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## Faith of the Church (Book Review)

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*The Faith of the Church.* M. Eugene Osterhaven, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982, 248 pages, \$11.95. Reviewed by Wayne A. Kobes, Assistant Professor of Theology.

M. Eugene Osterhaven, Professor of Systematic Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, sets out to give a Reformed perspective on the historical development of the Church's faith. To trace significant developments in the Church's belief over a span of nearly two thousand years within the confines of approximately 250 pages at first strikes one as pretentious, to say the least! Yet, the author does an admirable job in tackling the task which he set before himself.

In his first chapter Osterhaven focuses on preliminary considerations, focusing specifically on the nature and task of theology as well as on the general development of doctrine in the Church. By revealing his own theological assumptions, Osterhaven enables the reader to understand more fully the study which follows. Chapter one reflects a classical Reformed understanding of the nature and task of theology, an understanding which is both its strength and its weakness. Although the author clearly defines "theology" and "doctrine," he fails to break through the dualistic and scholastic approaches that have plagued the Reformed community since the time of Beza, reflecting little evidence of the insights of A. Kuyper and other more recent Reformed theologians on this matter. In addition, he could benefit the readers by defining more carefully what he means by the term "church."

Nevertheless, having laid a foundation and having clarified a number of important concepts, Osterhaven reaches back into the faith of Israel in an attempt to summarize crucial underpinnings of the early Christian Church. With both brevity and clarity, the author discusses the existence of God, revelation, covenant, creation, grace, and the eschatological hope of Israel.

At this point the study moves into a very helpful discussion of the early Church's struggles relating to the doctrines of the Trinity and Jesus Christ as God and man. Again, the author's teaching ability shines through the text as he repeatedly makes complex issues understandable in few words. Several of the significant heresies which faced the early Church are summarized in this section.

Having provided a good foundation in exploring the struggles of the early Church relating to the Trinitarian and Christological debates, Osterhaven focuses on the Church's struggles concerning Scripture, the nature and extent of sin, the atonement, justification by faith, the Church, the sacraments, Christian freedom, John Calvin on the Holy Spirit, experiential Christianity, eschatology, and the relevance of faith today.

Chapter fourteen, "John Calvin: Order and the Holy Spirit," is especially interesting. Osterhaven appreciatively discusses major insights of the great Reformer in such a way as to show their relevance for the believing community today. The chapter serves well as a succinct primer in crucial elements of Calvin's thought.

Apart from concerns expressed above concerning Osterhaven's understanding of "theology" and "doctrine," I found *The Faith of the Church* to be an excellent overview of major developments in the belief of the Church. It is clearly and interestingly written and reflects a high level of scholarship. Throughout, Osterhaven has successfully avoided unnecessary abstractions and is always concerned to show the relevance of issues for life today. This book is a valuable resource for reading Christians who want to understand better the roots of their faith.

*The Fourth Day,* by Howard J. Van Till, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986, 286 pages, \$9.95 paper. Reviewed by Russell Maatman, Professor of Chemistry.

On the fourth day of creation God made the sun and the moon. According to Genesis 1:16, "He also made the stars." Howard Van Till, a professor of physics and astronomy at Calvin College, wrote this book to discuss the creation and history of the heavens. Van Till also includes other parts of creation in his discussion. He gives his view of the relation between biblical revelation and natural scientific results. The subtitle, "What the Bible and the Heavens are telling us about the Creation," a reference to Psalm 19:1, is a summary of the book.

Van Till's position in the creation-evolution debate is as follows: both the Bible and scientific results are to be taken seriously, but the contents of the Bible and the results of scientific discovery constitute answers to different ques-

tions. Therefore, says Van Till, the Bible and natural science cannot conflict. What does the Bible tell us about the relation of God to creation? The author says that the Bible teaches God is the Creator, the Preserver or Sustainer, the Governor, and the Provider. In other words, the Bible tells us about the relation between God and creation. The natural sciences do not describe this relation. Rather, natural scientific results describe the creation. For questions about the relation between creation and God, seek answers in the Bible. For questions about the nature of creation, seek answers by carrying out scientific study. Van Till takes the position that most modern controversy concerning origins arises because questions which should be addressed to the Bible are asked of the natural sciences and questions