

*Between Faith and Criticism* is a major contribution to our understanding of the development of the American evangelical mind in general and the evolution of the relationship of evangelicals to critical methods of studying scripture in particular. Of special value are the historical chapters. Those chapters should be read by all who are interested in evangelicalism, American religion, or the role of critical methods in Bible study, even if they choose not to read the entire book. The scholarly world is indebted to Noll for this contribution and to the Society of Biblical Literature for its insight in sponsoring its series of studies on Confessional Perspectives.

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Perkins, Richard. *Looking Both Ways: Exploring the Interface Between Christianity and Sociology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987. 189 pp. Paperback, \$8.95.

To the extent that sociology is taken seriously in Christian circles, it is generally viewed in one of two ways: as a threat to faith or as an aid to greater understanding of religious commitments. These views roughly correspond with conservative or liberal orientations, and with rejection or acceptance of sociological insights. Most often, however, sociological methodology is used without regard to the discipline's philosophical underpinnings—an unsatisfying solution to the sociologist, as well as to the thinking Christian, but one that is perceived to be safer than other alternatives.

In *Looking Both Ways*, Richard Perkins takes the bull by the horns and examines the foundations of sociology and Christianity as belief systems that do not naturally mix. The result is a profound yet readable book that offers as much to the sociologist as to the committed Christian, but most to those who try to integrate the two viewpoints. In his analysis, the author sacrifices neither faith nor scientific integrity—in itself a respectable achievement. By getting to the roots of both sociology and Christianity (a “radical” approach), he finds a meeting ground that appears to be mutually satisfying to all who accept the premise that several perspectives are better than one.

Comprised of two parts, the first on the problem of relativity and the second on the problem of ideology, the book focuses on the central questions that confront Christians as they grapple with the insights that sociology can offer. Perkins defines a Christian as one who subscribes to the core tenets of the Christian gospel, including creation, fall, and restoration through the sacrificial death of Christ. Thus, the analysis transcends denominational boundaries. Sociology is seen as representing two contradicting claims: that social reality is a human construction and that humans

are conditioned by the structures of social experience—in short, the constructionist and the structuralist approaches (p. 15). The interpretive, phenomenological orientation of the constructionists leads to relativism; and the positivistic orientation of the structuralists may lead to determinism—both abhorred by the committed Christian.

The solution Perkins proposes to the problem of relativity is found in the difference between metaphysical relativism and cultural relativity. A Christian can accept the latter but not the former. Thus, a Christian has no problem with social construction of reality at the micro-level. It is when sociology begins to assert its own metaphysical assumptions, such as the denial of any absolutes, that the Christian will have to part company. Yet Christianity can gain from sociology the ability to step back and look at itself from a cognitive distance and see its own assumptions, some of which are not biblically based. “Sociologically informed Christians,” claims Perkins, “are metaphysical absolutists while remaining epistemological relativists” (p. 84), recognizing that, from the human standpoint, knowledge will always be relative and incomplete.

In the second part, Perkins shows how ideologies work implicitly to legitimize the existing structures that are conducive to one’s own interests. Christianity, in its ideologically conservative individualism, has tended to reduce social issues to personal troubles, thus blaming the victim. Such moralist reductionism, however, is not inherent in Christianity but has been “tacked on” (p. 140), forgetting that an issue-oriented approach to sin is biblical. Much of sociology, on the other hand, is amoral structuralism. Perkins asserts that Christian sociologists ought to reject both. A combination of Christianity and sociology can lead the way out of the parochial confines of each, since each provides the criticism that the other needs. Christianity and sociology can meet in “reflexive praxis”—i.e., in cognitive detachment from conventional social reality, transcending immediate interests, and learning through committed involvement, while exercising faith active in love.

Through an analysis that is equally critical of sociology and institutional Christianity, Perkins has avoided the pitfall of religious dogmatism that sometimes colors Christian sociology. It is easy to say that secular science is arrogant, as S. D. Gaede (*Where Gods May Dwell: On Understanding the Human Condition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), for example, has asserted. It is far more difficult to defend Christianity without a tone that may sound arrogant to secular scientists. Perkins has done this by subjecting the Christian assumptions to the same scrutiny as those of sociology—a strategy that speaks of openness and objectivity. He makes an excellent point in showing that all parochialism, Christian or secular, is arrogant. To force one type of explanation onto everything is “analytical imperialism” (pp. 125-126). The key lies in the centrality of faith that, following the example of Jesus, challenges society rather than justifies its

ideologically-based status quo. This powerful conclusion strikes at the core of both sociology and Christianity.

There are a few points used for illustrative purposes that seem to have been stretched too far. For example, in his explanation of reification in Christianity, Perkins equates monogamy with slavery as humanly-constructed institutions. Although he accepts the family as "divinely sanctioned," he sees monogamy merely as a "useful cultural form," endorsed by NT writers but "not prescribed anywhere" (p. 161). A parallel could be drawn, however, from what Jesus said about divorce: "from the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8, RSV). In the same spirit, it could be said that monogamy is assumed in the Bible as the original plan, which has fallen victim to many human aberrations, such as polygamy, divorce, and so on. The survival of monogamy, furthermore, would suggest a more enduring quality to that institution. It seems that in "looking both ways" Perkins has in this instance cast a longer look in the sociological than in the biblical direction.

Another problem area is related to the history of ideas, which Perkins has oversimplified in his attempt to explain the pitfalls of dualism (p. 173). While the idea that dualism has prevented the integration of faith and action is valid, it is not entirely correct to attribute the origin of dualism to Greek thought and to perceive it as a Western development. Dualism is a common notion in much ancient literature, particularly in Iranian Zoroastrianism and Jewish apocalypticism. Primitive Christianity was not devoid of it either, as is evident in the NT writings. Furthermore, in the author's search for the origin of dualism, the distinction between the Greek use of the word for knowledge as a noun and its Hebrew use as a verb is somewhat forced. The latter observation seems to be based on the tendency in Hebrew lexicography to prioritize words by their verbal forms. The ancient Hebrews, however, did express knowledge also as a noun. Interestingly, in the Gospel of John, faith and knowledge appear only in verbal forms, a fact that lends support to the Gospel's emphasis on active faith.

Perkins seems to use the concept of dualism in a narrow, restricted sense as an antithesis to action-oriented faith. He condemns dualism in this sense while endorsing it in its more general meaning, such as good versus evil and physical versus spiritual. This is evident in his commendation of sectarian Christianity for its detachment, skepticism, and marginalism ("sojourner" and "pilgrim," p. 162) in his statement that Christianity liberates "from the conventions of the cosmos" (p. 164), and in his view of Jesus as one who always stood apart from conventional definitions of reality (pp. 170-172). While such marginality is a good antidote against reification, it is based on a dualistic worldview. Certainly it is not the incarnational theology that praxis would suggest. The challenge is to be *in* but not *of* the *cosmos*, as Perkins concludes (p. 177). His basic point is

thus well taken. Western Christianity's overemphasis on correct doctrine or propositional truth has to some extent obscured the concept of relational truth capable of integrating knowledge and practice, faith and action.

*Looking Both Ways* is a thorough and thought-provoking analysis of a dilemma every enlightened Christian must face, since sociology's secular, humanistic foundations are shared by other disciplines. It is by looking critically at the assumptions of both Christianity and sociology that Perkins has succeeded in providing a larger perspective: Whatever else they are, "social science is a metaphysical exercise" and "Christianity is a collective human endeavor" (p. 24). Each benefits by learning from the other, and in this intersection lies the challenge of faith as praxis. Presenting that challenge is one of the many contributions of this excellent and enlightening book.

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Rast, Walter E., ed. *Preliminary Reports of ASOR-Sponsored Excavations 1980-84*. BASOR Supplement Series, No. 24. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986. 164 pp. Paperback, \$20.00.

This volume is the second in a series incorporating preliminary reports of ASOR-related excavations. Its intent is to publish archaeological reports in the shortest possible time after their completion.

Each study focuses on the results of either the initial or the most recent season of excavation for each site covered. Due to their introductory nature, a necessary tentativeness about conclusions is maintained, though there is frequent reference to earlier discussions and/or field reports where appropriate. Fuller treatment must, of course, await the final excavation reports.

The geographical areas represented in this volume are Turkey, Israel, and Jordan. It begins with the 1983 season at Sardis as reported by C. H. Greenewalt, M. L. Rautman, and R. Meriç. Material remains from the various sectors on the site and in a regional survey span from EB through Byzantine times, though the most prominent features examined were from the Lydo-Persian and Late Roman periods. The second report (by R. Bull, E. Krentz, and O. Storvick) covers the ninth season (1980) at Caesarea Maritima. The excavations were concentrated in Fields C and G, which are located just south and north, respectively, of the Crusader Fortress. Important finds include slight evidence of a Roman *cardo* beneath the Byzantine one, and the major city wall (W 8001) from Herodian Caesarea.

The third report (by E. Oren, M. Morrison, and I. Gilead) is on the 1982 and 1983 seasons of the Land of Gerar Expedition. The project includes systematic mapping and surveying of the Gerar and Besor Wadi Systems. The present report, however, deals with the excavations at Tell