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Christianity on Trial (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Christianity on Trial, by Colin Chapman. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1975. Reviewed by Rich Buckham, Assistant Professor of Psychology.

Chapman's book is in the class of popular apologetics. It sets forth many of the basic questions about Christianity (e.g., God, man, the universe, and Jesus Christ) that have been posed by Christians as well as by the numerous critics of Christianity. Chapman attempts to vindicate the historic Christian position on these questions by showing that it can successfully withstand critical investigation by the many non-Christian traditions and perspectives that are paraded before us throughout the book. For Chapman, if Christianity is to be more than "wishful thinking," it must be able to demonstrate and provide evidence for its positions on these issues. Christianity is, as it were, put on trial, with the reader serving as judge and jury of the outcome.

Eight questions are posed in the book. These questions, in order of presentation, are: How can we know if Christianity is true? Who or what is God, and does he exist? What is man? What kind of universe do we live in? What was Jesus' relation to God? What is the meaning of the death of Jesus? Did Jesus rise from the dead? Where do we go from here, and is Christianity true? To give an example, for question two (Who or what is God, and does he exist?), the positions of Biblical Christianity, "primal religion," Judaism, deism, Islam, agnosticism, mysticism, atheism, pantheism, and "some modern theologians" are presented and assessed for their validity.

For each of these questions, the Biblically Christian answer is given first, after which several

non-Christian and/or less-than-orthodox-Christian answers are presented. Chapman concludes each of these question-and-answer sections by showing how the orthodox Christian position provides the most satisfactory solution to the problem. The answers to the questions are usually presented by quoting from various thinkers and cultural spokesmen who have, directly or indirectly, dealt with the question at hand. Thus, not only do philosophers, theologians, scientists, and other such professionals have their say, but we also hear from leaders in the mass media, "music, art, politics, economics, and others." This voluminous quoting lends a certain disjointedness to each question-and-answer section, and somewhat reduces the value of the book.

By reading through each question-and-answer section, the reader will become familiar with most of the major "-isms" and influential world and life views of our century. For those who desire such exposure to the "spirits" of our age, this book would be a useful resource. However, given the temper of our age (subjectivism), it is to be questioned if the demonstrated logical coherence and empirical validity of Christianity would make much of an impact on modern secular man. Humans are extraordinarily capable of ignoring "the facts of life" and living with inconsistencies in their basic beliefs and values, and will not necessarily be driven to give an account of their lives and change their ways in the face of "proofs" against their own position. (Out of fair-

ness to Chapman, he does seem to be aware of the problem with the traditional "proofs" of Christianity; see Part I.)

Furthermore, if the Christian is indeed more than an intellectual or rational understanding of such basic questions (with the "right" answers of course), it is to be wondered if such understanding will necessarily deepen the faith of the Christian. However, when such understandings

find concrete and vital embodiment in our lives, they may deepen our faith and contribute to the development of the "Christian mind" in an orthodox Christian community which is too often anti-intellectual.

Given the above provisos, this book is worthy of consideration, especially for those in positions of leadership.



Six Psalms of John Calvin (words by John Calvin, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, harmonizations by Stanley Tagg.) Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978. Reviewed by Noel Magee, Associate Professor of Music.

The musical publication of *Six Psalms of John Calvin* is a gratifying achievement since it makes available nearly forgotten texts and melodies of the Calvinist heritage in a modern musical setting. The melodies with Calvin's versifications of these Psalms first appeared in *Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant*, published in Strasbourg in 1539. Four tunes were composed by Matthaus Greitter, one by Wolfgang Dachstein; the composer of the sixth is unknown. They now reappear in Ford Lewis Battles' anthology of writings by Calvin entitled *The Piety of John Calvin*, with harmonizations by Stanley Tagg. The music is also published separately from the rest of the anthology for use in performance.

Mr. Tagg has honored the plainness of the original melodic and rhythmic style in both his accompaniments for the unison singing of four of the six Psalms, and in his polyphonic choral arrangements of the other two, whose verses alternate with unison congregational singing. Although the clear, spacious layout of the words and music is praiseworthy, it would have been helpful if the choral parts had been printed for keyboard, with the suggestion "for rehearsal only," assuming that a *cappella* performance is intended for verses sung by the choir.

The arranger-composer has creatively used Renaissance as well as pre- and post-Renaissance compositional devices, but he has permitted his musical vocabulary of mild dissonances to reflect the ear and mind of a 20th-century musician. The old tunes receive this treatment without having their own grace hindered. Canonic writing flows

so easily (though perhaps not so easily perceived in the compositional working stages), that it is as if the tunes were originally conceived with this contrapuntal texture in mind. Each line maintains melodic interest that was obviously generated by the original melody. Occasional cadences on open fifths as well as cross-relations lend to the spirit of archaism. In short, the fusion of the older with newer musical sonorities is so well-balanced that if one does not respond favorably to the one quality, he will certainly be charmed by the other. However, the real beauty of Tagg's arrangements lies in the integration of the two.

The texts of Calvin reflect his piety, but the musical settings in this anthology do not. Nor does the essay of Chapter 6, "Metrical Psalms Translated by Calvin," written jointly by Battles and Tagg, present the total picture of Calvin's piety with respect to music. It is only suggested that "although the early Psalters contain only texts and melodic lines, there is no reason to hold that accompaniments were not employed." (p. 141).

There is no mention of Calvin's opposition to part-singing or use of accompaniment in the services, a position which he held throughout his roughly thirty years of leadership, and which was adopted by a number of Calvinist churches. A Ph.D. dissertation, unavailable for corroboration, and Calvin's *Institutes* are cited to support the claim for accompaniments. The passage referred to in the latter does not speak to this issue of performance practice. (If anything, Calvin's remarks in this context should be interpreted to suggest unison singing,