

Weremchuk, Max S. *John Nelson Darby: A Biography*. Updated and expanded ed. El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary Press, 2021. 214 pp. + 16 pp. (back matter).

John Nelson Darby is a fairly well-known figure in church history, but not always one who is known accurately. Writers sometimes label him as the founder of the Plymouth Brethren (which he was not) or as the man who invented dispensationalism (which he did not). Rather he deeply influenced these movements in their early history. Throwing further light on Darby and his contribution would be a welcomed contribution to historical understanding.

Max Weremchuk attempts to provide a fuller picture of Darby's life, but his attempt is not a complete success. This biography, a revision of an edition published in 1992, seeks to be more edifying than scholarly. The author does not discount scholarly research on Darby—and hints at other studies to come—but his purpose is more to present the personal life of Darby. Such an emphasis is welcomed toward contributing to a better understanding of Darby's character, but it leaves the reader wishing for a bit more.

Part of the problem is the author's determination to communicate the details of Darby's life—too much detail at times. The book relies heavily on block quotations. Although this method demonstrates that the author's points rest on primary sources, it is stylistically deadening. The author also devotes too much space in the text (rather than footnotes) to dealing with matters of detail such as the chronology of the events of Darby's life. More summarizing or editing of the selections from the quoted material along with moving technical points to the footnotes would help the work to flow better and better highlight the main points the author is making.

Weremchuk succeeds in providing insight into Darby's life and heart, but often the reader could profit from knowing more of the historical setting. At one point the author quotes Darby: "I felt God, out of England, gave me the French speaking countries as a field of labour, perhaps America also, and in fact this did not fail. In His constant goodness He added part of Germany." The problem is that Weremchuk provides little detail in the narrative of the wide ministry represented in this statement, although in an appendix he does provide a helpful timeline that gives some context. Integrating Darby's views and personal reflections more into Darby's historical context would in fact help the reader grasp those views and reflections better.

Fortunately, there are positive aspects to the book. It is refreshing to hear a sympathetic author review Darby's life, particularly because he is a controversial figure who has often drawn a negative press. Although one might regret that the book does not give greater place to Darby's theology or the controversies in which he participated, the author gives good emphasis to Darby's devotional and church life. The reader likely understands his character a little more. Also, although the large quotations from primary sources work to the detriment of the flow, some of the selections do provide insight into Darby's thought. For example, the final appendix—a writing by Darby titled "What Do I Learn from Scripture?"—not only sums up Darby's views but also illustrates something of his method, such as his resistance to formal statements of faith.

So, in brief, the work is a sympathetic biography that casts light on Darby's views and personal character. The author mentions in his "Foreword" (which technically should be a preface) that in this

revision he took to heart some of the criticism of his first edition. Perhaps this present book is another step toward bringing the story of Darby to the public, to be followed by a more scholarly work that the author intimates is yet to come.

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