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Woman in the Bible

by Mary Evans

(Paternoster Press: Exeter, 1983)

133 pages, £ 4.95

There is no doubt as to the contemporary importance of women's role, both in the church and in secular society. 1985 marks the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, with the closing conference held in Nairobi, Kenya. Over recent years, many books have been published on the subject and evangelical Christians are becoming increasingly aware of the need to come to grips with the issue from a firm biblical basis. Most of the Christian books on the topic, although referring to the biblical evidence, are of the lightweight variety, designed to appeal to a wide lay leadership. They are generally written from a western cultural viewpoint (a very middle-class western cultural viewpoint at that) and therefore have little relevance for other cultures. What would the average rural African make of one writer's assertion that a woman's place is in the home because "it is every child's inalienable right to come home to the smell of fresh-baked cookies"?

It is refreshing, therefore, to read Mary Evans' book **Woman in the Bible** with its detailed exegetical approach. Her intention is to examine what the Bible says about women and their role, and in particular how the New Testament church viewed its female half. She starts by surveying the Old Testament doctrine and practice, then moves on to a section on contemporary cultural and religious influences on the New Testament. She then has three sections on the New Testament: the gospels; doctrinal teaching in the Acts and the Epistles; and community practice in the Acts and the Epistles. Mary Evans teaches at London Bible College, England, and her M.Phil. thesis provides the backbone of the book. It is a tightly argued work and requires careful reading.

The widely held view that from creation woman is receptive, passive and a follower, whereas man is the active initiator and leader is convincingly argued to have little biblical foundation. Most Christians holding a traditional view of women's role in the church use verses from I Cor 11 and 14 and I Timothy 2 as proof texts to limit women's participation and function in the church. Mary Evans looks at all these passages in great detail, but with her wider biblical approach comes to a more egalitarian conclusion. She looks closely at the concepts of authority, headship and submission, and concludes that the evidence does not necessarily lead one to a traditionalist position.

The usual interpretations of I Cor 14:34-35 have two main problems: (a) the command for women to remain silent contradicts I Cor 11 where Paul permits women to pray and prophesy; (b) it is difficult to understand the appeal to the Law. Paul normally uses the word to refer to the Old Testament law, but the Old Testament nowhere forbids women to speak in the assembly (and even if it did, it is most unlike Paul to require his gentile converts to obey the Old Testament law. On the contrary his

normal stance is to emphasize the Christian's freedom from the law). Mary Evans, following J.A. Anderson and J. Harper, posits an interesting interpretation, namely that I Cor 14:34-35 are a quote from the Corinthians' letter to Paul, which he goes on to refute. Although speculative, this certainly poses fewer problems than the standard interpretations.

Of the I Timothy 2 passage, Mary Evans maintains that the prohibition against women teaching was never intended to be universal or permanent, especially in view of Paul's acceptance of Priscilla as a teacher, and his exhortations elsewhere (e.g. Col 3:16, Romans 15:14) for believers to teach one another. This view is gaining credence among evangelicals although many would hold that the kind of teaching open to women is unofficial, whilst only men are allowed to teach in an official capacity. Mary Evans does not believe that such a distinction can be sustained from the New Testament. Some commentators understand the reference to the Fall in I Timothy 2:14 to mean that women are easily deceived and that this is one reason why Paul does not permit them to teach. However, as is pointed out in the book, Paul uses the same illustration in 2 Corinthians 11:3 to speak of the possibility of both men and women being deceived. [In this context it is interesting to note Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger's view of I Timothy 2:13-14: they refer to gnostic teaching that special revelation was given to Eve, for she was the first to eat of the tree of knowledge (gnosis) and had also enjoyed a prior existence. If this heresy was indeed current at Ephesus, it gives extra weight to Paul's insistence that Adam was created first, and Eve deceived (not enlightened) when she ate the fruit. As John Stott points out in his **Issues Facing Christians Today**, this view is at best speculative, but it does serve to show that the matter is not as black and white as some would lead us to believe.]

Mary Evans brings convincing evidence to show that headship in the New Testament does not necessarily imply authority. She suggests that in I Corinthians 11, "head" is more appropriately linked with "source", and in Ephesians 5 with self-sacrificing service. It would have been helpful to have had this, and other themes (such as the husband being prior in the marriage relationship) further developed and applied to contemporary situations. However, Mary Evans cannot be criticised for this, since she states in her introduction that her aim is to study the biblical data, and not to decide how it should affect us today (although she fully recognizes the importance of the application of biblical teaching). In fact this could be seen as one of the strengths of the book since it makes it relevant for Christians of differing cultural backgrounds. Africans will find the material helpful as they seek to do their own contextualization.

Not everyone will agree with the book's conclusions. Nevertheless, **Woman in the Bible** is an important work for anyone who wishes to take seriously the biblical teaching on this subject. Mary Evans has covered the basic groundwork. It is now up to others to see how this can be applied to the contemporary situation. It is to be hoped that African evangelicals will be amongst those to take up the challenge.

Alison Cook
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Unreached People of Kenya: Summary Report

Ken Shingledecker, editor
(Daystar Communication: Nairobi, 1982)
120 pages, Ksh 20/=

According to published statistics, Kenya is one of the most Christian countries in Africa. Some 70% of Kenya's 16 million people are now considered to be Christians. Yet within Kenya there are a number of smaller people groups which are still unreached with the Gospel, or where there is not yet a viable church.

Daystar Communications, on behalf of the Committee on Unreached Peoples, has conducted an extensive survey throughout Kenya to determine which of Kenya's more than 60 people groups are still without a viable church. The research has centered on 26 people groups which together make up less than 11% of the population of Kenya.

The report has revealed that there are some people groups in Kenya with no Christian church at all. The 380,000 Somali who live in Kenya's Northeastern Province are one of these unreached groups. To date there are less than 5 known Somali Christians living in Northeastern and only 2 or 3 ministries actively trying to reach these Somali for Christ. The Somali, like many of the unreached of Kenya, are nomadic, strongly Muslim, and live in one of the more remote parts of Kenya. Hostile relationships between Somali clans make ministry even more difficult, as a ministry to one clan excludes one from any relationship with other clans. Other unreached people groups include the Korokoro, Malakote, Digo, Swahili, Bajun, Boni and Orma (all Muslim peoples).

Other people groups in Kenya have been found to have some Christian witness and the nucleus of a church, but one which is small and weak. The Samburu, Rendille, Gabbra and Boran of north Kenya would fall into this category. Among these peoples there are pockets of other people (Sakuye, Daasenech, El Molo, etc) who are still unreached.

There are other people groups which research has revealed have a large church with widespread influence throughout the people. The Massai, with their more than 395 congregations, 43 trained pastors, and 220 evangelists scattered throughout the Massai area, are one of these groups in which God has now solidly planted his church. Other groups where there was found to be a strong Christian presence include the Pokot, Girriama and Turkana.

The study reveals that there are Christians working with nearly every people group in Kenya, but in many cases there is not yet a viable church that has its own pastors, evangelists and lay leaders and which is carrying on evangelism of its own. Among these people groups there is still a need for missionaries to assist in the establishing of the Christian church.

This volume, while only a summary of the major findings of a

comprehensive study of Kenya's Unreached Peoples points the reader to the availability from Daystar of 13 detailed reports covering each of the 26 people groups studied. These volumes filled with facts, statistics and recommendations are of extreme importance to anyone concerned with Kenya's Unreached Peoples.

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Paul Tillich

by John P. Newport
(Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984),
232 pages, \$12.95

Paul Tillich is believed by many to be the most significant North American theologian of this century. John Newport backs this up with the results of a survey published in 1977 by the Council of the Study of Religion (p.16). The study showed that among 554 theologians surveyed, Tillich ranked first as the major influence among American theologians. In addition, Tillich's **Systematic Theology** is the most widely used text among North American theologians. So a book of this nature, which introduces such an influential thinker, is a welcome addition.

Paul Tillich is part of a series called **Makers of the Modern Theological Mind**, which is edited by Bob E. Patterson. The purpose of the series is to provide a reliable introduction and guide to the ideas of the men who have shaped Christian theology in this century.

The purpose of this particular book is to "set forth in clear, intelligible form the basic purpose, idea, method and key concepts of Paul Tillich's theological writings" (p.15). Along with this, Newport seeks to point out the various influences which have shaped both Tillich and his ideas. John Newport appears to be highly qualified to write such a book. Not only has he done limited study under Tillich, but is presently a director of the North American Paul Tillich Society.

Unfortunately, this reviewer feels that Newport was only partially successful in accomplishing his purpose. Therefore, it might be helpful to comment on both the strengths and weaknesses of the book.

In terms of strengths, first the book is extremely well organized and laid out for the author's purposes. It is divided into four parts. Part one deals primarily with an introduction to the life, background, purpose and influences of Tillich. The reader will find this part very helpful, especially the sections on his basic purpose (apologist to intellectuals) and basic idea (Ontology: essence, existence and essentialization). Part two deals briefly with Tillich's method and then more extensively with his main ideas and the outworking of his system. The brief chapter on his method is important since some feel Tillich's greatest contribution to theology is not dogmatics but methodology. Part three introduces the relationship and

importance of Judaism and other world religions in Tillich's system. Part four concludes the book with an evaluation both of Tillich's life and work. This, too, the readers will find helpful because Newport cites the weaknesses and strengths as perceived by other theologians. Overall, the organization of the book provides a good structure from which to introduce Tillich.

A second strength is the unbiased nature of the book. Usually in writing a book of this nature an author is so much for or against the subject of the book that a fair, unbiased account is not written. However Newport provides a very fair representation of Tillich and his ideas. He assesses both strengths and criticisms from others at various points in the book. So one sees Tillich as Tillich.

A third strength is the wealth of biographical material in the book. The book is well footnoted so the student can easily refer to the primary sources for further study. In addition, Newport shows familiarity with all of Tillich's major writings.

The weaknesses of the book can be summed up in Newport's failure to make Tillich truly intelligible to people who are not academicians trained in western, especially existential, philosophy. Frequently statements are made without any supportive explanation. So it almost seems that a basic familiarity with Tillich and his ideas is already assumed.

Along with the above, there are sections of the book in which key concepts and major ideas of thought are not sufficiently defined and explained. Tillich's ideas are usually expressed in very technical, philosophical terms that are not part of every-day vocabulary. Consequently the reader will struggle with some parts. It would have been more helpful if Newport would have taken Tillichian ideas and communicated them in more common language. Since he has not done this, this will probably be a difficult book to understand for most African students and pastors.

However, the book is not without value. While it is not an adequate substitute for Tillich's own writings, it would be a helpful guide and resource along with a first hand study of Tillich. This book is recommended for any student as a resource if one is studying all or part of Tillich's writings.

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Jesus Christ: The Witness of History
by Sir Norman Anderson
(Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1985)
176pp.

This book is a revision by the author of **Christianity: The Witness of History** (1969). The work is intended primarily as a defense of the factual and historical basis of Christianity, with a focus on the plethora of reliable sources that authenticate the New Testament accounts of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ as well as His crucifixion and resurrection. The author's

major concern is to demonstrate that "the Christian faith did not emerge from some popular legend . . . nor yet from any process of metaphysical speculation" (pp.7-8).

It is only at infrequent intervals that a book appears that is both overtly sympathetic to Christianity and also highly convincing in its own right. Anderson's book is of this calibre. Besides being well organized and masterfully written, with every word properly fitted like a gemstone in an intricately designed bracelet, the book takes the reader from point to point with arguments that savour of integrity rather than manipulation. The author's breadth of knowledge of Greek, Roman and Hebrew culture and history gives this book a rare feature that many so-called Christian college texts lack: resonance. The tone of the book is scholarly, but not pedantic; it is vibrant and dynamic, but not brash or colloquial.

No college or seminary that stresses the reliability of Scripture should be without this book. Steering a straight course between the Charybdis of theological liberalism which challenges the authority of Scripture as a whole and the Scylla of neo-orthodoxy with its shifting eclecticism, Anderson makes a strong case for both the historical basis for Christian belief as well as its existential integrity. To have a "firm" belief not based on actual historical events is merely subjectivism, and is ultimately incapable of rational defense; yet to be intellectually convinced of the reliability of the New Testament account of the life of Christ without personal commitment also falls short of the faith the apostles were willing to die for. The author thus implicitly invites the honest inquirer to sift the evidence -- but this evidence may very well lead to Christian commitment.

Jesus Christ: The Witness of History is then, the kind of book that any thinking person would enjoy reading. The young Christian will be impressed by the wealth of learning that permeates the firm faith of the author, while the mature Christian will appreciate the rich perspectives and insights that unfold page after page. Any open-minded sceptic or agnostic will be amazed at the author's intimate familiarity with the secularly oriented mind and all of the common objections raised against Christianity.

The book deserves a careful reading in the western world, where it is fashionable among so-called intellectuals to reject Christianity as passe without giving it the honest consideration they would give to anything else they might encounter, however bizarre or perverse; it is needed in the African community, where there is increasing pressure to mold and reshape Christianity into some of the traditional or tribal patterns of belief. Anderson earns himself a hearing by freely admitting that "the other world religions include much that is true and helpful . . . all that is true ultimately comes from God" (p 18). Yet, he clearly recognizes the unique and indispensable claims of Christ and Christianity and then carefully proceeds to demonstrate the strength and integrity of these claims. **Jesus Christ: The Witness of History**, without a trace of fanfare, implicitly urges the objective inquirer to move beyond syncretism towards the clearer light of a "mere" Christianity based on facts not myths.

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**The World In Between:
Christian Healing and the Struggle
for Spiritual Survival**

by E. Milingo

(C. Hurst and Company: London and Orbis Books: Maryknoll,
New York, 1984)
138 pages £ 3.75

Emmanuel Milingo became the Archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia, in 1969 at the age of 39. In 1973 he discovered he had a gift of healing and this became a major part of his ministry. Three years later he came into contact with the Catholic charismatic movement which came to be an important source of encouragement for him. But his fellow clergy in Zambia, especially the Europeans, were not happy with the healing aspect of his ministry, and in 1982 he was summoned to Rome to explain his pastoral methods. He subsequently resigned as Archbishop and is now a Special Delegate to the Pontifical Commission on Migration, Refugees and Tourism. He continues his healing ministry on Rome.

This book is made up of extracts from Archbishop Milingo's writings from 1976 - 1982, which have been re-edited with his permission by Mona Macmillan, an English Roman Catholic writer. It is not a systematic presentation of Milingo's thought but a personal explanation and defense of his ministry. He writes of himself as being at one and the same time a Roman Catholic, a pastor-healer and an African, and the book can be considered under these three themes.

As a Roman Catholic, Milingo is a child of his church. His healing ministry which so offended his fellow clergy, was nevertheless conducted within the framework of Catholic liturgy and practice, including for example, reliance on the prayers of saints and angels.

Because of his basic attitude of loyalty and obedience to his church he was astonished and deeply hurt by the response of the church to his ministry and the trials he has received as a consequence. At the same time in the chapter 'Living in Christ' his description of his experience of Christ and prayer is strongly 'evangelical'. He expresses very clearly his dependence on Christ, his work on the cross and his all-conquering resurrection.

As a pastor-healer, Milingo insists that the church must face the facts of where people are as it ministers to them. A minister of the church who evades people's needs for the sake of his own comfort denies his ministry. Christians in Africa -- as elsewhere -- are troubled by illness and death, poverty, family and work problems. But because the church has not given them

help that makes sense, Christians are looking for help from 'alien and dangerous sources.' They are Christians with two religions; he quotes a Kenyan nun, 'We leave (God) in the church on Sunday and we ask our ancestral gods to accompany us for the rest of the week' (p.77).

Milingo's particular concern is for those troubles by **mashwe**, a form of spirit possession. This possession he attributes to demons (bad angels) or to the spirits of the ancestors who have been angered or who seek revenge; these evil spirits are parasites on the person possessed. The task of the church is to exorcise such spirits, so that the person may be healed. To engage in exorcism is no light thing; serious precautions must be taken. Milingo is very clear on the power, destructiveness and deceit of the devil. He warns against pride, impatience and professionalism when ministering. He stresses total dependence on Jesus Christ and total confidence in the power of the Blood of Jesus. 'Jesus has done it for us . . . He has full authority over Satan and all his powers' (pp. 70-71).

No Christian in Africa would dispute the importance of the spirit world, 'the world-in-between' as Milingo calls it. The church in Africa needs teaching on 'the evil spirits and how to fight them' to quote one of the chapter headings. But there are some difficult distinctions that need to be made about the spirit world and I'm not sure that Milingo always gets them right. Is it speaking biblically to speak about possession by benign guardian spirits which do not require exorcism? Is it possible for spirits of ancestors who have been angered to return to trouble relatives? (Milingo speaks of them as needing permission from God to return to earth, but he doesn't elaborate on this). How can we distinguish between the spirit of an ancestor with an evil intent and a demon? Milingo admits that the demons are great liars, able to take the name of a relative. I would like to see these sort of questions given more biblical thought and evaluation.

But it is in the chapter, 'African Spirituality' that I found Milingo most thought-provoking. For him African Traditional Religion (ATR) is a providential preparation for the Gospel. He uses the teaching of the book of Hebrews to suggest that it has a place in relation to the Gospel equivalent to the place of Old Testament religion. 'Just as Paul (sic) showed the Jews the superiority of Jesus over Moses, Melchisedek and the Jewish sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats, so should the Africans be reasoned with too. . . , on the basis of their respect for their ancestors (p.85). Christianity is a conqueror but not a destroyer of what exists. 'Make an African a Christian **with** his beliefs in ancestral spirits'. This is 'a necessary step on the way to their full conversion.' So Jesus is the Ancestor of ancestors and the Mediator of mediators; 'the living-dead ancestors . . . will give away when Jesus comes in' (p.87).

Once again I fully agree with Milingo's desire to express the Gospel in terms that make sense to the African. God does walk with his people. He does live with them and he may be consulted by them every time a need arises. In that sense he is God in the traditional African pattern. The distant God 'who remains in the church as preached by 'Western Christianity' is a

caricature of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But is it right to put ATR on the same level as OT religion as a preparation for the Gospel? Doesn't OT religion have a unique place in God's revelation? The Gospel may not destroy what already exists but it does **supersede** it. Milingo argues 'Paul did not say to the Jews that the blood of bulls and goats was ineffective. He only pointed out that the Blood of Christ has much greater efficacy,' (p.82) implying that ATR is similarly not effective. But isn't this exactly what the writer to the Hebrews does say, that the blood of bulls and goats **was** ineffective; it could not do what needed to be done between man and God, it could only give him a superficial cleansing. So should we not query the true effectiveness of ATR between man and God? (Especially when what Milingo sees as its key aspect, 'we can speak with the dead,' is specifically forbidden in OT religion, as well as being forbidden to the Christian).

Inevitably in a compilation like this there is a certain 'bittiness' of presentation, but Milingo's writing is always interesting and at times properly disturbing. One omission, I think, is a bibliography for further reading: the brief bibliographical note on Vatican documents is not enough.

Ultimately this is a book about Christian ministry in Africa, and therefore it is very relevant to those who exercise pastoral care in Africa, and to those who are training to do so. The moral of the book so far as the Catholic church is concerned is: "You can't be an Archbishop and a healer at the same time . . . at least not if you are an African." That surely is a sad conclusion. The moral so far as this reviewer is concerned is: let us listen to the African -- let us listen to our own hearts if we are African. Let us not close our eyes and ears to the real needs and experiences of people, and let us minister with compassion in the all-powerful Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Ethics: Approaching Moral Decision

by Arthur F. Holmes

(Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 1984)

132 pp. Ksh. 73/50

Metaphysics: Constructing a World View

by William Hasker

(Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1983)

132 pp. Ksh. 73/50

Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions is designed as a basic introduction to the philosophical perspective on ethics. Holmes divides the book into four major sections. The first section (Chapter one) briefly examines the interrelationship between

Christianity and ethics. The second (Chapter two through five) explains four views that are opposed to Christian ethics. The third (chapters six through eight) is used to propose a general Christian ethic in which Holmes puts forth three proposals for the development of ethical theory:

Our proposals have included (1) a structure for Christian ethics that distinguishes cases, area rules, the overall principals of justice and love, and their logical basis, (2) an approach to moral knowledge via biblical and natural indicators of God's purposes for us in His creation, and (3) the basis of obligation in the divine nature and will (p.78).

The fourth (Chapters nine through twelve) attempts to apply this ethic to four moral issues faced today (including criminal punishment, laws that regulate morality, sex and marriage, and the ethics of virtue).

Ethics follows the general format of this series, which is designed to introduce students to different fields of philosophy. The student who hopes to see detailed expositions of texts will be disappointed, since the stress is on the philosophical considerations rather than the exegetical options. In addition, the nature of the series prevents any really detailed discussion of the topics at hand. **Ethics** is designed to introduce, not expound.

As an introduction, **Ethics** serves its purpose well. Holmes avoids lengthy discourse, but does not avoid discussion on different issues. The overall approach is balanced and gives the reader the chance to consider differing perspectives. The average reader will find it heavy on the philosophy and needs to be ready to take some time with the book. As expected, the illustrations and case studies are primarily American, making some hard to follow. The four moral issues he discusses are in process of becoming more relevant here, and the book might help by being a preventative for the Christian community.

Three major weaknesses include (1) some of the major issues faced here in Africa are completely ignored (e.g. polygamy), (2) Holmes seems to leave open doors on certain issues that the reader may rather see closed (e.g. abortion and the question of whether or not morality should be legislated), and (3) the far heavier reliance on a philosophical/theological framework than a purely biblical one. The first and third are understandable in light of the nature (introductory) and expected audience (American University students) of the book. The second is a reflection of the greater reliance on philosophical foundations than on purely biblical ones in developing ethical concepts, and is the greatest weakness in the book as seen by this reviewer.

In spite of these two weaknesses and the difficulty of reading the book, as a basic introduction to the philosophy of ethics it is well worth taking the time necessary to become familiar with its contents.

In **Metaphysics: Constructing a Worldview**, Hasker presents the same type of overview of metaphysics as Holmes did on ethics. In the first chapter Hasker introduces the topic by asking three questions which metaphysics seeks to answer: (1) What is real (2)

What is ultimately real? (3) What is man's place in what is real? Recognizing that these are not the only questions asked in metaphysics, he builds a basic methodology for answering them by setting out two guiding principles which enables him to proceed in his analysis. First, he says, "We must take as premises for metaphysical argument anything we know or have good reason to believe is true" (p.19). The second rule is, "No belief no matter how firmly held or apparently well supported, is beyond the possibility of challenge or question," (p.20). The second of course may give us trouble as believers, but Hasker perceives it as necessary as we really desire to understand metaphysics. The only foundation left for evaluating metaphysical answers is to do so on the basis of their factual adequacy, logical consistency and explanatory power.

Given these bases of evaluation and his guiding principles, Hasker sets out to deal with selected metaphysical questions. Chapter two explores the concept of free will: does it really exist, or is everything already determined? Chapter three discusses the nature of the relationship of the mind and body: are we nothing more than physical creatures, or is there something in us that goes beyond our bodies? (His answer is an interesting one that will certainly provoke the reader's thought.) Chapter four attempts to examine the nature of our world and the resulting consequences for science and scientific thought. Chapter five introduces the concept of God, and shows various philosophies of His nature and interaction with the world. The epilogue seeks, on the basis of previous discussion, to build a Christian outlook. Hasker tries to show that there are three foundations upon which the Christian metaphysic must be built: God, creation, and man as the image of God.

The presentation as a whole, like that of Holmes, is well-argued though it will not be easy reading for the beginner. Be ready to take the time to read it carefully and put it down occasionally in order to think. As an introduction the purpose is clearly achieved, though sometimes with the loss of a more detailed explanation of various views.

Metaphysics, like **Ethics** is not concerned with Scriptural exposition as much as philosophical understanding. They were not designed to give a biblical introduction, and they hold to their designed scope. Thus, the reader may be frustrated with a lack of Scriptural backing which would shed light on the complex issues that are presented.

Again, as with **Ethics** the weaknesses are outweighed by the overall strengths this book has as a basic introduction to the topic of metaphysics. Do not, however, expect it to go beyond the stated intention in the introduction.

There were some weaknesses that should be pointed out. First, the term "metaphysics" itself is never clearly defined. Second, many illustrations will give difficulty to a non-American, non-science student. Third, he does not adequately seek to integrate the philosophical systems with their corresponding theological ones, which would be of great use to the Christian audience for which it was written. Fourth, his presentation on constructing a Christian worldview lacked depth. Finally the nature of the questions asked was heavily western and

not necessarily relevant to the African scene.

My overall recommendation is that both books are worth a careful reading, but I would at the same time suggest that these would be more suited for school libraries than the student's personal collection. This is mainly because the cost does not justify the material unless the student plans on philosophical study in the future.

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Christian Theology

Vol. I

by Millard J. Erickson
(Baker: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983)
pp. 477., N.P.

Erickson's three-volume **Christian Theology** is planned to correlate with the three readings in Christian theology (**The Living God, Man's Need and God's Gift, The New Life**) which he edited and which are already published by Baker. Erickson's projected audience is the seminary student who is already familiar with the contents of the O.T. and N.T., with the history of Christianity, and who also possesses a rudimentary knowledge of N.T. Greek. His perspective is unashamedly evangelical but he does take great pains to interact with important theologians of other persuasions.

The book consists of four sections. The first explores the nature of theology, its relationship with philosophy, and the correct way of doing theology, especially in the light of the developments in form criticism and redaction criticism. Although the primary datum for theological study must be divine revelation, philosophy, we are told, "can evaluate the cogency of the evidence advanced [by theology], the logical validity of its arguments, and the meaningfulness or ambiguity of the concepts" (p.28). The first section also includes a chapter on contemporizing the Christian message, in which the author offers guidelines for distinguishing between culturally relative and universally applicable doctrines, and a chapter on theological language in which the charge of Logical Positivists that religious language is meaningless is rebutted.

Section two deals with revelation. Against Barth, the importance of general revelation is affirmed. It is also insisted that special revelation is both personal and propositional (**pace** Kierkegaard and Neo-Orthodoxy). While rejecting the dictation theory of Biblical inspiration, Erickson nevertheless maintains that the very words of Scripture were given by God: "Since God has access to the very thought processes of the human author and, in the case of the believer, indwells the individual in the person of the Holy Spirit, this is no difficult matter, particularly when the individual is praying for enlightenment and displaying receptivity. The process is not greatly unlike telepathy . . ." (p.218).

After a detailed evaluation of the inerrancy debate, the author accepts the word defined thus: "The Bible, when correctly interpreted, in the light of the level to which culture and the means of communication had developed at the time it was written, and in view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that it affirms" (pp. 233 f). A final chapter deals with the question of Biblical authority. The position taken is that we know Scripture is authoritative not because the church tells us, nor because rational evidence like fulfilled prophecy compels such belief, but rather because the Holy Spirit convinces us of its divine origin while enlightening us to its meaning.

The third section is concerned with the nature of God. Erickson refuses the abstract categories inherited from Scholasticism and prefers, for example, to speak of God's 'constancy' rather than his 'immutability'; God is stable but not static. He also experiences time but ". . . is not restricted by the dimension of time" (p.274). After exploring what he calls the 'Attributes of Greatness', Erickson discusses first God's moral qualities and then there follows a detailed treatment of God's 'Nearness and Distance' (Immanence and Transcendence). The third section ends with a chapter on 'God's Three-In-Oneness' in which the author admits that whereas formerly he accepted a modal view, he now realizes the necessity of affirming equally both the oneness and the threeness. As an analogy we are offered the familiar wave/particle paradox.

The fourth and final part is entitled, 'What God Does' and deals with such issues as Creation, Providence, Theodicy and Angels. While preferring the word 'plan' to 'decrees', Erickson holds a strong view of divine sovereignty while maintaining that this does not negate human freedom. In light of both the scientific and biblical evidence, he feels progressive creationism is the most tenable hypothesis. His Theodicy follows orthodox lines: the free-will defense plus natural evils explained in terms of the regularity of the universe, the role of pain as a warning signal etc. His treatment of angels, good and evil, is carefully balanced, for example he writes, "The Christian should be alert to the possibility of demon possession occurring today. At the same time one should not too quickly attribute aberrant physical and psychical phenomena to demon possession" (p. 450).

This brief survey of the book's contents cannot do justice to the thoroughness and penetration of Erickson's treatment of the issues he addresses. On the whole he manages to make well-worn doctrines interesting and potentially baffling themes like Heidegger's notion of Nothingness (p.370) both intelligible and fascinating. He has succeeded in writing an up-to-date theology which, while being uncompromisingly biblical, is also prepared to build upon such recent techniques as redaction criticism and upon the work of important contemporary theologians like Pannenberg under whom, in fact, he studied for a time. The book is not only contemporary in its scholarship but also topical in its illustrations.

The structure of the book is clear and helpful. When relevant, some historical theology is provided, and a survey

given of the various opinions current today. The author then expounds his own view with biblical support and, again when relevant, with rational argument. One then discovers a particularly valuable aspect of the volume: Erickson outlines the practical relevance of the topics discussed. He writes as a pastor as well as a scholar. We are told (p.14) that he was impressed by Clark Pinnock's advice that a work of theology should ". . . sing like a hymn, not read like a telephone book." Erickson has commendably succeeded in taking this advice to heart. Again his pastoral illustrations are often memorable and trenchant; I particularly enjoyed the words of a minister that he records when discussing the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures: "If you have the Bible without the Spirit you will dry up. If you have the Spirit without the Bible, you will blow up. But if you have both the Bible and the Spirit together, you will grow up" (p.252).

Because the book is orthodox and written in relatively simple language, it will prove invaluable as a textbook all over the world. African students will find chapter 5, 'Contemporizing the Christian Message' especially useful, with its helpful advice on how to separate the essence of God's revelation from culturally relative expressions of it. With the vexed question of the fate of unevangelized ancestors in mind they will also be interested in chapter 7, 'God's Universal Revelation'. On this issue, Erickson holds out some pale hope: "Now if the God known in nature is the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (as Paul seems to assert in Acts 17:23), then it would seem that a person who comes to a belief in a single powerful God, who despairs of any works-righteousness to please this holy God, and who throws himself upon the mercy of this good God, would be accepted as were the Old Testament believers" (p.172).

In the estimation of the reviewer, the volume is not without some flaws, however. We are correctly informed on p. 234 that inerrant Scripture contains false information at times, that is when it infallibly records the words of ungodly men. Therefore, of course, it is important to examine each text in its context. It is a pity then, that Erickson, for example, cites Job 34:12 as a proof text for the doctrine of God's absolute goodness, for this verse records a statement of Elihu.

The author maintains that not everything the apostles wrote and said was inspired (p.212). He also contends that although the apostles show no evident consciousness of writing under inspiration in epistles such as Philemon, we must nevertheless assume that these epistles were inspired (p.188). But the reader may well ask 'why?' Is it just a matter of the Spirit's witness that Philemon is Scripture? This alone would seem a perilously subjective criterion. Or is it more of a historical matter, which opens the question of the development of the canon? It seems to me clear that a work of the breadth of **Christian Theology** should have dealt with the issue of canon criticism but it is completely omitted. Surely sound and detailed theological work on this matter is as foundational for Evangelicalism as is work on the doctrine of inerrancy.

Occasionally an important aspect of a topic is left unmentioned. For instance, it would seem to me that a

significant component of Theodicy is the insight that without first order evils there could never be second order goods like courage and compassion. Erickson's discussion leaves this important point unmentioned.

Although usually a model of clarity, there are one or two lapses in the book. The explanation of structural criticism (p.84) is opaque. And when we read, "God is the one who brought space (and time) into being. He was before there was space" (p.273) are we to infer that God created time before He created space?!

But all these criticisms are small and even carping. However, there is one substantial weakness in the opinion of the reviewer, and that is in Erickson's handling of divine providence and human freedom. After a survey of what he considers to be the key Biblical passages, he unequivocally asserts that God has predetermined every event in history. Now, of course, this is an orthodox point of view, but Erickson really should have discussed alternative evangelical interpretations, for example someone of the stature of Prof. I.H. Marshall can write "The Bible does not suggest that everything that happens is a divine action or a divinely caused action. On the contrary, it presents God as often responding to human actions, and nothing suggests that the response is other than real or genuine. . . We should think of divine action in history as being interventionist. . ." ('Some Aspects of the Biblical View of History' in **Faith and Thought**, Jan 1984 pp.63-64). The biblical data is more complex and ambiguous than Erickson allows. For instance, Prov. 16:33 ("The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord") is cited by him as one of the clear texts showing that God determines even what we consider the most random events (pp. 349, 396) but as Kidner comments on this verse, "The Old Testament use of the word 'lot' shows that this proverb . . . is not about God's control of all random occurrences, but about His settling of matters properly referred to Him" (**Tyndale Commentary**).

The author is well aware that this strong view of divine providence (basically the Calvinist view) threatens the free-will defense in Theodicy for it seems to entail that God causes all human choices, but Erickson believes that he can still affirm human freedom and responsibility. However, his procedure is less than clear.

At times it seems he is presenting a libertarian view of man (e.g. ". . . decisions are in large measure influenced by certain characteristics of mine . . ." [p.357], not, notice, completely determined by my nature), but overall he seems to prefer a soft-determinist model, defining freedom as merely freedom from constraint, i.e. I am free when my action results from my choice. "The plan of God does not force men to act in particular ways, but renders it certain that they will **freely** act in those ways" (p.353). God "renders it certain" by determining my heredity and environment, from the combination of which my choices inevitably flow. I freely choose evil and therefore am responsible for it, yet God is the providential power behind all events.

Now there are two things wrong with this approach. One has been pointed out by A. Flew who shares Erickson's definition of

freedom as Erickson himself informs us (footnote p. 357). Flew correctly observes that given this definition, there is no contradiction in positing a universe where God created people who always freely chose the right (see Flew's 'Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom' in **New Essays in Philosophical Theology**, ed. A. Flew & A. MacIntyre, SCM, 1955). That He did not is God's responsibility. Flew is again correct when he argues that anyone who espouses this view of freedom cannot employ the free-will defense, for it is God who becomes ultimately responsible for the evil in the universe. It is significant that Flew himself is unable to accept theism. Yet Erickson still vainly attempts to employ the free-will defense.

Secondly, not only does God become logically responsible for evil given soft-determinism, but man becomes completely absolved of all responsibility. On the soft-determinist model an action can no longer be said to stem **from** my will, even though it may be mediated **through** it, therefore the action is not really **mine**. I can be held no more responsible than a man who murders someone as the direct result of post-hypnotic suggestion.

Erickson mistakenly describes this alternative, libertarian view as understanding freedom in terms of "total spontaneity, random choice" (p.359). It is true that random choice equally deprives man of responsibility but, in fact, libertarianism teaches that freewill is a bridge between determinism and indeterminism (the random). It involves two strange notions: that a free being is self-moved and that he is the uncaused cause of his free choices. There are those like Jonathan Edwards, who have found such a notion totally incoherent, but evidently Erickson does not, for he seems to maintain that God is free in just this sense: ". . . although God's decisions and actions are quite consistent with his nature, they are not constrained by his nature" (p.352). (Nor, of course, are they constrained by anything outside His nature).

Erickson does attack libertarianists on another ground, however. He argues that "In their view, divine foreknowledge is just as incompatible with human freedom as is divine ordination" (p.360) since both foreordination and foreknowledge entail an uncertain future. But, in fact, libertarianism **can** accommodate a certain future, for whether it is predestined or not, the future is surely as certain as the past since it is as analytically true that what will be will be, as what has been has been. On either the determinist or the libertarian model it is an error to assume that the past is closed and the future is open. In fact they are both as open and closed as each other. No, the Arminian can consistently entertain a **certain** future but what he cannot accept, unlike the Calvinist, is a wholly **predictable, predetermined** future. In fact the libertarian can consistently incorporate divine foreknowledge into his theology either by insisting that God is eternal (beyond time) so that strictly speaking, God knows rather than foreknows our future (and of course, knowledge of another's choice by no means necessarily entails a causal relation to that choice) or by postulating an everlasting God who simply precognizes the future (i.e. the future causes God's knowledge rather than vice versa).

I conclude that in spite of his subtle argumentation

Erickson has failed to produce a viable Theodicy or an acceptable view of human dignity and responsibility since he has opted for a strong notion of divine providence. In fact, given that notion there seem to be only two alternative routes: (i) adopt a theology which ignores the canons of rationality and insist that both divine determinism and human libertarianism are true, or (ii) define divine goodness in an equivocal way so that God remains good by definition, even when he acts in a manner that to us seems manifestly evil. Erickson rightly rejects both these alternatives but he fails to find a better one. Perhaps the only way out of the dilemma is to accept something like I.H. Marshall's view of providence.

Having stated my major misgiving at length, I would like to reiterate my overall appreciation of **Christian Theology**. It is indeed a major contribution to evangelical scholarship. In fact, the complete trilogy can be warmly recommended to every serious student of theology.

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