

## BOOK REVIEWS

Bebbington, D. W. *Patterns in History: A Christian View*. Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1979. xi + 211 pp. Paperback, \$7.25.

Bebbington, a professor of history at the University of Stirling in Scotland, received his D.Phil. at Cambridge. This book does not attempt to answer the question, "How should a Christian view history?," although this end may be accomplished in reading the book. Rather, the author analyzes the various concepts of how history works, presenting five conceptual frameworks. One of these five is the Christian view. He assumes a particular Christian stance and does little to defend this against alternative views that are put forth as Christian. The final conclusion is that the Christian view is most viable, at least for persons who have faith.

The book's first chapter provides an explanation of historical methods and problems, including the problem of "facts" versus "assumptions" and preconceptions that are brought to the study by the historian. In the next five chapters, each of the five conceptual frameworks is defined and discussed: the cyclical view, the Christian view, the progressive view, the historicist view, and the Marxist view. At the end of each chapter, the author suggests the advantages and problems of the view treated therein. Chap. 7 discusses the last four of the five views in terms of how they affect modern historiography. Then, the final chapter brings all the preceding into focus to show how the Christian view presents the truest meaning of history, and to indicate how the Christian historian should deal with the problems of using the Christian view in the academic world.

This reviewer's strongest complaint is with the chapter on "Cyclical History." Here the author pools together most philosophies of history evident in the ancient world. He includes some frameworks which do not contain room for even one complete cycle, claiming that they can be viewed as a segment of a cycle (such as the pessimist view being a downswing). Furthermore, it should be recognized that the Christian view itself contains major cycles too—cycles far more complete than some of the examples presented. At least Paul's concept of the first and second Adam contains a single complete cycle, as is also the case with Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Indeed, it seems to me that it is not so much the cyclical aspect of these "cyclical views" which Bebbington finds objectionable or contrary to Christianity, but rather their common element of fatalism. By contrast, in almost all Christian views of history, God is not subject to fate, and he may also allow man some freedom in the

determination of history. In other philosophies, however, not only man, but the gods themselves are helpless at the hand of fate. The title "Fatalist History" might provide a better description for the conclusions of this chapter.

The chapter on the Christian view is very worthwhile, especially the analysis that is afforded of millennial thought throughout time. There is a lack, however, in that the author bypasses the role of revelation in interpreting history, and has also neglected the question of accurate history as evidenced in the remarkable accuracy of biblical records. The role of providence is discussed, especially in the last chapter.

The chapters on the progressive and historicist views are profitable, particularly so the discussion of the results of this sort of thinking in modern affairs. Marxism is also described accurately, except for a slight misconception of Marx's central dogma. Bebbington states that Marx saw the economics of production as the controlling factor in history, whereas Marx actually said that the economics of *essential* production was controlling—the essentials being food, clothing, shelter, etc. This is one reason why Marxism cannot explain the economics of America and western Europe, where the vast majority of the population is more than adequately fed and housed. The author is correct in assessing Marx himself as not being a fatalist, although some of his followers have been so.

The larger part of chap. 7, which discusses the last four of the five views and how they affect the recording and study of events and cultures, deals with the concepts of progressive-positivist determinism and historicist-idealist freedom. Determinism and freedom are then examined in Marxist and Christian historiography. The author's conclusion is that both determinism and freedom are necessary for the balanced Christian view.

Showing that the progressive, historicist, and Marxist views grew out of Christianity as emphases of extremes, the last chapter suggests that these three views must return to their Christian roots for proper balance. When it comes to the practical aspects of the Christian historian in the academic world, Bebbington warns against compartmentalizing the Christian viewpoint from the practice of historiography. He counsels that providence should be recognized in the study of history, but in order to make it acceptable to the academic community it should be pruned of overt reference to God and providence. He claims that even without direct reference to God and providence, the published product will still exhibit to the academic community Christian values and a Christian view of history.