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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

John Murray: *The Claims of Truth. Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. I. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1976. 374. \$10.95.

It is appropriate to begin this review with an expression of gratitude and indebtedness to The Banner of Truth for undertaking to collect and publish the writings of John Murray, for over 35 years the distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology in Westminster Theological Seminary. The author had consented to this project, and work was well underway when he died on May 8, 1975. Far from being discouraged by this loss, the publishers have sensed the greater urgency of completing the project. Volume I, *The Claims of Truth*, is now available, and the editor, Iain Murray, hopes to have Volume II in the United States by December, 1977.

Volume I includes 49 shorter writings that are either impossible or difficult to locate. Most are designed for the general public. The more technical, theological writings will appear in later volumes of the planned four-volume series.

Because of Professor Murray's death, more responsibility has devolved upon the editor for the selection and arrangement of materials. The scope has been extended beyond what the author in his modesty might have been willing to offer, but the results have justified the editor's wisdom in this matter. Not only the contents, but the quality of the volume itself as a product of the publisher's art is a fitting tribute to one whom we continue to love and respect as a father in the faith.

Dust jackets do not usually find their way into reviews, but the covering of this book does because of the beautifully executed color reproduction of the portrait of John Murray which hangs in Machen Hall of Westminster Seminary. Perhaps the publisher can be persuaded to give it a more permanent place as a frontispiece in one of the forthcoming volumes.

The writings included in Volume I come from virtually the whole range of Murray's ministry, from 1935 to 1973. In many instances the source and date is indicated. Unfortunately this information was not

always available to the editor. Most of the footnotes belong to the writings themselves, but since not all of them do some method should be found to differentiate between material inserted by the editor and the text of the author. The promised index at the end of Volume IV will be of immense help in making this collection of miscellaneous writing more useful as a reference work.

Reading John Murray is always a pleasure, not only for what he says, but also for his manner of speaking. We are reminded that wisdom does not necessarily require a multitude of words, and that words well chosen can bear much weight. The reader may have to do some work, however. "Resile" (p. 256) will send most of us to our dictionaries. But there are lapses with even the best of writers, and with a moment's reflection John Murray would doubtless appreciate the humor of the image suggested by the metaphors found on p. 185, "The ministry of mercy is one of the arms which Christ has put into the hands of the church for effective witness."

It is worth observing how these shorter writings from various periods, when brought together in a single volume, exhibit a profound practical concern with the church and her ministry and with personal and social ethics. This is due in part to the broad Christian audience for which most were designed, but it is also due as well to Murray's grasp of the practical nature of systematic theology. There was no gap between the student's classroom learning and the pastor's working theology. The infallibility of Scripture serves to promote faith, hope, and love, and is directly relevant to the guidance needed by the pilgrim on his way to the city whose builder and maker is God (p. 15). As the editor rightly notes in his preface, "all that John Murray wrote was intended to promote 'the obedience of faith'" (p. xiv).

Of special value in view of the current concern with the nature of distinctively Reformed evangelism is what Professor Murray has to say of the gospel and its proclamation. He often draws attention to frequently neglected truths. For example, the work of evangelism does not have exclusive reference to those reckoned by the church as unbelievers. "A considerable part of the work of the church, properly regarded as evangelism," must have as its aim the instruction and edification of un instructed believers (p. 124). While proper place is given to the record of Christian testimony, Murray views it as a snare of Satan to regard "the witness of Christian experience as that which constitutes testimony to Christ" (p. 133).

The practical value of Murray's theological writing has its deepest

root, however, in his profound conviction concerning the concrete, biblical, and anti-speculative character of the theological enterprise itself. His sympathy for Calvin is undisguised as he notes the reason for the reformer's abiding value: "Every careful reader of Calvin, especially of his Institutes, detects what may be called his biblico-theological method in contradistinction from the more scholastic method characteristic of his predecessors in the medieval tradition and of many of his successors in the Protestant tradition" (p. 308). In this basic orientation he was at one with his colleague, Cornelius Van Til, so that the two could labor together profitably, complementing one another in spite of obvious differences in temperament and pedagogical methodology, not to mention ethnic origin.

No one in the orthodox Reformed tradition would deny that systematic theology must be biblical, but in the strength of his training at Princeton Theological Seminary, especially under Geerhardus Vos, this principle came to new and powerful expression. Here, and in his sensitivity to the needs of the day in which God called him to labor, lies the secret of the freshness with which Professor Murray propounds the historic Reformed faith. Reformation is not merely an accomplished fact; "Reformation is a present duty. . . . But Reformation as a task here and now is complexed by the different context in which we live" (p. 292). "We must not discount, may I repeat, the situation in history in which God has placed us" (p. 284).

Reliance upon "a reservoir of knowledge" leaves the church "in a dangerous and slippery position. Thought and life are too complex to be adequately met by any such reservoir" (p. 7). "But let us know that it is not the tradition of the past, not a previous heritage, and not the labors of the fathers, that are to serve this generation and this hour, but the Word of the living and abiding God deposited for us in Holy Scripture, and this Word as ministered by the church" (p. 22).

Even in his admiration for the Westminster standards, Murray did not succumb to the Lutheran error of raising the confession to the level of inspired books. "The teaching of the Confession and Catechism must always be subjected to the scrutiny of the Word of God" (p. 314). To make any doctrinal formula sacrosanct and to place it beyond question was to commit idolatry (*ibid.*).

An illustration of progress in theological understanding and formulations is furnished in the brief article, "The Church: Its Definition in Terms of 'Visible' and 'Invisible' Invalid." The distinction "is not well-grounded in terms of Scripture" (p. 232). Professor Murray was doubt-

less aware that the doctrine of the church in the Westminster Confession (Ch. XXV) was developed precisely in terms of this distinction.

Volume I of the Collected Writings is saturated with wisdom, good judgment and sobriety. Each reader attuned to the premises on which the collection is built will find much with which to resonate and even much to challenge his own assumptions. For purposes of this review we can conclude by noting two areas of more than passing interest.

Professor Murray was aware of a problem within the Reformed community which he describes in these terms: "But deep persuasion of the particularism of the plan of salvation, and revulsion from Arminian evangelism, have sometimes been the occasion for the abandonment of evangelism altogether or, at least, for the denial of the full and free offer of the gospel to lost men." He speaks of "a conspicuous awkwardness and lack of spontaneity in the preaching of the free offer" (p. 131; cf. p. 146). He addresses himself to the problem at various points and in various contexts, but especially in "The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel," consisting of two articles written originally for a largely Christian Reformed readership when that denomination was involved in serious debate on the nature and extent of the love of God. Professor Murray did not permit the particularism of Calvinism to cancel out the free offer, nor did he view the free offer as destructive of particularism. The key to the spontaneity and urgency of Reformed evangelism lay in the foundation which particularism provided for the offer of genuinely good news to sinners. The purpose of particular redemption is not exclusion, but the manifestation of a salvation which is complete and wholly sufficient to meet the needs of the sinner. "The church cannot make a census of the elect nor of the reprobate" (p. 231), but it can proclaim Christ who is all that the sinner needs. "All that the atonement means and secures is that of which sinners dead in trespasses and sins are invited to become partakers" (p. 85). The value of the author's counsel in this area can only increase with time.

The second area worthy of express mention is Murray's conception of the Reformed life and world view. Fundamentalism has for so long conceived of the gospel in narrowly individualistic and pietistic terms that only under pressure to justify the relevance of its gospel to the needs of modern man, and with considerable awkwardness, has it begun to reflect in depth on the social "implications" of the gospel.

There is no comparable awkwardness when Murray writes in the middle of World War II, 1943, of "The Christian World Order." He is simply working out and applying the Reformed doctrines of repentance

("Good tidings without radical revolution would only confirm the world's sin and misery," p. 60) and sanctification (Christ did not simply bear the penalty of sin. "He bore our sins," p. 38). Long before the emergence of the modern and thoroughly secularized theologies of revolution and liberation, Murray had parried their thrust. "We must be bold to say that the Christian revelation does not allow us to do anything less than to formulate and work towards a Christian world order in the life that we now live" (p. 357). "There is, therefore, something drastic about the transformation that Christian order effects" (p. 359). He deplored the fact that "the economic and educational systems of this country are very largely devised and conducted in systematic disregard of the authority and will of God" (p. 351).

"The Christian World Order" is to be realized through the divinely established institutions of family, church, and state, each functioning in its own sphere, but under the authority of God revealed in the Bible. Especially noteworthy is the task assigned to civil government. "Civil government has its own distinct sphere of operation and jurisdiction. This sphere is that of guarding, maintaining, and promoting justice, order, and peace" (p. 253). *How wide?*

Interestingly enough, these three words, justice, order, and peace, appeared in a request by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1976, meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, addressed to its constituency. The request was that "all member churches of the RES give serious attention to the problems involved in creating an atmosphere of dissatisfaction and unrest in their own lands and throughout the world, and do all in their power as Christian churches to promote justice, order, and peace everywhere." The church does not exceed its own sphere of concern and competence in proclaiming the Word as it bears on the functions which belong properly to the state. "The church may not supinely stand aside and ignore political corruption" (p. 257). "Political revolution which contravenes the principles of God's Word" is to be denounced in pulpit and press; but "if political revolution is right; if it displaces usurpation and tyranny, and is in the interests of equity, the church may not refrain from expressing by like media the favourable judgment which the principles of the Word of God dictate" (p. 257).

In the closing years of his life, Professor Murray expended much of his waning energy in promoting the cause of Christian schools in Scotland. A welcome sample of this labor is provided in the final chapter on "Christian Education." In this lecture he declared, "Christianity is not something tacked on to our world view; it is itself a world view" (p. 372).

Not only his theology, but his vision for the impact of revealed truth in all of life is truly worthy of being called Reformed.

The debt we owe to the publisher of this volume is second only to the debt we owe to the author himself. But above all, our gratitude is to God and to the Lord of the New Covenant for the gifts and graces bestowed on John Murray for our benefit.

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