

Shorter Reviews

Timothy R Phillips and Dennis L Okholm (eds) *The nature of confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in conversation*, (Downer Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1996) 298 pp.

As a 1980s movement postliberalism is a new boy on the theological block. Despite its name it differs from old-time liberalism as chalk from cheese. Where liberalism sought to reduce the gospel to the axioms and assumptions of Enlightenment (= modern) thought, postliberalism wants to do the reverse. It recognises that there is no foundation beyond Christ and the Scriptures, and that these particularities therefore constitute the very essence of the Christian faith. In the postliberal view our task is not to fit the Bible into the world, but rather to fit the world into the Bible.

Noises of this kind inevitably cause evangelical antennae to vibrate. Is it the case that evangelicals and postliberals could work together, or at least learn from each other? This book explores that possibility. It represents a symposium of papers and discussions from the Wheaton Theology Conference in 1995. Key questions are whether evangelicals can be non-foundationalists (like postliberals), or whether postliberals with their stress on intratextual coherence are really antirealists (as evangelicals suspect). The conversation between the two sides is lively, stimulating and suggestive.

A welcome presence in the book is an essay on the doctrine of the atonement by George Lindbeck, one of the founding fathers of postliberalism. It contrasts with most of the writings of postliberalism which to date have been mainly concerned with method. But a preoccupation with method alone is, as one commentator observes, rather like clearing your throat before a public lecture. You can only do it for a little while before your audience loses interest.

Brian K Smith

Nancy T. Ammerman *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 434 pp.

Every month a new stock of books lands on the shelves of Christian book stores purporting to provide the answers to the latest "crisis" in the Church. Nancy Ammerman has done her share of examining crises, publishing a few years ago a penetrating analysis of