
Book Reviews

Statement of Faith

Scottish Theology Study Group, 1991, 14 pp, £1, Rutherford House, 17 Claremont Park, Edinburgh EH6 7PJ

This is a good piece of work and worthy of the widest consideration by all who confess the evangelical faith. In days when clear and faithful confessional statements are at a discount and we are inclined to view anything new with suspicion, this statement is as refreshing as the morning dew. If such words seem extravagant - and I don't think they are! - then send for a copy and read the Statement for yourself.

It comes from the Scottish Theology Study Group which meets under the auspices of the Rutherford House Fellowship. The Group is composed of evangelicals from the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the United Free Church and a Baptist Church, and includes such well-known names as James Philip and Donald Macleod. The aim was to produce 'a Statement of Faith which was theologically reformed but which dealt with the issues and concerns of today rather than those of earlier centuries'. As the Introduction makes clear, the Statement 'is intended to stand on its own and not simply be an adjunct to or an attempt to improve upon the Westminster Confession of Faith'. It is written with the Scottish situation in mind, in 'the language of today' and with 'a strong experimental emphasis'.

The Statement reads well and in the main would be understood by the ordinary church member; however, it is clearly the work of men who are familiar with theological thought and careful definition. It is both stimulating and heartwarming.

In structure the Statement is Trinitarian, beginning not with Scripture but with the self-revealing God. Thereafter the order is The Trinity; Creation; The Fall; Jesus Christ

- Incarnate, Crucified, Risen and Ascended, Returning; The Holy Spirit; The Story of Salvation; Scripture; A Holy People; The Church; Baptism and the Lord's Supper; Discipleship and Mission. The whole Statement is reformed in its ethos, and salvation is presented as the sovereign work of God. This comes out clearly in the statement on the church. "The Church consists of all those in every age chosen and called by God to be his believing and obedient people". In the section dealing with the Incarnation there is an explanatory paragraph on Mary our Lord's mother, included, we must suppose, to counter both the Mariolatory of the Roman Church and the occasional disparagement of Mary by evangelicals. The historical nature of Revelation and Redemption is expressed very well under the heading of 'The Story of Salvation'. "The divine drama of salvation-history is set forth in words given by God in the books of the Bible, which were produced at different stages in its progress. By predictive prophecy and retrospective explanation the words interpret the drama of God's self-revelation to us. The provision of this written Word of God is itself an act in salvation-history". A whole section (seven paragraphs) is devoted to Sanctification - stating positively the main Biblical principles of Christian holiness whilst at the same time countering false views. The statement on Baptism and the Lord's Supper will be acceptable to most Christians, with the possible exception of an explanatory paragraph in smaller print which says, "By analogy with the practice of the Old Testament people of God, the majority of Christian communions baptise the infant children of Christian parents as members of the covenant community". The final section is on Mission. I was pleased to see the task of evangelism recognised as "the Church's primary responsibility towards the world", but I would have liked

an affirmation of the truth of Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved".

One of the aims of the Statement is "the exclusion of known heresy", and certainly this is diligently pursued. Let me give some examples. The Bible is not simply a witness to revelation; it is itself revelation - revelation and scripture are inseparable. "All human beings possess equal dignity before God... from the earliest beginnings of life to the moment of death", - thus euthanasia is excluded, if not abortion also. So too is 'feminism' - husbands and wives are equal before God but have different roles and responsibilities which are complementary to one another. "A similar complementarity obtains in the ministry of the Church". The deity, humanity and sinlessness of Christ are carefully stated so as to exclude modern heresy. The substitutionary and penal nature of the Atonement is affirmed, as is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Annihilation is excluded - the unrighteous are "condemned to everlasting destruction". The great redemptive acts of God are not only recorded in Scripture but explained to us. Progressive revelation involves no contradiction but each successive stage harmonises with all that precedes it and all that follows. The Scriptures are both human and divine and are entirely trustworthy and without error; inspiration extends to both its verbal form and content, and thus Scripture is itself objectively the Word of God. Sanctification is both definitive and progressive, involving the active participation of the believer. Thus, passivity and 'the Higher Life' teaching are excluded. The challenge of charismatic teaching is countered - "All members of the body of Christ which is the Church are called to share in the work of the ministry and receive gifts (charismata) from the Holy Spirit to do so. In this sense the church of Christ is always a charismatic community of faith".

Neither I nor the authors of this "Statement of Faith" would suggest that the work is all that it could or should be; nevertheless, it

does have many excellent qualities, and should it find a wide acceptance amongst evangelicals then it may serve a serve a unifying purpose as an expression of the faith which we hold in common.

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Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament

Gerard Van Groningen

1990, 1018 pp, £39.95 Baker

This is a book to get enthusiastic about. It addresses a genuine need, and meets it in an impressive fashion. For some time now there has been no extended presentation of the Messianic content of the OT. This volume ably meets the deficiency, and is worthy of a place alongside Hengstenberg's *Christology* and Gloag's *Messianic Prophecies* on any minister's shelves.

After an introduction to the Messianic Concept (78 pages), Van Groningen surveys its presentation in the OT. Genesis is treated in the course of 91 pages, followed by the rest of the Pentateuch (67 pages), the Former Prophets (68 pages), and the Poetic books (95 pages). The Latter Prophets, including Daniel, merit a treatment extending to 515 pages, including four chapters on Isaiah; The Son of the Virgin, The Ruling Son, The Servant-Son and The Suffering and Ministering Son. Such lengthy discussion might raise suspicions of possible tedium. But the style is crisp and clear. Frequently in looking at the book to consult its interpretation of a specific passage I found myself being drawn into reading even more.

That was not, however, just a matter of style. It reflected principally the congeniality of the contents, especially the author's presuppositions. The book is deliberately written from within the perspective of a reformed approach to Scripture. This is not just a matter of conservative dating of individual books and attribution of authorship, though these are of great significance in determining the framework of a study which traces the historical develop-

ment of Messianic prophecy. It is more crucially a matter of the origin of those prophecies. *Revelation* is not an accidental addition to the book's title. The author does not consider himself to be probing the story of evolving human religious insight, or of hopes dreamed of for a better day to offset the gloomy present. The author correctly and consistently brings out the difference between a prophet projecting his mind forward, and God granting a prophet knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible to human consciousness. What is being traced is God's on-going revelation of the dimensions of his covenantal purposes for his people, as he has determined they should be recorded for our learning and benefit.

At all points Van Groningen shows a serious desire to evaluate recent trends of thought, from whatever quarter. Indeed he criticises the on-sided treatment that prevails in most liberal works, where conservative scholarship is not referred to. His book does not, however, degenerate into a summary of recent liberal thought. While showing an awareness of what has been said and written, he does not refer exhaustively to it, but critiques major representatives of various positions. Where his work also scores is that he integrates present discussions with those of the past. In a work as long as this there are of course minor nigglers. The footnotes contain many minor inaccuracies. Authors and their works are not referred to in consistent fashion: annoying to the bibliographic purist, but probably unnoticed by many. There is an Index of Persons which mixes authors and Biblical personalities so that Moses is listed between Leon Morris and J A Motyer. There are occasional lapses such as *synthetic parallelism* for *synonymous parallelism* on 33, and the American commentator of last century T V Moore is treated as a Puritan on p 572, presumably a too quick inference from the fact that his commentaries were republished by the Banner of Truth! The discussion of 2 Samuel 7: 19b, though not directly germane to the main theme, is rather cursory

and does not even notice the work done on this text in recent years in conservative circles. It is also surprising that the discussion of Isaiah 53:11 on p 640 does not mention the evidence of the Qumran scrolls. But such minor quibbles do not detract from the impressive scholarship of the book.

But if one already has Hengstenberg and Gloag, and a number of conservative commentaries, why add this book? After having read and used it for several months, it seems to me that apart from those features already mentioned it has two outstanding emphases.

1. When looking for OT prophecies of Christ, we are apt to think first of all of passages such as Isaiah 53 or those involving sacrifice and priesthood. Van Groningen emphasises that *Messiah is primarily a kingly title*, and that the basic model for such kingship is not to be found in David (and certainly not in earlier Canaanite or Mesopotamian concepts of kingship), but in Adam. He stresses the royal role accorded to mankind in Genesis 1. "The royal couple were established in their responsibilities in the garden (earth) with its wide-ranging forms of life. The royal couple were in fellowship with their sovereign Lord" (p 105). The emphasis is on covenant kingship, viceregens under the sovereign Creator and Ruler. But the Fall disrupted this relationship. "Rejecting their royal status, they lost it; refusing their royal position, they became prisoners of sin and Satan; disobeying the Sovereign's expressed will, they became slaves to Satan, the master of deceit and evil. Fallen mankind had become dethroned and enslaved royalty" (p 106).

This provides the basis for a distinction Van Groningen employs throughout the book, between wider and narrower views of the messianic concept. The narrower concept focuses on a royal figure, who is in essence a Second Adam. The wider messianic concept takes within its purview all that has to be accomplished by the Messiah so that he is not alone in enjoying paradise restored, as well as what sets forth

the character of that final state of blessing. Hence, in discussing Genesis 3:15 Van Groningen acknowledges that the passage is not messianic in a narrow sense because there is no direct reference to a single royal person whose task has been delineated in detail, but will not on that account say the passage is non-messianic. Rather, by using the broader conception of messianic prophecy he points out that there is "(1) an agent arising from a 'royal' source; (2) a task performed which demands sovereign and royal authority and power; (3) a substitutionary victory to be gained on behalf of others; and (4) the setting of the stage for the full restoration of the fallen royal image-bearers of God to their original status, position and service" (p 114).

2. The other dimension of messianic prophecy that Van Groningen addresses more directly than older conservative works is hermeneutical, and particularly *the use of typology in discussing figures in Old Testament history*. The main discussion is to be found on p 153-167, but there are extensive references elsewhere. The distinction is made between correspondences that are typical and those that are not. It is also emphasised (to what I find a surprising extent) that an ancestor of Christ is not necessarily a typical person, nor is a typical person necessarily an ancestor of Christ. Van Groningen argues that, among others, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David and Solomon were types of Christ. Indeed, he goes so far as to say, "What Esther and Mordecai did was, to some degree and in various ways, analogous to what Christ was to do and did do. Thus, one could conclude that there is some evidence for considering Mordecai and Esther as messianic types by analogy" (p 920). This seems to resemble the distinction between narrowly and broadly messianic prophecy. Van Groningen's discussion might perhaps be improved by focussing more explicitly not on typical persons who were in God's providence assigned *roles that were typical* in that they foreshadowed the work

of the Messiah. To this could be coupled a distinction like that of Vos, that such persons would have to have been intended as illustrations to the OT church of the saving work of God that would be ultimately and completely achieved by the Coming One. All in all, this work is one which I can highly commend. It is readable and useful. Especially, it meets the challenge of making one want to preach, and of providing solid Biblical fare to be shared with others.

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The Lives of Robert and James Haldane

Alexander Haldane, £12.95, 1991, 706 pp

This hardback is an irresistible bargain for those eager to learn from church history. The lives of James (1768-1851) and Robert (1764-1842) Haldane are certainly interesting, challenging and, at times, exciting. Robert's plans to involve himself in missionary work in Bengal were frustrated and, in the Lord's providence, he preached the gospel in his beloved Scotland and further afield on the Continent. 1816 marked his famous visit to Geneva which in turn resulted in an extensive revival as well as the later publication of his commentary on Romans. He was involved in controversy, too. Having an important position in the British and Foreign Bible Society, Robert Haldane fought successfully to keep the apocrypha out of the English Bible. Along with his brother James who was an itinerant evangelist and pastor in Scotland, he seceded from the Church of Scotland in an attempt to reform church life on a more consistent New Testament pattern. There were mistakes and wrong attitudes at times but the biographer is honest in describing this important period in their lives. Altogether, this is an excellent book containing principles and lessons relevant for our contemporary situation.

Dr Eryl Davis, ETCW
