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Coppenger, A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF JUSTICE

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In terms of the analyses of individual works, I found the explorations of the earlier pseudonymous writings (*Either-Or*, *Fear and Trembling* and particularly *The Concept of Anxiety*) to be more illuminating than the work on the Climacus literature. However, even in the latter case Dunning's original approach continually produced provocative new insights and perspectives on familiar texts. All in all, this is a first-rate piece of work—well conceived and carried through.

A Christian View of Justice, by **Mark T. Coppenger**. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1983, 173 pages, no index, Paper \$6.95.

DAVID A. HOEKEMA, University of Delaware.

Mark Coppenger, a former member of the philosophy faculty at Wheaton College in Illinois who left the academic world a few years ago to prepare for the ministry, undertakes in the book under review to relate the pressing questions of social justice to the theological commitments of evangelical Protestantism. It is a book which will appeal both to Professor Coppenger's former philosophy students and to the Reverend Coppenger's parishioners.

Encompassing a wide range of issues in a small book, Coppenger has chosen to keep his discussion on a relatively elementary level. The five chapters of the book resemble a series of lectures which might be offered in an undergraduate course in an evangelical college, and perhaps this resemblance is more than coincidental. In the first chapter, Coppenger argues that the fatherhood of God provides the essential foundation for any Christian moral or political theory. A "father model" of ethics, he urges, rules out either hedonistic utilitarianism or strict deontological ethics. God demands obedience but at the same time intends, and ensures, human happiness in the deepest sense. In a second chapter Coppenger argues that, when we examine those moral issues which are issues of social justice, the concept of *desert* provides a basis on which we build the principles of a just social order.

In the third chapter Coppenger describes what he terms a "matrix that distinguishes among benefits and harms according to whether an individual deserves to receive or suffer them. Each of the four categories of this schema—deserved benefit, deserved harm, undeserved benefit, undeserved harm—calls for a particular response from governmental institutions. For example, governments have a duty to inflict certain kinds of harm on those who deserve it, and this is the essential character of punishment. Social institutions must also try to prevent undeserved harm. Widows and orphans, impoverished children, and others who are the victims of undeserved harm should receive benefits from the state—even

though they do not, properly speaking, deserve these benefits. The government also has an obligation to ensure that individuals receive the benefits they deserve, by requiring employers to pay just wages and by protecting individual's property. Thus, Coppenger summarizes,

the matrix provides an outline of the principles which compose the concept of justice. Among these are "Do not harm innocents," "Help victims," and "Reward responsible workers."

In the remainder of his book Coppenger sketches the application of his understanding of the Christian concept of justice to a wide range of issues. In a single 50-page chapter Coppenger surveys the issues of taxation, wages, welfare, prices, health care, foreign aid, war, and public education. A closing chapter offers brief comments on five legal cases dealing with such issues as affirmative action, pornography, and treatment of the retarded.

The brevity and the clear organization of the book are among its strengths. Coppenger evidently regards his "matrix model" as the key concept in his vision of Biblical social justice and as a potentially important conceptual device in Christian social ethics. I cannot quite share his enthusiasm for this formal schema, at least in the form in which Coppenger presents it in the present book: it aids clarity and helps Coppenger structure the chapters of the book, but he does not employ it in a way that deepens or unifies his analysis of social issues.

The book is marred by a number of regrettable lapses. Coppenger is insensitive to sexual stereotypes, repeatedly using both "man" and "men" in contexts which he no doubt intends to include all humanity but which sometimes carry the suggestion that the normal human being is male. He reassures readers troubled by his exclusive emphasis on God as father that this "is not meant as a snub to feminists" but that he is merely following a Scriptural pattern without implying its suitability for today (p. 16). To dismiss the issue so lightly may offend both feminist and non-feminist Biblical scholars.

At other points Coppenger's efforts to achieve brevity and clarity lead to misleading oversimplification. Noting the difficulty of applying the high standards of Jesus' moral teaching to the activities of governments, Coppenger sweeps the whole issue aside with the claim that the moral ideals of the Sermon on the Mount "apply to individual Christians and not to matters of public policy." This facile dichotomy leads the author to evade many crucial questions about the relation between morality and political authority, including the questions which have historically divided Calvinists from Anabaptists.

The specific recommendations made in the last chapters of the book are interesting and provocative—all the more so because they do not fall neatly into any particular region of the political map. Coppenger insists on strict enforcement of laws governing wages, for example, but believes that Biblical justice is

consistent with any number of different modes and levels of taxation. We must have systems of welfare (tied to job placement) and national health care, he argues; yet government should let prices and the distribution of wealth be determined by the marketplace.

Interesting as they are, these views are not clearly rooted in the central theses of Coppenger's book. Furthermore, Coppenger's account relies on some important assertions—that it is just to kill terrorists pre-emptively (p. 136), and that the state must “provide the possibility for wealth” (p. 74)—that are put forward without argument. Certainly one can offer theological as well as philosophical reasons in support of these assertions, but their truth is by no means self-evident.

Despite these lapses, *A Christian View of Justice* may serve to advance the discussion of issues of social justice in the Christian community. A student from a conservative Christian background struggling to relate religious belief to social realities might find it particularly helpful. A more critical reader—one aware of the political divisions in the evangelical wing of the churches, aware of the challenges of liberation theology and free-market economics—may find instead that the more difficult problems of relating Christian faith to political action begin where this discussion ends.

The Cognitivity of Religion: Three Perspectives, by **J. Kellenberger**. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985, pp. x + 214.

WILLIAM J. WAINWRIGHT, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Kellenberger's book examines three approaches to the question of religious knowledge. “The “First Perspective” insists upon the subjective dimension of faith, and is “inclined to deny that one can understand religious belief without believing” (36). The “Second Perspective” maintains that religious attitudes and practices presuppose “the cognitive belief that God exists” (36), and thinks that little sense can be made of skepticism, loss of faith and conversion unless one distinguishes understanding and belief.

The two perspectives also differ in their attitudes towards reason, evidence and knowledge. The first is “highly suspicious of rationality in religion” (6). It is reluctant to give evidence a place, and suspects that faith and knowledge are incompatible. The second values reason, thinks evidence is important, and believes that faith and knowledge are compatible.

Both perspectives are dominated by the model of “enquiry-rationality.” One's beliefs are rational when one has evidence for them, and adopts them after investigating to see *what* evidence there is. “What is at issue is correct reasoning