

Book Reviews

THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY, by Russell H. Dilday, Jr. Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1982. 158 pp. \$2.20.

Reviewed by Ircel Harrison, Campus Minister, Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee.

Russell Dilday has been president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1978. This book was written as the text for the 1983 Baptist Doctrine Study sponsored by the Church Training Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board, but Dilday has provided us with a resource which should not be limited to that particular emphasis.

Writing as biblical scholar, preacher, seminary administrator and former pastor, Dilday deals with a controversial issue with clarity and honesty.

In his preface, Dilday positions himself by declaring that he believes "the Bible to be totally authoritative in all that it affirms" and "the sole authority for faith and practice" (p. 10). He acknowledges, however, that by using these words he has already limited himself and raised questions in the minds of his readers, since words carry emotional impact and lack common definition. We must acknowledge the preconceptions and biases we bring to the discussion.

Chapter one discusses "Sources of Authority in Christian Thought." Chapters two and three give an overview of "The History of Biblical Authority" from the time of Christ to the present. Other chapters deal with revelation, inspiration, transmission, the nature of the Bible, interpretation, and application.

Dilday very clearly presents several concepts about biblical authority. First, our faith is ultimately rooted in the personal revelation of God through Christ rather than in a book. He states, "It is Christ who speaks to us through the Bible. Its authority is ultimately personal in nature" (pp. 33-34). He reinforces this with the statement, "The Bible is the instrument of revelation which God uses; but we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, not faith in the Bible" (p. 61).

Second, he insists that the Bible should be accepted exactly for what it is: the means by which man may come to know God in fullness. He quotes W. A. Criswell's affirmation that

The Bible is a book of redemption. It is that or nothing at all. It is not a book of history, science, anthropology, or cosmogony. It is a book of salvation and deliverance for lost mankind. (p. 96)

Third, Dilday points out the problems associated with placing excessive emphasis on any single word to describe the nature of biblical authority, especially the word **inerrant**. He lists the ways in which "inerrantists" must qualify the use of the word in order to be consistent with scripture. One problem associated with the use of the word is that it is not used in the Bible and has only rarely (and lately) been used in Christian statements of faith. (p. 101).

Fourth, an overemphasis on inerrancy tends to negate the fact that the Bible is both human and divine in nature and make it into a "docetic Bible." Doceticism was "the heresy that Jesus is only divine and not human" (p. 58). This stance does violence to the way in which God has chosen to act in this world.

Fifth, Dilday stresses the distinctive heritage of Southern Baptists in avoiding theological extremes in regard to biblical authority:

They have rejected the tendency to elevate the Bible even above God himself. They have also rejected the liberal, humanistic position that makes the Bible little more than another ancient book, full of errors, contradictions, and editorial additions and certainly not authoritative. (p. 114)

Dilday has written a broad, polemical work primarily for a lay audience but with insight and integrity. He has taken a clear, strong stand which has already provoked controversy in some quarters.

This book is a useful resource for campus ministers. This reviewer recommends it highly as a basis for a student discussion group or background for a study on biblical authority. If you have a student who has heard only one side of the controversy among Southern Baptist over the Bible, place a copy in his or her hands and be ready to answer some questions.

* * *

AGENDA FOR BIBLICAL PEOPLE, by Jim Wallis. new York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976. 145pp. \$5.95.

Reviewed by Charles L. Nored, BSU Director, Walters State Community College, Morristown, Tennessee.

Jim Wallis is often labeled a "radical" because he definitely looks at issues and preaches about them rather differently

from most Southern Baptists. But I prefer to consider him a visionary, prodding us to push an obedient biblical lifestyle into areas formerly untouched. In this particular writing he shares with the reader his insights concerning the Christian's response (or a lack of one) to economic, political, and legal injustices, racism, military policies, the effects of power, class distinctions, and civil religion.

He addresses these and other issues by examining our Christian heritage, showing how our spiritual forefathers spoke prophetically to the issues of their day and sometimes urged action as a proper and necessary response. Then taking a contemporary issue, he urges the reader to follow suit. He often uses Scripture to show us how he arrived at his opinions, but I feel that he bends some of his interpretations in order to proof-text. (But then don't we all, just a little?)

I found chapters One and Two, "Gospel of a New Order" and "Returning to Our Roots," the most stimulating in that they aggressively attacked my traditionally held and preconceived notions of repentance, balanced discipleship, lifestyle, and the so-called "conservative/liberal" tensions in living out the faith. He forced me to reflect on why I found myself in a see-saw situation most of the time. Here I agree; there I disagree; I can change my opinion here; no way I will change here.

In "Idols, Powers, and Worship," the third chapter, I found the section on contemporary idolatry the most prophetic of the book. Unfortunately, the presentation in the rest of chapter three, as well as in most of chapter four, "The Powerful and the Powerless," could have been said without being so wordy and repetitious. It is also here that I found myself disagreeing the most with his interpretation and application of Scripture.

He finishes the book with "The New Community," a chapter in which his role as a visionary shines brightly. He sets forth dreams which one can feel quite realistic about: Christians actually living out an alternative as a witness to society; Christians allowing the Holy Spirit to radically transform and renew their lives; Christians taking on the roles of reconcilers and servants; Christians willing to be a prophetic minority, being faithful to God's command to live as salt and light.

THE SERVICE OF GOD: HOW WORSHIP AND ETHICS ARE RELATED, by William H. Willimon. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press 1983. 239 pp. \$10.95

Reviewed by R. P. Hodge, Campus Ministry Intern, Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee.

The book by Willimon is an in-depth examination of the question, "Does Christian worship affect Christian moral life?" Willimon is pastor of the Northside United Methodist Church, Greenville, South Carolina, and associate professor of liturgy and worship at Duke Divinity School. In writing the book, the author seeks to respond to the inconsistencies he sees in his own life and in the lives of other Christians concerning worship and the moral life affected by that worship. By making some general assertions concerning the relationship of worship and ethics and providing particular examples of that relatedness, Willimon writes clearly and concisely concerning the topic.

Willimon begins the discussion with general definitions of worship and ethics, then moves into examining the specific illustrations which point out their relation to each other. In Willimon's opinion, worship and ethics are to be Christocentric. This is to be the foundation for any study of worship and ethics. He then examines Baptism and the Lord's Supper in establishing how liturgy can and should affect ethics. He also notes that the reverse is possible in some instances as ethics can be liturgy's worst critic. The sermon is discussed next since it is seen as the focal point in liturgy. Willimon criticizes its misuse in the past and provides some suggestions on returning to honest, relevant proclamation of the word which should yield ethical responses. Willimon uses the service of matrimony as another example of the relationship of worship and ethics. In the service of Christian marriage the vows that are expressed during the liturgy are more than mere words; they are lifelong promises at which each person must work if they are to be kept. The author also takes an aspect of marriage, child raising, and looks at the theological ethics of whether or not couples should bring children into the world.

In the conclusion of the book, Willimon centers on the offertory in the liturgy as the summation of the book's message. Christ has given the example by offering Himself on the cross; therefore, in like manner, we are to offer ourselves

to Him each day. It is through the offertory that this can truly be actualized as we give as a reflection of how we live in the world, in response to our relation to Him.

In reading the book one senses that the author struggled with his own experience as to the best way to integrate worship and ethics . This struggle did not take place in an ivory tower but in the everyday work of the pastoral ministry. Willimon has also drawn from a number of people and a vast amount of material in seeking to present a responsible study of the topic.

In regard to the book's relevance to campus ministry several points should be noted. The book's insight as to what is going on inside the church affects the campus as young people who are raised in that environment participate in the campus ministry programs. It also calls on campus ministers to create and facilitate the integration of worship and ethics in their programs and to constantly evaluate those programs to assure that the message is getting across. Another point to note is the opportunity to build a bridge between the local church and campus ministries. Through this co-operation, a unified effort can be mounted to deal with the issue, strengthening ties between the two.

In conclusion, the book caused a re-evaluation of this writer's attitude and should have something to say to anyone who seeks to worship and serve God in everyday life.