

BOOK REVIEWS

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PASTORAL CARE

The Christian Couple. By Larry and Nordis Christenson. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1977, 185 pp., \$5.95.

This is an irresponsible book verging on immorality and heresy. Irresponsible? Immoral? Heresy? Hard words. Yet an examination of chap. 8 ("Contraception: Blessing or Blight?") will prove them true. In this chapter the Christensons launch a strong and psychologically intimidating attack on what they call the "*unthinking acceptance* of contraceptives" (p. 74). On the basis of what they call "natural methods" that appear to be based on some form of nature mysticism, they argue for the rhythm method of birth control and give unwary readers various sympto-thermic signs that will enable to know when it is safe to indulge in intercourse. In doing so they totally fail to warn unsuspecting readers that as a result of following their methods they may very easily have an unwanted pregnancy. Instead they imply that other forms of contraception are signs of a degenerate and permissive lifestyle that is unworthy of Christians.

Nowhere during their emotional argument against contraception do they quote Biblical evidence or present a sound theological argument. Instead they appeal to what is "natural." They fail to warn readers to take medical advice while at the same time creating guilt feelings about the use of any form of contraception other than the one they advocate. To create guilt in this way is surely immoral; to advocate a very uncertain form of contraception is irresponsible; and to back one's arguments by an appeal to nature verges on heresy.

Whatever merits this book has, it is marred by this chapter. There may indeed be good arguments against most forms of contraception. It may also be true that the rhythm method of contraception is indeed the best available. But the way in which it is advocated in this book is sub-Christian and unworthy of the authors. No doubt many people will find a blessing in this book but many others will find worry, ill health and unwanted pregnancies. One would hesitate to recommend the book to a mature Christian and certainly never to someone who is young in the faith.

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BIBLE

The Bible Makes Sense. By Walter Brueggemann. Atlanta: John Knox, 1977, 155 pp., \$3.95 paper.

The title of this book might suggest a popular introduction, but this would be misleading. It is a serious theological prolegomenon to Bible study, approaching the Scriptures as the life-giving Word of the Lord addressed to us. Brueggemann, who is professor of OT at Eden Theological Seminary, does not belittle the more usual introductions, expositions and commentaries—all useful—but points to a need for something more. "It is strange that our Bible is our most treasured book, and yet it seems so difficult that we don't find it very helpful." We need not only running explanations of the text but, more important, a general framework of reference.

This Brueggemann offers in these pages. The Bible, he insists, yields its message only to those who read it *from the inside*. Its connecting theme is God's covenant with his people, and only insiders to this covenant can discern the message. Partners in the covenant share not only a common faith but a common memory, a common deposit of history. There are valuable notes on the literary forms in which the covenant is mediated to us, but the emphasis is on the nature of the covenant and of the God who initiated it. He is ever present with and for his people; he gives life to the lifeless, and a home and an identity to the displaced and homeless. All this is richly expounded in the OT but set forth even more clearly in the Person and ministry of our Lord in the gospels. The covenantal relationship starts with conversion, a deliberate turning of the sinner, yet also paradoxically the free gift of God, by which slaves and orphans become sons and daughters. A brief final chapter, "Perspectives on the Bible," has some wise things to say about what the Bible is and is not.

Each chapter concludes with suggestions for reflection and discussion, with two or three Scripture passages for meditation, illuminated by searching comments. These will add immeasurably to the book's usefulness for group study and discussion. Brueggemann has a command of language and of his subject, making for clear and lucid exposition. Above all he has a clear appreciation of the greatness of his theme and of the Bible's relevance to the times in which we live and to every individual who, as an insider, will give himself to its study. The publisher's note claims that "this is a unique 'how to' book about the Bible." No careful reader will disagree.

Laurence E. Porter

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The Land. By Walter Brueggemann. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977, xiii + 203 pp., \$5.50 paper.

Not satisfied with the polarized options of the objective historical description of what the Bible *meant* and the subjective existential statement of what the Bible *means today*, W. Brueggemann and J. R. Donahue, S. J., have initiated a mediating option in a series of studies called *Overtures to Biblical Theology*, books that are "concerned not only with what is seen and heard, with what the Bible said, but also with what the Bible says . . ." (p. xi). They are also written with the hope that the studies "will be relevant without losing the mystery of biblical religion's historical distance" (p. xii).

In this first volume of the series, Brueggemann is certainly faithful to his own directive. It is not unusual to find the Biblical situation of Israel in relation to her land juxtaposed with the modern setting of urban landholding in America. Even footnotes illustrate Brueggemann's contemporizing method. Alongside scholarly works in Biblical studies stand ref-

erences to *Time Magazine*, *Saturday Review*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and Alex Haley's *Roots*.

Brueggemann's thesis is that "land is a central if not *the central theme* of biblical faith" (p. 3). "Land functions as a prism through which other aspects of Israel's faith can be seen" (p. xii). In developing this thesis the author asserts, among other things, that land is the essence of history. "Land is lost and history is ended" (p. 121). Again, "it takes land to make history" (p. 125). We find here no mention of a history of Israel but rather three histories of the land—the first being from promise to entry, the second from management (judicial and regnal) to exile, the third from the new promise given in exile, which culminates in the kingdom. The study is therefore transtestamental, though only one chapter treats the possible NT assessment of the land. The conclusions reached in this chapter are rather dubious and are fortunately declared as provisional.

Land is seen further as the good news of the gospel—that is, insofar as it is a gift given in the context of exile. "That is the good news, that God transforms those who are displaced and makes them a home, gives to them secure turf" (p. 134). Certainly an encouragement in gospel is that "things which seem hopeless need not stay as they are" (p. 133), but this principle of conversion cannot be reduced to such materialism. A usual fault of interpreters is that the material is spiritualized; Brueggemann materializes the spiritual.

Happily, land is always understood as gift, gift given in covenant. "The enduring covenant leads to enduring land" (p. 23). This gift has the precarious value of inviting problems. Brueggemann demonstrates that each of the three land histories is an experience in land manipulation and injustice.

Contemporary implications of a theology of land are suggested in the following interfaces: (1) conversation between Jew and Christian regarding the modern state of Israel; (2) conversation between Marxist and Christian; "concern for a material, physical promise," says Brueggemann, "gives credibility to Christianity as a religion of materialism" (p. 191); (3) concern for the dispossessed or landless by the landed; (4) challenging claims of urban technocratic values in America (pp. 189-196).

Though occasionally succumbing to near sermonization, overstating his thesis (probably necessary to bring more attention to this important theme), and reaching some questionable conclusions, Brueggemann demands to be read. Free of overly technical jargon (some Hebrew words do appear untranslated), the author is very readable and deserves reserved congratulations.

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NEW TESTAMENT

The Samaritan Problem: Studies in the Relationships of Samaritanism, Judaism, and Early Christianity. By John Bowman. Translated by Alfred M. Johnson, Jr. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975, 169 pp., \$5.95 paper.

John Bowman is something of an enigma. When his article "Samaritan Studies" (*BJRL* 40 [1958] 298-327) appeared it was hailed as a minor classic. By contrast, when his book *The Fourth Gospel and the Jews: A Study in R. Akiba, Esther and the Gospel of John* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975) was published, it was universally panned. Its thesis—that the fourth gospel was written to counteract the influence of Akiba, who was using the book of Esther to promote nationalism and a policy of retaliation—was considered sufficiently eccentric as to render the book scarcely worthy of serious attention.

The book being considered in these brief lines lies on the valuable side of the spectrum, despite minor eccentricities. It is a translation of Bowman's four Franz Delitzsch lectures, delivered in 1959. The first two chapters, "The History of the Samaritans" and "The Religion of the Samaritans," are worth the price of the book—provided one does not take as fact Bowman's theory concerning the Zadokite priesthood. The last two chapters, "The

Samaritans and the Gospel" and "The Samaritans and the Sect of Qumran," are useful because they are stimulating. They provide us with expounded versions of the theories Bowman has enunciated briefly elsewhere. Because he is out to prove somewhat disputed points, however, and because his work is already dated, Bowman's book needs to be read against the sober (and recent) treatment by R. J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews: The Origins of the Samaritans Reconsidered* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

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Der johanneische Kreis: Sein Platz im Spätjudentum, in der Jüngerschaft Jesu und im Urchristentum: Zum Ursprung des Johannesevangeliums. By Oscar Cullmann. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1975, xii + 111 pp., DM 14,80 paper.

Those of us who have read with interest the articles by which Cullmann has, over the years, contributed to discussion on the fourth gospel have sometimes wondered how he put it all together. Here is the answer.

Cullmann rejects complicated redactional histories like that of R. E. Brown and identifiable sources like those traced out by Bultmann, Fortna and Becker. He thinks that John was written by a strong leader, unknown to us by name but certainly not one of the twelve. Probably this took place prior to A.D. 70, but his work was edited by a disciple or group of disciples and published toward the end of the century.

The "Heimat" of the author was Palestine/Syria, but Cullmann is not certain the gospel was written there. Taking a cue from F.-M. Braun, he suggests that the writer may have traveled a good deal. But the original "Johannine circle," from which the writer sprang, was in contact with heretical Judaism and was part of the "hellenist" group that evangelized Samaria and from which Stephen emerged. The author's intention in writing is given in general terms in John 20:31; more specifically, he wanted to show believers that in each event in the life of the incarnate Jesus, Christ was simultaneously at work in the life of the contemporary Church. Thus what Luke took two books to present the author of the fourth gospel succeeded in doing in one.

This little book is unusually rich in seminal thoughts, but its smallness is also its chief weakness. In detail after detail, Cullmann proceeds by way of mere assertion or by argumentation so brief as to be unconvincing to all but his disciples. In some cases he takes note of published criticism of his positions, but instead of answering the criticism he simply thinks his own stance more probable. For instance, it is well known that Cullmann sees the Samaritan mission of Acts 8 in John 4:34-38, but his position has been cogently criticized by J. A. T. Robinson (*Twelve New Testament Studies* [1962], pp. 61 ff.), who argues for a reference to John the Baptist and his colleagues. Cullmann simply goes his own way. Again, he repeatedly sees reference to a "Gottesdienst" in the fourth gospel, and no doubt he is relying heavily on his own earlier work at this point. But he has taken no notice of criticism, such as the two articles by J. Dunn (*ZNW* 61 [1970] 247-252; *NTS* 17 [1970-1971] 328-338). He argues that the last clause of John 20:31 shows that the fourth gospel is directed to believers, but that is disputed, especially when the verse is contrasted with 1 John 5:13. Although Cullmann argues that the evangelist is trying to portray simultaneously both the incarnate Jesus and the exalted Christ of the Church, he handles questions of historicity too loosely to be convincing to the present reviewer.

This book is not designed to give an exhaustive bibliography, and it is often churlish for a reviewer to criticize another man for what he left out. But I am surprised by the number of quite significant omissions. To cite but one example of many: In discussing the relationship between the fourth gospel and *Odes Sol.*, Cullmann (p. 38) overlooks the article by J. H. Charlesworth and R. A. Culpepper on this subject (*CBQ* 35 [1973] 298-322).

Although the book is unconvincing, at least to this reviewer, in many of its constituent parts, its thrust is not implausible (save that I still hold to apostolic authorship). But its chief worth remains in its synthesis of Cullmann's thought.

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