

distressing. The article on Judaism and Christianity neglects the Dutch contribution to the debate, while that on Liturgy and Doctrine does not acknowledge the contributions of Mercersburg, Forsyth, W. D. Maxwell, Neville Clark *et al.*, which are of more than a little significance where liturgical convergence is concerned.

Secondly, there is the question of the balance *between* articles. What are we to infer from the fact that the amount of space allotted to Moltmann is exceeded only by that allotted to Barth and Schleiermacher? That Moltmann is the third most significant Christian thinker since 1700? That his thought is so technically sophisticated that extended exposition is required—or that it is so convoluted or incoherent that lengthy unscrambling is needed? Or that we have here a case of editorial haphazardness? This last must surely explain why Moltmann occupies six columns while Kierkegaard, Pascal and Wesley receive less than one each. Why are there separate articles on Alisdair Macintyre and Stanley Hauerwas but not on Francis Hutcheson and Richard Price? On John Hick but not on Samuel Clarke, Berkeley or Reid? On T. F. Torrance but not on F. D. Maurice? On Rosemary Radford Reuther but not on Herrmann? On James Denney but not on James Orr, A. M. Fairbairn and W. B. Pope? On B. B. Warfield but not on Nevin and Schaff? On C. S. Lewis but not on Charles Kingsley? On Austin Farrer but not on F. R. Tennant? On Louis Berkhof (incredibly!) but not on A. H. Strong? Among others who do not receive their own articles are Berdyaev, Bergson, Blondel, Dörner, Eucken, Kuyper, Lammenais, Lotze, Sabatier and Whitehead. In the period since 1700 few have epitomized the intention of this book more completely than the polymath Priestley, who adjusted his thought to most of the intellectual disciplines current in his day. Readers will search in vain for his name in this volume.

Turning to topics, we find Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology, Narrative Theology, Postmodernism and Process Theology, but not Antinomianism, Arminianism, Socinianism, Unitarianism, the New Divinity, Common Sense Philosophy, the Noetics, the Oxford Movement, Mercersburg Theology and Neoscholasticism. At Calvinism we are referred to Presbyterianism, which is, as we have seen, a regional-cum-denominational account, and hence of little use in understanding Calvinism. While the regional articles covering more than fifty pages on Protestant Theology will

serve to remind some that there is theological life in countries other than their own (and it is particularly encouraging to see the contributions on Australia and Canada), to confine Roman Catholic Theology to a mere eleven pages seems parsimonious in the extreme. When, quite rightly, we have articles on Christianity in China, India, Japan and Korea, on what grounds do we not have one on Africa? Finally, the article on Ecclesiology omits two of the three main varieties of church polity, the presbyterial or consistorial and the congregational; and, notwithstanding the ecumenical promise of its catholic ecclesiology and its significant contributions to worship, theology and mission, there is no article on Congregationalism (though Quakerism is present, as is Baptist Thought—the latter's four columns being dwarfed by the entirely disproportionate eleven devoted to Dispensationalism). When an academic Anglican editor can overlook an entire tradition of orthodox Dissent in this way it bodes ill for that long overdue reconciliation of memories as between the Church of England and the heirs of the Congregational Way.

Among minor slips are the transfer of Reinhold Niebuhr from the Evangelical/Evangelical and Reformed/United Church of Christ to the Presbyterian Church; and the running heading above the article *Evil, problem of*, which proclaims Evangelism. The bibliographies clearly had to be selective, but a number of them are dated too.

The editor and publisher had a good idea; the book is good in parts, and many will be helped by individual contributions; but overall we are given a somewhat skewed picture of modern Christian thought.

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What is Scripture?

Wilfred Cantwell Smith

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RÉSUMÉ

L'ouvrage de Smith passe en revue les traditions écrites qui dans les diverses religions du monde sont considérées comme Écritures Saintes. Il insiste beaucoup sur le rôle de

l'homme dans la reconnaissance de certains textes comme Écriture Sainte. Pour lui, un texte est considéré comme Écriture à partir du moment où des êtres humains y voient le moyen d'entrer en contact avec une réalité divine. La démonstration pêche par son relativisme dans le domaine de l'herméneutique et par sa tendance à déprécier les formulations particulières de la croyance adoptée dans les traditions religieuses, pour favoriser plutôt une compréhension neutre des livres sacrés.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Smiths Buch gibt einen detaillierten Überblick über die traditionellen Texte, die für die verschiedenen Weltreligionen als heilige Schrift gelten. Er betont besonders stark die von Menschen gespielte Rolle, wenn sie gewisse Texte für heilig halten, und er findet Antwort auf seine Frage 'Was ist Heilige Schrift?' in der Benutzung von gewissen Texten als Kontaktpunkte mit göttlicher Realität. Sein Argument weist sich aber als unzulänglich aus, indem es von einem hermeneutischen Relativismus geprägt ist, und indem er die spezifische Glaubensformen von verschiedenen Traditionen einem allgemeinen, neutralen Verständnis der heiligen Bücher unterordnet.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith's published work has a long and proven track record in the field of comparative religion. Primarily a historian of religion, he has never shied away from drawing radical theological conclusions from his work. He has been a major influence on John Hick who has attempted to give much philosophical justification for their shared vision of the world religions as different human responses to the same ultimate transcendent.

In his recent book, Smith deals with the important question of how those who engage in religious studies are to understand and interpret the scriptures of the world religions. There are two aspects to this question. Firstly, there is the matter of what scripture actually is and, secondly, the question of what scripture means.

In the introduction to the book, Smith outlines his general conclusion. It is not appropriate, he argues, to give a local or particular answer to the question of what scripture is in terms of a specific scriptural tradition. Such an approach would fail to take into account the vast diversity of texts and oral traditions held as scriptures in the world religions. Smith answers the question by replacing

scripture as a noun with the verb 'to scripturalize' (p. 18). The answer lies in a human activity. Consequently, while he places the weight of his research upon textual traditions, he concludes: 'Scriptures are not texts!' (p. 223). Rather they are points of interaction between human communities and transcendent reality.

Smith catalogues an impressive and often fascinating range of evidence in defence of his thesis. He chooses the *Song of Songs* as an example of how a particular scripture may be understood in very different ways. He then develops his theme with reference to Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism. The conclusion of Smith's study of Islamic scripture is that 'the Qur'an as scripture has meant whatever it has meant to those Muslims for whom it has been scripture' (p. 88). There is no objective meaning in scripture but that offered by the human activity of 'scripturalizing'. This conclusion leads inevitably to relativism. The only requirement for a reading of a text to be accepted as valid is that there is someone who does in fact read the texts in that particular way. Smith moves on to apply this relativist understanding of scripture to all the major world religions. This description of scripture departs from any recognisably Christian understanding but that does not trouble Smith. His desire is to conceive a definition of scripture for the wider religious world in all its plurality. Hence, he acknowledges and rejects theological definitions of scripture as 'theories' limited to 'the particular premisses of the worldview in question' (p. 214) and, therefore, of no great bearing on the more general question of what scripture is outside of any particular tradition.

When Smith turns to providing a positive account of what scripture is he searches for theological expressions that are not limited in validity to any particular tradition. Having denied that scriptural statements, beliefs or creeds have any absolute status, Smith defends the 'transcendent significance' of sacred books (p. 221). They 'open up a window ... to a world of ultimate reality and truth and goodness' (p. 232). However, this transcendent significance is not found in scriptures having a divine origin in tablets of stone or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Rather, this significance originates in the way a particular book is used.

Smith's thesis is methodologically suspect. His attempt to compile neutral, historical observations of the way texts are used in the world religions are interesting in themselves and provide reason for reflection. Yet his attempt to arrive at any theological conclusions on the basis of his historical survey alone is flawed. Reaching the end of the book, one is not surprised that he must conclude: 'There is no ontology of scripture . . . nothing that scripture finally "is"' (p. 237). This is probably a valid observation concerning the fact of such a diversity of texts that are taken as scripture and uses made by religious people of those texts. This is particularly so when one considers how widely he spreads his net (even including national anthems and Shakespeare in his general considerations).

However, a more satisfactory conclusion might be to agree that the global diversity of scriptures allows for no unitive doctrine of scriptures such as Smith sets out to produce. Smith's book suggests that the attempt to produce a universally binding conception of scripture is a misconceived goal. There really is no answer to the question posed by the title of Smith's book that can be arrived at divorced from any particular theological context.

His attempt to produce an answer to the question is suggestive of a theological *esperanto* where terms can only be defined in terms of a lowest common denominator satisfactory in accounting for all the diverse phenomena described as scripture. This leads to such near vacuous conclusions as this:

'Any scripture—Gita, Bible or Buddhist Sutra, or whatever—and any verse or term within it, means what it in fact means, and has meant, to those for whom it has been meaningful.' (p. 89)

Smith's book sadly betrays all that is wrong with the pluralist assumptions of some religious studies. It is sad because there is much of value in his writings and his survey of the world scriptures provides much stimulating material and yet the theoretical structure that holds his argument together is committed to the distortion of all religious traditions through the homogenising tendencies of pluralism.

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Christliche Lebensführung: Eine Ethik der Zehn Gebote
Klaus Bockmühl

Gießen: TVG Brunnen. 1994, 160 S., DM 19.80. p.b., ISBN 3-7655-9061-4

SUMMARY

The Ethics of the 10 Commandments was read to students of all faculties during the Regent College's summer courses in Vancouver. It is a publication from the work of an important evangelical scholar of ethics and offers a generally intelligible and academically sound exegesis. In Calvin's manner, it includes both the negative version of the commandments and the corresponding positive demands in the Old and New Testaments. This book offers, in addition to a contribution to material ethics, typical results of Klaus Bockmühl's thought particularly in the first chapters dealing with systematic matters. This includes e.g. his plea for the lasting significance of the commandments as opposed to legalism on the one hand and to lawlessness on the other hand. It includes his defence of high-level ethical courses at evangelical institutes as opposed to the ethical individualism and pluralism of a secular society. It also includes the approach of interpretation based on the preamble and the first commandment. This particularly impressive and committed part depicts ethics not only as instructions for behaviour but as a call back to the biblically testified relationship with God, which is the foundation for christian ethics.

RÉSUMÉ

A l'occasion de cours d'été au Regent College de Vancouver, l'auteur, qui est un spécialiste bien connu dans le domaine de l'éthique, a donné une série de conférences pour toutes les Facultés de cette institution. Nous avons ici le texte de ces conférences. L'exposé est à la fois compréhensible et d'un haut niveau scientifique. A la manière de Calvin, l'auteur expose les commandements sous leur forme négative (interdictions) et avec leurs implications positives à la lumière de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament. En plus d'une contribution à l'éthique proprement dite, le livre nous donne des aperçus significatifs de la pensée de Bockmühl, particulièrement dans les premiers chapitres systématiques. Voir entre autre son plaidoyer pour la valeur permanente des dix commandements