

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

* * * * *

From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law

Philip S. Ross

Tain: Mentor, 2010; 426 pp. £12.99 pb; ISBN
9781845506018

RÉSUMÉ

Philip Ross considère dans cet ouvrage la conception classique de la loi mosaïque qui y discerne trois catégories distinctes : les lois morales (toujours en vigueur), les lois cérémonielles (qui ne sont plus en vigueur) et les lois civiles (qui sont encore d'actualité quant à leurs principes généraux). Bien que cette conception ait été récemment critiquée, il montre que c'est là la doctrine catholique de l'Église, et qu'elle est en plein accord avec l'intention de la loi telle qu'elle a été donnée à l'origine. Il examine soigneusement les données bibliques et manifeste une bonne connaissance d'un large ensemble de travaux ayant trait à ce sujet.

SUMMARY

In this book Philip Ross examines the classical division of the Mosaic law into three distinct elements: moral (ever-binding), ceremonial (no longer binding) and civil (binding in its general principles). Although this division has been under attack lately, Ross shows that it is the catholic doctrine of the Church and that it is consistent with the intention of the law as originally given. He pays close examination to the biblical material and shows an acquaintance with a wide range of secondary literature on this subject.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In seinem Buch untersucht Philip Ross die klassische Einteilung des mosaischen Gesetzes in drei unterschiedliche Bereiche, nämlich den moralischen (fortwährend gültig), zeremoniellen (nicht mehr bindend) und den zivilen Bereich (mit bindenden allgemeinen Prinzipien). Obwohl diese Dreiteilung unlängst kritisiert wurde, zeigt Ross auf, dass sie die katholische Lehre der Kirche ausmacht und mit der ursprünglichen Absicht des Gesetzes übereinstimmt. Er untersucht das biblische Material ganz genau und ist auch mit einem beträchtlichen Umfang an Sekundärliteratur zu diesem Thema wohl vertraut.

* * * * *

Paul's question in Galatians 3:19, 'Why then the law?' resonates with every serious exegete of the Scriptures. The line of purpose and promise seems to run seamlessly from the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 through the successive covenantal epochs, interrupted only by the giving of the law through Moses. What was the purpose

and function of the law within an otherwise evangelical and promise-focused salvation? That was a problem in Paul's day, and it is a problem still.

The Westminster Confession of Faith articulates a view of the law which was pretty much standard across a range of theologies until fairly recently. As Philip Ross puts it in this book, to the question 'Am I still bound to obey the Mosaic law?', the threefold division says 'Yes and no'. 'The Mosaic law does not apply without exception to the Christian, but nor can we dispense with it altogether. One part of the law is non-binding, another binding in its underlying principles, and another ever-binding' (2). This echoes the traditional view that there are three dimensions to the Mosaic law: moral, ceremonial and civil. Ross argues that this was the catholic doctrine of the Church from the earliest era, and that only in recent times it has been questioned. Indeed, he suggests that these two elements – the catholicity of the doctrine and 'the manner of its recent dismissal' (33), are the two factors that make it a worthy topic of study.

Beginning with Moses (surely a valid hermeneutical approach!), Ross examines the vocabulary used within the legal material of the Old Testament itself. In particular, he is concerned to ask whether the Decalogue is distinctive within the corpus of Old Testament laws and whether, therefore, it ought to be dealt with differently. Was Aquinas correct to suggest that the phrase 'commands, decrees and laws' (Deut 6:4) pointed to a threefold division? Can we properly distinguish between civil laws and ceremonial? And is a threefold division enough?

Ross's handling of these questions is thorough and exacting. He is correct to suggest that the phrase 'and he added nothing more' in Deuteronomy 5:22 points to the distinctiveness of the Decalogue. He also takes Christopher Wright to task for not understanding the threefold division correctly and for trying to impose a more elaborate structure which does not do justice to the text. Ross is also correct to challenge what has become a given in hermeneutical discussion and interpretation of the law: that the threefold division has become 'sabbatarianism's guilty accomplice' (165). With the volume edited by D.A. Carson *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) a polemic was raised against the transference of authority from the Old Testament Sabbath to the New Testament Lord's Day, and that polemic continues in New Perspective and in New Covenant Theology. Ross argues convincingly, however, that this is to misread both the Old Testament and the New; in his discussion on Jesus' claim that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it, he summarises it in this way: '[Jesus'] followers will follow and

teach the commandments in a way that is in continuity with the law's intent, the prophetic oracles and Jesus' teaching as recorded in Matthew 5' (219).

This is exactly right, and Ross's articulation of this thesis makes his book an invaluable contribution to contemporary discussion on the place of the law. The threefold division is simply a recognition that part of the law corpus was given with the intention of being temporary, and part with the intention of being primary and binding. Through both the prophetic writings and the teachings of Jesus, the moral core of the Decalogue is held forth as that which is binding on all humans at all times.

Careful exegesis and discussion of the relevant material characterise this work throughout. It is true – and the author knows it – that 'no single passage of Scripture clearly states the threefold division of the law'. Yet he is correct to argue that 'if the source of Christian confessionalism is Scripture – read as a coherent, progressive and self-interpreting whole – then the threefold division of the law need not roll over and die' (353). Indeed, it must not, for this is no arbitrary classification imposed on the text, but a recognition throughout Scripture, as Ross demonstrates, that not every part of the law is of equal ultimacy. We are indebted to Philip Ross for this carefully argued and clearly written contribution to an all-important topic.

Iain D. Campbell
Isle of Lewis, UK

***The Pastor as Scholar and The Scholar as Pastor.
Reflections on Life and Ministry***

**John Piper and D.A. Carson; Owen Strachan
and David Mathis (eds.)**

Wheaton: Crossway, 2011; 124 pp. pb., £5.97; ISBN
1433526476

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses kurze Buch stammt von den hochrangigen Evangelikalen John Piper und Don Carson und befasst sich mit der Vereinbarkeit von pastoraler und wissenschaftlicher Berufung. Der Abschnitt Pipers schildert dessen Erfahrungen im Bereich von Studium und Promotion, was sein Verständnis von einem intellektuell geprägten Dienst beeinflusst hat. Carsons Teil berichtet auf ähnliche Weise von dessen Erfahrungen im pastoralen und akademischen Dienst. Obwohl das Büchlein ein wichtiges Thema anschnidet, besteht sein hauptsächliches Manko wohl darin, dass es den Begriff ‚Wissenschaftler‘ nicht ausreichend definiert. Dieses Problem bringt dann weitere mit sich, wenn es um die Abhandlung des Themas ‚Pastor und Wissenschaftler‘ geht. Dies schränkt die Wirksamkeit des Buches ein.

SUMMARY

This short book, written by the high profile evangelicals John Piper and Don Carson, sets out to engage with the

convergence of pastoral and scholarly vocations. Piper's section outlines his experience of seminary and doctoral study, followed by the sense in which this informs his approach to an intellectually informed ministry. Carson's chapter similarly tells of his experience in the pastorate and the academy. Although the book raises an important topic, its central failing is perhaps that it does not adequately define 'scholar': a problem that creates various others in its handling of the pastor-scholar issue. Because of this, its effectiveness is somewhat limited.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce court ouvrage, écrit par deux auteurs évangéliques renommés, traite du rapport entre la vocation pastorale et la vocation académique. Piper évoque son expérience des études théologiques en faculté puis au niveau doctoral et indique comment cela détermine sa manière d'aborder le ministère pastoral en donnant sa place au travail intellectuel. Carson évoque lui aussi son expérience du ministère pastoral et du travail académique. Bien que consacré à un sujet important, cet ouvrage présente peut-être le défaut majeur d'omettre une définition adéquate de ce que l'on nomme « académique ». Cette carence engendre divers autres problèmes dans sa manière d'aborder son sujet et sa pertinence s'en trouve quelque peu limitée.

* * * *

This short book comprises addresses given by John Piper and Don Carson on the topic of how one serves as either a pastor-scholar or as a scholar-pastor. The opening chapter, written by Owen Strachan, introduces this topic in relation to the writers. The American Piper and the Canadian Carson initially followed similar post-seminary paths. Both headed to Europe to pursue doctoral studies, the latter to Cambridge and the former to Munich. Despite this similarity, their paths nonetheless took an inverse pattern. Following seminary and doctorate, Piper began an academic career which soon led to a lifelong commitment to the pastoral ministry; Carson initially served as a pastor before beginning his doctorate and then embarking on a noteworthy seminary career. Accordingly, this book markets itself as bringing a pastor-scholar and a scholar-pastor together to help those who find themselves between these two vocations.

I approached this book having recently moved from a pastoral role (my PhD years were spent juggling pastoral work and academic research) in Scotland to a primarily academic role in the Netherlands. As such I brought various personal questions to the text and hoped it would help clarify my sense of vocation between my previous and current roles: can and should a theological academic in such a context continue to self-identify as a pastor? Can and should one aim to keep up scholarly contributions after leaving the academy for the pastorate? However, I found the book to contain various limitations that curtail its usefulness in this respect.

Piper and Carson each contribute one chapter, both of which began life as earlier conference addresses given