

BOOK REVIEWS

Abraham, William J. *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995. 115 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

The phenomenon of self-conscious confessional movements in a number of mainline Protestant denominations seeking to recover doctrinal "orthodoxy" is nothing new. It seems, however, that in recent years there has been an almost spontaneous revival of this process. The common thread in all of them seems to be a reaction to perceived modernity and rampant, relativistic pluralism.

Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia is representative of what could be construed as the Methodist version of confessional recovery (some would feel compelled to construe it as a cranky, schismatic rebellion). While Abraham's book could be considered a tract for the times or even a manifesto, it certainly is not propaganda or some kind of obscurantistic call for an ultra-right theological witch-hunt. The book embodies a well-thought-out historical and theological analysis of where United Methodism has been, is, and may be headed.

There is a major plot and an interesting subplot. Of course the major plot has to do with Abraham's call for Methodism to recognize its constitutionally grounded doctrinal standards and begin to recover them in a way that will reenergize Methodism in its worship, service, and witness. The subplot involves Abraham's almost compulsive opposition to the excesses of many who have misused the Wesleyan "Quadrilateral" in the service of pluralism, as well as his serious questioning of the heralded value of the Quadrilateral itself. In view of the rather wide consensus regarding the positive value of the "Quadrilateral," Abraham's attack should be taken very seriously. The consensus seems to transcend the traditional bounds of both evangelical and liberal Wesleyans.

Abraham is certainly persuasive when he scores those who have abused the "Quadrilateral" in the service of a quite widely accepted pluralistic agenda to relativize Methodist doctrine. But his critique of it cries out for further elaboration. One senses that Abraham has not only important practical criticisms, but also very serious historical, methodological, and even philosophical misgivings. I was left a bit bewildered as to exactly what Abraham was driving at in his somewhat intemperate attacks on the "Quadrilateral." One also senses that Abraham has only just begun to elaborate an important line of thought having to do not only with theological methodology, but also with the way doctrinal integrity relates to the broader issue of theological reflection.

A comparison with Thomas C. Oden's *Agenda for Theology* (1979), revised in 1990 as *After Modernity What?*, is in order. *Agenda for Theology* was Oden's opening salvo in what has turned out to be a protracted struggle with relativistic pluralism. Oden's work has not only involved severe criticisms of "modernity," but has featured a full-scale (and sustained) effort to positively construct an alternative through the recovery of what Oden terms "consensual orthodoxy." One hopes that *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* is only the prelude to a sustained treatment of the "Quadrilateral," of broader issues in theological methodology, and especially of the way basic, received doctrine relates to how Christian theologians go about theologizing.

In one sense this is an insider's book. It will probably be of most interest to United Methodists and other mainline Protestants involved in struggles for the doctrinal soul of their respective churches and traditions. But in another sense, it will also be of interest to Wesleyan specialists and others with concerns over theology and doctrine, the development of doctrine, and especially Wesleyan theological methodology.

Andrews University

WOODROW W. WHIDDEN

Anderson, Gerald H., Robert T. Coote, Norman A. Homer, and James M. Philips, eds. *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement*. American Society of Missiology Series, no. 19. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994. xviii + 654 pp. \$36.50.

Cooperative mission scholarship is not dead! Sixty-six authors and four editors produce in *Legacies* seventy-five biographical essays on key missionary personalities of the modern missionary era. The chronological range is from Charles Simeon (b. 1759) to Alan R. Tippett (b. 1911). The essays are grouped under seven major headings: (1) Promoters and Interpreters, (2) Africa, (3) China, (4) Southern Asia, (5) Theologians and Historians, (6) Theorists and Strategists, and (7) Administrators. Most essays conclude with bibliographies listing works both by and about the person described. Although mainline Protestant males from North America and Europe predominate, Roman Catholics, women, and six key leaders from Asia and Africa are also present.

The essays originally appeared in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, beginning in 1977 with Wilbert Shenk's essay on Henry Venn in what was then called *The Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*. This leads one to believe (and hope) that future collections may be forthcoming. Anyone interested in the recent history of world Christianity should find this volume a must read. It is a treasure chest of careful summary, balanced evaluations, little known facts, and human-interest tidbits. The scope and general quality are excellent. Most of the essays show careful research, clear writing, and even-handed evaluation—avoiding hagiography on one side and excessive criticism on the other. The chapters are amazingly consistent in general approach and even length—averaging about eight pages.

What struck me was the number of ways the book could be used. Besides being fascinating as a human-interest read, the volume is an obvious possible choice for a class in mission history. I recently used some of the essays for a seminar in mission strategy and practice. Reading about Roland Allen, Henry Venn, Frank Laubach, and Donald McGavran gives background to missions theory. Certainly those studying leadership can find valuable case studies here. Reading these stories reveals in a natural way the theological and personal convictions of these mission stalwarts. The list could go on, and demonstrates the many uses good biography can have.

Like all human productions this one is not perfect. One could wish for the inclusion of more women and non-Westerners, as the book itself recognizes (xvii). Seeing the continued (and growing?) influence in world mission of nonmainline Protestants like Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists, one wonders why not