
Pro Rege

Volume 11 | Number 1

Article 8

September 1982

Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Nawyn, William (1982) "Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 11: No. 1, 30 - 31.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol11/iss1/8

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Book Reviews

by Russell Maatman

Romans, Chapters 1-8 and *Romans, Chapters 9-16* by William Hendriksen. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980 and 1981. 303 pages, \$14.95, and 230 pages, \$12.95. Reviewed by James A. De Jong, Professor of Theology.

Dr. Hendriksen's two-volume commentary on Romans was his final contribution to his "New Testament Commentary" series to be completed before the Lord took him home. Through his years of diligent work after retiring from the pastorate, Dr. Hendriksen was able to write expositions of the four gospels and the entire Pauline corpus, except for I and II Corinthians. His work is already highly regarded and widely used by pastors and laymen in North America and abroad. It is safe to predict that his books will continue to serve the church of Jesus Christ well for decades and even for generations to come.

As were his previous commentaries, the two volumes on Romans rest on careful, thorough scrutiny of the best Greek readings. Yet the author does not intimidate the non-specialist; technical points are relegated to the footnotes. His work is marked by helpful illustrations, analogies, line drawings, and pastoral observations. At points his material assumes a devotional character, as when he casts the beautiful eighth chapter into poetic form (I, pages 294-298). His work is distinguished by his excurses or short essays on crucial topics; his notes on ecclesiastical gifts and functions (II, pages 480-413) and his three interpretations of Romans 11:26 (II, pages 379-382) are examples of this pattern. After explaining verse by verse each chapter of Romans, the author includes a summary of his exposition. Read seriatim, these summaries alone provide a quick but thorough overview of the Hendriksen interpretation of Romans. Thus,

throughout the commentaries one sees the unique touches that make these volumes so distinctively the work of William Hendriksen.

While the Hendriksen commentaries were never written with the technical theologian in mind, the Romans volumes, like their precursors, are theologically decisive. About questions regarding Romans 9:13 as adequate support for the classical Reformed doctrine of election and reprobation, the author says, "Having examined the objections, the result is that the doctrine of divine election and reprobation, based, among other passages, on Rom. 9:13, stands. The arguments against it are shallow and fallacious" (II, page 324). Likewise the author forthrightly defends the position that Romans 7:14-25 is a description of Paul's own condition as a believer and thus, by extension, that of believers generally (I, pages 222-239). He strongly affirms apostolic office and authority against "much present-day religious literature" (I, page 39). Thus, if Hendriksen's theological interpretations are one-sided, they are clear presentations of positions that have predominated in the history of Reformed exegesis.

The "New Testament Commentary" series belongs in every Reformed church, every Reformed pastor's library, and every Christian school collection. While it should never be the sole basis or resource for interpreting a passage, Hendriksen's exegesis should be consulted regularly by interpreters and serious students of the Bible.

Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox, by W. Stanford Reid. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982. 353 pages. Reviewed by William Nawyn, Associate Professor of History.

Originally published by Scribner's in hard-cover in 1974, this biography of the Scottish reformer and founder of the Presbyterian Church, John Knox, is from a scholarly point of view an impressive work. It does credit to the author, a leading evangelical Christian historian of our day, now emeritus professor of history at the University of Guelph in Ontario. It takes Knox, sometimes in great, almost excessive, detail, from the early preparatory years in Scotland, through the impor-

tant formative and foundational years as an exile in England and on the continent of Europe—especially with Calvin at Geneva—on through the years of leading and molding the Scottish Reformation, and finally into the last days of declining health and waning influence.

Reid sharply disagrees with those who contend that Knox was but a minor figure, arguing instead that he was a significant and influential person in his day and has had an important influence on history to the present

time. Indeed, this thesis is essentially the *raison d'être* for the book, and in its pages Reid persuasively supports his contentions that Knox contributed significantly to the English Reformation, that he did much to influence and form the beliefs of English refugees in Geneva (future Puritans) and that he, especially, profoundly and decisively shaped the Scottish Reformation.

In at least two respects this is more than a simple biography of John Knox. It is, as Reid himself maintains, an interpretive study that seeks to promote a better and more accurate understanding of the reformer. It is also a history of the politico-religious developments in sixteenth-century Scotland during the six decades of Knox's lifetime—a story incredibly confusing, tangled, violent, and erratic.

The author states he seeks neither to praise nor to condemn Knox in the course of his narrative. For the most part he successfully achieves this objective. Partly, this is due to the fact that Reid wisely deals with Knox in terms of the century in which he lived. It was a violent and intolerant age. Those of differing religious views railed at each other in the strongest language possible. Knox was no exception. To the twentieth century ear, their words sound very harsh, if not downright sinful. Generally, the author holds his peace, but upon occasion he cannot resist from going out of his way to defend his subject against modern-day detractors who, in his estimation, distort the record or engage in unfair attacks. Such excursions are understandable, if somewhat out of keeping with his announced intentions. Upon other occasions, one could almost wish that the author had departed from his objectivity sufficiently either to explain or question certain of Knox's actions—e.g., Knox's seeming approval, at least tacit, of acts of murder for "religious" purposes. In the end, Reid appears somewhat overly defensive of the Scottish reformer.

John Knox is frequently and popularly depicted as the arrogant, iconoclastic religious tyrant of Scotland, the man who was the intolerant author of *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of*

Women, and the relentless moral condemner of Mary Queen of Scots. The Knox that emerges here is considerably more subdued and less aggressive, even more tolerant and less self-confident. It is a more balanced picture, yet it does not obscure Knox's unalterable determination to uphold Scriptural truth as he saw it and his strong compulsion to denounce evil policies and immoral conduct.

Reid portrays a man who in his younger years was hesitant to enter the ministry, somewhat reluctant to assume leadership in the reform movement in Scotland, and who upon occasion was given to pessimism, even despair. He also pictures a mature reformer who was obdurate in matters of basic principle. If something was, to Knox's satisfaction, clearly taught by the Bible, he refused to compromise. Nevertheless, in "matters indifferent" not clearly dictated by Scripture, he is shown to be flexible and accommodating.

One is deeply impressed by Knox's unshakable belief in the sovereignty of God and the authority of Scripture as well as his determination to stand squarely on Biblical truths. His application of these truths to the political and religious circumstances and conditions of his environment may legitimately be questioned and debated, but the conviction from which they arose can elicit only admiration.

Knox conceived of himself as the "Master's trumpeter" and frequently he spoke and wrote of himself as blowing God's trumpet. It is this self-image that Reid has incorporated in his title and that provides a theme that he effectively carries on throughout the book in chapter titles and in the text itself.

This book is not for the casual reader. It is, in fact, tough going, demanding one's full attention. It is difficult to keep track of the many characters and places that appear in the account. It is not always easy to follow the complex events of the Scottish Reformation which are described. However, the reward is, as the author hoped, a better understanding of John Knox and, more broadly, of the environment and events associated with the Reformation in Scotland.

Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica, III: *Marten Mikron, Een Waerachtigh Verhaal der t'Zamensprekinghen Tusschen Menno Simons ende Martinus Mikron van der Menschwerdinghe Iesu Christi (1556)*, a new edition with notes and introduction by W.F. Dankbaar, ed. Vol. X, *Kerkhistorische Bijdragen*, under editorial supervision of C. Augustijn, etc. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981. LV + 194 pages, 76 Dutch guilders. Reviewed by James A. De Jong, Professor of Theology.

The above publication data testify to the complexity and expense of making scholarly editions of theological classics available today. The academic community engaged in the study of the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions is indebted to Professor Dankbaar for editing, to E.J. Brill for publishing, and to the Dutch Organization for Pure Scientific Research (Z.W.O.) for supporting this rendition of Micronius' account of his

debates with Menno Simons.

Micronius was a Reformed minister, who after studying in Basel and Zurich, served the Dutch refugee congregation in London during the reign of Edward VI. With Mary Tudor's accession in 1553, Micronius and his followers were harried by weather and opposition across the North Sea and through Denmark and northern German cities until they found temporary refuge in