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## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Jonathan Edwards: A Life**

George M. Marsden

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

615 pages, cloth, \$35.00

It appears that there have been four kinds of biographies on the life of Jonathan Edwards, each reflecting the sentiments of the age in which they were written. The first three biographers of Edwards were all Edwardsean pastors in the Christian ministry: Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Sereno Edwards Dwight (1786-1850), and Samuel Miller (Presbyterian pastor before becoming "Old" Princeton Seminary's Church history professor). Miller's mid-nineteenth century biography was largely an abridgement of Dwight's 1829 "many years" of preparation to publish *Life of President Edwards*. This first kind of biography shared a similar appreciation for the Calvinism and the Great Awakening. By the end of the next century, however, a new kind of author emerged. Henry B. Parkes (1930), Arthur C. McGiffert (1932), and Ola E. Winslow (1940) authored biographies on Edwards in an age of "modern" scholars. "By the early decades of the twentieth century, however," writes Marsden, "Puritan bashing had become widely acceptable as a way for progressive Americans to free themselves from Victorian moralism. Edwards was an easy target" (501).

Henry Bamford Parkes blamed Edwards by writing: "It is hardly a hyperbole to say that, if Edwards had never lived, there would be to-day no blue laws, no societies for the suppression of vice, no Volstead act," and Calvinism is "an amazing travesty of . . . Christianity" (501). McGiffert's biography was more

sympathetic. Ola Winslow's biography replaced the previous two as the standard of modern biography because of her careful use of Edwards' own unpublished manuscripts and other sources. Winslow, however, reflected the same "progressive tone" regarding his Calvinism that "needed to be demolished" (501). "Already by the time of Winslow's writing, however," writes Marsden, "the theological and cultural climate was changing and a new Edwards—best characterized as the neo-orthodox Edwards—was emerging" (501). Perry Miller's biography represents the third kind on Edwards' life.

Marsden shows great appreciation, although mixed, for Perry Miller because he "contributed immeasurably" with his publication of an "intellectual biography" in 1949. Marsden compares Miller's "influential, brilliant, and often misleading" biography with Iain Murray's "honorable but uncritical tradition of Edwards' earlier admirers" (17). Miller is "eloquently" misleading as "the most influential historian of New England" (60); yet "Miller thereby created the possibility of 'atheists for Edwards'" (501-502). Marsden's appreciation for Miller is, perhaps, most reflected in his dedication: "To a generation of Edwards scholars who made this work possible" (5).

The first biographers were pastors in the Christian ministry, the second kind was not. Although the third kind, Christian neo-orthodox scholars, gave scholarly permission to have "atheists for Edwards," they remained "modern scholars" without an appreciation for Edwards' Calvinism. Toward the end of the twentieth century and into this century another kind of biographer on Edwards' life emerges, the George Marsden kind.

In the Fall 2001 issue of *Christian History*, George Marsden and John Woodbridge discussed their different approaches of historical scholarship as Christians. Marsden, the Francis A. McAnaney professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, represented the "ordinary" approach using rules prescribed by mainstream academy. Woodbridge of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School represented the "providentialist," who is concerned by the "professionalization," scholarly conven-

tions, and natural premises of academic historians.<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in Marsden's Introduction: "I am not attempting a theological work nor even an essentially intellectual biography. . . . My focus is primarily on understanding Edwards as a person, public figure, and a thinker in his own time and place" (6). It is also expressed in his concluding and personal remarks: "One of my hopes is that this book may help bridge the gap between the Edwards of the students of American culture and the Edwards of the theologians" (502). He attempts this as a "cultural historian" employing "historical consciousness for developing more *discriminating* assessments of the wisdom of the past" (502). Here, we catch a glimpse of Marsden's "outrageous idea" of Christian scholarship as a historian:

The point of historical scholarship should not be, as it so often is today, simply to take things apart, to destroy myths, or to say that what looks simple is really quite complex. It should also be to help people see how to put things back together again. We need to use history for the guidance it offers, learning from great figures in the past—both in their brilliance and in their shortcomings. Otherwise we are stuck with only the wisdom of the present (502).

This year marks the 300-year anniversary of Jonathan Edwards' birth. Marsden, a prolific author and American historian of Christian history, wrote this well-researched biography on Edwards with integrity to his historical approach above. Both Edwardsean theologians and scholars will be thankful for the way this work will promote the ongoing legacy of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). This biography, therefore, is not like the earlier biographies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; it is discriminating in its assessments and appreciative of Edwards' life and theology. It is for both scholar and theologian to read and assess. With this in mind, *Jonathan Edwards: a Life* is reviewed.

There are several things to appreciate about Marsden's book. It is well written with symmetry and proportion. The reader learns much about every place, person, and event of Edwards' life with measured balance. Each member of

Edwards' family is given proportioned description to Edwards in a way that adds color to his life. This was done without many personal matters mentioned by Edwards, who wrote with theological and pastoral concern in spite of a variety of circumstances. "Even his family letters," writes Marsden, "seldom deal with personal matters outside a theological framework" (10). Marsden displays great scholarship by keeping each chapter near the same length, while flowing chronologically through Edwards' life, and filling each with sources from people close to Edwards.<sup>2</sup> The book's thirty chapters each bring good closure and transition to each period of Edwards' life and thought. This makes it much more readable for those who are not able to read through it in one sitting.

Due to the author's steady and proportioned approach to each period of Edwards' life, the reader captures a better understanding of the variety of seasons influencing his personal relations with the Lord, his relatives, and his church communities. The seasons of revival<sup>3</sup> are compared with and understood better by the seasons of spiritual decline.<sup>4</sup> Lessons are learned by Edwards as he grows and matures in his assessments of revival experiences and Satan's strategies. For example, after the second season of revival began due to Whitefield's preaching visit, Edwards was more cautious. "Reminding the congregation that many of them had lapsed from their fervor of five or six years earlier, Edwards was determined not to have the same thing happen again" (212). Edwards employed smaller groups through his elders, pastoral traveling teams (chapter 13), and congregational covenanting with God as means for sustained revival (260-63). By the writing of *Religious Affections*, Edwards was cautious of revival professions that were not followed by a life of loving God and man well. In a well-placed quote from a letter to James Robe of Kilsyth, Scotland, Marsden shows Edwards' viewpoint on why New England was divided into two parties regarding the revival. "This is," Edwards added, "very much owing to imprudent management in the friends of the work, and a corrupt mixture which Satan has found means to introduce, and our manifold sinful errors, by which we have grieved and quenched the Spirit of God" (283-84).

Seasons of war, sickness, and economic prosperity all interplay with his personal state of mind in the midst of his busy life as a pastor and theologian. By recognizing this reality Marsden bridges a large gap that often occurs in dealing with Edwards. He thus helps us better understand the contexts of Edwards' many theological and philosophical writings. Rather than a mere representation of the major players of the Enlightenment abroad, the academic scholar may also benefit by learning the international and local theological contexts of Edwards' thoughtful and influential writings. He was a family man surrounded by illness and troubles. He had ten children and often entertained sick pastors who would stay in his house while waiting for healing. The Northampton people clearly had a cool attitude toward their pastor at times, especially over salary issues. And Indian threats were continual. Appreciating Edwards' drama-filled life will lend insight into the works so many scholars and theologians study. For example, Marsden gives a vivid account of the stressful life at home during Brainerd's visit and death at which time he wrote *An Humble Attempt*. This was followed by the death of Brainerd, his daughter Jerusha, and the writing of *The Life of David Brainerd* (chapter 20).

Although there are many worthy things to point out about the book, and many reasons why we ought to read it, the reviewer was troubled by some of the author's interpretive assumptions. Although Marsden recognizes the difficulty of being objective and fair-minded with the evidence, he offers some "interpretive intrusions" that lack a strong relation to the evidence. He states: "I have tried to tell the story of Edwards and his family with relatively few interpretive intrusions" (5). The reviewer found a "relatively few." For instance, Marsden interprets Edwards before conversion as one overcome by sexual lusts. Marsden wrote, "He struggled with sexual lusts which despite prodigious efforts, he could not wholly control" (36). Again: "His fretful disposition plus his pride and the resultant attitude toward others were the sins he combated most openly, but we can be sure that he was also fighting sexual desires, even if he did not directly record his strug-

gles with those temptations" (56). "All these points," wrote Marsden, "can be inferred from his later diary when he is trying to strictly reform his habits and cultivate a more positive disposition" (520). Marsden's other argument for this interpretation is: "We also do not have the originals of the Diary but only versions copied by his admiring editors" (522). Perhaps Marsden could have begun his statement (36) with, "He probably struggled with sexual lusts." Therein lurks the twin dangers of projection, projecting on to others either unholy vices or hagiographical virtues that may have not existed.

In spite of any "interpretive intrusions," the reviewer highly recommends Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: a Life* for the following reasons. First, it is the most recent biography and it contains the best use of source material by an experienced historian and scholar. Yale University Press has twenty-two volumes of Edwards work to this date, and the secondary sources for Edwards' seem to multiply annually. Marsden works with well-respected colleagues, such as Nathan Hatch, Mark Noll, and Harry Stout. He earned a degree from Westminster Theological Seminary and is thus familiar with the theological issues of both academic and popular Reformed theology.

Second, this biography is a very good starting point for understanding Edwards for many readers just beginning to be "turned on" to Edwards' writings. This biography, along with Iain Murray's useful popular biography,<sup>5</sup> will make a great resource for your church's library next to Edwards' *Works* and a few John Piper books on Edwards. One can hope that a new generation of popular Edwards readership among pastors and Church leaders will arise out of the scholarly renaissance that has clearly taken place over the last twenty years or so.

Finally, we can all benefit from Marsden's approach to historical research. I'm thankful that this large volume will land next to the first three kinds of biographers so far on the shelves of the university libraries all over America. It is an excellent corrective to some of the anti-Calvinistic and caustic approaches to Jonathan Edwards' life and thought. In fact, this reviewer gained a deeper appreciation for the women in Edwards' life,

the trials and joys out of which Edwards continually labored, and the seasons when there was no revival at all.

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#### Notes

1. "A Conversation with George Marsden and John Woodbridge" in *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 72, Fall 2001, vol. xx, No. 4, p. 8.
2. Marsden gathered his sources to use them to speak into the context of Edwards' life as it unfolded. His end notes (pp. 513-600) demonstrate a consistent use of not only Edwards' published and unpublished writings, but also the letters written by and to the Edwards' family members, friends, and opponents.
3. Pages 159-162; 207-226; 260, and 427.
4. Pages 163, 184, and chapters 17-18.
5. *Jonathan Edwards: a New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

#### ISLAM UNVEILED: DISTURBING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WORLD'S FASTEST-GROWING FAITH

Robert Spencer

San Francisco: Encounter Books (2002)

\$24.95, cloth, 214 pages

Books on Islam have been appearing quite frequently during the last twenty-five years. Most of these works have dealt with specific topics, such as "Islam and War," "Islam and the West," "Race and Slavery in the Middle East," "Faith & Power: The Politics of Islam," "The Political Language of Islam," and "In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power." What distinguishes Robert Spencer's new book is that he treats a wide range of current issues in a thorough and objective manner against the background of the sacred Islamic texts, the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*.

The publication of *Islam Unveiled* occurred between two important, but troubling, media events. In May 2001, and January 2002, PBS broadcast a two-hour documentary,

"Islam: Empire of Faith." A video of the documentary is now being shown in a number of public schools as part of social studies. One can hardly believe the shocking revisionism, distortions, and omissions that are replete in this video account of the history of Islam.

Not content with launching the above-mentioned documentary as a means to "enlighten" the American public about the true nature of Islam, one week before Christmas 2002, PBS broadcast a similar documentary on the legacy of the prophet Muhammad. Referring to this television event, Robert Spencer wrote an article for the *National Review Online* with the title, "Islam Soft and Hard: PBS's Whitewashed Commercial for Islam" (December 19, 2002). Commenting on the manner in which the slaughter of the Jews in Arabia was described, Spencer referred specifically to the primary narrator, Karen Armstrong, a British religion writer who once was a Roman Catholic nun. He referred to Armstrong correctly as an "indefatigable apologist for all things Islamic," and quotes her referring to this mini genocide, by saying, "All that can be said is that this cannot be seen as anti-Semitism, per se. Muhammad had nothing against the Jewish people per se, or the Jewish religion."

In the foreword to *Islam Unveiled*, a British expert on the Arab world, David Pryce-Jones states:

Most people in the West know virtually nothing about Islam. A few may visit one or another Muslim country as tourists or perhaps on business, and find that the inhabitants, hospitable and vivacious, seem to be getting on with their lives like everybody else. The events of September 11 therefore appeared to come from nowhere. What was this holy war against the United States and the West, this jihad, declared by Osama bin Laden, and how was it possible that to the Arab and wider Muslim world he became an instant popular hero because he had organized the murder of several thousand innocent people in New York and Washington? Westerners in general, and Americans in particular, had little or no idea that there were Muslims out there who so hated them, and little or no idea either of the causes of that hate (ix).

Robert Spencer endeavors to give us his explanation for this hatred in ten chapters, nine of which are framed as questions. As already mentioned, his answers are solidly based on the authoritative Islamic texts, the *Qur'an*, which is regarded by Muslims as the eternal and uncreated word of Allah, and the *Hadith*, i.e., the traditions relating the sayings and example of the Prophet Muhammad.

Here are the titles of the ten chapters in *Islam Unveiled*:

1. Is Islam a Religion of Peace?
2. Does Islam Promote and Safeguard Sound Moral Values?
3. Does Islam Respect Human Rights?
4. Does Islam Respect Women?
5. Is Islam Compatible with Liberal Democracy?
6. Can Islam Be Secularized and Made Compatible with the Western Pluralistic Framework?
7. Can Science and Culture Flourish Under Islam?
8. The Crusades: Christian and Muslim
9. Is Islam Tolerant of Non-Muslims?
10. Does the West Really Have Nothing to Fear from Islam?

At the outset, Spencer strongly disagrees with those who claim that the word "Islam" means *peace*. Etymologically, the word means "surrender" i.e., to the will of Allah as revealed in the sacred text. Historically, the claim that Islam means peace is disproved by the fact that it spread primarily by conquests. Growing up in Syria, I read in my teens many Arabic historical novels that glorified the conquests of the Middle East, North Africa and Andalusia, the Arabic name for Spain. The presupposition of the authors was that those conquests were necessary, and sanctioned by the will of God. In fact, in Arabic, they are called, *Futuhat*, or "openings." Modern Arab Muslims writers call them euphemistically, "liberations." However, unlike the later European empires that came and went away, Islamic conquests, with few exceptions, altered permanently the demography and the faith of the conquered lands.

Thus, Robert Spencer is right in disagreeing with both

President George W. Bush and former President Bill Clinton, who have continued to tell the nation that Islam is a religion of peace. Most likely, they were motivated by political factors, partly internal, and most likely by the necessity to keep the good favor of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, our present "allies." Unfortunately, neither man seems to possess an adequate and objective knowledge of the history of Islam, relying mostly on the "experts" at the State Department.

The treatment of Christians in the conquered lands is discussed on pages 30 to 32. In response to the claim that both Christians and Muslims have indulged in persecutions throughout their history, Spencer responds by referring to the present-day persecution of Christians in the Sudan and Pakistan, and adds:

When confronted with this kind of evidence, many Western commentators practice a theological version of "moral equivalence," analogous to the geopolitical form which held that the Soviet Union and the United States were essentially equally free and equally oppressive. "Christians," these commentators say, "have behaved the same way, and have used the Bible to justify violence. Islam is no different: people can use it to wage war or to wage peace" (33).

But what Western liberals seem to forget is that violence, conquest, and religious apartheid, are truly sanctioned by the texts of Islam. The Bible does not *sanction* violence. And, during this present new covenant age, the Bible does not endorse theocracy. When Christians resort to violence, with the exception of participating in a just war, they are acting *against* their sacred text.

The timeliness of *Islam Unveiled* can be noticed in several chapters. Consider, for one example, the discussion in chapter 6 of the subject, "Can Islam Be Secularized and Made Compatible with the Western Pluralistic Framework?" Spencer refers to the latest book of Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*. The British scholar, an expert on Islam and the Middle East "proposes that Muslim states follow the Western secular model in order to

solve some of [their] difficulties."

This advice is not acceptable to Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi. "There is nothing new about this remedy, which is one that the West has tried before to impose on Islamic countries, albeit without major success." For him and other Muslims of like mind, the Sharia is not negotiable. "Muslims will not abandon their belief that state affairs should be supervised by the just teachings of the holy law" (103).

Chapter 7 deals with the question, "Can Science and Culture Flourish Under Islam?" Our author details the great achievements of Islamic civilization in several pages and states that "Muslims built their great medieval civilization with an attitude of openness to what they could learn from non-Muslims" (118).

However, due to the influence of the great Sufi theologian, Al-Ghazali (1050-1128), the author of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, a "closing to the Outside World" took place. Spencer quotes from Philip Hitti's book, *The Arabs*, with these comments on the consequences of the closing of the Arab-Muslim mind: "In no branch of pure or physical science was any appreciable advance made after Abbasid days. In fact the whole Arab world had by the beginning of the thirteenth century lost the intellectual hegemony it had maintained since the eighth" (124).

Continuing his discussion of this subject, Spencer quotes from V. S. Naipaul in his book, *Among the Believers*. In Islam, says Naipaul:

The West, or the universal civilization it leads, is emotionally rejected. It undermines; it threatens. But at the same time it is needed, for its machines, goods, medicines, warplanes, the remittances from the emigrants, the hospitals that might have a cure for calcium deficiency, the universities that will provide master's degrees in mass media. All the rejection of the West is contained within the assumption that there will always exist out there a living, creative civilization, oddly neutral, open to all to appeal to. Rejection, therefore, is not absolute rejection. It

is also for the community as a whole, a way of ceasing to strive intellectually. It is to be parasitic; parasitism is one of the unacknowledged fruits of fundamentalism" (129).

There is no question mark at the end of chapter 8. It deals with the "Crusades: Christian and Muslim." The juxtaposition of Christian and Muslim in the title of the chapter is of great importance here. Muslims never cease to reproach the West for the crusader wars (1099-1291). Their assumption is that, while the Arab-Muslim armies of the seventh century had a "divine" right to conquer Christian lands, Western Christians were not to engage in re-conquest. Spencer quotes from *The Arab in History*, again by Bernard Lewis, and notes:

At the present time, the Crusades are often depicted as an early experiment in expansionist imperialism—a prefigurement of the modern European empires. To the people of the time, both Muslim and Christian, they were no such thing. When the Crusaders arrived in Jerusalem, barely four hundred years had passed since that city, along with the rest of the Levant and North Africa, had been wrested by the armies of Islam from their Christian rulers, and their Christian populations forcibly incorporated in a new Muslim empire. The Crusade was a delayed response to the jihad, the holy war of Islam, and its purpose was to recover by war what had been lost by war—to free the holy places of Christendom and open them once again, without impediment, to Christian pilgrimage" (139).

Chapter 9 deals with the vaunted "tolerance" of Islam. According to the Islamic Law, followers of Judaism and Christianity were allowed to remain in their faith. They were granted the status of "dhimmi," an Arabic word that etymologically means "protection." However, "dhimmitude" was not equivalent with real freedom. Dhimmis were not supposed to propagate their faith, their houses of worship could not be repaired without governmental approval, and no new churches could be built. And once a dhimmi Islamized, no return to his or her formal religion was allowed. And yet, Muslims love to talk about their tolerant treatment of non-Muslims.

One little-known Ottoman Muslim practice, the Devshirme, exhibited one of the most inhuman and barbaric treatment of Eastern European Christians. Let Robert Spencer enlighten us about this subject.

Another source of the fear in which dhimmis lived in the Ottoman Empire was the notorious devshirme. Begun in the fourteenth century by Sultan Orkhan and continued until late in the seventeenth century, this was the seizure and enslavement of 20 percent of the Christian children in various predominantly Christian areas of the empire. These boys were given the choice of Islam or death, and, after rigorous training, were enrolled in the janissary corps, the emperor's elite fighters. At first these unfortunate boys were torn from their homes and families only at irregular intervals—sometimes every seven years and sometimes every four—but after a time the devshirme became an annual event. By the time it ended, around 200,000 boys had been enslaved in this manner" (152-53).

At this point in my review, I remember how horrified I was when viewing for the first time the documentary, "Islam: Empire of Faith." The narrator dealing with devshirme, looked almost angelic in her account, and referred to that evil institution with a smile on her face, and by claiming that those Christian boys "were recruited." That statement went unchallenged; and yet since that narrator was a Turkish "expert," I should not have been surprised. More than seventy-five years have passed since the Armenian genocide of World War I, and Turkey, to this day, does not acknowledge that it has ever happened!

Chapter 10 deals with the question, "Does the West Really Have Nothing to Fear from Islam?" and ends on a very sobering note with the following:

Whether or not Islam ever becomes dominant in Western Europe or elsewhere in the former lands of Christendom, the wars will not end. Militant Islam will not go away with the death of bin Laden, or Arafat, or Saddam Hussein, or anyone else. It will clash increasingly with the weary secular powers that it



blames for all the ills of the umma. No one can predict the features of the world that will emerge from these conflicts, except that it will be new, and that it will be difficult—unless there is some wondrous intervention from the Merciful One" (176).

This book is heartily recommended to all those who want to understand the global challenge of Islam. While its forecast for the future of Islam's relation to the rest of the world may sound quite alarming, it does not differ significantly from the predictions found in Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, that appeared in the mid-1990s.

In a future edition of *Islam Unveiled*, a correction should be made on page 103, in the subtitle of Bernard Lewis' book, *What Went Wrong?* Spencer's version of it reads as follows: "Approaches to the Modern History of the Middle East." However, the subtitle on the book itself (published by the Oxford University Press), is actually: "Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response."

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### ENCOUNTERING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM—THE CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MISSION

Harold Netland

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)

368 pages, paper, \$27.00

Harold Netland is already known for his expertise in addressing the issues raised by religious pluralism through his earlier work *Dissonant Voices* (1991). His latest work marks a further invaluable contribution to this important, contemporary field.

The book is divided into two parts. The first explains how the idea of equality among all religions has become so popular. Netland harnesses insights from the social sciences, philosophy and history. Despite the range of subject matter, his

work is characterized throughout by scholarly rigor. He shows the uses, limitations and ambiguities of such terms as globalization, modernity, post-modernity and secularization which are often bandied about by less careful writers as though their significance was self-evident. He is also particularly effective in demonstrating that it is misleading to view post-modernity purely and simply as a reaction against modernity, particularly the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason. Netland proposes a complementary model—the intensification of trends already at work from globalization and modernization, as well as an enduring legacy from intellectual skepticism about ultimate questions. He knows that the history of thought will not explain everything; he has a sharp eye for those social and cultural changes which either trigger or accompany intellectual shifts.

Netland rounds off this section with a prominent example of such a shift. He uses the career of the English academic, John Hick, who early in his student days was a conservative evangelical, but has steadily shifted his ground so as to become one of the most articulate exponents of religious pluralism.

The second part, titled "Engaging Religious Pluralism," sets out some parameters for an evangelical response to the issues raised in the first. Initially, Netland takes up philosophical challenges, exposing weaknesses in the influential positions of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Hick. Then he contends for an apologetic that goes beyond the limited goal of showing that evangelical Christians are not irrational in believing what they do. He prefers the more positive goal of arguing that the evangelical worldview is the most accurate and most appropriate for all cultures given the world in which we find ourselves. Here Netland recognizes that his views have met with resistance even among some evangelicals and others opposed to religious relativism. His thesis, put forward firmly yet charitably, deserves careful reading, and will doubtless receive expansion in future work.

Finally, Netland laments the paucity of detailed thought from evangelicals about other religions, and exhorts them to a

comprehensive theology of religions. I am sceptical of the scale of the project he envisages. It is certainly apposite for evangelicals to assess particular religious traditions or religious communities. It is also apposite for them to assess how the *sensus divinitatis* that all humans possess (to use Calvin's expression) is both revealed and often distorted in various societies. But an evangelical work embracing all religious phenomena and handling sensitively the interrelation between culture and religion in different countries would necessarily be encyclopedic in scope and probably of limited use to missionary practitioners in the field.

In short, this is a wide-ranging work that never degenerates into superficiality. It combines accurate assessment with practical and biblical suggestions as to the task before us. Undoubtedly, to gain maximum benefit the reader should go from cover to cover. However, it is one of the book's merits that most chapters could stand by themselves. Above all, the book is surely right in contending that religious pluralism is no passing fad. It is a challenge which will not go away and which cannot be shirked. Netland's book is a "must" in this field both for its own content and for the further reading that can be gleaned from its detailed references.

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### THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

John Frame

Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed (2001)

864 pages, cloth, \$27.99

There are more triads to be found here than in Chinatown but more of that later! This study of the doctrine of God, by professor John Frame of Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, is a *tour de force* and deserves to become the standard Reformed work on the subject. With just over 800 pages, it is not for the faint hearted but it repays care-

ful study. Those who have previously thought of Professor Frame primarily as an apologist or a philosophical theologian will have to think again. His credentials as a systematic theologian are demonstrated in the breadth and thoroughness of this volume and in the wise and careful judgements he makes. Also in evidence is that typically gracious and humble approach, especially toward those with whom he disagrees, which characterizes all of his writing but which is often in such short supply among Reformed writers.

Professor Frame's central motif is covenant Lordship and he follows his earlier volumes, especially *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, in using as an overarching theme the three "lordship" attributes of control, authority and presence. He also develops a perspectival triad: "situational, normative and existential." This approach is broadly persuasive, if very occasionally forced! After an introduction (chapter 1) the book is divided into six main parts, each consisting of a number of chapters. After chapter 30, "Summary and Conclusion," there are nine appendices. Seven of these are book reviews, two are responses to book reviews and one is a further list of triads!

In chapter 1, Frame sets the scene and makes a number of introductory points. For example, he insists that while biblical theology is important it should not control systematic theology (7 and 8). He also notes that there is a tendency among some evangelicals to base theological judgements on tradition not Scripture (10), a tendency he successfully resists.

Part One of the book is titled, "Yahweh the Lord" (chapters 2-7). In chapter 2, Frame spells out the central motif of covenant lordship, noting the three "lordship attributes" of control, authority and presence. Chapter 3 is a superb chapter on the sovereignty of God, amassing all the biblical evidence. In chapter 4, "God's Control: Its Efficacy and Universality," Frame continues his discussion of the lordship attribute of control. In chapter 5, "The Lordship Attributes: Authority," he moves on to the second of the lordship attributes. He distinguishes between control and authority as representing the difference between might and right (81). In defining God's authority as absolute, Frame argues for the infallible authority

of God's Word on the basis of God's authority (89). He also shows that God's absolute authority precludes pluralism. Chapter 6, "The Lordship Attributes: Covenant Presence," deals with "presence," the third of the lordship attributes. He notes, however, that this is not "mere" presence but "covenantal presence," commenting: "He is with his creatures to bless and to judge them in accordance with the terms of his covenant" (94). In chapter 7, "Transcendence and Immanence," Frame turns to deal with the distinction (and the relationship) between transcendence and immanence. He would prefer the three lordship attributes to be used in place of this distinction, since they too describe God's relationship to the world (103). He regards immanence as equivalent to covenantal presence (105). He wants to see transcendence not simply as God "up there" but as representing "God's royal dignity" (105 and note 4). Thus he argues that transcendence is the equivalent of the lordship attributes of control and authority (106). Frame argues that, because of Greek philosophy, many unhelpful concepts of immanence and transcendence have entered Christian theology. He surveys the false views of immanence and transcendence, including deism, pantheism, panentheism (modern process theology) as well as the views of individuals like Barth and Moltmann. Many have argued that the problem in modern use of transcendence and immanence is the respective weight given to each and the lack of balance. Frame believes that the problem is wrong *views* of transcendence and immanence.

Part Two of the book is titled, "Some Problem Areas" (chapters 8 and 9). In chapter 8, "Human Responsibility and Freedom," Frame defines responsibility as accountability and liability. He demonstrates that both God's sovereignty and human responsibility are taught in Scripture. Indeed, he argues that human responsibility is only truly intelligible in the context of the lordship attributes of control and authority (125). Having provided a useful definition of "compatibilist freedom" (136), Frame goes on to argue that moral freedom was lost at the Fall but not compatibilist freedom. There follows an extended critique of libertarianism (138-145). In this

chapter Frame makes the point that human responsibility is based on the fact of God's authority rather than on some concept of freedom. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the problem of how divine control and human responsibility can both be true. He concludes by offering various models, especially that of the author and his characters. In chapter 9, "The Problem of Evil," Frame distinguishes first between natural evil and moral evil, the former being the result of the Fall. The remainder of the chapter concerns moral evil, including discussion of evil as privation, being and non-being and a version of the "greater good defence" vis-à-vis the problem of evil.

Part Three of the book is titled, "A Philosophy of Lordship" (chapters 10-12). In chapter 10, "Ethics," there is an interesting argument that philosophy is a sub-division of theology (185). There is also an important comment on the dangers of philosophy (185). Having provided an argument for dealing with ethics before epistemology and metaphysics (the other two main sub-divisions of Philosophy) he outlines three "metaethical tendencies": existential, teleological and deontological (187-92). He then discusses some other approaches before presenting his own position (192-98). He calls his position "an ethic of lordship" (198). In chapter 11, "Epistemology," Frame begins with Calvin's teaching on the interdependence of knowledge of God and knowledge of self and then discusses analogy and notes that knowledge begins with God's lordship (211). In chapter 12, "Metaphysics," which he also calls "ontology" (214), he makes the excellent, but often missed, point that you cannot talk of God's roles or functions without talking about his nature (215). In the course of this, he argues (217) that the Creator/Creature distinction is maintained even in the person of Christ! It will also be maintained in heaven (219).

Part Four of the book is titled, "The Acts of the Lord" (chapters 13-16). With chapter 13, "Miracle," we come to an important new stage in the book. Frame gives a preliminary definition of miracle (245-46), which he hones and refines through exposure to Scripture. There is a helpful excursus on

natural law (248-51). Interestingly, he draws our attention to Kuyper's view of miracle, namely, that Adam before the Fall had miraculous powers and therefore it was Jesus' unfallen human nature that enabled him to do miraculous things, *not* his divine nature (256-57). Frame thinks that these are interesting ideas but speculative and unproven. He then provides his own definition of miracle, "Miracles are extraordinary manifestations of God's covenant lordship" (258). Frame rejects the sharp distinction often made between providence and miracle. (261-62). He then touches on the issue of whether miracles have ceased (262). He believes that the canon is closed and that probably tongues and prophecy have ceased but that there is no theological reason why miracles should have ceased. He calls himself a semicessationist (263). In chapter 14, "Providence," he discusses providence under the three regular sub-divisions of "government," "preservation" and "concurrence" but adds a fourth category of "revelation" (275-76). In chapter 15, "Creation," he provides a good summary of the relationship between creation and redemption (295ff.) including a discussion of *ex nihilo* (298ff.) and the six days of creation (302ff.). Chapter 16, "God's Decrees," marks a transition point. It is in this section that his triad (control, authority, presence) comes particularly into its own (316-17). His distinction between being "historically elect" and "eternally elect" is profoundly helpful. The pages following are very helpful in expounding this distinction and solving some of the difficult theological problems concerning election (322-34). There is also a useful discussion of supralapsarianism & infralapsarianism (336-39). He chooses to reject both!

Part Five of the book is titled, "Biblical Descriptions of God" (chapters 17-26). In chapter 17, "Names of God," Frame runs through all the names used for God and explains their meanings. He notes, interestingly, that "God is incomprehensible, not unknowable" (347), in response to religious pluralism. In chapter 18, "Images of God," he deals with images such as "a king, a father, a shepherd, a light, or a shield." (362). In chapter 19, "God's Attributes," having

affirmed that the names, images and attributes of God are perspectively related, Frame now turns to the third area—the attributes. He refuses to identify any one attribute as "fundamental" but insists that all of them be viewed perspectively (393). In rejecting the classification of attributes based on a transcendence/ immanence model, Frame reminds us of his definitions of these words (397). Instead, he groups the attributes of God under the headings "power, knowledge and goodness" (397) and sets them in the context of the overall lordship attributes. In chapter 20, "God's Goodness," Frame deals with the "euthyphro problem": Is "good" what God says, or is goodness an independent concept to which God conforms? He deals in this chapter with goodness, love and grace, showing that they are all covenantal. There is an interesting excursus on "Common Grace" (429ff.) where Frame tentatively suggests that we should use a different expression to convey what common grace is normally taken to affirm. In chapter 21 "God's Righteousness and Wrath," Frame continues the discussion of "God's attributes of goodness—his attributes in the general sphere of ethics" (446). He affirms "God's Righteousness Standards" (the normative perspective) and notes that "the standard for our moral behavior is not an abstract concept, but an infinite person, God himself." (449). He then moves to the situational perspective, "God's Righteous Deeds," the actions of God in history (451ff.). In the remainder of the chapter (458ff.) he deals with God's jealousy, hatred and wrath. In chapter 22 "God's Knowledge," Frame deals with the epistemological attributes. He has already dealt with two of these (incomprehensibility and knowability); now he deals with the other five: speech, truth, knowledge, wisdom and mind. There is an interesting excursus on God's foreknowledge, directed against Arminians and Open Theists (486ff.). In chapter 23 "God's Power," Frame notes that "God is able to do 'all things,' not just the things he has ordained" (518). This is qualified, since God cannot lie, etc. (518-21). There is also an interesting discussion on "absolute" and "ordinate" power (523-25). Frame also has a very good section here on "God's Will" (528-42), dealing

with "Antecedent and Consequent wills," and "Decretive and Preceptive Wills." In chapter 24, "Lord of Time," Frame deals with several of God's "attributes of power" as he prefers to call them, namely, infinity, eternity, temporal omnipresence and unchangeability. In chapter 25, "Lord of Space, Matter, Light and Breath," he says that God is "immense" (579) as well as omnipresent and incorporeal. In his section on "Theophany and Incarnation," (585-87) Frame argues that "the Creator-creative distinction must be affirmed even in Christ" referring to the two natures (587). This is naturally followed by a section on "God's Invisibility" (587-91). The chapter ends with sections on God's glory and his spirituality. Chapter 26, "The Self-Contained God," has two sections: Aseity (600-608) and Impassibility (608-16). Frame maintains the doctrine of impassibility, carefully defined, in response to Moltmann (614).

Part Six of the book is titled, "The Triune God" (chapters 27-29). In chapter 27, "God, Three in One," references to the triadic nature of the godhead, in both Old Testament and New Testament, are explored. God is one and God is three. Chapter 28, "The Three are God," powerfully amasses the evidence for the deity of Christ and then very briefly (685-87) summarises the evidence for the deity of the Holy Spirit. Chapter 29, "Father, Son, and Spirit," deals with the distinctiveness of the persons within the Trinity and their eternal relationship to one another. Frame, from a starting point in John 17:22, suggests that the "mutual glorification" within the persons of the trinity should be reflected in the Church. We are to "glorify" one another (696). On the use of the vocabulary of trinity: *substantia*, *hypostasis* etc., he brings a welcome wisdom (700). The complexity of the relationship between God as one and God as three is brought out in dialogue with Cornelius Plantinga (701-703). The argument that God is one person (as well as three) is discussed in relation to both Warfield and Van Til (703-704). In dealing with "eternal generation" (707-14) he goes as far as Scripture does, then adopts what he calls "a certain amount of reverent agnosticism," quoting similarly from Charles Hodge and Robert

Dabney (712-13). His conclusion is very good, arguing that "at least some of this discussion amounts to playing with words." (714). On "eternal procession" (714-16), he takes substantially the same position. He is also somewhat non-committal on the "filioque" clause (716-19). In an interesting section on "subordination" (719-22) he argues for an eternal and ontological subordination of role within the trinity, on the basis of analogy rather than scriptural data. In discussing models for the Trinity he notes that Barth and Rahner reject the notion of "three centers of consciousness," which he accepts. His use of Poythress (729-32) on the Trinity and on logic bears further, closer study.

In the concluding chapter, "Summary and Conclusion," Frame gives a superb summary of the main themes of the book. The last few pages (739-42) are on the theme: "Does God exist?" and are marvelously evangelistic.

Professor Frame has provided us with a massive treatise, which not only takes us back deep into the Scriptures and reaffirms the orthodox doctrine of the Church, but which also stimulates fresh thinking. He brings to the subject his massive learning, so that he engages with theologians and philosophers, past and present, from across the theological spectrum. He also demonstrates a real awareness of the key issues at stake and of the way in which these issues have been dealt with by other scholars.

There are undoubtedly some who will argue that Frame provides insufficient historical analysis of the development of the doctrine of God. Perhaps three points ought to be made in response to this. First, as a matter of accuracy, the criticism is unfair. Where treatment of the historical debate is necessary to the discussion (Council of Nicaea, etc.) it is there. Second, Frame's main intention is to provide a biblical and theological study of the doctrine and not an historical study. Third, there is a developing flaw in many treatments of doctrine within the Reformed tradition whereby theologians judge all matters on the basis of the "Reformed tradition." Hence those who change the language of Reformed theology, or express old doctrines in new ways, or refuse to use the traditional categories,

immediately come under suspicion. Those who deal with theology in this unfortunate and deeply unreformed manner will not like this book.

Frame's exposition of the doctrine of God is solidly based on his exposition of Scripture. Where he questions or rejects the Reformed tradition, he does so on that basis. His commitment to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is evident throughout, both in positive affirmations of the doctrine and also in the theological methodology he adopts. I await with interest the next volume in this projected series, which is to be on the authority of Scripture. He has given us hints here (and in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*) as to how he will deal with that subject, but it will be worth waiting for.

At a number of points in the book Frame brings his mind to bear on some of the most difficult problems in Reformed theology and offers creative, biblical solutions. See, for example, his marvelous treatment of human responsibility and freedom in chapter 8 and his exposition of the doctrine of election in chapter 16. These are chapters to which I will be directing any of my students who have difficulties in these areas.

Frame is also profoundly challenging at points, leaving one with the need and desire to go back again to consider some deep matters. For example, is he correct in what he says about the need for a revision of the language of common grace (429ff.)? On another matter, is it true that "the Creator-creature distinction must be affirmed even in Christ" (587)?

At several points I was not convinced (or still remain to be convinced) by his arguments. Let me give just three examples. First, his acceptance of using "extra-biblical female images as images of God" (386) seemed to undermine his earlier arguments. Second, I am not sure about his use of "necessity and freedom" (529). Third, I was not convinced by his arguments for an eternal and ontological subordination of role within the trinity (719-22). I also had one concern about the structure of the book, namely, the need for the appendices. In my view, it would probably have been better to work the themes into the main text of the book. For example, instead of the

review of Brian Armstrong's *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, it would have been better to work a discussion of Amyraldianism into chapter 16 on God's decrees.

All in all, however, this book is probably the most important and significant volume I have read for some time and I cannot commend it too highly.

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**ENGAGING GOD'S WORLD: A CHRISTIAN VISION OF  
FAITH, LEARNING, AND LIVING**

Cornelius Plantinga Jr.  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)  
150 pages, paper, \$15.00

Cornelius Plantinga Jr., president of Calvin Theological Seminary, dedicates this book to Charles Colson, "who kneels with those who stumble" (v). "You are holding," writes Plantinga, "a monograph that Calvin College commissioned me to write when I was its Dean of the Chapel. I have edited it for a wider Christian audience, but I still write as who I am—a Christian minister in the Reformed tradition who probably quotes Calvin too often" (xv). Who does he quote? If Plantinga probably quotes Calvin too often, then he probably quotes C. S. Lewis way too often. The quotations are really worth the price of the book, unless the reader is already well read. The author quotes from poets, Catholics, Anglicans, Church Fathers, Reformed theologians, and fiction writers, using "reader-friendly" footnotes instead of endnotes. Each chapter begins with a relevant series of Bible verses on the chapter's theme that appear on the first page of the respective chapter.

The contents are broken down following the standard pattern of a systematic theology, but they are written more

like a Christian living manual. Plantinga beautifully begins with a chapter titled, "Longing and Hope." This is a great way to invite the reader into theology so that the heart and life are both deeply moved. Influenced by C. S. Lewis' exploration of the phenomena of human longing and yearning, Plantinga invites the reader to actually long for "Shalom." "This webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight," Plantinga explains, "is what the Hebrew prophets called *shalom*" (14-15). The remaining chapters cover creation, the fall, redemption, and "vocation in the Kingdom of God." By this method the reader is urged to thirst for shalom at the beginning of the book before covering the three major themes of Scripture, and then to discover his or her significance through the classic Reformed doctrine of vocation and calling in the end.

For me the highlights within this framework are "dreams and visions" in the New Covenant (12), hospitality as it relates to God in three persons (20-21), God's "endless dance of *perichoresis*" (22), an apologetic against creative anti-realists (41-43), the limits of mere education to redeem (68), a corrective to "entire sanctification" doctrines (90-91), why "God loves adverbs" (117-121), and the privilege believers have of being "a prime citizen" in the Kingdom of God by a fulfilling vocation catalyzed by a Christian education (108-144).

If you were thinking of sending your children to a secular university or to any other Christian college besides Calvin College, you may want to read Plantinga first. He uses not only Harvard College's original 1643 educational pamphlet as an illustration, he also uses Calvin College's statement of purpose twice (124, 130). This book is *highly recommended* for all the above reasons.

ROBERT DAVIS SMART  
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ACTUALLY, WE'D PREFER YOU'D USE "THE SPIRITUALLY CHALLENGED IN THE WARM EMBRACE OF THEIR HIGHER POWER."