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God's Strategy in Human History (Book Review)

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Book Reviews

John M. Zinkand

God's Strategy in Human History, by Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1974. 296 pages. Cloth \$5.95; paper, \$3.95. Reviewed by Wayne Kobes, Instructor in Theology.

Roger T. Forster, a British evangelist and Bible teacher and V. Paul Marston, a senior lecturer in statistical methods and operational research at a London business school, have combined talents to write this book dealing with a Christian view of history. In the first paragraph they identify their purpose clearly: "It is this general sweep and strategy of God's action throughout history which this book seeks to portray from the Bible" (p. 3).

Forster and Marston structure their study by considering man as the battlefield and a combatant in the great struggle between God and Satan. The battle to which Scripture alerts us is a genuine battle declared at man's Fall into sin; and as history unfolds, one sees God's strategy worked out in Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and the nation of Israel. It is this conflict of ancient origin which still concerns modern man. God does have a strategy in the conflict even if man may not fully understand it.

As one reads the book, he can only appreciate the authors' determination to present a biblical approach. This is done by means of a study of various passages in their contexts, as well as by inclusion of a

section of word studies. The reader also comes to appreciate the authors' stress on the history of redemption, a stress too often lacking in other books.

It is, however, the authors' views on predestination which offer difficulty. Although Marston and Forster's primary purpose is to present a positive view of God's strategy in history, much of their study is devoted to an attempt to disprove the Augustinian, Calvinistic view of predestination. However, often what the authors attack is not the Calvinistic understanding of predestination, but a view more accurately called determinism. The teachings of Calvinism, claim the authors, make man a mere puppet. Writing about predestination, they state that:

It does not concern who should, or should not, become Christians, but rather their destiny as Christians. ...Way back before the foundation of the earth, before time began, God could look ahead. He foreknew all about those who would repent in response to his Holy Spirit and would put their hope for the future in Christ. God had to decide what their fate should be. They earned nothing by repenting and could have been condemned. Yet the essential being of God is Light and Love. His decision, therefore reflected his essential nature. His decision was made "in-love." (p. 101)

Marston and Forster in God's Strategy in Human History present an Arminian view of the history of redemption. The radical nature of man's Fall into sin is not an element in this study. Instead, God, in His perfect foreknowledge, determined to redeem those who repented. Election, in the authors' view, is conditional. "God ordains that the new heaven and earth will come. He does not ordain which particular individuals will accept his plan for them to have a part in it"(p. 28). Obviously, such a stance colors and shapes the whole study.

God's Strategy in Human History is an interesting and thought-provoking book. Many of the arguments presented may not be convincing, but they do spur the reader to a new and thorough study of the Scriptures.

Models of Religious Broadcasting—by J. Harold Ellens, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974, 168 pages, \$3.45. Reviewed by Martin Dekkenga, Assistant Professor of Speech.

This is a relatively short book, 168 pages, in paperback form. To set the stage for the book, which deals with various "models" of religious broadcasting, J. Harold Ellens presents a brief but concise history of broadcasting including both radio and television, with major emphasis on religious broadcasting. The book may be a little weak at this point because of the relatively small amount of space given to such a time span in our history. One would have to be quite familiar with broadcasting to follow well the material presented.

The "models" referred to earlier are dealt with at some length, and it is at this point that the book is strongest. The models of religious broadcasting Ellens discusses are: Pulpit--broadcasters using the camera and microphone as an extended pulpit; Spectacle--the use of camera and

microphone as tools to create a spectacle; Pedagogy--the use of the media to teach; and Leaven--the use of the media to provoke earnest thought.

In his review and analysis of the various models, Ellens presents the broadcasting effort of various religious leaders and organizations. The Pulpit model is best illustrated in the works of Bishop Sheen, The Lutheran Hour, the Back to God Hour, and others. These men and organizations use the radio basically for the "preaching" of the Word, not attempting to use varied format but rather to use a straight-forward preaching style.

The second model Ellens deals with is the Sinai or Spectacular model. Some of the better-known evangelists who employ this technique are Rex Humbard, Oral Roberts, and Billy Graham. The use of this technique depends on the strong personality of the individual and the fact that the broadcasting of religion must be theological in nature. And according to Ellens, "The religious broadcasting spectacle operates with the same limited view of the nature and behavior of God that Jesus opposed in Judaism, the view of Old Testament supernaturalism rather than New Testament incarnation" (p. 92).

Ellens shows a preference for the third model, Pedagogy, Electronic Education, or Instructional broadcasting. Several of the major denominations—including the United Church of Christ, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church--have made extensive use of documentaries, lectures, and dramas with religious significance. Ellens indicates that this model may be hard to distinguish from the Pulpit model, as it employs some closely related techniques. The Instructional model does not rely on the use of mood-setting music, and staging, lead-in, and introductions, as do many of the Pulpit models. It does rely on the "lecture-homily teaching of Christian ideas and theological concepts" (p. 97).

A fourth model favored by Ellens is the "Leaven" model, which makes use of commercial spots inserted into regular pro-