

12-1983

Review: General Revelation

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Recommended Citation

Beck, W. David, "Review: General Revelation" (1983). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 82.
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and more Biblical designation of God's creative act than *creatio ex nihilo* (p. 51, Appendix D). He does not attempt to relate the details of Genesis 1 to scientific data, believing that whereas scientific explanations deal with secondary causation the "language of creation," theological language, is that of divine, *fiat* causation (pp. 62, 246). Appealing to the "literary framework" understanding of Genesis 1, he suggests that the six days are days of revelation about creation, not days or periods of creation itself (pp. 58-59). On the question of the literary genre of Genesis 1 he suggests that the text is best understood by viewing its "polemical intent" to counter the magic and idolatry of ancient Near Eastern polytheism and to lead man to live a godly life before the one true Creator (pp. 62-66).

Houston deals with the nature of man, as God's image-bearer, in terms of man's stewardship or "sovereignty" over other creatures, his responsibility to God, and his "relational" nature with respect to God and mankind (pp. 77-80). In sin man, by wrong choice of freedom, irresponsibly asserts an inordinate sovereignty in revolt against God's rule, and this disrupts his relational being (p. 86).

Houston's emphasis on the Word is prominent in much of the book. Not just God's creation but God's providence is also by the Word (p. 110), and through the incarnation of that Word "the divine meaning and purpose behind creation is now revealed." Christ is "the centre, the rationale, and the clue of all reality" (pp. 128, 135). The emphasis of course is Biblically sound, but Houston sometimes appears to lead it on to a semi-Barthian stance whereby the doctrine of creation becomes dependent on Christology. Not only does he deny any valid arguments for God's existence (p. 57) but he seems to underrate the intelligibility and witness value of creation as general revelation apart from the saving grace of Christ (see e.g. pp. 55, 98-99, 155). Some of Houston's comments in the area of historical theology are unfortunate, such as his assertion that Augustine "excluded philosophy, that is, Greek thought, from Christian theology" and ignored the Fall "to dwell almost entirely upon redemption" (p. 168). Also, Houston shows a traditional Protestant reaction to Thomas Aquinas' nature-and-grace scheme, seeing it as paving the way for the secularization of science (pp. 168-169). Houston's indictment of modern man's exaltation of technology, resulting in "technocracy," is timely (pp. 40, 43, 161-62, 179), though sometimes it is overdone (e.g. "the evolution of the machine results in the devolution of man," p. 97). Just once I would like to see an evangelical theologian extol some of the benefits of modern technology.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, I found most sections of the book good and helpful reading. The latter chapters were especially inspiring, dealing with the way of life of one who lives by faith in the Creator. In the chapter "The Enjoyment of God's World" Houston develops a stimulating section on "holy humor." He refers to humor as an "attribute of our humanity and the rhetoric of God's grace" (p. 219). Humor can enable us to recognize our idolatry and the discrepancies of our human life and to seek the transcendent power that comes as grace (pp. 219-222). In the last chapter Houston presents a helpful analysis of the *chronos-kairos* distinction in Scripture and cogently shows the significance of time for human life on earth from the perspective of faith in Christ's resurrection and the prospective hope in the "new creation."

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General Revelation. By Bruce Demarest. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, 320 pp., \$12.95.

There can be no doubt that Bruce Demarest has made an important addition to the current discussion of the matter of our general knowledge of God. We have here a survey of historic views going back to Augustine and the medievals as well as a particularly wide-ranging panorama of current positions. It is especially on this latter subject that the book shows special and commendable strength. Beyond the historical, however, Demarest also adds his own voice to the debate, both by way of critiques of specific positions throughout

the book and a carefully-argued concluding chapter.

Obviously in a 300-page book one cannot expect a complete and detailed coverage of the subject, and each of us will have our own top contenders for "most serious omission." My own would certainly be Immanuel Kant, who provided not only the epistemology, as Demarest states (p. 21), but also the finished position on revelation for nineteenth-century liberalism as well as its twentieth-century practitioners. Nevertheless Demarest does an admirable job of avoiding superficiality. Each of his subjects is discussed in remarkable depth with frequent quotes and good documentation.

Following a chapter of introduction and definitions, Demarest covers what he considers to be the foundational views of Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas. Thomas fares rather poorly in this chapter, although Demarest's criticisms have all been answered. Many readers will not be happy with his interpretation, nor with the sharp contrasts drawn to Augustine.

Chapter 3, which discusses the Reformers, is quite excellent. Of particular value is Demarest's argument for an acceptance of general revelation by both Luther and Calvin.

In chapters 4 and 5 Demarest discusses the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century developments. Certainly one of the strong points of the book is the excellent overview of Puritan views. This is an oft-neglected period among apologists, and *General Revelation* should spark much new interest. Chapter 6 discusses Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Troeltsch and Otto as high points in the development of nineteenth-century liberalism.

The following five chapters each focus on aspects of the twentieth-century theological spectrum. Demarest's helpful knowledge of Dutch Reformed positions adds a special dimension here. The chapter on neo-orthodoxy includes, beyond the obvious Barth and Brunner, a section on Hendrik Kraemer. Chapter 8, which traces the development of presuppositionalism from Kuyper and Berkouwer to Van Til, is worth the price of the book by itself.

Chapter 9 contains a somewhat amorphous collection of "neo-liberals": a surprising section on Toynbee, Tillich, Robinson and Hick are here. This is also where we find process theology. This last section is somewhat weakened by its excessive reliance on Whitehead. Demarest regards the position as empirical and experiential. I would argue that this is rather a one-sided view of Whitehead, but it also downplays the significant influence of Hartshorne, which is surely strongly rational.

The following chapter gives us a valuable overview of Catholic positions, Vatican I and II, as well as Rahner and Küng. Finally, there is another particularly valuable chapter on Third-World theologians, including, beyond the expected section on Latin American liberation theologians, sections on Asian and African views.

The concluding chapter gives us Demarest's own discussion of the relevant Biblical passages and a statement of position. This is a strong argument in favor of the affirmation of general revelation but within the confines of the Calvinist-Puritan mold. Especially prominent is his insistence on an intuitive "religious a priori" knowledge of God that underlies any natural theology. Both evidentialists and presuppositionalists alike will find Demarest's arguments challenging and helpful.

With all its obvious strengths there is a pervasive ambiguity in this book. Demarest wants to reject the validity of formal logical proofs of God's existence while accepting man's general ability to infer the creator by reasoning. Perhaps his most telling statement is this: "Whereas the Thomistic arguments in actual fact fail to prove the case, they are not entirely wanting in value. The proofs appeal to sufficient data or evidence to form a significant cumulative argument" (p. 39). Later we are told that they are "useful apologetic tools" (p. 240). This ambivalence is shown in some curious distinctions. Augustine used "proofs," "arguments," and "line of reasoning," but not "formal proof"—though he does "postulate" God as the most coherent explanation (pp. 28-29). While the Puritans are said to follow in the tradition of Augustine and Calvin (pp. 62, 244), and Demarest commends their "emphasis on the rationality and verifiability of the theist's position" (p. 72), they too, "by the discursive power of the mind, whereby one thing is inferred from another,"

reached conclusions regarding God's existence "to various degrees of certainty according to the strength of the evidence" (p. 65).

Clearly this distinction between reasoned arguments and formal demonstrations or proofs (p. 240) is important to Demarest's scheme. It is enough to place Thomas and subsequent Roman Catholic views on general revelation outside of the line of truth (p. 244). But what is this distinction? At one point he indicates that proper arguments are probable, corroborative and observational, not formally deductive (p. 240). Earlier, however, Thomas is rejected for being inductive, and Augustine is approved for arguing *a priori* rather than inductively (pp. 36, 28). Does he mean that proper arguments are those based on the prior acceptance of the "religious *a priori*," as his criticism of Thomas suggests (p. 38)? This, however, would make the arguments themselves circular, and Demarest criticizes Thomas for circularity (p. 39).

I must confess that I do not understand Demarest's distinction. If there is a discursively reasoned argument for God's existence that is known by all men, then it is perfectly legitimate for philosophers to put that argument into a formal mold. If it cannot be translated into a formal demonstration, then it is just a bad argument and has no apologetic value whatever. Whether or not Thomas himself correctly formalized such arguments is irrelevant, as is the fact that nonphilosophers cannot understand them in their abstract professional jargon. Either they are sound arguments or they are not.

These complaints should not detract from the undeniable value of this book. It will serve especially well in seminary courses on the subject. Perhaps Demarest's greatest contribution here is to reassert the real presence of general revelation to be accounted for and assimilated by apologists and theologians alike. In light of present detractors, that is certainly a welcome contribution.

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Christian Ethics For Today: An Evangelical Approach. By Milton L. Rudnick. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979, 150 pp., \$7.95.

America's moral malaise has been diagnosed as a nonterminal illness by the moral majority. A four-year prescription of moral politics has been mandated for the full recovery of the patient. Abortion, euthanasia, birth control, surrogate parenting, genetic manipulation, hostages, missiles, crime, drugs, fornication, homosexuality and divorce form the cultural heritage of problems to be faced. Surely survival in our age is predicated on right answers to ethical questions.

Milton Rudnick's book is a welcome addition to the minuscule literature available in Christian ethics. The work is an outgrowth of the author's perceived need for a textbook in ethics that is both comprehensive and comprehensible to students faced with ethical questions and issues. Existing textbooks are judged to be either superficial or too academically demanding for introductory courses offered to college students. In order to accomplish this purpose the book is broken down into ten chapters dealing with the corruption of man, motivation, external norms, internal norms, reasons, resources, failure, improvement, conscience and process. Each chapter is intended to teach the student the appropriate questions to be raised rather than offer solutions to particular ethical problems. Problems are dealt with as illustrations of theory put into practice. The stress in every chapter is designed to fall on the process of inquiry whereby each individual can learn to make his own ethical decisions. The strength of the book may well be this conception of the need for adequate theoretical content and process as the first step to moral decision-making. However, as is so often the case, the promise and the product turn out to be divergent.

Perhaps the most challenging exercise in reading the book is to deal with the tension between the author's announced position and the perception of how he develops his material. Rudnick informs us that he is a rule-deontologist with a contextualist bent (p. 10). There is a constant use of the words "sense," "feel," "impulse"—all of which causes one to



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