

ers set forth more theoretical perspectives. Subjects include such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Mormons, Afro-Americans, Meher Baba. Chapters relate to law, music, linguistics, theology, political science, and homiletics. This massive book also has a forty-three page bibliography.

Another broad book on contemporary British and international religious movements is *Sectarianism: Analyses of Religious and Non-Religious Sects*, edited by Roy Wallis (1975, Halsted/Wiley). This book contains useful distinctions to separate the religious from the nonreligious. It has essays on the Krishna movement, Scientology, and various therapeutic sects. Perhaps with criticism and competition, researchers on the new religious consciousness in the new Fertile Crescent will give us more thorough studies.

Although interest in new religions is on the rise, none of the recent works has used a Christian theological perspective in assessing their work. Making generalizations about religious consciousness in America has led to fewer differentiations between the myriad religious groups in the world, past and present. Hence the CWLF, an innovative expression of evangelicalism, submerges into the counterculture as some kind of countercultural force against the overriding traditions of American Christianity. Generalizations on the relationship between peripheral sects and predominant christianizing and dechristianizing movements need more refinement than can be found in most of these books. Also, techniques of religious studies, especially in the Glock-Bellah work, have difficulty accounting for shifts within so voluntaristic a scene as American religion. They tend to overplay an undefined traditional religion or make rash demarcations about major changes in a complex, variable environment. And none of these books point out how destructive these sects can be. Christian churches have long had ways to differentiate between spooky, heretical, and destructive sects as compared with a more serious, religious experience. □

Edifying Addresses

Our Sovereign God, edited by James Boice (Baker, 1977, 175 pp., \$4.95 pb), is reviewed by D. A. Carson, associate professor of New Testament, Northwest Baptist Theological Seminary, Vancouver, British Columbia.

The title of this book captures a theme that has in recent years rekindled a lot of interest among evangelicals; but the subtitle more accurately reflects the contents of this book. Here are fifteen addresses presented to the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology by seven men. John R. W. Stott deals with "The Sover-

eignty of God the Son" and with "The Sovereign God and the Church." Roger R. Nicole expounds "The 'Five Points' and God's Sovereignty," "The Doctrines of Grace in Jesus' Teaching," "Optimism and God's Sovereignty," and the historical implications of "Soli Deo Gloria." Stuart D. Sacks draws relationships between "God's Sovereignty and Old Testament Names for God," and James I. Packer contributes a section "On Knowing God." R. C. Sproul follows up the latter theme with "Why We Do Not Know God" and "Why We Must Know God," and then discusses two further topics, "Discerning the Will of God" and "Prayer and God's Sovereignty." Ralph L. Keiper gives us "The Key to Knowing God" and "Witnessing and God's Sovereignty." The editor, James M. Boice, seeks to reconcile "Disobedience and God's Sovereignty." I confess I found the book extraordinarily difficult to evaluate, not so much because of the diversity of approaches and of merit from chapter to chapter (a problem in most symposia), but because I enjoyed and appreciated the work more than my critical faculties tell me I should.

The unifying feature is the forum at which they were delivered rather than some common theme. For example, Stott's second message affirms that "[the] purpose of our sovereign God is not just to save isolated individuals, but to call out a people for himself." Stott then expounds Acts 2:42-47 in a manner that would be acceptable anywhere in evangelicalism, not just at a Reformed conference. The exposition, as one might expect from Stott, is competent and telling; but its link with the "theme" of the book is no more than could be generated by considering the connection between *any* biblical passage and the sovereignty of God. The same artificiality afflicts more than half the chapters in the book, but comes to its apex in the second of the four sections into which the book is divided. That section, "Knowing the Sovereign God," has very little within it that has any exclusive connection to Reformed theology.

The diversity of approaches adopted by the various contributors adds to the reader's awareness of disarray. In his chapter "On Knowing God," Packer consciously presents his material as an exposition of Calvin's thought. In one of his four chapters, Nicole seeks to reformulate the traditional "five points" in ways open to less ambiguity, effectively jettisoning TULIP *en route* while retaining its essential content. Keiper is largely anecdotal; Sproul, though scarcely less so, organizes his material topically. Boice tries to deal with the difficult topic "Disobedience and God's Sovereignty" by expounding selected parts of Jonah; but the limitations of the passages chosen preclude the possibility of admitting important considerations from elsewhere, though the centrality of the topic makes

some of the exposition forced—a classic case of the mutually destructive homiletical marriage between exposition of a major topic and exposition of a restricted passage.

To this methodological disarray must be added two or three major errors. Considering the fruit of Anabaptist research during the last three decades, it is astonishing to be told that "The Anabaptists of Calvin's day were similar to the liberal and radical theologians of our time, for they appealed to the spirit in their own minds rather than what was said in the Scriptures. They said, 'Because we have

spiritual intuitions that come strong upon us, we are going to follow them. We accept them as from the Spirit of God; if this means leaving the Bible behind, well, so much the worse for the Bible!' Calvin denied this, for he denied that the Spirit contradicts himself." No doubt that is the way Calvin perceived things; but Calvin never enjoyed any first-hand knowledge of the leaders of the Anabaptists, whose writings portray them to be no less biblically oriented (to say the least) than any of the other branches of the Reformation. A little later in the book, a writer takes pains to differentiate between the person who

knows God's will as revealed in Scripture, and the one who seeks to discover it when it is not so revealed. "It is one thing," we are told, "to put out a fleece in attempting to discover that which God has not revealed. But to test that which God has revealed is to insult the integrity of his word, and I will not do it" (p. 93). I will try not to do it, too; but I can't help remembering that when Gideon put out the fleece—twice, at that—it was for no other purpose than to test that which God had indeed already revealed.

Again, when a contributor writes that in forty years "I think I have heard only one truly honest prayer from the pulpit," does he intend to use hyperbole to underline the remarkable candor and humility of the example that he then proceeds to give? It must be so, for I cannot believe his ecclesiastical experience is as limited as his words suggest.

Despite my criticisms, however, I find this little book quite compelling. It cannot be compared with *Grace Unlimited* (edited by Clark Pinnock), for the latter is openly polemical and designed as a symposium of written essays, whereas *Our Sovereign God* expounds its position with little polemic, and is scarcely more than transcribed addresses. So little concerned is this book to offer a definitive defense of Reformed theology that there is virtually no mention of such topics as covenant, Romans 9 or Ephesians 1, decree, *ordo salutis*, or a *crux interpretum* like First John 2:2. Yet this formal lack nonetheless conspires to make this book a helpful, edifying volume, eminently useful in a wide reading circle. To say this is not to despise the polemical work or to give it no place; but it is to say that its place is rarely for edification *per se*. *Our Sovereign God* is a work that, though not very profound, is not polemical either, and is edifying.

Although the reader must put up with an informality of style more suitable behind the pulpit than on the printed page, yet he does not have to read far before gaining genuine and valuable insights. One man writes, "Knowledge of God is more than any particular experience of God. For, like the Biblical writers, Calvin comes out of an era when people were less self-absorbed than we are. They were more interested in the realities that they experienced than in their experience of those realities" (p. 63). Another says, "Foolishness is in many of the catalogues of serious sins in the New Testament, along with adultery and murder and things like that. Foolishness is a moral refusal to deal honestly with the truth" (p. 81). And peppered through the book are choice quotations from Calvin, Wesley (!), Warfield, Kierkegaard, Geoffrey Fisher, Brunner, and others.

If you are looking for a book that will establish the truth of Reformed theology, look elsewhere. If you are looking for a generally interesting and edifying collection of sermons, this is for you. □