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Covenant and Creation by Piet Schoonenberg, S. J. (review)

Martin K. Hopkins

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

182 BOOKREVIEWS Cove Mnt and Creation. By PIETScHoONENBERG, S. J. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969. Pp. 213. \$5.95. In 1955 the author published the first part of a dogmatic treatise on the Apostles' Creed designed for the laity and entitled Het geloof van ons doopsel ("The Faith of Our Baptism"). This ambitious project was never finished, not only for lack of time but also because of the radical changes which theology itself was undergoing. However, the work contained many valuable insights, and the present volume represents selections taken from it. The rationale of this book is the author's desire to expound dogmatic truths within their biblical categories and at the same time to make them meaningful to modern readers. Trained in both Scripture and dogmatic theology, Fr. Schoonenberg comes to his task well-equipped. The first part of the book contains a resume of salvation history. The author gives us a biblical portrait of the God of the Covenant (and dates the emergence of monotheism with Abraham). The "absolute

" attributes of God are examined first: holiness, mercy, faithfulness, illustrated in their Old Testament context. Then follow his " relative " attributes: God as Creator, Father, Savior. The purpose of this historical survey is to underscore the personal dimension which the notion of covenant involves. In the next section the author elaborates the concept of creation in depth. He is at pains to show from his analysis that what theologians call God's " conservation " and " governance " represent a continuation of creation . The creative element involves newness: conservation represents newness in respect to duration; governance represents newness in respect to activity. In the case of man, God's creativity is apparent in the former's free decisions (which provide a unique element of newness). Fr. Schoonenberg sees law as governing only the fixed elements in created activity, not their newness. Thus, man's free actions-along with the freaks in nature-are not subsumed under the law. Now comes the author's principal interest: a consideration of "supernaturality." In the Old Testament, he points out, the gratuity of God's "hesed " in connection with the Covenant foreshadowed this concept. In the New Testament, supernaturality lies beneath the gifts attributed to the Holy Spirit. A lengthy analysis of human versus divine covenants in the context of interpersonal relationships leads the author to conclude that the supernatural consists essentially in God's gratuitous, unpredictable exceeding of man's needs and expectations: an uninterrupted series of unmerited surprises. These reflections cause Fr. Schoonenberg to see that covenant is implied in the very act of creation. Perhaps that most intriguing portion of the book is that which deals with miracles. Reacting against the Scholastic tendency to place the sign value of a miracle in its going-beyond-the-laws-of-nature, the author insists that it is to the religious context that we are to look for the sign value. He BOOKREVIEWS 188 builds his case on the observation that modern science has tended to debunk the notion of God's immediate action in miracles: he seems always to use secondary causes. (Teilhard de Chardin's theory of " hominisation " is cited at this point). A survey of some of Christ's miracles tends to bear this out: they were never performed as stunts nor simply as proofs of his own authority; they normally presupposed a minimal faith and carried with them a symbolic message (exorcisms and healings not only taught the lesson of God's mercy, but also pointed to the dawn of the messianic era). Actually, miracles represent "no intervention from without, no removal of the forces of creation, but a heightened involvement (of God)" (p. ~07) Indeed, " The extraordinary is at all times to be expected from God." (p. ~08} The reader who is willing to study this book will be richly rewarded. Perhaps the best recommendation which this reviewer can offer is that he has just finished using it as a satisfactory text in a course entitled, " Man and Grace." University of DaUas Irving, Texa3 MARTIN K. HoPKINS, O.P. 'l'he One Bread. By MAX THURIAN. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969. Pp. 159. \$4.50. The American...

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