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BOOK NOTICES

John H. Armstrong

**MY ONLY COMFORT: DEATH, DELIVERANCE, AND
DISCIPLESHIP IN THE MUSIC OF BACH**

Calvin R. Stapert

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)

241 pages, paper, \$16.00

In the history of Western music there can be little doubt that J. S. Bach is the unsurpassed master of both musical technique joined with profound theological and biblical thought. Bach, a faithful Lutheran, brought his great knowledge of the Scripture to all his work. Calvin Stapert, a professor of music at Calvin College, wrote this unique guide to the theological roots of the master musician's work in order to coincide with the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Bach's death.

Stapert provides an introduction to Bach's life, his theological knowledge (which was quite profound), his musical language, and the various genres of sacred music in his corpus. Besides taking the reader through major Bach pieces, showing how he uses principal doctrines in each piece, Stapert relates each work to quotations from *The Heidelberg Catechism*. This is a fresh, original interpretation from a clearly Reformational perspective that can be used with great profit by both the professional musician as well as the interested non-musician. A wonderful book that is highly recommended.

THE FINGERPRINTS OF GOD: TRACKING THE DIVINE SUSPECT THROUGH A HISTORY OF IMAGES

Robert Farrar Capon
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)
163 pages, paper, \$15.00

Capon is an Episcopal priest who is the author of numerous helpful books for serious biblical preachers, including *The Foolishness of Preaching* and *The Parables of Grace*, two wonderful books that ministers should own and read.

In this present book he asks, "How shall we understand God? The Trinity? The Bible?" He argues, correctly, that most of the time we conceive of answers to these questions through images, many of which are quite wrong. He develops the history of images and shows how they can and should be used to talk about God and the nature of Scripture. The Bible, says Capon, "is the mystery story of God's hidden presence as the Divine Suspect behind all history."

In the second part of this provocative and useful volume Capon surveys the work of major thinkers in church history, including Irenaeus, Athanasius, Anselm, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, and Julian of Norwich. This section lends a particular well-roundedness to the arguments made.

131 CHRISTIANS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW

Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, editors
Nashville: Broadman & Holman (2000)
384 pages, paper, \$14.99

This lovely book would be useful for almost any conceivable church context. It surveys the lives of theologians, evangelists, missionaries, pastors, musicians, artists,

poets, rulers, scholars, scientists and martyrs. It covers each entry in three pages or less and includes a telling quotation from the person surveyed and a helpful historical timeline graphic. It is arranged topically and includes a very good subject index. For those who find history hard to teach, and who doesn't, this is the book you have been looking for. Get it, read it, and then buy copies for others. It is wonderfully written and marvelously laid out in both design and conception.

THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY: ROMANS

Douglas J. Moo
Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2000)
532 pages, cloth, \$26.99

Moo, who is now the Blanchard Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, is a first-rate New Testament scholar. This is one of the better volumes in this series. It does a great job in giving the preacher/teacher the essence of what the epistle says, in quite simple prose, and also provides good insights into how evangelical interpreters have applied the text. Moo's thesis about Romans is quite parallel to that of Martin Luther. This means the reader should know this going into the work and read and use it accordingly. I would urge faithful expositors to put this work alongside of Thomas Schreiner's masterful exegetical commentary on Romans (Baker). By this procedure the skillful student will be able to compare and contrast interpretations that ought to be seriously weighed.

THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY: JOHN

Gary M. Burge
 Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2000)
 618 pages, cloth, \$26.99

To borrow a biblical saying, and to revise it slightly for use it in the present context, one might say "of the making of commentaries on the Fourth Gospel there is no end." Burge has given a good deal of his academic career to exegetical and theological work in the Fourth Gospel and the letters of John. He does a fairly good job of bridging the ancient text to the present modern context, a feature of this series that often makes these volumes worthwhile for American pastors and Sunday school teachers. What makes this volume valuable is precisely this attempt at "modern application" which often provides stimulating, if not sometimes brilliant, application.

TWO VIEWS OF HELL: A BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson
 Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2000)
 228 pages, paper, \$12.99

I am inclined to think that no subject brings more disagreement among modern evangelicals than the nature of hell. That hell is real, and that it is terrible, is agreed upon by all who take the authority of the Bible seriously. What is not agreed upon, so readily, is the nature of the torment that constitutes the reality of hell. Is the suffering experienced conscious and eternal, or is temporal, perhaps even remedial?

Fudge, the author of a modern defense of a temporal suffering in hell, *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case*

for *Conditional Immortality*, presents his case and is rebutted by an able Reformed exegete, Robert A. Peterson, professor of theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, and author of *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment*. The debate here is frank, honest, and serious. Both authors make a scriptural case for their view. They both challenge the reader to think beyond categories that they might normally be comfortable with in dealing with such a difficult doctrine. I highly recommend this book for pastors and serious lay readers alike.

THE CALL OF GRACE: HOW THE COVENANT ILLUMINES SALVATION AND EVANGELISM

Norman Shepherd
 Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed (2000)
 110 pages, paper, \$8.99

Norman Shepherd, a retired Christian Reformed church minister, and former professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (1963-1981), provides for Reformed readers and preachers a lucid and "controversial" reading of the law/gospel paradigm that often confuses biblical texts because it reads concepts into the Scriptures which are foreign to the Bible itself. Shepherd shows how unscriptural the notion of "merit" actually is and thus reveals *how* obedience properly relates to saving faith.

This little book is pregnant with ideas that every Reformed reader should seriously grapple with before rejecting them as out of turn. Examples abound. Shepherd writes, for example, that:

The structure of the new covenant can give no comfort to the legalists because salvation is a matter of gracious promise,

not meritorious achievement. But at the same time, the new covenant gives no comfort to the antinomians. The free gift of salvation is received through faith, and saving faith is not a dead faith, but a living and active faith (57).

Another amazing example of Shepherd's careful and provocative insight can be seen near the end of the book when he writes:

It is both striking and significant that the Great Commission in neither Matthew nor Luke speaks of calling upon sinners to believe. Faith is not mentioned specifically, but only by implication. What is explicitly asserted is the call to repentance and obedience. When the call to faith is isolated from the call to obedience, as it frequently is, the effect is to make good works into a supplement to salvation or simply the evidence of salvation (104).

This is a book that will not please many typical Calvinists but needs to be reckoned with nonetheless. I do not agree with Shepherd in the way he relates the call of the gospel to baptism, for example, but I find his major arguments both compelling and helpful at crucial points.

THE SPIRITUAL QUEST: PURSUING CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Luder G. Whitlock, Jr.
Grand Rapids: Baker (2000)
185 pages, paper, \$12.99

What does it really mean to "be conformed to the image of God" or to grow up into Christ? Christians are generally unclear in their answers, if not downright confused. We speak a lot about maturity in our evan-

gelical circles, even writing and commending self-help volumes that read more like "sanctification for dummies" than sober biblical manuals for real users. It is time we had a clear, biblical, non-quixotic treatment that dodges no important question and gives no pat answers. Luder Whitlock understands this problem and has thus written a sane, sound, and satisfying book. Read it and give it to growing believers. They will be glad you cared enough for them to provide such solid food.

THE SMELL OF SAWDUST: WHAT EVANGELICALS CAN LEARN FROM THEIR FUNDAMENTALIST HERITAGE

Richard J. Mouw
Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2000)
159 pages, cloth, \$14.99

Richard Mouw, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, knows the traditions of fundamentalism, having grown up seeing the "sawdust trail." He is concerned, after a lifetime of seeking to correct the abuses he sees in the past, that we might have forgotten much of the good of the tradition we rejected. He states that his purpose, in this sorting out process, is "the simplicity that lies beyond the complexity."

Chapter titles include: "A Label Worth Wearing," "Mindful Evangelicalism," "Fundamentalism Revisited," "Dispensational Blessings," "Preaching the Blood," and "A Word Hidden in the Heart." One example of Mouw's concern comes through in his chapter on evangelism. He believes "real" evangelism must contain three components: (1) Conversion—people's lives must change. (2) The experience of conversion—we want people to know they are saved. (3) The acceptance of some important *cognitive content*—we want people to understand and believe the truth

of the gospel (116). This is a reflective and insightful read, especially for those who have the background to appreciate Mouw's journey, one probably shared by many readers of this publication.

SIN, DEATH AND THE DEVIL

Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, editors
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)
132 pages, paper, \$15.00

Carl Braaten, a retired Lutheran professor of theology, directs the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, Northfield, Minnesota, while Robert Jenson, also a Lutheran systematic theologian, is the senior scholar for research at the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. Together they have previously edited six volumes that have come from addresses given at their annual conference in Minnesota. This present work is the seventh such volume.

Luther referred to sin, death and the devil as "the unholy trinity." They are the classical enemies of God in Scripture and the virulent oppressors of humanity. In these essays the writers take their cue from John Paul II's description of Western society as a "culture of death." Essays deal with "original sin" and "the eucharist as a sacrament of union." Another chapter bears the title, "Christ and the Devil," while the final essay is, "O Death, Where Is Your Sting?" Colin Gunton, professor of theology at King's College, Oxford, writes on the cover, "The best theological treatments of evil—those that take it with due seriousness—are those that see it in the light of its overcoming through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus." He notes that this volume contains "some profound and brilliant papers." I concur.

TAKING RELIGION TO SCHOOL: CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND SECULAR EDUCATION

Stephen H. Webb
Grand Rapids: Brazos Press (2000)
253 pages, paper, \$19.99

Brazos Press is a new imprint of Baker Book House that intends to explore academic concerns that are important to both the church and the academy. The author of this title, Stephen Webb, is associate professor of religion and philosophy at Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana. He also believes that the teaching of religion in public high schools and colleges is serious business, one that should be undertaken not simply as a disguise for Christian faith. He also believes religious teaching is an activity that must be done forthrightly through an honest dealing with pluralism and the multitudinous ways that religion can and should be expressed in a secular setting.

An example of the way Webb thinks can be seen in the way he addresses the question: "What would it look like to teach religion more directly, and thus more theologically, in the secular classroom?" (85) He believes there are two models to be considered, both of which have something to commend them. One is to teach religion "like teaching a foreign language" (86), thus teaching the rules of grammar, as it were, to those who know almost nothing about the language itself. The second model Webb calls "the metaphor of passing." By this he means the teacher "hides" (or, "passes" over) one's own views in order to be a faithful representative of the subject at hand. (An example would be a Protestant teaching Thomas Aquinas in the classroom as if he were in agreement with Aquinas' Roman Catholic theological premises, when in fact he was not, for the sake of both method and fairness.) Webb argues that both models have things to commend them and elements that

should cause us to question them as well. This is typical of the kind of issues honestly faced by Webb. This is an intriguing autobiographical account that will benefit all who are serious about the subject of religious faith and the secular school.

***BETWEEN TWO HORIZONS: SPANNING NEW
TESTAMENT STUDIES & SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY***

Joel B. Green and Max Turner, editors

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)

246 pages, paper, \$18.00

Contributors to this extremely important volume include, among others: Stephen E. Fowl, John Goldingay, Trevor Hart, Steve Motyer, N. T. Wright, and the editors. The question of how to bridge the centuries-old gap between the disciplines of systematic theology and biblical exegesis is the issue at stake in the so-called "Two Horizons." How should systematic theology be used to read Scripture? What does Scripture have to do with doing productive and useful theology? And what does biblical hermeneutics have to do with the bridge?

Though this volume is actually an introduction to the *Two Horizon Commentary* series it stands on its own as a wonderful introduction to the disciplines addressed. The question addressed here is actually simple—how can readers understand individual books in the New Testament theologically in their ancient context and then interpret them properly for a context now removed by nearly twenty centuries? This book could well open up new vistas of thought for serious students of the Bible and theology. I look forward to the commentaries themselves, especially after reading these weighty but accessible essays.

***THE LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS: THE ANCHOR
BIBLE (VOLUME 32B)***

Abraham J. Malherbe

New York: Doubleday (2000)

508 pages, cloth, \$50.00

Malherbe offers not only a commentary on these two Pauline letters but, consistent with this series, provides a fresh and original translation. He vividly opens up the social, cultural and philosophical context in which the Thessalonians lived. Detailed introductions help the reader get a sense of both the what and why of these epistles.

This series, like all such series, is uneven. The authors do not always represent evangelical convictions but they often open up matters evangelicals are prone to miss in their reading of both the text and the background literature. Because those to whom Paul wrote these letters were new to the Christian faith, and because Paul had deep pastoral concerns for his readers, the two Thessalonian letters open up some extremely important issues for modern Christian leaders. Malherbe uses a clear and simple style that does not put off the serious reader. He is a published scholar of note who is now the emeritus professor of New Testament Criticism at Yale University.

***A GLOBAL HISTORY OF CHRISTIANS: HOW EVERYDAY
BELIEVERS EXPERIENCED THEIR WORLD***

Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg

Grand Rapids: Baker (2000)

486 pages, paper, \$26.99

What happens when two professors of history write on the social, cultural and popular sides of Chris-

tian history? Answer: You get a marvelous book which beautifully covers the scope of worldwide Christianity from a vantage point that opens up entire new vistas of understanding for Christians.

The multicultural approach allows the authors to open up both the theologies that are considered orthodox as well as those marginal and fringe views that are, or were, held by committed believers. Key developments both in the church, and in society, are addressed and much attention is given to native cultures. Also included are brief treatments of key persons.

This book could well serve as a kind of crossover text, serving both for missions courses and as a supplemental church history text. It is, at times, positively exciting in the way it helps us to break out of "our box" as western Christians. Both pastors and interested lay readers will profit.

JOHN NEWTON AND THE ENGLISH EVANGELICAL TRADITION

D. Bruce Hindmarsh
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2000)
366 pages, paper, \$30.00

The famous author of the world's best known hymn, "Amazing Grace," should be better known to modern Christians. Too much popular myth making surrounds the life of this man of faith. Hindmarsh allows us to see the real Newton, the converted slave-trader who only came to see the evil of this system some years after his conversion, and the Church of England clergyman who loved the whole body of Christ deeply.

The author draws upon previously unused antiquarian source material and thus writes a scholarly book that will be useful for all readers who want to understand John

Newton (1725-1807), both his life and theology. British evangelical historian David Bebbington says that this highly acclaimed work is, "Certainly the best introduction to the world of eighteenth-century evangelicalism in England." That is enough commendation for any interested reader. This book is not only good history but it reads nicely and moves the reader to give thanks to God for the life of the *real* John Newton.

WHO IS JESUS? HISTORY IN THE PERFECT SENSE

Leander E. Keck
Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press (2000)
207 pages, cloth, \$24.95

The study of the historical Jesus has borne much fruit, both good and bad. The infamous Jesus Seminar is a clear example of the latter. This book, with some exceptions, is an example of the former. Keck allows the reader to explore the major issues of the human life of Jesus; his Jewishness, his teaching, his death, and his significance for moral life and discipleship. Paul Achtemier is surely correct in noting that Keck provides, "A good antidote for facile answers to hard historical and theological questions about the reality and significance of Jesus of Nazareth, it is critically acute and theologically perceptive."

Keck believes that Jesus did expect the imminent arrival of his kingdom, which will rightly trouble readers. The point he makes can be taken as sound so long as we properly understand the meaning of "the arrival of the kingdom." Don't let issues that are troublesome stop you from benefiting from this book if you are a serious student of the historical Jesus. There is much here that is worth wrestling with by orthodox believers.