

Book Reviews

Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke, eds., *The Book of Acts in its Ancient Literary Setting*. The Book of Acts in its First-Century Setting, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 479 pp., cloth, \$37.50) reviewed by Warren Vanhetloo.

Scholars, specialists, and libraries will benefit greatly from this extensive survey of background and contemporary influence relating to the literary structure of the book of Acts and the historical setting of the period in Roman history. Thirteen studies of the ancient literary setting, plus an appendix dealing with problems associated with the Western text of the book of Acts constitute this first volume. Of the six volumes proposed, this first one well manifests the intended quality of scholarship. Anticipated: the Graeco-Roman setting, Paul in Roman custody, the Palestinian setting, the Diaspora setting, and the theological setting. Contributing scholars are from various disciplines, from Canada, Australia, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Literary genre as well as historical setting receives intensive investigation. The chapters treat patterns of the ancient historical monograph, ancient intellectual biography, biblical history, the motif of fulfillment, subsequent ecclesiastical histories, ancient literary parallels, public and forensic speeches, and classical rhetoric. Although the book of Acts was divinely inspired, the Holy Spirit guided by directing holy men to employ language and literary patterns characteristic of the day for clearest comprehension in that day and today.

John B. Polhill, *Acts.*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992, 574 pp., cloth, \$27.99) reviewed by Warren Vanhetloo.

No matter how extensive a pastor's previous acquaintance with the book of Acts, before beginning a Sunday school or preaching series, he would do well to read the introductory pages of this book (20-72). The author surveys past pertinent materials and sets forth important insights to direct serious consideration of the text. His outline of the book is beneficial in showing Dr. Luke's purpose and progress of thought.

The author recognizes the empowering of the Holy Spirit for effective witness by many or by few (Peter, Barnabas, Paul). Commentary concerning verses is clear, footnotes extensive. The pastor who does his own study first will find further stimulus and information he will appreciate.

As announced for the set, this work both incorporates quality scholarship and meets practical needs for preaching and teaching. Authors accept the inerrancy of Scripture. They accept divine inspiration, the complete truthfulness and the full authority of the Bible. Although Acts is predominantly an historical account, proper emphasis is given to its theological content. Both preachers and Sunday school teachers can profitably employ this commentary.

Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*. New Expanded ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1994, 602 pp., paper, \$14.99) reviewed by Warren Vanhetloo.

Students and scholars do well to favor original sources whenever such are available. This reprint enables direct study of that which a great theologian himself said, not another's evaluation of what one judging from another point of view (often Calvinistic) accused him of saying. A discerning reader can profit from each section of this edition. A selective reader

should become familiar with the sections on the extent of the atonement, regeneration, sanctification, election, reprobation, sovereignty, perseverance, and the purposes of God. Appendix D demonstrates misrepresentations by Dr. Charles Hodge. The Scripture index will be of practical help to expositional preachers. None should instinctively dismiss notions of purchase of this reprint.

James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995, 286 pp., paper, \$10.99) reviewed by Warren Vanhetloo.

Every pastor can benefit from the first four chapters of this book; most will benefit from the detail of the other chapters. This book has been recommended by many as the clearest, most simple presentation of a technical and at times confusing realm of study. Because study of Hebrew and Greek text variations necessitates knowledge of the languages and of principles of evaluation beyond the ordinary activities of a local pastor, many have not seen the need to look into claims of those who in recent decades have promoted the King James version of the Bible as the only "correct" English translation of the Word of God. This clear summation will provide easy acquaintance with the issues and evidences. The benefit of this book is not for preaching materials, but to be aware of assertions of some who might cause dissension in the flock.

The author cites reaction against Jerome for his new Latin translation by those familiar with the old Latin and then later the same reaction against Erasmus by those who by then were accustomed to the Vulgate of Jerome. He recognized cultural influences which have stimulated multiple new translations in English (there is no commercial demand for numerous updated translations in Romanian or Japanese). The author lists half a dozen conservative versions and notes several liberal or sect-oriented publications. Believers can rejoice that many desire an

easy to understand translation, especially if that means more people read the Bible more frequently.

Rather than accepting God's infallible inspiration of the first written copies (the autographa) by the forty-some human authors of the sixty-six books of the Bible, the assertion of King James only adherents is that the 1611 Authorized Version is God's certified standard by which all variations are to be judged. But there have been and still are various different KJV texts; the one currently standard in the United States is different from the one which is standard in England. Promotion of any single KJV text is arbitrary and baseless. By the proper process of evaluating ancient texts, there is certainty regarding more than ninety-nine percent of the autographa.

Claims and charts employed to promote the King James only position are largely based on *ad hominem* arguments, that is, attacking the motives of translators. The most frequent charge is that an aim of the translators is to detract from the deity of Christ or the power of His blood, even inventing a massive conspiracy. Dr. White carefully shows both the incorrectness and the inconsistencies of such accusations. Related to these charges of malicious intent is the attitude that academic achievement is destructive of the faith. A believer need not fear careful examination of the basis of his faith. This book enables any believer to appreciate God's purposeful preservation of His infallible Word.

Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995, 274 pp., cloth, \$19.99) reviewed by Michael Sproul.

From his first statement, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind," Mark Noll declares war on what he considers the laziness and apathy of the evangelical mind. The author is the McManis Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College.

His concern is the lack of *thinking* among evangelicals. By this *thinking* he is not referring to merely ideas, but rather putting Christian ethics into the market-place of ideas on issues like poverty, science, Aids, euthanasia, population control, abortion, life-support, arts, literature, race relations, etc. This goal is commendable, but it requires a biblical world view.

Much in this book is positive, yet more is negative. Other than brief comments of praise for the battles fought by fundamentalists in the 1920s, Noll articulates a virulent polemic against them. He identifies three major tragedies of evangelicals which allegedly have handicaped their contribution.

The first disaster is a literal acceptance of the six days of creation. The second is the holiness movement and the last, dispensationalism. Noll struggles to determine the difference between his beliefs and intellectualism. He seems to believe they are synonymous. Consequently, Mr. Noll establishes a theological 'litmus test' for what constitutes intellectual thought—if you believe as Noll does, you are intellectual.

It was fascinating to this reviewer how enamored Noll was with the intellectuals of liberal denominations and even non-Protestants (e.g. pp. 125, 138, 220, 236). The saddest point in the book in the opinion of this writer, however, was when he articulates his core beliefs. He writes:

"Does the cross show for the death of an incarnate Savior? Was the Son of God truly born of a virgin, truly incarnate in human nature? Did Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, really rise bodily from the grave? And does the Holy Spirit really extend to repentant sinners the benefits of the incarnate Christ in this life?"
(p. 252)

What is problematic with this statement is not what it says, but what it does not say. What is left out of this statement is *how* does the Spirit "extend to repentant sinners." Does He do it through baptism? The mass? Or is it through a once for all,

personal relationship with Christ outside of a church hierarchy and the majesterium of traditions? The Reformers' cry of *sola fida* (justification *only* by faith) is absent in this set of core beliefs.

One of Noll's heroes, Jonathan Edwards, struggled with Stoddard's Half-way Covenant, because it allowed the lost into the church, hence the need for the Great Awakening. Edwards did not write such a Half-way doctrinal statement. This reviewer claims that the disaster of the evangelical mind is its willingness to sell the purity of doctrinal truth for the pottage of an academically acceptable mind.

Having said that, this is an excellent book for fundamentalists to read. Much of what he says about evangelicals is also true about fundamentalists today. Our sometimes anti-intellectual bias keeps fundamentalism from serious thought. Fundamentalism cannot afford to become a modern monastic movement. We must engage our culture and be ready to answer the lost with a biblical perspective. Our answers must address issues in the complexity and tension of the real world. We dare not belittle honest seekers by trivializing their concerns. Jesus never did. Fundamentalism must continue its path of spiritual growth and educational development.

Josh McDowell, *Right from Wrong*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994, 335 pp., \$19.99) reviewed by Mark Farnham.

One needs only to dialogue briefly with the average teenager or young adult to notice a completely different mindset from those of older generations. All too often there is a complete lack of moral absolutes. But that is not all. There is an obvious, devastating reaping of consequences from living without absolutes. In *Right from Wrong* McDowell gives evidence of the inability of today's youth to determine right from wrong and shows ways in which parents can restore commitment to absolutes in their children.

Citing extensive studies and surveys, McDowell convincingly demonstrates that the church-ed youth of the 90s believe less than any American generation before them. They also have less confidence in the Bible and greater confidence in their own abilities to determine what is right and what is not. He is correct in identifying the cause of today's teens' problems as the failure to understand or the refusal to accept absolute truth, that is "That which is true for all people, for all times, for all places" (p. 27).

McDowell bypasses all the usual excuses for this mess (poverty, low self-esteem, stress, culture, TV, music) and gets to the root cause—the failure of parents to pass on a moral and biblical foundation of truth to their children. This book is not about bashing parents for their failures, however. It is a helpful, encouraging manual of how to restore and strengthen our children's commitment to godly living. It gives parents the tools necessary to build their children's understanding of truth and gives young people the weapons necessary to fight the culture that so strongly influences them.

In a simple manner, the author lays out a concise apologetic that compares a behavior or attitude to a standard (namely, God) and then shows how this truth works in reality. The first step of that equation, known as the Test of Truth, shows that rules, regulations and commands of Scripture (precepts) are based on a standard that is applicable to any situation (principle). The principle helps explain the "why" behind the precept. The principle in turn is based on the character of God. So, everything that is based on the character of God is an absolute.

The second step of the equation, the Evidence of Truth, looks at the consequences of an action. A violation of an absolute will bring unpleasant, even horrible results. Adherence to an absolute will bring ultimate hope, satisfaction and freedom from negative consequences. The author vividly portrays these truths in a running fictional story about members of a small church. Many examples and illustrations are given to clarify the

author's points. The last 78 pages detail the surveys from which the author drew his material on the state of church-ed teens in the 90s.

Right from Wrong is a challenging and convicting book for any parent, especially one who has teenagers or children approaching that stage of life. The direct and compassionate style of the book will encourage anyone struggling with these issues and will strengthen the faith of the reader as well. It is a highly recommended book that will plant the reader's feet firmly on God's Word in a shifting and uncertain world.

Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, *Jesus on Fire*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, 256 pp. cloth, \$16.99) reviewed by Mark Farnham.

Studies about the life of Jesus have flourished since the Enlightenment and a recent one has caused quite a furor. The Jesus Seminar, formed in 1985, has examined the sayings of Jesus in an attempt to determine which are authentic and which are myth. They have come to a startling conclusion: less than twenty percent of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels were actually spoken by Him.

Jesus Under Fire was written as a rebuttal to the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar and others who would deconstruct Christ. It has two objectives: (1) to address current teachings about Jesus, His life and ministry that undermine the biblical record and (2) to provide a cogent defense of the biblical account of these topics. It is written for both the lay person and Bible scholar.

The editors, both professors at Talbot School of Theology, have compiled eight outstanding essays by world-class scholars that address the contentions of the Jesus Seminar. The first article, by Craig Blomberg, answers the question, "Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?" He argues that "modern skepticism is unwarranted and that historic Christian confidence in the

reliability of the Gospels remains defensible." Blomberg contends that the Seminar does not represent a scholarly consensus. Almost half come from some of the most radically liberal New Testament departments. Moreover, he notes that European scholarship is barely represented (in contrast, half of the contributors of this volume have doctorates from European schools). Blomberg also presents arguments against the presuppositions of the Seminar.

Scot McKnight's essay gives an introduction to Jesus studies that is equally cogent. He persuasively argues that the Jesus of the Seminar would never have been crucified, drawn the animosity of the Jews, created such a faithful following or started such an enduring and world-shaking movement.

Other chapters address the words of Jesus, His acts, the historicity of His miracles, His resurrection and extra-biblical evidence. A pleasing inclusion in this volume is the article answering the question, "Is Jesus the Only Way?" This chapter demonstrates the intention of the book to be profitable to lay people and those searching for answers concerning Christ. A helpful bibliography in addition to subject, author and Scripture indexes make this book easy to use and a quality resource. *Jesus Under Fire* certainly meets its objectives and will be a valuable tool in defense of the Savior we know.