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Pat Robertson: A Personal, Political and Religious Portrait (Book Review)

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sheep, and the new denomination grew, slowly but solidly.
Many of the issues which led to the formation of the O.P.C. are still with us. All true Calvinists can benefit from 
the insights and message of this book. As we approach the 
twenty-first century and the third millenium we cannot af-
ford to forget! This would also be an excellent book to give 
or recommend to those adults who are joining the church, 
and want to understand more of our reformed background.

"Pressing Toward the Mark" consists of thirty essays writ-
ten by leaders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the 
fiftieth anniversary of that denomination in 1986. At the 
end of the volume there is also a bibliography of the works 
of J. Gresham Machen, including also a record of reprints 
and translations up to 1984.

Of the three books here reviewed, this one is the 
heaviest. It shows that biblically-directed learning is 
still strong in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It reflects 
upon a variety of topics which should be of interest to all 
Calvinist pastors and elders, whether they belong to that 
denomination or not.

The essay portion of the book is divided into four parts.
In the first part there are seven essays reflecting upon the 
foundations for historic presbyterianism, including 
valuable contributions by Richard C. Gamble on "Presbyterianism and the Ancient Church" and "Distinctive 
Emphases in Presbyterian Church Polity" by Edmund P. 
Clowney.

The second part deals with the American Presbyterian 
experience. It covers well the experience and controversies 
which arose prior to the 1930's.

The third part give perspectives on the issues which led to 
the formation of the O.P.C., and the turmoil of its early 
years. Mark Noll writes on "The Spirit of Old Princeton 
and the Spirit of the O.P.C." D. Clair Davis discusses 
"Machen and Liberalism." George Marsden supplies 
"Perspective on the Division of 1937." But it is not all a 
matter of doctrine unrelated to people. David W. Kiester 
has written an excellent piece on "The Life and Death of a 
Dakota Church" which helps the reader sense what the 
struggle was like when it was translated into the life of a 
particular congregation.

In the fourth part there are several essays discussing the 
mission and current issues now facing the Orthodox 
Presbyterian Church. The problems and opportunities of 
the mission fields are explored well.

This is an excellent volume, and deserves a wide reading. 
"Pressing Toward the Mark" summons all of us to consider 
awakening our calling in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to understand 
more fully what the Apostolic faith means, and the suffer-
ing it sometimes involves.


David Barratt provides the perfect resource for the per-
son who wants a quick overview of the personal and 
literary life of C.S. Lewis. A forty-six page volume 
obviously limits the scope of the C.S. Lewis world, but 
attractive full-color or sepia photographs, which appear on 
nearly every page, greatly expand the setting.

Barratt draws from a wide variety of primary and 
secondary sources to recreate the world of the still-popular 
Oxford scholar, but he tells us little that is new to the 
Lewis devotee. However, he skillfully weaves biography 
through overviews and criticisms of Lewis' fifty volumes of 
fiction, allegory, literary criticism, and apologetics.

"Lewis is best at commending literature, less certain in 
criticizing it," says Barratt (140), who in turn commends 
Lewis with more certainty than he criticizes. Barratt 
presents Lewis as a "supremely confident writer" (41) whose 
perception of myth and metaphor, whose invention of pro-

Pat Robertson: A Personal, Political and Religious Portrait. David Edwin Harrell, Jr. San Fran-
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy.

Following an extended discussion of the TV ministries 
and ministers, the March 18, 1988, issue of Christianity To-
day furnishes "a selective, annotated bibliography" by 
Quentin J. Schultze of the Calvin College Communications

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Department. Schultze rates the "authorized biography" of Pat Robertson by John B. Donovan as "long on description and short on analysis." The biography by Neil Eskelin, an employee of Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network, Schultze rates as "inspirational but superficial." Harrell's biography, herein under discussion, Schultze rates as a "valuable study with limited analysis of CBN" (CT p. 41).

One would scarcely expect an unbiased book on the life of Pat Robertson by an employee of CBN such as Neil Eskelin. Nor would one expect an unbiased approach by someone associated with People for the American Way as, for example, its very vocal president, The Reverend John Buchanan. As Chairman of the History Department at the University of Alabama, David Edwin Harrell, Jr., comes with more reliable credentials and proves himself equal to the task of furnishing a highly objective view of the life of Robertson and those influences which have fashioned the basic ideas that Robertson espouses.

If Harrell gives somewhat less space to the discussion of Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network, his CBN, than some critics of the media ministries might wish, it is because he wants to cover adequately those influences which have shaped the Pat Robertson whom we recently saw on the campaign trail seeking the Republican nomination for the United States presidency. I think Harrell has done that job very well.

Instead of spending time on the question of Robertson's premarital sex life and his disputed Korean War service, Harrell analyzes such concepts as Christianity, evangelicalism, fundamentalism, charismatics, premillennial dispensationalism, and extrabiblical revelation. He does this because they as religious tenets are the deposit upon which Robertson draws to form his political philosophy. That kind of treatment does much more to enlighten the reader than those personal activities which the popular media have tried to sensationalize.

It is interesting to note that Robertson received his introduction to charismatics from Reverend Harold Bredesen of the First Reformed Church of Mt. Vernon, New York, where Robertson served briefly as assistant pastor. Presumably, it was there that Robertson received the gift of tongues, Bredesen having been a prior recipient. Upon invitation, those two, and a third party, spent an evening with Mrs. Norman Vincent Peale for the purpose of demonstrating their gifts. That interest by Mrs. Peale led eventually to the publication of the little volume They Speak In Other Tongues by John H. Sherrill, a staff writer for Guideposts, the Peale magazine.

In discussing Robertson's past claims to extrabiblical revelations Harrell quotes from the comments of George Marsden as "one of the most penetrating critiques of Robertson as a political candidate." Concerning Robertson's claims to extrabiblical revelation Marsden wrote, "Once in office someone who thinks he has such powers would certainly want to draw on those powers in times of crisis. The results could be disastrous" (p. 123).

Secular publicists such as the satirical columnists Art Buchwald and Mike Royko and the cartoonist G.B. Trudeau have had their heyday ridiculing Robertson's claim to direct word from God and direct answers to prayers. More restrained, Harrell offers this comment:

A theology founded on the rapturous leading of the Lord opens itself to an endless parade of self-proclaimed prophets and exotic revelations (p. 126).

A president's commitment to premillennial dispensationalism might also have far reaching implications. It could be a real threat to a reasoned and reasonable foreign policy as it pertains to the Israeli-Arab conflicts. It seems to have a strong influence on Robertson's views concerning Zionism. For example, the Six Day War of 1967 erupted the same day that ground was broken for the new CBN facility at Portsmouth. That was taken by Robertson as a "direct sign from God." In 1975 Robertson made four trips to Israel.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's Robertson repeatedly explored the twentieth-century significance of the prophecies of Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah, Isaiah and other prophets of the Old and New Testaments. Among other things, he concluded that he would "be alive when Jesus Christ comes back to earth" (p. 145).

I think the fact that Robertson was the only presidential hopeful who conferred with Itzaak Shamir in his March (1988) visit to the United States is noteworthy. The fact that Shamir would take time for such a conference indicates that Shamir is quite cognizant of the fact that, as Harrell puts it, Israel is "dear" to fundamentalist dispensationalists. It is not hard to understand that such a prejudice could give Robertson a distorted and myopic view of Israeli-Arab relations and the United States interests therein. In the "Prologue" to his book, Kingdoms in Conflict, Charles Colson gives us a scenario for the kind of conflict of interest a president's dispensationalism might present. It is alarming, to say the least. It seems to me only an ardent charismatic and/or dispensationalist follower of Robertson could avoid considering the hazard that those views would present if held by the occupant of the Oval Office.

The publishers could hardly have anticipated that Robertson's star would have faded from the political sky so soon. With that decline no doubt there will be a commensurate loss of interest in Robertson's life and views. Be that as it may, this book still remains worthwhile reading because of the insights it furnishes into the aggregate of beliefs which make up the views of a Robertson type candidate. That, and as the author suggests, the fact that Robertson is not too old for another try.

All Christians should be interested in getting American politics and American life turned around to a respect for Judeo-Christian morality and values. Billy Graham suggested concerning Jimmy Carter's candidacy that being a "born-again" Christian in and by itself did not qualify one to be president of our country. It may well be that a strong dispensationalism in and by itself is also enough to disqualify one for the presidential office.