

## BOOK REVIEWS

Barnes, Robin Bruce. *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988. 371 pp. \$29.95.

In *Prophecy and Gnosis*, Robin Barnes opens a new frontier in the study of the Lutheran movement. Challenging the deeply rooted belief that the Puritans were the foremost Protestant students of Biblical prophecy, Barnes affirms: "[Puritan] England saw only a weak reflection of the eschatological excitement that obtained among the Lutherans" (5). After reading this work one must be convinced that justification by faith cannot be separated from eschatology in early Lutheran theology.

Barnes supports his thesis with the careful analysis of materials from more than 500 books and pamphlets published during the first century of Lutheranism. He places those writings in their cultural and historical contexts and thus gives his work the additional value of a demonstration of how culture and history affect theology.

While Barnes' main concern is for Luther's successors, he shows clearly the debt of Lutheranism to late medieval thought and clarifies several aspects of the Saxon reformer's ideas on eschatology. For instance, he points out that Luther's main contribution was his belief that Antichrist was not an individual wicked pope or king still to come but an institution, the papacy. He also shows how Luther's understanding of the end was closely bound with his view of the unconscious condition of the dead in the grave. He could also have written that the concept *simul justus et peccator* made it impossible to believe, as did Calvinists, in the possibility of establishing a kingdom of Christ on earth.

Luther's main theme, however, was the imminence and hiddenness of the end. His followers, on the other hand, tried to find the proper method of reading biblical prophecy to determine when that event would come. In their eagerness they turned to every other source of speculation on the future to try to solve the puzzle. Publishing interests fostered the flood of books on the topic. This obsession with biblical prophecy was reflected in the painting of biblical, prophetic symbols on clocks.

By his study of numerology, Michael Stifel came to the conclusion that Christ would return in 1533. Because Christ had announced that there would be signs in the heavens, many tried to read the book of Revelation in the light of astrology. From celestial events in 1571, for instance, the date of 1588 was set for the end. From a new star in 1604, Paul Nagel reckoned the date 1618. Some even believed that it took a certain spiritual gift to interpret prophecy, a gift that was also found among the heathen,

and thus the Sibylline Oracles and other classical oracles were included in those eschatological speculations.

The main sign for many was the preaching of the gospel by Luther, seen as a fulfillment of Jesus' promise that the gospel would be preached and then the end would come. Likewise the flourishing of so many heresies, such as Calvinism, Anabaptism, and Antitrinitarianism, was interpreted as the fulfillment of the announcement of the coming of many false prophets. One is struck by the way eschatology fostered the study of history, natural science, and even mathematics.

The approach of the Thirty Years War with its election of a Calvinist to the throne of Bohemia and the renewed belligerence of Catholicism increased the excitement. The field became a true Babel of confusion, and there arose a polarization between the eschatologists and the exponents of the new Protestant scholasticism, who branded eschatological speculation as spiritual pride or ignorance, an accusation made credible by the total failure of the many efforts to identify events of the war with prophetic announcements. Thus the eschatological ferment came to an end. A personal quest for piety replaced in Pietism the hope of a collective divine transformation of all things.

Because of the mass of information it contains, the book requires careful reading, especially due to the fact that the author has chosen a thematic approach which, at times, makes the chronological framework difficult to follow. But the reading of this book is a must for anyone who is interested in the history of eschatology or Lutheran theology.

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Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther. Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*. Trans. James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990. xvi + 543 pp. \$39.95.

This volume is the second of three in the extended biography of Luther by Martin Brecht, Professor of Reformation and Modern Church History, Evangelical Theological Faculty, University of Münster, Westphalia, Germany. The first volume, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, was well received by scholars, as this one will be. Brecht covers here the middle period of Luther's life, essentially the same period as that covered by Heinrich Bornkamm's 1979 study, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521-1530* (trans. E. Theodore Bachmann. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983). The main justification for a volume so soon on the same subject and time period is simply that this will be a part of a comprehensive overview of the whole Luther. In this regard, Brecht's work is welcome. This time period in Luther's story is too often neglected in