

being willing to tackle the tough issues of life. This he does, but he also tackles them in a simple, uncomplicated way that will both enlighten and encourage readers.

Pam Betker

The Sensate Culture: Western Civilization between Chaos and Transformation. By Harold O. J. Brown. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996. 257 pp. \$21.99.

Based on the work of the Russian scholar Pitirim Sorokin and in the tradition of Francis A. Schaeffer, Brown, now retired professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, offers a contemporary survey of socioculturalism.

Brown says Western culture is decaying from the inside out. And why? Because people have deliberately rejected the "personal God of the Bible" and spiritual truth for "a sensate materialism that recognizes no reality but that which can be seen, heard, smelled, and felt" (p. 24). This is clearly evident when one examines the crisis in the arts, systems of truth, religion, ethics, law, democratic theology, education, and medicine. The repercussions of rejecting the God of the Bible and at the same time embracing materialistic hedonism are so great that it will involve the rest of the world. This may very well be the case because "all the nations of the earth, with their distinctive cultures and patterns of life, are becoming even more closely interconnected" (p. 203). In view of those evidences, will this society be able to survive its own decay? Brown suggests that "our culture is now at a crucial point. It must either experience a far-reaching orientation and renewal, or it must disintegrate in chaos" (p. 215).

Is there any hope for Western civilization? Brown is correct in assuming that "our systemwide crisis needs a systemwide solution" (p. 210). "An integrated system," he says, "exhibits an integrated, coherent world and life view, but as the sensate culture ripens and begins to decay, it also disintegrates and manifests mutually conflicting trends and views" (p. 215). No materialistic ideology (e.g., Nazism or Marxism) provides the stability a culture so desperately needs (p. 216). The answer, of course, lies in the God of the Bible (p. 251).

However, is it possible for a culture that has intentionally rejected its "Christian heritage" (p. 240), to find that the God of the Bible is the remedy for its decadence? Brown believes that "there is a spot of bright light on this pessimistic landscape; indeed, it could be the glow that marks the sun shining through clouds that are beginning to break up and scatter. If human beings are made in the image of the divine, then man and human society cannot indefinitely be deaf to the voice of conscience and blind to the vision of virtue" (p. 235). He further states, "As people become more aware that our overripe sensate culture is nearing disaster, it is not unreasonable to hope that large numbers of them will be willing to listen once more to the counsel and principles that brought about the great shift from moribund paganism to early Christianity sixteen hundred years ago [in the Roman Empire]" (ibid.). Brown adds, "Whether or not one believes in the God of the Scripture, it is undeniable that several systems that have systematically repudiated faith in him have made shipwrecks of themselves, destroying tens of millions of lives and immeasurable human happiness in the process" (p. 249).

The Sensate Culture is an excellent, thought-provoking work. Like Schaeffer, Brown paints with a broad brush that yields a grievous portrait but with a glimmer of hope. The content is both rich and deep as Brown uses intellectual ideas, social history, and the Bible to build his arguments. He is correct in affirming that the God of the Bible provides the stability so urgently needed.

However, the broad usefulness of this work may be questioned, because it is limited to people who are familiar with history, social theory, and philosophy. As society moves away from educating minds with the "great books of Western civilization," the terms Brown uses become more unfamiliar each day. His bibliography features some of those important works that every person should know. A glossary of terms would be helpful. Though Brown's writing style is clear, the book's small margins and small print take away from what he is attempting to convey.

What civilization needs is a "Reformation" back to the God of the Bible, a "Reformation" that will impact every aspect of society.

Paul R. Shockley with Robert P. Lightner

Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation. By Miroslav Volf. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 336 pp. \$22.50.

This highly acclaimed work by a professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, addresses the nature and possibility of genuine Christian reconciliation in the late twentieth century. A native Croatian, Volf has witnessed the realities of ethnic violence in a way that will forever prevent him from accepting the platitudes of outsiders, and his realistic discussions of evil, justice, and human nature are fresh, well informed, and thoroughly persuasive. Volf recognizes that violence escalates through cycles of collective self-justification and blame, and he refuses to take part in the system, calling instead for confession and forgiveness.

At the heart of his proposal stands the image of the "embrace," consisting of opening one's arms in invitation, waiting for the other to respond, gently closing one's arms again in mutual giving and receiving, then opening them again to release the other. Such an embrace involves risk, but Volf is quick to point out that both the invitation and the response demand confession. The two sides may not have sinned equally, but they have both sinned, and acknowledgement of that sin precedes any genuine reconciliation.

The task is complicated by varying concepts of justice and the difficulty of dialogue in a postmodern environment, but Volf deftly guides the reader through those issues, arguing that agreement on justice demands a "double vision" in which each side makes room for the perspective of the other. He recognizes the idealistic tone of this discussion, but his exacting arguments point forward to the eschaton, when the "unjust justice" and incomplete forgiveness of our experience will be replaced by true justice and perfect love. In the meantime people must pursue justice while refusing to get caught up in the cycle of violence. Volf writes, "But if one decides to put on soldier's gear instead of carrying one's cross, one should not seek legitimation in the religion that worships the crucified Messiah. For there, the blessing is given not to the violent but to the meek (Matthew 5:5)" (p. 306).

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