

In print

A.J. DE GRAAF. 1976. The Kingdom of God in the preaching and work of Jesus. Wetenskaplike Bydraes van die PU vir CHO, Reeks F2. Brosjyre nr 8. Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. Potchefstroom.

The author is a dynamic minister of the Reformed Churches of Australia. The publication is one of the first done by the Clearing House of the Alliance of Institutions for Christian Higher Education, an international movement of Reformed academic institutions on all continents.

This short but packed study (33 pages) consists of three chapters:

- I. The Servant-King (1-10)
 - II. The King and his Servants (11-19)
 - III. Children of the Kingdom (20-30)
- A bibliography follows on pages 31-33.

In their original form the three chapters represent three lectures read in Australia — this should be kept in mind, otherwise a degree of repetition and sometimes lack of style might irritate. As it is, one can fully agree with Snyman's Preface that "alteration to the original form ... could have resulted in a loss of the dynamic tension and directness so typical of the author".

The frequent occurrence of technical errors is quite irritating. But the lively down to earth and yet academically more than adequate contents more than make up for this deficiency.

In this booklet De Graaf wants to emphasize two major concepts in Reformed, or if you like Calvinist, or again, if you prefer, truly Biblical thinking:

(A) *The "servant-character" of the Kingdom of God in this age:* "Kingdom" is a dynamic concept, the *Kingship* of God in Christ, the active rule of the Lord over a fallen creation, the overthrow of the unlawful rule of Satan, "claiming back from Satan the very kingdom he declared he had!" (p. 7).

„But for this it was necessary that he went the humble way of the cross. Because the Kingdom of God had to come the way that rebellion against it came: from the inside out, gripping the very heart of God's representative on earth, which is man" (7).

That was why so few recognized Him as the Messiah of God: "Everybody was looking for a Lion, and behold, there was a Lamb" (9).

That is why Christians had and still always have so much difficulty in

recognizing the Kingdom of God in this age. It is the tension between King and Servant; between being as believers princes and princesses, and yet in this age looking like slaves and beggars, which is so unbearable to our sinful hearts!

That is why through the ages Christians have tried to ease this tension: building a "fat and pompous church" into "the visible Kingdom" (12); identifying God's Kingdom with "the holy Roman Empire (or British, for that matter)" (12-13); reducing the "Kingdom to the inward relation between God up there and my heart (13-14); pushing God's Kingdom into the eschatological, for ever futuristic tomorrow (14); bringing the Kingdom right onto mens' own laps, to do with it as we find fit, in the modern theology of revolution!

(B) The world-wide, all-spheres-of-life-encompassing character of God's Kingdom: Modern revolutionary christianity wants violently to change systems, structures. But in God's rule *man* is changed, reborn, recreated — for God wants to make the *whole* man new and to create a new world. a new creation! Therefore He starts at the very root of all things: the heart of the head of all creation: man, created after the image of God. From "within", starting from the very hearts of men, God in his rule begins his new creation. And in this coming of the Kingdom, the children of the Kingdom, renewed through Christ, must be "on the march" to claim all things to the service of the Lord God: education and learning (26); political righteousness (26); "peace on the job" (26-27); the arts (27); journalism (27-29) ...

A little masterpiece of brevity and clarity!

J.C. Coetzee
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BJ. VAN DER WALT. 1978. *Heartbeat: Taking the pulse of our theological-philosophical heritage*. Potchefstroom University, Potchefstroom. 1978.

Together with his other publication of this year*, this volume of collected essays is representative of Van der Walt's valuable contribution to neo-Calvinistic, philosophical literature of recent years. Whereas *Heartbeat* constitutes the historical dimension of his work – inter alia explaining his criticism on fundamental aspects of existing Christian thought – *Horizon* gives the reader a more systematic outline of his own thoughts on metaphysics, ethics, anthropology, etc. Although this review only covers *Heartbeat*, the reader should therefore keep in mind that the two works are complementary to each other: the one diagnosing the symptoms of an endangered philosophy – the other theorizing, probing, scanning for new answers.

The recurring theme in all the essays is that of the 'tension' between faith and reason. The historical roots of this theme are traced from Ancient Greek thought right through the Middle Ages and Reformation, to the Further Reformation – covering such eminent Christian philosophers as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin.

Characteristic of Van der Walt's approach to these philosophers is his use of the problem-historic method which has its origin in the work of the Dutch philosopher D.H. Th. Vollenhoven. As this method is relatively unknown to most of his readers, Van der Walt immediately sets out to explain its different aspects and intricacies in the first essay of the volume. For those readers who are still a bit confused after reading this essay, there is this consolation – you will probably come to understand more of its implications while reading Van der Walt's application of the method throughout the succeeding essays.

According to Van der Walt, the main achievement of this method is that it can "as an analytic tool at the beginning of one one's enquiries, ... considerably facilitate(s) our task and can be very illuminating as regards the complicated problem-patterns in the history of philosophy" (p. 6). On the same page he also states that this method gives us "the skeleton of a philosopher's system" . If it is further kept in mind that the larger part of the work (with the exception of some papers read at international conferences

* *Horizon. Surveying a route for contemporary Christian thought*. B.J. van der Walt. Potchefstroom University, Potchefstroom, 1978.

or short extracts from his M.A. or D.Phil. theses) is basically meant for undergraduate students, the use of this method is acceptable. I am, however, of the opinion that for anything more detailed than a skeleton or framework of a philosophical system, the problem-historic method should at least be complemented by a more analytic and comparatively inclined historiographic method.

As has been mentioned before, the 'antithesis' of faith and reason, manifested inter alia in the nature-grace and theology-philosophy dualities, is the main theme of the volume. In the second essay this theme (more specifically the roots of the Natural Theology) is examined in his realization in Ancient Greek thought from the preplatonian thinkers up to the Stoic philosophers.

The third essay, concentrating more on the methodological implications of the acceptance of the nature-grace scheme, examines the prevailing methods of synthesis in Medieval philosophy, e.g. the methods of eisegesis-exegesis, paradox (Tertullian) and nature-grace (Clemens of Alexandria and others).

The relation of faith and knowledge is discussed with reference to early Christian and Medieval thinkers in the fourth essay, while a comparison of the viewpoints of Averroes and Thomas Aquinas on this problem is given in essay five.

Essays six to ten are concerned mainly with the work of Thomas Aquinas. As an introduction to his thought, the sixth essay gives a short but handy biographical sketch of the life of the *doctor angelicus*. In the seventh essay emphasis is placed on the topicality of Thomas' thought for today, especially as seen from the viewpoint of Catholic thinkers themselves. (This essay gives Van der Walt's impressions of the International Congress commemorating the seven hundredth anniversary of Thomas Aquinas' death from 17-24 April 1974 at Rome and Naples.) A more systematic exposition of Thomas Aquinas' main doctrines is given in the eighth essay, as well as in the ninth essay, where his ideas about wonders are critically examined. Mention should be made of Van der Walt's novel and refreshing (to me) approach and answer to this real problem. Van der Walt ends his examination of Thomas Aquinas' with a look (in the tenth essay) at his view on the theology, e.g. the relation of theology to philosophy, the need for a Natural theology, exposing simultaneously the underlining suppositions (of the two-realm theory) of these aspects of his doctrines.

In the eleventh essay Bonaventura is discussed with emphasis on his demarcation between a transcendental and non-transcendental world and the consequences of this dualism for Bonaventura's anthropology. The re-

relationship between nature and supernature according to Duns Scotus is the subject of the twelfth essay which ends with Van der Walt's critical appraisal of the two-realm theory.

A very interesting essay (and for some probably illuminating) is Van der Walt's examination of the Biblical and Unbiblical traits in John Calvin's anthropology in essay thirteen. He critically examines Calvin's views on self-knowledge, the soul (mind)-body dichotomy, the immortality of the soul and the whole problem of man as the image of God. His conclusion: the Unbiblical traits show the same dualism (of nature-grace) which was the subject of the earlier essays.

Essay fourteen is a summary of Van der Walt's D.Phil. dissertation on the roots and characteristics of Natural Theology with reference to the viewpoints of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*. This same subject is also under discussion in the fifteenth essay where the revival of Natural Theology among contemporary Christian (and even non-Christian) thinkers is examined, as well as in the sixteenth essay where Van der Walt conclusively clears up a popular misconception among Christians, i.e. that Acts 17:15-34 and Romans 1:18-25 are proofs for a Natural Theology.

The last two essays (seventeen and eighteen) stand, to my mind, more on their own than the others. The seventeenth essay is concerned with the relapse into scholasticism during the Further Reformation (with emphasis on the work by Melancthon and Beza). The writing of essay number eighteen, according to Van der Walt, arose as a result of his doctoral studies about the problem of faith and knowledge and is therefore included. The question is asked: How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God? While it is true that Van der Walt made some 'explosive' remarks (for instance – "We thus absolutely reject the idea of the self-evidence of Scripture because behind it lies a false criterion-search"), it is also true that he concedes much in a final paragraph (e.g. that his argumentation was probably a bit one-sided).

After giving a short outline of the contents of *Heartbeat*, allow me some remarks.

After reading this volume the main impression that remained with me was that of one recurring theme which ran like the proverbial golden thread through most of the essays, i.e. that of faith and knowledge, theology and philosophy, nature and grace. Let me quickly say that I believe that Van der Walt succeeded in doing what he set out to do, namely to take the pulse of our (Christian/Calvinistic?) heritage. If it is kept in mind that these essays are all self-contained essays written originally for under-graduate students (mostly), the repetition of this main theme is not only acceptable, but

even desirable. There are, however, some statements which demand a more detailed comment.

The first statement (concerning Plato's doctrine of ideas/forms) which I want to look into, is repeated three times in two different essays:

"According to him (Plato), laws do not inhere in the subjects and objects but have to be considered (those of the true, good and beautiful) in the intelligible world" (p. 37 and repeated on p. 39).

Plato only knew the three ideas (of the true, beautiful and good) and numbers as ideal models in the intelligible world" (p. 149).

It is, however, a fact that Plato did *not* accept the existence of only the ideas of the true, good and beautiful. I refer the reader to passages in three dialogues only. In the *Phaedo* Plato accepts the existence of inter alia, the following forms: of equality (74a, 78d, et. al), justice (75c-d), duality (101c) and greatness (102b-130a), and in the *Politeia* even such forms as beds and tables (596b). It is only in the *Parmenides* that Plato begins to question the existence of some forms like man, fire and water (130c) and denying the existence of other forms like hair, mud and dirt (130c), BUT still affirming the forms of the just, beautiful, good "and all such conceptions" (130b).

Van der Walt's statement that numbers are forms need qualification as well. A.G. Crombie (*An examination of Plato's doctrines*, II, p. 308) comments on this point as follows: "So far as the dialogues are concerned, if we dismiss phrases such as "the many" and "the equals", then the most that could be said is that Plato believed in the existence of numbers as occupants of the intermediate status of perfect non-physical embodiments... It is conceivable... that there may have been a time at which Plato believed in the existence of pure numbers, as that in which the forms find their perfect embodiment. But the evidence is very slender".

A next statement concerning the hulemorphism of Aristotle also needs comment. On p. 39 Van der Walt writes the following: "By developing this hulemorphism Aristotle hoped to improve on Plato's doctrine of the forms. He did not accept only three ideas (truth, good, beauty) but desired each thing to have its own law in itself. His forms are thus actually a multiplication of the ideas of Plato". Aristotle's own criticism of the theory of ideas in his *Metaphysics* (M, IV) puts a big question mark after these statements: "To posit the existence of ideas was almost as if a man wished to count a few things but imagined he could not do so unless he added to their number. The forms are almost as many as, if not more than, the particulars whose causes the Platonic school professed to discover in them; for they say there is an entity corresponding to each thing, having the same name as it

and existing apart from the substance, both in this transient world and in the eternal world of the heavenly bodies.”

If it is clear that Aristotle is actually saying that Plato has multiplied the number of things by accepting the existence of other corresponding entities in an other world, would he himself make this same mistake? Is the interpretation of Aristotle’s hulemorphism as but another multiplication of the ideas therefore correct?

The last point that I would want to raise is aimed at the paragraph on p. 82 (repeated on p. 222) where Van der Walt is describing the practical consequences of the nature-grace theme in everyday life. Some of the dualistic notions which are mentioned there, like optional-necessary, observation-evaluation, now-then, already-not yet, require, to my mind, further clarification before they can be claimed to be manifestations of the nature-grace theme in practical life. As they stand, they are only confusing the main issue.

Both the composition and technical outlay of the volume are satisfactory. The only typing error that stands out is the misspelling of *critical* in the title of the twelfth essay (p. 213). With reference to Van der Walt’s selection of essays, I have already said that certain recurring themes do in fact bind the individual essays to a coherent whole. I have, however, two remarks to make in this respect.

Firstly I am of the opinion that the inclusion of essay fifteen is not really justified. This essay, which is nothing more than a summary of the author’s D.Phil. thesis, gives the reader nothing new on the subject — a subject which had been dealt with thoroughly in other essays. The space saved with its exclusion could rather be used to include the bibliographical references of the eighth essay (Van der Walt left these to save space). This is, however, the only place where I have serious criticism of the author’s bibliographical notes. Van der Walt is known for the dedicated and detailed way in which he exploits the available literature on his subject — the rest of this work is also no exception. For the interested reader there are more than enough references for further reading.

In conclusion: In this volume Van der Walt has set out to take the pulse of our Christian heritage. In the execution of this task he always tries to base his results on a radical christian interpretation of the Bible. It is therefore no wonder that his results are not only relevant for the specialist (philosopher or theologian) but to the layman as well, i.e. to every critically minded Christian.

J. Mouton

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