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Lectures in Systematic Theology (Book Review)

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sion about what might constitute a more just framework for the entire broadcasting and other public media systems. Christians have contributed little, if anything, to this discussion from a biblical perspective.

In other areas Horsefield is more helpful. He raises the question, for instance, whether the paid-time evangelical broadcasters have avoided compromising the gospel. Some have claimed that since the evangelicals pay for their TV time, they present the gospel with no compromising dependence on commercially oriented TV executives. Horsefield argues convincingly that while evangelical broadcasters may not be beholden to the TV industry, they have often substituted pleasing their audiences. Only by rapt sensitivity to what audiences will and will not support financially, have the TV preachers been able to survive. In surviving, he shows, they have tended to stress those marketable aspects of the gospel message that blend with television's format and commercial worldview.

Another issue Horsefield discusses is whether the preachers—who have often claimed to be evangelists in the first place—are actually reaching the unconverted. Research suggests, he shows, that very few of those who watch religious TV are not already professing Christians. Religious TV then, appears to function as a support to individual Christians, but rarely as a means for reaching those outside the church.

A third issue is whether the audience-building and fundraising practised by the preachers contribute to or compete with the growth of churches. Again, contrary to what the TV preachers have argued, research suggests that TV preaching contributes little to church growth figures. Horsefield argues that, in fact, there may be serious competition for dollars and loyalty. This is one area where the later research points to a different answer. The NCC/NRB-

sponsored study suggests that the people who give to TV ministries tend to attend and give to their own churches also. Here, there needs to be a discussion of what the role of media in the Christian community ought to be. Can this community do without its own television programs and networks in this age? If it can't, then surely churches should willingly share resources with Christian TV organizations of some sort.

In his last section, Horsefield suggests reforms in the way that Christians strategize and act toward TV. Several of his suggestions are helpful. Christians who think in a reformational vein, however, will find his discussion too narrowly concerned with "religious" television alone. He does suggest that Christians develop a critique of the "dehumanizing and humanly destructive aspects" of television programming in general, but his positive suggestions have to do with what congregations and denominations should do. There is no truly fresh vision for what the church in a broader sense should do. Nor is there any discussion of whether and how this Christian community should challenge secular TV in news and entertainment programming in such a way that Christians could strengthen their own communal life across the board, and at the same time—in appropriate ways—support evangelistic efforts.

Horsefield's discussion should prove helpful for our sorting out of our feelings and thoughts about these preacher-entertainers, and it may help too in discussing the strategies our own churches and Christian communities should adopt in this area of cultural endeavor.

*For a report on this research, see William F. Fore, "Religion and Television: Report on the Research," *The Christian Century*, July 18, 1984, pp. 710-713.

Lectures in Systematic Theology, Robert Lewis Dabney, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 1878, Reprinted 1985, 903 pp., \$24.95. Reviewed by John B. Hulst, President, Dordt College.

Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898) was ordained to the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in 1847, at which time he became pastor of the Tinkling Spring Church in Augusta County, Virginia. His ministry was very effective—a time of hard study, continual pastoral work, and diligent exegetical preaching. At the age of 33, Dabney was called to the Chair of Ecclesiastical History and Polity at Union Seminary in Hampden-Sydney, and six years later was transferred to the Department of Systematic Theology. He remained at Union for thirty years and, according to a majority of his students, "he was the greatest teacher they ever knew." In 1883 he joined the faculty of the University of Texas, where he taught Moral and Mental Philosophy until his retirement in 1894.

Douglas F. Kelly, in *Reformed Theology in America* (edited by David F. Wells, 1985), introduces Dabney as "perhaps the greatest, and certainly the most prolific, Southern Presbyterian theologian of nineteenth-century America." Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, and W.G.T. Shedd all considered Dabney to be the greatest teacher of theology in the United States. And B.B. Warfield is quoted as saying: "Dr. Dabney was not only an influential statesman and a powerful ecclesiastical force, not only an acute philosopher and a profound theologian, but also a devoted Christian—which is best of all" (p. 208). Dabney was a Calvinist, whose approach to theology was thoroughly conservative. He accepted the Bible as the Word of God, as inspired and infallible. According to his

biographer, Thomas C. Johnson, in *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney*, (1903):

He accepted the Bible's whole humiliating portraiture of human sinfulness, its doctrine of the absolute necessity of salvation by grace, if salvation there be, its doctrine of predestination, its doctrine of vicarious atonement, of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, of justification through faith on the ground of our Redeemer's righteousness, of progress in sanctification, God's grace cooperating with and giving efficiency to regenerate effort. (pp. 550, 551)

Dabney was a prolific writer, producing articles that appeared in various publications. One of his major literary productions was *The Life and Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. Thomas J. Jackson*. (Dabney served as Jackson's chief of staff in 1862.) His theological lectures, prepared for publication by his students in 1871, first appeared under the title *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary Virginia*. The book was revised in 1878 by Dabney himself and was titled simply *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Since then it has seen eight editions or printings.

The *Lectures* reflect Dabney's teaching style, which was instruction by means of dialogue. Two days before lecturing on a particular subject he wrote on the board a series of questions—questions which now appear in the book at the beginning of each chapter or lecture. In addition to the questions, he assigned the students readings in various theologians, especially Francis Turretin in Latin and John Dick in English. The class was required to answer the questions in writing. Dabney would correct the answers, and then he would present his lecture on the subject.

According to Dabney, *Lectures* was designed to provide "a view of the whole field of Christian theology, without swelling the work to a size too unwieldy and costly for purposes of instruction. Every head of divinity has received at least brief attention" (p. 3). However, in considering each head of divinity, Dabney does not follow the usual order of a systematic theology. Instead he observes the pattern of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

But *Lectures in Systematic Theology* does not merely follow the pattern of the Confession. It is, in fact, an exposition and defense of the Confession. This should not surprise us, for Dabney adhered so closely to the Westminster standards that on one occasion, speaking before the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly, he declared:

"...the Confession will need no amendment until the Bible needs to be amended." At the same time, Dabney saw himself as primarily a biblical and exegetical theologian. Therefore, as he expounds the Confession of Faith, he is concerned even more to expound the Scriptures as they come to bear on the parts of the confession.

Dabney's adherence to the Confession of Faith did not cause him to avoid theological issues. According to Johnson, "Every student of Dabney, when wrestling with a difficulty in the Calvinistic system, pulls down Dabney with the expectation of seeing him resolutely grapple with that difficulty. He never dodged." Dabney refuses to make distinctions which the Scriptures do not permit. For example, he will not make the distinction between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, mediate and immediate imputation, or creationism and traducionism—"acknowledging the limitations of the human mind to comprehend what is nevertheless to be accepted" (pp. 557, 558). His "moderate," rather than "hyper"-Calvinistic approach also causes Dabney to consider the possibility that all who die in infancy will be saved. While holding to the "particular redemption" of the elect, in *Lectures* he prefers to speak of "general design" in the atonement rather than "limited" atonement; he speaks of a "sincere offer of mercy"; and, concerning Christ's sacrifice, he sees that "along with the actual redemption of the elect, it works out several other subordinate ends. There is then a sense in which Christ 'died for' all those ends, and for the persons affected by them" (p. 529).

One final comment concerning Dabney's theological method—he is obviously committed to the Scottish Common Sense Philosophy of Realism, which he sees as a way to affirm Christianity as a well-reasoned faith. His reliance on Scottish Realism causes him first to consider "natural" and then "revealed" theology. In the line of Thomas Reid—founder of the Common Sense School—Dabney establishes the traditional proofs for God's existence on the basis of cause and effect. His adherence to the categories of Scottish realism also reflects itself in his view of the sacraments, in which he declares Calvin's view of sacramental union and the real presence of Christ, considered from a rational point of view, is "not only incomprehensible, but impossible" (p. 811).

Nevertheless, while we cannot accept Dabney's scholastic approach to theology, we can and do join with Morton H. Smith, author of the Foreword, in the hope that Baker's republication of *Lectures in Systematic Theology* "may stimulate fresh interest in the study and propagation of the Reformed faith."