

BOOK REVIEW

of

John W. Robbins, editor,
The Church Effeminate,
The Trinity Foundation, 2001.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

When I first started to read this book, it seemed to me that a better title would simply be *The Church*, or something similar, as the book has a great deal to say about the Church. If you have wanted to read details on the Presbyterian form of Church government, and arguments that it is the best expression of that taught in the Bible, then you would do well to read Chapter 2 in *The Church Effeminate*, “The Apostolic Church,” by Thomas Witherow. If you are curious about exclusive psalmody in worship services, perhaps Chapter 7, “Exclusive Psalmody,” by W. Gary Crampton would be useful. If you wished to know more about evangelism, then Chapter 25, “Ought the Church to Pray for Revival?,” by Herman Hanko, Chapter 26, “The Great Revival of Religion, 1740-1745,” by Charles Hodge, Chapter 27, “The Power of the Word,” by Martin Luther, and Chapter 29, “What is Evangelism?,” by Gordon Clark would be valuable to read. If you have wanted to read about the continued necessity of reformation within the Church, then perhaps Chapter 30, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church,” by John Calvin, Chapter 31, “Idolatry,” by J.C. Ryle, Chapter 32, “Pharisees and Sadducees,” by J.C. Ryle, Chapter 33, “The Good Fight of Faith,” by J. Gresham Machen, Chapter 34, “Apostolic Fears,” by J.C. Ryle, and Chapter 35, “The Separateness of the Church,” by J. Gresham Machen would be a good place to start. But the topic that is most pervasive throughout the book is the importance of doctrine. For examples, see Chapter 4, “The Primacy of Preaching,” by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and Chapter 5, “Preaching to the Heart,” by Jay Adams.

However, after reading Chapter 12, “Paul on Women Speaking in Church,” by Benjamin Warfield, Chapter 13, “The Ordination of Women,” by Gordon Clark, and especially Chapter 14, “The Church Effeminate,” and Chapter 39, “The Church Irrational,” both by John Robbins, it becomes clear why the title of the book is what it is. Robbins contrasts the Church Militant with what he calls the Church Effeminate. Politically correct he is not, but both historically and theoretically he explains how the Church of today differs from the Apostolic Church. Simply stated, it differs doctrinally. The Apostolic Church was almost exclusively concerned with correct doctrine: teaching it and ordaining others to teach it. Whereas the Church of today, in large part, reflects the post-modernism of western society, and is much more concerned with tolerance, open-mindedness, compassion, not being judgmental, being open to the “truth” in other religions, and in being a loving, accepting community. Emphasis on these topics is, Robbins suggest, effeminate and not militant. Some, arguing for the new emphasis approvingly refer to it as feminine. While some of this is not necessarily wrong, when the anchor of the doctrine taught in Scripture has been lost, then so has the Gospel. Apparently human nature is such that this is easy to do, for it happens over and over again.

The book has a total of 39 chapters. In addition to the authors mentioned above, there are also chapters by Samuel Miller, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Jeremiah Burroughs, John Witherspoon, N.S. McFetridge, Godwell Chan, John à Lasco, and Thomas M’Crie. The book is divided into six parts. Part 1 is titled The Church Belonging to Jesus Christ. Part 2 is The Purpose of the Church. Part 3 is The Officers of the Church. Part 4 is Autocrats in the Church. Part 5 is The Growth of the Church. And Part 6 is The Purity and Peace of the Church. 6 of the topics of the book are mentioned above, but with 39 chapters comments on a few are only possible here. Since, it appears to me, that the topic most emphasized in the book is the need to concentrate on doctrine, and its implications, that will be the focus here.

In Chapter 4, Martyn Lloyd-Jones identifies several things that he considers has contributed to the lack of primacy of preaching in the Church: (1) Loss of belief in the authority of the Scriptures, (2) A lowered belief of the concept of truth, (3) A reaction against what he calls ‘pulpiters,’ i.e., great speakers that know how to handle a congregation and play on their emotions, (4) A lack of understanding as to what a sermon really is, and therefore of what preaching really is, (5) The increase in the element of entertainment in public worship, (6) The emphasis in some congregations on personal testimonies, and (7) The increasing emphasis upon counseling.

In Chapter 5, Jay Adams complains that “For years homileticians have been exhorting preachers to ‘preach to the heart.’ But what are they talking about? Do you know? Do *they*? Is the concept Biblical, and if so, how does one do it?” “To speak of peaching to the heart, then, is to speak of preaching that brings a definitive response; it is preaching that evokes words and action from the listener.” “If *heart* is used to refer to feelings or emotions as over against thought or intellect, that use is discordant with Scripture. Never in the Bible is the word *heart* set over against the head or the intellectual processes.”

In Chapter 14, John Robbins thinks of masculine Christianity as that that boldly proclaims Christian doctrine in the face of opposition: the Church militant. And by the Church effeminate he means the Church that downplays doctrine and emphasizes compassion, tolerance, self-fulfillment, pluralism, and counseling. The “masculine Christianity of the Reformers has long been displaced by the effeminate Christianity of the modern.” The “feminization of theology and the church is a consequence of mysticism and anti-intellectualism.” “What makes Christianity virile is its emphasis on the intellect, on logic, and on systematic thinking. Almost alone among the religions of the world, Christianity is the religion of the mind, not of the feelings, the imagination, or the will.”

In Chapter 39, John Robbins continues by accusing the modern Church of embracing irrationalism. “It is clear from Scripture that all knowledge, wisdom, and discernment come from God alone. It is equally clear that it is God who withholds knowledge, wisdom, and discernment from people. God darkens the minds and hardens the hearts of men; he withholds his knowledge and wisdom and sends delusions and lying spirits to men”. “Professed churches and professed Christians lack discernment today because they do not know or believe the truth.” “The cause of Christ has nothing to gain by vagueness, distortion, indirection, or irrationality. Because Christianity is the only rational religion – the only religion that teaches the truth – it has nothing to hide. Unbelief needs obscurity; it requires a vagueness; it demands grayness; it has everything to hide”.