

verkieslik indien ons die empatiese God en die empatiese self beter wil verstaan (p. 249).

Davis redeneer dat empatiese taal oor God nie in die eerste plek met die eiename van God verband hou nie. In die empatiese taal gaan dit eerder oor die selfopenbaring van God waaruit telkens God se empatiese betrokkenheid by die mens afgelei kan word. Dit lei hom daartoe om te formuleer: "God, who has revealed himself as the creator, has also said: speak of me as one who is compassionate" (p. 250).

'n Hermeneutiese godsbeskouing wat met God se selfopenbaring verband hou, prioritiseer die goddelike en menslike empatie as 'n verskynsel wat sy oorsprong in die wese en selfopenbaring van God vind en nie in die wese van die mens nie (p. 251).

Ou-Testamentiese en kontemporêre narratiewe word gebruik om die teologie van empatie en kommunikasie aan die orde te stel. Hoewel empatie die fokus van die studie is en op teologiese vlak uiters bekwaam hanteer word, verval die werk ongelukkig in die moeras van filosofiese teologie en kom dit dus nie binne die vaarwaters van die praktiese nood van die menslike bestaan en die talle vrae van gelowiges oor God en die kerk se daadwerklike betrokkenheid by die mens en sy wêreld van nood uit nie.

Ten spyte van hierdie leemte word die boek sterk aanbeveel vir teoloë wat in die filosofie en die sistematiese teologie belangstel en nog bereid is om met gewigtige teologie van 'n hoë standaard om te gaan.

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RELUCTANT SAINT? A THEOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY OF FLETCHER OF MADELEY

Translated from the German by G. W. Knowles.

2001. London, Epworth Press, ix + 406 pp.

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It was said of Martyn Lloyd-Jones that whenever he felt depressed he would retreat to the eighteenth century and refresh himself with the accounts of the great Methodist preachers and revivals of the era. Surely he would have

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enjoyed this biography of Fletcher of Madeley, notwithstanding his different theological perspective.

Patrick Streiff's biography of Fletcher first appeared in German in 1984 and was quickly recognised as a major contribution to the history of Methodism. Streiff's research was very extensive and the sources used have been listed in a very helpful table at the end of the book. This table of sources, together with endnotes and an index occupy ninety-five pages. The fact that it is a translation is occasionally apparent, but the translation excels in simplicity of style, enhancing the readability of the work.

The subtitle of the book — a theological biography of Fletcher of Madeley — indicates the main objectives of the author. Firstly, to provide a life of Fletcher, and secondly, to give the reader insight into the theological world of eighteenth century England. Concerning the first objective, Streiff succeeds in providing a fine portrayal of a leading Methodist preacher and theologian. This was the man whom Wesley tried to persuade, on repeated occasions, to take over the leadership of the Methodist movement. As it turned out, Fletcher died before Wesley. In his funeral oration, Wesley described Fletcher as the holiest man he knew, and with good reason. His simple, sometimes almost naïve, sincerity, humility and love of God shine through the account.

But the most interesting aspect of this biography is the window it provides us into the spiritual and doctrinal world of the eighteenth century Methodist movement. The major controversy within this movement, which eventually divided it into two, was the Calvinist/Arminian one. Fletcher became the leading protagonist of Wesleyan Arminianism, although this is not how he saw himself. He understood his role as striving for a mediating position between what he called Bible Calvinism and Bible Arminianism. The Calvinist/Arminian controversy might not be a major issue today, yet it represents one of those perplexing tensions within Christian theology that has risen periodically to provoke controversy between the saints from earliest times (cf. Augustine in the 5th century, Gottschalk in the 9th century, the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century, Arminius and Jansen in the 17th century). In fact, whenever Christian thinkers take seriously the doctrinal convictions of the New Testament writers, especially St. Paul, the tension between divine sovereignty and human free will is likely to arise.

Eighteenth century Methodists were divided over predestination and perfection. The Wesleyans rejected the former and promoted the latter; and the Calvinists vice-versa. Not that the differences between them were great. Fletcher, along with other Wesleyan Methodists, strongly emphasised the helpless plight of the natural man, in bondage to sin and Satan and inca-

pable of any good work apart from the preveniant grace of God. So what was the difference between the Calvinistic and Arminian Methodists? The Calvinists saw predestination as the logical and Scriptural corollary of grace. In the eyes of Wesley and his followers the Calvinistic understanding of predestination was sheer fatalism. It also struck at the root of holiness and led inevitably to antinomianism. Whether the spectre of antinomianism was real or imaginary (and there did seem to be some cases of it in the Calvinistic camp) this was the great danger which Fletcher set himself to oppose in his many "Checks to Antinomianism." He did this, negatively, by opposing predestination, and positively, by promoting the doctrine of perfection. But Fletcher was also aware of the danger of Pharisaism in pursuing Christian perfection. To the end of his life he looked forward to being filled with Holy Spirit, without ever claiming the experience. He also continued to strive for reconciliation between contending Christian parties.

Streiff's "theological biography" contains much more, of course, than contentions over predestination. There are interesting accounts of Fletcher's relations to other Christian bodies: Baptists, Quakers and Roman Catholics. Fletcher supported Wesley's criticism of the American Revolution and wrote some tracts and books on that subject. His views on women in the ministry sought a mediating position and could be studied with profit by various protagonists of that contentious issue today.

In a letter to a friend in 1772 Fletcher wrote "Of late I have been brought to feed more upon Jesus as the truth . . . All out of him are but shadows. All in him are blessed sacraments, I mean visible signs of the fountain, or little vehicles to convey the streams of inwards grace." Such sentiments sum up the heart of the Methodist movement and the heart of the man who played such an important role in it. Streiff's biography of Fletcher of Madeley provides us with a valuable insight into both.

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