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Review: Christian Theology, V 1&2

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A Virgin Shall Conceive

by Richard D. Patterson

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).

This grand prophecy that occupies so prominent a place in Isaiah's "Book of Immanuel" (Isa. 7-12), has suffered much at the hands of its expositors. However, a simple look at its contextual setting and its use by the gospel writer (Matt. 1:23) settles the matter for any Fundamentalist. Turning to the historical setting of this chapter, note that the events that took place there were set in crucial days for Judah. The long-standing Syro-Israelite alliance against Judah (cf. 2 Kings 15:37) had recently brought forth an all-out invasion of Judah led by the Syrian king, Rezin, and the Israelite king, Pekah, (2 Kings 16:6; 2 Chron. 28:5). To make matters worse, these two kings were joined by Israel's traditional enemies, the Edomites and the Philistines (2 Chron. 28:6-19). Even now a bitter attack was aimed at Jerusalem (Isa. 7:2-6). Judah's plight was desperate.

Spiritually, the whole complex military campaign against Judah appears to be satanically designed in an effort to put an end to the Davidic line (Isa. 7:5-7). Nevertheless, God was superintending the whole episode to bring judgment to Ahaz, the Judean king, for his abominable sins and, perhaps, to bring the apostate king to repentance (2 Chron. 28:5,19; 2 Kings 16:3-4, 10-18; Isa. 7:4,10-11). In His mercy God dealt with Ahaz. Through Isaiah he told him that the enemies' plans would fail and gave him a divine sign that all would surely come to pass as Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 7:3-16). The marvelous, miraculous sign was nothing less than a virgin-born Son in the line of David who would be born in humble circumstances and who would be called by the divine title *Immanuel*, "with us is God." Within the time that it would take the future "Greater David" to grow old enough to "know to refuse the evil, and choose the

good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings" (Isa. 7:16).

The whole sign is directed to Ahaz as the representative of the House of David, who sat on the throne of David, and through whom Messiah would come (cf. 2 Sam. 7:18-19; Ps. 89:3-4,19-29,33-37; Ezek. 34:22-31; 36:22-36; 37:21-28; Matt. 1:21-23; Luke 1:68-71; Acts 2:22-36; 13:22-23). Since it is a specific virgin (lit. "the virgin") of the future House of David (cf. Isa. 7:2,13) that is mentioned in the supernatural sign, no woman who was contemporary to Ahaz's time, not even Isaiah's wife, can really be intended. Further, only a truly virgin-born Greater David could fulfill all the prophecy relative to the Davidic Covenant, for only such a one could in the fullest sense be called "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35), "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and made higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26).

When the demise of Judah's enemies quickly took place (2 Kings 16:9), Ahaz should have recognized the superintending hand of God, despite his own subsequent scheming (2 Chron. 28:19, 2 Kings 16:7-8). The whole episode should have convinced Ahaz that God would also fulfill the rest of the divine prophecy relative to the virgin-born son of the future House of David. But such was not to be the case, for Ahaz "did . . . trespass yet more against the Lord" (2 Chron. 28:22). As Ed Hindson well remarks, "Therefore, the destruction must come, but yet there is hope for the house of David, for the virgin's son yet comes and He is God's sign. There is, therefore, both a message from the age and a message for the ages." (*Isaiah's Immanuel*, Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978, p.57).

Unfortunately, men are still disbelieving or explaining away the work of God, which is centered in the promised virgin-born Son. May we who know that Greater David as Saviour (Acts 13:22-23) be faithful to introduce men to Him, "the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). ■



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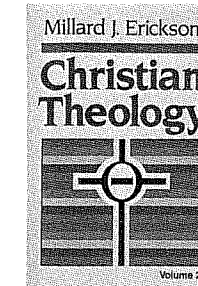
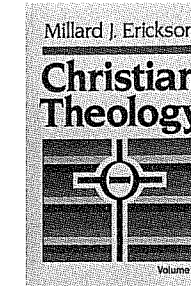
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CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, Vol. 1 and 2 by Millard Erickson

Reviewed by John D. Morrison, assistant professor of theology, Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

For some time a void has existed in Conservative Christian theology. There has not been a systematic theology text fully adequate to *both* expound the faith once delivered to the saints *and* to speak regarding contemporary challenges to biblical Christianity from a stance of historical orthodoxy. This dearth (as happens periodically) has led a number of theologians to undertake this nearly impossible task in hope of filling the gap.

To the joy of many, Millard Erickson has made a firm step in writing an introductory theology text that does stand for the critical fundamentals of the biblical faith while fairly wrestling with questions arising in the contemporary philosophical, theological, and biblical milieu. He does not allow himself to fall back on overly simplistic pat answers, but reflects sincere Christian thoughtfulness in the desire to synthesize what God has said to man.

Some inclusions in this first volume (of a projected three-volume set) are especially noteworthy, such as a section on the often neglected theological method and the issue of temporization of the Christian message. In all of this, Erickson's purpose to bring clarity and answer questions is repeatedly accomplished.

Erickson discusses Form Criticism and Redaction Criticism, though he does not wholeheartedly endorse these methods. In fact, he sees danger in them. Yet, through his discussion, it seems he may give a bit too much credence to these methodologies. Even in this area, Erickson gives clear expo-

sition and shows his emphasis upon the inerrant Word of God.

This volume covers the areas of introduction and methodology, the doctrine of God, and angels.

In his second volume, Erickson deals with the critical issues of man, sin, the person of Christ, and salvation (the work of Christ). As the majesty of God is purposefully set forth by the author, the reality of God's majestic love (discussed in volume one) that has reached redemptively to fallen man in the person of Jesus Christ is given careful exposition.

Under each major heading Erickson willingly handles difficult issues, but further, he takes up other subjects that have too often been left undiscussed in systematic theologies. For example, this volume works to give discussion to the very question of humanity, its essence, and related critical issues with implications for ethics (abortion, the aged, etc.). In the realm of man's fallen state, the author deals with the problem of sinfulness in its social dimension, not just within the sphere and situation of the individual. Many other examples could be given in each doctrinal area. In his desire to grapple with the contemporary questions, Erickson occasionally takes a position that will not be accepted by all.

Erickson's first volume seemed more complete and its discussions fuller as a rule. The difference may be the topics handled, yet there are places where one desires just a bit more.

Despite this, Millard Erickson's second volume and his *Christian Theology* as a whole is to be recommended (with the related volumes of readings) for seminary level theology classes and pastors who desire to interact with today's questions. Erickson's work is the best available today to fit these needs. (Baker Book House, Vol. 1, 1983, 477pp., \$19.95; Vol. 2, 1985, 407pp., \$19.95)

FAMILY BOOKSHELF

THE DEATH DECISION edited by Leonard J. Nelson

These unique essays cover a range of issues related to decisions to kill human life, especially by abortion and euthanasia. The concluding article, a general discussion of bioethics, is especially good. The discussion of birth control is a welcome addition to the usual list of issues and contains both an excellent historical summation as well as a fine contemporary defense of the all-but-forgotten traditional view. Harold O. J. Brown's article on euthanasia is outstanding for its careful distinctions and good practical advice. (Servant Books, 1984, 179pp., \$8.95) —W.D.B.

AMERICA, CHRISTIAN OR SECULAR? edited by Jerry S. Herbert

Religious and legal historians respond to the debate centering around Francis Schaeffer and Mark Noll as to the degree to which America's Founding Fathers can be said to have been "Christian." Together they provide a well-rounded, objective, and well-researched conclusion. These essays are crucial and to be read by every American who wishes to understand his own heritage and its implications for present policy issues. (Multnomah Press, 1984, 313pp., \$10.95) —W.D.B.

THE HIGH COST OF INDIFFERENCE edited by Richard Cizik

This collection of statements on a variety of political and social issues—from abortion to poverty, nuclear arms to pornography—is different in its emphasis on getting involved. Each chapter contains a brief examination of cur-