

THEOLOGICAL JOURNALS 1979 -A SELECTIVE REVIEWDr Eryl Davies

In the view of some political observers, Ayatollah Khomeini's triumphant return to Iran after fourteen years' exile and his impact upon the international scene marked 1979 as the year of the Ayatollah. 'The Times' observed that most of the history made in '79 occurred within the sphere of Islam. But we must not forget Mrs Thatcher's historical election victory which made her the first woman prime minister in Britain. Within Christendom itself 1979 was the year of the peripatetic pope. His traditionalist approach to Roman dogma became very apparent before the end of '79. Just before Christmas, for example, the Pope suspended the renowned Catholic theologian Hans Küng. This represented a remarkable change of attitude on the part of the Vatican for his immediate predecessor had written to congratulate Küng on his book, 'On becoming a Christian'.

The tensions, excitement, problems and trends both of contemporary history and theology are not always reflected, and grappled with, in theological journals and 1979 was no exception. Some journals still appear somewhat remote and irrelevant. Let us, however, strike a more positive approach.

In '*THEOLOGICAL NEWS*' (Dec '78 - Jan '79 , a useful and informative quarterly news-sheet providing worldwide coverage of developments among Evangelicals), Professor Klaus Bockmühl wrote an interesting editorial entitled 'Why theology?' He observed with regret the estrangement and cleavage between many believers and theology, between doctrine and life. All too often theology is regarded as a purely theoretical and remote activity irrelevant to the everyday life of the Christian.

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The estrangement, he adds, is evidenced in the polarization in evangelicalism between evangelism and teaching, then between Church and theology. This division "causes inestimable damage to the Church", for example, by weakening preaching and surrendering itself "to the reign of subjectivism." The same issue also refers to a searching article by Dr Harry Boer on 'Reprobation in the Canons of Dort' which appeared in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod's '*THEOLOGICAL FORUM*'. Dr Boer argues that the Canons fail to provide biblical support for the teaching on reprobation and four representatives from the Presbyterian Reformed traditions reflect on his paper.

We find Professor Bockmühl writing again, but this time in '*CHRISTIANITY TODAY*', under the general title of 'Bringing Theology back down to earth' (20th April, p54). He refers to a series of articles by West German theologians entitled 'What is the Matter with German Theology?' which appeared in the influential Protestant monthly '*EVANGELISCHE KOMMENTARE*' and which created a stir in that country. The New Testament scholar in Tübingen, Pieter Stulmacher, expressed his unhappiness with the results of the whole de-mythologization debate and called for a "post-critical exegesis of Scripture". The article from the pen of Zurich's leading theologian, Gerhard Ebeling, was equally surprising. Describing a great deal of contemporary theology as "unproductive productivity" in which the essence of theology has evaporated into either abstractionism or the journalistic craze for the latest ideological fashion, he observed that efforts to reform the study of theology have been to no avail. He complains that theology, lacking a sense of direction, tends to become subject to alien interests. Ebeling's position is clear. No one can be a theologian who does not exercise faith in his personal life. "To put it bluntly", he says, "the doctrine of God has its touchstone in prayer, Christology in worship and pneumatology

in the actual existence of the church." Theology needs to be re-orientated in its work of relating doctrine to life - not in an exclusively social or Marxist sense, for, he warns, there is "no promise for an overall social betterment but rather the commission to contain the effects of sin as much as possible." This reminder, even from a liberal theologian, merits our consideration.

In a later issue (29th June), Harold Kuhn analyses a term popular among secular theologians, namely, "doing theology", and he rightly states that the term indicates a basic existential methodology involving a deep aversion to "academic theology" and an affinity for open-ended and unstructured forms of theology. Kuhn warns that "this view that Christian theology is something 'done' rather than something derived from biblical revelation carries with it implications of the gravest sort for historic Christianity" (p56). It represents the relativizing and humanization of theology, besides robbing Christianity of its uniqueness. Deeper still, it involves the abandoning of reason in favour of an irrational type of group privatism.

Three articles on psychology caught my attention in 'C T' also. One article, 'Is Psychotherapy Unbiblical?' argued that a caring Christian community and a biblically based counselling are not always enough. While "miracles of healing have their place and confrontation with biblical principles is essential, there is also a place for therapy that occurs within a caring relationship and has as its goal the enhancement of the patient's capacity to give and receive love" (p29, 19th January).

Warning us that 'Psychology is not a Panacea but ...' another writer urges us to broaden our concepts of psychology and its role in the church. "Psychology is not a panacea, but this science of human behaviour does have practical value far

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greater than many Christians have recognized. There is a challenge now before Christian professionals and nonpsychologists to work together to build a biblically based psychology that can have a broader influence on the lives of Christians and on local churches" (p25, 16th November).

I found another article - "Abandoning the Psyche to Secular Treatment" (29th June) - most challenging and relevant. Here Professor Ronald Koteskey illustrates historically the effectiveness of moral treatment in mental illness some 150 years ago and the involvement of Christians in this development and treatment. Some hospitals had recovery rates of 80 and 90 per cent higher than at previous or subsequent times. Moral treatment did all this without tranquilizers, antidepressants, shock treatment, psycho surgery, psychoanalysis, etc. Kindness, patience, attention to needs, opportunities for expression of creativity, trust and the maintenance of self-respect were very effective. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the use of moral treatment declined with disastrous results and recovery discharge rates went down sharply in the wake of the new medical approach. Why was the moral treatment abandoned? One reason, suggests Koteskey, was the success of medicine in the nineteenth century leading to its adoption as the model for psychiatric treatment and research. Another reason was that the early moral therapists thought it unnecessary to develop theoretical conceptualizations of their principles. Why not return to the use of moral treatment? Possibly the fear of being labelled "unscientific" deters some from seriously proposing moral treatment. Furthermore the concept of 'moral' conflicts with the amoral approach of modern secular psychology and psychiatry. In conclusion the writer urges Christians to be more involved in this whole area of human need and to develop once again as Christians the methods of moral treatment.

There is a growing concern amongst some evangelicals

for theological creativity. Geoffrey Bromley of Fuller College, Pasadena gives expression to this vexed question in '*THEMELIOS*' (September). He appreciates that it is not to be endorsed or pursued without reservations and that too high hopes of creativity must not be entertained. In Bromley's view, for example, biblical studies provide ample scope for creativity where much linguistic and background work still needs to be done. The same he feels is true of historical studies where sacrosanct evaluations need to be reappraised. Dogmatic theology also opens up a vast area for original thinking, but it has the "delicate responsibility" (p7) of being both loyal in content and contemporary in expression. The reviewer feels that the biblical content of some attempts at creativity suffers at the expense of contemporaneity. Hermeneutics also provides scope for creativity especially in relation to ethics. Here there are two basic questions of application. One concerns the permanent validity of biblical injunctions given in different situations and at different times. The second concerns the relation between the core of biblical doctrines, injunctions and commands and the cultural medium in which they were expressed. Bromley suggests what some of us already feel, that this field of application is one where the need is most urgent at this juncture in Evangelical history.

The reviewer found the January '79 issue of '*Themelios*' stimulating and informative with its historical survey and biblical view of universalism as well as an additional article on the issue at stake in this debate and some reflections by Bruce Nicholls on contemporary trends towards universalism in the Asian context. In view of its contemporary application this latter article especially deserves a wide reading. An article - 'Preaching in Worship' - by Dr R.T.Kendall in the April issue was another highlight. With his usual directness he argues for the centrality of preaching in worship. He concludes with the following

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challenge: "If indeed the churches of Great Britain would come before God with weeping; if indeed the services of divine worship in this country would make preaching central; if indeed the ministers of the Gospel would preach the Word under the anointing of the Spirit, this nation would be healed" (p92).

The claim that "the discipline of hermeneutics is emerging as the new dominant movement in both American and European theology" was made by Walter Kaiser in 'C.T' (5th October). No longer are we discussing simply the traditional questions as to what is literal or figurative or normative, etc. Now the norm is for "the text to interpret us and become itself a new event as we read or hear it." This new orientation has its roots in the existentialism of Heidegger whose thought was popularised and extended by Hans-Georg Gadamer in 1960. His main premise was that the meaning of a text was not the same as the author's meaning. No one, according to Gadamer, could claim to know the precise meaning of a text since the number of possible meanings are endless. This 'New Hermeneutics' (so described by James Robinson in 1964) claims that each text has a plethora of meanings which exist without any norms for deciding which are right and wrong. The text itself is free from the author once he has written it and is ready to be shaped by our act of understanding it (p31). We cannot, of course, agree with this approach, but we need to be aware of it especially as Kaiser calls the evangelical community "to a whole new hermeneutical reformation" (p33).

Bernard Ramm wrote on the same subject in 'ETERNITY' (November). Under the title "Who can best interpret the Bible? Why the experts have been challenged." He speaks of a "ferment in hermeneutics" and pinpoints four main challenges to the traditional historical-grammatical-critical method (HGC) of interpretation. The first challenge was initiated by Barth and up-dated by

Brevard Childs of Yale who argues that the interpreter must go beyond the HGC method and give the text a theological interpretation. Challenge two came from Kierkegaard who demanded that an existential dimension be added. Bultmann used this position in a radical way but Gadamer, as we have already seen, has recently given a new impetus for a more existential un-Bultmanlike interpretation. The third challenge is a psychological protest led by Morton Kelsey and Walter Wink, who are critical of theological giants like Barth, Brunner, Bultmann and Tillich. For these theologians, theology was more of an academic exercise. Kelsey, for instance, argues that the interpreter must "put himself in the act" and find that meaning of the text which is "meaning for me". The final challenge comes from the literary experts who regard the HGC method as being too restricted to cover the manifold task of biblical interpretation.

1979 was also an important milestone for two well-known theological publications. Whereas the '*CHURCHMAN*' is now a hundred years old, with the January-March '79 issue the '*EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY*' entered upon its second half-century under the editorship of Professor F.F. Bruce. We wish both publications well. Articles in the '*Evangelical Quarterly*' during '79 included 'God and Mammon', 'Midrash and "Magnet" words in the New Testament', 'Baptism and Communion in contemporary thought and proposal', 'The transfiguration of Jesus: the Gospel in microcosm', 'Redactional Trajectories in the Crucifixion Narrative', 'Women and Church Leadership', 'The Hymnic Structure of Colossians 1: 15-20', 'On Discontinuity' and 'Hymnody in Lancashire'. The article on 'The Jewish Understanding of the Old Testament as the Word of God' was refreshingly conservative. "For Jesus", concluded David Kibble, "what was written in the O.T. Scriptures was God's Word: no more, no less ... It therefore follows that Christians ... must accept the Old Testament as the Word of

God as did Jesus and the Jews of his day" (p154). This article was spoilt by a concluding footnote that spoke of the need of the O.T. Scriptures becoming the Word of God for us "in the sense that Barth expounds in his 'Dogmatics'". I wonder whether the writer appreciates the contradiction between his position as outlined in the article and that of Barth? In the same issue we are treated to an enjoyable article on 'Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles' by Peter Jensen of Australia, whose conclusion is that Calvin would have seen in the charismatic movement "a new and erroneous version of the Christian life, assaulting the 'mind at rest' with false promises and ultimately robbing it of all that is worth possessing in the Christian Gospel" (p144).

At present it is a popular pastime for some to collate and discuss Calvin's teaching on the spiritual gifts and what might have been his attitude towards the contemporary charismatic movement. Paul Elbert attempts the former in the '*JOURNAL OF THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*' (September, p235). The article is thorough, daringly critical in parts and up-to-date in its many references to contemporary writings. Calvin's position concerning the cessation of the visible gifts was based, writes Elbert in conclusion, "on observation and was made within a highly polemical setting of antagonism regarding the miraculous. I think that Calvin did not understand why there was not a total apostolic recapture. Yet he was modest enough to realise that it was difficult to make up his mind about gifts and offices with which he had no personal familiarity" (p255).

The '*CALVIN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL*' also contains some useful material with articles on the 'Uniqueness of reformed theology', 'The basic structure of Pauline ethics', 'The redemptive focus of the kingdom of God', and 'Wish, work or hope in marriage'. The November issue is worth buying for the excellent Calvin bibliography 1979, spanning 25 pages!

The '*EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY*', published by the World Evangelical Fellowship, is trying to grapple more and more with contemporary theological problems. A brief glance at its contents for '79 illustrates the point - 'Believing in the Incarnation Today', 'Questions concerning the future of African Christianity', 'The theology of liberation in S.America', 'Evangelism in a Latin American context' and 'A selected bibliography for Christian Muslim workers', 'Ethics and Society' etc. Its book reviews and articles from such widely diverse backgrounds make this journal provocative and interesting. By comparison, the '*REFORMED THEOLOGICAL REVIEW*' from Australia appears somewhat tame and dusty although some of the subjects covered are important like 'Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Argument of Hebrews', 'Imitatio Christi in the New Testament' and 'Paul's Conception of the law of Christ and its relation to the law of Moses'.

One would like to spread the net more widely and include in this review other important journals such as the Scottish Journal of Theology, etc but pressure of space dictates otherwise. However, I cannot resist the temptation to refer to a publication that, probably, most of our readers are unacquainted with, namely, the '*SCIENCE DIGEST SPECIAL*' (Winter, '79). In a prominent article entitled 'Educators against Darwin', Larry Hatfield describes Christian scientists in N.America who "utterly reject evolution" as "one of our fastest growing controversial minorities". They prefer to call themselves 'scientific creationists' and their ranks, including engineers, physicists, biochemists, biologists, entomologists and physiologists, are swelling in numbers. One of their goals is to have scientific creationism taught in U.S. public schools and/or have evolution dropped from the syllabus. They are enjoying success, too, in some areas like Dallas, Texas, Columbus, Ohio etc. Let the last word be with Edward Blick,

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Professor of aero-space and nuclear engineering at the University of Oklahoma, one of the leading members of the Institute for Creation Research in N.America, who declared, "Evolution is a scientific fairy-tale just as the flat-earth theory was in the twelfth century ... Evolution requires a faith that is incomprehensible! Biblical Creation is the only sensible alternative" (p96).

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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Any theology of the Bible - thus any Biblical Theology - must begin with the question of what the Bible is. To state that the Bible is the inerrant word of God is quite right, and this is the presupposition of our study, but this only asserts something about the origin of the Bible and the extent of its trustworthiness, it does not answer the question of what this word from God is and what it has to do with us.

It is our contention that the Bible tells a story, a true story to be sure, but a story nevertheless; it is the story of redemption. Though the Bible tells one story, its unity does not consist in the sameness of all its parts - the book of Leviticus is very different from the Gospel of John. The unity of Scripture is to be found not in its unchanging doctrine but in the directed coherence of its story; each part is built upon what has gone before and each part points beyond itself towards what will come after, demanding the subsequent chapters for its completion.

Any Biblical Theology, if it is to be a Biblical theology, has to do justice to the nature of Scripture as the revelation of the redemptive