

raised by Barth's ethics. Specifically, he responds to two criticisms frequently directed to Barth's talk of ethics as response to the divine command. The first is that Barth is an ethical charismatic who treats the divine command as a private revelation. According to this line of criticism, Barth is essentially an irrationalist, to be categorized with Spiritualists of the left-wing Reformation. The second charge depends upon the first: Barth's theology precludes a normative ethics. In response, Biggar shows that the hearing of God's command is not to be detached from a prayerful reading of Scripture within the context of the Church. This text and this context act as checks on privatism. Biggar goes on to show that Barth actually engages (covertly!) in a soft form of casuistry. So Barth's theology is not at all lacking in a normative ethics. What Barth does do is to leave a certain salutary gap between rule and case so that an absolute casuistry (with the attendant risk of self-justification) is rendered impossible. Room is thus left for God to speak anew; to apply the rule to our situation in such a way that the rule is qualified by the fresh command. The net result is that ethical principles serve as a preparation for hearing the command of God but they are not a substitute for that hearing.

It is to be hoped that a second edition of this informative and interesting volume will eliminate the misspellings of German words which occur from time to time, as well as Alister McGrath's mistaken attribution of H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Kingdom of God in America* to his brother, Reinhold. Notwithstanding such blemishes, the book is well worth recommending to anyone who cares about the future of theology.

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## RÉSUMÉ

L'ouvrage contient des conférences prononcées en Australie en 1989. Le titre, *le Gouvernement divin*, use d'une formule de substitution pour «Royaume de Dieu», ceci pour souligner l'approche nouvelle de la question dont ce livre fait la tentative. L'ouvrage est destiné à un large public, mais contribue néanmoins aux études plus avancées sur l'Évangile de Marc. Il est utile, intéressant, stimulant.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Vorlesungen wurden 1989 in Australien gehalten. Der Titel 'Göttliche Regierung' stellt eine Alternative zu 'Reich Gottes' dar, um den neuen Zugang zu dieser Frage zu unterstreichen, den das Buch versucht. Das Werk wendet sich an ein breites Publikum, trägt aber dennoch zur wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Markusevangelium bei. Es ist ein sehr nützliches, interessantes und gedanklich provozierendes Buch.

This work is a collection of lectures given by R. T. France in 1989 at Moore Theological College, Sydney. Although a measure of acquaintance with NT scholarship is assumed, on the whole the work is accessible to the vast majority of readers – it is clear, down-to-earth and readable. The book reflects a desire to convey the results of specialist discussion 'to a wider public in an intelligible non-technical form, as a positive contribution to Christian faith and living' (p. viii).

The phrase 'divine government' is offered as an alternative to the traditional expression in NT studies, 'the kingdom of God.' The subtitle makes France's emphasis clearer yet: God's active 'kingship' instead of a static 'kingdom' is in view. For France the plethora of various current understandings of 'the kingdom of God' and the unfortunate popular trend to make 'kingdom' an adjective warrant new and fresh approaches to this central concept in the teaching of Jesus.

The introduction sets out the aims of the work in terms of the historical Jesus and the evangelist's *Sitz im Leben*. We are told, 'The primary object of this book is to enquire what Jesus of Nazareth had in mind when he launched this powerful slogan [i.e., 'the kingdom/kingship of God'] on the world' (p. 2). This task is not attempted on a 'pan-synoptic' basis but by studying Mark, the earliest of the Gospels. Further, the focus on a particular concept does not eliminate the need to 'read Mark whole' (p. 6); we can only do justice to Mark's account of Jesus' teaching on God's kingship when we read specific texts against the backdrop of the broader narrative. As the chapters

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## ***Divine Government: God's Kingship in the Gospel of Mark***

**R. T. France**

SPCK, London, 1990; vii + 135 pp., £6.95, paperback; ISBN 0 281 04471 6

## SUMMARY

These lectures were given in Australia in 1989. The title 'divine government' is an alternative to 'Kingdom of God', in order to underline the fresh approach to this question which the book attempts. The work is designed for a popular readership, but it also contributes to the scholarly study of Mark's Gospel. It is a very useful, interesting and thought-provoking book.



unfold, the emphasis seems to be upon Mark's portrayal of Jesus's teaching, but a concern to recover the message of the historical Jesus also runs through the work.

The five chapters discuss key 'kingship' (*basileia*) texts, but are also concerned to reveal the pervasive presence in Mark of a concept that cannot be restricted to occurrences of the term. Light is shed on Mark's Gospel by frequent references to background or parallel texts in Matthew, Luke and the OT, as well as other writings France stresses the paradoxical nature of God's kingship – it is hidden, humble, misunderstood and rejected. God is 'taking over', but ordinary nationalistic ideas of God's deliverance miss the point. God's saving action (i.e., his kingship) is too revolutionary for Jesus' contemporaries to grasp; it is focused not on overcoming Roman rule (Jesus is not a zealot) but on the more fundamental task of toppling demonic forces. Spiritual conflicts punctuate the Markan narrative, and many individuals whose lives had been dominated by demonic power are liberated in the revolution Jesus leads.

As well as refuting claims that Mark 9:1 is an instance of failed prophecy, France maintains that 8:38, 13:26 and 14:62 correlate with 9:1 and have their basis in the enthronement vision of Daniel 7. This implies that the 'coming' of the Son of Man and the 'coming' of the kingship of God in power anticipate Jesus' enthronement in heaven and not the Parousia. France concedes that this is a controversial thesis, but it has the advantage not only of removing the problematic edge of 9:1, but also of doing justice to Markan language and imagery.

Although this work is targeted mostly at a popular readership, France interacts with and contributes to the scholarly discussion of Mark's Gospel. On the issue of the obtuse Markan disciples, France maintains (against Weeden) that Mark has no vendetta against the disciples or a group which they represent. Rather, the disciples exemplify ordinary people who need to allow the paradoxical kingship of Jesus to reverse their conventional system of values. As for the messianic secret, France suggests that it reflects an attempt of the Markan Jesus to avoid handing ammunition to his opponents (any notion of royal or messianic identity was likely to be heard in political terms). The 'Son of man' in Mark is heavily dependent on the man-like figure in the vision of Daniel 7 (there is no discussion of a possible collective Son of man in Dan. 7). Finally, Markan christology has been greatly underestimated: it may be less developed than that in other NT writings, but there are still strong implications of Jesus' divinity.

My only significant objection to this work is that there is a certain lack of clarity in the introduction and throughout the work as to the focus of analysis: France seeks to understand both what the historical Jesus had in mind and the Markan portrayal of him. While it is quite appropriate to approach NT texts on both of these levels, this book has neither differentiated consistently between them (frequently the work slides from the *Jesus Sitz im Leben* to the Markan, or vice versa), nor provided a method by which one can confidently work back from Mark's final text to recover the mind of Jesus. Of course, France is not suggesting that the fact that Mark's is the earliest of the Gospels (pp. 2-5) means that it is free of redactional features and constitutes a perfectly clear lens to the period of Jesus, but the reader may nonetheless get the impression that there is an easy transfer of content from the message of Jesus in history to the message of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

That concern aside, this is a very useful, interesting and thought-provoking book. Students, ministers and any who wish to understand the NT better will benefit by reading it. Further, there is no lack of relevance for 'real life' today. This is especially true in regard to the sharp critique the work offers of conventional ideas about authority, power and prestige: Jesus brings God's kingship to serve the lowly, the child, the outcast; ordinary values of greatness are thus turned upside down.

Peter K. Nelson

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***Gereformeerden op zoek naar God.  
Godsverduistering in het licht van de  
Gereformeerde Spiritualiteit***

**C. Graafland**

Kok, Kampen, 223pp., hfl. 29,50.

**SUMMARY**

This book is concerned with the decline in Church attendance in the Netherlands. The author discusses secularization, especially in the writings of Dr Hendrikus Berkhof, which leads him to a fresh discussion of Reformation theology and spirituality. He insists that the real point at issue between Calvinists and Arminians at Dort was justification, not double predestination, though the latter doctrine assumed greater importance in the final documents. The book is an interesting corrective to much traditional thought, though it contains the danger that regeneration will be given too central a place, leading once more to a dangerous internalization of spirituality.