

---

# Book Reviews

---

*God at Work in Israel*, by Gerhard Von Rad, trans. John H. Marks. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980. 223 pp. \$6.95.

The late Gerhard Von Rad will long be known as the German Old Testament scholar who, along with Walter Eichrodt, recovered Old Testament theology for the Church.

From the 1870's onward the triumph of Higher Criticism had made it impossible to speak of a unified and consistent Old Testament theology. But first Eichrodt in the 1930's and then Von Rad in the 1950's showed that whatever one's critical perspective, it was still possible to see in the Old Testament a revelation of God to the peoples of the earth.

Although Eichrodt did not publish a great deal beyond his *Theology*, Von Rad was very prolific and this book is a testimony to that fact. It is a compilation of lectures and addresses delivered under various circumstances between 1934 and 1970, but mostly during the 50's and 60's. The kinds of materials included range from rather popular interpretations of some of the Biblical stories as delivered on German radio to more thought-provoking discussions of the nature of monotheism, Israel's approach to history and the reality of God in the Old Testament.

Because of its nature as a compilation the content of the book is somewhat uneven. The interpretations of Biblical accounts are somewhat flat, often spending more time on technical details than on the meaning of the ideas. It is when Von Rad comes into the broader topics that his great gift for synthesis comes into play. Here too some of the richness of his thought is evident. Perhaps it is because conservatives think they understand God too well that their works are often rather one-dimensional and unstimulating. Von Rad can never be accused of this. He is not tempted to play down the inner contradictions of the Scripture. Yet he is able to see in them the multiple aspects of the one tremendous Being who cannot be encompassed by the human mind. It is a testimony to the richness of his thought that there is very little repetition in these lectures covering some 30 years.

Those who have read the *Theology* will appreciate this book as a

refresher, while those who have not can find here a wide-ranging introduction to the thought of a significant scholar.

John N. Oswalt  
Professor of Biblical Languages and Literature  
Asbury Theological Seminary

*Ministry in America*, David S. Schuller, Merton P. Strommen, and Milo L. Brekke, Editors. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980. 581 pp.

This volume is a summary of the six year (1973-79) intensive study of ministry conducted by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada in conjunction with the Search Institute of Minneapolis, MN. The project was funded by a grant from the Lilly Foundation.

The study was limited to clergy who were seminary educated and to laity in congregations served by seminary educated ministers. The study was also limited to denominations that have seminaries or whose ministerial educational institutions are members of the Association of Theological Schools. A third limiting factor is that the data were gathered in a single, cross sectional sampling taken in the mid-70's and therefore does not provide longitudinal information. Therefore, the study is less than a total picture of ministry.

The Association of Theological Schools identified the study as the Readiness for Ministry Project. The purpose of the project was to try to assess the professional skills a graduating seminary senior needs to begin an effective ministry. Over 12,000 people participated in some aspect of the project. Their involvement included describing contemporary ministry, choosing and refining items for the Readiness questionnaire, ranking the descriptions of ministry in terms of their importance, naming clusters, developing and testing criterion-referenced instruments, and preliminary drafts of this volume.

The early chapters of the book provide a quick overview of the "Basic Issues in Defining Ministry." In the mid to late '60's some evidence suggested a crisis relating to ministry was underway. Ministers were leaving the ministry for a number of reasons. The role models for ministry were becoming blurred between a traditional, biblically centered pattern and a pattern oriented to contemporary society with an emphasis upon the professional approach to ministry. The goals of ministry were being torn between a ministry in the public sphere and a ministry focused on the inner life of people.

In response to the perceived ambiguities, the Readiness for

## *Book Reviews*

Ministry Project was generated. The first step was to identify an act of ministry through description of critical incidents. Over 12,000 people across a broad spectrum of the church were asked to recall a specific moment when an ordained clergy person ministered to them, either effectively or ineffectively. Out of these descriptions and a review of the literature, thousands of criterion-of-ministry statements were developed.

A preliminary questionnaire of 850 items was prepared and distributed to over 2000 people, randomly selected, and a balance between clergy and laity was achieved. The clergy sample included seminary professors, clergy active in ministry, denominational leaders, and senior seminary students. Minority and women clergy were especially invited to participate. The respondents were asked to rank the degree of importance of each of the items for the specific situation in which they were experiencing ministry. Out of the preliminary survey a revised questionnaire of 444 items best able to describe ministry and reveal patterns was chosen. The individual items were arranged into 64 dimensions of ministry or core clusters. The core clusters were then combined into 11 specific characteristics of ministry of basic factors. Of these eleven, 9 are positive factors as follows: open, affirming style; caring for persons under stress; congregational leadership; theologian in life and thought; ministry from personal commitment of faith; development of fellowship and worship; denominational awareness and collegiality; ministry to community and world; priestly-sacramental ministry. The above list is in rank order from most to least importance relating to effectiveness in ministry. There are two other factors identified as detrimental to ministry: privatistic, legalistic style; and disqualifying personal and behavioral characteristics.

In this brief review it is impossible to include the specific items for each of the major factors; however, the “disqualifying personal and behavioral factor” merits inclusion of the individual descriptive items: i.e., self-serving ministry characterized by undisciplined living, irresponsibility, professional immaturity, and pursuit of personal advantage. These behavioral traits were identified emphatically by both clergy and laity as the kind of behaviors perceived as detrimental to the effectiveness of one’s ministry.

Forty-seven denominations are related to the Association of Theological Schools. They vary greatly in size; therefore, the

denominations were grouped into denominational families. A preliminary grouping was made by the staff members of the Association of Theological Schools and then checked by factor analysis. As a result of this process, 17 denominational families were finally identified.

The key element which identifies these denominational family groupings is their particular model of ministry. One model is that of "Spiritual Emphasis," a second model is a "Sacramental-Liturgical Emphasis," a third model is a "Social Action Emphasis," and a fourth is noted as a "Combined Emphasis," which incorporates elements of the prior three models.

The balance of the book is devoted to profiling each of the 64 dimensions (core clusters) in reference to how significant that particular cluster is to denominational families. These profiles then provide the basic data from which an individual, thoroughly acquainted with the denomination or denominational family, could write an interpretive chapter. The data provided makes it possible to make comparisons and contrasts between sub-groups within the denominational respondents: e.g. clergy-laity, active attenders-inactive, age-youth, highly educated-limited formal education.

The final section of the book provides a detailed description of the research methodology.

Overall the book gives the reader a detailed and factually documented description of a major segment of ministry in America. The reader is familiarized with the variety of responses to ministry among the denominations included in the study. One can also examine a specific denomination or denominational family to note the distinctive characteristics of ministerial models within that group.

*The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus, An Exposition of John 14-17*, by D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980. 207 pp. \$9.95.

D.A. Carson holds the Ph.D. degree from Cambridge University and is associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The Gospel of John is his major area of study. This book grew out of a series of addresses given at several conferences in North America. It is primarily written for laymen,

## *Book Reviews*

rather than scholars.

Dr. Carson sees the Farewell Discourse as designed to meet a specific situation — to encourage the disciples preceding the crucifixion of Jesus. However, it is not a mere word of consolation. It is first and foremost an exposition of the significance of Jesus’ “going away” to his Father by way of the cross. It is elemental theology. And only as such, does it offer encouragement and consolation to the disciples.

The author presents a clear and sensible outline of these four chapters in the Gospel of John. For each section he points out its relationship with the preceding and the following sections. He clearly indicates the major points in a given section. This makes it easier for the reader to follow the flow of thought of John.

In the exposition Carson gives due considerations to the context. Often he lets the context shed light on the particular passage. Even though he does not treat the passage exegetically in this book, often he does share insights from his own exegetical work published elsewhere. For example, he shares the result of his more technical study in a scholarly journal when he maintains that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its “righteousness” (self-righteousness), just as Jesus convicted the world’s self-righteousness when He was on the earth (John 16:8).

In general, Dr. Carson does a good job in this exposition. However, one wishes he had done more thorough exposition on some key words, such as “glory” which occurs many times and is very important in this section of John.

At the various places in the book, Dr. Carson deals with some theological issues derived from the text of John. On the issue of the relationship between the Son and the Father Carson maintains that the Son is ontologically God, divine in his very being. Yet in his mission as a man, he most reflects God by hiding his own glory and, in perfect response to his Father, by showing forth, by his words and deeds, his Father’s glory.

On the basis of John 14:15-24, Dr. Carson emphasizes the importance of discipleship. Those who profess to be believers have the responsibility to love, obey and trust the Lord. This is healthy. Yet in connection with his exposition on divine election, the author writes “I do not doubt for a moment that men are responsible to repent and believe; but it is to recognize that no believer will have legitimate grounds for claiming, throughout all eternity, that he

made it and his neighbor did not because he made the right choice.” (p. 107). There must be some alternative theological contrast which avoids this inconsistency.

In connection with John 15:1-16, Dr. Carson writes, “The question must then be squarely faced: can true believers lose their salvation, or not? Can a person be a branch in the vine, and then subsequently be cast off and destroyed?” In the process of answering, he writes “there is much biblical evidence to suggest that a person’s spiritual condition *should* (emphasis added) be addressed more *phenomenologically* (emphasis added) than ontologically: that is, more according to his behavior and responses than according to what is going on in his very being” (p. 97). Then, referring to certain people, he writes “To all who are limited by the *phenomenological* (emphasis added) that person is a Christian, a brother. He is a branch; he is a seed that is sprouting and growing. But if at that point he rejects the truth, remains fruitless, or wilts before opposition, . . . he could not possibly have been a true believer in the first place.” (p. 98-99). Dr. Carson, on the one hand maintains that one’s spiritual condition *should* be addressed *phenomenologically*, on the other hand indicates that *phenomenological* observation can be erroneous. Dr. Carson wants to say that if a person apostatizes, this is proof that he has never been a true believer. A true believer can never apostatize. Yet Jesus says, in John 15:2, “Every branch of *mine* that bears no fruit, he takes away.”

In spite of some minor weaknesses noted above, this is a useful book. It helps laymen to come to a better understanding of John Chapters 14-17, and provides a good example of exposition for ministers and teachers.

Joseph S. Wang, Ph.D.  
Professor of New Testament  
Asbury Theological Seminary

*An Index of Reviews of New Testament Books Between 1900-1950, Perspectives in Religious Studies, Special Studies Series No. 2*, by Watson E. Mills. Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1977. 69pp.. \$3.50. Order from “Special Studies Series,” Box 2190, Danville, VA 24541.

Watson E. Mills received the Ph.D. degree from Baylor University. He is associate Professor of Religion and Departmental Coordinator at Averett College in Danville, Virginia. Presently he serves as editor of *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, a scholarly

## *Book Reviews*

journal containing articles and reviews of the widest interest for the professional scholar-teacher. It is a publication of the Association of Baptist Professors of Religion.

The research for this index was done as partial fulfillment of requirements for the Ph.D. degree at Baylor University. The books indexed are those listed under the classification "F" in the Shelf List of the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Thus it includes virtually all significant books in New Testament Studies published between 1900 and 1950. Most of the periodicals of academic nature in the field of New Testament studies are covered.

*New Testament Abstract* which reports critical reviews of significant books in the field of New Testament studies appeared in 1956. In many cases, some years lapse before a given book is reviewed in scholarly journal. Chances are *New Testament Abstract* abstracts many reviews of significant books published in the period 1950-1956. In Mills' index the periodicals researched are indexed through 1956 to give continuity with *New Testament Abstracts*.

It is true that in many cases several years lapse before a given book is reviewed in a scholarly journal, yet it is also true that some books are reviewed immediately. For the sake of completeness, it might be wiser to cover the period, 1900-1956 or 1900-1960 if one thinks in terms of decade, than to cover 1900-1950.

The present index is a very useful tool for scholars.

Joseph S. Wang, Ph.D.  
Professor of New Testament  
Asbury Theological Seminary

*The Radical Wesley, and Patterns for Church Renewal*, by Howard A. Snyder. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980. 189 pp.

Howard Snyder has, with considerable success, articulated a major contribution of Wesley which has received little attention from Wesleyan scholars. Much has been written about Wesley's view of the Church, the sacraments, Christian experience, and his role as a reformer. But precious little has been said about his concept of discipleship, especially about his stress upon the importance of class meetings and bands as means of Christian nurture and Church renewal.

This past year the Association of Theological Schools emphasized the theme of spiritual formation. Asbury Theological Seminary

cooperated with this emphasis. This concept of spiritual formation took shape to some extent with Vatican II, and Protestant seminaries have profited much from this Roman Catholic theme. However, Wesley's concept of renewal has been in place for 200 years, and as Snyder has noted, it has largely been neglected within the Wesleyan tradition. Perhaps now with Snyder's clarion call to re-capture Wesley's view of Church renewal we can consolidate it with our contemporary concern for spiritual formation.

Snyder's work has ecumenical relevance. He particularly writes for: (1) "mainline" Christians who hold Wesley in high admiration but have not seriously studied his thought; (2) "immobilized heirs of the Holiness Movement who still see Wesley through the lens of his 19th-century interpreters," (3) "non-Wesleyan evangelicals who like Wesley's results but not his theology," and (4) "Charismatic sisters and brothers who (often unknowingly) stand in one branch of the Wesleyan tradition and to whom Wesley would speak both encouragement and caution."

This book will undoubtedly have wide appeal to the evangelical communities because of the contemporary interest in Church renewal. While Snyder does not break any new ground, his skill in popularizing Wesley's thought will help to introduce Wesley to non-Wesleyan circles. Hopefully his suggestion for "Patterns for Church Renewal" (the book's subtitle) will be taken seriously and implemented.

Though not of central importance to the value of the book, some aspects of Snyder's interpretation of Wesley are problematic. His assumption that Wesley stands "in the free church or Radical Protestant tradition" needs more qualification than Snyder seems to provide (p. 7). Snyder also seems to be embarrassed by Wesley's belief in infant baptism (pp. 116-117). He considers Wesley not to be "a good guide on social and political questions" because he was a "political conservative in the face of more democratic currents" (p. 157).

On the other hand, Snyder sides with the Anabaptist's political and social radicalism, noting especially their views on pacificism as opposed to Wesley's. He also faults Wesley for not making a "fundamental critique of the free enterprise system" (p. 138). Snyder laments "that Wesley changed his opinion more regarding the church than regarding politics and the state" (p. 157).

Some Wesleyan scholars will take issue with Snyder's apparent



## *Book Reviews*

attempt to make Wesley's doctrine of the Church more akin to Anabaptist belief than what is justifiable. It is also questionable for him to suggest he knows what Wesley "felt" as opposed to what Wesley "said" about the Church (p. 116). Snyder also too easily assumes that his understanding of ministry is more biblical than Wesley's or that an episcopal form of Church government is not biblically allowable (p. 156). It is also questionable to identify one's own social and political positions with what is biblical. Perhaps Wesley serves as a better model in this regard than Snyder allows. Wesley espoused certain social and political viewpoints (many of which we would not accept such as his belief in monarchy), but he did not try to make them evangelical requirements. It is also too idealistic to suggest the idea that Wesley could have saved the world from Marxism and a communist revolution if Wesley had adopted "a more social ethic," presumably by espousing a Christian social democratic kind of philosophy (p. 158).

Despite his obvious sympathies with Anabaptist beliefs at points which differ from Wesley and his attempt in places to reinterpret Wesley too much in line with Anabaptist themes than he really was, Snyder's overall analysis of Wesley is fair and stimulating.

Laurence W. Wood  
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology  
Asbury Theological Seminary