

Book Reviews

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This book tells the story of Albertus C. Van Raalte, his wife, and family. It is very much an American story. It is a success story.

The book consists of papers and essays on Albertus and Christina and their family. The essays and papers contain all the elements of a novel: adventure – members of the Seceder church, emigration to America, the founding of Holland, two sons who served in the Civil War; mystery – what happened to Albertus?: tragedy – William B. Eerdmans, Sr.'s failure to save the family homestead for posterity; historical intrigue – the struggle for control of the Van Raalte papers; success – the ministers, educators, legislators, business people, and many other professionals that descended from Albertus and Christina.

The end of the book traces Albertus' and Christina's ancestry. I found the ancestry of Christiana de Moen Van Raalte quite fascinating. Two of Christina's sisters married Seceder ministers: Anthony Brummelkamp and Simon Van Velzen. The Van Velzen story provides us with a glimpse into the persecution of the Seceders. Christina's brother, Carel Godefroi de Moen, not only became a medical surgeon and obstetrician, but a landowner, and businessman. Later, he became a Separatist minister. His second marriage was to Baroness Alexandrina Hendrika Adophina Carolina of Haersolte.

The authors have published a fascinating book about two people who are vital to the story of the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in the Midwest. It is not a theological study of Albertus Van Raalte. For that the reader would have to consult Gordon J. Spykman, *Pioneer Preacher* (1976). However, everyone will appreciate the struggles and successes of the Van Raalte family.

Barry L. Wynveen

The Hidden Shame of the Church: Sexual Abuse of Children and the Church, by Ron O'Grady, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2001. 73pp.

The bright light of God's justice shines forth dispelling the darkness, and exposing the places where evil takes refuge. How shameful, how shocking, indeed, how heart-breaking it is to learn that sometimes evil's refuge is in Christ's own Church. Recent media coverage has focused upon clergy sexual misconduct, particularly in the Catholic Church in the U.S. However, Ron O'Grady's book reveals that abuse of this kind knows no geographical or denominational bounds. Citing cases from Australia, Europe, and Asia, among others, the author implicates priests, pastors, and missionaries alike of ravaging the innocent and defenseless, and abusing their position and power in despicable acts of violence.

Hidden no more, sexual abuse of children within the Church has been brought to light for all to see, and for all to mourn. O'Grady spends significant time giving thought to how such a travesty could have been kept concealed for so long — through denial, downplaying, and defensiveness. He specifically names mistaken theologies of children, sex, and leadership as cesspools from which oozed the Church's historic response to abuse in which perpetrators were protected, and victims were blamed. Such non-remedies, O'Grady says, "ignore the effect on the children who were abused... and give priority to the institution of the Church ahead of the wellbeing of the children in its care" (p. 3).

In addition to renewing its commitment to the safety of children, O'Grady further calls the Church to rethink the practices of celibacy and confidential confession. He also charges the Church, as enabler, to take responsibility for her role in past abuses, and implores her to take proactive steps toward preventing it in the future. O'Grady further suggests that the Church participate in healing acts of repentance, restitution, and receptive listening to victims and their stories. And in the end, he asks the Church to walk in the light of the Truth, believing that:

To abuse the trust of a child is the greatest sin we can conceive
To love and protect a child is the finest gift we have to offer." (p. 71)

Elizabeth Potter

Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner. The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936, by John W. Hart, New York: Peter Lang, 2001. 262 pp., \$57.95.

One of the most famous theological debates that took place in the twentieth century was the dispute between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner over natural theology in 1934 — the cause *célèbre* of the decade. What is not commonly known, however, is that this was only one of several issues on which the two great Swiss theologians differed.

In this invaluable, groundbreaking study of the relationship between these two theologians, John Hart, a Presbyterian minister in New Jersey, traces their relationship over a twenty-year period based on their correspondence during that time. Hart has also read almost all of the relevant writings of Barth and Brunner relevant to this study as well as considerable secondary literature. The result is a fascinating study of the relationship of two of the foremost Protestant theologians of the twentieth century who were so close — geographically, in their traditions, and basically even their theologies — and yet so far at times. As Hart concludes,

It is the thesis of this book that Barth and Brunner represent fundamentally different ways of doing theology. This thesis is maintained despite the fact that, viewed within the context of the history of theology, it would be difficult to find any theologian closer

to Barth than Brunner, or closer to Brunner than Barth (218).

Both have been dubbed dialectical theologians and neo-orthodox theologians, labels that both of them rejected. Both rejected nineteenth-century liberalism, on the one hand, and pietism (Barth) and fundamentalism (Brunner), on the other hand. Both were biblically oriented and concerned about recovering the riches of the Reformation. There was a period, roughly 1919-1930, when they were united as theological allies. But that alliance began to show cracks in the late 1920s, culminating in Barth's sharp rejection of Brunner's attempt to develop a Christian natural theology in a little book titled simply, *Nein!* That is only one of several divisive issues, however. They disagreed on the nature of theology, the role of philosophy, the nature of apologetics, christology (particularly the virgin birth, rejected by Brunner, accepted by Barth), the church, predestination, and several issues such as Brunner's involvement in the Oxford movement. A fundamental difference was Brunner's more subjective approach—a theology of encounter—as over against what he termed Barth's "theological objectivism." There were also personality differences that made it difficult for them to get along with each other. Brunner complained constantly that Barth misunderstood and misrepresented him—and the feeling was mutual. Brunner also tended to minimize their differences, whereas Barth exaggerated them. At times the correspondence got nasty. Here Barth was the main culprit.

Hart is generally objective and evenhanded in his interpretation, but occasionally he did not do justice to Brunner's theology. His title is also somewhat misleading: *Karl Bart vs. Emil Brunner*. Despite all their differences, they were not always opponents at war with each other. To get the full picture, one must move on to their interactions in the forties and fifties and their famous "encounter" in the fall of 1960, which I negotiated while a student at Basel. The result was not a theological unity but a very meaningful personal reconciliation, the climax being Barth's pastoral, moving letter to Brunner on the eve of the latter's death in May, 1966 (cited on p. 204).

I. John Hesselink

The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problems of Evil (3rd edition), by John S. Feinberg, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004. 544pp., \$35.00.

The problem of evil refers to the apparent contradiction involved in asserting the conjunction of these three claims: (a) God is omnipotent; (b) God is good; (c) Evil exists. Feinberg demonstrates at least three ways in which *the* problem of evil is better understood as *a variety of* problems of evil.

First, there are many theological systems, each maintaining a different version of (a)-(c) based on different conceptions of "omnipotence," "goodness," and "evil." No one problem of evil confronts each system identically. Second, arguments from

evil fall into two categories: logical and evidential. Logical arguments claim that the conjunction of (a)-(c) is logically incompatible. Because most philosophers take Alvin Plantinga's free will defense to be a successful rebuttal, logical arguments have recently fallen out of favor. Attention has shifted to the less ambitious evidential arguments, which concede the logical consistency of (a)-(c) but point to the varieties and quantities of evil as evidence against the *probability* of (a)-(c). Third, the problems of evil are plural because they are either philosophical/theological or religious. The philosophical/theological problems of evil treat the existence of evil in general; their appropriate response is argumentation. But the religious problems of evil arise from particular instances of evil that someone experiences; their appropriate response is pastoral care.

Feinberg spends the majority of the book on the philosophical/theological problems, insisting that if discussions maintain consistency and clarity with regards to, first, the type of atheistic argument deployed and, second, the type of theological system under attack, then many theological systems withstand every formulation of the problem of evil. In the process, Feinberg comments expertly on the relevant scholarly developments and offers his own arguments. His analysis is both rigorous and thorough, demanding that the reader either be blessed with the virtue of patience or practiced in the art of skimming. In discussing the religious problems, however, Feinberg abandons his logic-chopping and movingly discusses his wife's battle with Huntington's disease. Some may find the interjection of this voice intrusive, but it seems appropriate coming from a man who has clearly spent a lifetime wrestling with the problems of evil.

Michael P. DeJonge

A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed, by James D.G. Dunn, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 136pp., \$12.99.

The author, James D.G. Dunn, is Emeritus Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham. He is a well-known published author whose writings include those of his commentaries on letters of the New Testament, as well as *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* and *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*. The latter book and this publication indicate his more recent turn to publishing work on his study of the historical Jesus.

As the subtitle of the book indicates, Dunn gives considerable critique of the previous quests of the historical Jesus which is connected to his three-point thesis. (1) Jesus made a faith impact on those who became his first disciples before his death and resurrection, which was expressed in the first oral formulations of the Jesus tradition, formulation which were made even before his death and resurrection; (2) the mode of oral performance and transmission of the formulations of that tradition continued the force of the original faith impact as the performances were varied to suit different hearers and situations; (3) the characteristic features of the Jesus tradi-

tion give clear indication of the impression Jesus made during his mission. Dunn writes: "There is no credible 'historical Jesus' behind the Gospel portrayal different from the characteristic Jesus of the Synoptic tradition" (p. 78).

In the second chapter Dunn gives considerable space to recent studies on the nature of oral/aural transmission and performance, related both to earlier and present day cultures and the New Testament. He gives great weight to Kenneth E. Bailey's articles: "Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991), 34-35; and "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels," *Expository Times*, 106 (1995), 363-7. Bailey has had more than thirty years of experience in Middle Eastern villages.

Dunn sees the villages as retaining their identity over many generations so that their oral culture is as close as we can get to the village culture of first-century Galilee. Bailey notes the gathering of the community at the end of the day to share news, tell stories, and recall important matters for the community. Dunn emphasizes how our modern "default setting" is to look at tradition with a textual bias rather than with an awareness of the nature of oral/aural culture.

Dunn give seven characteristics of Jesus' mission in the third chapter, based on the following criterion: "Any feature that is *characteristic within the Jesus tradition, even if only relatively distinctive of the Jesus tradition*, is most likely to go back to Jesus, that is, reflect the original impact made by Jesus' teaching and actions on several at least of his first disciples" (pp. 69-70). Seven characteristics meeting this criterion are the Jewishness of Jesus, his mission in Galilee, the kingdom of God, the "son of man" references, use of the term "Amen," John the Baptist as the starting point, and judgment on "this generation."

Dunn's thesis regarding the significance of the prior oral tradition in shaping the character of our present gospels does not prevent his acceptance of the two-source textual hypothesis, Mark and Q, and the presence of redaction by later writers. His thesis is bound to influence the scholarly community and I expect that we will see many references to his work in future studies of the Gospels and the historical Jesus.

David W. Jurgens

Notes on the Holiness of God, by David Willis, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 179 pp., \$20.99.

A number of books have been published in recent years dealing with personal holiness, i.e., living a holy life. However, I cannot recall any books of late, apart from systematic theologies, that treat the theme of this book, viz., the holiness of God. Here David Willis, Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus at

Princeton Seminary, attempts to refute some of the misunderstandings of God's holiness found in a number of contemporary theologians. According to Willis, "Confusion about God's holiness is due to the compound mistake of treating transcendence and immanence as opposites and subsuming holiness almost exclusively under God's transcendence."

As a result, for many Christians the holiness of God is a rather cold, abstract notion unrelated to the daily round of Christian life. Rarely do we hear prayers these days that begin with "Holy God. . . ." Willis demonstrates how the holy God is also the God of love, communion, and beauty. These are all facets of God's holiness. The chapter titles indicate something of the riches of this full-orbed vision of God: "The Holiness of the Cross"; "The Eternal Love of the Holy Other"; "The Holiness of Beauty"; and "The Hope of Holiness."

The scope of Willis's treatment is far ranging, as is his research. He deals briefly with the key biblical passages that speak of God's holiness and notes that they include complementary convictions. The first is that the glory of the Holy One is not shared with anyone else. The second is inseparable from the first, i.e., "that belonging to the Holy One brings with it the consequence that God's people are holy," and not simply called to be holy (86). In this connection, Willis discusses how traditional Reformed theologians defined the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God. Holiness appears in both lists. As a good Reformed theologian, Willis also stresses the covenantal nature of God's initiative and love, again an aspect of God's holiness. It is also an outworking of God's trinitarian activity.

At times Willis's exposition is complex and only obliquely related to his subject. For example, in his chapter on "The Purifying Love of the Holy Other," he gets involved in a comparison of his notion of "a covenantal ontology" with Barth's ostensible "actualistic ontology" (102); and in his discussion of the holiness of beauty – a lovely idea – his thesis is that "an abstract, an ideal, is simply inaccessible; rather, the only access we have to complex beauty is through congruent simplicity" (119). Fortunately, he quickly turns to Calvin's sense of integrity "where holiness, beauty, and doxology are mutually defined" (ibid.).

Thus, occasionally Willis's discourse is heavy going. Yet, one should not be put off by such diversions, for the book makes a distinctive contribution toward appreciating an undervalued subject. It is creative, thoughtful, and in many ways, very Reformed in its approach to the holiness of God.

I. John Hesselink

Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. vi, 215pp., \$23.00.

Nothing Greater, Nothing Better presents papers from the Sixth Edinburgh Dogmatics Christian Conference. In his introduction, Kevin Vanhoozer locates the papers within the Christian tradition's reflection on God's love. Galloping through the history of Christian thought, he describes a paradigm shift away from the emphasis of "classical theism" on divine immutability and impassibility toward contemporary theology's preference for a relational and dynamic metaphysic. This shift, he claims, is the "larger context...for the properly dogmatic questions to be addressed in the rest of the volume" (p. 23).

Many of the essays, though, are not dogmatic – they represent a variety of theological sub-disciplines. Geoffrey Grogan collects and categorizes key biblical passages that treat God's love. Lewis Ayres's essay is historical, reading Augustine's statements on God's love in the context of his incarnational and trinitarian theology. Paul Helm's essay, "Can God love the World?", is in the vein of analytic philosophy of religion. Roy Clements contributes a sermon, reflecting on the layers of love-language in Hosea 11.

The remaining essays are more properly dogmatic. Gary Badcock challenges the opposition between agape and eros love and argues for a third way that acknowledges God's willingness to be affected by the world. Trevor Hart highlights the difficulty in defining God but asserts the possibility of doing so based on God's self-defining incarnational act. Alan Torrance deftly ranges over a variety of interrelated issues on his way to developing an Athanasian ontology that grounds analogical reference to God. Tony Lane argues for a conception of God's love that incorporates God's wrath. And David Fergusson examines eschatology as the final triumph of God's love, looking to avoid the pitfalls of double predestination and universalism.

This diversity of approaches notwithstanding, the essays draw on a common Barthian theological heritage. Thus many of the dogmatic essays reprise Barth's criticisms of natural and liberal theology. This, together with the need for many of the authors to begin their essays with similar prolegomena, lends a certain redundancy to this volume. Those interested in studying God's love at length will start here before moving on to sustained, cumulative treatments.

Michael P. DeJonge