

BOOK REVIEWS

Alston, W. M. Jr. and M. Welker, ed., *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, pages xiv + 449, ISBN: 0-8028-4776-5.

This book is a collection of the papers of systematic theologians of the Reformed Tradition who took part in the international consultation convened by the Centre of Theological Inquiry at the *Internationales Wissenschaftsforum* in Heidelberg, Germany, during March 18-22, 1999. It consists of five parts as follows: “Reformed Identity in Historical Continuity and Contextual Awareness” (Part I), “How to Shape Reformed Ecclesiology” (Part II), “Spirit and Covenant: Reformed Pneumatology in Very Different Contexts” (Part III), “Affirming and Questioning Reformed Doctrines in Ecumenical Conversation” (Part IV), and “Ecumenicity and Ethical Profiles of Reformed Theology: Catholicity and Practical Contextuality” (Part V). In addition to the introduction by the two editors, there are 28 articles/papers, each by a different author dealing with the many relevant themes and challenges for Christian theology from the perspective of Reformed Theology. Thus, the book is the combined effort of 30 scholars.

In the first article, Y. H. Kim discusses the different spiritual challenges of the present millennium and tries to give theological responses to them. He focuses on the following five challenges posed by Postmodernism (with its tendency to relativize and dissolve truth and values), Religious Pluralism, New Age Movement (with its neopaganism, astrology, and reincarnation), High Technological Secularism, and Cyberculture. It is to be appreciated that the author boldly and unambiguously makes it clear what the Reformed Theology professes and what it cannot accept. Thus, he defends the Reformed Tradition of “the Scripture alone” (*sola scriptura*) (8-9) and “Christ alone” (*solus Christus*) where the uniqueness of Christ is emphatically affirmed in terms of the unique incarnation and the ultimate salvific revelation of God (10-11) in view of the challenges posed by Hinduism and Islam. Here we find a close

resemblance between his position and the official Catholic teaching on the matter. He further speaks of a Reformed “post-modern” theology in terms of a claim of universal truth (14-15) as well as a creation theology and Reformed Eco- and Bio- ethics (17-18). Another interesting article from the point of view of ecumenism is Chapter 5 by W. S. Johnson on “Theology and the Church’s Mission: Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Reformed” (65-81). In this article we find some interesting re-interpretations of the traditional principles of Reformation theology. Thus, “Grace alone” is explained as the ground of Catholicity (67-71), “Christ alone” as the measure of Orthodoxy (71-76), “Faith alone” as trusting the Gospel and being the Church (76-79), and “Scripture alone” as the fountainhead of ongoing reform (79-81). The conclusion on page 81 summarily appeals to us how theology can be simultaneously Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Reformed in the light of the above four principles.

Chapter 10 on “The Communion of the Triune God: Towards a Trinitarian Ecclesiology in Reformed Perspective” reiterates a basic Christian insight that Trinitarian doctrine provides the key to a proper theology of community. The author rightly shows that “Genuine human community has its ultimate basis in the communion of the triune God” (140). The article provides a significant ecclesiology in terms of the Church as a communion in faith, love and hope (143-152), and concludes with an observation on the promise and limits of Trinitarian Ecclesiology (152-154). The projection of hierarchical relations to the Trinitarian persons could be in the eyes of the author a danger if this is pointed out as a justification of a fixed hierarchical order in the relationship between clergy and laity, and also between man and woman. Hence, he thinks rightly that we have to reaffirm the ontological equality of the Trinitarian persons to overcome the danger.

In Chapter 11 we have an interesting and relevant discussion on “Charismatic Movements, Postmodernism, and Covenantal Rationality” (157ff.). Chapter 12 contains a good treatise on Pneumatology. It highlights the positive and negative aspects of both the Reformed and Pentecostal Pneumatologies. The author Myung Yong Kim makes a good and valid point in showing the unfortunate significant error of Pentecostal pneumatology as “the misunderstanding of the so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit as something that is ... distinct from becoming a Christian”

(178). Another error is “the overestimation of speaking in tongues” (179). Chapter 19 on “Reconsidering the Doctrine of Providence” by Jan M. Lochman provides us with new insights about Divine Providence in the framework of the relationship between God’s omnipotence and goodness. It includes discussions on the gospel of creation, human confusions and providence, and on theodicy (see especially 285-293). Chapter 20 by Dawn DeVries is a profound study on F. Schleiermacher and the role of the Bible in the church. This contains significant themes like the authority of Scripture, its normative character, the meaning of Inspiration, the formation of the canon, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the status of the OT in the Christian canon (298-309). Chapter 21 by G. Hunsinger is one of the longest chapters in the book. It deals with social witness in generous orthodoxy. This is a study of the new Presbyterian “Study Catechism” (311ff.). Two questions that are discussed here are: How should I treat non-Christians and people of other religions? How do you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? (316). Other topics are: Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It also includes some discussion in favour of the full equality of women.

Chapter 23 is an interesting discussion by the Anglican theologian D. Farrow on the Reformed View of Ascension and Eucharist. He carries out this in dialogue with Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Chardin (351-371). The readers will greatly enjoy the insightful discussion on the concept and theory of ecumenism or ecumenics in terms of unity and plurality by Ulrich H. J. Körtner in chapter 26 (398-411). W. Weinrath reflects on the Openness and Worldliness of the Church in the following chapter 27 (412-434). The author defends the Reformed annulment of the Magisterium of the church (417-419). The positive results are, thus, according to him, the clergy and the Magisterium are placed within the congregation. There is no more special interpretative authority of the Magisterium. That there are no more spiritual ranks in the Church is also considered as a positive result. The concern that the Bible is to be the sole foundation for the orientation of the Church can be appreciated. Removing the special authority of the Magisterium, however, does not do justice to the Bible or to the very mind of Jesus Christ. Arguing for and on the full normativity of the Bible has to be done, for the sake of consistency, in accordance with the teaching of the Bible! That the scripture is “not a matter of one’s own interpretation” is formally testified

by 2 Peter 1:20. Even otherwise it is clear that you need someone with authority to get the authentic interpretation of the Bible (See Acts 8:34f.). Doing away with the official instances of authority in the church has, in fact, backfired by creating chaos and the many divisions among Christians. Some kind of a ranking in authority and assignments of offices, not in personal worth or dignity, has to be there at the secular (sociological) level as well as the spiritual (ecclesiastical) level. Without such an order no society can properly function or help the members in matters of dispute or difference of opinion regarding interpretation of important matters.

The final chapter 28 is on dealing theologically with the so-called non-theological factors by Piet J. Naudé (435-449). The factors meant here are preferably termed by the author “social factors.” They are the factors behind both church divisions and church union from social sources: the historical, economic, and cultural factors.

Thus, on the whole, the book contains many interesting and important discussions on the theme of ecumenism from the perspective of reformed theology. The editors and the contributors have done a real serious work. The book evokes many appreciative and critical responses as well as healthy dialogue in the spirit of ecumenism.

Sebastian Athappilly

Schuster, Shlomit C., *The Philosopher’s Autobiography: A Qualitative Study*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003, pages xi + 244, ISBN: 0-275-97789-7.

Shlomit C. Schuster is a well-known practitioner of philosophical counselling, based in Jerusalem. Her earlier book, *Philosophy Practice: An Alternative to Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), contributed significantly to the solidification of the emergent field of philosophical counselling (also called philosophical practice). The present book is still another contribution to the field, but with a difference.

Though a philosopher's autobiography need not necessarily be a philosophical autobiography, in many an instance it is one. The philosophical autobiography is, in fact, a philosophical writing of distinct type. Schuster's work is not only a learned study of this genre but also the first book solely dedicated to the subject of philosophical autobiography.

If all philosophy is self-reflection, then it is all the more true of the philosophical autobiography. An autobiographical writing of a philosopher is a window to his or her world of philosophy and the modes of philosophising. A philosophical autobiography is for the philosopher what Schuster calls a "philosophical psychoanalysis."

The first three chapters of the book clarify the notions of philosophical autobiography and philosophical psychoanalysis. Philosophical psychoanalysis is a philosopher's attempt to understand oneself and others from a philosophical perspective. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are an in-depth study of Augustine's *Confessions*, Rousseau's *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and Sartre's *Words*. The author has chosen Augustine, Rousseau and Sartre as case studies in philosophical psychoanalysis, because their life-narratives are particularly rich in philosophical self-understanding. They made use of philosophical self-analysis to make their lives worthwhile and to become the persons they wanted to be, contends the author. She has successfully brought out the philosophical dynamics of these philosophers' living, thinking and writing and shows how they accomplished a successful philosophical psychoanalysis. Chapter 7 is an epilogue that further substantiates the author's project, drawing on the autobiographies of J. S. Mill, S. Kierkegaard and B. Russell.

Schuster's book is marked by originality, scholarship, clarity of thought and an engaging style. The book invites its readers to a philosophical-autobiographical reading of their lives and become more self-aware in the path of making their lives worth-living. As Maurice Friedman rightly notes in the foreword, this exciting book "deserves and hopefully will find a wide readership."

Joseph Kaipayil

Sweet, William, *Religion, Science and Non-science*, The Nimishakavi K. Subbiah Naidu Endowment Lectures 1998-1999 & The Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Endowment Lectures 2001-2002, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages 98, ISBN: 81-86861-60-2.

The inception of anything new (here, science since Galileo and Darwin) should prove to be disastrous (here, science's seeming antagonism to religion). The initial and seemingly ongoing conflict is, in fact, between (1) scientific dogmas and practices that threaten to be more adequate than those of religion and (2) religious practices and definitions of beliefs that always trade antiques with respect to both the blatantly scientific mind and the deeply intellectually and practically religious soul. As this question is not scientific or religious, it can only be philosophical and epistemological, in particular. Dharmaram Publications is now ready with the second insightful, succinct, satisfying and readable form of some of Prof. William Sweet's recent reflections on religion. (The first is dealt with in William Sweet's book *Religious Belief: The Contemporary Debate*, 2003. This book was reviewed in *Journal of Dharma* 28, 2).

The "Introduction" clarifies the concepts of 'science' and 'religion', bringing in much precision to the subject matter, aim and method of science and religion, and, thus, prepares the way for the ensuing discussion in four chapters.

Chapter 1 ("Science and Religion in Conflict") studies from a wider perspective whether science and religion have, in fact, suffered the supposed divide. He shows that the alleged conflict has behind it the slim and constricted mistaking of and overstepping by each field into the other. He discusses two representative authors, Richard Dawkins (*Unweaving the Rainbow*, 1998) and Stephen Jay Gould (*Rocks of Ages*, 1995), pointing out inaccuracies in their theories of the causes of science-religion wrangle and harmony, and concludes the chapter by arguing that the presuppositions, of the view that science and religion conflict, are problematic. He appeals for more exact speculations about the nature of science and religion as a predisposition for viewing the conflict-harmony hypothesis and to create an alternative shape for the perspective.

Chapter 2 ("The Compatibility of Science and Religion") moves deeper and discusses the two positions: (1) the highly positive one that

science and religion are compatible by mutual support for development and (2) the negative one that claims them to be radically alien to or incommensurable with each other and as lacking a common keystone. In this inquiry the author does not decide between the two positions but discovers their presuppositions and analyses them in order to find what is amiss in these presuppositions – a wonderful strategy of discretion, to be expected from the mind of a philosopher, not merely from a scientist or a theologian.

For example, Sweet examines the way in which Whitehead found that the Christian belief in God's rationality must have paved the way for the growth of scientific rationality, Plantinga's and Alston's studies regarding the route through which believers acquire certain beliefs, Laplace's rejection of the religious rationality, Wittgenstein's (and Wittgensteinians') opinion about how reasons for religious beliefs are acquired in peculiar ways, etc. He opines that the attractions and the persuasiveness involved in considering religious beliefs as "entirely independent of any *external* refutation, erosion, or confirmation by science, and no statement is possible on how science affects or should affect religious belief or religious believers in general" (40), is not a worthy way of saving religion. Instead, he argues: (1) religious beliefs cannot be evidently *sui generis* or incommensurable; (2) the said approach does not recognize the empirical or descriptive aspect of belief; (3) it is vague about how to distinguish a religious belief from a metaphysical or an ideological view; and (4) it falters into fideism, since the limit of distinguishing religious beliefs from others is not set (41-43).

Chapters 1 and 2 prepare the reader to proceed well equipped to the crux of the question of the relation between science and religion, by analysing the fundamental nature of religious belief. One might, however, wonder if there is a general view of the nature of religious belief given the variety of views of science by different theorists and by different religions. So Sweet enters upon a study of the region of the multi-cultural in search of further characterizations of the question.

Chapter 3 ("Science, Religion, and Truth in a Cross-cultural Setting"), therefore, discusses the theories of religious exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, as have been defended variously by different religious representatives and thinkers in the history of religious thought. The views of John Hick, a major protagonist of the pluralist view, are

analysed at length in this chapter, and it points to where sufficiently universal rational appeal can be identified. Hick's argument that it is possible to identify a level – the deepest level – of truth in all sorts of religions, is defended, in spite of the fact that the truth of other levels of specific, culture-bound and historical beliefs may not be determinable from within or without any tradition.

Sweet points out some of his concerns about some minor details of Hick's positions, but defends the position uppermost in Hick's pluralism, i.e., that the core level of religious claims may be sufficiently and universally true, and that particular religious beliefs and the common religious core of different religions have an empirical side. Thus, he prepares the way for contrasting religious truths with scientific truths. Following this, he conclusively argues: "We can have at least some necessary conditions for determining whether religious beliefs have meaning and whether they are true. For, even if religious belief has an expressive or intentional character, it is expressive or intentional about something, it occurs in the world, and it involves a number of other (e.g., moral and empirical) beliefs and, therefore, also has a descriptive or an empirical referent" (62). Sweet, thus, finds that the multi-cultural setting of religion makes it capable of meeting with and relating to science on a relatively parallel plane. This is a fine, pleasant and agreeable conclusion, safely drawn from the facts and arguments presented.

Chapter 4 ("Evolution, Religion, and Non-science"), the Dr. Radhakrishnan Endowment Lecture at Madras Christian College, is an additional material to the volume, further elucidating the question at issue. He takes up the most fascinating cosmological and biological question of the 1980s: intelligent design (that bears affinity to creationism) vs. evolutionism. Here he discusses the science-religion relationship from the prospects of the intelligent design argument (William Dembski, Michael Behe and others). He studies the implications of the intelligent design argument that holds the absolute necessity of a designer in a partially absolutized anthropomorphic manner, and those of evolutionism that considers such a hypothesis unnecessary from the point of view of the neutral character of processes in the world.

The whole exercise in the four chapters has been concise, and the book is recommended for the perusal of anyone who would like to achieve

a fair idea of the debates in the air in the philosophy of religion – the philosopher and the layman alike.

“Making a General Point” in the context of the intelligent design argument is not out of place. We should encounter crass intellectual atheism, too, as a sort of religion that claims to submit the claims that science challenges the existence of religion and refuses to be silent unless the existence of God is “proved beyond doubt.” When Sweet asserts, “science cannot prove *religious* belief” (80), what he denotes are specific beliefs like the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, etc. However, what about the possibility of ever pouring more light on the probability of there being a Divine Pole to Reality? Philosophers of the Cosmos and of God and Religion seem to shy away from grand attempts in this direction!

This will not be a criticism of the book at review, but an admission of the effects of the tremor of the so-called inadmissibility of the ancient, medieval and modern ‘proofs’ for the existence of God. We should dare make a passing but pertinent admission here, that today’s science, philosophy and religion do not seem to possess any scientifically easily permissible causal or other theory “demonstrating” that more than mediocre truth probability is already available to present-day scientific rationality to conclude to the existence of some sort of a Divine who is not the same as what we usually understand as the world. Ever after the centuries-long shudder of the philosophically widely accepted, theologically widely dreaded failure of modern and contemporary philosophies of God and religion, to prove the ‘existence’ of some sort of a Divine, thinkers tend today either (1) to take for granted the existence of some sort of a God; or (2) to indulge in outright questioning of the very possibility of a God; or still further (3) to be cringingly neutral about such a possibility. The present book seems to belong to the first category. But it still looks a valid Aristotelian and Thomistic engagement, and a theological attempt must – that fulfils the intellectual dimension of religious belief – tend to pursue researches towards creating a train of causal proofs (with a contemporary cosmological appeal) that end in a non-Aristotelian-Thomistic God and universe that engage in an infinite, eternal partially differentiable but partially communicable nexus. Will it be an intellectualist and dogmatist grandiosity to expect that greater cosmological probability for the belief in the existence of the Divine Pole

may be awaiting us? May time prove if this question is of any religious, philosophical and scientific relevance!

Sure, the challenge from theoretical atheism could not have been part of the two endowment lectures that have been collected herein. It would not be possible also to treat, in this book, the postmodernist challenges to the 'foundationalist' metaphysics of belief in the Divine and to the metaphysics of belief in the more specific truths of specific religions. Why not, however, we be inspired by the discussions of this book and its divine presupposition/s, to work out philosophically and scientifically more satisfying theories after theories for pouring more light on the question of proofs for God the presupposition of all philosophies of religion and of God? Such theories would, then, be part of the riches of human thought striving for a synthesis of foundationalism and anti-foundationalism!

After all, everyone has wondered at some time in life whether there is a God. Is this wonder to be condemned to futility as a useful presupposition merely on the ground that all those who cuddle on to such hopes for the future of science and philosophy will be eternally jeered at? If not, we students of philosophy should encourage the enthusiasm some may have, for attempting such 'proofs' within the limits of human intellectual reach. This openness alone will hold the future of the philosophy of religion or philosophical theology within a less than bleak benchmark, so that religions may evolve in the intellectual grasp of the truth probability of the infinite, eternal and absolutely communicable existence of the Divine Pole, who can *personally* enter into an infinite but tangible engagement with us and the world, and have us and the world enter into personal relationship with Him! Or else, we will have to shut out God and religion from all actuality and possibility, of which is this world made! Perhaps the causal, ontological, creationist, evolutionist and intelligent design theories might converge in the face of such an all-embracing argument for the existence of the Divine, and this might be a fitting reply and a worthy alternative to both foundationalism and postmodernism!

Raphael Neelamkavil