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Contours of a Christian Philosophy (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Contours of a Christian Philosophy—by L. Kalsbeek, Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto, Ontario, 1975. 360 pages, \$12.50. Reviewed by Nick Van Til, Professor of Philosophy.

The title of this volume happily lays claim to only a Christian philosophy and not the Christian philosophy as it outlines the system of Herman Dooyeweerd. The author then begins by stating, "This book is an introduction to the Philosophy of the Cosmonomic Idea, that imposing system which commands respect of everyone acquainted with it" (p. 7). The obvious implication, and I think rightly, is that anyone who fails to respect fails to understand or is not acquainted. Respect, of course, need not imply agreement.

By furnishing this primer to the thought of Dooyeweerd, Kalsbeek has performed a real service, particularly to English-reading laymen whose acquaintance with Dooyeweerd has been limited to and prejudiced by such commentaries as Lester De Koster's Banner "Tour of Cosmonomia." Kalsbeek does not include the extended critique of Immanentism as it is reflected in various philosophers which Dooyeweerd includes in his three-volume work. The author sticks to the basics of the Cosmonomic System, as it is called, thus supplying a readable and comprehensible exposition of the essentials of Dooyeweerd.

Though Kalsbeek's presentation should serve as a foil to many of the pseudo-problems which have been raised concerning Dooyeweerd's meanings, it does not eliminate the genuine problems that arise out of the Cosmonomic System and an exposition thereof. Nor does it eliminate some of the semantic roadblocks which bar the way to a clear understanding of Dooyeweerd's meaning.

For example, Kalsbeek tells us that Dooyeweerd has appropriated the term "enkapsis" from the Swiss biologist, M. Heidenhein. Heidenhein uses the term to describe the relation of organs and the total organism in which they function. As a derivative from the Greek word *ἐγκύπτω*, "enkapsis" means to gulp down quickly or to snap up (cf., Lidell and

Scott). If that is the meaning, then it seems particularly inappropriate to combine the term in the phrase "enkaptic intertwinement" or "enkaptic interlacement" by way of describing the relationship of such "spheres" as the church and the state in Dooyeweerd's "sphere sovereignty" relationship. Such use of "enkapsis" is a mixing of metaphors and creates confusion rather than clarity in an area of discussion where clarification is essential for discussion.

Similarly, we can question whether Dooyeweerd's insistence that the word "being" must be reserved for the Creator, while designating all creation as "meaning," enhances clarity. Though we may want to bind ourselves to clear ontological distinctions, will we not have to have a completely new vocabulary if we must use different terms for any reference to the Creator as distinguished from the creature? We regularly use terms analogously to refer to God and man. Why make an exception in the case of "being?" If we are to make exceptions, doubtless one can make as good a case for Tillich's approach which reserves the word "being" for man who exists and then makes God the "ground of being" concerning whom we do not posit existence.

I presume that everyone has the right to stipulate meanings, especially when new ground is broken. However, I see no particular merit in such departures from ordinary meanings as those instanced. Other examples could be offered. Philosophy, like many specialized areas of study, has its own peculiar vocabulary. To create new islands of meaning for oneself does not enhance the possibility of effective communication.

Even as Kalsbeek's lucid presentation cannot irradicate some of the semantic difficulties from the Cosmonomic System, so it cannot remove some of the real problems inherent in the structure. Stressing the point that the modality structure shows us how we experience the various aspects of the created order and not what we experience, for example, does not clear up my difficulties with the historical modality, to mention but one. If we take the "lead function" or the "nuclear moment" of historical modality to be cultural forming, then it seems that economic, political, or aesthetic

activity ought to be subsumed under the historical, rather than that the historical merely "anticipates" such activity (cf. my "Dooyeweerd's 'History' and the Historian," Pro Rege, December, 1973).

Furthermore, I think that it can be argued cogently that Dooyeweerd's method of transcendental critique proceeds more along the lines of Thomas Aquinas than St. Augustine and John Calvin with reference to the place of the Transcendent. For an elaboration on this and other points of dispute concerning the Cosmogenic System, however, one can turn to the extended bibliography which this volume furnishes.

Books come high these days, but the price of ignorance is higher. This volume includes a biography of Dooyeweerd and an extended bibliography of writings concerning the Cosmogenic System, pro et contra, a glossary of terms, and an index of names, as well as an index of subjects. The purchase price is an economical way of buying yourself independence from third-hand commentaries on Dooyeweerd, some wise and some decidedly otherwise.

The Book of Isaiah From the New International Version. Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975. 162 pages. \$1.95. Reviewed by Richard G. Hodgson, Th.M., Assistant Professor of Astronomy.

The latest and perhaps the best in the recent flood of Bible translations and paraphrases in the English language is The New International Version (NIV). The Book of Isaiah From the New International Version, here reviewed, represents the first portion of the Old Testament in that version to appear; the New Testament appeared in 1973. (For a detailed review of the latter see The Westminster Theological Journal XXXVII, No. 2 (Winter, 1975), pp. 256-265.)

The preface to the translation of Isaiah states the principles involved as follows:

The New International Version is neither a paraphrase nor a revision of any previous translation, but a new translation made directly from the original languages. In the Old Testament the Masoretic Text (the traditional Hebrew text) has generally been followed, except where the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and other ancient versions...have led to corrections in the Masoretic text.

The method of translation falls between the rather close type of rendering characteristic of the King James (KJV), the English Revised (ERV), the American Standard (ASV), and the New American Standard (NASB) versions, on the one hand, and the very free type found in the New English Bible (NEB) and Today's English Version (TEV). The result is a translation that is reasonably accurate and quite readable, a commendable combination which is rarely achieved.

It is difficult to write a brief review of this translation of Isaiah. One is tempted to discuss it chapter by chapter, if not line by line. On many points the NIV translation speaks far more clearly than the older versions (such as the KJV, ERV and ASV). The poetry of Isaiah's message is ably captured, and a powerful message from God it is indeed! Of the many passages which might be cited to illustrate the well-chosen vocabulary of the NIV, the following, taken from Isaiah 1:10 ff., is typical:

Hear the word of the LORD, / you rulers of Sodom; / listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! / "The multitude of your sacrifices— / what are they to me?" says the LORD. / "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, / of rams and fattened animals; / I have no pleasure / in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. / When you come to meet with me, / who has asked this of you, / this trampling of my courts? / Stop bringing meaningless offerings! / Your incense is detestable to me. / New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— / I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

There is much in the NIV translation of Isaiah that will appeal to the younger reader and to those who have a limited acquaintance with the Bible. This reviewer would recommend it highly for personal and family devotions where family members read around the table after meals.

For those who wish to engage in intensive Bible study, the present edition of the NIV translation provides some alternate readings as footnotes, but they are far fewer than in the ERV, ASV, or NASB. Marginal cross-references to other passages, so important to topical study, are not provided. Hopefully when the NIV is completed, these will be provided, together with maps, map index, and a concordance of generous proportions, so that the advantage of the other translations in this respect may be eliminated.

It is almost a tradition that a reviewer of Bible translations point to specific words and