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Above the Battle: The Bible and its Critics (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Above the Battle: The Bible and its Critics, by Harry R. Boer, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 109 pages, \$2.95. Reviewed by Wayne Kobes, Instructor in Theology.

Dr. Harry Boer is no stranger to most of our readers. Dr. Boer has been a missionary in Nigeria for more than twenty-five years and is the author of *Pentecost and Missions* and *A Short History of the Early Church*. He has taken an active, if somewhat controversial, role in the recent history of the Christian Reformed Church.

In *Above the Battle*, Dr. Boer focuses on an issue of pressing concern in the Reformed and more broadly in the evangelical community. That issue is the church's understanding of the Bible as the *inspired* and *infallible* Word of God. Dr. Boer is correct when he writes the following:

In Christian circles we do not argue with the proposition that God has spoken to men and through men, and that in various ways he has caused that part of his redemptive revelation known as the Bible to become inscripturated. The authoritative book which records this revelation we call, wholly correctly, the Word of God. The specific divine activity through which its several books came into being is called inspiration, and this inspiration we understand to have

been an activity of God the Holy Spirit.

On these broad but basic theses there is general agreement in the Christian community. Consensus ceases when we seek further to qualify the inspiration of the Bible (p. 99).

The continuing debate on the position of the Christian Reformed Church as stated in Report 44 (Synod of 1972), "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority," as well as recent struggles in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, indicate the relevance of Dr. Boer's book.

But has Harry Boer contributed to a clarification and resolution of the problems faced? To this question we must answer "yes" and "no."

To his credit Dr. Boer warns his readers against holding a docetic view of the Bible. In chapter 4, "The Humanity of the Bible," Boer goes to Herman Bavink's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* to gain support for his warning and concludes thus:

The Bible therefore is as fully and truly a human book as Christ was fully and truly a human being. As the Son of God became human and lived his humanity from crib to cross to the point of limited knowledge, temptation, and death, so the Word of God written is a human book, the product of thought, investigation, planning, and composition like any other piece of literature. We don't have a

docetic Christ and we don't have a docetic Scripture. (p. 46)

Certainly, recent debates in evangelical circles concerning the inspiration and authority of the Bible give reason to issue such a warning. Churches of the Reformed tradition in principle holding to the organic view of inspiration, should also take this caution seriously. But where does this concern to do justice to the humanity of the Bible lead us?

Dr. Boer suggests that we must reappraise our rejection of higher criticism. In chapter one, "Is Biblical Criticism Unbiblical?" he explains what he understands by the term "biblical criticism" and its various elements:

It is commonly forgotten not only that there is another category of criticism known as "lower" criticism, but that the "lower" is a twin brother of the "higher" criticism. Both were conceived in and have issued from the same womb. This womb is the rational human mind. The two forms of criticism are so interrelated and basic in the study of the Bible that it is impossible to use the one properly without acknowledging the legitimacy and necessity of the other. (p. 18)

But is Dr. Boer correct? Must one accept higher criticism if he accepts lower or textual criticism? Boer contends that this is so, but nowhere is this contention substantiated. Instead, it seems that the author has over-simplified the issues to the extent that they are, in fact, drastically distorted. Boer characterizes both elements of biblical criticism as being governed by "... the spirit of rational, scientific analysis uninfluenced, insofar as that is humanly possible, by dogmatic presuppositions" (p. 18).

This is the crux of the matter. Is higher criticism an objective, scientific approach to the Bible as Boer indicates? Historically, it does not appear so. One's presuppositions, Christian or non-Christian, enter into this part of life as they enter into all other concerns. To present higher criticism as that "objective" approach to the Bible of benefit to the Reformed-evangelical community is to muddy the waters of the current debate instead of clarifying them.

The real questions still remain: What is a Biblical approach to a study of the Bible? What are the implications of a Biblical view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture? What Biblical norms must shape our study of Scripture? To suggest that there is in the Reformed-evangelical community no understanding in this area is unfair and inaccurate. To maintain that more study and clarity are needed is timely and

necessary.

If we must reject Dr. Boer's approach to this issue as unacceptable, we can at the same time thank him for pressing us for greater clarity on a subject that concerns the entire Christian community and its mission.

Intended for Pleasure by Ed and Gaye Wheat, Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1977, 223 pages, Illustrated, \$7.95. Reviewed by Kenneth Bussema, Assistant Professor of Psychology.

Confronted by the staggering volume of literature available today which is devoted to the understanding of human sexuality, the Christian couple faces a difficult choice in selecting accurate, Biblical advice and information concerning sexual questions or problems. Much of this current literature is a product of Masters and Johnson-type research or *Redbook*-type surveys, and it reflects an attitude that, if it is not shocking, is at least offensive to most Christian readers. *Intended for Pleasure* is offered as an alternative for the Christian couple concerned about their sex life. Dr. Wheat and his wife have prepared a sex manual that they feel offers a "medically accurate presentation of sex in marriage within the framework of the Bible's teaching."

Intended for Pleasure presents medically accurate information; however, this reviewer finds the attempt at articulating a Christian perspective of sexuality less than satisfactory. The authors express their view of the Biblical framework of sexuality primarily in the first few chapters and in a couple of chapters toward the end of the manual. The remainder of the volume reads much like a family doctor's explanation of the major findings of Masters and Johnson's research. An occasional reference to the importance of prayer or a Bible verse supporting the goal of exercises serve as a reminder that this information is being presented to a Christian couple.

Intended for Pleasure serves as both the title and theme of this manual. Dr. Wheat continually reminds the reader that sex is not sin and that God created sex for man and woman to enjoy. The increasingly popular theme of "Christians celebrate your sexuality," is sounded throughout this presentation but a thorough explanation of the meaning of man's sexuality is absent. One can agree with the basic position that sexuality as part of the creation of man is intended for pleasure, but without an explanation of the nature and meaning of sexuality,