

you consider to be authoritative for those who call themselves 'Christian'. For most evangelical Christians, it can safely be assumed that the Bible is regarded as authoritative, with the interpretation of the Bible being a possible bone of contention. All in all, the author of a 'primer' on bioethics for Christians goes boldly where angels fear to tread. Having said all this, let us take a closer look at Meilaender's bold attempt to 'say what we Christians ought to say . . .' (p. xi). He starts off with references to a theology of 'limits' and the 'duality of freedom and finitude'. A particularly profound statement, which all of us do well to reflect on is that '[w]hat makes us true individuals . . . is that God calls us by name. Our individuality is . . . established only in *community* with God' (p. 2, emphasis in the original). After this brief introduction, he addresses the main issues surrounding the beginning of life, the termination of life, genetic engineering, organ donation and human experimentation. The overview is neither comprehensive (transgenic organ donation and cloning are not mentioned) nor systematic. Meilaender appears to be more interested in a ramble across the heath without sticking to a path, rather than in describing the extent and prominent landmarks of the field under survey. This makes for easier reading, perhaps, but leaves the aftertaste of candy floss. The serious reader is left with little substance, since the lack of a systematic approach damages the book's value as a springboard for further study.

This difficulty is further compounded by the lack of a bibliography. This lack is only partially rectified by the footnotes. For a book addressed to Christians, there is surprisingly little reference to Scripture, with 'in my opinion' and 'I think' being the basis of virtually all the conclusions reached. The reader is in essence given Meilaender's gut-feeling on the topic under discussion, instead of a set of tools to work with. The chapter on human experimentation is particularly badly written. As somebody who has been directly involved in medical research on humans for more than a decade (on both sides of the needle), I found Meilaender's opinions and speculations to be poorly researched oversimplifications. Even taking into consideration that this book is a 'small introductory work', the ten pages devoted to this topic could have been better researched and organised.

To anyone who manages to introduce bioethics to the lay person in 120 pages, as Meilaender has done, I say, 'Hats off!' To write

succinctly and flowingly is an art. Yet, as a 'small step for man', no matter how bold, it lacks the substance which could have made it into a 'giant leap for mankind'.

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The Last Things

Herman Bavinck, Edited by John

Bolt; Translated by John Vriend

Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Grand

Rapids: Baker Books, 1996, 204 pp., pb,
ISBN 0-85364-761-5

RÉSUMÉ

La Société de Traduction Réformée Hollandaise a pour but de rendre accessible au monde anglophone des textes de piété et de théologie réformée classique. Sa première production, intitulée Les Fins Dernières, est tirée de la Dogmatique Réformée de H. Bavinck. L'introduction de l'éditeur nous donne un aperçu intéressant des tensions théologiques de l'époque, entre le piétisme confessionnel et la modernité adoptée par Ritschl. Elles ont influencé l'approche de Bavinck, bien que l'orthodoxie confessionnelle conserve le dernier mot dans sa théologie.

Bien que rédigée il y a un siècle, l'œuvre de Bavinck est néanmoins bien informée et équilibrée. L'auteur rend bien compte des opinions théologiques opposées aux siennes, tout en présentant ses propres convictions. Il se fonde abondamment sur l'Écriture, bien que les présupposés philosophiques qui sous-tendent son approche soient parfois évidents. Bavinck défend une position amilléariste, affirme la condition consciente des personnes dans l'état intermédiaire et défend vigoureusement la position orthodoxe du châtement éternel conscient contre les diverses autres positions, comme celles qui affirment l'annihilation des perdus et l'immortalité conditionnelle.

L'ouvrage nous fournit une présentation claire de l'eschatologie orthodoxe réformée hollandaise au début du XX^e siècle.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Als ersten Versuch, die englischsprachige Welt mit der klassischen reformierten theologischen und religiösen Literatur bekanntzumachen, hat die holländische reformierte Übersetzungsgesellschaft das Kapitel Die

Letzten Dinge aus Herman Bavicks Reformierter Dogmatik heraus bracht. Die Einführung des Herausgebers vermittelt einen wichtigen Einblick in die theologischen Spannungen zwischen dem konfessionellem Pietismus und etwa der von Ritschl vertretenen Moderne. Sie waren für Bavincks Arbeit prägend, auch wenn bei ihm die konfessionelle Orthodoxie das letzte Wort behält. Obwohl hundert Jahre alt ist Bavincks Arbeit kenntnisreich und ausgewogen, jeweils mit einer angemessenen Zusammenfassung entgegengesetzter theologischer Ansichten und einer Präsentation der eigenen Überzeugungen. Der Rückbezug auf Schriftworte ist immens, trotzdem treten seine philosophischen Denkvoraussetzungen gelegentlich deutlich hervor. Besonders betont ist bei Bavinck der Amillenianismus, die Überzeugung vom Bewußtsein der Verstobenen im Zwischenzustand, und, mit Nachdruck vertreten, die orthodoxe Lehre einer ewigen, bewußt erlebten Strafe. Alternativen Ansichten werden diskutiert und abgewiesen, einschließlich der Annahme einer Annihilation oder einer bedingten Unsterblichkeit. Zusammenfassend: das Buch liefert ein klares Bild holländisch-reformierter Orthodoxie am Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts.

For many of us, acquaintance with the works of the great Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) is restricted to the few works previously translated into English (*The Doctrine of God*, and *Our Reasonable Faith* are the ones that come to mind), and, at second-hand, in Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*. So, for us, *The Last Things*, (newly translated as a result of the enterprise of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, whose directors are drawn from a wide spectrum of American churches of Dutch origin,) opens a door into a theological treasure-house. *The Last Things* is the section on Eschatology in Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, originally published at the end of the nineteenth century, and as we approach the end of the second Christian millennium with its accompanying eschatological excitement in the church and among the cults, Bavinck's work has much to say to us that is both instructive and salutary.

However, before commenting on Bavinck's work, it is necessary to draw attention to the Editor's Introduction in which John Bolt gives us, *inter alia*, a fascinating picture of the theological tensions that inform Bavinck's total approach to Dogmatics. These are the conservative, confessional pietism of the Dutch

secessionist churches, and the insights of modernity as expressed, for example in Albrecht Ritschl. These are polarised positions, and in his response Bavinck never surrenders his confessionalism, and never embraces the radicalism of the then 'moderns', but he recognizes that men like Ritschl have the virtue of calling on the Christian 'to exercise his earthly vocation and fulfill his moral purpose in the world' (p. 11) In the reviewer's opinion, the 'Dutch' Reformed viewpoint, with its rejection of an 'other-worldly' dualism, will always take seriously the 'this-worldliness' of the nineteenth century liberals. Bolt also correctly points out the theological relationship between Kuyper and Bavinck.

Turning to the work itself, Bavinck's treatment of eschatology is divided into three sections—'The Intermediate State', 'The Return of Christ', and 'The Consummation', and each of these is sub-divided in such a way that all the subsidiary issues usual to 'The Last Things' are dealt with.

There is no question that Bavinck was a thorough scholar, well acquainted with all the relevant material published in his day, and he moves through the writings of the Fathers, Scholastics, Protestant Reformers, Enlightenment thinkers, and his own contemporaries with confidence. A strange exception is his misunderstanding of Darby's views of the millennium, where he apparently confuses the so-called 'Tribulation' of seven years with the millennium!

Another marked feature of the work is the fair and balanced treatment of alternative eschatological views. Although 'soul sleep', 'purgatory', and pre-millennialism, for example, are rejected, the positions their proponents hold are not caricatured, and, for the most part, the rebuttals are presented without the opprobrium that disfigures so much writing on eschatology. For the record, Bavinck was an amillenialist, and not of the 'optimistic' sub-genus, either!

Mentioning alternative views leads one on to one of the revived debates of our own time—the arguments about eternal punishment. Holding to a rigorous orthodoxy on the question, Bavinck traces the rise of objections to the doctrine and sets out the grounds on which the doctrine is called in question, which, he says, 'always remain the same.' (144) (Little has happened in the past hundred years to change this assessment!) He then proceeds to rebut these objections, and his refutation might lead one to comment that 'the grounds of the refutations always remain the same, as

well!' However, the value of Bavinck's treatment is that it clearly delineates the issues, and recognises the tremendous place that human feelings play in the revolt against the traditional dogma. As he puts it, 'If human sentiment had the final say about the doctrine of eternal punishment, it would certainly be hard to maintain and even today find few defenders.' (147) He also acknowledges that presentations of the doctrine are 'often depicted in too much realistic detail.' (148) Nevertheless, it 'is . . . grounded in Scripture. And no one speaks of it more often and at greater length than our Lord Jesus Christ . . . It is the greatest love that threatens the most severe punishments.' (148)

Given that Bavinck's work is a century old, one might expect to be faced with the difficulty of assessing a presentation, that, for all its intrinsic excellence, inevitably suffers from a comparison with the advances in theological and eschatological thought. In measure, this is undoubtedly true, but one sees in some of his ideas the germ of later developments. For instance, while Bavinck holds to the dichotomous view of human nature, there are hints of a shift to the more recent view of psychosomatic unity. In his chapter, 'After death, What?', for example, he writes: '. . . though human persons are not merely physical beings, all their activities are bound to the body and dependent on it . . . the body is not the prison-house of the soul but belongs integrally to the essence of our humanity.' (47)

The Last Things is not the last word in eschatological theology, but for those who are looking for an eminently scriptural, well-informed and cogently argued presentation of the Reformed Faith, Bavinck's work is well worth reading, and assimilating. True, it is the Reformed faith as interpreted by a devout theologian of the very influential 'Dutch' school of the early twentieth century, but that does not make it irrelevant or out-dated. Those of the Calvinistic tradition whose background and reading are more 'Princetonian' will find much here to challenge their thinking.

All strength to the arm of the Dutch reformed Translation Society—from this first sample, they have embarked on a worthy enterprise!

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Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey

Craig L Blomberg

Leicester: IVP [Apollos], 1997, 440 pp., £16.99, ISBN 0-85111-770-8

RÉSUMÉ

On peut espérer que l'ouvrage de Blomberg, Jésus et les Évangiles, va devenir le manuel indispensable pour tous ceux qui étudient les Évangiles. Il traite les thèmes abordés avec rapidité, mais avec une profondeur qui manque habituellement aux approches embrassant beaucoup de sujets. Avec ses suggestions bibliographiques et les questions proposées au lecteur à la fin de chaque chapitre, nous avons là un outil de travail pour lequel nous devrions être profondément reconnaissants.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Es ist dem Buch zu wünschen, daß es als Lehrbuch zum Verständnis der Evangelien weite Verbreitung findet. Die Abschnitte werden zügig abgehandelt, jedoch mit einer Tiefe, die normalerweise in einem Überblicksbuch kaum erwartet werden kann. Mit den Literaturhinweisen und den Fragen an den Leser am Ende eines jeden Kapitels steht damit ein Arbeitsbuch zur Verfügung, für das wir zutiefst dankbar sein können.

'This book is designed to be a "one-stop shopping" textbook for courses on the Gospels', declares Craig Blomberg on the first page of this comprehensive introduction to study of the Gospels. In this reviewer's opinion, the book certainly lives up to its intention.

The book is split into five parts (i) Historical Background for studying the Gospels, (ii) Critical Methods for Studying the Gospels, (iii) Introduction to the Gospels, (iv) A Survey of the life of Christ, and (v) Historical and Theological Syntheses.

Each chapter contains a brief overview of the topic, thus the chapter dealing with the 'Historical Criticism of the Gospels' gives a brief historical summary which mentions the Fathers, Reimarus, Strauss, Schweitzer, Farmer, redaction criticism, and the quest for the historical Jesus. Each topic, however is not just skipped over but dealt with in some detail, for example, while only just over two and a half pages are devoted to discussion of Marcan priority, Blomberg is able to give 14 succinct points outlining both the positive and