

The Theology of John. By W. Robert Cook. Chicago: Moody, 1979, 284 pp., \$8.95.

Robert Cook here offers the reader "a serious treatment" of "Johannine theology from a conservative vantage point (thus going against the preponderant tide of contemporary scholarship)." The first part of this volume provides concise statements about the distinguishing characteristics of Johannine thought and about Cook's approaches to critical problems, the interpretation of the Apocalypse and the nature of Scripture. This first part (pp. 21-64) concludes with an outline of John's doctrine of God, of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit (pp. 40-64). The second part of the book (pp. 67-102) is entitled "Soteriology" and in four short chapters treats the doctrine of sin, the Savior, the Holy Spirit and the

work of salvation respectively. Part three (pp. 105-154) deals with "the Christian life," under three headings: "the theology of the Christian life," "the hamartiology of the Christian life" and "the ecclesiology of the Christian life." The fourth and final part of the book (and by far the longest: pp. 157-248) is entitled "Eschatology." This is almost exclusively a treatment of the book of Revelation. It is "most fitting" that John should give an entire book to the prophetic future because, *inter alia*, "he was by nature suited to apocalyptic vision" (p. 157). Cook devotes a number of chapters to the future of the Church, the future of Israel, the future of the nations, the future of the individual and the future of spirit beings. A standard dispensationalist approach to Revelation is adopted throughout Cook's exposition.

It is refreshing to read a book that treats the Bible as the Word of God and does not find it necessary to apologize for such a stance. Moreover it is encouraging to find evangelicals venturing into the difficult area of Biblical theology. Yet it is only with serious reservations that I could commend this work. My first hesitation does not spring simply from the fact that the book fails to interact with the broad spectrum of contemporary Johannine scholarship except in the most superficial way, for that would be to demand of the author that he write a book other than the one he chose to write. An exposition of the theology of some Biblical corpus does not *require* exhaustive interaction with contemporary options. But surely it requires some significant interaction if it is to hold its own against other positions. A glance at the bibliography and footnotes by anyone abreast of Johannine scholarship will generate certain doubts, and a detailed reading of the text will not remove them. Cook's preliminary statement on the hermeneutical problems surrounding the Apocalypse, for instance, will convince no one but the convinced. More disturbing is the failure to interact with alternative *conservative* options, except in a very few instances. For instance, Cook seeks to refute Gundry's posttribulational conclusions on Rev 3:10, but he does not deal with the structure of posttribulational thought. Worse, he does not wrestle with amillennialism or postmillennialism (I write as a premillennialist); he makes no mention of (*inter alios*) Allis, Berkouwer, Boettner, or foreign language works; and what brief references he does make to other positions tend to be peremptory and of the "everybody who thinks about it can see this is wrong" variety. Would any self-respecting amillennialist acknowledge that he approaches the Apocalypse with an "allegorical hermeneutic" that is "totally unwarranted" (p. 31)?

My second reservation is that Cook, in my view, is not really writing Biblical theology but systematic theology. Biblical theology must be distinctively inductive and nuanced and must pay close attention to history. There are occasions when Cook approaches these standards, but more often he sounds like a systematician working on a more restricted corpus than is customary for the systematician. I do not leave his book feeling I have come to grips a little better with John; I leave feeling I have learned a little more about dispensationalism. There is no doubt merit in that, and I am certainly not decrying the importance of systematic theology. But it should not be confused with Biblical theology.

Along the same line I am uncertain how to react to a volume dealing with "the theology of John" when the John in question has penned books as different as a gospel, three epistles, and a prophetic/apocalyptic work like the Apocalypse. Assuming a common author (which, though not unlikely, is not *required* by the texts themselves) does not altogether overcome the differences in genre and perspective from book to book. It would be good, for example, to read a thorough integration of the emphasis on inaugurated eschatology found in the fourth gospel with the emphasis on apocalyptic found in Revelation. But to subsume the former under the latter, or to swallow up the former by the latter, is scarcely to deal equitably with *Johannine* theology. Is it an accident that C. H. Dodd, three of whose works appear in the bibliography, appears elsewhere in the book only twice—and that in rather incidental footnotes?

My criticism may be too strong. If you are looking for a book that competently handles the Johannine corpus as a quarry for dispensationalism, this is a choice volume. If you desire a book with many insights on details of Johannine exegesis, this volume retains some

value. But a thorough Biblical theological treatment of the Johannine corpus, prepared by an evangelical, is still a distant goal.

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