

Review of *Ethik*, by Thomas Schirrmacher (Hänsler: Neuhausen), 2 volumes, 1994, total 1900 pages. and *Der Römerbrief*, by Thomas Schirrmacher (Hänsler: Neuhausen), 2 volumes, 1994, total 600 pages

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Ethics

Schirrmacher's two volume ethics, the first evangelical ethics in German for decades and published by the leading evangelical publisher in Germany, is something like Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law* in German, even though the style is much different because Schirrmacher argues less philosophically and more exegetically. Schirrmacher writes from a Reformed and theonomic viewpoint but very often presents positions different from those discussed in modern Reformed and theonomic writings, as Schirrmacher heavily uses older German and European exegetes. For example, he follows the exegesis of Wilhelm Lütgert's commentary of 1919 proving that Galatians is not only fighting legalists but also a second party of Paul's opponents who were totally opposed to the Old Testament and the law and lived immorally in the name of Christian freedom. In Romans 2: 14-15, to take another example, Schirrmacher does not find natural law, but together with Augustine and many European exegetes, he believes that Paul is speaking about heathen Christians, who originally ("from nature") did not know the law, but now live according to it and thus are an example to the Jews.

Most of Schirrmacher's 50 chapters start with a typical question such as "Is the Sermon on the Mount still valid?", "Is it allowed to take an oath?", "Is a Christian state possible?" or they discuss specific problems such as abortion or the death penalty. Thus it is easier for evangelical readers to understand why ethics is necessary. As every chapter can be read by itself, many people will read parts of the books who normally do not study this sort of work of systematic theology. Schirrmacher also has in mind that most evangelical and Christian readers actually do not know the Bible. Therefore he prints most of the Bible texts he is discussing or using as prooftexts. Often he will repeat those texts in an extra box after he has stated his case.

Schirrmacher not only teaches ethics but is professor of missiology. He seems more interested in reaching readers in general than in impressing other theologians (not to

mention liberal theologians). It is a pity that there will not be many theological reactions to Schirmacher's ethics which could start a fruitful discussion, as there are very few Reformed theologians in the German speaking world and virtually none who can discuss ethical problems en large. At the same time the English speaking world probably won't read the volumes because of the language barrier. And an English translation is not in view because normally only liberal works are translated from German into English.

Romans

This unusual commentary on Romans is at the same time an introduction to Reformed dogmatics and ethics. Schirmacher always starts with half a chapter and its exegesis, then summarizes what this text means for dogmatics and ethics and then discusses the same topic throughout the whole Bible or specific other texts. So the reader learns to start his systematic thinking with the Bible itself but also to proceed to the central topics of theology. The book is used as a theological textbook and as curriculum for the German Theological Education by Extension Seminary and thus is structured by pedagogical purposes.

Schirmacher is a Reformed professor of missiology, who at the same time teaches ethics, and he sees Romans as a great systematic letter to prove world mission to be valid and necessary. The best in biblical theology argues for world mission, he states again and again. For him Systematic and Practical Theology are just two sides of the same coin. Therefore he never stops with exegesis even though he often offers heavy exegesis and thoroughly discusses different views on a certain text. In Romans 2: 14-15, to take just one example, Schirmacher discusses the three main positions on the text, but for himself does not find natural law here. Together with Augustine and many European exegetes, he believes that Paul is speaking about heather Christians, who originally ("from nature") did not know the law, but now live according to it and thus are an example to the Jews. Romans 7 speaks about Paul as a Christian, because for Schirmacher Paul leaves the question of how to become a Christian after Romans 5:1 and takes for granted that the works of the law do not save. Romans 7 teaches, according to Schirmacher, that even a Christian cannot live according to the law of God and only Christ can fulfill his law through his Spirit in us (Romans 8:3-4). This presupposes that the moral law still is valid, but cannot be separated from Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Of special interest is the extra chapter on six major views on eschatology after the comments on Romans 11. In several tables, he compares dispensational premillennialism, historic premillennialism, historic amillennialism, historic postmillennialism, præterist amillennialism and præterist postmillennialism, which seems to be Schirmacher's own position. Compared to the rest of the commentary Schirmacher states his case quite softly when it comes to eschatology (and to baptism), even though everybody can know his position. The reason probably is the fact that the book is published by the leading evangelical publisher in Germany and is used by a wide range of evangelical institutions

of theological learning.