

*Absätzen und größeren Einheiten. Der Stil des Autors ist klar, überzeugend und wissenschaftlich.*

The subtitle of this admirable book might have been more precise, if more cumbersome, if it had read: 'An introduction to general linguistics as applied to the Bible, with a theological prolegomenon'.

The prolegomenon covers biblical perspectives on language in relation to creation, sin, and redemption, focusing on the linguistic implications of the doctrine that humanity is made in God's image. This chapter, though copiously illustrated by biblical references, deals more in principles than in specifics; it does not, for example, raise the question of what appear to modern readers as false etymologies in the Old Testament.

The introduction to linguistics begins with a chapter entitled 'The Scientific Study of Language', which concisely explains synchrony, linguistic structuralism, Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and the primacy of oral over written language. For good measure, the reader is given a whirlwind tour of the various disciplines relevant to the study of language.

Much of this will be new to many students of the biblical languages. They may feel more at home in the following discussion of the development of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, though even here, they will probably learn something, and see what they already know in a fresh perspective.

The most substantial part of the book consists of two chapters devoted to 'Describing the Biblical Languages', successively at the levels of sounds, words, sentences, paragraphs and larger units. Wherever appropriate, form and meaning are discussed separately, and there is a special treatment of ambiguity.

An Epilogue deals with problems of textual transmission and translation, and there is an appendix on 'the Biblical Language in Theological Education'. The author makes extensive use of the work of E. A. Nida and publications of the United Bible Societies; his discussion of dynamic equivalence would perhaps have benefited from being based on the Good News Bible rather than on NIV.

The writing is clear, compressed, and vigorous; and notes and bibliography provide ample food to satisfy the appetite which the book will surely arouse.

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## ***A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture***

**Alister E. McGrath**

Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, xv + 332 pp., £19.95, ISBN 0 631 16398 0

### **SUMMARY**

*The book discusses the influence of Calvin on Geneva, and of Geneva on Calvin and his theology. It has a special interest in Calvin's influence on our culture. It is also concerned to refute the myth that Calvin was 'the dictator of Geneva'.*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*McGrath explore l'influence qu'a eue Calvin sur Genève, et celle qu'a exercée Genève sur Calvin et sur sa théologie. Il s'intéresse aussi particulièrement à l'influence de Calvin sur notre culture, et réfute le mythe du Calvin 'dictateur de Genève'.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Dieses Buch untersucht den Einfluß Calvins auf Genf und den Einfluß Genfs auf Calvin und seine Theologie. Ein Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem Einfluß Calvins auf unsere Kultur. Ein weiteres Anliegen ist, den Mythos zu widerlegen, Calvin sei der 'Diktator von Genf' gewesen.*

Alister McGrath is one of the most prolific and most able of contemporary Reformation scholars. Having written extensively, especially on the doctrine of justification and on Luther, he has now turned his attention to John Calvin.

The scope of the work is ambitious. There are five chapters relating to the life of Calvin. These include discussion of the influence of Calvin upon Geneva and, interestingly, the influence of the Genevan environment upon Calvin and the formulation of his theology. There are two chapters on Calvin's thought, focussing on 'the medium' and 'the message', respectively. There are chapters on the spread of Calvinism and on the relation between Calvinism and western culture.

For whom is the book written? It is directed more at the student than the specialist, being a broad overview of the subject. It would be of interest to the history student as well as the theology student, with the focus on Calvin's life and his influence upon western culture. The author is concerned to present Calvin not just as a theologian but as one who has moulded our culture (pp. xi-xii).

One of the author's concerns is to refute some of the myths about Calvin. He points out that



Calvin was not the dictator of Geneva. While in no way approving the burning of Servetus, he wonders why this one execution has been singled out for attention rather than the countless others of the time. If Calvin cannot be excused in this manner, he may and must be contextualized, in an era which, lacking many of the sensitivities of twentieth-century liberal thought, regarded the execution of heretics as routine, (p. 117). The author also attacks the repeated, but unfounded, assertion that Calvin opposed Copernicus by name (p. xiv).

The author is commendably concerned to refute some of the anti-Calvin legends. But there is an alternative Calvin legend that is as much in need of refutation – the picture of a Calvin who was all but faultless and verged on infallibility. The author does not himself fall into this trap, but it might have been better if he had devoted more attention to this other danger in the interpretation of Calvin.

A book that is so general in scope is unlikely to break much new ground. The point where this most clearly happens is in the chapter on Calvin's Paris years, where the author questions the received opinion that Calvin studied at the Collège de La Marche.

How does this book compare with William J. Bouwsma's *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford, 1988), which has aroused such interest? It is less exciting and less iconoclastic than Bouwsma's book. At the same time it is a more solid book, with a secure theological underpinning, while Bouwsma is weak in this area. It is less speculative than Bouwsma's book and does not attempt to psychologise Calvin. At the same time, it is as much a 'sixteenth-century portrait' as is Bouwsma's, placing Calvin's life, thought and influence in a firmly sixteenth-century context.

On the dust cover there is a commendation from Francis Higman, a leading Calvin scholar, who states that it is 'an excellent book, remarkable in its scope, and interesting to read'. The interest is sustained by occasional flashes of humour, of which my favourite was the following: In 1532 the Paris theology faculty condemned a series of doctrines, 'including the radical suggestion that "now that God has willed that the Bible should be in French, women will take over the office of bishops and bishops the office of women. Women will preach the gospel, while bishops will gossip with young girls"'. The faculty found this too advanced for their understanding of orthodoxy' (p. 63).

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## **Le Livre de Michée**

**Daniel Schibler**

Vaux-sur-Seine: Édifac, 1989, 152 pp., 97 FrF. ISBN 2-904407-10-3

### **SUMMARY**

*The aim of this commentary is to steer a middle course between the great detail of some modern commentaries and superficial, popular treatments. In Micah, apparently conflicting viewpoints can be explained in terms of different audiences. The reign of Hezekiah is the background to Micah's prophetic hopes. The commentary is learned, clear and theologically well-grounded.*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*Le CEB, Commentaire Evangélique de la Bible, suit une voie moyenne entre le détail extrême de certains commentaires modernes et le traitement superficiel d'ouvrages populaires. D. Schibler étudie le livre de Michée, et résout par la référence à des auditoires différents les apparences de divergences internes. Il voit dans le règne d'Ezéchias l'arrière-plan de l'espérance prophétique de Michée. Le commentaire est érudit, clair, et bien fondé théologiquement.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Das Ziel dieses Kommentars ist, einen Mittweg zu finden zwischen der Ausführlichkeit einiger moderner Kommentare und der Oberflächlichkeit von populärwissenschaftlichen Abhandlungen. Scheinbar widersprüchliche Aussagen werden durch unterschiedliche Adressaten erklärt. Die Herrschaft Hiskias bildet den Hintergrund für Michas messianische Hoffnungen. Der Kommentar ist wissenschaftlich, klar und theologisch fundiert.*

This is the first book in a language other than English that I have been asked to review, and it has been a pleasure to sample a publication from the Faculty of Evangelical Theology at Vaux-sur-Seine. Micah is the eleventh to appear in a series planned to cover the whole Bible. The stated aim is to follow a middle course between the massive detail of specialist tomes and the superficiality of some popular publications that short-circuit the task of establishing the meaning in order to arrive at an application. The commentaries are based on the original languages, but do not presuppose a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, and make use of the principal versions of the Bible, especially those of the last decade. Readers of this