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Fables for God's People (Book Review)

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woman, the initial “good” character of the creatures, the discontinuity of creation-week events, the Fall into sin, and Christ’s place in redemption. A summary chart in the last chapter lists the essential differences between the two extreme positions.

From the text it is clear that the Genesis account and the theistic evolution position are incompatible and therefore the authors press for a clear choice. They urge full adherence to the teaching of Scripture and distinct separation from the teachings of both secular and theistic evolutionists.

Clear in its purpose and mincing no words, the book is supportive to those who hold to the historic understanding of Genesis, but it will make theistic evolutionists unhappy, as well as those who sympathize with the latter.

By clarifying the issues from a theological perspective, the book is helpful, but it will probably not bring greater peace in the denominational arena. Clarity may be more

important than peace in this instance.

Because of the intent of the book the authors do not go into any details from the natural sciences, possibly assuming that the reader knows those details. To include an adequate account of the various pertinent technical aspects from cosmology, biology, or other disciplines in this particular treatment would have changed the complexion of their presentation entirely.

The perspective from which the issues are treated is most basic, placing heavy emphasis on the reliability and centrality of Scripture and its final authority in these matters. Although this naturally causes limitations, the authors are definitely making a positive contribution to the ongoing debate by centering the spotlight on the incompatibility of the evolutionistic approach to ultimate origins with what God says in Scripture. The great divide is there. People must choose: either Christianity or evolution.

Fables for God’s People, John R. Aurelio (New York: Crossroad, 1988). \$8.95, 129 pp. Reviewed by James C. Schaap, Associate Professor of English.

Some theologians assert it was in his parables that Christ most vividly described the nature of his Kingdom. His use of the narrative form—of character and setting and plot—prompted his listeners, as it still prompts us today, to create word pictures of the truth he wished his hearers to own—pictures worth a thousand words. Because of parables, “the Good Samaritan” virtually embodies the idea of love—the point of the sermon.

John R. Aurelio’s latest collection of tales, *Fables for God’s People*, is a kind of descendant of Christ’s storytelling. Like Christ’s own narratives, these stories often are parables (as I learned in Sunday School), earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Although Aurelio’s stories are not gifted literally with “heavenly meaning,” in almost every case they reach for truth itself. They point at idea, as parables always do.

The art of parable telling or writing is in creating the fabric of the story itself. Twin dangers are always present: flat stories will bore the reader/listener, making the truth itself a bore; however, highly compelling narratives can overpower or obfuscate the idea which motivates the story and dissolve the fable into ordinary fiction. The end becomes lost in the means.

Aurelio’s tales achieve at different levels. Some are quite memorable, others merely cute; some reach toward magic, others seem only artifice. Some run several pages

long, offering the opportunity for a much more complex narrative. Others finished in less than a page have clearly visible ideas. Even Christ’s parables, of course, were substantially different: think, for instance, of the depth of detail in the Prodigal Son as compared with the brevity of the Mustard Seed.

But one doesn’t read a collection of tales like this for mere pleasure. Aurelio’s little stories move readers in and out of setting and characters with dizzying speed, and the effect, in essence, cheapens what he does. Page after page of parable becomes tedious, and finally makes one weary of the natural subterfuge of the parable form.

Parables such as these live most colorful lives when they exist to make concrete a more expository presentation of ideas—whether that be through Christ’s own lifetime of miracles and preaching, or, today, in a sermon in worship.

This book’s most obvious use is as a sourcebook for preachers who often find themselves searching for the kind of story which will, in a way that is both amusing and fitting, carry the burden of their sermon’s ideas. Any number of Aurelio’s tales could be used effectively in sermons. In fact, any number of these fables could easily become fascinating children’s sermons by themselves.

In the context of a sermon, many of Aurelio’s parables would vividly open the Word for listeners.

A Stranger in a Strange Land, Leonora Scholte (Des Moines, Iowa: State Historical Society, 1938). Reprinted by Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada T0G 1R0, \$7.95, 120 pp. Reviewed by James Calvin Schaap, Associate Professor of English.

Richard Ostling, the religion editor of *Time*, once explained to me some of the uniqueness of Dutch Reformed

people in the family of North American evangelicals by pointing at the historical roots of their sense of culture