

BOOK REVIEWS

The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area, by W. Harold Mare. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987. Pp. 323. \$19.95.

No committed Christian will want to take lightly, much less neglect or ignore the significance of Jerusalem. It is by no means the largest, not even the oldest city in the world. It is, without doubt, the most important and attractive not only for Christians but also for Jews and even to a lesser degree for Muslims. Again and again it is mentioned in Holy Scriptures in a variety of times and circumstances and with a variety of messages which challenge us as believers today. The first mention occurs as early as Genesis 14; the last in the final chapters of Revelation when the earthly has made way completely and comfordingly for the heavenly.

Because of that city's influential place in the Bible we do well to learn as much about it as possible. And here the author can help us by tracing its history also as some of its details are uncovered by archaeological research.

The author follows the chronology, beginning with the very earliest mention of this place in the 19th-18th century B.C. He brings the story of Jerusalem almost down to our own times, reminding us again and again that few if any other cities have even been fought over and destroyed and rebuilt so frequently as this one. Hence, and this he acknowledges frankly, the archaeological "finds" before the time of Herod the Great are few and far between. Interesting and informative is the discussion of the names given throughout history and also in Scripture to this place. We are reminded of the repeated changes in size and style which Jerusalem has undergone; from a very small settlement later called "the city of David" to an impressive town and temple under Solomon and the later kings; then laid waste and only slowly rebuilt until in the days of our Lord it was again great with multitudes swelling its population at the times of the

great feasts. But that city was destroyed once more in A.D. 70 to fulfill Jesus' prophetic warnings. The author also deals with the later history of the city under the Romans, Byzantines and Turks.

Although the "finds" for most of those long centuries are few, the author helps us understand how even bits and pieces can shed light on the lives and customs and religious practices of people living long ago. We read about pottery, about clothing, about tombs and bones, etc. At times these "small things" tell us as much as large foundation stones. As a help to "see" Jerusalem a little more clearly as it was in the days of the Old and the New Testament this volume, so profusely illustrated with photos, charts and maps, will be a worthwhile addition to any church and home library.

The credentials of the author are noteworthy. He has taught New Testament and archaeology at Covenant Theological Seminary since 1963. Even more, he has directed excavations in the Near East and has served as president of the Near East Archaeological Society for several years. Besides several books he has also penned many articles for journals and reference works in his field. Yet he writes with commendable restraint not only in enumerating and evaluating the archaeological discoveries but also when considering fellow archaeologists who agree to disagree sharply with each other. But his purpose in writing this volume is more than purely informative. "I hope this study will not only add to the readers knowledge of Jerusalem," he writes, "but also that it will be of spiritual and inspirational help."

Peter Y. De Jong

The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21:22 and the Old Testament, by William J. Dumbrell. Homebush West, N.S.W., Australia: Lancer Books, 1985. Pp. 200. \$10.95.

Here is a stimulating book which deserves to be thoroughly read and reflected on by every preacher, professor and theological student as well as by any church member eager to see more clearly the beautiful, comforting and

challenging unity of the biblical "story" within its rich diversity! As an exercise in biblical theology in a responsible manner, it is one of the best to appear on the market during the last few years.

Dumbrell, who serves as professor of Biblical Studies at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, first presented this material as the 1983 Moore Theological College Lectures, in Australia. It appears here as "five stories," each with a major idea or theme found in the last two chapters of Revelation. This gives rise to such questions as: "Why is this such an appropriate way to finish the book of Revelation with all its catastrophic events?" and also "From where did these ideas spring and how have they been developed throughout the Scriptures?" To discern this, he insists that we need to go back beyond the Gospels and the Epistles to the Old Testament, sometimes even to the very beginnings.

The five stories or themes, all mentioned in Revelation 21:1-5, are the new Jerusalem, the new temple, the new covenant, the new Israel and the new creation. Each of these, he is convinced, "serves as a window on the entire structure of the Bible." And to our mind he demonstrates his convictions well. Indeed, he warns against supposing that these five capture the full breadth of biblical data. Other themes and topics are also worthy of careful exploration and development. Nor do these five exist independently of each other; there is clear overlapping and interacting. But for the sake of clarity each deserves its own independent treatment within the whole.

That Dumbrell is a competent as well as fascinating teacher is evident from the manner in which he treats the material. He begins with the "idea" as found towards the close of the last Bible book. Then he traces its origin and development with its many nuances throughout the Old Testament and into the New. Nowhere does he find contradiction; much less the notion of several unrelated and/or discordant theologies in the biblical writings. But he takes great pains to show how in each age the message of that present, while based on the past, opened up richer and newer perspectives. And having surveyed the course of

development of each idea, he returns to the book of Revelation and provides us with a summary and conclusion.

A few quotations from his final section on "The New Israel" may show somewhat more clearly how the author has worked with the biblical materials to answer the questions which he posited at the beginning.

The transference of the promises from Israel to the new people is now fully made. For example, consider the use of Exodus 19:6 at Revelation 1:6 within an address to the church universal, or believers generally. In this context the notion "priestly kingdom" in Exodus 19:6 is applied to believers, and embodies the idea of both a dedicated and worshipful response to the Christ revealed, while the note of kingship indicates a sharing of dominion with the victorious Son of Man. . . .

Both Revelation 1:6 and 5:9-10 assume that a new worshipping community (i.e., an "Israel") has arisen through the death of Christ. . . . The message is that the establishment of the kingdom of God is a reality seen in present Christian community, and the parousia will simply extend this rule and give it its true character. . . .

The new community as priest and kings unto God is a legatee of all the promises given to national Israel. . . . It presents the ideal to which historical Israel never corresponded. In these people all the symbolism of the Old Testament which emphasized Israel's function--covenant, land, temple, priesthood, kingship--has been gathered together. In ceaseless worship, they praise the God of the beginning and Jesus whose death and resurrection has made this expectation the end which they now celebrate (159-160).

Here is a feast with several rich courses; each deserves to be savored slowly as the wondrous ways of the eternal God in Christ Jesus through the long centuries of special revelation are set before us so clearly and compellingly. Preachers who make proper use of this book will find that their preaching and teaching will be enriched.

Peter Y. De Jong

Faith for the Journey, by Reuben R. Welch. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988. Pp. 154. \$10.95.

As the sub-title indicates, this is a study-help dealing with the epistle to the Hebrews, one of the most important yet frequently neglected New Testament writings. Many believers fail to see the riches of this epistle as it declares the superiority and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ for our complete redemption.

The author, professor at a Nazarene College in San Diego, California, does an admirable piece of work within the compass of thirteen lessons to prepare groups for a thorough discussion of this comforting and challenging material. That it is eminently practical for Christians today, as well as inescapably theological and doctrinal, soon becomes evident from the treatment given. At specific points the writer challenges some of the usual explanations, then encouraging a discussion for clearer and fuller understanding.

But, one might ask, can Hebrews be adequately studied and discussed in thirteen lessons? Of course not. Yet in a day when also in Reformed churches much of Holy Scripture is in danger of becoming "terra incognita" and people want knowledge within the shortest possible span of time, this little volume can serve a useful purpose. It is not a commentary, of course. Hence group leaders would be well advised to supplement for their preparation this work with a good, thorough and, hopefully, Reformed commentary. But above all, challenge the study group with direct confrontation with Scripture itself. Without this, ardently pursued, the church's life languishes.

Peter Y. De Jong

Against the Night, by Charles Colson. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1989. Pp. 205, including index. \$12.95.

Against the Night is not a scholarly book in the sense that it is written by a scholar for scholars. It is a very well-researched and well-written study of our times from a frankly Christian perspective. Colson's main point and theme

are well expressed by the subtitle of this little volume, "Living in the New Dark Ages." This theme, that the loss of Christian influences and righteous standards in Western, and particularly in North American, society has led us into a new age of intellectual and cultural darkness comparable to the "dark age" of the medieval world, is not particularly original with Mr. Colson, but he and his writing assistants (due recognition of their assistance is given in the preface) have done a careful and believable job of making their point.

Colson's thesis in *Against the Night* is that the Western world is in the process of cultural collapse, not from physical invasion by a new horde of barbarians from without, but by a horde of barbarians who have arisen from within Western society itself.

Having begun with a brief reference to the fall of Rome as historical precedent for the fall of other societies (has anyone ever failed to do that in writing a book about decline?), Colson traces the roots of the new dark age to various streams of the philosophies which undergird modern humanist thinking. Tracing man-centered thinking to the great philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries, e.g., Descartes and Rousseau, and noting the individualistic influence of John Stuart Mill upon Western thought, Colson concludes that these basic views of man and reality have born bitter fruit as they have been applied in our century. The resulting shallow, self-centered life of the present-oriented human has created a world in which nothing is worth either living or dying for.

However, the author of *Against the Night* goes beyond simply pointing out the roots of our societal darkness; he notes particularly the resulting failure of faith in the historical institutions which have undergirded Western civilization, namely, family, church and state. In such a world it is not surprising to find an underlying relativism in most human thinking, a relativism which denies the reality of morality, of faith, and of God himself.

Having considered the sources of modern barbarianism, Colson gives a chapter each to the particular places taken by

these barbarians in home, classroom, government, press and church, and concludes his work by proposing solutions in chapters entitled, for example, "God and Politics," "Moral Education," "Metanoia," "Communities of Light," "The Christian Mind," and Moral Imagination." In these chapters Mr. Colson points to the basic "myth" or story by which people view themselves and their world as the essential ingredient in the kind of a society they produce, and calls for a replacement of the above-mentioned "barbarian" mindset with one which includes a view of humanity's "shared destiny," of the "dignity of human life," and of "respect for tradition and history."

Against the Night is a book that should have been written. It is not the first somewhat pessimistic analysis of our life and times. Nevertheless, the reality of a descent into very harsh times for all citizens, and particularly for Christians, is something that none of us can afford to ignore or take lightly. *Against the Night* should and will find a wide popular readership among evangelical Christians. It also deserves to be added to the list of required reading for college and seminary students. Colson's own history as a son of our time, first as unbelieving government functionary and later as Christian prisoner and popularizer, gives him a good background for this work.

Robert E. Grossmann

The Case Against Divorce, by Diane Medved. New York: Donald I. Fine, 1989. Pp. 262. \$18.95.

Diane Medved is a Ph.D. clinical psychologist who has come through, and is still to a large extent a part of, the feminist movement. Her book was written somewhat by accident as Mrs. Medved set out to write about the usefulness of divorce and to demonstrate that most women do just fine after leaving their marriages. The author goes on to confess, however, that what she found is quite the opposite; ex-wives, ex-husbands and the children of divorced couples suffer far more emotional, social and financial trauma than they would have had they maintained their marriages.

This book is not written from a Christian perspective. Dr. Medved makes no claim to be Christian, nor does her work show any clear evidence of a Christian position. Indeed, her work suffers from this fact. Nevertheless, the book is an honest attempt to face a fact largely glossed over and denied by secular psychology, namely, that divorce generally makes matters worse, not better in the lives of those "freed from the shackles" of marriage. Thus the book is a breath of fresh air in a field of secular science which is often quite misleading in its handling of human problems. Moreover, this book is the type of material that often appears on public library shelves (where we borrowed the copy we are reviewing), and is thus read by thoughtful Christians in our congregations. Here is a good example of modern pragmatic psychological thinking, and those who seek to do Christian counseling must be aware of the methods of those who often participate in dealing with people's problems in our communities and churches.

Never does the author apply moral standards for adulterous actions even though she frequently cites such activity as example of how people fall into the mistake of divorce. This is perhaps the most distressing thing about the book. If clinical psychology can operate in an a-moral environment, it offers no help to those who turn to this "science" for help with emotional and social problems. Sadly, many Christian readers of books like Dr. Medved's will not notice this powerful amorality, since they will find themselves agreeing with her conclusions against divorce.

It is important for pastors and counselors to understand that while conclusions may appear to coincide with those of Christianity, the roots of those conclusions may be entirely unbelieving. It would be a drastic mistake to adopt the non-Christian presuppositions on which the conclusions are based. Mrs. Medved is quite right about the fact that divorce seldom solves more problems than it creates. However, this must not be the reason we Christians oppose divorce. Even if it could be shown that divorce is very beneficial to emotional and financial health, it would be wrong because it is a violation of the sanctity of the marriage bond which God himself

created. As Christians we may indeed use the factual conclusions to argue against evil, but we should never allow pragmatism to be the foundation of our moral positions.

Another reason for knowing this kind of literature and its attraction to Christians is the very real danger of Christian believers coming under the treatment of unbelieving psychological care. This happens continually in our society, where pastors and other Christian counselors are intimidated enough by the "sciences" of Freudian psychology to believe that these sciences can do a better job of helping troubled persons than the Word of God. There is, of course, a place for a true science of psychology, but a psychology based on antibiblical principles will not be true to real human nature, and may often cause emotional and moral harm to those who come under its control. Only when pastors and counselors are confident of the Christian commitment of the psychological helpers they employ can they have real confidence of benefiting the sheep of God's flock by referring them to such counselors. For example, Dr. Medved, while being fully opposed to divorce in most cases, sees no real need for a life-long commitment to marriage as an ordinance of God. Her primary concerns are the personal comfort and financial stability of those she advises, not the glory of God. Interestingly, the Bible makes personal self-interest and financial gain false gods which lead to destruction rather than life.

This book is then worth reading for pastors and counselors, as well as for well-grounded and mature Christians, so that they may know better the world of thought in which we live. It is, however, not to be recommended to those who are unstable or suffering the very problems it seeks to address, for it will only tend to lead them to adopt false principles of living because of its "upright" conclusions.

Robert E. Grossmann

The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature, by Sidney Greidanus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988. Pp. xvi + 374, incl. select bibliography, subject and Scripture indexes. Paper. \$19.95.

The aim of this volume, stated in the author's own words, is quite ambitious: "to set forth a responsible, contemporary method of biblical interpretation and preaching" (xii). The categories of hermeneutics and homiletics will serve, then, as useful classifications for reviewing this work.

The author commendably spurns *naturalistic* historical criticism of the Bible for its failure to understand the Bible on its own terms, for its post-Enlightenment worldview, and for its methodological starting point of doubt. As a substitute he proposes a *holistic* historical-critical method which starts with a posture of confidence and of openness to divine intervention in a historical universe.

Unfortunately, this substitute seems flawed at crucial points too. Take, for example, its confused approach to the phenomenon of divine miracles. We are steered away from an unnecessary dualism arising from a definition of miracle that pits nature against God; in fact, the God of the Bible performs many miracles by natural means (39; examples here include the crossing of the Red Sea and Samuel's conception). Yet this admission seems to be withdrawn when we read three pages later, "Basically the biblical worldview leads one to recognize that events can be of two kinds: in most events God works unobtrusively through 'natural' causation; but some events are surprising, unique, 'naked' acts of God, miracles." Here, the second kind--the surprising, unique, without-natural-causation act--is termed miracle and *contrasted* to divine acts performed through natural means. Where, then, does this leave us? Were the crossing of the Red Sea and Samuel's conception miracles, or not?

The author's preoccupation with answering historical criticism takes its most objectionable turns in chapter 4, "Historical Interpretation," and chapter 9, "Preaching Hebrew Narrative." Here he insists concerning the Bible's historical accuracy that the biblical message will not stand or fall on the basis of the truthfulness of its historical details. If that sounds too strong to be true, listen: "The biblical authors, either because of ancient standards of history writing or because of authorial freedom (or likely for both reasons), felt free to present their messages the way they did,

and *historical imprecision as far as the details are concerned cannot detract from the point of the messages*" (92; emphasis added). The biblical kerygma depends not on the how, when and where, but on the *that* of the events reported. But in our opinion the *that-ness* derives precisely from those details whose historicity is allegedly inconsequential. Unless, of course, one is interested in saying simply that "something" (we don't really know what) happened.

In fact, Bible readers are advised in this book to employ the distinction between what is hermeneutically indispensable history and what is hermeneutically inconsequential history. Belonging to the former is the fact, for example, that God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. To the latter belong the questions whether or not Job and Jonah really lived, and whether there was one or two blind men at Jericho.

But what will prevent this from fermenting into Bultmann-style denial of the historicity of biblical events? We're given the antidote (195-196): if the truthfulness of the message being communicated depends on the historicity of the events/persons presented, then that history is hermeneutically indispensable. One would look a long time for so clear an example of circular reasoning!

For example, with regard to Genesis 1-2, the only conclusion of any importance is simply *that* God created the world, not how or when or why. We're told that the Genesis author didn't intend to answer those "secondary" questions, since he tried to fit the divine creative acts into the literary mold of the Israelite week. Given this approach, is not the historical likelihood that Eve was created before Adam just as great as the other way around? And could it be that both were made before the animals? Or doesn't it matter who was created first? Is this another of those "secondary" questions? Who decides what is secondary, and what is hermeneutically indispensable history? How can Greidanus' holistic historical-critical approach avoid the same result achieved by naturalistic historical criticism, namely, stealing the Bible from the ordinary reader?

These and a host of related questions make the hermeneutical conclusions of this book far too uncertain and unuseful.

What, then, of its homiletical prescriptions? The introductory chapter on expository preaching is somewhat helpful, in that it gathers together what many have been saying throughout much of the twentieth century. The attention throughout the book to characteristics of literary style (genre) will be helpful, more for exegesis than homiletics.

With this last statement we identify what appears to be the book's major flaw. We too can agree with H. Van Dyke Parunak when he asserts that "biblical literature, in contrast to modern literature, is 'essentially aural,' that is, 'it was intended to be understood with the ear, and not with the eye'" (61). Nevertheless, it appears to be overstating the matter to insist that *literary* genre is "an epistemological tool for unlocking meaning in individual texts" (17). Moreover, little attention is given to the difficulties associated with applying categories of rhetorical analysis to a literary document. Repetition, chiasm, and inclusio: are these primarily literary, or rhetorical, devices?

It is true enough that literary style is an important factor to consider in biblical interpretation, along with figures of speech, political/cultural environment, history of revelation, etc. But Greidanus elevates what is, after all, but one exegetical component (literary genre) to the level of homiletical norm.

Rather than imitate past preachers whose sermons were strictly didactic, feeding the congregation a diet of propositional truths, the modern preacher must carry the text's form through in his sermon. Yet, his goal cannot be to copy slavishly the biblical form--how could a preacher compose his sermon as a psalm or an epistle or an apocalyptic vision? "Rather, the goal is to study carefully the form of the text and how it, in its literary context, plays its part in carrying the message to its intended effect with the hearers" (19). The goal is to produce the same effect as the text sought to produce.

Effect-oriented preaching must go beyond the so-called didactic form of sermonizing (theme and logically arranged points). "For passages whose aim is specifically to teach doctrine," the author writes, "the didactic form may work well, but for passages whose aim is to proclaim, to surprise, to encourage, to seek praise, etc., the didactic form is not very appropriate because the message 'becomes transformed into an intellectual topic'; . . ." (147).

Embedded in the didactic form is the mischievous word "logical." Unfortunately the author's analysis is marred by his ambiguous use of that word. If by "logical" one means simply "fitting in a coherent framework," such a framework need not be intellectualized at all. *Any* discernible framework is inherently logical. For example, there's a very logical relationship between a cuckoo clock, a second-grader's paper silhouette, a printer ribbon, a statuette of Bartjens van Zwolle, an AM/FM radio, and the World Book Encyclopedia--these are things in my study which catch my eye moving from left to right as I'm seated at my desk. Just as there is a logic to most car repair manuals, some collegian's history papers, and many personal checkbooks, there can be (indeed: must be) a non-intellectualized logic to every sermon. It has been the glory of didactic preaching that it tries to reconstruct the *text's* "logic" (read: message-in-its-framework) in sermonic form, as even the examples of the didactic form cited from James Daane's *Preaching with Confidence* demonstrate (145).

What, then, is an acceptable alternative to the didactic form, to theme with textually logical subpoints? The author recommends the narrative form, which employs the techniques of story-telling and verbally dramatic development in the sermon.

Is modern preaching, then, no more than story-telling? Immediately we are warned that God's Word "as inscripturated had a normative point (theme), and that point ought to be transferred to today. It will not do, then, simply to tell a story and leave the interpretation to the hearers" (149). Again: "Preachers appear to be caught here between a rock and a hard place: making the point too explicit destroys the

force of the narrative, while leaving the point implicit makes the sermon vulnerable to widely divergent interpretations" (153). This tension dissolves into imagination, however, with the verbal magic of claiming that an advantage of the narrative form is its use of the same form as the text (151; in contrast, recall, to the didactic form). But it doesn't! According to the author himself, the modern preacher had better employ story *plus* interpretation/application, whereas the *biblical* form is story *as* interpretation! Confusion reigns, finally, when the author echoes Haddon Robinson's insistence that sermons on Hebrew narrative must have a theme and subpoints (225). What becomes of the difference between didactic and narrative preaching?

The sixth chapter, "Textual-Thematic Preaching," is the best of the whole volume. Some students from Greidanus' own generation and tradition, as well as alumni of the institution publishing this journal, will recognize these echoes from class syllabi authored (though not published) by Samuel Volbeda and Peter Y. De Jong.

Chapter 8, "The Relevance of the Sermon," comes in a distant second; even the appeal to a biblical author's originally intended relevance (175-181) doesn't provide adequate guarantees against subjective and arbitrary identification with Bible characters.

This work will be useful, for the time being, as a resource for tuning into contemporary discussions in homiletics. Due to some of its hermeneutical and homiletical conclusions and confusion at crucial points, it is not likely to replace standard evangelical texts or syllabi. Regrettably, scholars may be put off by its Dutchisms ("mount the pulpit"), and by the sad and rather inexplicable disregard for contemporary, relevant discussions available in the Dutch and German languages.

Nelson D. Kloosterman

Turning to God: Biblical Conversion in the Modern World, by David F. Wells. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989. Pp. 160, incl. bibliography and index. \$10.00.

This study of "biblical conversion in the modern world" is a report and an interpretation of a consultation jointly planned by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Theological Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. It is a sequel to an earlier study of Wells, professor of historical and systematic theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, which reported on a prior consultation on the Holy Spirit sponsored by the same organizations. The earlier study, *How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith*, considered the manner in which the Spirit effects salvation; this study considers more specifically the nature and aspects of biblical conversion.

The various papers which were presented at this consultation on biblical conversion, held in Hong Kong from January 4 to 8, 1988, focused upon three different disciplines: the biblical-theological, the psychological, and the cultural-anthropological. In his report and interpretation Wells also approaches the theme of the necessity and nature of conversion in terms of each of these disciplines. He begins with a summary of the biblical-theological givens on the subject of conversion. He then turns to the "psychology" of conversion. And he concludes with a treatment of the relation between biblical conversion and the "cultural-anthropological" situation of modern people in a variety of religious and secular settings.

Wells introduces his treatment of the biblical understanding of conversion by noting that it is being challenged today on two fronts: externally, alternative religions are compelled to reject the Christian teaching that conversion is the "only way" of entry into the family of God, and internally, many "Christian" churches and denominations have failed to preserve the biblical view of the necessity of conversion.

It is especially this latter failure which Wells addresses in his introduction. As an evangelical Christian, he identifies

the prevailing ideology of the World Council of Churches as one which repudiates the necessity of *personal conversion* through faith and repentance at the preaching of the gospel. This ideology, which comes to expression in a variety of social gospel theologies and in a syncretistic approach to inter-faith dialogue, strikes at the heart of the biblical view of conversion. The biblical view of conversion is built upon "two suppositions" which are antithetical to this prevailing ideology of the WCC: "Christian conversion is supernatural, and it is unique" (20). Within WCC circles, however, conversion is frequently identified with various social or political programs of "humanization" which are the task and accomplishment of man himself. Or Christian conversion is simply reduced to a form of behavior modification which is effected in a variety of ways in different religious settings.

In his summary of the biblical teaching on conversion, Wells notes that conversion is fundamentally a turning from sin to God; it involves forsaking sin and turning to Christ in faith and repentance. Such conversion involves the elements of a new status which is ours in Christ (we are forgiven and justified through faith) and a new pattern of conduct (we are repentant). In this broad and general sense, Christian conversion occurs when the Spirit enables us to respond in faith to the Word, particularly to the promise of salvation through Christ's saving work in his death and resurrection, and to turn in heartfelt repentance from sin to righteousness.

Though Wells emphasizes that this conversion takes place in a variety of ways and under a diverse set of circumstances, it is always a supernatural work wrought in us by the Spirit. Contrary to the tendency in evangelicalism to identify conversion with the *experience* of conversion (described then in the form of one's "testimony" to conversion), Wells argues not only that conversion is primarily a work of the Spirit but also that it leads to a *life of conversion* from sin to God. Biblically, Christian conversion is "not an isolated event but is related to the entire life of faith that follows upon it" (39). Furthermore, it is a reality which cannot be separated from the church and the sacrament of baptism; those who are converted are also incorporated into the

body of Christ and this incorporation is publicly signified and sealed through baptism. Here, too, Wells contrasts the biblical view of conversion with the tendency in evangelicalism to focus too much upon the convert's experience, or to identify conversion with an "initial" conversion which takes place outside of the sphere of the church.

After elucidating the main themes in the biblical view of conversion, Wells addresses the way in which conversion occurs in the case of those who are "insiders" within the community of faith and those who are "outsiders." What differences, if any, may we detect between the conversion of the children of believers who are raised and nurtured within the framework of the covenantal promises and Word of God, and the conversion of those who are confronted with and hear the gospel call to conversion from the "outside"?

It is striking that Wells, in addressing this question, argues that, biblically considered, conversion always involves the same basic elements, whether it concerns the "insider" or the "outsider." However, these elements have been truncated or minimized in much of evangelical teaching and practice.

Because evangelicals tend wrongly to identify conversion with a particular "decision" for Christ which occurs in a moment of time, children of believers who have been nurtured in the Christian faith and as well those to whom the gospel is first preached are confronted repeatedly with the challenge to "make this decision." And so for them and for those who first hear the gospel proclaimed, conversion is a "decision" made to believe in Christ, often under unusual circumstances and without much emphasis upon the obligations and implications to serve Christ which attend that decision. Evangelicals, therefore, have often failed to articulate the fullness of the gospel message and claim upon the convert. The gospel is reduced to a simple formula, and the biblical description of a renewed life in all of its richness and diversity is truncated. Against this tendency, Wells argues that all who are called through the gospel to conversion must be presented with the same gospel promise and command to believe and repent. This gospel promise and command includes a considerable amount of instruction in

the content of the gospel and the scope of Christian obedience, apart from which biblical conversion does not ordinarily occur.

Thus, Wells argues that we need to resist the superficial approach to conversion which oftentimes plagues contemporary evangelical Christianity. Consistent with his treatment of the biblical view of conversion, he argues for a more wholistic approach to the preaching of the gospel and the call to conversion, together with an insistence upon the convert's incorporation into the life and fellowship of the church.

The following summary of the difference between the biblical view of conversion and the narrow view that often prevails in the church well represents the tenor of Wells' argument:

We need to note, then, that the narrowed preaching on conversion with which we are so familiar today is not how the church has always done its gospel business. We may think that using the word *conversion* of the whole of Christian life will belittle the importance of the first act of believing; we may worry that a person could agonize before the law so long that belief in Christ is never arrived at; we may be so in awe of the exponential growth in world population that we may feel driven to introduce our own "new measures" that will make believing so easy that the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world in our generation becomes feasible. If, because of these concerns, we end up with a gospel that demands little from the believer, offers little because little needs to be received, issues in a faith that is just a notched-up sense of self-awareness, and makes few or perhaps no connections with the great issues and challenges of our day, we can say surely that ours is no longer the biblical gospel (95).

The remainder of Wells' report consists of a treatment of the peculiar challenges and difficulties to the biblical understanding of conversion in the world today. Wells treats, respectively, the peculiar situation and circumstance of

“religious outsiders” (Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists) and “materialistic outsiders” (western capitalists or eastern communists). In this treatment he draws upon the contributions of the cultural-anthropological analyses offered at the consultation of which this book is a report and interpretation. Throughout this discussion, he endeavors to set forth not only the distinctives of the faith and practice of these “outsiders,” but also of the way in which they are to be addressed with the one gospel of faith and repentance in Christ.

There are three observations that I would make about this report and interpretation of Wells.

First, because it is a report and interpretation of a consultation which involved a wide variety of contributions and perspectives on the subject of conversion, it tends to be more of a “survey” than an in-depth treatment of the various issues it broaches. Anyone who is looking for a comprehensive and careful treatment of the subject of conversion in biblical-theological perspective, for example, will find that Wells provides something on the order of a “sketch” but not a full-blown portrait of the subject. The interests of the consultation and of his study are so wide-ranging that no one of them is able to receive sustained attention and development. Well’s study reads at times more as an “impressionistic” survey of the field than a systematic treatment of any one item on the landscape. Notably lacking in his summary is any discussion of the covenant of grace and its significance for the conversion of the children of believers. This is especially noteworthy, given Wells’ attempt to deal with the differences between what he terms (unhappily) “insider” and “outsider” conversion.

Second, Wells provides a number of helpful criticisms from within evangelicalism of some of its excesses and misconstruals of the biblical doctrine of conversion. He points out quite correctly that many evangelicals often treat conversion as an experience that occurs at the inception of the Christian life only. Moreover, this experience is reduced to a momentary “decision” in response to a superficial presentation of the gospel, often stripped of its richness not

only in terms of the provisions of Christ's saving work but also the obligations of obedience and service within all areas of life. The discerning Reformed reader will recognize many of his own concerns in the criticisms which Wells registers against this evangelical view of conversion. Wells offers the advocate of the mass crusade or "television church" style of evangelism, in which the call to conversion minimizes the primacy of the Spirit's working through the Word and the call to discipleship within the life of the church, little encouragement. In this respect, his study is an excellent antidote to the reductionistic view of conversion prevalent in many evangelical circles.

And third, Wells' study provides a helpful, albeit synoptic, analysis of the situation of those to whom the gospel call to conversion must be addressed today. His description and analysis of the obstacles to the presentation of the gospel among "religious" and "materialistic" outsiders in the closing chapters of the book, are thought-provoking and instructive. Those who are called to preach need to know not only their message from the text of Scripture; they also need to know those to whom their message is addressed. Wells' has rendered an important service by summarizing and drawing this material together in his report.

On balance this is a good little book. We can only hope that it will serve to correct some of the bad practices and teachings on conversion that have plagued evangelicalism and the modern church.

Cornelis P. Venema

The Princeton Theology, ed. by David F. Wells. Vol. 1 of *Reformed Theology in America*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989. Pp. xii + 127, incl. bibliography and index. \$7.95.

Dutch Reformed Theology, ed. by David F. Wells. Vol. 2 of *Reformed Theology in America*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989. Pp. xii + 96, incl. bibliography and index. \$7.95.

Southern Reformed Theology, ed. by David F. Wells. Vol. 3 of *Reformed Theology in America*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989. Pp. xii + 92, incl. bibliography and index. \$6.95.

These three brief volumes on Reformed theology in America are Baker Book House reprints of an earlier work edited by Wells, entitled *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development* (1985). Whereas the earlier, single work treated Reformed theology in America under three rubrics, the Princeton Theology, the Dutch schools, and the Southern tradition, these three volumes give separate consideration to these three traditions. Each of the volumes begins with an introductory essay by George M. Marsden, describing the general history and distinctives of Reformed theology in America. Each also includes a bibliography of important primary and secondary sources related to the tradition it considers, a helpful feature which was not a part of the earlier volume.

The introductory essay of Marsden in each of these volumes provides a general background to the various representative theologians treated. Marsden suggests that, in the history of Reformed theology in America, there have been three dominant "types" of Reformed emphases--the "doctrinalist," the "culturalist," and the "pietist." Though these are only typical or ideal emphases, none of which necessarily is exclusive of the others, they represent dominant ways in which being Reformed has been defined by different groups within the Reformed communities of America. For example, among the Orthodox Presbyterians the emphasis has been predominantly doctrinal; among the "progressives" within the Christian Reformed Church the emphasis has been upon cultural transformation; and among many Reformed evangelicals the emphasis has been upon piety, the proclamation of the gospel of salvation through the work of Christ and a high view of Scripture.

After identifying these three dominant emphases within the Reformed tradition in America, Marsden then traces the history of various Reformed communities, beginning with the oldest, the Puritan stock, which was so influential in

early Presbyterianism. Unfortunately, though he considers the history of various Presbyterian communions, the "Old Side/New Side" split of 1741, the related "Old School/New School" schism of 1837-38, and the differences between the Southern and Northern Presbyterian traditions, he does not give any sustained attention to the Continental Reformed communities (e.g. Dutch Reformed, German Reformed). His brief survey of this history mirrors his own special interest in Puritanism and the history of Presbyterianism in America. One of the theses he does develop is that the differences within Presbyterianism in this history are largely consistent with the divergent emphases of the "doctrinalist" (Old Side, Old School) and the "pietist" (New Side, New School) traditions. In this history, despite the tremendous cultural and historical influence of the Puritans upon American culture, the "culturalist" emphasis has been a decidedly minority one within the American Reformed tradition. Though the "pietist" emphasis has given strong impetus to the "new evangelicalism" and the "doctrinalist" emphasis continues to be a significant force in this tradition, the "culturalist" emphasis has not emerged as a unified or an influential force.

Each of these volumes summarizes its particular branch of Reformed theology in America by means of a similar procedure. An opening chapter describes some general features of one of the three main traditions, and the following chapters treat several prominent theologians whose life and work have played a significant role in forming their particular tradition.

The volume on the Princeton theology begins with a chapter on the history and distinctives of the Princeton school by Mark A. Noll. It then considers three outstanding representatives of this school: Charles Hodge (by David F.Wells), Benjamin B.Warfield (by W.Andrew Hoffecker), and J.Gresham Machen (by W.Stanford Reid). The chapter on J.Gresham Machen was originally one of two essays in the earlier, single work on Reformed theology, which were included in a section on the Westminster Seminary tradition.

The volume on the Dutch theology begins with a chapter on the Dutch schools by James D.Bratt. This chapter is followed by three chapters on Louis Berkhof (by Henry Zwaanstra), Herman Dooyeweerd (by C.T. McIntire), and Cornelius Van Til (by Wesley A.Roberts). The chapter on Van Til, like the chapter in the previous volume on J.Gresham Machen, was included in the earlier work in the section on the Westminster Seminary tradition. Robert's chapter provides an excellent and insightful summary of Van Til's Reformed apologetic, one which makes this particular volume especially worthwhile.

Finally, the volume on the Southern Reformed theology includes a general chapter on the Southern tradition (by Morton Smith), followed by a chapter on Robert Lewis Dabney (by Douglas Floyd Kelly) and James Henley Thornwell (by Luder G.Whitlock, Jr.).

For anyone interested in studying the history and distinctives of the Reformed theological tradition in America, these volumes will prove highly useful, not only for their summaries of the contributions of leading theological figures but also for their general surveys and excellent bibliographies. The interpretive essay of Marsden provides a good, though incomplete, introduction to the major emphases and history of this tradition. The individual chapters are also of a consistently high quality.

The limitations of these volumes are also evident. Because they approach the three major traditions in terms of "representative" theologians, they are more useful as introductions to the life and contribution of these theologians than they are for a thorough analysis of the history and development of their particular traditions.

Furthermore, the choice of certain theologians and the exclusion of others from consideration is always open to evaluation and criticism. Though the editor has generally done a fair job in selecting the most influential and representative figures, there is, in my judgment, one outstanding exception. In the volume on the Dutch Reformed tradition, it is odd that a chapter is devoted to Herman

Dooyeweerd, a Dutch jurist and philosopher. Though I would not dispute the claim that Dooyeweerd's thought has been influential in shaping some elements within the Dutch Reformed tradition in America, he has not been nearly as influential in the Dutch Reformed *theological* tradition as has been G.C. Berkouwer, professor of dogmatics for many years at the Free University in Amsterdam. The widespread dissemination of Berkouwer's *Studies in Dogmatics* among Reformed and evangelical circles in America suggests that his influence has been much greater in the Dutch Reformed (and even American evangelical) theological tradition than that of Dooyeweerd.

These volumes will serve, then, as point of departure for a study of the Reformed tradition in America. They cannot, however, take the place of other more detailed and comprehensive treatments of this tradition.

Cornelis P. Venema

Mark A. Noll & David F. Wells, eds., *Christian Faith & Practice in the Modern World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988. Pp. 327. \$11.95.

The thirteen essays of this book were first presented by different authors at a conference on "Christian Theology in a Post-Christian World," held at Wheaton College in 1985 (x). Thereafter, the editors arranged them into three main divisions and added an introductory chapter.

Part I contains three essays on the subject, "The Image of God." Part II has four essays under the heading, "The Self-Disclosure of God," and Part III has six essays under the heading, "Creation and Its Restoration." Each major division is introduced with a biblical meditation by John R.W. Stott which is related to the theme of the particular division.

The introduction by the editors is a presentation of modern evangelicalism (hence, the sub-title of the book, "Theology from an Evangelical Point of View"), together with a delineation of its task. The tone of the book is found in the sentence, "The essays that make up this book

are. . .intended as contributions both to the discipline of theology and to the ongoing dialogue between Christianity and modern thought" (2).

J.I. Packer, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., and C. Stephen Evans have contributed essays in the first division. Packer's essay, "God the Image-Maker," on the whole is a good presentation of Christian theism, although he perhaps is too critical in seeing little value to natural theology (38ff.).

Plantinga's essay, "Images of God," opts for a more functional definition of the image of God in man (dominion, fellowship and fruitfulness) which has been restored by Christ. This leads him to assert, "Because Jesus Christ's redeeming work ranges universally across the human race (Rom. 5:18), all humans are to be seen in Christ unless they give final and decisive evidence to the contrary" (65). This highlights the disappointing features of this essay, for it not only presents speculative and questionable theology, but gives little attention to serious exegesis. While a book review is not the place to deal with exegesis, suffice it to say that Romans 5:18 does not teach what Plantinga says that it does.

In his article, "Healing Old Wounds and Recovering Old Insights: Toward a Christian View of the Person for Today," Evans effectively argues for biblical dualism re: the person as over against monism. As he correctly says, "To make a biblical case against dualism one must show more than that the Bible teaches the unity of the person; one must show that unity is incompatible with dualism" (79).

The four essays in the second division are written by Gabriel Fackre, Thomas V. Morris, Anthony C. Thiselton, and Clark H. Pinnock. Fackre's essay, "God the Discloser," is a condensed presentation of biblical theology. At the end, the reader is left wondering whether "the God of holy love revealed through the journey. . ." (118) doesn't also righteously manifest his wrath on occasion when necessary, something about which Fackre is curiously silent.

Morris' essay, "Rationality and the Christian Revelation," is an evidentialist apologetic "that there is no obstacle. . .to be rational when believing that Jesus is God incarnate"

(138). This statement, while laudable, leaves this reviewer with the question, are rational arguments alone convincing? Doesn't Scripture teach that something more is needed?

Thiselton's essay, "Speaking and Hearing," points out that God has spoken, but hearing and speaking is a two-sided event (151).

Pinnock's article, "The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religion," is a provocative interaction with the idea that salvation may be found in other religions apart from Christ. While seeking to remain evangelical, he yet proposes that "God takes account of faith. . . even if it occurs in the context of general revelation, and always sees to it that those responding to the light they have, encounter Jesus Christ, whether before or after death" (163). This leads Pinnock to see I Peter 3:19-20, 4:6, as teaching a gospel proclamation to the dead. Does this "second chance teaching," then, cut the nerve of missionary endeavor? Pinnock admits that this may be the case (167) but feels that more is to be gained by holding to it; for it makes good "the universal reach of the atonement" (166). In the end, the article reveals how Pinnock, while perhaps still an evangelical, continues to move to the left of evangelical, not to mention biblical, thinking.

The six contributors to the third division are: Donald Bloesch, Paul Marshall, Richard J. Mouw, David N. Livingstone, Klaus Bockmuehl, and David F. Wells. Bloesch's "God the Civilizer" is an effort to show how Christianity is to interact with culture. The latter bears witness to human vanity and creativity in conflict with the omnipotence of God (182).

Marshall's "Calling, Work, Rest" seeks to give a biblical understanding of work in fulfillment of the cultural mandate, together with recovering a genuine pattern of rest. This leads him to define the *imago Dei* in strictly functional categories (206ff.). While this is true (as we've also seen with Plantinga's view), we are nevertheless left wondering how the functional can operate apart from the ontological which, far from being ignored as modern evangelicals increasingly seem to be doing, is and must remain primary. After all,

robots can be programmed to operate functionally but that hardly makes them reflectors of the *imago Dei*!

The thesis of Mouw's "Toward an Evangelical Theology of Poverty" is that God's people are constantly admonished to hear the cries of those whose claims have no official status. . .because God graciously heard the cries of the people of Israel when they had no rightful claim on his mercy" (230). Hence, as we await the coming of the King and his Kingdom, we should "do everything possible, within the life-contexts in which the Lord has placed us, to promote charity and justice--associating with the lowly and seeking the well-being of all humankind" (237).

Livingstone's "Farewell to Arms: Reflections on the Encounter between Science and Faith" develops the thesis that the conflict between science and faith should be "seen in terms of the shift in intellectual authority. . .from the preprofessional clerical sage to the middle class professional intelligentsia" (242). What we therefore need, he argues, is "a coherent hermeneutic of Scripture that will allow it to be heard fully as canon and yet remain sensitive to modern scientific discoveries" (261). We must continue to confess our commitment both to theology and science, to the God of creation and to the creation itself (262).

Bockmuehl's "Secularization and Secularism: Some Christian Considerations" points out that Christianity itself is responsible for the development of secularism, for creation is an entity which can be viewed as acting within the framework of its own laws. Add to this the medieval antithesis between the sacred and the secular, and the modern divorce between God and his world becomes complete. He goes on to suggest several things the church should do to tame and even to overcome the secular spirit of our age (prayer, sustenance of the fellowship, and proclamation) (282).

Well's "The Future" is a study of eschatology's impingement upon the present. "The future intrudes upon the present with regularity and insistence, whether we like it or not" (285). Yet the antithesis between "this age" and "the coming age" remains because Christ alone, not humankind,

can bring about his coming Kingdom at his return. Meanwhile, the already intruding presence of the power of the coming age should bring about progressive renewal of life in the people of God and renewal, within measure, of society as well.

The authors of the essays, on the whole, are to be commended for their attempts (though not always successful) at bringing theology into dialogue with the problems and ills of modern society. The weakness of the book is the prevailing lack of serious scriptural exegesis which too often lands the authors into questionable conclusions and positions.

Raymond O. Zorn

Clarification for the Reader

In the spring issue of the 1989 *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, we published a review article that I had written on the book, *Inerrancy and Hermeneutics* (Harvie M. Conn, ed.: Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988). In the course of this review article, I stated that Moises Silva, in his chapter, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," had "drawn too sharp a distinction between an author's intent and the meaning expressed in the text." I also stated that "Silva's discussion of the author's intent or purpose suggests that it is discovered in some manner other than by way of a grammatical-historical reading of the text." Professor Silva has pointed out to me that these statements do not properly represent his position as this was expressed in his chapter. He is committed to the grammatical-historical method as the only legitimate method of determining the meaning of any biblical text and thereby the intention or purpose of the text's author. I would like, therefore, to use this means to apologize to Professor Silva and to readers of the *Journal* for my misrepresentation of his position. I am sorry for any misunderstanding about his position that this may have produced.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the problem we face whenever we speak of an author's