

that that vision was really pretribulationist in even the most incipient form. Its very text speaks to the contrary!

In spite of the author's failure to *prove* his thesis regarding Margaret Macdonald, his chap. 3 and Appendix A summarize some vital discoveries that have been made with respect to early pretribulationist developments. It is interesting to find, for example, that Irvingites did not express pretribulationist ideas until September of 1830 and that among the Plymouth Brethren the earliest evidence of such leanings comes from 1831. Moreover, J. N. Darby himself—the individual most responsible for the origin and initial spread of *present-day* pretribulationist views—did not manifest any pretribulationism prior to 1834. Finally, in the earliest period of the two-stage second-advent theory, the two stages were separated by only a very short period of time; it was not until about 1839 and 1840 that both Irvingites and Darbyites stretched the period out to encompass seven years.

In conclusion: Although I see in this new volume some of the same weaknesses and strengths as I have indicated in my reviews of MacPherson's earlier books on the topic, the present title has additional material that is helpful indeed. The presentation style is again popular, rather than scholarly, in nature. It is obvious, however, that the author has done a great deal of "homework" (or perhaps better said, "library research"). *The Great Rapture Hoax* can well be read and reflected upon by Christian educators, pastors, and laity. The enthusiasm with which MacPherson and his wife have devoted themselves to the task of divulging the *late* origin of the pretribulationist theory (in this point they are correct, regardless of the manner of the origin) and the very reasonable price of the books they have published—these are indications that theirs is indeed "a labor of love." That labor of love can well be received as such; and its fruitage, as represented in *The Great Rapture Hoax*, provides both fascinating and helpful reading, irrespective of points of agreement and disagreement.

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O'Brien, Peter T. *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44. Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1982. liv + 328 pp. \$18.95.

In my review of the commentary on Philippians in this series, I have made certain general observations concerning characteristics of the various volumes of the entire series (see p. 60, above). Those observations pertain also to the volume here under review.

With respect to the two epistles treated in this volume of the commentary, O'Brien sees them both as written by Paul about A.D. 60-61 during the

Apostle's first Roman imprisonment. The two letters were carried by Tychicus, who had also been entrusted with the return of Onesimus to Philemon.

Concerning the Colossian epistle and the situation in Colossae, O'Brien is tentative about a Colossian heresy. If it did exist, he would tend to agree with F. F. Bruce that it was "a Phrygian development in which a local variety of Judaism had been fused with a philosophy of non-Jewish origin" (p. xxxiii).

As for O'Brien's comments on the biblical text in Colossians, as with Hawthorne's commentary on Philippians, this author too displays penetrating insights. This fact can be illustrated by reviewing his treatment of three controversial passages (though, of course, not all of his conclusions will or should go unchallenged).

First, after surveying recent comments on the Christological hymn at 1:15-20, O'Brien states that the case developed by the majority of writers against Pauline authorship is very flimsy indeed. To speak of this hymn as a Christological digression—an excursus—or to speak of it as not belonging to the context is misleading. This hymn "undergirds" the whole epistle; "remove it and a serious dislocation occurs" (p. 62).

Second, at 2:11 the "circumcision of Christ" is not taken as a subjective genitive, with the understanding that Christ circumcizes the heart of the believer, and that Christian baptism replaces circumcision as the sign of the covenant. Rather, O'Brien follows Bruce, G. R. Beasley-Murray, and others in seeing the circumcision of Christ as his crucifixion, of which Christ's literal circumcision was an anticipatory token. O'Brien feels that Paul's statement here concurs with others made by the Apostle, in which the believer is described as sharing in Christ's death (= circumcision), burial, and resurrection. However, in the NT Jesus' suffering is repeatedly called his "baptism," not his "circumcision," and one wonders if O'Brien does not force the meaning of the text here in Col 2:11.

Third, "the religious festival," "new-moon celebration," and "sabbath day" at 2:16 are not, declares O'Brien, being condemned by Paul, for the observance of these holy days was a sign of Israel's election and evidence of her obedience to God's law. These sacred days, however, were being kept at Colossae for the sake of the "astral powers who directed the course of the stars and regulated the order of the calendar" (p. 139), i.e., the elemental spirits of the universe. So, what Paul is condemning is the wrong motives for the observance of these days. Nor, in O'Brien's view, were the Colossian Christians to observe these sacred days as obligatory, for Christ and his gospel are the perfect reality to which these customs pointed as a shadow—customs that had lost their binding force.

With respect to the epistle to Philemon, one can wonder why this epistle, consisting of a mere twenty-five verses, was included in the canon. O'Brien, following J. Knox, supports the idea that Onesimus, the fugitive slave, became the bishop of Ephesus; and, in this position of authority, Onesimus saw to it that Paul's letter to Philemon became part of the Pauline corpus. The alternative possibility that Philemon was included in the canon because the three principal characters—Philemon, Paul, and Onesimus—portrayed the workings of the plan of salvation is not even entertained by O'Brien. However, except for this one glaring omission, O'Brien's insights with respect to this epistle are generally good, and his treatment of the text is helpful.

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Raitt, Jill, ed. *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland and Poland, 1560-1600*. New Haven, Conn., and London, England: Yale University Press, 1981. xx + 224 pp. \$22.50.

The book *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland and Poland, 1560-1600* is a bold undertaking. It attempts to present within 224 pages the biography, the theology, and the role in the church of twelve important but generally poorly-known theologians of the second half of the sixteenth century: Matthias Flacius Illyricus, Johann Wygand, Martin Chemnitz, Jakob Andreae, Heinrich Bullinger, Theodore Beza, Lambert Daneau, Zacharias Ursinus, Peter Canisius, Stanislas Hosius, Peter Skarga, and Faustus Socinus. Thus, one may not expect in-depth treatment. The success of the book must be judged on the basis of the crispness and clarity with which it brings out what is most significant about each of those shapers of religious traditions. Elusive as this goal is, it has been successfully reached by several contributors to that work.

For instance, in her chapter on Theodore Beza, Jill Raitt, the editor of the volume, has done a remarkable job of presenting in easy-to-read language the essentials concerning Calvin's successor at Geneva. Her presentation of his theology is a model of the genre, a broad overview that focuses on the points which are quite particular to Beza. She clarifies for the reader how God's sovereignty meshes with man's capacity to make decisions, however warped by sin the latter may be. One may well be surprised at the degree of concern that this predestinarian had concerning man's free will. Also, by a sharp definition of Beza's christology, Raitt is able to give the rationale for his views of the Eucharist. And throughout the chapter, she shows the points at which Beza went beyond Calvin.