
Pro Rege

Volume 18 | Number 1

Article 7

September 1989

Great Divide: Christianity or Evolution (Book Review)

Al Mennega
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation

Mennega, Al (1989) "Great Divide: Christianity or Evolution (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 18: No. 1, 28 - 29.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol18/iss1/7

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.



A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

reformer into a book of this size. If one wants to know Calvin's thinking on the topics noted in the subtitle, this is a good place to find it, with Wallace's own insights to add to one's understanding and appreciation.

Though the aim is not to tell the reformer's life story, the author wisely elects to begin with a brief biography, in order that the reader may understand both the context and the thrust of Calvin's ideas. Wallace's major effort is "to show how his [Calvin's] thought determined his aim and policy" (vii). He demonstrates repeatedly that Calvin's ideals were not ivory tower theologizing but were *practiced* (*passim*, esp. 19,41,43). Calvin was not just a theorizing academic but was involved in the practical experience of trying to be an everyday leader. In the author's words, Calvin was "close to life" (45).

Wallace might also have said he wished to show how vital it is to know Calvin's life situation in order to understand his thought, for this is a recurring motif. Indeed, it is one of the book's chief virtues that it does well, thus bearing out the wisdom of Wallace's decision to open with biographical chapters, which are remarkably thorough in view of the space allotted. The historical context provides valuable clues to the proper understanding of many ideas, emphases, and actions.

Students of Calvin have spilled much ink in arguing about what they see as the central idea or first principle in the reformer's thought. Wallace claims and shows clearly that the first principle is the central importance of the Word of God. Both beliefs and actions are shown to rest wholly on that Word (*passim*). His was a "theology of the Word" (222), and from that flowed views on such matters as government, both church and state (114), discipline (51), personal honor (60), the ministry (60-63), the Lord's Supper (83-84), and pastoral work (176), to

give only a partial listing. Calvin, like Luther, made the Word of God his touchstone.

Chapter 12 (166-184) is of special significance because it focuses on what the author regards as one of the Genevan reformer's major emphases, his pastoral concern. Wallace stresses Calvin's view of the preacher as being first of all a pastor, and he shows how much of the reformer's work, including his writing, is underlain by a concern for the welfare of the individual parishioner. Many a modern minister could learn from a study of Calvin on this point.

Since this is a collection of essays, no review can deal with every topic covered, but one would be remiss not to note that Wallace, while refuting many of the unjust or untrue criticisms often leveled at Calvin, has not simply written a whitewash. Though showing how many commonly repeated assertions are without factual basis, he also deals honestly with some of the matters about which a modern Calvinist feels out of sympathy with the reformer, and he devotes considerable space to a discussion of the most controversial doctrine commonly, though wrongly, seen as peculiarly Calvin's, namely, predestination (Ch. 17). Not every Calvinist will agree with Wallace's interpretation, but at least all must admit that he does not try to dodge issues.

All in all, this is a useful and thoughtful book, well-written, clear, and with every indication of thorough scholarship and total mastery of the subject. I have two minor criticisms. The proof-reading let a number of printing errors slip through, and there ought to be a bibliography appended. It is a nuisance to have to thumb through many previous pages hunting for a title to which one now sees only *op. cit.* as a footnote reference. Neither of these, however, detracts from the basic value of the book.

The Great Divide - Christianity or Evolution, Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster (Grand Rapids: The Christian's Library Press, 1988). Soft cover, 76 pp. \$8.95. Reviewed by Aaldert Mennega, Professor of Biology.

In the Foreword the authors plainly state the thesis of their book in the following words: "Theistic evolution, also called 'creationomic science,' perverts Christianity into just another man-tailored religion" (13).

The principal reason they give in support of this strong assertion is that

Theistic evolutionists reject Genesis by paying it lip service. They label God's Word as primeval history, or poetry, or saga, myth or legend, to justify reading their own meaning into what Genesis says. The result is a hybrid "religion" mislabeled "Christianity" to mislead. (14)

They trust that God's Word will persuade the reader that the thrust of their book is correct.

Structured according to the Plan of Redemption, the book has three main parts, dealing with Creation (9 chapters), Fall (3 chapters), and Incarnation (4 chapters). Part four is a summary and consists of a single chapter.

At the beginning of each chapter the authors indicate in short statements what Genesis says on a subject, and then contrast it with the positions of secular evolution and theistic evolution. In the chapters they elaborate on those summary statements.

The recurrent theme of the book is that there is a great divide between God and Christianity on the one hand, and evolution on the other hand. As they move from one chapter to the next, the authors illustrate the contrast and incompatibility of the evolutionist positions with Scripture. They speak specifically to the initial beginnings (vs. the Big Bang), the origin of light, the origin of man and

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