
Book Reviews

Love Your Unborn Neighbour

Intro'd, S Foster

SPUC, 1994, 176 pp, £5.95

This is a well written, beautifully illustrated, 'reader friendly', book of eleven chapters. The authors are SPUC Evangelicals, a division of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children formed in 1991 and a member organisation of the Evangelical Alliance.

'This book is primarily a plea from evangelicals to evangelicals although it will be of interest to many others'. They 'ask those who accept the authority of the Bible, who love God and long to obey God to look at what is happening to unborn children in our country'. The book should elicit a response from the Lord's own people and the author of this review was helped to clarify his own position on screening tests during pregnancy.

Each page of the book has a wide margin useful for notes or comments and there are also phrases highlighted in colour. For example, in the preface there are little phrases like 'right faith must issue in right conduct', 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood', 'defence of the unborn is a requirement not an option' and 'Christians in this country are deeply implicated in the guilt of our society'. It is the hope of the authors that 'the eyes of Christians will be opened to the truth, appalling as it is, and that the Church will repent of its disobedience.'

Ch 1 The Church and the unborn child.

The authors state that all they want to say about the unborn child and the stand the believer must take is based upon the scriptures and the witness of the Christian community from its earliest days until the present day.

The importance of the sanctity of human life, the mention of unborn children in the Bible including our Lord in His incarnation, the three themes of creation, continuity and communion found in Psalm 139 and the interpretation of Exodus 21:22-25 are brought together in the conclusion that God made all human beings in His image and likeness. This leads to the assertion that abortion is contrary to His revealed will and that 'the prophetic voice of the people of God must speak out in God's name to this generation'.

Ch 2 You knit me together.

This chapter seeks to show that each person is unique, loved and absolutely priceless in the eyes of our maker - Almighty God. The reader should be stirred again to realise the wonder of our creation by following human life month by month in its development from fertilization and up to the fifth month and then on to birth. It is shown that such development within a mother's womb is overseen and directed by a loving God and that the image of God in a human person is moving, growing, creative. From these arguments they take the view that the taking of human life is, therefore, prohibited.

It concludes with the statement that 'God sent Jesus to earth as a zygote, embryo, foetus, child and man. He did not by-pass the early stages of human life as holy, sacred and of the greatest value'. This last sentence raises the difficulty of the genetic nature of Jesus, which is perhaps best left as an incomprehensible mystery.

Ch 3 Arguments for abortion.

Commonly heard arguments for abortion are discussed and to each one the test of truth is applied. Such arguments that are mentioned are 'a woman has the right to control her own fertility', 'abortion is a

woman's right to choose', 'back street abortion would be a greater evil than a controlled legal situation' and 'abortion is a necessary evil until some social problems, such as poor housing and overburdened mothers, have been overcome'. The 'world is overpopulated and without abortion it would be even worse'.

Some of the theological arguments which have particularly influenced the thinking of evangelical Christians on abortion are considered.

Ch 4 The hard cases.

Situations are discussed where the mother's life is at risk from her pregnancy, from abortion and cancer, ectopic pregnancy and rape, with an interesting and illuminating account of the American Supreme Court's judgement in the *Roe v Wade* case which changed America's abortion laws resulting in a ruling that abortion must be available to all women as a constitutional right. There is also space given to the recent constitutional issue of abortion in Ireland.

Perhaps more could have been said about the decision-making of doctors in this chapter, especially those who literally agonize to come to a right decision in the 'hard case'.

Ch 5 Abortion and the Law.

A review of English Law from 1250 to the present day shows that the unborn child has enjoyed the protection of the law since ancient times. It reveals how the 1967 Abortion Act was passed by 167 votes to 83 in a half empty House of Commons after an all night sitting. The fight back against abortion is documented. The issue of the creation and use of human embryos culminating in the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act of 1990 is then traced.

Ch 6 Abortion and the Doctors.

This chapter mainly deals with the technical aspects of abortion and the methods commonly used in Britain. The section on prostaglandins needs to be

updated as prostaglandin vaginal pessaries are now widely used to induce a late abortion and most medical authorities would believe injecting urea or saline into the amniotic sac to be contra-indicated as maternal deaths have followed such procedures.

In my professional experience I have seen complications arising from both early and late abortions and I entirely agree with the authors when they state that abortion is not the simple safe procedure which many women have been led to believe it to be. Again I wish more could have been said about doctors' attitudes towards their patients coming to seek help and the value of perhaps encouraging a mother to continue with her pregnancy. Doctors are not just technicians!

Ch 7 Research on humans.

The authors in this chapter make clear their position and feel that all the alarming developments of modern state science such as *in vitro fertilization* have brought us close to the Brave New World. The idea of IVF raises 'profound ethical questions which no previous society had to face'. What is the moral and legal status of these embryos? Who did they belong to? Did they have rights?

The authors argue cogently for the position that from the point of fertilization the embryo is a human being but I personally feel unable to reach the same conclusion, believing that the Scriptures only teach about life within the womb. As a practising gynaecologist who has delivered a few 'IVF babies' I believe that IVF is a relevant treatment for the infertile couple, provided they are counselled well prior to treatment and where safeguards are built in so that only a certain number of embryos are used and none is discarded.

Ch 8 Handicapped Children.

With the issue of Down's syndrome screening very much in the forefront of discussion by health authorities, obstetrical

departments, doctors, midwives, geneticists and, most importantly, mothers this excellent chapter is most helpful in clarifying attitudes towards screening in pregnancy and I believe Christians need to speak out on this issue.

The section ends by showing that Biblical standards are shocking and radical and that it is those who are most vulnerable who need our protection and are deserving of our respect.

Ch 9 Abortion's other victims.

This moving chapter emphasises the needs of those mothers who have undergone abortion and need special help especially when they may be suffering from 'post abortion syndrome'. This entity is then described in its ten features and those seeking to pastor or counsel such mothers would be much helped reading this section of the book.

At the end of the chapter the address of British Victims of Abortion is given. This is a group within which there is much pain and suffering but also much love and care.

Ch 10 Christian responsibility in public affairs.

This seeks to show how Christians can be salt and light in our present society.

Ch 11 Our guilty silence

The Church is challenged that our present silence is as remarkable as the strange silence of the Church in Germany during the atrocities of the Nazi era. There is a good appendix with a widespread bibliography, notes on each chapter and over 130 Scripture references.

This book is very warmly recommended to every theological student and those called to minister and pastor Churches and any serious Christian considering the abortion issue.

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Beyond Canberra

ed. B J Nichols & B R Ro

Regnum Books, 1993, 144pp £12.50

Subtitled *Evangelical Responses to Contemporary Ecumenical Issues*, this symposium brings together 14 reflections on the 7th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Canberra in 1991. The overall theme was COME HOLY SPIRIT, RENEW THE WHOLE CREATION but a major evangelical disappointment was the scant attention given to discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and the renewal of the churches.

Most contributors reflect the overall perspective of the Lausanne Movement and there were fringe meetings at the Assembly of a group of over 100 people 'with evangelical concerns'. Chapter 3 of this book gives a full text of the 'Open Letter' signed by 60 of this group at the close of the Assembly including the challenge: 'Evangelicals need to take a more active part in ecumenical events, both evangelicals who are part of member churches and those who are outside.' Of interest to UK readers is the fact that four signatories were from the Baptist Union here and another is listed as a Roman Catholic!

Since the Second Vatican Council co-operation between WCC and the Roman Catholic Church has increased dramatically, as the following statistics recognise. 'According to declarations by Archbishop Edward Cassidy, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, these years have seen the notable growth in confidence between the two institutions, and this has led to new forms of mutual co-operation. At present, twelve of the 120 members of the WCC Faith and Order Commission and one of the tutors of the Bossey Ecumenical

Institute are appointed by the Vatican. Seven Roman Catholic consultants attend the annual meetings and one is a member of the staff of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, and about one quarter of the WCC Geneva staff are Roman Catholics' (pp 34-5).

Throughout the Assembly one major programme of activity was held in the women's tent, *Womanspace*. Evangelicals were keen to commend the part women played at Canberra and the questions this raises for the church at large. 'Women were visible and active participants in the full programme of the assembly including worship (both preaching and administering the eucharist); section work, plenary sessions, business and committee actions as well as the educational offerings of the visitors' programme. The assembly was enriched by the participation of these many gifted women. This challenges the evangelical movement to reassess its theological understanding of women's spiritual giftedness and to take care that it does not unwittingly quench the activity of the Holy Spirit' (p 70).

Dominating the book, as it did the Assembly itself, is the furore over syncretism following the keynote address by Chung Hyun-Kyung, 'a combination of Korean-style liberation theology and North American feminist theology learned at New York's Union Theological Seminary, where she had finished her doctorate a few months before' (p 32). It was, in fact, the Greek Orthodox delegation which reacted most strongly of all to this denial of the uniqueness of Christ. Their concerns are reproduced here in full (chapter 5) and include sentiments also echoed by evangelicals present, 'The biblical faith must not be changed. . . Pneumatology is inseparable from Christology or from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity confessed by the church on the basis of divine revelation'.

What Rolf Hille calls her 'Spirit and Soil Theology' raises the burning issue for the WCC of the limits of legitimate pluralism within a body committed to Christianity. Roaring applause from countless delegates showed that 'she obviously caught the mood of many participants and brought the issues to a head' (p 66). Whilst Hille recognises that this 'suits the taste of the natural man' he himself sees it as 'an undeniable sign of the seduction of the last days' (p 68).

The book reflects the urgent question being asked by evangelicals 'to what extent the task of sharing faith in Jesus Christ with non-Christians has a place in the WCC agenda' (p 27). Despite the WCC world mission conference at San Antonio in 1989 their Commission had no part in the programme of the 7th Assembly. It also reminds us that the ongoing questions about hermeneutics are at the root of many contemporary issues of applying the faith on a global scale (p 9).

One German Lutheran contributes a chapter expressing gratitude that the WCC has given new impetus to 'the quest for visible unity among the separated churches.' Whether he speaks for his counterparts in the UK will be up to them to say but he is clear that, 'Since its founding in 1846 the Evangelical Alliance has been committed to unity in truth and love and wishes to do its share to help the ecumenical movement move closer to its goal' (pp 46-7).

This is not a gripping book but I'm glad I made it to the closing chapter by Peter Kuzmic of Croatia to find the aphorism he quotes which is sure to travel far. It is by Donald Gee, a Pentecostal pioneer, 'The Word alone will make you dry up, the Spirit alone will make you blow up. The Word and Spirit together will make you grow up' (p 143).

Alan Gibson