment.

The remainder of the study consists of a sustained philosophical critique of the viability of the pantheistic world-view which undergirds the New Age movement. In chapter 7, "The Pantheistic World View," the authors begin by identifying certain criteria which are fundamental to the evaluation of world-views. Consistent with their apologetical stance, Clark and Geisler argue that there are such *common criteria* by which to measure and test world-views, criteria which are themselves *not world-view dependent.* There are rational principles and rules of evidence that apply to all world-views, including the Christian theistic world-view, by which to determine the validity of world-views. These criteria are principally four—consistency, or the rule of non-contradiction; coherence, or the requirement of genuine unity and relatedness between aspects of a world-view; comprehensiveness, or the demand that a world-view accommodate the whole range of experience; and congruity, or the requirement that a world-view "fit" with the facts. Measured by these criteria, Clark and Geisler assert, the pantheistic

world-view fails. By the standards of consistency and coherence, the pantheist faces insoluble problems, when he simultaneously rejects any description of God and attempts to describe the Real nonetheless. And by the standards of comprehensiveness and congruity, the pantheist denials of selves, others, a personal God, the real world, do not fit with the vast wealth of experience and testimony to such realities.

In a subsequent chapter, Clark and Geisler take aim at the knowledge of mystical consciousness. Here their argument is similar to that employed against pantheism; the claim of New Age epistemology, that true knowledge is directly given through mystical consciousness, can not withstand rational scrutiny. The three major components of this claim—that mystical experiences of God are unmediated by logic or language, that mystical experience is self-authenticating, and that mystical experience confirms the unity of all things with God—prove unsubstantiated, when tested by the actual experiences and claims of New Age proponents. Clark and Geisler find it particularly ironic that those who defend this mystical consciousness position, while repudiating ordinary logic, employ a variety of important logical distinctions to make their case! This shows the self-contradictory and self-defeating character of many New Age themes.

In a very intriguing and persuasive chapter, Clark and Geisler tackle the pluralistic position of New Age pantheism. Recognizing that one of the major attractions of this pantheism is its openness to a variety of religious perspectives and viewpoints, each of which is accepted as a legitimate, albeit different, pathway to union with God, they show that this pluralism actually requires a kind of exclusivism. Though advertising itself as the position of "tolerance," this pluralism is actually quite intolerant. It will not recognize or tolerate any religious position, including traditional Christian theism, that makes exclusivistic claims about the truth and the way of salvation. All religions are tolerated, but at the high cost of repudiating what is integral to many, if not most, of them, the claim to be *the* truth. This chapter provides, therefore, a helpful discussion of what true tolerance between religious world-views means, and shows the inconsistency of New Age pluralism.

The remainder of Clark and Geisler's study consists of a chapter dealing with the problem of good and evil from a pantheistic standpoint (pantheism cannot account for the difference between good or evil, nor can it sustain a positive ethics), and a concluding chapter on apologetics in the New Age. They also add to the usefulness of their study by providing the reader a glossary of terms, a list of suggested readings, and an index.

Clark and Geisler are to be commended for writing this book, adding to a growing body of literature on the important New Age movement that is having a profound impact upon North American culture and the Christian church. Though their study is philosophical rather than popular in nature, it provides a much-needed analysis of the philosophical background and pantheistic world-view so characteristic of this movement. Their concise summaries of various forms of pantheism and penetrating analysis of the incoherence and inconsistencies of this world-view are useful tools for those who wish to defend the Christian faith in the face of one of the more important religious counterfeits today. The discerning reader will benefit considerably from this book.

There are two comments I would like to make, however, by way of criticism of this study. The first concerns the selection of pantheism in the first part of the study. It is difficult to see how the chapters on Plotinus and Spinoza fit with the overall focus of this study on the New Age movement and its philosophical underpinnings. Though it is true that both of these philosophers were pantheistic in outlook, their relationship to the modern New Age movement is, at best, rather indirect and tenuous. Apparently, the reason Clark and Geisler choose to include these chapters is their interest in the philosophy of pantheism generally. Nevertheless, these chapters do not really meet the criterion of "congruity" that they employ in evaluating world-views; they are not directly related to the modern development of New Age thinking and practice.

The second comment relates to the approach to apologetics taken by Clark and Geisler. Readers who are acquainted with Geisler's work in the area of apologetics will not be surprised to find him taking the approach known as "rationalist" and "evidentialist." Clark and Geisler are convinced that there are rational and evidential criteria which are world-view independent and capable of being employed to evaluate and measure conflicting world-views. The problem with this approach is that, while many (including myself) would agree with the validity of these criteria, they are themselves clearly drawn from the Christian world-view of the authors. Though Clark and Geisler would term this a "fideist" objection, it cannot be denied that the world-view they evaluate repudiates the criteria they employ to criticize it. Accordingly, though their criticisms may well be "valid," they will not prove "cogent" or persuasive to an adherent of New Age thinking. The problem here is Clark and Geisler's insistence that these criteria for evaluating world-views are "common" and world-view independent,

when they are explicitly rejected by exponents (including New Age pantheists) of alternative world-views.

The flaw in Clark and Geisler's approach is the rationalism and evidentialism which their apologetic represents. The fact that an exponent of the New Age would be willing to suffer the charge of irrationalism and indifference to the "facts" testifies to a clash of world-views, rooted in different presuppositions about what is reasonable and in accordance with the evidence. Clark and Geisler, by minimizing the role of presuppositions in apologetics and the all-embracing claims of their Christian world-view (which itself grounds the criteria they employ to measure world-views), give the impression that they have underestimated the apologetical task in confronting the New Age movement. Nothing less than a "Copernican revolution" in the basic heart commitment and perspective of the New Age devotee will suffice to bring him to a recognition of the error of his position.

Cornelis P. Venema

Catholicity and Secession, by Henry Zwaanstra. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991. Pp. 128. $14.95.

This book by the Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary is an enlargement of a chapter he wrote for the book, *Catholicity and Secession: A Dilemma?* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1991) which was edited by Paul G. Schrotenboer, Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council until his retirement a few years ago.

The sub-title of Professor Zwaanstra's book is, *A Study of Ecumenicity in the Christian Reformed Church*, and as such it is an unfolding story of the CRC's effort to be more ecumenically involved with the church catholic. As Rev. Clarence Boomsma, Administrative Secretary of the Interchurch Relations Committee already puts it in the Foreword,

> An urgency exists in many denominations to address the tension between their separatism and their ecumenical responsibility. This book is a study of one denomination's struggle with its secession history and existence and its confession of the catholicity of the church (viii).

The book brings into focus the larger question which is, can loyalty to the authority and truth of Scripture yet be maintained while at the same time a greater ecumenical involvement is pursued? Both Boomsma and Zwaanstra definitely think so, and Boomsma gives two

reasons for this viewpoint: 1) the unity of the church is itself a fundamental truth of the gospel; and 2) no church can claim a final priority for its interpretation of the gospel. In ecumenical dialogue, "we obtain a deeper common grasp of the truth" (viii).

Zwaanstra devotes five chapters of the book to delineating the four periods of the CRC's history: 1) from the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands and more particularly that of 1857 from the Reformed Church of America (RCA) during which time a decidedly secessionist mentality was dominant; 2) from 1898 to 1944 when a catholic Christian consciousness began to assert itself; 3) from 1944 to 1987 when this catholic consciousness and ecumenical vision broadened and expanded; and 4) the current period beginning in 1987 with the adoption of the Ecumenical Charter which endorses CRC membership in ecumenical organizations that are not strictly confessionally Reformed (xi).

Zwaanstra accurately and for the most part objectively sets forth this history, though it is obvious where his sympathies lie. Already near the book's beginning we learn of the more than half dozen reasons for the secession of the fathers of the CRC from the RCA in 1857, at the heart of which were such factors as neglect of RCA churches to preach the Catechism, hold catechism classes, do home visiting, plus the practice of open communion and tolerance of Freemasonry (7). While in his concluding evaluation in the final chapter of the book Zwaanstra admits that this separation was "not a matter of convenience or preference but one of ultimate loyalty to Christ and his Word" (110-111), already on page 8 he also says, "in the secessions of 1834 and 1857, catholicity and the unity of all believers in the one body of Christ suffered severe blows." While in his judgment this may have been the case, wouldn't a further word have been in order as to its necessity in the circumstances? Or should the reader conclude that the founding of the CRC was perhaps simply a schismatic movement so that for the next fifty years of its existence the CRC was simply more interested in "maintaining its ethnic and distinctively Reformed identity than church unity. . ." (13)?

Fortunately, from Zwaanstra's viewpoint, the winds of change thereafter began to blow, even if ever so gently at first, though the reasons may have been due to causes other than ecumenicity. In the chapter, "Catholicity Affirmed," he points out that after 1898 the CRC began to take up correspondence relationships with other Reformed churches, with "the twofold purpose of assisting them to purify themselves of all foreign or non-Reformed elements and of helping one another to promote a soundly Reformed church life" (17). Perhaps for

this same purpose there was even a vision by the 1898 synod of a world-wide council of Reformed churches, though this was to lay dormant over the years with nothing concrete eventuating until after World War II, when in 1946 the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (later, Reformed Ecumenical Council) met for the first time.

Zwaanstra feels that a turning point in the CRC's approach to the concept of a "sister church" took place in 1944 when a committee on church correspondence made the observation that heretofore the concept of the CRC had been that only certain Reformed churches were considered to be in that category when actually "all churches of Christ were related to one another and therefore sisters" (31). Therefore, recognizing the CRC's obligation to maintain its Reformed witness, the committee recommended that contact with non-Reformed churches should have as its aim "to win them to the Reformed faith, and so pave the way for eventual union with them, please God" (35). Though three designations of churches were made (i.e., like-minded Reformed churches, delinquent Reformed churches, and non-Reformed churches), the synod decided to implement correspondence only with those in the first category (37).

For a time also, from 1943 to 1951, the CRC was a member of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Among the reasons given for the termination of its membership were: the presence of Arminianism in the Association, looseness of organization, and lack of a well-defined program of action (51).

In 1956, "ecumenical and closer fellowship conversations" were taken up with the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (Covenanters) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Conversations with the former ended after five years because of differences in interpreting the purity of worship principle (the Covenanters held to exclusive psalmody and no organs in the worship service) and to political dissent (disengagement in political life until the lordship of Christ was acknowledged by constitutional amendment).

Matters proceeded more satisfactorily with the OPC, and in 1959 the joint committee was mandated to work for union (53). By 1966 representatives of the OPC asked their General Assembly to work toward organic union. However, after this, matters began to deteriorate. Although the fraternal delegate of the OPC to the 1970 CRC synod pointed out four areas of concern which the OPC had with the CRC—1) its views on Scripture's infallibility, 2) the particular atonement of Christ, 3) creation versus evolution, and 4) the CRC consideration of possible membership in the World Council of Churches

(WCC)—Zwaanstra feels that these allegations of Liberalism were unjustified, being based not upon synodical pronouncements but on articles written by church leaders, etc., which

> forced the CRC representatives into a defensive posture, shifted the focus away from eventual union, and imposed an undue emphasis on defending statements and answering allegations dealing with subtle differences of opinion that frequently were merely semantic in nature (55).

It is evident that Zwaanstra does not take seriously these concerns of the OPC General Assembly, choosing to see the termination of union efforts by the two denominations as caused by other things such as: 1) a church (the OPC) that was "more confident of its Reformed credentials and more ready to reprove and correct than was the CRC" (116), and 2) the OPC's failure to understand that "ecumenical and inter-church relationships by definition must be based on parity and mutual respect" (117).

The ironic feature of all of this is that the concerns of the OPC which were expressed twenty-five years ago, far from being without substance, have remained as issues which have continued to plague the CRC, especially the matters of the authority and interpretation of Scripture (women in office), and the creation versus evolution debate as it presently devolves about the teaching of professors at its college and seminary. Moreover, these issues are no longer simply matters raised by a self-confident church more ready to reprove and correct than was the CRC, but are plainly concerns equally shared by an increasing number within the CRC, so much so, that actions of separation are beginning to take place by those who see little hope of the CRC returning to its former confessional commitment. Zwaanstra, however, says nothing of this and instead implies that all is well in the CRC, so much so that he regards suggested criticisms coming from outside the CRC as unjustified and due to a different agenda that the critics may have.

Zwaanstra continues to trace the CRC's progressive movement away from the "separation mentality" into a broadening "catholicity" involvement. Before the meeting of the REC in 1968, the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands (GKN) asked its advice about joining the WCC. In response to this request, the CRC appointed a study committee, as did other member churches as well. The CRC committee submitted a majority and minority report. The synod eventually adopted the majority view which maintained that joining the

WCC would be incompatible with the creedal adherence of a confessional church such as the CRC. Zwaanstra, however, clearly shows that he favors the minority view which was that "we have a responsibility to all the churches of Christ in order that we may all be one in Christ, in truth, and in love, and that our fellowship with Christ and with his body may be perfect" (67):

> . . .membership in the WCC does not constitute a denial of the faith nor involve a failure in obedience to the Word or loyalty to the Reformed confessions, and therefore must be judged permissible to a Reformed church (75).

To join or not to join "was simply a matter of strategy or tactics" (76). The minority committee could therefore also advise that the CRC was not yet ready to enter the ecumenical arena of the WCC (76).

Despite the collective advice of the REC not to do so, the GKN chose to ignore it and promptly joined the WCC in 1968 after the meeting of the REC. While the CRC has not since this time actively taken up the goal of also joining the WCC, it has however rejoined the NAE in 1988 with a unanimous vote to do so (104). Zwaanstra welcomes this action with the comment,

> By joining the NAE, the CRC for the first time in almost forty years stepped out of its isolationist tradition and narrowly circumscribed ecumenical involvement exclusively with confessional Reformed churches. It did so recognizing that the NAE offered the only realistic means for ecumenical contact with a wide variety of American evangelical churches (105).

Interestingly enough, the CRC, as recently as 1988, rejected an invitation to become a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) on the basis that some Reformed churches in this body were delinquent in doctrine and discipline (109). Concerning this action Zwaanstra says,

> The synod's action indicates that the CRC was not ready to risk arousing uncertainty in its membership regarding its confessional distinctiveness and loyalty to the Reformed faith—a distinctiveness and loyalty historically maintained and secured through separation and isolation—by allowing its representatives to participate in ecumenical dialogue, on an equal basis, with those of other Reformed churches that were delinquent in doctrine and in discipline (109).

With regard to the CRC's eventual joining of the WCC, Zwaanstra opines that,

> The catholicity and unity of Christ's church has not yet penetrated the CRC consciousness so as to create enough yearning for ecumenical involvement to implement the ecumenical vision either articulated in the report of 1944 or embodied in the WCC (119).

He apparently sees little danger in the CRC's joining the WCC, in the same way as has been true of the GKN, nor is he seemingly aware of the increasing liberalization of the WCC which is taking it down the path of syncretism with other religions, as this was manifested at its 1991 meeting in Canberra, Australia.

Already in 1972 the OPC submitted to the REC five factors which were present in the GKN and which therefore made incompatible its membership in that organization. They were: 1) membership in the WCC, 2) the admission of women to the teaching and ruling offices in the church, 3) its repeal of a synodical decision which affirmed the literal interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3, 4) its doctrine of Scripture, and 5) its failure to administer discipline in response to H.M. Kuitert's questioning of the historicity of the fall of man (80). Zwaanstra admits that GKN membership has been a continuing bone of contention in the REC over the years, with

> nine churches having resigned their membership, allegedly because of the serious defects in Reformed faith and practice present in the GKN and because of the continued presence of this church in the fellowship of the REC (81).

But he feels that the apartheid issue present in the South African churches has been only "somewhat less threatening to the existence of the REC" (81). We would however suggest that the difference between the South African churches and the GKN is that they have, at least to some extent, responded to the REC's efforts to have apartheid removed from South Africa, whereas the GKN has to date been unwilling to accept any advice which the REC has given it. Zwaanstra suggests that the CRC may not have been evenhanded in its dealing with the South African churches, being more severe with them than with the GKN. But then he adds,

> the CRC has not called for the termination of the membership of any of the South African churches, nor has it threatened to withdraw its membership on account of racial attitudes present within South African Reformed churches (84).

But it is obvious that he regards apartheid as a more serious error than those found within the GKN.

Zwaanstra reports that the most successful ecumenical relationship the CRC has found to date has been its association with the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), but then he caustically observes in a footnote, "This judgment may in the near future have to be revised" (86) because of NAPARC's audacity to

> call upon the Christian Reformed Church to reverse the action of the 1990 synod leading to the opening of the offices of minister and ruling elder to women, as contrary to the Scripture and the Reformed standards. . . (87).

It seems that the CRC, like its older sister the GKN, does not like nor is it minded to listen to advice from brethren outside its communion.

Since 1962 the CRC has once again sought a closer relationship with the RCA which since 1976 has broadened and deepened at local and classical levels (96). In 1989 their unity as churches in ecclesiastical fellowship was visibly expressed when the synods of the two churches met concurrently on the campus of Calvin College (97). Zwaanstra regards this as a good development and comments,

> For a union of the churches to take place, the RCA's Reformed consciousness and sense of identity will have to become clearer and more sharply focused, and the CRC's catholic consciousness and sense of identity will have to broaden and deepen (122-123).

The reader is left to suppose that the issues in the past which caused the separation in the first place are adequately included in this summary evaluation.

Zwaanstra hopes for the CRC's increased ecumenical involvement with its adoption of the Ecumenical Charter in 1987 which among other things allows for diversity in worship, confessional formulas and church order (99). He notes that this is a far cry from the report of 1944, but he adds, "Yet since all perceptions of biblical truth are fallible and incomplete, the CRC must guard against the presumption that it possesses the truth in all its fullness" (101).

We have in this review already referred to parts of Zwaanstra's concluding chapter which is an "Evaluation and Appraisal" of the CRC's history as he has given it. A few additional remarks are in order by way of our evaluation of the book. One of the concluding observations Zwaanstra makes with regard to the CRC's historical Dutch Reformed tradition is,

> Unless the CRC establishes relationships with historically Reformed bodies in America adequate to counterbalance the potentially formative influences of American evangelicalism, the church may more and more experience difficulty in maintaining its confessional Reformed character (123).

This is a significant admission, for it directly involves the future of the CRC. Can it, in turning from its so-called Reformed isolation which Zwaanstra has virtually identified with Dutch parochialism, and in pursuit of greater ecumenical involvement, thereby becoming more closely identified with evangelicalism and perhaps even liberalism, still maintain its distinctively Reformed character? On the one hand, no one should question the biblicality of the unity of the church. Nor even that such unity must be sought in dialogue with other churches. But on the other hand, what the CRC seems to be losing sight of is the fact that not all that calls itself church is indeed church. Unity, therefore, must still be sought within the framework of truth as defined by Scripture and confession. Otherwise, where truth is lost, unity becomes a sham and mirage. The latest developments of the WCC, about which (as we have before noted) Zwaanstra appears to be (naively?) unmindful, are eloquent confirmation of this observation.

One could even go a step further and say that the CRC's progressive loss of confessional acuity, as Zwaanstra, perhaps inadvertently, brings this to light in his book, is responsible for the presence of increasing division rather than unity within its own ranks, and this is an ironical twist to its attempts at greater ecumenical identity and unity. Over the years, the CRC's so-called secessionist (but biblical and confessional) policy has established and maintained a spiritual life, commitment and practice on the part of its members that have been the envy of many. Who else over the years could boast (in the good sense) of well-attended worship services, catechetical training and Christian schools for its youth, a high standard radio ministry, missionary endeavor, etc.? But the question can now be legitimately asked, will the erosion of doctrinal consciousness which is progressively occurring in the interest of broader catholicity result in the loss of these distinctives? We can only hope

and pray that, instead of continuing to pursue the dubious goals of catholicity at the increasing expense of its Reformed distinctives, the CRC will return once again to a more consistently Reformed position which, under the blessing of God, has made the CRC what it has become.

Raymond O. Zorn

Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century, by Aubrey Malphurs. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. Pp. 256. $11.95.

Aubrey Malphurs is chairman of the Department of Field Education at Dallas Theological Seminary. His new book is designed to provide insight and instruction in the development of vision-oriented ministry on the part of evangelical pastors and leaders. The fundamental assumption of the work is that many conservative ministries in the churches today are foundering and stagnating because of the lack of a clear vision of what a particular ministry ought to have as its goals and how it ought to be attaining them. Its theme is that a ministry will be successful only if it has a clear, challenging and urgent vision.

Developing a Vision is activistic in its approach. It is a "how-to" book which seeks to communicate methods which will provide the means of success to those who follow its plan. Using a hypothetical minister, "pastor Bob" (unrelated to the author of this review), it begins with a chapter emphasizing the need for a vision, proceeds with a definition of a vision for a ministry, and describes the process and actions required to lead a team in developing a ministry vision. The final four chapters then deal with implementing the vision, overcoming obstacles, management leadership and maintaining the vision. Overall the volume is quite a thorough presentation of the author's plan for a vision-oriented ministry and he is to be complemented for this. The author's presentation is also realistic in that it addresses the problems raised by those in the church who might object to new directions or who are only reluctantly agreeable to them.

There are several strengths and weaknesses in the vision-oriented approach to church leadership presented by Mr. Malphurs. First of all, there is no doubt that people who are only vaguely aware of what the church ought to be and be doing will fail as leaders. Furthermore, the idea that in today's society it is necessary to enlist the natural leaders of a congregation in a concrete vision of the church and its work is also necessary; the day of the Lone Ranger dominee has rightly been

relegated to history. These truths underlie the message of this book and ought to be taken into account by all who would serve the Lord well in our day. Many of our Reformed churches could benefit immensely from serious vision planning on the part of their leaders. New pastors ought especially to communicate concretely with their councils and membership about these things.

Along with these strengths there are what seem to this reviewer to be some real weaknesses. First of all, Mr. Malphurs seems to assume that "success" in the ministry is to be measured in the usual human terms of acceptance in the community and growth in numbers. It is not that the book is without reference to biblical theology, indeed the sample programs listed for the church as needing balance include worship, edification and outreach, rightly seen as carrying out the great commission. Nevertheless the underlying assumption is that these programs can serve a number of church-visions developed to fit differing local situations. It seems to us that beginning with a biblical view of the work of the church, such as that summarized in Acts 2:42ff (where doctrine, fellowship and worship resulting in outreach are emphasized), might be a better approach to the matter of vision. In short, we believe that Scripture should be given the lead in providing the vision for our ministries, rather than a team of success-oriented leaders.

The second weakness we see in Mr. Malphur's approach is that others in the congregation are seen politically, that is, as human beings who are to be led, and perhaps even manipulated, into following the vision of the church pastor and leaders. We would rather think of them as objects of discipleship, that is, of leadership by the Lord Jesus Christ, who are to be led into the good pastures of his word and then taught to lead their lives as responsible to him. Perhaps these two approaches can be used in tandem rather than in conflict but we are concerned that the latter will happen. Since the author presents so little of his own theology, assessing this weakness is difficult. We are a bit reminded of the classic booklet called *The Gospel Blimp* in which the method of evangelism (dropping tracts from a tethered blimp) requires so much work and causes so much upset in the city that its effects are negative on both church and surrounding community.

Finally, we are concerned about the Madison Avenue approach to "casting the vision," that is, communicating it from the team which has developed it to the rest of the congregation and to the community. Seeing catchy slogans, logos, charisma, etc., as part of this process seem to us to be manipulative. While the author claims to use the word "charisma" somewhat reluctantly, and is thus evidently sensitive to our

skepticism about these methods, he does recommend them as the way to develop excitement and approval for the vision. We would be more comfortable with goal and vision setting in which people are convinced that the vision presented ought to be followed because it accords with the will of the Lord.

Our subject volume is well-written and edited, and thus provides easy reading. With our caveats in mind, it could well serve as a helpful waker-upper to those who feel bogged down in a god-less pastorate. It includes a sample vision presentation (202-213), and a number of worksheets to cover the subject of each chapter. There is no index.

Robert E. Grossmann

To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism, by Theodore Dwight Bozeman. Chapel Hill, North Carolina and London: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA, 1988. Pp. xii + 413. $34.95.

The reason for writing this study is simply to counteract the emphasis in many modern studies of Puritanism and especially American Puritanism. The most influential essay on American Puritanism is that of Perry Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," in which he teaches that the Puritan migration to Massachusetts was not only for the purpose of setting up a community guided by the Bible, but also for the purpose of creating a society which would be "a model of Christian reformation that all England and Europe were to imitate" (82). This latter was a new emphasis Bozeman, professor of religion and history at the University of Iowa, points out. He writes, "Earlier historians of the Great Migration knew nothing of a Puritan exemplary mission" (82).

Bozeman's purpose in this volume is to offer a corrective to the widely believed and circulated view of Miller. He points to evidence which does not seem to support overwhelmingly Miller's view. His position is that the Puritans were "primitivists," that is, they wanted to return to the simplicity of the early Christian Church—the days of the New Testament Church. It was a reaction to the complexity of Anglicanism. In short, Puritanism was an attempt to return to the Bible. This was the reason for the settlement in the new world.

He refutes the common view that eschatology was at the center of the purpose for founding New England. To believe it was is to put too much stock in the then-current prophetic theory. While there certainly

was an emphasis on the millennium in Puritan preaching, it was not apparently the "conscious purpose of the Great Migration" (23).

Bozeman has brought together a good deal of evidence to support his view. What he has written, though sometimes tedious and a bit repetitious in style, should not be overlooked by the scholars. It is worthy of their study and reflection.

Jerome M. Julien

How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil, by D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. Pp. 275, including Scripture index. $13.95.

The problem of suffering and evil from a biblical perspective has been frequently discussed in recent theology. Many of the discussions which have occurred have approached the problem from a primarily theoretical perspective, endeavoring to show the consistency of the Christian doctrine of God's sovereignty and goodness and the existence of evil. The Reformed philosopher and apologist, Alvin Plantinga, for example, has re-articulated the so-called "free will defense," in order to defend the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and goodness in the face of the problem of evil. However, other writers have conceded the traditional doctrine of God's sovereignty in order to maintain his goodness. Process theology, for example, has relinquished the classical view of God's power by developing a doctrine of a limited God who, though perfectly wise and good, is simply unable to prevent suffering and evil. Several years ago a Jewish rabbi, Harold Kushner, made a similar adjustment in his best-seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken, 1981).

D.A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a prolific author, has now added his contribution to this discussion and tackled the problem of evil and suffering. Working from the perspective he earlier developed in his *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), Carson argues that we need not give up the historic Christian view of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, when it comes to the problem of evil. Rather, we can hold these in proper biblical tension, neither denying God's sovereign superintendence of all that occurs within his creation nor absolving his creatures of their responsibility for sinning against him and introducing evil and suffering into his good creation.

In the Preface to this book, Carson clearly articulates his purpose and the scope of his study. He does not pretend to offer a "quick answer to difficult questions about suffering" (9). Nor does he expect that his book will serve as an easy help for Christians who are experiencing grief and affliction. He aims, rather, to "help other Christians think about suffering and evil" from a variety of biblical perspectives. Such thoughtful reflection, from a biblical standpoint, will serve, he suggests, as a "preventative medicine," enabling Christians to avoid the kind of false expectations for the Christian life that leave them devastated when they encounter grief and suffering. By means of a biblical reflection upon the problem of evil and suffering, Christians may be "equipped for every good work," even the good work of persevering under trials and afflictions that God may by his hand bring into their lives.

Carson divides his discussion into three major parts. In the first part, he introduces his subject, "Thinking about Suffering and Evil." In the second part, "Parts of the Puzzle: Biblical Themes for Suffering People," he develops several biblical themes which are helpful in facing the reality of evil. And in the third part, "Glimpses of the Whole Puzzle: Evil and Suffering in the World of a Good and Sovereign God," he sets forth what he terms "compatibilism," or the biblical tension between God's comprehensive sovereignty and human responsibility.

The opening part of Carson's study clears the ground of a number of "false steps" that Christians and others may take in approaching the issue of suffering and evil. Many of the typical shelters sought by people in their time of storm are insecure and unworthy. Christians, for example, can respond indignantly to evil and suffering, when they always stress the triumphs of the Christian life and minimize the inevitable trials. Or they may succumb to the tyranny of the moment, demanding immediate gratification and refusing to wait upon the Lord's goodness which will come according to his, not our, timetable.

Frequently, Christians also misunderstand texts like Romans 8:28 to promise that all things in the Christian life will be good, rather than that God will work, even *in and through evil things*, for the good of his own. It is also a temptation to believe that right belief brings with it the guarantee of "easy answers" to difficult questions. Inadequately reflecting upon the cross of Christ and our participation in his sufferings, Christians, particularly in North American evangelicalism, are inclined to develop a triumphalist faith of guaranteed prosperity and success.

Corresponding to these false steps taken by Christians to the problem of suffering and evil, Carson also debunks several false steps deriving from a non-Christian world-view. He singles out such approaches as: atheism with its mechanistic view of the universe; the increasingly popular doctrine of a limited God; deism; and pantheism.

In the largest section of the book, Carson sketches a variety of biblical themes which provide not an easy answer or resolution of the problem of suffering, but a perspective from which to approach this problem. Though these themes do not provide, he acknowledges, a complete picture, they do constitute a kind of piecing together of parts of the puzzle.

The first of these themes is the biblical story-line of creation, fall and redemption. According to this story-line, suffering and evil are ultimately the product of God's just judgment upon a sin-cursed and rebellious creation. To locate the reality of evil and suffering properly, it is fundamental that we always bear in mind how God looks at our sin (as inexcusable rebellion against him) and what our sin and rebellion deserves at his hand (his holy displeasure).

After summarizing various biblical insights on such issues as social evils, poverty, war and natural disasters, Carson turns to the important topic of the suffering peculiar to God's people. Pointing out how infrequently this topic is addressed by the contemporary, North American church, Carson notes that the Scriptures teach that such suffering is an inescapable and significant component of the life of every Christian. For example, the Bible teaches that God disciplines every child whom he receives; suffering in the Christian life often serves as a kind of discipline, teaching the believer to rely upon the Lord and combat sin. Furthermore, the Christian life always provokes the opposition and persecution of the world; there is an anti-thesis, a line of division, between those who are loyal to the Word and kingdom of God and those who remain hostile to that Word and kingdom. Such suffering is an unavoidable aspect of following Christ and taking up the cross. Indeed, this form of suffering, opposition and persecution, is especially directed against those whom Christ has called to be shepherds and leaders of his flock.

In subsequent chapters, Carson sketches a biblical perspective on such difficult questions as hell, illness and death, and the Christian hope for the final victory of Christ and the consummation of God's redemptive purpose. In these chapters, Carson's approach is to affirm the Bible's teaching, however uncongenial it may be to modern standards, and to show its benefit for dealing with suffering and evil in the

Christian life. Carson rejects recent attempts to deny the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell, particularly when they are based upon unbiblical views of what is "fair" or in keeping with God's goodness and love. He correctly points out that we often labor with an unbiblical view of God's holiness and the gravity of sin as rebellion against him, when the doctrine of hell is repudiated or treated as though it were sub-Christian. He also sets forth the ways in which the Christian believer is sustained by the hope of the gospel in the face of illness and death. Suffering brought on by illness and death is often used by the Lord to strengthen and build up his people in their faith. For this reason, Carson criticizes the contemporary "health and wealth" gospel teachers who, by creating unreasonable expectations in the hearts of some believers, rob them of the opportunity of growth *through* suffering rather than without it. He also provides a good summary of the contribution of the book of Job to suffering which appears inequitable and inexplicable. The last chapter in this part of his study deals with the perspective provided the believer by the cross of Christ and the suffering of God in Christ on our behalf.

In the third part of his study, Carson draws together a number of threads of biblical teaching to argue for what he terms "compatibilism." Compatibilism is the position which simultaneously affirms both God's sovereignty and human responsibility, without attempting (rationalistically) to resolve the mystery of their inter-relationship. Carson defines compatibilism as holding to two propositions:

> 1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized, or mitigated. 2. Human beings are morally responsible creatures—they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, make decisions, and so forth, and they are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent. (201)

For Carson, compatibilism is not only the clear teaching of Scripture, but also the perspective on the problem of suffering and evil that is alone satisfying. On the one hand, it does not, in order to defend and preserve God's perfect goodness, resort to relinquishing God's power and sovereignty. Though God is "asymmetrically" related to good and evil (he wills and authors all that is good, he permits and employs evil to effect his good ends), he is nonetheless the sovereign Lord over all that occurs within his creation. Only this kind of affirmation of God's complete sovereignty can sustain the Christian hope that God will

ultimately triumph in his redemptive purpose and work. On the other hand, he holds tenaciously to the biblical insistence that all evil and suffering are the result of the introduction of sin into God's good creation through the sin and rebellion of the creature. Only within the context of this two-fold affirmation is it possible to make biblical "sense," to the extent that this is possible at all, of the problem of suffering and evil.

After setting forth his compatibilist position, Carson concludes his study with a helpful chapter, giving "some pastoral suggestions" to Christians who may be in a position to help and encourage fellow Christians in their suffering and affliction. He also provides an appendix, "Reflection on AIDS," in which he sets forth a balanced and useful approach to the problem of AIDS.

Though there are many books on the subject Carson addresses in this study, there are few that are as good as this one. Carson accomplishes his modest purpose admirably—to provide his readers a biblical perspective with which to approach suffering and evil. The biblical perspectives and themes he outlines should help any Christian believer sort out a number of the problems relating to suffering and evil. While Carson is careful to avoid glib and hasty answers to many of the questions that arise, he is not afraid to echo the clear teaching of Scripture when necessary. I can only recommend this book highly to any believer who wants Scriptural counsel and perspective in the face of suffering and evil.

Cornelis P. Venema