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Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544-1569 (Book Review)

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Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544-1569, by Phyllis Mack Crew. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 221 pages, \$19.95. Reviewed by James A. De Jong, Associate Professor of Theology.

To see how a social historian handles an event commonly viewed in more theological categories is a fascinating prospect. A careful reading of Professor Crew's monograph rewards us with a deeper understanding of the complex factors operative in the shaping of Dutch Reformed Christianity. Her careful and thorough investigation of the original and secondary sources on the "churches under the cross" leads to new, interesting information and to an alternative interpretation regarding the "wonder year," 1566-1567.

The "wonder year" refers to the events which followed a government decree, issued in April, 1566, which curbed activities of the Inquisition against reformers. Immediately some fifty ministers living in exile returned to the Netherlands and, with those who had maintained covert operations there during more hostile days, began preaching to huge audiences in the hedgerows outside the towns and cities. In August small groups initiated a phase of iconoclasm, breaking into hundreds of Catholic churches, smashing anything that smacked of Catholicism, and holding Reformed services in the cleansed buildings. Reprisal was quick and vicious. The Duke of Alba was sent from Spain in 1567 and began a new wave of repression and execution of heretics. But the "wonder year" has long been regarded as the era when the Reformed cause was galvanized into the movement that triumphed religiously in the northern Netherlands the following decade.

Crew approached her investigation with the thesis that in the Netherlands of the 1560's we find a unified resistance movement orchestrated by clergy who held unswervingly to Calvinist ideology. Her study of the sources soon led her to discard that theory. Unlike Huguenot France and Puritan England, the Netherlands reformers reflected a frustrating diffusiveness. Some were theologically trained and ordained; others were self-taught lay evangelists. They were shaped by all the European Reformed centers: London, Geneva, France, Emden, the Palatinate. Some, a minority, were militant revolutionaries; others urged respect for the magistrate, restraint, and patience. Some organized and operated through what we would now see as patently Reformed consistories and congregations, albeit underground; others showed little ecclesiastical sensitivity as they merely discussed Scripture and sang hymns while they sipped beer in the local pubs. The author does a masterful job of showing us how Erasmian ideals, the caustic dramas of the

Chambers of Rhetoric, popular Catholic piety, and Lutheran and Mennonite influences all became formative ingredients of the social milieu.

What, then, shaped a common consciousness among the Reformed clergy? This becomes the central, pressing question for Ms. Crew. In the absence of what she calls a "Common ideology," there did develop a common, heroic Calvinist attitude to dying the martyr's death. It served to unify the movement. Further, there were common strains in Reformed preaching, though these do not appear to be grounded in a shared theology. Finally and ultimately, she suggests that a society in transition found in the Calvinist ministers an authority which voiced the concerns and ideals of the public. She sees the *Prêche*, the public and field preaching services, as social happenings which transcended differences in society and unified all classes in a common expression of a new, emerging order.

Whether the author's interpretation of the "wonder year" and the influences and events that precipitated it is ultimately convincing remains to be tested. Her approach is certainly a helpful and needed corrective to histories overly weighted in the intellectual or theological directions. Yet precisely here she appears to be most vulnerable. Does her thesis explain why exiles with a shared homiletical emphasis were driven back to their homeland to make common cause? Has she probed deeply enough the relationship between preaching emphases and theology? Is the absence, or seeming absence, of a demonstrable social network among the reformers proof of a lack of a common ideology? In this light has she traced Calvin's influence on all the intellectual centers of the Reformed cause? Although the Dutch exiles gravitated to different geographic centers, is it possible that they found something intellectually and Biblically similar when they got wherever they were going? How can she convince us of the absence of a unifying ideology when she has paid such scant attention to the writings of Calvin? From the late fifties and early sixties is not the emerging ecclesiastical underground, evidenced by the eight synods and the required signing of the Belgic Confession which she mentions, suggestive of a common mind taking shape? There appears, therefore, to be a corrective which the intellectual and theological historians can offer the Crew thesis.

Nonetheless, this historian from Rutgers University has placed us in her debt with a mar-

vellous and colorful tour of the formative period of the Dutch Reformed faith. The pity is that those who belong to and who continue to give leadership in that tradition often do not show the interest in and knowledge of it that Crew does. Her book deserves to be bought and read by all of them.

Its three appendices, which constitute a fourteen page list of Dutch Reformed ministers active from 1544-1570, is rich with information and so fascinating and important that it alone makes the book worth the purchase price. The bibliography and helpful charts and maps are a bonus.

Dreams and Dictators. On the Book of Daniel, by Herman Veldkamp (translated by Theodore Plantinga). St. Catherine's, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978. 251 pages, \$4.95. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology.

This publication is another meditational jewel from the late Rev. Herman Veldkamp, a minister in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in the Netherlands. Just as his earlier books *The Farmer from Tekoa* and *Waiting for Christ's Return*, this book clearly displays Veldkamp's uncanny ability to point out the comfort of Scripture and to open new vistas for the covenantal pilgrim.

By means of thirty-five meditations, Veldkamp provides the reader with a glimpse of God's (progressive) revelations to Daniel and of the responses of Daniel to God. Each meditation is a close-up picture of outstanding features of many baffling episodes in the life of Daniel, the only prophet who witnessed both Judah's exile and, seventy years later, her return. Taken together these devotional closeups comprise a fascinating spectacle of the unique experiences and visions of this remarkable prophet and powerful ruler.

The character of the subject matter and nature of the approach used in these devotional gems have been well-stated on the outside cover of this book:

Daniel lived in frightening days: God's people were in the grip of a pagan empire, and that empire was under growing pressure from without. Against this background, Herman Veldkamp tells a dramatic story of dreams and dictators, of fearful visions and empires in collision, emphasizing that God's people are never forgotten, however desperate their plight.

Veldkamp shows how prophecy and history blend in the book of Daniel to present a single message. That message is intended to strengthen believers of all ages as they face the assaults of Satan and his hosts and pray feverishly for the return and final triumph of Christ.

Particularly beautiful and helpful are those meditations — cf. 5, 16-19, 27-29, 35 — that deal with the role, essence, and power of prayer in the life of the believer. By focusing on God's promises of grace and threats of judgment, and on the central significance of the coming of Christ and the new kingdom, Veldkamp has demonstrated how listening to Scripture can be pastorally enriching and culturally relevant. What is especially refreshing about this book is that it is void of all premillennarian speculation and Bible-distorting moralism.

I find the section on Christians being lights in the world (cf. pp. 42-45) somewhat distracting as far as the flow of the book's main thought is concerned. Also, I question the legitimacy of equating the fourth man in the fiery furnace, who looked like "a son of the gods," with a prophecy that points to "Christ's descent into hell" (p. 57). Furthermore, because of the ambiguous meaning of the word "theology" in our intellectualistic western culture, I consider the reference on page 31 to "theological faculty" and the phrase "theologians like Daniel" unfortunate, if not misleading.

Even though Veldkamp warned against reading Daniel 11 "as a prophecy about the struggles and conflicts of our time" and playing "ingenious games with the Bible" (p. 222; also, pp. 227, 244, 249), he did not avoid this pitfall himself when he suggested that "the leopard" could be considered a prophetic reference to "motorized vehicles," "unmanned missiles," "intercontinental missiles, rockets, and nuclear warhead," and that the fourth, unidentified animal could be conceived of as a possible allusion to "frightening machines of war manned by people disguised as robots" (pp. 153-154).

Dreams and Dictators is an excellent book to be used in personal devotions, as official proclamation of the Word, for communal Bible study, and for teaching of Bible in both grade and highschools.