
Book Reviews

Freedom and Grace: The Life of Asa Mahan, Edward H. Madden, and James E. Hamilton, Studies in Evangelicalism, No. 3, (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1982). 273 pp., \$17.50.

Since the appearance of Timothy Smith's *Revivalism and Social Reform* in 1957, historians of American religion have become increasingly aware of the central role Perfectionism played in the nineteenth century. Charles G. Finney, second President of Oberlin College, has been rightly recognized as the bridge via which the dominant stream of American religious experience crossed from the Puritan thought of the country's roots. In recent years, however, there has been a growing appreciation for the role which Oberlin's first President, Asa Mahan, played in that transformation. An accurate assessment of his impact has been hampered by the fact that, aside from his *Memoirs* published in 1882, no full-length treatment of his life has been offered. One hundred years later, *Freedom and Grace* has appeared to fill this gap.

Mahan, born in New York State in 1799 to Presbyterian parents, was instilled with "Old Light" Calvinism during his youth. His conversion experience in young adulthood rendered this theology unconvincing. While at Andover Seminary in preparation for ministry, he accepted "New Light" Calvinism as the answer to his quest. Believing that nothing is either sinful or righteous unless it is a free act of the will, Mahan would, with Finney, go on to develop a concept of Christian Perfection within the Reformed Tradition that was very close to Wesley. They argued that since all sin is voluntary, it is inexcusable. The provisions of the New Covenant enabled the Christian to choose the good in every instance of responsible choice. To choose correctly, however, a second work of grace, entire sanctification, must completely overwhelm the person's will. According to Mahan, the individual enters this state by faith through an act of entire consecration and attains completeness of abiding trust. The power of sin would be then replaced by the power of the Holy Spirit. The regenerate enters into a state of perfect obedience and experiences a new dimension of joy, peace, freedom and stability.

Mahan's vision of Christian Perfection was not limited to the individual. The call was for the whole Church to experience a sanctification of perfect love within its communal life. A microcosm of the life of the world to come, the Church was to become the principal agent for societal reform as well. It was not to rest "until every form of iniquity" was "driven from the earth."

In his pastorates in New York, Ohio and Michigan, in his college presidencies at Oberlin, Cleveland and Adrian, and in his writings, Mahan urged his charges to action which he felt would usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth. Active in such reform movements as abolition, co-education at the college level, women's rights and temperance, Mahan took positions that continually set him at odds with the majority of society. In addition, his conviction that he was right in the stands that he took was coupled with the suspicion that those who differed with him had failed to gain adequate light on the subject. Such a stance often led to charges of arrogance, self-centeredness and pride and helps explain the troubles that forced him to move on throughout his life.

Retiring at age 73, Mahan spent the remaining sixteen years of his life in England where he wrote eight books, edited two periodicals, *The Banner of Holiness* and *The Divine Life*, and was actively involved within the English holiness community.

Freedom and Grace is organized geographically focusing on his time in New York, Cincinnati, Oberlin, Cleveland, Michigan and England. Within each chapter, Mahan's life is dealt with topically rather than chronologically. While having the advantage of tracing a theme to its completion, the overall effect on the reader is sometimes disjointed and somewhat disconcerting. One suspects there is also a tendency to understate Mahan's weaknesses and to show his opponents unnecessarily in an unfavorable light when discussing the many controversies in which he was involved. These deficiencies, however, are more than redeemed by the rich depth of primary source material upon which the authors draw, and by the breadth of understanding of nineteenth century American religious life that they bring to bear when interpreting the significance of their subject. *Freedom and Grace* fills an important lacunae in our understanding of nineteenth century Perfectionism.

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Moral Development Foundations: Judeo-Christian Alternatives to Piaget/Kohlberg, edited by Donald M. Joy, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

This volume grew out of the editor's challenge to the membership of the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education in 1979. At that conference the editor presented a paper entitled: "Kohlberg Revisited: A Supra-Naturalist Speaks His Mind." The challenge was for several of his colleagues at the conference, who represented the Judeo-Christian religious traditions — Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant — to join him in critically examining the moral development theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. The examination should evidence mastery of the fundamental concepts of moral development theory and some experience in the usefulness of these concepts for understanding and guiding the moral and religious instruction of persons.

Nine have responded to that challenge and include two from the Jewish tradition, one Roman Catholic, and six from the Protestant tradition. Among the Protestant writers is a Lutheran, a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a process theologian who is United Methodist, and one who is within the charismatic movement. Each of the writers has done serious work with the research and theoretical contributions of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. The distinguishing feature of this group of writers is they are all deeply rooted in their own faith perspectives.

It is noted that both Piaget and Kohlberg "take pains to set themselves outside any faith perspective," although some note that agnosticism is as surely a 'faith perspective' as any of the more traditionally religious ones.

The editor sets the tone of the volume in the first chapter when he discusses "Life as Pilgrimage." He notes the characteristics of the pilgrimage to be: dynamic, relational, aspirational, epochal, and cumulative. Each of these characteristics relates to an aspect or segment of moral development research and theory.

Both Piaget and Kohlberg set out to systematize an explanation of how a person develops a sense of justice and moral responsibility through one's life. Based on extensive research, Kohlberg developed his theoretical construct of three levels — preconventional, conventional, postconventional — of moral thought. Within each level there are two stages. Every person, according to the theory, moves through these six stages in the process of maturation of moral

judgment.

Each of the writers in this volume takes that basic scheme and analyzes how it is helpful in understanding human growth and development in moral judgement. The authors also note the shortcomings of the theory since it is limited by Kohlberg's "naturalistic secularist presuppositions." The theories emphasize the strict empirical nature of the research procedures, and therefore one is limited to the realm of the physical senses, or to data which is "factual." Each of the authors point out that the realm of "values" or the noumenal data is short-changed by this approach.

The reader should have some basic acquaintance with the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg in order to gain the most from this volume. A glossary of terms and a basic digest of Kohlberg's structural categories is provided to assist the reader who may be somewhat fuzzy about the terminology.

There is some unevenness among the chapters which may cause the reader some frustration. The writing style varies from the calmly analytical to the more polemical in approach. All the writers give evidence they have done their homework and most express appreciation for the insights to be gleaned from Kohlberg's theories. However, all writers note that the theories are limited when one seeks to explain the full range of processes implicit in mature moral decision making.

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The Victorian "Lives" of Jesus by Daniel L. Pals. San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 1982. 223 pp.

Unlike many books, this one produces more than it promises. At the outset the reader is warned that what follows is only a "discussion about the attempts in Britain to match the output of Continental scholars who wrote on the life of Jesus during the nineteenth century."

What is presented is a review of English writers who wrote lives of Christ, often to refute critical scholarship from Germany. These include Farrar's best-selling *Life of Christ* (1874), Geikie, *Life and Words of Christ* (1877), and Edersheim's two-volume *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883). These conservative, evangelical scholars provided English readers with edifying and informative lives of Christ, while on the Continent scholars were publishing studies that

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called in question the historical truth of the gospels. The author provides a helpful background of each author and the response which each book received in England. Especially helpful is his comparison of British writers with critical Continental scholars from Strauss and Renan to Bultmann. The difference between the prevailing liberalism in Germany and the conservatives in England, Pals attributes to the difference in theological training. In Germany the universities placed a premium upon critical scholarship which found expression in lecturing. In England, however, education was by tutors who felt little incentive for original research. They were more influential than the lecturers in British universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. The author fails to note the effect of the evangelical revival under Whitefield and the Wesleys, the influence of which continued until the end of the nineteenth century. However, by the end of the century, evangelical Christian influence waned in England, and by 1910 "skepticism of the scholars and the secularization of the populace" made *Lives of Christ* unnecessary. The research of author Pals ends here. No notice is taken of trends during the twentieth century in which there was to some extent a renewal of evangelical religion, especially in the United States and Canada, but of the few evangelical scholars in England at the same time. Both in his research and in the analysis of his findings, Pals has rendered a valuable service in his review of New Testament scholarship of the Victorian period and his sifting of its significance.

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