

But overall, the author has produced a lucid, well-reasoned presentation of his thinking on the enterprise of Old Testament theology and has effectively reminded us of the centrality of the text in this enterprise. This book is recommended for all who are interested in the current status and future directions of the field.

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Clouser, Roy A. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Beliefs in Theories*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991. 330pp. \$39.95.

In his book, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, Roy A. Clouser (Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Trenton State College, Trenton, NJ) presents a "radical reinterpretation of the general relations of religion, science and philosophy" (xi). Such a correlation will be hereafter referred to as a religion-science-philosophy (RSP) correlation. In the four sections of his book Clouser gives definitions of religion, theory, supporting case studies, and finally, his "biblical" theory of reality.

Section One presents Clouser's definition of religion as belief in the divine category of self-existence. Religious belief perceives the divine either as part of one continuous reality or as discontinuous with creation. This definition encompasses unconsciously believing scientists, nonworshipping ancient Egyptians, amoral Epicureans, and Hindus without belief in a Supreme Being. All persons trust in the reliability of, and in some theoretical truth about, what is held as self-existent.

Section Two defines theories as explanations subject to justification. Clouser does not separate faith and reason; rather, he distinguishes justifiable theory from religious belief. While science explains aspects of experience, and philosophy explains their relation, religious belief regulates philosophy and science. There can be no justification of self-existence. Even the denial of a self-existent ground for the universe affirms the self-existence of the universe itself. *Faith* in the self-existent is essential to knowledge.

In *Section Three*, Clouser supports his definitions by case studies on the influence of belief in mathematics, physics, and psychology.

In *Section Four* Clouser discusses four concerns as he completes his proposal for RSP correlation: 1) On the basis of his understanding of religious language, Clouser critiques the reductionist identification of the nature of reality with some aspect(s) of reality, as incoherent and pantheistic or pagan. 2) He suggests that God is self-existent Creator and Sustainer, so that all created aspects are equally real, divinely caused, subject to a cosmic framework of laws, and understood only in connectedness. 3) He gives brief

suggestions for a theory of society and the state. 4) He outlines challenges involved in developing a biblical RSP correlation. Clouser expects mixed success because of the tenacity of pagan and scholastic theories, sinful inclination, and self-deception. He also regards "fundamentalistic" assumptions as counterproductive, and denies that Scripture can provide truths for theory-making; that God acts in His providence, by intervention, as he does in His covenant; and that science and philosophy can confirm religion. Instead, Clouser seeks RSP correlation based on presuppositions which regulate theories but do not explain experience (94-107).

Clouser's biblical critique of the myth of religious neutrality in theory-making is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on RSP correlation. His broad working definitions, supported by case studies; his understanding of religious language; his critique of reductionism; and his theories about nature, society, and the state, are grounded in the biblical teaching of creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, Clouser's proposal of biblical RSP correlation demonstrates the real difficulties one must overcome if committed to doing thoroughly biblical theology in the contemporary theological atmosphere.

Although this reviewer has no inclination to defend the *extreme* positions usually associated with the term "fundamentalism," which, as Clouser points out, "is used in a variety of ways and is applied to many different doctrines and attitudes" (94), Clouser's distinction between the regulatory function of belief and the explanatory function of theory seems also to be *extreme*. For example, biblical teachings may provide more than "a distinct perspective which delimits a range of acceptable hypotheses" (173). In what he affirms, Clouser stands in radical contrast with those who articulate theology internally, according to a tradition, or externally, in terms of scientific theory or philosophy (see Phillip Hefner, "Theology's Truth and Scientific Formulation," *Paradigms and Progress in Theology*; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The God Question and Modern Man*). However, in what he denies, Clouser stops short of a *thoroughly* biblical theory.

Clouser's work also leaves some questions unanswered. Can biblical Christianity be more useful for RSP correlation than other "biblical" religions? Can presupposition research be supplemented by research which uses biblical data in theory-making? Can God's creative, covenantal, and providential action provide data for scientific and philosophical theorizing?

Unless the questions above are answered negatively, Clouser's conclusion seems premature—that "it is simply a colossal error to suppose that because an event is religiously important, such as the importance of the flood to the covenant with Noah, that it must therefore be also of key importance to geology or any other science" (98). If the questions are answered affirmatively, then it may be simply a significant theoretical breakthrough to suppose that religiously important events may be of key importance to scientists and philosophers.

However, the positive contribution Clouser makes in answering objections to biblical RSP correlation need not be overshadowed by the questions raised above, and this clearly written book remains a helpful introduction to the issues involved.

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Coggins, James B. *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence and the Elect Nation*. Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1991. 232 pp. \$29.95.

In this well-documented study, James Coggins, the associate editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, provides a fascinating image not only of John Smyth's congregation but also of other Separatist groups in the Netherlands, as well as a clear description of the many strands of Anabaptism in that country at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the process he dispels many common incorrect assumptions concerning the origins of the Baptist movement.

He shows, for instance, that the members of the Gainsborough Separatists, far from being an assortment of poor and uneducated people, had a solid core of members who could read and write. Almost all of them were literate enough to sign their names to the covenant, something which was not common in those days. Furthermore, the assembly included a significant number of ministers who had left their livings because of royal repression, which explains their insistence on the use of the original biblical languages in the pulpit.

A careful study of J. Smyth's theological development, the author also reveals, proves that he had accepted believers' baptism before he came in contact with the Dutch Anabaptists. Coggins also makes a strong point to support the belief that the division between the Leiden and the Amsterdam Separatist congregations occurred in the Netherlands, as a result of theological disagreements, rather than in England because of geographical separation.

The author gives careful attention to the break between J. Smyth and T. Helwys, which was due primarily to a heated dispute on the former's compliance to a "principle of baptismal succession," which had led him to seek rebaptism by the Mennonites, after he had already rebaptized himself. Helwys, on the other hand, stressed the importance of a "spiritual succession" and rejected anything that echoed of the apostolic succession of the Catholics and the Anglicans.

For many readers, the most significant element of this book is the better understanding of the Separatist "covenant church" concept which it sets forth. At the heart of that idea is the radical commitment to follow truth