

Book Reviews

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By Grace Alone: Stories of the Reformed Church in America, by Donald J. Bruggink and Kim N. Baker, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, No. 44, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. ix, 222pp., \$29.00.

After having served as the founder and general editor of the Reformed Church in America's Historical Series since its inception in 1969, Donald Bruggink now makes his contribution to the series as an author of a new history of the denomination. He was joined in this major endeavor by Kim Baker, his former student at Western Theological Seminary, who was primarily responsible for the format of the book and many of the sidebars that enhance the beauty and the quality of the volume.

The book consists of twenty chapters written in story form. The subjects of the stories are selective, not comprehensive as was the case in general histories of the Reformed Church published in the past. The book resembles somewhat *Reformed Church Roots*, written by Arie R. Brouwer in 1977. Brouwer's work was also in story form and lavishly illustrated. *By Grace Alone* brings the history of the denomination up to date, of course, but it is more comprehensive than Brouwer's as well. Bruggink, as a professional historian, has written a more substantive and scholarly book, one geared to the general reader, however, and not the specialist. *By Grace Alone* is designed for readers who have an interest in reading a denominational history that has weight and causes one to think.

The book has a broad appeal for several reasons. The first is that the text is beautifully and amply illustrated. Several of the pictures have not appeared in print before. The denominational archives, which has been built up under the direction of Russell Gasero at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, gives historians many more opportunities for finding good illustrations. In addition, several of the illustrations were pictures taken by Bruggink, who is an able photographer himself.

The chronological charts placed strategically throughout the book are attractive and extremely helpful. For example, on page 112 the reader can follow key events in American religious life from 1550 to 2000 on the top half of the chart and particular events in the life of the Reformed Church on the bottom half of the chart. Events from 1800 to 1860 are found on page 120 denoting events in European history on the top part of the chart in contrast with religious events taking place in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and in the United States.

Another novel feature is the use of sidebars. They contain miniature stories about well-known church members or subjects of special interest. For instance, a full-page sidebar on page 65 gives the story of the famous Indian chief Geronimo

and the Apache Mission in Oklahoma. The chief was baptized at the Reformed Church mission located in Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Particularly valuable in the book are the stories about the Reformed Church that have not been significantly dealt with before in its histories. One is the role of women, who virtually moved mountains in the denomination in eras that were very male dominated. Native-, African-, and Asian-Americans are also given good space in the stories as well as in the sidebars.

The final chapter, entitled, "What's Next?" is a good analysis of the Reformed Church today. By showing the considerable diversity in church life throughout the denomination and the country at present, Bruggink postulates a vision for the future. Variety and diversity are much more welcomed in the twenty-first century, and as a result the denomination is again more involved in urban areas. Older congregations that have been willing to change are reaching out to people of various ethnic backgrounds. Possibilities for growth are no longer limited to suburban areas, where the Reformed Church has had its traditional strength, but effective outreach is seen in many geographical areas, resulting in a more vital and stronger church life. Bruggink uses historical analysis in order to provide a vision for what lies ahead for the church. All denominational leaders must read this chapter carefully.

Questions could be raised about some interpretations of points in the church's history. For instance, the description of the beginnings of Hope College in the book is dependent upon old sources. Recent studies consider Philip Phelps Jr. to be the primary founder of the college and not Albertus C. Van Raalte, who was the founder of the Holland Colony (p. 133). It is inevitable in a history book of this length that some errors would have crept into the text. For instance, the name of Edward Tanjore Corwin was misspelled on page 110, and some terms are spelled inconsistently: dominie or domine, Dort or Dordt. For the most part, the text is remarkably free of errors, and many of these errors and inconsistencies can be corrected in the second edition. That there will be a second edition is a certainty as this interesting, well-written history is sure to sell out soon. Church libraries must have copies, and many church members will want to have their own copies. Books in the Historical Series have a reputation for quality. Serious readers who have enjoyed reading previous publications in the historical series will add to the number of purchasers as well.

Elton J. Bruins

Calvin for Armchair Theologians, by Christopher Elwood, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002. xiii, 182pp.

It would be difficult to find a more winsome and readable introduction to Calvin's life and theology than this. One of a series that also includes Augustine and Aquinas, these sprightly, learned little volumes are also enhanced by cartoons, in this case by Ron Hill. Some people may be put off by the cartoons, feeling they cheapen the quality of the book, but I suspect most readers will find them delightful.

Although this is a semipopular approach to Calvin, one should not dismiss it as light and unreliable. The author, who is associate professor of historical theology at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, wrote his doctoral dissertation on Calvin at Harvard Divinity School. Hence he has the scholarly credentials to write a book on this subject. Fortunately, he is also a gifted writer so the text reads very nicely. In addition, he is quite aware of current cultural trends, so there are references to Bruce Springsteen, Dr. Seuss, Dale Carnegie, and the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

The treatment of Calvin's theology is balanced, fair, and often very perceptive. Elwood is especially good in his handling of difficult issues such as the Servetus affair and predestination. There is only one factual error. The author attributes the first catechism that was used in Geneva after Calvin's arrival to Farel rather than Calvin. I also question his description of the Third Book of the *Institutes* as "The Inner Work of Healing." I would prefer "The Holy Spirit and Personal Renewal."

In the last chapter, "Calvin's Children," he deals with a wide range of topics: the question of Calvinism and capitalism; Calvinism, church government and democracy; the Synod of Dort; and the Puritans. He also touches on the impact of Calvin on Schleiermacher, the Princeton theology (Hodge and Warfield), Karl Barth, and liberation theologies. Missing, however, is any mention of neo-Calvinism (Bavinck and Kuyper).

One might raise questions about a few other matters, but overall this is a splendid achievement. I recommend it heartily to laypeople as well as ministers and theological students.

I. John Hesselink

Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking about Christian Worship Today, by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 185pp., \$18.00.

Discerning the Spirits is a proposed treaty for the worship wars that still rage in many churches. The negotiators of this treaty are Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., president of Calvin Theological Seminary, and Sue A. Rozeboom, a doctoral student in liturgics at Notre Dame University. These diplomats were sent forth on a peace-making mission by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and financed by the Lilly Endowment (Preface, ix).

The negotiation begins with a theological presentation, "The Things of the Spirit," which describes the present impasse between the proponents of "contemporary worship" and proponents of "traditional worship." This theoretical description of the problem is followed by a descriptive chapter, "Costa Mesa, South Barrington, and Rome: The Rise of Contemporary Worship."

The terms of the treaty are laid out in the chapter, "The Bond of Peace: The Worshipping Church." Churches who are engaged in the struggle are addressed in the chapter, "Unity in Diversity." This unity is ultimately based on the churches confession of the doctrine of the Trinity and the principle of *koinonia* (community).

The treaty is subsequently sealed in the final chapter, "God's Story and Ours: The Worshipping Church." Using Robert Webber's observation in his book, *Worship as a Verb*, the negotiators' argue for worship as a Christocentric narration in the church.

This is a book that should be read by every pastor, worship leader, and worship committee. Whether God's people prefer a contemporary or traditional style of worship, we need to bring the glory to God and to love one another.

Barry L. Wynveen

The Essence of Christianity, by Bruno Forte, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xiv, 132pp., \$22.00.

The author, professor of systematic theology at the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Naples, Italy, contrasts the Trinitarian core of the Christian faith with certain claims of nineteenth-century postmodernism. Forte has selected Ludwig Feuerbach's polemical stance (1841) that genuine language about God amounts

to speaking about ourselves; that is, when we address God, we really communicate with ourselves. He then probes Adolph von Harnack's 1899-1900 lectures, "The Essence of Christianity," which reduced the Christian message to God's fatherly love for humankind and humanity's universal response of love.

Over against Feuerbach's "unhappy love" and Harnack's "tranquil love," our author squarely places the gospel's "crucified love," the Son coming from the Father in the incarnation, surrendering to death on the cross, and returning to the Father at Easter. This coming from and returning to – within the one deity of love – is the model for Christians who are "servants out of love," and who as believers find community within the Church.

Forte presents an adroit rebuttal to a select number of postmodern critiques of the Christian faith; evangelical Protestants can appreciate his biblical stance. His retrieving of the Augustinian images of the lover, the beloved, and love remains a welcome choice. Further, his comments on a future reconciliation between Jews and Christians (cf. Romans 11:25-26) are biblically sound and may already partly be implemented by so-called Messianic Jews. The author's last chapter on Mary, regrettably, is less successful. The Bible affirms that Mary is the mother of Christ; church history has elevated her to a "unique depth" in the divine life of the triune God.

Ralph W. Vunderink

Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics, ed. Vincent Bacote, Larua C. Miguez, and Dennis L. Okholm, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004. 245pp. \$23.00.

The ongoing issue of the nature of scripture and its appropriate interpretation for evangelicals is the focus of these essays from the 2001 Wheaton Theology Conference. Twelve well-known leaders address the issue in three major parts: "Scripture and the Evangelical Tradition," "Scripture and Evangelical Exegesis," and "Scriptures and Evangelicals in Postmodern Context."

Those acquainted with earlier disagreements will find a much more moderate, conciliatory, and irenic tone to these pieces than in the earlier literature. The writings of the last quarter century, while not dissolving the key issues, have at least given a sense of perspective. This younger generation of scholars is able to look more dispassionately on earlier wranglings and to address important questions without recourse to defensive posturing or casting aspersions on the faith and commitment of others who seek to identify themselves as evangelicals but without an endorsement of the concept of inerrancy and what its proponents

said was necessarily entailed in an affirmation of the authority of scripture. So this is refreshing.

Consider, for example, the editors' introduction, where it is noted that "Grenz, McCormack and Dayton argue that the emphasis on an inerrant Bible rested on prior philosophical commitments that reflected the beliefs of the day" (8). The three writers unpack this a bit differently, but the overall recognition is salutary.

Also of interest: John Brogan's claim that he is not persuaded that "the 'inerrant in autographs' position is an adequate view of Scripture" (107). Also Kent Sparks's piece on accommodation in the inscripturation and interpretation of scripture that leads to his statement: "To make God out as errant is heresy; to make the human authors of Scripture inerrant is docetism" (131).

Further perceptive pieces by Bruce Ellis Benson, John R. Franke, Daniel J. Treier, and David Alan Williams consider today's postmodern context. Williams concludes the volume by suggesting that "we need not be put in the situation as to have only one metaphor for truth." He argues that the wide range of scriptural metaphors should be "exploited in addressing the concerns about truth in our postmodern context" (243).

It is refreshing to hear evangelical voices, steeped in scholarship, address these important topics with sensitivity, openness, and without rancor. This bodes well for ongoing discussions and bridge-building between the evangelical community and the wider ecumenical world.

Donald K. McKim

An Introduction to the Theology of Religions, by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003. 372pp., \$29.00.

Kärkkäinen offers a brief review of biblical perspectives on religions and surveys the high points in the history of a Christian theology of religions, but he gives most of his attention to more recent developments. In a helpful review of ecclesiastical responses to the question of the plurality of religions, Kärkkäinen treats the Roman Catholic Church, mainline Protestant churches (Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist), free churches (Anabaptists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Charismatic movements), the evangelical movement, and the ecumenical movement. In each case, he cites formal statements wherever possible.

Nomenclature to describe the various positions one finds within the Christian church continues to plague theologians of religions. Kärkkäinen chooses the

following: ecclesiocentrism; Christocentrism; and theocentrism. Ecclesiocentrism is marked by its insistence that one must have the revelation concerning Christ, which is normally only available through the witness of the church, in order to be saved. Christocentrism allows for the possibility that some of the unevangelized may be saved through Christ's work, but it grants that other religions may "play some positive role in God's overall plan of Salvation" (169). Theocentrism denies that Christianity is intrinsically superior to other religions. But these three terms clearly correlate to the traditional categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, which he also uses quite frequently.

Wisely, Kärkkäinen notes the difficulties of placing particular proposals within one of these three groups, and he indicates points at which he had difficulty making such decisions. Nevertheless, his concise descriptions of the proposals made by key representative theologians are clear and helpful, so that readers get a fine view of the current scene and are able to make their own judgments about how best to locate the various proposals within a typology.

Given Kärkkäinen's goal of providing an introduction, his selection of representative theologians is apt. This book will serve well as an introductory textbook in the subject but will also be helpful to all Christians who strive to formulate their own understanding of the role of the religions within God's purposes in the world, an issue which no one should avoid.

Terrance L. Tiessen

Jesus in the New Universe Story, by Cletus Wessels, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003. xiii, 240pp., \$25.00.

To many believers, the Christian faith comprises a three-layered universe, with heaven above, the earth in the middle, and the underworld below, the earth having been created seven thousand years ago. In this setting, Adam and Eve were created good, but fell into sin. As a result, all of humanity became sinful and needed a savior.

The author exchanges this familiar picture for a new one, an emerging universe, in which humans appeared a long time ago, *homo sapiens* came on the scene more recently, and Jesus was born two thousand years ago. Rather than coming "from without," Jesus is a human being "from within" the emerging universe, who through his resurrection opened up a deeper dimension within this cosmic drama.

The author, who is professor and president emeritus of Aquinas Institute in Minneapolis, links the human need for salvation to the Christian notion of sin.

But he reinterprets the Old Testament story about sin in the light of the Pauline parallel between Adam and Christ, considering these two figures symbolic rather than historical personalities (176). Further, he accepts the presence of chaos as part of the universe, and suggests that out of chaos can come forth order. Human violence, evil, and sin, which change the balance of nature, are "contrary to the evolutionary drive of the Earth" (184), but nature can be healed through Jesus. Even an emerging universe calls for a savior to deliver it from human sin.

To some readers, especially to those who wish to integrate faith and current cosmologies, this new picture of a dynamic God working within an changing universe is appealing. To others, however, Wessels's Christology should be fleshed out and given more "definite shape" (x), before the older notion of faith is to be partly discarded.

Ralph W. Vunderink

The Path of True Godliness, by Willem Teellinck, trans. Annemie Godbehere and ed. Joel R. Beeke, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. 300pp.

Willem Teellinck (1579-1629) is often called the father of the *Nadere Reformatie* (or the Dutch Second Reformation), a topic that was dear to the heart of Eugene Osterhaven (1915-2004), former professor at Western Theological Seminary. Gene was a member of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society that produced this work and was always a strong advocate of any efforts to recover a vibrant and Spirit-inspired Reformed piety for today. Teellinck desired to claim the same power from God and piety for the church in the seventeenth century.

Joel Beeke provides a valuable introduction to the life and times of Teellinck as well as an overview to his ministry. One of the critical factors that contemporary readers must face in reading ancient texts is sensitivity to the context so that we do not project our own expectations or agendas on earlier generations. Beeke's excellent treatment of church life in seventeen-century Netherlands is most helpful in sketching this background to assist our reading of this outstanding work.

One of the primary goals of the *Nadere Reformatie* was the recovery of a practical godliness that both informed the mind and inspired the heart. *The Path of True Godliness* reflects this critical integration, revealing the importance of walking with God for every Christian. Teellinck begins this treatment of sanctification by exploring the character of true godliness. He then examines both the kingdom of darkness that seeks to oppose God and the kingdom of grace that inspires faithful living for God. The remainder of this work considers the various means for attaining and motivating us toward the practice of godliness.

Contemporary students and scholars of Christian spirituality would refer to this book as spiritual theology. It is packed with refreshing wisdom and insights that are as relevant today as when they were first penned in 1621. I offer a few illustrations both to enlarge your awareness and to stimulate your own desire to read this practical work. "People who are yet to be won for Christ or are very weak in the faith are much better led by example than by rules" (p. 134). "Let those who would live lives of true godliness be mindful of the flaws of their own understanding and not overly trust their own judgment" (p. 193). "It is the same with us in spiritual battle. We have not been defeated until we no longer resist" (p. 236). Teellinck speaks powerfully across the generations and declares to us the perennial truths of walking with God in practical godliness and with heart-felt devotion. This outstanding book deserves a broad and enthusiastic readership. The result will be a life more focused on living to the glory of God and the good of our neighbor.

Tom Schwanda

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 4: The Age of the Reformation, by Hughes Oliphant Old, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xiii, 556pp., \$45.00 (paper).

This is the fourth volume of a projected seven-volume history of the reading and preaching of scripture within the Christian church. Structurally and metaphorically, at least for Protestants, it also represents the midpoint of this great series. The first three volumes powerfully captured the foundation from which many of the Reformers turned for their own inspiration and theology of preaching and worship. In volume four the preaching of the Reformations, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, are introduced and analyzed. The remaining three volumes will reflect the impact that the two Reformations had on the ministry of the Word as it has developed in the ensuing centuries.

Beginning with Luther, the author guides us in understanding the dramatic transition that occurred from the medieval period. This trajectory develops first through the unfolding Protestant representatives of Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Capito, Bucer, Calvin, and finally reaching England in the homiletical examples of Hugh Latimer and John Hooper. This in turn is followed by a treatment of the Roman Catholic reformation, highlighting the examples of Luis of Granada, the Jesuits Francis Xavier and Robert Bellarmine, and finally exploring Charles Borromeo and Frances de Sales. The seventeenth century is well represented by a rich treatment of the Puritans (e.g. Perkins, Sibbes, Preston, Thomas Goodwin, Manton, Flavel, etc.) and Anglicans (e.g. Lancelot Andrews, Donne, Jeremy Taylor, John Tillotson, etc.). The remainder of the volume examines the

flowering of Protestant orthodoxy in Germany (e.g. Johann Gerhard, Heinrich Muller, etc.), in France (e.g. Pierre du Moulin, Jean Daille, etc.), and in the Netherlands (e.g. Teellinck, Voetius, Cocceius, and von Lodenstein). The final chapter reviews the practices of preaching during the age of Louis XIV (e.g. Jacques Bossuet, Louis Bourdaloue, Fenelon, etc.).

This volume is enhanced by the author's earlier training in art history, which shines through at numerous places on the canvas of church history. His ability to illustrate how the various preaching styles reflect the art of that period enlarges the richness of this history of worship. Additionally Old is always interested in making connections between the practice of preaching and how it was seen as an act of worship. While space prevents doing this significant work full justice, this is a valuable resource for tracing the growth and transition of the history of preaching and the ministry of the Word, especially during the critical stage following the medieval period.

Tom Schwanda

Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity, ed. Wallace M. Alston, Jr. and Michael Welker, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 449pp., \$49.00.

This book addresses the question, "What does it mean to be Reformed?" The chapters originate from a 1999 consultation of Reformed scholars at the Internationales Wissenschaftsforum in Heidelberg, Germany. The current volume is a follow-up to a previous publication, *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, edited by David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). The present publication attempts to explore "the rich, structured pluralism that we find in Reformed theology today" (x).

Although Luther, Calvin, and other sixteenth-century theologians are used as referents for these articles, Fredrick Schleiermacher and Karl Barth are often cited as the way for the twenty-first-century Reformed theologian to address contemporary challenges.

What is fascinating about this volume is the diversity of Reformed theologians who contributed to it. In addition to the traditional Europeans and North Americans, there are also presenters from Asia and South Africa. Most of these presenters address their papers out their own contextual experience. For instance, Asians will address the whole issue of pneumatology. South Africans will address the issue of apartheid and the Council of Reconciliation. Leann Van Dyke from Western Theological Seminary addresses the topic of theological education from a Reformed perspective. Botond Gaál has a fascinating story

about the past and the present work at the Reformed College at Debrecen, Hungary.

The book makes a contribution to the ongoing discussion about our Reformed identity in a changing milieu, while at the same time interacting with Christian brothers and sisters in other traditions.

Barry L. Wynveen