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Lives of Robert and James Haldane (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

The Lives of Robert and James Haldane by Alexander Haldane (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990) first published, 1852. 706 pages, hardcover, \$34.95. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Professor of Philosophy and Theology.

In this biography of his father, James Alexander Haldane (1761-1851), and uncle, Robert Haldane (1764-1842), Alexander Haldane describes in great detail the aristocratic background, ecclesiastical context, and passion for mission and revival of these two remarkable Scottish brothers.

Both men labored feverishly as lay preachers at a time when Moderatism paralyzed churches in Scotland, Enlightenment revolutionized society in France and North America, Deism eclipsed Christ's uniqueness in England, and Socinianism undermined orthodoxy in Switzerland. The pervasive spirit of Enlightenment had given rise to a widespread liberalism based on reason-empowered optimism and the possibility of self-redemption.

The Haldane brothers focused their ministry on missions to the Orient, especially India and China, educational outreach to African children, and revival of primarily Anglican communities in Scotland. They traveled as itinerant preachers, encouraged Bible distribution, wrote numerous tracts, and published major commentaries, hefty apologetical treatises, and numerous pamphlets.

Robert Haldane's opening of Scripture, especially Romans, proved to become historically significant in the evangelical revival that swept across western parts of the European continent at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1816 in Geneva and the following year in Montauban, he explained Paul's letter to the Romans to groups of young seminarians.

Converted from liberalism to biblical faith, these seminarians in Switzerland and France became the leaders of the Reveil that moved from Switzerland to France to Belgium to the Netherlands. In the Netherlands it greatly influenced Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801-1876), spiritual mentor of Abraham

Kuyper, by changing him from an enlightenment liberal to a radical confessor of Christ in all of life.

Although, like Groen van Prinsterer in Holland and Wilberforce in England, Robert Haldane sensed something of the decadent spirit of the French Revolution, he assumed (unlike Groen van Prinsterer) a pro-French stance during this tumultuous period in Western history. In addition, his *Evidences and Authority of Divine Revelation* clearly indicate his uncritical acceptance of Socratic thinking and rationalistic scholasticism.

Despite this compromise with ideas and policies which they sought to counteract in church life, both churchmen played a crucial role in calling numerous Christians back to the basic principles of the Christian faith. They failed to stress *all* the rudiments of the Gospel, however, and they did not relate them to the critical issues in European culture at that time, including the industrial exploitation of the masses and colonial domination of non-Western countries.

As author of this biography, Alexander Haldane was still too close to his father and uncle to sense the limitations in their views. He endorsed the well-intended but simplistic and dualistic worldview of his father and uncle.

The decision of the Banner of Truth Trust to reprint this extensive biography, nearly one hundred and forty years after its first publication in 1852, is an unfortunate one if it is intended to encourage in our post-colonial era the kind of privatistic and dualistic view of reality these men espoused. The decision is laudatory, however, if its intent is to provide us with a window through which we can obtain a good glimpse of the unique role played by these two Scotsmen in the nineteenth-century Reveil of Western Europe.

Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, by George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 1991. 201 pages, paperback, \$12.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

Is Reformed Christianity evangelical? It depends on whom you ask within the Reformed movement. In fact, it may depend on what time of day you ask. Within

the span of no more than two sentences I will notice myself speaking of Reformed Christianity as evangelical, and then, almost as if I have forgotten what