

Book Reviews

What Christians Believe About the Bible. Donald K. McKim. Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985. 192 pp. \$8.95.

Reviewed by Bill Choate, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

In this latest volume Donald McKim proceeds with a tradition begun in earlier works. A Presbyterian minister and faculty member at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, he co-authored with Jack B. Rogers *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* and edited *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*. His name and works have become known in recent discussions of the inerrancy, authority, and interpretation of Scripture.

The current interest in the nature of Scripture has prompted McKim to write a broad, balanced survey of Christian theological perspectives and their particular relative views of the Bible. The work is organized along lines of church history. Beginning with McKim's views on the classical differences between the Roman Catholic concepts of interpretational authority and those of the Reformation, the author moves quickly from European Protestant beginnings to "Feminist Theology," touching on much of Western Christian thought along the way.

Each chapter of the book deals with a distinct theological school of thought. As an immediate indication of McKim's attempt at balance, he allots approximately eleven pages to each. In them the author provides a three-word summary, what he refers to as a "bumper sticker," for each concept, offers an historical background, examines leading figures of the movement, and often chooses one individual representative theologian. Out of the background he draws implications for views concerning Scripture and gives examples of the reality of these implications within the writings of appropriate representatives. Within each school of thought, the writer is careful to deal with key issues, terms, and debates.

Because Donald McKim has brought together such diverse lines of theological thought, it is useful to observe the way in

which he attempts to weave them together. What he eventually provides is an easily read compendium of modern theological thought. By tying to this structure the concepts of Scripture held by each, he does give the reader a useful guide for encounter with persons of many backgrounds. He provides an understanding of hermeneutics in a very broad range and provides grounds for respect of persons within each school.

Such a brief condensation of so much information is not without dangers, however. One could question the author's representatives in some areas of theological thought. As representatives of fundamentalism McKim chooses Charles C. Ryrie and John R. Rice. At the same time, trying to tie systems of thought to institutions, something he does nowhere else in the book, he states that the Southern Baptist Convention is the major denomination which identifies with fundamentalism. In a very interesting chapter concerning "Story Theology," the author chooses Sallie McFague as the representative thinker, a rather extreme example when compared with the possibilities of C. S. Lewis or the more recent Frederick Buechner, neither of whom are mentioned in this chapter. There seems to be some license practiced in the choice of representative thinkers.

As the writer has attempted to write with equity on various theological schools, it seems that the reviewer might mention that some editorializing does sneak into the text. In the chapter concerning "Liberal Theology," McKim chooses to place the word "inspired" within quotation marks. Discussing Cady Stanton's feminist perspective on Scripture, he writes that she proposes the "Bible be treated like any other book," an implication he draws with which she may not totally concur but which would certainly raise the ire of most conservative Bibli-cists. Overall, however, McKim has written a survey with surprising fairness.

The most enjoyable section of the work for this reviewer is the collection of extensive endnotes. It serves as a very fine, if incomplete, bibliography. The endnotes are an acceptable trade for a concluding chapter, a feature which is conspicuously absent. The book, generally, may provide a quick review of theological history and chance to consider various hermeneutical styles. It is not to be the definitive work in this field.

Invitation to Dialogue: The Theology of College Chaplaincy and Campus Ministry. New York: Education in the Society, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1986; \$4.00.

Reviewed by Charles J. Scalise, Instructor in Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

Theological reflection upon ministry in higher education is a continuing task of particular urgency for Christian churches in contemporary American society. The processes of secularization and pluralization of American higher education in the context of accelerating technological change, combined with the cultural resistance to these trends, have constrained campus ministry and college chaplaincy to engage in a continuing quest for "roots" and "foundations" for ministry. Otherwise, ministry in higher education quickly follows Qoheleth's cynical admonition: "Whatever your hands finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccl. 9:10a).

Invitation to Dialogue seeks to respond to this theological challenge. Eight papers, interspersed with insightful meditations and concluded with a "thematic study guide," comprise this volume. This publication represents the attempt of the Program Committee of the Education in the Society Unit of the National Council of Churches (chaired by Robert Rue Parsonage) to "stimulate theological reflection" on the part of practitioners and begin a new phase in the churches' ongoing discussion and evaluation of their denominational and cooperative ministry ventures in this area.

Particular mention should be made of James Bacik's contribution: "Campus Ministry: Theological Reflections from a Catholic Perspective." Bacik is a follower of Rahner's theology who served as the writer of the American bishops' 1986 pastoral letter on campus ministry. In my opinion, his paper offers the most biblically balanced, theologically grounded, and ecclesially based approach to campus ministry in the collection.

Endemic to any such pluralistic venture in Christian theological reflection is the danger of "potpourri" theology. Despite much pastorally perceptive and theologically articulate language (e.g., Schroeder, Shockley, Bacik), one is left with a

predictable lack of balance and coherence among the papers. This result seems largely due to the absence of a clearly defined and mutually accepted theological method. With no formal prolegomena, the authors accept their traditions as givens — “standard brands” of “theological fare” — from which they selectively appropriate items to enrich the “common stew.” The outcome of such laissez-faire methodology resembles a “church potluck dinner” rather than a “banquet in the Kingdom.” One may enjoy the rich diversity of the supper, but the menu is not repeatable! Thus, such theological reflection will prove to have much contemporary relevance but, unfortunately, scant capacity for extension to — and little lasting impact upon — the churches and their ministries in higher education.

Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. New York: Harper and Row, 1985, 355 pp.

Reviewed by Wellford C. Tiller, Jr., Baptist Campus Minister, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

How ought we to live? How do we think about how to live? What is our character? These are questions that a group of sociologists led by Robert Bellah put to over 200 Americans during interviews in a five-year-long research project. Essentially their study was an inquiry into the morés of middle-class America. *Habits of the Heart* is the researchers' reflections on what they discovered while talking to their fellow Americans.

Bellah is the Ford Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and is a well known commentator on American culture and values. He and his colleagues received much of their inspiration from the writing of Alexis de Tocqueville, the French social philosopher of the early nineteenth century, whose *Democracy in America* was an insightful study of the newly developing American character. (“Habits of the heart” is Tocqueville’s phrase for American morés.) Tocqueville was one of the first to describe the strong strain of individualism in American life, and he foresaw that it held the potential of blessing and curse. Bellah and his colleagues

began their work with the concern that “this individualism may have grown cancerous.”

Bellah identifies three major strands of thought that have been dominant in American life: the “biblical,” personified by John Winthrop, an early Puritan; the “republican,” represented by Jefferson; and the “modern individualist,” as seen in Franklin and Walt Whitman. The first two strands, deeply rooted in western civilization, place a very high value on community. The self is always seen in relation to the community to which it belongs, whether a faith community or a civic community. In both traditions the needs of the individual are subordinate to those of the community. In earlier days when most Americans lived in small towns or rural areas, this sense of identification with the community was very strong. As we have become a mobile, industrialized, urban society, we have found it more difficult to maintain a sense of connectedness with each other. Thus the “modern individualist” strand of thought has come to dominate the modern American character.

Those in campus ministry will find the chapter entitled “Finding Oneself” to be intriguing — but disturbing. The college years are typically the time of separating from family and more intentionally establishing one’s own identity. In a society that emphasizes autonomy and self-reliance, we must face the question of what it is that determines who we are. If we seek to separate ourselves from the traditional communities of family, church, and hometown, how do we establish what it means to live a “morally coherent” life? Many of the persons interviewed reported that although there were points of contact between their view of life and that of their parents, they saw themselves as having a very different value structure.

It is Bellah’s conclusion that for most people in our society, deciding what is morally appropriate behavior is primarily a matter of personal choice. Traditional sources of ethical guidance (family, church, civic community) are viewed by many as too rigid and outmoded. Thus the individual becomes his/her own standard of right and wrong. As Bellah observes:

Now if selves are defined by their preferences, but those preferences are arbitrary, then each self constitutes its own moral universe, and there is finally no way to reconcile conflicting claims about what is good in itself. . . . In the absence of

any objectifiable criteria of right and wrong, good or evil, the self and its feelings become our only moral guide.

It needs to be pointed out that Bellah and his colleagues are not calling for a return to a pre-nineteenth century way of thinking and behaving. They share the concerns of some of their interviewees that traditional structures have frequently been oppressive. Yet they are gravely concerned about the direction of our society with its continued momentum toward intense individualism. As they conclude their third chapter they state:

We believe that much of the thinking about the self of educated Americans, thinking that has become almost hegemonic in our universities and much of the middle class, is based on inadequate social science, impoverished philosophy, and vacuous theology. There are truths we do not see when we adopt the language of radical individualism. We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. . . . We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning.

For those of us who have given a portion of our lives in the attempt to build communities of faith in the midst of academia, it is gratifying to read a scholarly work which implies that we just may be on the right track. *Habits of the Heart* is quite worthy of the time and attention of campus ministers and pastors alike. It is not light reading, and it will not produce material for next week's Bible study. However, for those who wish to better understand the environment that shapes our students and ourselves, it is valuable reading.