

Reformation: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Carl R. Trueman

Bridgend: Bryntirion Press; Dundas, ON: Joshua Press, 2000, 100 pp., pb., £4.95, ISBN 1-85049-175-5

SUMMARY

Carl Trueman's lecture series on the Reformation takes as its basis the definition of the Reformation as representing 'a move to place God as he has revealed himself in Christ at the centre of the church's life and thought' (pp. 14-15). In four informative, thought-provoking and challenging chapters, Trueman explores the lessons the Reformation can teach the church today particularly through the person and thought of Martin Luther. This he does through a study of the continuing reformation of the church under scripture, especially in relation to the cross of Christ, the written and proclaimed word, and the assurance of salvation.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Carl Trueman's Vorlesungsreihe zur Reformation basiert auf der Definition von Reformation als „einen Schritt, den sich in Christus geoffenbarten Gott in das Zentrum des Lebens und Denkens der Kirche zu stellen“ (S. 14-15). In vier informativen, zum Nachdenken anregenden und herausfordernden Kapiteln wird am Beispiel der Person und des Denkens Luthers untersucht, was die Reformation der heutigen Kirche zu sagen hat. Trueman untersucht dabei auch die kontinuierliche Reformation der Kirche unter dem Wort, besonders in Bezug auf das Kreuz Christi, das geschriebene und das verkündigte Wort, sowie die Gewissheit der Errettung.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cette série de causeries, Trueman commence par définir la Réformation comme «un changement plaçant Dieu tel qu'il s'est révélé lui-même en Christ au centre de la vie et de la pensée de l'Église» (p. 14-15). Il cherche à découvrir quelles leçons la Réformation peut enseigner à l'Église d'aujourd'hui, en particulier par la personne et la pensée de Luther, en apportant bien des informations et des réflexions stimulantes. Pour ce faire, il étudie le développement continu de la réforme de l'Église sous l'autorité de l'Écriture, notamment pour ce qui concerne les thèmes de la croix de Christ, de la Parole écrite et proclamée, et la doctrine de l'assurance du salut.

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This is a series of lectures delivered at the Evangelical College of Wales's Word and Spirit Conference in July 2000, which explores ways in which the contemporary church can learn from the life and thought of the sixteenth-century Reformation. I have several minor criticisms, which can in part be explained by the author's necessary selection of material for inclusion in lectures. First, the study draws largely on Luther, with only some discussion of Calvin and a few others. Secondly, the only

reference to the evangelical Anabaptists is dismissive. This is surprising because a study that is evangelical in content and intent could find much in their thought, which the contemporary church could learn from, given that it was this radical wing of the Reformation that sought to be rigorously and consistently evangelical in a way that the magisterial reformers were not. However, these are minor criticisms and should in no way detract from this excellent book.

Trueman's working definition of the Reformation is that it 'represents a move to place God as he has revealed himself in Christ at the centre of the church's life and thought' (pp. 14-15). In Chapter one, he convincingly argues that key insights of the Reformers are as relevant today as they were in the sixteenth century. If this book does nothing else, it will help dispel the assumption of too many that the past is of no use to today's church. The focus here is on setting God at the centre of the church's life and thought – a marked contrast, for example, to the present preoccupation with self. The difference between the Catholic and Protestant Reformations is that the former focused on practical and moral issues, while the latter addressed the theological foundations of the church and sought to reform the whole. The Reformation laid the emphasis on God, specifically God in Christ.

The second chapter examines how Luther's theology of the cross clashed with the theology of glory, which predominated the late medieval world as it does the contemporary world. This chapter is simply rich in content, dealing with such important issues as the problem of suffering, what it is to be a theologian and the Christian life as the way of the cross. This is followed by a lecture on the word of God, both written in the Bible and proclaimed. Of especial relevance to those training for ministry, or already in ministry, is the discussion of the preacher and their training, including the importance of language study, biblical and systematic theology, as well as the minister's central task, which is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The book closes with a study of Christian assurance, which seeks the path between those who tend towards a legalistic introspection that devalues assurance and those whose triumphalism practically denies the reality of doubt. Both, Trueman maintains, are obsessed with the believer's experience as the basis for assurance, a position shown wanting by the Reformers, who perceived God as trustworthy and understood that it is his promises that save us.

Written as a series of lectures, this book reads well, explains some key Reformation doctrines (of particular note is the discussion of Luther's theology of the cross in Chapter two) with clarity and applies them to contemporary issues. Sometimes controversial, this is always thought-provoking and challenging. Not everyone will agree with all of Trueman's points, nor be wholly sympathetic to his Reformed evangelicalism, but throughout readers will, I believe, be wanting to read more on the subjects raised. Well-chosen illustra-

tions and judicious applications make this a most useful volume, which will be ideal for those new to the study of the Reformation, those who might doubt the relevance of studying church history and theology as well as those who wish to enjoy a refreshingly well-written study, which will bring the Reformation alive and make it relevant to the present day.

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Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness

Thomas Albert Howard

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, xii + 250 pp., hb., £32.50, ISBN 0-521-65022-4

SUMMARY

Investigating the rise of historicism and focusing in particular on the German biblical scholar and theologian W.M.L. de Wette and the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, Howard argues that historicism and secularisation do not represent the major breaks with the Christian heritage that they are often assumed to be. This is a rich and fascinating book, which, in addition to serious reflection on theological and philosophical developments as well as the rise of historicism, offers some intriguing glimpses into the lives of its main protagonists.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Howard argumentiert in dieser Untersuchung zur Entstehung des Historismus, die sich vor allem dem deutschen Bibelwissenschaftler und Theologen W.M.L. de Wette sowie dem Schweizer Historiker Jacob Burckhardt widmet, dass die Phänomene des Historismus und der Säkularisierung keineswegs die großen Brüche mit dem christlichen Erbe darstellen, als die sie häufig verstanden werden. Dies ist ein inhaltsreiches und faszinierendes Buch, das neben bedeutenden Überlegungen zu theologischen und philosophischen Entwicklungen sowie zur Entstehung des Historismus auch einige interessante Einblicke in das Leben seiner Hauptdarsteller gewährt.

RÉSUMÉ

Prenant pour objet d'étude l'avènement de l'historicisme, l'auteur s'intéresse au bibliste et théologien allemand W.M.L. de Wette, et à l'historien suisse Jacob Burckhardt. Il défend la thèse selon laquelle, contrairement à ce qu'on considère souvent, l'historicisme et la sécularisation ne constituent pas une rupture majeure avec l'héritage chrétien. L'ouvrage est riche et fascinant ; outre qu'il apporte une réflexion sérieuse sur l'évolution de la théologie et de la philosophie, ainsi que sur l'apparition de l'historicisme,

il nous fournit quelques renseignements surprenants sur la vie de ses principaux promoteurs.

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Investigating the rise of historicism and focusing in particular on the German biblical scholar and theologian W.M.L. de Wette and the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, Howard argues that historicism and secularisation do not represent the major breaks with the Christian heritage that they are often assumed to be. He demonstrates the centrality of inherited theological patterns of interpreting experience in the thought of Burckhardt, one of the key representatives of the emerging modern secular historical consciousness.

In the introduction Howard puts forward his main thesis, arguing that the 'shadows of theological presuppositions and attitudes, albeit in secularized forms, are ultimately more significant than the radical break that notions of religious crisis and apostasy seem to entail' (p. 7). He also discusses various definitions of historicism and points to weaknesses and self-contradictions in historicist thought. Modern secularisation, 'a complex process in which religion came to lose its authority over other social institutions' (p. 17), is traced back to the legacy of the Reformation and its stress of the importance of independent inquiry into the biblical texts.

Chapter one focuses on de Wette, situating his early thought in the cultural contexts of the late German Enlightenment, early romanticism and nineteenth-century historicism. Howard shows that de Wette's theology and exegesis epitomise a unique blend of Enlightenment historical-critical traditions in biblical scholarship, Kantian epistemological concepts and the aestheticising tendencies of the philosophies of Schelling and Fries. De Wette is said to embody the fundamental tension between wishing to preserve the true content of Christianity and embracing the critical spirit of *Wissenschaft*. This led him to embrace the philosophy of Fries, who offered an intellectual basis for the validity of metaphysics and religion by limiting the scope of reason. De Wette applied his insights to biblical interpretation, distinguishing between knowledge (*Wissen*, the mode of cognition applicable to the spatio-temporal world), belief (*Glaube*, which relates to a noumenal, infinite reality outside the phenomenal world) and aesthetic sense (*Ahnung*, 'cognition through pure feeling', which bridges the chasm between knowledge of the finite and faith in the infinite).

The second chapter looks at de Wette's time at the University of Berlin, arguing that his theology was worked out in conscious opposition to Schleiermacher. De Wette was particularly critical of Schleiermacher's willingness to minimise the importance of past expressions of faith (especially pre-Christian ones), his definition of religion, which he thought drove a wedge between religion and moral action, as well as his tendency to underrate aesthetics. Outlining de Wette's application of Fries's philosophy, Howard notes that