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Review: Basic Theology

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Basic Theology, by Charles C. Ryrie. Wheaton: Victor, 1986. Pp. 544. \$16.95.

The author of the popular *Ryrie Study Bible* and a host of biblical and theological works, and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at Dallas Seminary, has now contributed a volume aptly subtitled "A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth." *Basic Theology* is indeed well-written at the targeted popular level (pp. 9–10), characteristically systematic and thorough, though compact (featuring "bite-size" chapters), and lucid. Ryrie again demonstrates his exemplary facility for clarity and economy of expression in dealing with theology at an introductory, but not insignificant level.

This reviewer was pleasantly surprised to find that *Basic Theology* was not simply a revision or an expansion of Ryrie's 1972 primer, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Moody). While there are obvious similarities, the very order of development of the doctrines and the foundational styles of the books are so different as to quickly convince the reader that *Basic Theology* is a substantially fresh treatment. That is a lot of "freshness," too, when it is noted that *Basic Theology* is almost triple the length of the earlier *Survey* (544 pp. to 191 pp.).

As to content, there is little that is creative exegetically or theologically about Ryrie's moderate dispensational approach here, although he has been a bellwether theologian at times in his career (e.g. his *Dispensationalism Today* [Moody, 1965]). At a juncture when dispensationalism is increasingly diverse in expression (see V. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationlists* [Zondervan, 1987], it would have been welcome for a theologian of Ryrie's stature and insightfulness to address such issues, though that was not his aim. He did, however, fire a salvo in the mounting debate over the content of the gospel (pp. 337–39).

As to proportional handling of the various doctrines, it is hardly surprising, in the recent evangelical context, to find that the treatment of the "God-breathed" scripture is considerably longer (54 pp.) than that of the doctrine of God (34 pp.) or of Christ (37 pp.). However, even granting dispensational eschatological distinctives, it is still somewhat of a surprise to find "Things to Come" covers 83 pages in a volume of this size!

Basic Theology can be heartily recommended, not only for its readability, compactness, and trustworthy content, but also for such consistent features as charts (e.g. "How the Bible Came to Us," p. 117) and practical application (even applying the Trinity, on p. 59). There also are helpful concluding sections on "Central Passages for the Study of Theology" (pp. 525–30) and "Some Definitions for the Study of Theology" (pp. 533–38), as well as scripture and subject indices. Disappointing by its absence, though, is even a "basic" bibliography, or list for further reading and study, befitting such a fine introductory theology text.

Now, it is hoped that Ryrie will see fit to move beyond "basic theology" to the more indepth kind of treatment of which he is clearly capable. There is still plenty of room for another evangelical *magnun opus* on the theologians' bookshelf, such monumental works as Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority*,

Erickson's *Christian Theology*, and Lewis and Demarest's *Integrative Theology* not withstanding.

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The Coming World Leader by David Hocking. Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1988. Pp. 319. \$10.95 paper.

David Hocking is the Senior Pastor of Calvary church in Santa Ana, California. His radio broadcast is heard nationally on "The Biola Hour". He is the author of two other books and a series of pamphlets.

The current volume is a commentary on the Book of Revelation. Since that book focuses on Jesus, he must be assumed to be "the Coming World Leader". The book is written for those who have not studied that book of the Bible in depth, and who are not looking for a commentary on the Greek text, even though the author makes frequent reference to the meanings of Greek words. The study has a format that suggests it is the outcome of an extended sermon series. About one third of the volume's comments are on Revelation 1-3. His eschatological position is Premillennial. He holds to a Pre-Tribulational Rapture position, but acquaints his audience occasionally with other views. Hocking has provided a useful introductory commentary for pastors and Sunday School teachers.

Before pointing out some of the valuable features of the commentary, let me indicate some identifiable weaknesses. First, the elementary nature of the book promotes simplistic approaches to complex problems: for example, what one has to do to understand the Revelation (p. 9), the use made of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse, and the question of authorship. A second weakness is that it is an uncritical commentary in the main. Perhaps this feature emerges out of the author's reading habits, the bibliography appending the book contains no book written on Revelation in the last twenty years, it consults no "liberal" commentary, and apart from Swete's commentary, has not taken into account any commentary making use of the Greek text and grammar, including conservative works. On two occasions where the author makes use of the textual apparatus, it appears that he is not well-acquainted with the science of textual criticism: the number of manuscripts for or against a reading cannot be decisive; variants' existence is not determinative and at 8:13 the UBS text and Nestle's 26th edition shout almost unanimous support for the reading $\alpha\epsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ (eagle) rather than $\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ (angel).

There are places where greater use of background materials and added depth of treatment are desirable: the crown of life (p. 58), the two-edged sword (p. 60), the hidden manna (p. 65), and "lukewarm" are examples. Fuller treatment would have reduced ambiguity about the four beings (p. 109)—views one and three are not antithetical, the significance of the precious stones in Revelation 4, the animalistic descriptions of the "four