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Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics (Book Review)

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sertions. Ken Taylor, the author paraphraser, sees the world through dispensationalist glasses. For example, he renders John 1:17 to read, "Moses gave us only the law" (this isn't just poor; it's downright wrong), and he paraphrases "the curse of the law" in Gal. 3:13 as the "doom of that impossible system" (246). This is dispensationalist theologizing on the law, plain and simple.

While the Living Bible was a project without literary merit, and one that spoon fed millenarianism to its readers, it was immensely successful. That success should say something to those who oppose modern Bible translations. Some people believe that the only real Bible is the KJV. Many of the problems and debates relevant to biblical revision arise from misconceptions about the KJV. "Many people believe that the KJV is the Bible against which all new translations are to be measured. Some assume that the KJV, if not inspired, is at least free from doctrinal problems and thus becomes a refuge from questions raised by the novelties in the new translations" (35). Lewis goes to some lengths to show not only that the KJV is archaic for the modern reader, but that identifying the KJV is a real problem. Which version of the more than thirty revisions are we to take as authoritative? Moreover, "If revision has been tolerated and even encouraged in the past, why should it be terminated now" (40). Lewis points out that the KJV can be as paraphrastic as other versions. In fact, paraphrase is sometimes necessary, because the sentence structure and grammar of both the OT Hebrew and the NT Greek differ so widely from English. The point, however, is that the KJV is not inherently more faithful to the Hebrew and Greek texts than other versions.

One of the more unfortunate elements of the KJV is that it is based upon a problematic textual base. The translators had but twenty-five NT manuscripts at their disposal, and those were often carelessly used. Today we have over 5300 manuscripts and fragments from which to determine the most original reading of a text. It is on this note that Lewis concentrates his polemic against the New King James Version (1982). The NKJV is a deliberate effort to pretend that two centuries of

manuscript discovery and the rise of textual criticism did not take place.

The NKJV's application of Elizabethian style to twentieth-century vocabulary and grammar ends up in a "new old English," in a quaint version that is designed to be an antique right from the printer. "Why create something which is unlike the way English-speaking people ever expressed themselves?" (339). The fact that the NT was written in Koine, the common Greek of the Roman world, argues strongly against imprisoning Scripture into Tudor or Jacobean (supposedly "biblical") style or vocabulary.

Translating is a human enterprise. Thus no translation is perfect. Yet the Word of God speaks through each and every version which is presently on the market. Even the New World Translation cannot totally obscure the gospel. Some are better than others, to be sure; but any Bible is better than none at all. As Lewis states (more by implication than direct assertion), where explicit theological choices were made in Bible translation—and thus an attempt to skew the interpretation of the text—it has come more often from conservative circles than liberal.

Which versions does Lewis praise? I will let the reader discover that for himself. But beware, this is not for the causal reader. Its appropriate audience is probably the seminary student. If that does not include you, I'll give you a hint. Although its style is a little flat, the Good News Bible (sometimes referred to as Today's English Version) is as good as it gets for accuracy (286). It all depends on your needs and tastes. If you want a study Bible, you might want to choose the Good News. If you are seeking readability, look at the Revised English or perhaps the Jerusalem Bible.

The one or two criticisms I would lodge are that the introductory chapter on the history of the English Bible before the KJV is a bit skimpy; and a separate chapter covering major manuscript finds, textual criticism, and translation philosophies would have been helpful. Otherwise, it is a most helpful book in making sense of the present variety of biblical translations.

Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics, by Gordon J. Spykman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1992. 560 pages, hardcover. \$39.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

Gordon Spykman has enjoyed a career of important contributions to the confessional life and theological reflection of the Reformed community, both nationally and internationally. *Reformational Theology* is his magnum opus, and it represents a true milestone in Reformed dogmatics. Quite simply, this is a work that

no one who has an interest in Reformed theology can afford not to read. It is easily the most important book to appear in Reformed theology since Anthony Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future* (1982), possibly since the English translation of G.C. Berkouwer's *Sin* (1971). In terms of its scope and its setting in the North

American context, Spykman's work is the most important contribution to Reformed theology since L. Berkof's *Systematic Theology* (1947).

Convinced "that every dogmatics worth its salt must . . . take its stand squarely within one confessional tradition or another" (5), that "every dogmatics stands within a certain larger religio-philosophical tradition" (133), Spykman consciously works within and speaks out of a tradition. He counts D.H.T. Vollenhoven and H. Dooyeweerd as important thinkers within his philosophical heritage, and he locates himself within a theological tradition that stretches from Calvin to A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, and G. C. Berkouwer. Spykman thus places himself within the Neo-Calvinist tradition of Dutch Kuyperianism.

As the subtitle suggests, Spykman is about the business of recasting the traditional *loci* of dogmatics. It is clear that he has L. Berkof's *Systematic Theology* in mind here. The intent of the book is to offer a replacement for Berkof's book and the approach to theology taken by Berkof. The fundamentally rationalistic categories and structure of classical dogmatics are given up in favor of Scripture's own narrative story-line of creation-fall-redemption-consummation, cross referenced to the trinitarian structure of the Apostles' Creed and Calvin's *Institutes*. Thus the book's major headings are Foundations, the Good Creation, Sin and Evil, the Way of Salvation, and the Consummation.

Part One: Foundations includes a lively survey of the history of theological discussion. Spykman notes that the endemic problem in the history of theology has been its "two-factor" problematic. The theologian works dialectically between the divine and human poles. Having only the two factors of God and man to work with, the norm for theological discourse is located in either one or the other. The result, of course, is dualism: nature/grace, heaven/earth, faith/reason.

Scholastic theology eternalizes the norm of relationship in such a way that the theological enterprise is understood as one of transcribing the mind of God. Thus theology becomes divine science, thinking God's thoughts after him. The distinction between Creator and creature is lost in the confusion of theology and revelation. At the other end of the spectrum, the liberal theology of Schleiermacher finds the norm in the subjectivity of human experience. It then becomes impossible to distinguish the norms for creaturely life from the contingencies of history. Thus the norm for theology—and all creaturely life and reflection—either "gets frozen on the other side [God's side] or it gets absorbed into the historical process with its flux and flow. Thus we are left with the choice between a refined

form of deism and the refined form of humanism" (71). Both extremes miss or eclipse the Creator/creature distinction. The scholastic attempts to move man to a position above the line by way of an *analogia entis*, an analogy of being in which man's so-called higher capacities mimic those of God. The liberal does the opposite. God is moved below the line, into history in such a way that God is indistinguishable from history. In the first, man is deified. In the second, God is distributed in a pantheistic universe.

Spykman's answer is a "three-factor" alternative to dualism. The relationship between Creator and creation is mediated by the Word of God. The Word is at one and the same time the divine initiative or revelation for creation and that to which creation responds. "God's Word is his way of coming out to his creatures" (93). Thus the Word is both the bridge and the boundary between God and his creation. As such, the Word is neither divine or creaturely. It "is subservient to God himself. At the same time it transcends the creation" (79). Graphically we may envision Spykman's three-factor approach thus:

GOD

-----WORD-----

WORLD

This works fine so long as Spykman limits Word to God's revelation in creation and Scripture (Belgic Conf. art.2). Possible misunderstandings arise, however, when he extends the category of Word to Christ. Christ is, of course, the Word of God personified, incarnate. He is the express image and personification of the Father's will. And he is the One through whom God creates, governs, sustains, and directs his world (Heb.1:2-3; John 1:14-18). But is Christ then to be understood as neither divine or human? As some middle being? Clearly, this is not Spykman's intent. He speaks of the Word as a third "factor" rather than an ontic structure.

While I greatly appreciate what Spykman wants to do with his notion of Word as boundary and bridge, I wonder whether his association of Christ with the Word as boundary does not open him up to the charge of christological subordinationism. I do not believe that he means to speak of Christ as an Arian tertium quid, but it is possible that a subordinationist christology may be read into his treatment of Christ as Word (see 75, 82-3, 93). Spykman needs to further develop and more clearly articulate the connection, and the distinction, between Christ as Word and God's Word as it is found in creation and published in Scripture.

Not everyone will agree with all of Spykman's assumptions and commitments. Yet the reader will still

find this a most useful book. I found his treatment of man as the image of God a bit thin. He seemed to vote too quickly for one side of the traditional functionalist versus substantialist debate (223ff). On the other hand, there are some real gems here. Spykman's discussion of the attributes of the church (440-50) ought to be required reading for any Reformed Christian. His emphasis upon election as God coming out to his people "in Christ" offers a much needed and utterly biblical corrective to the speculative and ahistorical aspects of the Reformed tradition (356-8). The emphasis upon Christian piety and holiness that pervades the work, especially in the section on salvation, is a most welcome aspect of the book.

Reformational Theology deserves to be read by every pastor, theologian, seminarian, and thoughtful Christian who desires a clearer vision of the comfort and challenge of the Christian faith. Quite simply, it is systematic theology as it ought to be done. The reader's attention is focused not upon the speculations of medieval metaphysics and arcane theological categories and jargon, but rather upon the living God who reveals his Word in history, who reveals himself in Christ, who is ever there before us, and before whose face we ever live our lives. In fact, Spykman does not bother to take up such traditional dogmatic issues as the being and attributes of God, the person of Christ, or the person of the Holy Spirit. Departing from the scholastic tradition's commitment that theology is a study of God, Spykman develops a theology that takes its point of departure in the commitment that revelation is a telling of the divine Word and deed in creation, the authoritative Scriptures of the Christian tradition, and—most personally—in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

Spykman speaks the language of the history of redemption rather than the abstract and rationalist categories of L. Berkof. There is no litany of metaphysical speculations here. Like the mountain climber who knows that the peak he is about to ascend is arduous and demanding, Spykman does not pack any unnecessary equipment. In a manner much like that of the Apostles' Creed, he concerns himself more with the drama of redemption than with questions of ontology. And he eschews the jargon of theological definition for the sake of the unadorned yet graphically elo-

quent language of affirmation and event, benefit and response. True to his commitment to a redemptive-historical approach toward dogmatics, Spykman articulates the Christian dogma not as eternal verities sitting comfortably in a heavenly cupboard but the mighty deeds of God worked within the rough and tumble of human history.

Aside from Spykman's historical-redemptive realignment of the theological loci and his Neo-Calvinist critique of dual normativity via his emphasis on the Word as boundary, he writes not as a critical or speculative theologian but as a confessional and traditional thinker. Spykman is not working as theological innovator here. He is setting down or framing the Kuyperian theological tradition in fairly popular, non-technical language. In short, Spykman is writing more for pastors than for theologians. The language and level of discourse is fairly popular. When he does introduce technical language he does so in such a way that it is not problematic and its meanings are clear. His cutting through the jargon of the Neo-Calvinist tradition is itself worth the price of admission, although sometimes the theologian may find some of his articulations a bit too facile or aphoristic. Yet throughout, the emphasis on the Christian life, the traditional—yet often forgotten—Reformed theology of piety will find an appreciative audience in even the most jaded theological reader.

There is much to applaud here. Spykman's attempt to overcome the dualisms in the history of theology and his bold recasting of Reformed dogmatics according to the redemptive-historical story-line have already been noted. In both, Spykman has written a pace-setting book for the Reformed tradition. But where the book really shines is in its pastoral tone. One senses throughout that dogmatics is not a mere head trip for Spykman. Believing leads to and is never to be thought of apart from doing. The gentle hand that contributed to *The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority* [Synodical report 44] (1972), and *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* (1987) is in full evidence. Spykman's commentary on the Heidelberg, *Never On Your Own* (1979) echoes throughout, as you hear him ever asking the catechetical question: "how does this truth benefit us?" No one answers those questions as faithfully, as pastorally, as Gordon Spykman.