

**Christianity Without Fetishes:
An African Critique and Recapture
of Christianity**

F. Eboussi Boulaga. Translated from the French
(Christianism sans fetiche)
by Robert R. Barr
Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1984.
238pp. \$13.00

Once a Jesuit professor of philosophy, Eboussi left the academic world to return to his own village to rethink the whole question of Christianity in Africa. A native of Cameroon, he is now professor of philosophy at the National University of the Ivory Coast. His critique is far-reaching, penetrating beyond Christianity as it is in Africa to ask questions and propose answers about the nature of revelation, truth, and faith.

The book is divided into three parts, of which the first is in large measure a critique of Christianity as it has been brought to Africa, and is entitled: Domination and the Estrangement of Belief.

The domination in question is most obviously the result of the historical coincidence of missionary endeavour and colonial imperialism. Eboussi here says what many other writers have said before him. Christianity is 'coupled with victorious Western expansion.' 'One of the reasons for the loss of credibility of African Christianity is its dangerous alliance with might and force.' 'In mission lands, nationalism . . . places the missionary in solidarity with the colonist more efficaciously than religion places him in solidarity with the indigenous person.'

More subtly, however, Eboussi argues that the domination results from the content of the faith, and indeed, its very nature. Christianity has been presented as a package of dogmas and rituals for simple credence. These 'truths-to-be-believed' are in turn the product of a certain (mistaken) notion of revelation which postulates truth as a given whole, to be transmitted 'as-is'. It can be accepted or rejected but cannot be changed. Its immutability is 'the index and icon of the transcendent God'. Its acceptance by the neophyte guarantees him salvation. This credal corpus mediates a knowledge of God, and thereby becomes a fetish. Western Christianity has exalted biblical myths and mysteries to the plane of history which now needs to be accepted. Myths and symbols are thus fossilized and become idols and fetishes before which the new converts must prostrate themselves. 'God's manifestation is fixed, not in a piece of wood, but in a slice of time, two thousand years or thirty years'. Saving truth is thus encapsulated within irrefutable rites and dogmas and must be repeated word for word, even if it makes no sense to the convert. For those propagating the Faith are blind to see that human beings believe otherwise, not just believe what is opposed to their dogmas, but actually believe in different ways, resolving the problems of existence without recourse to 'the binary logic of yes/no, true/false.'

Eboussi thus denies the possibility of ever isolating an irreducible kernel of what Christianity should be, admitting only a 'Christianity as it has become' in a given historico-cultural context; it is inseparable from that context. 'Christianity is milieu, it is atmosphere.' It is so impregnated with its Western ambiance that it cannot survive without its cultural and social accretions. It will thrive where there prevail the financial, economic, and political lifestyle and power of the west'. Eboussi concludes that 'the Christianity mounting the African shore is that of bourgeois society.'

What, then, is the result of all this for the new convert? He will acquiesce, but without understanding, for he has sacrificed his intelligence. He finds himself 'locked out', discovering truth only outside of himself. This 'dictated understanding', this 'faith-under-tutelage' or 'by proxy' sees him forever as an inferior, eternally grateful but forever paralysed of soul and alienated. More, he henceforth lives on two levels: the first is that of orthodox rituals and dogmas mouthed but not understood, the second is that of the real world of practice. Baptized into this alien and alienating world of a loveless, individualistic bourgeois Christianity which 'speaks with a forked tongue', in which there is no internal consistency, the neophytes are strangers to themselves, and therefore to one another.

Little wonder, then, that the African Independent Churches have arisen in reaction. The dissident churches have sought to be places where a human being 'feels at home'. They are places where the Black Prophet is another Christ, or at least the black emissary of the Founder. They have a different sense of the human predicament, no longer seeing in terms of the Western preoccupation with individual guilt and repentance, but rather in terms of victory of life over death, and not only for the living community, but for the dead, too, as being part of the wider corporate existence.

The problem is isolated so that an alternative solution may be proposed: 'We shall escape the fetishism of revelation only if we admit, with all its theoretical and practical consequences, the metaphorical character of the notion or expression of "revelation": or "Word of God"'. What is proposed, therefore, is an existential encounter with Christ, free from the enslaving shackles of alien credenda. 'Christ must be encountered upstream from dogma'. The Gospel must furnish us, not with specific, singular content, but with a 'model of self restructuring in and by history'. It is significant that Part Two is entitled: 'The Christic Model'. For Jesus' message is not, according to the form of a 'creative action'. Biblical Christianity arose in existential response to an historic situation. What is called for now, therefore, is not a transmission of that response, but rather a reinvention, a new response, appropriate not to the Palestine of 2000 years ago nor to the Europe of the 5th or 15th Centuries, but to the Africa of today.

The Christic model, according to Eboussi, reveals Christ as the figure of fulfilled humanity. Several times the author quotes John 12:24, - 'Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it

dies, it produces much fruit.' This seems to be for him the central 'myth' of Christianity, and Jesus came not to abolish myth but to fulfil it. Christ is the heroic human being, who takes on human existence with a passion, and heroic human beings likewise accept the risk of a higher life at the price of suffering and death, - a life in transfigured form beyond self-consciousness, beyond individuality and the immediate continuities thereof. It is in the community that God is known; indeed, persons are not the means of the revelation of God, 'they are his real, finite representation'. And faith, then, is not the intellectual assent to a package of dogmas and rites, but is rather the risk of hope in the resurrection conceived in a commitment of love on the part of oneself and one's neighbour unto death, and 'desisting from oneself' in this world. Anything else, unless it be understood as an expression of this mystery to be experienced is, insists Eboussi 'but credal belief, inveigling, alienating, estranging.'

Part Three explores in a more practical way the 'outworking of the solution. Four 'rules of conversion', that is, for the transformation of Christianity, are detailed. Christian truth must be personalized where in the past it has been conceptualized. That is, it must be demonstrated concretely within the community of 'fulfilled persons'. Then, too, faith must be a process of historicization with realism as a revolutionary task. Christianity must become a 'redemptive ethic', no longer exclusively concerned with a salvation pushed on and away into the realm of the 'last things', but concerned rather with the here-and-now, the 'next-to-last realities', for 'the world of redemption is where every proposition calls for its visible process, every idea has its material referent'. It is a world where the body regains its rightful nobility. Finally, the Faith must be 'universalized', but this must not be considered as a duty of conquest or expansionism. Rather, 'the Church is universal in the measure and to the extent that it acknowledges God in His mystery, lets-Him-be in His mystery.'

The book ends with several 'sketches of action', in which Eboussi pleads that Africans no longer be objects but rather subjects, coming to grips with the specific challenges arising deep within the African situation. It will involve power-sharing and self-determination. This in turn will permit the effective addressing of the real (not illusory) world, allowing, from within, the healing of the alienated, sick society of which it is part.

Eboussi has written a stinging and radical critique of Western Christianity in Africa. If his language and style are generally involved and difficult, they are also graphic. His analysis is penetrating and to those who (whether African or expatriate) are involved in the Church in Africa, painful. They would be advised to look beyond the overstatements to heed carefully all that is said of a Christianity that is often triumphalistic but loveless, precise, but irrelevant.

Ironically, the author uses philosophical arguments that are more at home in Europe than in Africa, and the dogmatism he so roundly condemns in Western Christianity is abundantly evident throughout the book. The discussion cannot but come back to the

question of revelation and the nature and content, if any, of Christianity. Is there a communicable 'given' in Christianity? If so, what relation does it bear to the Judeo-Christian scriptures? Will the Christ-event, (the person, life, words, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) only permit a 'model' interpretation, or does it demand more than that?.

The book's subtitle is: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity. Many, both inside and outside of Africa, will want to ask whether what is 'recaptured' here is, in fact, Christianity.

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The Nature of God in Plain Language

by David L. Hocking
(Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1984)
180 pp \$8.95

The book is intended to 'talk about God in plain language - so that everyone could understand and get some of the basic questions answered' (p. 13). The organization of this book is logical and straightforward, transporting the reader easily from point to point. Each of the ten chapters is in the form of a question relating to an aspect of the nature of God starting with His existence and ending with affirmations regarding His concern and love for humanity. Virtually all of his points are reinforced by Scripture passages, often cited in full for the convenience of the reader.

One of the major attractions of the book is the author's interweaving of personal experiences derived from many years in the Christian ministry. He shows a sensitivity to many of the questions asked, not only by Christians, but also by the unbelievers, agnostics, and atheists he has encountered in his people-oriented outreach. It was, in fact, his conversation with a Jewish man who wanted "to know if it was possible to know God in a personal way" (p. 13) that motivated Hocking to write this book.

At the end of the book is a short bibliography of various theological and apologetical works which an earnest reader might wish to pursue. Unfortunately, very little of this valuable resource material has been incorporated into Hocking's own book, which could have benefited from a greater infusion of scholarly gleanings without jeopardising its appeal to the "average" reader. And why was the highly relevant and penetrating book, **Know Why You Believe**, by Paul Little not mentioned, as it addresses so cogently some of the very points Hocking offers as evidence for the existence of God?

While **The Nature of God in Plain Language** is dynamically written, the treatment of its rather broad subject is slightly disappointing. For a committed Christian reader, the ideas are impeccably orthodox but patently obvious and self-evident. Apart from some fascinating approaches to the mystery of the nature of

the Trinity and an excellent analysis of God's omnipresence ("God is not everywhere present in the same sense", p. 103), it is not at all demonstrable that the book "will motivate believers to continue to pursue the knowledge of the Most High", as Dr. Wendell G. Johnson affirms in his brief forward to the work (p. 10). An even more serious deficiency becomes apparent when it is recalled that the book was initially prompted by a concern to reach the honest non-Christian inquirer (exemplified by the Jewish man already referred to above). The problem of suffering and evil in the world-- always the greatest obstacle to the unbeliever -- is not addressed with the seriousness and intensity it deserves, even though Hocking touches on it in several places and even reinforces his points with Scripture. In his final chapter in particular, "The Love of God", there is an indefinable touch of glibness. A more apparent recognition of the colossal misery of the world especially beyond the boundaries of North America, or California, where the author lives -- would undoubtedly broaden the appeal of the book to honest, sensitive, and reflective people, whether Christian or non-Christian. What about the profound perspective of our groaning creation found in Romans 8, for example, which indicates a clear Scriptural recognition of the magnitude of the devastation cut by the swath of evil?

Hocking's book will probably find its greatest usefulness as a point of departure for adult Sunday School classes, where the issues raised can be discussed in more depth. Pastors will also find it useful as a framework for a series of messages on aspects of the doctrine of God. But the book will not find a comfortable niche in any degree-level African theological college, where the awareness of the uniqueness of Christianity and its dynamic transformational potential is manifested in a far greater measure than in the comfortable pulpits and pews of North America.

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Soren Kierkegaard

by E. H. Duncan

(Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1976)

155pp, \$7.95

Duncan's book is another in the important series **Makers of the Modern Theological Mind**. Since the author's PhD dissertation was on Kierkegaard (hereafter S.K.) he is well qualified to write on this seminal thinker of the nineteenth century. However Duncan admits that he is primarily a philosopher and he therefore illicited the help of a theologian in writing the chapter on S.K.'s influence on modern theology.

After a brief biographical study, the book takes the reader through what S.K. calls the three spheres of human existence: the aesthetic (spontaneous hedonism), the ethical and the religious. The two major religious texts, **Philosophical**

Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript are then examined in some detail. There follows the chapter on S.K.'s impact on the twentieth century theological world with special reference to Jaspers, Barth, Heidegger, Bultmann and Tillich. After a brief conclusion, the book ends with an intriguing bibliographical essay which tells the story of how S.K.'s writings emerged from decades of obscurity into the limelight of twentieth century scholarship.

As the editor's preface informs us, the series sets itself the formidable task of interesting and informing the layman as well as profiting the doctoral student. Duncan manages remarkably well. The layman who may never have come across the notion that existence precedes essence is offered a six page background on Sartre's existentialism (47-52). In fact the whole book is written in a non-technical, conversational style with a multitude of helpful analogies from everyday life and useful summaries of the thought of relevant philosophers like Kant and Hegel. On the other hand, the mature S.K. scholar will be grateful to discover the fruit of Duncan's research on, for example, the influence of Feuerbach on S.K. (76-82).

Yet some of these strengths point to a weakness. The book is a little eccentric in that the material often seems to reflect the author's main interests rather than those of S.K. Is it not rather excessive to spend six pages on Sartre in a book of just over a hundred pages (excluding the biographical essay) on S.K.? And how can one justify five pages (69-73) comparing S.K.'s thought with the contents of Ibsen's play **Brand**? Is the debate over whether Heidegger was a Nazi (119-121) really relevant, or the problem of the political neutrality of Pope Pius XII (27-28)? Why spend so much time on Feuerbach and not even mention, for instance, S.K.'s considerable debt to Lessing? Instead of expending so many valuable pages on the above, I would have preferred an analysis of such key topics as S.K.'s use of Indirect Communication and a fuller discussion of the motive behind his extensive use of pseudonyms.

I would also question Duncan's interpretation on one or two points. He contends that S.K.'s criticism of the aesthetic sphere is largely an indirect attack on Hegel. However, I would maintain that his prime targets here are those swayed by the Romanticism of authors like F. Schlegel and that his covert attack on Hegelianism is found most forcibly in his criticism of the ethical sphere's bourgeois morality. Occasionally also Duncan fails to take S.K.'s penchant for irony seriously enough. For example, he seems to assume that the Judge of **Either/Or** is the mouthpiece of S.K. and through him S.K. criticises the aesthetic stance of the Seducer while presenting his own ethical views (57). But why should the Judge represent S.K. any more than the Seducer? S.K. is a subtle and devious author and as he admits in **The Point of View for my Work as an Author**, there is a dialectic **between** his works as well as within a given book like **Either/Or**.

Nevertheless, Duncan's book offers a stimulating introduction to S.K. from an evangelical perspective and S.K. is an important author for African students to become acquainted with. He is significant for at least two reasons. Firstly

because, as Duncan's book ably demonstrates, it is impossible to understand twentieth century theology without some comprehension of S.K.'s thought, and secondly the kind of problems he addresses are by no means absent from African Christendom, most particularly: nominalism which ignores the need for genuine personal commitment, and rationalism which drains the faith of all sense of mystery in worship. To counteract these dangers S.K. developed his ideas on Subjective Truth and Paradox which still remain thought-provoking and challenging concepts.

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Ethiopian Orthodox Church
An annotated and Classified Bibliography
by John Bonk
(The American Theological Library
Association and the Scarecrow Press, 1984)
132 pages \$15.00

Dr. John Bonk is not a stranger to Ethiopian Culture for he was reared as a child in Ethiopia. He has done book reviews and articles for **Evangelical Mission Quarterly**, **Missiology**, **Trinity Journal** and **Survey of Current Literature on Christian Mission** and **Christianity in the non-Western World**.

In his first book, Dr. Bonk gives a bibliography of articles and books in English concerning the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. There are about 570 separate entries. The author has arranged the list under five major classifications as follows:

General works (which includes articles and books of an introductory and general nature); History and Development (which includes literature pertaining to establishment, expansion, reorganization, and ecumenical relations of the church in Ethiopia); Teaching and Practice (which includes the doctrine, rites, liturgy, services, sacraments, calendar, worship, monasticism, and social character of the Church); Literature and Scriptures (which includes literature by or about the Church as well as its Sacred Canon); and Organization and Government (which includes literature pertaining to the Church's architecture, education, clergy, hierarchy, and relation to the state). (Preface VII)

The annotations are useful for giving a brief introduction for each entry. It is a scholarly work which will assist any person who would like to research the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This Church has been very rich in her own traditions but hidden from the world. This happened partly because the writings of the

Church, liturgy, doctrine, history and government were done in Ge'ez (the liturgical language of the Church) and Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia). The bibliography is limited to books in English.

The author has done a real service in assembling, classifying, and describing the literature. The descriptions, though informal, will be helpful, especially to beginners.

Weaknesses include some typographical errors, and the system of classification, which has resulted in several books being listed twice. We can be grateful for this bibliography as a very convenient starting place for the study of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Therefore it is a book worth keeping in our College libraries and in our private libraries if we need a guide to the study of one of the oldest Churches in Africa.

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**Reaching the unreached:
the old-new challenge**

by Harvie M. Conn

(Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company)

pp. 178., \$8.95

This book focuses on the unfinished missionary task of the church, i.e. to reach the 3 billion yet without any gospel witness. It is a compilation of papers given by an impressive team of North American College professors, mission executives and mission strategists under the direction of Harvie Conn. These papers were given to a select gathering of forty eight mission leaders, pastors and third world leaders at a Reformed Missions Consultation at Westminster Theological College, Philadelphia, USA, in March 1983.

Although the setting of the conference was the USA and the main focus was inevitably upon the church in North America, the book has a very real usefulness for churches in other parts of the world.

The opening chapter by Robert Recker is a masterly survey of the Biblical Basis of Mission and has universal significance. He rightly asks in concluding his paper "Why have we as a church been so slow to fulfill the dynamic and mandate of the kingdom of Jesus Christ?". His answer challenges all churches to look at their agendas and priorities when he writes "It is because the church has been too preoccupied with her own life, her own internal workings, the intricacies of her liturgical life, her organisational life and her own nourishment."

Ralph Winter's two chapters trace the development of the Unreached Peoples concept and seeks to define what they are and where they are. Much of his material can be found elsewhere but these chapters give a summary of the Unreached Peoples

movement as a whole.

James Reapsome collates a selection of quotations from different mission leaders as to their perceptions of the meaning of the phrase "unreached peoples".

Chapters 5 - 11 deal with the implications of the Unreached Peoples concept upon strategy, mission structures, methods and training.

Roger Greenway asks six incisive questions concerning mission strategy. Perhaps his most disturbing is his last one "How can the new emphasis on unreached peoples be kept from becoming just another fad which will eventually fade away and be replaced with some more clever idea to raise interest and funds for missions?"

Several "Issues that agitate" which must be faced are identified by Paul Schrotenboer. He then makes a strong plea for interdependence amongst those committed to Biblical Christianity. He writes with passion to those of the Reformed tradition about the ongoing task of reforming the Reformed faith, as well as the Reformed churches. He questions whether Reformed churches committed to Reformed theology have anything more than a nondescript missiology.

Paul Leng in his chapter "Avoiding past mistakes" looks at several current thorny issues created by former strategies that have now become irrelevant in a fast changing world. I found his plea for "Spirit-equipped, Spirit-directed, Spirit empowered communicators of the gospel" a valuable corrective to much that is being written about qualifications for missionary service. In addition he rightly emphasised that "the cost of commitment today to evangelism and church planting among unreached peoples is one's life."

A great variety of different methods to reach the unreached are identified by Dudley Woodberry. He reviewed the many different approaches being undertaken by God's people worldwide from the research angle to "tentmaking" and the use of modern technology, God's Navy with the MV Logos and MV Doulos, to the use of professional contacts in high places.

Chapter 10 on the 'Restructuring of Mission Boards' should be read by all senior executives of missions and churches. It won't be comfortable reading for anyone who is wanting to maintain the old ways. Paul McKaughan writes "We must cherish those individuals within our organisation who have a vision, a world view, a paradigm for the future, as in fact the bridges of renewal." He follows this up by making several proposals as to how the restructuring of our organisations can be achieved - not for its own sake - but to meet the challenge of reaching Unreached Peoples.

The final chapter should be compulsory reading for all leaders of theological education institutions and programmes. Addison Soltan writes "the missionary dimension of the church is primary. Unless the church is brought face to face with the fact that it is missionary through and through, that it is missionary by its very nature, and that the missionary task belongs to the entire body, missionary work very quickly becomes the activity of specialists carried on in unknown places of no great interest to the main body."

How this understanding is conveyed to those in training is outlined by Mr. Soltan. He addresses himself however to the problem of convincing theological administrators and members of faculties of colleges recognising that there is a failure to appreciate that "missiology is not simply yet another subject, but a dimension of theology as a whole, an indispensable dimension which must preserve the church from parochialism and provincialism." Although this book was prepared by a team from a Reformed doctrinal position, it is valuable for all churches to consider. It gives more than a theoretical basis for reaching the unreached. It provides clues and suggestions as to how that vital task can be tackled by theologians, colleges, churches, pastors, mission leaders and Christians worldwide.

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Keep in Step with the Spirit

by J. I. Packer

(Inter-Varsity Press)

pp. 285 Kenya Price: Shs. 130/-

Dr. Packer's book is a serious theological study of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and at the same time morally challenging and spiritually enriching to the reader. It keeps constantly close to the teaching of the Bible about the Spirit and it is difficult to read without a Bible at hand all the time.

The author is convinced that, in spite of the strength and vigour of a number of movements for renewal within the Church today, real revival is not yet with us and needs to be prayed for. It can also be worked for by the purifying of the lives of today's Christians with the Holy Spirit's help and guidance.

The book begins with an attempt to show that the Holy Spirit does not "work for himself". He points us to Christ, glorifies Christ, and mediates Christ's presence to believers. We do not need to be "intellectuals" to experience the work of the Holy Spirit, for "a person's spiritual experience may be ahead of his notional knowledge". The real meaning of the "power of the Holy Spirit" is examined, and it is shown that when God's work in human lives is spoken of in the New Testament, "the ethical has priority over the charismatic". The author complains about those who have "spiritual gifts without graces", not being sensitive to the needs and personality of others to whom they minister. He talks of salvation as not only forgiveness but also washing away of sin.

The Holy Spirit in the Bible is shown to be active, and yet the bustling over-activity of the modern world, including many church going people, is condemned, because it deprives us of time "to relate to the inner life of fellowship with God". The book then goes on to deal with the nature of spiritual gifts, the

meaning of Pentecost, and the pursuit of holiness. It is pointed out that we often pursue holiness in a man-centred rather than a God-centred way - not to glorify God but to feel more satisfied with our personal spiritual progress. The agent of holiness is shown to be the Holy Spirit, not our own efforts, but at the same time our co-operation is required to the extent of "co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ." We have to avoid both the legalism of the Pharisees and the quietism of some later people in order to "keep in step with the Spirit", whose actions will be according to Scripture but can be unpredictable and surprising in other ways.

The quest for holiness is next examined in greater detail using the examples of holiness as described by Augustine and his followers, the "perfectionism" of John Wesley and the early Methodists, and the teaching about "victorious living" as taught at the early Keswick Conventions. Dr. Packer is charitable towards each of these forms of the quest, telling us in what ways they are good, but at the same time he points out some weaknesses in each. He insists that perfection is not to be attained this side of Heaven: the struggle against sin will go on through life.

A similar examination of the modern charismatic movement follows, stressing the value of its joy, its spontaneity and its emphasis on the ministry of all believers; but warning against its sometimes over-emotional, anti-intellectual tendencies and the over-readiness of some of its followers to claim direct revelation from God. The stress of charismatics on speaking with tongues is also examined and (like Paul) the author warns against regarding this spiritual gift more highly than others, or as a "test" of a "first-grade Christian".

The last section of the book, "Come, Holy Spirit" challenges us to prepare for revival by preaching and teaching God's truth, preparing Christ's way, and praying for the Spirit's outpouring.

The book is relevant to the Christian situation in Africa today, where so many different "spiritual", "pentecostal" and "charismatic" groups compete for our attention, and it may give us guidance to help us see how far these movements are really inspired by the Holy Spirit, and what the strengths and weaknesses of each are. Dr. Packer's charitableness should help us not to dismiss any group too readily because it differs from ours or from the way we have been accustomed to worship, but his serious examination of the teaching of the Bible will also help us not to accept too easily what is just man-made.

The book requires to be read with concentration and with examination of the Biblical background of the author's argument, but there is no unnecessary obscurity in its presentation. Dr. Packer does not use long words or unusual expressions where simple and straightforward ones will do, and the "parables", word pictures and personal reminiscences, which are numerous, make it more interesting to read.

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In the beginning
by Henri Blocher
(IVP English Trans. 1984)
240 pages., Kshs. 130.00

Origins. Where have we come from? How did it all begin? These questions are of growing importance today for all people. The book of Genesis, especially the early chapters, gives the Biblical answers. But beware. There are many traps for the unwary. Are these chapters myth, or are they history? Are they scientific? Do we read them with strict literalism, or do they contain symbolism? How do we distinguish between these and recognise which is which? In other words how do we approach these chapters?

A vast amount has been written about these chapters from the most minute analysis to the most incredible rubbish. The complexity, the disagreements and the specialised knowledge needed can easily leave one bewildered and confused not knowing where to turn for help, or can drive one to preconceived ideas where there is no longer an openness to listen to what God is saying.

So where does this book stand? Its stated purpose is to provide a self-consistent and biblically consistent interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis, making practical application whenever possible, and taking careful and critical account of the whole range of writing on them. Eight chapters deal with Genesis 1-3, while the last chapter takes us through to Genesis 11, ending with the reminder that the goal is the outworking of God's plan of salvation fulfilled in Christ.

The book begins with an examination of the way in which we should approach Genesis. Blocher holds without compromise the position that Genesis and all scripture is the inspired word of God, these chapters are 'rich with the truth of God, clothed with the authority of God'.

The question of the relationship between science and the Bible is one that has caused a great deal of disagreement. The author identifies three basic positions, for which he chooses the titles concordism, antisecientism and fideism. Concordism is concerned with the agreements between science and the Bible. Antisecientism is the approach which insists on a strict literal interpretation, it rejects current scientific theories replacing them with alternative theories. Fideism avoids the controversy by separating faith from science, saying in effect that there is no relationship between the Bible and science nor can there be, it is meaningless to try to harmonise them since neither have anything to say about the other. Each of these three positions has a measure of truth, but each on its own is inadequate. Having given this helpful survey he then steps basically into the position of the fideist saying that his whole concern is with interpretation, the discerning of the meaning of the text. The study of the interrelationship of the Bible and science is left to others, though he does review briefly a few aspects in an appendix.

When he begins to look in more detail at the text another major issue comes to the surface. How are we to interpret what we read? Literally or figuratively? However this is not the question he asks; instead he asks what sort of literature it is. He sees that it is composite, so the question becomes what are we to understand by what is written? This means that both a purely literal and a purely figurative reading are inadequate and misleading by themselves.

The issue comes to a head in the way one should understand the days of chapter one. He looks at four different ways of interpreting the text. The reconstruction theory, better known as the gap-theory, he dismisses as quite impossible. The concordist theory attempts to harmonise the Bible and science by understanding the word 'day' to refer to enormous geological eras. But it fails because the sun, moon and stars are created on the fourth day after the earth and its vegetation. He feels that the text cannot bear the weight of a purely literal interpretation, particularly when there are clear indications of non-literal language. He therefore argues strongly for a fourth way of reading the text, the literary interpretation.

The purpose is not with the chronological sequence of creation, but with the way that creation is related to God and what this means for man. The writer does this by means of an artistic arrangement structured around a week. By doing this he is also able to lay the foundation for a theology of the sabbath. The literary approach brings out clearly the biblical message, that man has an essential relationship with God. The problems of contradictions with science, whether real or apparent, are no longer important, and no longer divert our attention and energy from the basic message.

Blocher draws our attention to three ways in which the biblical account differs from other accounts of origins. First, God created the world giving it form and being, but is himself entirely free from all that he created. Second, he is the God of order not chaos. There are distinct categories and natural laws which maintain the harmony of that order. Third, creation is filled with life, and with man, made in the image of God, at the highest point of God's structured ordering of his creation.

What does it mean that man is made in the image of God. Blocher briefly reviews various suggestions and then leaves them for his own approach in which he feels that the main point is that man is defined as being in a relationship with God. Mankind is to be the created representative of his Creator, and here on earth, as it were, the image of the divine Glory. It is of interest that he understands man's nature as a quality of soul/spirit and body which is shown unambiguously throughout scripture.

Seven times God says of his creation that it is good, then suddenly he says 'it is not good'. What is not good? It is not good that man should be alone. It is an essential part of man's nature that he belongs with others. Blocher suggests that this may well be necessary in order for man to respond to God. He goes on to give a very penetrating study of the relationship between man and woman. They have a common yet complementary nature that is different from that of the rest of nature. There

is an order in their relationship which is the basis of the harmony of marriage, and which is the answer to the horror of all the perversions which resulted from the Fall.

The Edenic covenant is a further reminder that man has a relationship with God, showing the limits of man, his dependency upon God and his responsibility before God. The "Fall" goes on to describe the breaking of that covenant with the guilt resting equally on both the man and the woman. Blocher shows that the rest of scripture, particularly the book of Revelation, unambiguously identifies the snake as symbolic of Satan.

Is this history or myth? He shows that it cannot be myth. The fact of evil in God's good creation and in the nature of man requires the essential historicity of the Fall; in addition there are other scriptures which presuppose its historicity. The consequence of the Fall is death which is understood as the reverse of life, not the reverse of existence. This judgment is neither arbitrary nor does it undermine divine justice. Nevertheless evil does not triumph, God has put man on his side in the conflict against the snake with the decisive blow being struck by the seed of the woman.

The final chapter looks at what develops. Sin and corruption grow alarmingly; there is violence between brothers then within civilization, accompanied by ever-increasing corruption and arrogance, so that judgement inevitably follows. The result is that God's promise of sheer grace shines all the more gloriously.

The book is a fine translation from a French original, though the reader is hardly aware of this. Two print types are used, the smaller type is used for technical material. The preface suggests that some readers will wish to pass over these sections. However, this is misleading since there is much of interest in these sections, and some of these need to be read in order to follow the argument.

No one can read this book without being stimulated to think anew and to think deeply about Genesis 1-11, and so come to a richer and more profound understanding of God's message to mankind. It is a book of careful exposition that is well worth reading.

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