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Chosen for Life: An Introductory Guide to the Doctrine of Divine Election (Book Review)

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Colson's selective review of history moves very quickly, perhaps too quickly for some historians. Yet, his purpose is not so much to write history as it is to prove what happens when church and state become entangled, when each does not keep to its respective role. Rather than detailing scholarly argument to develop his thesis, the author provides story after story. Each story contributes to his thesis, but more precisely defined terms would have been helpful. For example, he defines power narrowly in terms of official control. Too often, people—in both church and state—become enamored with power, he says. I would have preferred to see him define power in terms of dependency, as many social scientists do. Then he would not have needed to argue that Christians do not need power. Instead he would have given even more support to his major point that “little platoons” of Christians working in their small corner are the forces God uses in bringing his Kingdom. Real power, the author could have said, lies in these seemingly insignificant forces which perform mighty works for the name of Jesus. A similar problem occurs in his use of the term “Judeo-Christian values” which he should have defined clearly, especially because the term has been used in such a loose way in society that we are never sure what is meant by “values.”

These small problems, however, are far outweighed by the strengths of this book. Its most significant values lie in two areas. First, he wrestles honestly and extensively with questions of what a Christian should do in the political process, whether that be as a private citizen, a member of the clergy, or a government official. His own experience as an insider during the Nixon administration equips him to

speak on these matters with much credibility. He gives no easy answers but he clearly shows what questions one needs to ask.

The second significant value, which by itself justifies reading the book, is his extensive and moving description of how faithful Christians can have fantastic impact in the political process. He draws on many stories of how converted prisoners have influenced others for good in ways that no one could have dreamed. His wealth of experience with Prison Fellowship testifies to the power of the Kingdom of God. These examples range from Benigno Aquino's conversion in his Philippine prison cell to the story of a converted Irish Republican Army terrorist who helped to heal the family of the victim of I.R.A. terrorism. He travels far beyond the prison walls to find many other exciting stories of the impact faithful Christians have. For example, he shows that large one-time programs will not solve problems of poverty, but John Perkins' work among the poor has lasting results. The stories of the lives of these people should encourage all Christians to get busy working for the Kingdom of God wherever he calls them. As Colson sees it, “The fact that God reigns can be manifest through political means whenever the citizens of the Kingdom of God bring His light to bear on the institutions of the kingdom of man” (371).

While political scientists and clergy will benefit much from this book, so will people who are not trained in political science. Extensive notes and his list of recommended works encourage the reader to move beyond the book. In the words of Gordon Spykman in a recent commencement address at Dordt College, “Colson deserves a good hearing.” Get this book, read it, and then pass it on.

Chosen for Life: An Introductory Guide to the Doctrine of Divine Election. C. Samuel Storms. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987, 142 pp., \$6.95. Reviewed by Helen Petter Westra, Associate Professor of English.

The author of this little paperback does not claim to resolve Christendom's sinewy, centuries-old debate on the doctrine of election. In his effort to lead the “theological beginner” through a complex theological question, Storms deliberately avoids subtle argument, technical jargon, extensive documentation, or heavy use of Hebrew or Greek. The strength, and at times the limitation, of this book is its simplicity.

The occasion for Storms' work is his expressed desire to offer clarity and guidance for the average Christian layperson seeking to understand the crucial doctrines that relate divine sovereignty and human will.

In his defense of the doctrine of divine election, Storms asserts his perspective as one which is “decidedly Calvinistic” (11), although to this claim he might as well have added “Lutheran” for in his work *The Bondage of the Will* Luther, like Calvin, battled against contingency and forcefully stressed God's purposive, unchanging will. Further, Storms' agenda is “to persuade . . . (with the Spirit's help, of course) that the doctrine of unconditional election . . . is biblical doctrine” (11).

According to the Calvinist view, God chooses individuals regardless of their adverse will at any stage of salvation, but

according to the Arminian view, God chooses only persons who at some point are first freely willing to be chosen. Using quotes from numerous Arminian authors, Storms documents their objections that the Calvinist belief in divine election inevitably places people in a position of having to accept a God who is unfair and partial (21, 22, 24).

With remarkable restraint, Storms resists any impulse to answer the Arminian accusation with acrimony or countercharge. Instead, in direct and lucid language, he explicates various biblical passages (Matt. 11:25-27; Matt. 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-13; John 6:37-40, 44, 65; John 10:14-16, 24-30; Acts 13:44-48) which outrightly express or strongly imply the Calvinist view of election.

Likewise, in answering the classic Arminian objections (how can the Calvinist God of unconditional election be just and loving? and what is the use of evangelism if all depends on God's sovereign will and choice?) Storms does not so much debate the issues as repeatedly stress the total depravity of humans and the astounding grace of God who sacrifically redeems his people through the suffering and crucifixion of his divine Son.

One limitation of Storms' abridged discussion is that it somewhat glosses over the mystery of human will as well as

somewhat glosses over the mystery of human will as well as the related matter of human choice which God sovereignly controls while the individual is accountable, whether he or she conforms to or transgresses God's revealed will. It is, however, understandable that Storms touches this issue only lightly, for the mystery is so great that even the inspired prophets (Isaiah 40:12-28) and the apostles (Paul in Romans 9:19-24) groped for symbols and imagery to communicate God's ineffable power and majesty.

Although the brevity of Storms' book necessarily

Worldly Saints: The Puritians as They Really Were. Leland Ryken. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1986, 281 pp., \$14.95. Reviewed by Helen Petter Westra, Associate Professor of English.

Although overt Puritan-bashing is no longer in style, the negative stereotypes of Puritans as fanatic, guilt-ridden, religiously regimented folk remain part of our received tradition. A long line of writers as varied as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, H. L. Mencken, and Robert Lowell have offered portraits of the Puritans, generally stressing their somber and unattractive side. Leland Ryken attempts to enlighten and correct this view, not apologetically but with zest and delight that makes this book a pleasure to read.

Indeed, as he attempts to set straight the record on Puritanism, Ryken finds much to praise in the Puritans' robust godliness. His celebrative study of "the Puritans as they really were" presents a people and movement whose strengths and virtues included many remarkably positive, balanced attitudes toward such things as money, child-rearing, sex, education, and social action. To Ryken's credit, he steps aside often "to let the Puritans speak for themselves and to allow readers to draw their own conclusions" (xvii). In fact, one of the most attractive ingredients of this volume -- in addition to its very appealing format and illustrations -- is its graceful inclusion of a wealth of revealing and notable passages from Puritan writers whose volumes are not readily accessible to the general reader.

In examining Puritan morals, values, and theology, the author includes chapters ranging from marriage, family, and work to worship, preaching, and the Scriptures, and finds in the Puritan views a reforming biblicism and piety which he suggests twentieth century Christians would do well to emulate. But this study is not simply an uncritical glorification of the Puritans. As it corrects distorted notions about the Puritans and reflects the complexities in Puritanism as a movement, Ryken's work also tests the Puritan reputation, surveying its weaknesses as well as its strengths.

Ryken deals candidly with the negative stereotypes held about Puritans. His initial chapter ("What Were the First Puritans Really Like?") unblinkingly lists, analyzes, and counters many of the charges commonly directed against Puritans—they were opposed to sex, fun, sports, recreation, art, and physicality; they were self-abasing, moralistic, overly strict, overly emotional, and obsessed with work. Following his disarming introduction, Ryken examines Puritan attitudes (documented in the works of

restricts the depth and range of his discussion, his little volume with its "plain talk" (10) is both valuable and timely. History reveals that churches which permit the gospel of divine election and God's absolute sovereignty to slide toward Arminianism with its emphasis on human freewill suffer grave risks of erosions by an effete social gospel and by cultural and spiritual delusion. Hence Storms' modest paperback is a worthy effort to buttress the gospel of sovereign grace and unconditional election, a gospel we must hold faithfully even as it most assuredly holds us.

writers and leaders such as William Perkins, William Ames, Richard Baxter, Eleazar Mather, Anne Bradstreet, John Eliot, Samuel Williard, and a host of others) toward labor, reproduction, finances, and family relationships. In the chapters on these various topics, we see that many of the positive, constructive approaches Puritans developed toward family, sexuality, work, and money grew out of a reformatory response to Roman Catholic views which minimized sex and family life (in the decrees of celibacy) and minimized industry and enterprise (in the doctrine of monasticism and the oath of poverty).

To conclude his survey of Puritan values, the author turns his attention to education and social action. He underscores the Puritan emphasis on God's Word and an unshakeable view of God's sovereignty as the inspiration for the Puritan's determined quest for knowledge and a society founded on biblical justice, piety, and obedience to God's authority and injunctions.

In his last two chapters, Ryken summarizes Puritanism at its worst and best. In his penultimate chapter titled "Learning from Negative Examples: Some Puritan Faults," Ryken exposes the Puritan tendency to legalism, verbosity, and too much moralizing. He also criticizes their male chauvinism and the partisan spirit in which they overreacted to many positions held by the Catholics and Anglicans. The final chapter, "What the Puritans Did Best: the Genius of Puritanism," forcefully highlights the Puritan principle of "putting God first and valuing everything else in relation to him" (206).

One of the author's stated goals for this book is to help contemporary readers discover "how on many crucial issues the Puritans remain a guide for Christians today" (xviii). On a similar note, theologian James I. Packer's "Forward" to Ryken's book lauds the Puritans for their heroic courage and perseverance as "great souls [in whom] clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined" (x).

In our present era of spiritual confusion, decay, and lethargy, we do well to recall the vigorous Puritan efforts to integrate faith and action, to struggle for biblical justice, to view the miracle of each human life against the backdrop of eternity, to labor ardently for the greater glory of God. Ryken is to be commended for his compelling reminder of the often neglected and maligned but nevertheless important position of Puritanism in our religious and national heritage.