

BOOK REVIEWS

From Christ to Constantine, by M. A. Smith. (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971.) 208 pages. Reviewed by W. Nigel Kerr, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, Massachusetts.

This book is an excellent introduction into one of the less well known periods in the history of the church, the first three centuries. Since it is a brief work (204 pages), the author has had to be highly selective in his choice of material. The reader is surprised at the author's ability to bring the chief participants and their labors into such a readable order.

The author is an evangelical and this assists him in understanding the peculiar genius which made the early church a dynamic force in the Roman world. He is able to see not only the importance of the myriad of outside forces as they act on the church but also to respond with sensitivity to the inner feeling of Christians operating under the Lordship of Christ in the context of Scripture and in a hostile world.

The book attempts a contemporary approach to church history and includes material relevant to today's youth. With delightful directness he shows the church in its inception ("Handover," page 17), in its launching ("The new generation," page 30), facing heresy ("The way-out men," page 47), in its doctrinal development ("Grounds for argument," page 116), and so forth. The book takes us inside the life of the church, revealing on the one hand its struggle for theological self-consciousness and on the other the development of worship practices and the inter-personal relation of Christians. The reader is introduced to the most important source documents of the Ante-Nicene Period and develops an appreciation for them. Smith rarely quotes from secondary sources (see footnotes) but moves with ease through the age as a companion of those who lived and wrote at the time.

The biographical insights (see Justin Martyr, pages 81-84) and the fine selection of illustrations add much to the interest quotient of the volume. The correspondence of Pliny and Trajan, for example, is highlighted with the half-page bust of Trajan in the British Museum. The Time Chart at the beginning and the fine 25-page glossary at the end are excellent assists in making the material understandable to a reader finding his way through the labyrinth of early Christian history.

Here is book pleasant in format, style, and attitude. It is a pleasure to read and though it is especially valuable for a first venture into primitive Christianity, the initiated will see behind the author's words the scholarship necessary to produce a work of such fine form and clarity.

For Adults Only, by Lars I. Granberg. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.) 96 pages. \$1.50. Reviewed by Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

The author, former dean of students at Hope College, is now president of Northwestern College in Iowa. His background as a counselor and psychologist well equips him to treat some of the problems and issues in family relationships. This particular paperback is better than some of the other family books currently being produced, simply because of Granberg's superior writing style. The use of practical life situations and illustrations makes the material not only readable, but usable.

The main problem, in this reviewer's mind, is the subordination of Biblical material to psychological and sociological emphases throughout the book. In Chapter III for example, entitled "Husbands Hold the Key to Happy Homes," the author offers us only three scripture references in twelve pages, an unbelievable situation in view of the depth of Biblical content on the role of husbands and fathers. At times he seems to acquiesce to the pressures of modern sociology to abandon some of the Biblical injunctions which seem incongruous with contemporary views of the family. Minimizing the scriptural command for wives to submit to their husbands, he says, "Instead of the dominance-subordination pattern implied by the traditional melody-harmony interpretation of the Biblical instruction to submit to their husband's leadership, the contrapuntal analogy seems to me to create for many couples a climate more likely to eventuate in a true 'one-flesh' relationship. It is truer to life." Granted. The question is, is it truer to the Bible?

The Evangelical Home Bible Class, by Ira L. Shanafelt. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.) 104 pages. Reviewed by Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

Home Bible classes represent one of the most significant means of community evangelism in this last third of the twentieth century. It is surely impossible to estimate how many hundreds of such classes are now being effectively conducted throughout the realm of evangelicalism. Some are connected with local churches; others are totally independent; most are genuinely seeking to provide an informal neighborhood atmosphere for the communication of the Gospel.

In this helpful paperback, Dr. Shanafelt shares his experiences in

developing and teaching home Bible classes at the Skyline Wesleyan Church and the First Church of the Nazarene in Bakersfield, California. The book offers information on class structure, selection and training of the teacher, and guidelines for the study. More than half the book consists of a verse by verse exposition of I John as a model for the home Bible class study. Shanafelt recommends that all home Bible classes use I John as a base during the first year.

One gets the feeling in the second half of the book that a non-professional teacher utilizing Shanafelt's material would tend to be overly didactic and dogmatic in his teaching of the Johannine content. Other experts in this kind of ministry suggest that a more open-ended discussion motif be employed to avoid the danger of sermonizing. Nevertheless, Shanafelt provides a great deal of helpful information and the book will be profitably read by churches or individuals interested in the ministry of home Bible classes.

The Christian Reader's Guide to the Old Testament, by David Waite Yohn. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972.) 200 pages. \$3.45. Reviewed by Carl E. Armerding, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia.

The title of this book is deceiving. It is neither an introduction to the Old Testament for Christians nor a textbook on hermeneutics. It is rather a collection of sermons loosely structured on the Old Testament theme of the covenant. In actual fact, the book has relatively little to do with the Old Testament, as the sermons contained therein reflect more the personal prejudices of the preacher than any kind of careful exegesis of Old Testament texts. Each sermon (or chapter) begins with a passage from the Old Testament, though this reviewer found it difficult to know why? Certainly no attempt is made to discuss the text cited, and at times it is difficult to see any connection whatsoever with the passage in question.

What makes the book a work on the Old Testament is only the fact that the concept of the covenant provides a convenient rubric for the heterogeneous collection of ideas the author wanted to express. The book is really a study of his own concept of the contemporary, involved Christian community, particularly as it is called to oppose various social injustices now rampant in American society. Whether the covenants with Abraham and Moses can truly be fitted in as witnesses against the Vietnam war and the injustices wrought against Mexican fruitpickers is questionable. Yet those supposedly form the base of all of Yohn's concerns. One other covenant, that with David, seems cast in the role of opposition (it created nationalism and boxed God into a static commitment), while the new covenant in Christ (though neither defined nor exegetically explained) takes up the refrain against the injustices of society.

The basis for a true covenant reconciliation in the work of Christ is seriously mishandled. To suggest that the Jesus of the gospels was crucified by a Roman government whose action was analogous to the action of the United States government "trying to suppress the voice of young people who are crying out against the injustices of the industrial revolution" (p. 31) is banal, if not blasphemous. As a further example of banality we read in the same paragraph, "Jesus was willing to risk crucifixion to do what God wanted done. The same risk is being asked today of those who want a relationship with God."

Though we may applaud the author's stern call for commitment and his concern for justice, we must demur with respect to his picture of a Christ whose covenant role is little more than that of a forerunner in ushering in a new social order, wherein individualism and nationalism would be abolished (see pp. 71, 169 ff.). No reference is found within the book to the theme of individual forgiveness through the blood of the new covenant, nor is place given to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, both of which themes loom large in discussions of the subject both in Hebrews and the writings of Paul. When salvation is defined it is simply "God's free gift of justice, love, and peace to every person, to the covenant community (which we know as the church) and most especially to all mankind" (p. 180). Further, salvation is "the energy of renewal—resurrection, if you will—of the person and the community" (p. 181). Apparently the means by which this will be accomplished is for the churches to return to a vision of God as the working Savior, and to express this perspective in small committed groups. These groups will take the place of the present-day "dead" church, and will somehow, though not by their own effort, again see the salvation of God in the world.

The emphasis on renewal within the church is perhaps the strongest part of the book. Apart from that, there is little in its understanding or application of the covenant idea that is not better expressed elsewhere. And even Yohn's little communities of covenant Christians had better clarify their understanding of the theology of both testaments if they are going to have the kind of world-changing impact envisaged by the author.

Beginning Now, by John D. Davies. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971.) 285 pages. \$5.95. Reviewed by Carl E. Armerding, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia.

An Anglican chaplain from a South African university setting explores in this book the Christian implications of the first three chapters of Genesis. Its value lies not in an exegetical treatment of the subject, but rather in its bringing together of many stimulating thoughts from the whole range of Christian thought, and showing how each has its genesis in the Biblical book by that name. According to the preface, the

book began as a series of Bible studies for the 1964 national conference of the South African Students' Federation. However, much of the necessary basis for understanding the text has been glossed over in favor of a kind of *pot pourri* of contemporary application, with apt quotations drawn from such quotable figures as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Erich Fromm, Paul Tournier, Teilhard de Chardin, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, Charles Coulson and Ian Barbour.

In this weakness lies the strength of the book. Davies may not have written a valuable commentary on Genesis 1 through 3, but his own writing has something of the personal vibrant quality reflected in the authors he is fond of quoting. Though not himself committed to what most would consider an evangelical position in matters of Biblical criticism (the accounts are cautiously divided into the post-exilic "Priestly" document and the "earlier" tradition), Davies is intensely Christian in his view of life and the world. His starting point for the Genesis account(s) of creation is the presupposition of Christian faith, and it is no surprise that his favorite Old Testament theologian is G. A. F. Knight. Creation is seen not only from a Jewish perspective as a preface to the redemption event of Exodus, but from a Christian perspective as the first activity of the covenant-making God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. From such a beginning, a number of keen theological insights are developed. A good example is the handling of the "chaos" theme in Genesis 1:2. Though God is rightly seen as one who brings forth "out of nothing," a necessary correlative is found in the emphasis on a God who characteristically brings order out of chaos. Davies notes that, for the Hebrews, there was no question of chaos being personal (in contrast to other Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies) and stresses the importance of the contemporary activity of the same Creator-God in dealing with the threat of formlessness, facelessness, namelessness, non-being and the like in 1972.

An excellent discussion of the variety represented by the two creation accounts is marred by a too facile assumption that they come from sources whose way of looking at the world was directly opposed to one-another. The orderliness of the world as seen in Genesis 1 does not depend for its origin upon its creators having "been through the disorders of the Exile" (p. 119), but may well reflect the primitive revelation to the Patriarchs. Likewise the emphasis on freedom and relationship in the so-called second account need not depend on the situation of its creators. Despite such somewhat gratuitous assumptions, the author has drawn a beautifully harmonious note of unity through the two chapters, and one feels he understands the message in its original intent far better than most fundamentalists whose harmonies have been constructed along lines more conducive to Western logic and contemporary science.

Beginning Now is not recommended as a commentary. More useful

works are available. Its value comes rather in the exciting field of Old Testament theology, a field for which the author, despite certain tendencies toward modern existentialism, has a good touch. Only occasionally does one feel that his insights are parochially directed toward a uniquely South African situation. More often this reviewer found himself wanting to preserve and file a particular quotation that seemed, like the writings of Bonhoeffer, Lewis, Thielike, and Chesterdon, whom he quotes, very beautifully to express a penetrating insight into life as we all experience it.

The Church in God's Program, by Robert L. Saucy. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.) 254 pages. \$4.95. Reviewed by Cyril J. Barber, Head Librarian, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

Has the church had it? There are many who think it has. However, in a day when many are forsaking the church as an institution it is refreshing to read this vigorous, Biblical treatise on the place of the Church in God's program and the role of the church in the world today. Saucy writes:

Amid the blustering crosscurrents of our time, which have shaken all of man's institutions down to the foundations, . . . the church has not stood unscathed. That which bears the name of God has suffered confusion with the rest. The resultant widespread weakness and uncertainty has caused many to turn aside, rejecting with castigation the church as the locus of God's activity. While it is true that certain forms of our church life, accretions of time more than biblical patterns, may be rejected, the follower of Jesus Christ cannot profess allegiance to Him *and* deny His church (p. 7).

Believing that the Architect of the Church has left us a blueprint, Saucy proceeds to examine the Scriptures to find out what God has to say before he addresses himself to the problems facing the church today. His work is divided into three main sections: chapter 1 is foundational, chapters 2-5 deal with the Church universal, and chapters 6-9 focus on church organization.

Beginning with a study of the usage of the word *ecclesia*, Saucy reminds his readers of the meaning of the word in classical and Biblical times in order that he may build his ecclesiology upon a proper Biblical foundation.

In his handling of the nature of the Church, Saucy pays close attention to the metaphors used by Christ and the New Testament writers as they describe the assembly of believers. He emphasizes the place and importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and stresses the supernatural ministry of the Paraclete as a living and dynamic force making worship meaningful and service acceptable.

His section on the priesthood of believers is simple, yet sufficient. He confines his remarks solely to those aspects of the believer's ministry which bear on the theme of the book and does not allow himself to be sidetracked into a lengthy, technical discussion.

Saucy unashamedly places the origin of the Church at Pentecost and, while he provides adequate Biblical support for his views, he does not estrange those who may not agree with him. His recounting of the Church's beginning serves to prepare the way for his treatment of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Apostles in the establishment of the Church and its service.

Of particular significance are Saucy's chapters on the organization, worship, ministry and ordinances of the church (6-9). He does not willfully avoid any of the thorny problems which have plagued the church down through the centuries, and readily defends his beliefs against those who hold a different point of view. However, instead of engaging in a lengthy polemic he aims at providing a sound foundation for the establishment of a healthy church.

In these days when the true essence of the Biblical teaching on the Church and its ministries has been obscured it is refreshing to read a Scripturally oriented treatise like this one and realize that there are still some who have not bowed the knee before the shrine of ecumenism.

This work is ideal for use in Bible colleges and seminaries, and pastors will appreciate it as well. The writer is to be congratulated on producing such a fine example of scholarship couched in simplicity of style.

Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in the Book of Exodus, by John J. Davis. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971.) 331 pages. \$3.50 paper, \$4.50 cloth. Reviewed by Robert L. Alden, Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, Denver, Colorado.

Professor Davis of Grace Theological Seminary has done an excellent job in this third volume of his in Baker's Old Testament series. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* is a collection of fourteen studies in the book of Exodus arranged in the order in which the subjects occur. This is not a commentary as such, nor is it exactly an introduction, but an examination of every noteworthy subject in the second book of Moses.

Almost no stone is left unturned in the thorough treatment of such subjects as the ten plagues, the date of the exodus, or the arrangements of the tabernacle. Davis spends some time reviewing critical positions on these questions and then proceeds to build and fortify his view which, not surprisingly, is conservative and traditional.

Abundant footnotes and a ten page bibliography all impress the reader that the writer has done his homework carefully. Laymen, pastors,

and teachers will all find this book a valuable aid in the understanding and explanation of this portion of the Bible.

Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary, by John B. Taylor. (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969.) 285 pages. \$3.95. Reviewed by Charles Lee Feinberg, Talbot Theological Seminary, La Mirada, Calif.

No one who is acquainted with the calibre of works published by Inter-Varsity Press will be disappointed in this volume. A commentary on Ezekiel is a major exegetical enterprise by anyone's reckoning, and Vice-Principal John B. Taylor is to be warmly commended for the manner in which he has undertaken his herculean assignment.

Early in the volume he presents a good summary of the critical and conservative positions on the authorship of the book (pp. 13-20). A balanced evaluation follows of the personality of Ezekiel (pp. 20-29). The book contains a fine treatment of the several facets of Ezekiel's message (pp. 39-47). Good insight is shown into the doctrinal difficulty in 3:20 ff (p. 70). A fine refutation is made of the claim that the prophet used sympathetic magic in 4:1-3 (pp. 76-77).

In his discussion of Daniel 7:13, 14 Taylor identifies the designation of "Son of man" as "the personification of spiritual Israel," and not yet a Messianic title. There is a strange interpretation of Christ's use of the title (p. 60). From the conservative viewpoint it is unacceptable to deny Daniel was a contemporary of Ezekiel and then equate him with Daniel of the Ugaritic Tablets of 1400-1360 B.C. (p. 129).

The author makes too little (pp. 235, 236) of Ezekiel 37 for the doctrine of resurrection, physical, spiritual, or even eschatological. He mingles certain features of the passage with New Testament events, but does see a future literal fulfilment of the text.

Comments on Ezekiel 38, 39 leave much to be desired and do not fit the eschatological plan of the book (e.g., p. 243, par. 1 and 2). The writer permits himself a harsh stricture on Scofield's interpretation (p. 243, fn. 1). There is too strong a tendency to symbolize or spiritualize the text regardless of the abundance of minutia. He finds the fulfilment of chapters 40-48 in heaven: "The glory of heaven is the ultimate fulfilment of it all."

Perhaps the weakest part of the commentary is the treatment of chapters 40-48 (pp. 250-285, esp. pp. 251-254). He unquestionably misunderstands the dispensational view of these chapters (cf. top of p. 253), with a sweeping judgment that has no basis in fact. Moreover, can so strong a contrast be drawn between prophecy and apocalyptic as Taylor has drawn? On what grounds?