

Fall 1990

Review: Incriptions and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology

John D. Morrison

Liberty University, jdmorrison@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs

Recommended Citation

Morrison, John D., "Review: Incriptions and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology" (1990). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 80.

http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/80

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

reality, and his subjectivism, implicit in his theory of "prehensions," cannot finally be reconciled with the Christian confession of a transcendent God who not only accounts for the unity of the cosmos but is its creator. This clarification of Pannenberg's relation to process theology is especially helpful in locating him on the map of contemporary theology.

This book will not be much help to those who seek to understand the content of Pannenberg's idea of God and its relation to the God revealed in Holy Scripture. Theological readers would be advised to pursue that issue in his systematic theology. Philosophers of religion will no doubt find him to be on occasion obscure, and generally lacking in conceptual clarity and argumentative rigor. It would be helpful, for example, to know precisely what Pannenberg means by the "unity of the world," and one would like to know what (if any) is the literal truth in his claims about the "presence of the future." Despite these limitations, this very influential theologian's explorations of the historical and conceptual connections between the metaphysical tradition and theism generate insights that are often intriguing and sometimes illuminating. Evangelicals and other conservative Christians will applaud his determination to avoid basing all of theology in subjective experience and welcome his theological project of grounding theological knowledge in God's action in human history. The question these essays and lectures leave is whether in his attempt to do this Pannenberg has avoided letting natural theology and the generic theism it undergirds take the place of the God of biblical revelation.

DONALD H. WACOME
THE KING'S COLLEGE

Inscription and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology, by Robert P. Scharlemann, University Press of Virginia, 1989. Pp. 254.

As the subtitle of this work indicates this is a series of previously published essays brought together as varied expressions of a unique, radical and rigorous theological agenda. As Robert Scharlemann, Commonwealth Professor of Philosophical Theology at the University of Virginia says in his "preface," "... the task of theology is to say that it is to inscribe the name 'God' upon every event, and the judgment 'God is God' upon any identity." These essays reflect that task. Scharlemann's purpose is to rethink the whole question of philosophical theology by understanding the task of theology as an "after-thinking" (*metanoesis*; cf., the first essays titled "Onto- and Theo-logical Thinking") and inversion of ontology. In this task he is much indebted to Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, G. W. F. Hegel and the French deconstructionists (Derrida) as well as his primary theological mentor Paul Tillich. Yet it is also important to note the influential role played by the early Karl Barth (up to 1931) as he sought to radically think through the theological task.

This is no book for the beginner or the "intermediate" in things theological, philosophical or linguistic. A number of passages may have to be read and re-read in order to follow the complex and philosophically demanding line

theory of "prehensions," cannot
 sion of a transcendent God who
 ; but is its creator. This clarifica-
 aeology is especially helpful in
 ology.

ose who seek to understand the
 relation to the God revealed in
 e advised to pursue that issue in
 ion will no doubt find him to be
 ion conceptual clarity and argumen-
 to know precisely what Pannen-
 one would like to know what (if
 "presence of the future." Despite
 ian's explorations of the histori-
 etaphysical tradition and theism
 l sometimes illuminating. Evan-
 ll applaud his determination to
 perience and welcome his theo-
 ledge in God's action in human
 s leave is whether in his attempt
 atural theology and the generic
 of biblical revelation.

DONALD H. WACOME
 THE KING'S COLLEGE

Philosophical Theology, by Robert P.
 39. Pp. 254.

s a series of previously published
 of a unique, radical and rigorous
 , Commonwealth Professor of
 Virginia says in his "preface,"
 o inscribe the name 'God' upon
 pon any identity." These essays
 rethink the whole question of
 task of theology as an "after-
 titled "Onto- and Theo-logical
 his task he is much indebted
 F. Hegel and the French de-
 mocratic primary theological mentor Paul
 uential role played by the early
 ly think through the theological

"intermediate" in things theo-
 of passages may have to be read
 philosophically demanding line

of thought. Much is required of the reader. Constant engagement and mental
 grappling are wearying at times, yet the book is stimulating and stretching.
 This is especially true in the first half of the book. In a crucial statement in the
 first essay Scharlemann states his point in a way that illustrates some asser-
 tions. He says, after details interactive discussion and analysis that:

This leads me to propose that theological thinking is an inversion of
 ontological thinking, so that to think theologically is to think of the
 thinking of being (ontology) not as our thinking of being but as the
 being of God when God is not being God (p. 10).

This evidences some of the complexity and difficulty as well as its very point of
 interest, demand and provocative uniqueness. This theological thinking which
 Scharlemann calls "afterthinking," this "overturning of the ontological so as to
 think the thinking of *being not* as *our* thinking of *being* but as the *being of God*
 when God is *not* being *God*," is both theological and *christological*. The *being*
 of God when God is *not being God* is when God is Christ, God's being as
human being for us.

For the prepared reader, as noted above, this stimulating series of essays
 requires a redirecting of thought which is always difficult. It can be downright
 unnerving, as well as perplexing at times, yet it does (if an allusion to Heidegger
 is allowed) heal "forgetfulness" and asks the "unasked question." But there is
 far more here. Those somewhat familiar with Scharlemann's ground breaking
 work (cf. *The Being of God: Theology and the Experience of Truth*) may
 simply think of Scharlemann as a philosopher of religion or a radical religious
 thinker whose notions do not relate to the issues of faith in Christ, God's
 salvation. This observation of Scharlemann is not accurate. A better way of
 stating the case (which may be surprising to many on various sides) is that
 Robert Scharlemann's thought is radically confessional. Here is a man who is
 uniquely wrestling with the issues of "the faith" in relation to current philo-
 sophical, hermeneutical and linguistic issues in ways unknown to others. To
 wrestle with the content of the faith and its relation to and concrete instantia-
 tion in theological language—especially the word "God," is admirable. He is
 attempting to open whole new possibilities for faith and understanding. The
 first eight essays are especially effective in contributing to this goal.

There are, however, aspects to this collection of essays that are less
 positive. On the more mundane level, several essays seemed to be less interest-
 ing than those in the first half, although that is primarily a point of taste. More
 to the point (especially in the last few essays), the strong strain of Tillich and
 the "God"/"One" of Plotinus as a warrant for religious pluralism is emphati-
 cally problematic. This is a central viewpoint throughout the essays but it is
 more distastefully present at the end. Also, such articles as his "Argument from
 Faith to History," which seems to be related methodologically to Barth's work
 on Anselm, is unconvincing. Though it elicits a response similar to Hart-
 shorne's statement on the so-called "ontological argument," it leaves the
 believer invulnerable and is all quite unreal. Further, the view that Jesus
 become an amorphous "depth of actual freedom," while suggestive and insight-
 ful in relation to redemption, is insufficient in light of the actual incarnate

movement of God in human history and for human redemption. In spite of the positive comments above, it is still necessary to follow Pascal, the French mathematician-philosopher in his view, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not the God of the philosophers."

JOHN MORRISON
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

The Dawn's Early Light, by Joseph M. Stowell. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990. Pp. 178. n.p. Cloth.

In this book, Joseph Stowell, President of Moody Bible Institute, seeks to build on Francis Schaeffer's prophecy of a "post Christian era" . . . that would become increasingly hostile to believers" (p. 9). His purpose is to help Christians know how to live in this new era (p. 10).

The book contains a series of popular treatises dealing with various aspects of living "Christianly" in an ever increasing darkening world (p. 10). He considers matters such as courage and persistence in confronting the darkness, right thinking about values, morals and people, and the place of Scripture as the agent of change and satisfaction.

One thought-provoking chapter addresses the purpose for living built on the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26. Here he develops the notion of man being the image-bearer of God with the consequent necessity of "reflecting" God, "ruling" creation appropriately, and "responding" correctly to God's rule (pp. 75-78). Christian living and thinking not often in the popular realm are taken back to this proper foundation point.

He further discusses the handling of difficulties in life, the biblical perspective of power and success, appropriate new covenant worship and a response of compassion to our world. In a postscript he portrays the danger of the church caught unprepared to face the modern world using the image of the fabled Rip Van Winkle.

The fundamental issue throughout the book is "right thinking" and that we are "contaminated in our way of thinking" (p. 30). He writes, "We can't appropriately talk about right moral codes and right laws until we have first disciplined our minds to think sacredly instead of secularly" (p. 31). This premise is well taken. The church needs to hear more of the power and centrality of the mind when it comes to reflecting and practicing biblical values.

A most intriguing comment is found on p. 10 where Stowell asserts the premise that if Christians will live according to the principles outlined in the book then "what appears as dusk turning to darkness could actually be the first rays of a new dawn." The same premise is reflected in the title of the book. In light of the fairly serious treatment of 2 Timothy 3, as well as the postmillennial overtones of such a remark, this seems to introduce some confusion as to the place of the church and its members in the world. However, outside of the postscript where he returns to the notion, the balance of the book does not advance this premise, presenting instead exhortations and instructions on personal godly living.