

Another revolutionary view that emerges as a result of this early dating of the NT documents is that the Gospel of John preserves early reliable historical material. John has been considered the least historical and most theological of the Gospels. In Robinson's words, "In fact John is at his most theological when he is most historical, and most historical when he is most theological. . . . His method is, as it were, to project two colour transparencies at once, one over the other" (p. 91).

But the crucial question is, Can we trust the NT in what it says about Christ, his preexistence, virgin birth, person, and miracles? Yes, says Robinson, but not in a literal and direct sense. What the Gospel writers did was to make explicit what was implicit in the words and work of Jesus. In the words of John as placed in his mouth by Browning, "What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars." As the Gospel writers reflected upon the life of Jesus, they were led to speak of preexistence, virgin birth, etc., in order to bring out his true significance. "But if we can learn to trust the New Testament for what it is trying to say, rather than for what it is not trying to say, then we may find ourselves concurring with the claim of St. John as much as any of the others, that 'his witness is true'—the real, inner truth of the history" (p. 112).

Robinson believes that the account of the trial and arrest of Jesus is trustworthy and that the empty tomb, while a solid piece of tradition, does not prove the resurrection. The appearances of Jesus to the disciples are difficult to discredit, but more important was the corporate awareness in the Church that Christ was a living presence. Yet all three must go together since there must not be too great a credibility gap between this awareness and the attestable historical phenomena. "The scholarship does not give me the faith; but it increases my confidence that my faith is not misplaced" (p. 134).

While the book is conservative in outlook, some will not be satisfied especially with Robinson's treatment of Jesus' person, preexistence, miracles, etc. Also while his dating of the NT is conservative, the evangelical must not gullibly accept it because of that fact, but must examine the evidence for himself and may even place the dating of some of the books at a later period. At any rate, Robinson has set forth his thesis clearly and persuasively, as usual, and invites serious dialogue.

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Stohlman, Martha Lou Lemmon. *John Witherspoon: Parson, Politician, Patriot*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976. 176 pp. Paperback, \$2.95.

Although few Americans know who John Witherspoon was, this man who served for many years as President of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) and played an active role in Revolutionary government deserves attention. Because only two biographies have been written, the last in 1925, Princeton Theological Seminary commissioned Martha Stohlman to write for the bicentennial "a compact, readable account of Witherspoon—something that Presbyterians, both clergy and laity, and Americans with any interest in history would enjoy" (p. 13). The author has fulfilled her commission admirably.

Witherspoon's biographer has had little to go on. Between the British troops who ransacked his office in Nassau Hall and Witherspoon's own order to his wife late in life to burn his papers, little correspondence has survived. Stohlman has had to depend upon Witherspoon's own published *Works*, some letters discovered in 1943 that Lyman Butterfield edited as *John Witherspoon Comes to America*, Ashbel Green's *The Reverend John Witherspoon*, which although written around 1840 did not appear in print until 1974, and Varnum Lansing Collins's two-volume *President Witherspoon*. She has woven her material into a connected and witty narrative.

Born in Scotland, Witherspoon, while being educated for the ministry, sided with the conservative Popularists against the Moderates in the Presbyterian church. Out of this debate came Witherspoon's first writings, and as he became increasingly involved in the dispute, he developed a knowledge of ecclesiastical law and skill in argument. His role as leader of the conservative cause brought him to the attention of the New Side Presbyterians in America who, after considerable effort at persuasion, convinced him to accept the presidency of the College of New Jersey.

Coming to America in 1768, Witherspoon first applied himself to raising funds for the College. On the academic side, he opposed Berkeley's idealism in favor of the Scottish common-sense philosophy, and in his own classes he introduced the at-that-time innovative lecture method. Although he was a stern disciplinarian he won widespread affection among the students.

But politics forced its way into the academic atmosphere. Early, Witherspoon sympathized with the Revolutionary cause and by 1774 was serving on a Committee of Correspondence. This political stance resulted from the respect for personal liberty, popular government, and honest expression that he had gained in Scotland. After defending the colonies through writing and speaking during the prerevolutionary era, he later served in the Continental Congress, where he advocated strong central government.

Throughout the war Witherspoon also struggled to keep his College together. In an attempt to gain funds for the school he served in the New Jersey legislature for a short time after the war, as well. Efforts to solve the financial problem kept him from doing much writing, an activity that blindness stopped completely during the last three years of his life. He died in 1794.

In telling this story, Stohlman has maintained a good sense of perspective. She suggests that Witherspoon did not achieve the prominence of the founding fathers for several reasons: He may have seemed a foreigner, he was a clergyman, he lacked family connections, and the nature of Congress did not give the ordinary member much chance at fame. Furthermore, his writings have not worn well because of excessive wordiness. Rather than politics, Stohlman concludes, Witherspoon's major influence was in education, an observation for which the title does not prepare the reader. *John Witherspoon* is popular biography at its best—accurate, perceptive, and readable. A note on sources indicates where the author obtained her information, but the lack of footnotes and index makes this a book for reading rather than for reasearch.