
Review of Theological Journals 1983-4

The Editor

“Evangelicals at the Cross-roads” was the rather startling headline to the editorial in **Theological News** (vol.15, No.2). “During the past two decades,” the editorial continues, “there has been an enormous increase in involvement in evangelism and in relief and in social services. Evangelicals are in need of a doctrine of the Church to integrate these two streams and to define priorities” (p.2). We heartily agree and so does Professor Klaas Runia in a fascinating article in the **Evangelical Review of Theology** (vol.8, No.1) entitled, ‘Evangelicals and the doctrine of the Church in European Church History’. He suggests three reasons why it is necessary for evangelicals to give thought to the doctrine of the Church. One reason is that the main churches of Europe are “at present passing through one of the most serious crises in history”. Secondly, ecumenical, sociological or political solutions are “neither hopeful nor helpful”. But, thirdly, evangelicals cannot afford to be smug at this point for the Church is “one of the most neglected parts of our doctrine” (p.41). Professor Runia recognises realistically that the way forward is far from easy. “Are evangelicals not hopelessly divided, not only as to their doctrine of the Church, but also as to their actual place within the Church? Some belong to established or national churches. Others belong to Free Churches. Others again belong to assemblies of Brethren or charismatic groups. How can we ever find a common doctrine of the Church in such a situation?” He suggests some pointers from a European-historical perspective. For example, “there often was (and is) a one-sided emphasis on the spiritual nature of the Church. I do not deny, of course, that the deepest secret of the Church is that it is the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit ... But ... we have often overstressed the distinction between the visible and invisible aspects of the Church ... and used this distinction as a means of escaping from the troubles in our local church or denomination ...” (p.51). Also, “there was (and still is) a one-sided emphasis on the spiritual unity of the believers” without its visible expression (cf. John 17:21,23). Runia’s final pointers are that we need to give urgent attention to the question of separation and, at the same time, make a study of church discipline (p.54).

The guest editorial by Dr. David M. Howard in the recent issue of **Theological News** (vol.16, No.3) reminds us that “the problem of

hermeneutics is one of the most vital issues with which the Church must struggle today” (p.2). In this respect the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship has study units doing some original work in the area of hermeneutics and the Church, ethics and society, mission and evangelism (issues concerning the integration of converts from Islam into the Church) and pastoral ministries (questions such as polygamy and the Church in Africa) while another study unit is focusing attention on the Church and China, working out biblical principles and strategy concerning Church and State in totalitarian situations.

Volume 7, No.1 of the **Evangelical Review of Theology** was, in the reviewer’s judgment, both an important and stimulating issue for it included the papers given at the Third World Theologians’ Consultation Seoul, Korea in 1982. These papers mark “an historic moment in the development of third world theological reflection. The degree of unity achieved in the midst of incredible diversity and tensions of cultures, mission and ecclesiological heritages, economic and political systems is remarkable. It reflects a common determination to uphold the primacy and authority of Scripture and devotion and obedience to one Saviour and Lord. We may find fault with the wording of the Seoul Declaration, but its central thrust is clear and augurs well for the theological undergirding of the churches which will embrace three-fifths of the world’s Christians by the 21st century” (p.7). Once again these papers raise the crucial question of hermeneutics.

The first paper by Ismael E. Amaya is a Latin American critique of Western theology. He is unhappy with the systematising approach of Western theology which has often been “dogmatic ... philosophical and traditional rather than biblical” (p.13). Dr. Amaya argues that most of the weaknesses of Western theology are related to ideology and technology resulting in a failure to deal adequately with the issues of riches (“do the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:24 have any meaning for a rich society?” p.22), abundance and waste, overeating and obesity, ecology, social problems such as divorce, drugs, corruption, civil rights, etc. This article is inadequate and unbalanced as a critique of Western theology and the relationship between systematics and the scriptures needs to be expounded more carefully but there is ample food for thought there.

This is followed by a brief African critique of Western theology by Billy Simbo dealing with the roots and results of Western theology and an Asian critique of Western theology by Han Chul-Ha. Principal Simbo sees the Hebraic thought pattern of Third World cultures with its striking resemblances to the Old Testament world view and cultures as the distinctive feature distinguishing Western theology from Third World theology (p.32). Twelve more chapters follow in which Third World theologians indulge in self-criticism and seek to construct a more biblical

theology within the framework of their own cultures. All this makes good reading and these brethren need our prayers and practical support. Congratulations to **The Evangelical Quarterly** for some valuable articles particularly in 1983. I am referring to the April and July issues '83. Allow me some space just to whet your appetite! The April issue was superb despite the fact that I did not agree with some of the conclusions of various writers. This issue took as its theme 'Calvin and Calvinism' and in the light of recent controversy concerning the agreement of Calvin's theology with later Calvinism here is an issue not to be missed. Paul Helm wrote on Calvin and the Covenant, Unity and Continuity while James Torrance dealt with The Incarnation and Limited Atonement. Tony Lane then provided a well-documented essay on The Quest for the Historical Calvin in which he contrasted and compared various attempts to find out what Calvin actually said on various controversial issues. Some of this discussion is open-ended but fair and his main conclusion which many will want to question is that "Calvin did not give way to a controlling principle in his theology, whether that be the Calvinist doctrine of the eternal decrees or of Barthian 'Christomonism'. Calvin was prepared to recognise both God's universal love for all mankind and his desire for all to repent and his purpose that some only should be saved" (p.113). The final article is by Charles Bell on Calvin and the Extent of the Atonement in which he attempts a critical appraisal of contributions by Helm, Lane and Kendall, and suggests no-one should be dogmatic in their evaluation of Calvin's teaching!

Similarly the July '83 issue was provocative and relevant with its major articles on Inerrancy. The first one was entitled Inerrant the Wind: The Troubled House of North American Evangelicals which was a critical survey by Robert Price of current approaches to the question of the inerrancy of the Bible and another one, Short Study: Inerrancy, Dictation and the Free Will Defence — briefly questions ways of describing the manner in which God's inerrant word was communicated through the means of human authors.

A more thorough and reliable treatment of inerrancy is found in the **Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society** (vol.25, No.4, which is the silver anniversary issue of the journal). This is an outstandingly useful and competent discussion of subjects such as Biblical Inerrancy: The Last Twenty Five Years, Raking up the Past, The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, The Bible and the Conscience of our Age, Upholding the Unity of Scripture Today, From Tatian to Swanson, from Calvin to Bendavid: The Harmonisation of Biblical History, John Calvin and Inerrancy, The Doctrine of Inspiration Since the Reformation, The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy: The Hermeneutics of Charles Spurgeon, Jacques Ellul's View of Scripture, Let's Put 2 Tim. 3:16 Back in the Bible, The Love Poetry Genre in the Old Testament and the

Ancient Near East: Another Look at Inspiration and, finally, Re-Examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy. If you want to keep abreast of the inerrancy debate and want a good, historical perspective on the subject then read this issue in its entirety.

Then in **Vox Evangelica XIV** (biblical and historical essays from London Bible College), Dr. Tidball writes on 'A Work so Rich in Promise: The 1901 Simultaneous Mission and the Failure of Co-operative Evangelism' (pp.85-103). "During its brief heyday," writes the author, "the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches initiated, in 1901, a united mission to the nation in an attempt to stem the growing tide of secularism and bring the masses back to church. The nineteenth century had seen a growing proliferation of home mission agencies both of a denominational and independent kind but this was to be evangelism conducted on an unprecedented scale and would attempt, for the first time, to secure the national co-operation of the Free Churches. The 1901 Simultaneous Mission is significant in that it established a pattern of co-operative evangelism which has subsequently been repeatedly adopted with approximately the same results being achieved. It is surprising, therefore, that it has been so neglected by historians and ... churchmen" (p.85). In the opening section we are given the background to the mission before being given a glimpse of the quality of co-operation. Six denominations were represented on the central committee and the Free Churches greeted the proposals for the mission with enthusiasm. Because of the threat of Romanism and sacerdotalism, only a few Anglicans participated in the mission but the most serious threat to the unity of the mission came from the Evangelical Alliance who were concerned about unorthodoxy of one missionary, Charles Aked but the Alliance was eventually pacified even though Aked was unsound in a number of doctrines. Several missionaries like Gypsy Smith, John McNeill and F.B. Meyer conducted meetings in London before reaching out to the provinces. In evaluating the effectiveness of this mission, Dr. Tidball writes of the excitement and approval in the religious press as well as statistics detailing the number of converts in the various centres. "And yet, underneath the triumphalist image projected, all was not well. All agreed that the Simultaneous Mission had been a failure in reaching those outside the church" (p.96) and an examination of the growth rate of six main nonconformist denominations reveals that the effect of the mission on overall church growth was marginal. The mission "continued the pattern, already established, that more and more evangelistic effort produced less and less result as the nineteenth century progressed ... Sadly," concludes the writer, "eight decades later, the same methods and style of evangelism are still being adopted, in the mistaken belief that it is a means of reaching the nation. If it was a work 'so rich in promise'

it has to be said that the promise has never been realised” (p.100). Relevant? Incidentally, in the previous number there is another historical essay by David Bebbington on *The Gospel in the Nineteenth Century*, that is, as it was understood in England among evangelicals. “The nineteenth century,” we are told, “as much as the eighteenth, shaped evangelicalism for the twentieth. If today we wish to stand in this evangelical tradition, we need, like nineteenth century evangelicals, to be conversionist, activist, biblicist and crucicentric ... The centrality of Christ crucified is the legacy of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, and to the twenty-first” (p.27).

Before I complete this review, I want to refer to the fifth bi-annual conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) which was held in West Germany from 13—17 August 1984. About seventy members attended from most of the Western European countries, including members from East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and news of church life and theological study in many of these countries was encouraging. The conference theme was the place of experience in Christian theology and life which, in our existentialist age bereft of absolutes and dependent to a large extent on emotion and experience, is a relevant subject. One session dealt with the place of experience in theologies as diverse as those of Schleiermacher and Barth while in another session the contributions of contemporary theologians are evaluated. The final paper on the biblical theology of experience was given by the FEET chairman, Professor Klaas Runia of Kampen, Netherlands. “The conference,” writes Professor Howard Marshall, “achieved a useful purpose in enabling the participants to engage in honest self-examination, to widen their understanding of other evangelical traditions and to recognise afresh the reality of the gifts of the Spirit with which God continues to enrich His Church.”

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