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A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

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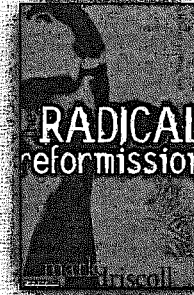
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**REVIVAL**  
*JOURNAL*

*A Quarterly for Church Renewal*

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VOLUME 14 · NUMBER 3 · 2005

## BOOK REVIEWS



*THE RADICAL REFORMATION:  
REACHING OUT WITHOUT SELLING OUT*  
Mark Driscoll  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004  
200 pages, paper, \$14.99

The author is pastor of Mars Hill Church in downtown Seattle. His book's title and subtitle are good clues to his purpose. Driscoll wants to help believing Christians let God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit work through them to reach the "lost," which is a New Testament description of those who do not know God as revealed in Christ. His theme is mission, not in the sense of "overseas missions" but of mission of Christian communities to their immediately surrounding neighborhoods. Driscoll thinks this will require many churches and individual believers to reform their thinking and acting as Christians, especially regarding what evangelism is and regarding how to relate to the many cultures in our postmodern world.

Driscoll carries out this purpose of reforming our standard views of mission in two major steps. Part one of the book, "Loving our Lord Through the Gospel," has three chapters on Jesus' example as a paradigm for mission today. These chapters define the gospel that Christians should bring to unbelievers and address the implications of the two standard views of mission for contemporary evangelism.

Part two, "Loving Your Neighbor in the Culture," has four chapters about culture and ways Christians do (and should) relate to culture. The first of these summarizes some perspectives

on what a culture is and reminds readers that our traditional and untraditional churches also have a culture, which may help or impede evangelism. The second chapter in part two provides more ways of understanding culture, but focuses on helping believers discern positive and negative in culture and to avoid false generalizations about culture. The third chapter in part two describes two erroneous ways to relate to culture, the way of syncretism and the way of sectarianism, and uses the drinking of alcohol as a test case for discerning good and evil in culture. The fourth chapter in part two focuses on the much discussed and debated concepts of modernism and postmodernism, assessing them from the norms of a Christ-centered kingdom-culture.

In the conclusion, Driscoll identifies features of a kingdom culture, and in the epilogue he draws on futurologists to describe probable trends in contemporary and near-future culture. The book also contains several short "stand alone" interviews with Christians deeply engaged in the popular culture.

Driscoll's presentation style includes humor, concrete examples from his own experience, and good summaries of pertinent sociological research by others. The book is very accessible to non-academically trained readers. But it also contains major substance, which should also engage academically trained readers. The book is theologically orthodox (Trinitarian/Incarnationalist); it is neither superficial nor simplistic; it is intellectually coherent; and it effectively addresses a subject at the center (or should be) of every believer and believing community.

The remainder of this review will engage several of Driscoll's most important points and conclude with a very positive assessment.

Driscoll starts with an insight from the great missionary, Lesslie Newbigin, that three realities must always come together: the Christian gospel of God's love in Christ, specific cultures, and the church. Driscoll's major concern and interest in this book is the right interrelation among them. One distorted relation is *gospel and church without culture*. In this

paradigm a Christian community builds a wall of condemnation and self-righteousness separating itself from the surrounding culture(s). A second distorted paradigm is *church with culture, without the gospel*. Here the church allows itself to be massively shaped by the ideals and anxieties of its surrounding, sinful culture, but loses its grip on the distinctive Christian gospel of God's reaching out in Jesus and the Holy Spirit to confront, challenge, heal, and renew sinful people in sinful cultures. A third distortion is *gospel and culture without the church*. Many Christians have given up on the traditional, institutional churches and organize themselves according to social grouping or job or gender or generation. They have cut themselves off from the tradition of God's people, often from its theological, worship, and sacramental resources. If the conservative, fundamentalist churches typify the first distortion, the liberal, main-line (better, old-line and declining) churches exemplify the second distortion. The para-church groups exemplify the third distorted relation between gospel, culture, and church. Driscoll's aim is to get the relationship right.

The right relation, in his view, starts from the belief that God calls believers together into the church in order that they then will go out to nonbelievers in their cultures and, through trusting and friendly relationships, be the means by which God leads people to Jesus Christ as their Savior. Reforming mission by this idea will mean for most churches and believers hard and painful work: self-examination; cultural discernment; and theological reflection on what the gospel is, what the church is, and what cultures are.

Above all, Driscoll's paradigm of church, culture, and gospel requires Christians to re-vision themselves as called by God to bring the gospel to the lost and dying people in their culture. Though the gospels' picture of Jesus' life and ministry should make this obvious, most Christians don't make mission and evangelism the center of their identities or, if they do, chose such destructive and alienating means that they undermine their own intention.

Christians should engage the culture and the people in

them. The means to this engagement is developing friendships with unbelievers. This involves working to understand the hopes and fears, the sins and commitments of unbelievers in surrounding cultures. Engaging nonbelievers is not in order to condemn and alienate them from the Christian community but to let themselves be means for God to call the dying, lost, and despairing people in our cultures to discover Jesus Christ as their salvation.

In addition to befriending and taking unbelievers and their cultures seriously, reform mission will require Christians to become aware of their own prejudices and self-righteousness that destroy the possibility of friendship, caring, service, and witness to unbelievers in the surrounding culture. Before Christians reach out in friendship, understanding, and compassion, they will have to recognize the basic human sin of self-righteousness, fear of contamination, and simple cold-heartedness that infects us all.

A third major change needed is nothing less than churches redefining their reason for existence. Many churches exist to perpetuate themselves, or even some Christian subculture apart from the world. Or they exist to perpetuate a more or less veiled racial class or ethnic sense of superiority. Sadly, most Christian churches are not committed to being the means God uses to bring unbelievers to love Christ and their neighbor, but to cultivating a denominational nostalgia or a sense of moral uprightness or class identity. These church cultures will actually punish members who cross the barriers into the secular, unbelieving cultures that define our modern life.

Another area of reformation in mission concerns what we think about how people come to know and love Jesus Christ. Driscoll deals with this question in his third chapter. One typical evangelical model is to get in the face of strangers and directly challenge them as to whether they know Jesus. By this method Christians tell people the dangers of not knowing Jesus and the need to commit themselves to Jesus as Lord and Savior, and then to join a Christian community. Driscoll wants to challenge this model and propose a very different one.

One major problem with the traditional evangelistic model is that it seems to ignore the enormous anger and distrust that many nonbelievers have toward Christianity as an historical movement. This anger and distrust is often aimed at Protestant and Roman Catholic religious institutions and practices, and toward the evangelizing believers themselves whom unbelievers perceive as religious predators who are earning points in their churches by bringing in conversion scalps. The unchurched also see them as those who use psychological terror (believe in Jesus now or burn forever) in the name of the love of God. Most non-believing people in the developed world simply don't trust Christians or the churches.

Driscoll cites this problem, but this reviewer thinks he does not alert readers strongly enough to the resistance in our secular cultures to traditional "decision for Christ" evangelism. Our contemporary culture is very critical and wary of "sells." Most nonbelievers in the West associate Christianity *primarily* with the institutional churches and their histories. They imagine the church and its history as a record of killing Muslims (Crusades), burning women (witch trials), torturing Jews and other Christians (Inquisition), with backing right-wing politics, with forcing celibacy and teaching psyche-violating sexual norms, with practicing intellectual authoritarianism, with demonstrating closed-mindedness, and with showing distrust and hatred between Christian groups. This reviewer thinks that most Christians have not begun to estimate accurately the distrust, anger, and, indeed, the revulsion that many, if not most, nonbelievers in Western cultures have toward their image of the churches, of Christians, and of the gospel.

The liberal mainline churches are not guilty of this destructive kind of "buy or fry" evangelism, only because they have pretty much given up the duty and privilege of evangelism altogether. They appear to have redefined their purpose as being a religious branch of social services and a religious legitimization for liberal attitudes and policies within the knowledge class of the larger society.

Driscoll's alternative is cultivating friendship between

believers and unbelievers as a means by which unbelievers come to trust Christians as friends, giving them a chance to see real human lives transformed by Christ. The way to let God reach the lost is for believers to befriend non-believers. Non-believers should first be shown how love of Jesus Christ can enrich human relationships and transform people. They should be able to meet people who are genuine friends, helpers, and companions as human beings who have found (better, been found by) God in Jesus and who, therefore, love Jesus. Unbelievers will meet Jesus through their Christian friends. And even while they are still unbelievers, there are plainly ways unbelievers connect very humanly to other non-believers and impact them. In Driscoll's model, unbelievers can further evangelism even *before* they become believers. Driscoll's model is first drawing people through friendship and involvement in Christian community activities, and letting these involvements and relationships become the means by which God reaches the lost with his love in Christ. The steps are not first you convert to Jesus, by some kind of emotional or intellectual commitment, and then you connect to a church. Rather the process is first be drawn into the circle of Christ's transforming power through Christian friendship, then you are drawn to conversion to Jesus Christ as the center of relationship to God and neighbor.

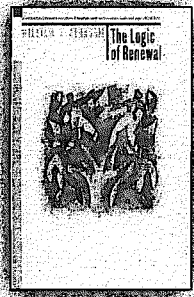
One aspect of Driscoll's chapter on modernity and post-modernity raised a question for this reviewer. Driscoll, on page 172, defines feminism along with postmodernism as "springing from the myth of egalitarianism, the silly notion that everyone is equal." This reviewer is not an uncritical subscriber to the feminist agenda. Driscoll himself acknowledges that a claim for equal dignity for every person is theologically right. But his one-sentence reference to feminism could easily mislead readers. Driscoll, based on the rest of the book, would, I judge, agree with a feminist who criticizes Christian teachers who insist a wife should passively submit to an abusive husband in the name of Paul's teaching. Driscoll would also agree, I assume from what else he says, with the feminist argument for equal pay for women for equal work, and with

the earlier feminist struggle for the right of women to vote. These, and similar, feminist claims are theologically and morally legitimate and a correction of some past, false Christian teaching. But Driscoll's dismissive equating of feminism with a myth that Christians should reject opens him to being misunderstood as dismissing every aspect of feminist critique and every proposal from a feminist. At this point, Driscoll seems to have faltered in his discerning of what can be true and false in our cultural environment, or perhaps he sacrificed accuracy in his writing for the sake of making generalizations.

That said, I consider Driscoll's *Reformation* a very important and very good book. Its importance lies first in the centrality of its subject: nothing less than what being a Christian means. Second, the book is important because its answer to that question is massively legitimated by the First Testament (God's choosing and schooling Israel as a light to the nations), by the Gospels (Jesus on the Father's mission to the lost and Jesus as commissioning his disciples to be on God's mission to the lost), and by the letters of Paul (apostle to the Gentiles). This book is very good because Driscoll makes his case for reformation in a well-informed, accessible, and practical way. Among the many current writings about the emerging church, the seeker-oriented church, about post-denominational, post-Constantinian, postmodern Christianity, this is the best I have seen so far.

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*THE LOGIC OF RENEWAL*

William J. Abraham

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003

172 pages, paper, \$17.00

This is an amazing little book. In less than two hundred pages, we are given a panoramic view of renewal in the last fifty years. Fourteen figures—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant (fundamentalist, mainline, and charismatic)—are presented in pairs of contrasting proposals for renewal in the church. Abraham draws a map of concrete figures and movements on the landscape of renewal. Along the way, he acts as a lively tour guide, warning of missteps that can be taken and dangerous pits into which pilgrims of renewal may fall. He calls attention to recurring patterns in renewal strategies as well as to their unexpected consequences and fruits. We meet renewalists who chase after romantic horizons, others who despair in the ruins of past glory, and still others who display, at the cost of their own lives, the bright light of the inbreaking kingdom of God.

Abraham is something of a pilgrim for renewal himself. An Irish Methodist transplanted to Texas, he teaches philosophy and theology at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. He regularly does short-term missionary work in Karaganda. He has been a frequent observer, critic, and guide to renewal movements within United Methodism and has published significant accounts of strategies for renewal within mainline denominations in journals like *Interpretation*, *Zion's Herald*, and *First Things*.

In this volume he reviews what he considers to be “the most salient proposals on renewal,” providing both pastoral guidance and theological critique. In the vast literature on revitalization and reform, few volumes exhibit the scope of

Abraham’s serious attention to renewal figures (from all three segments of divided Christianity) and his penetrating theological analysis. It is an exciting read, providing many entry points for those interested in the renewal of Christian faith in our time. He helps us listen to diverse voices, describes the common features of divergent strategies, and exposes us to the intellectual challenges of renewal: e.g., his brief and bracing venture in the last chapter into the philosophical hinterlands of epistemology!

There is an artful progression to Abraham’s account. He sets his seven comparative studies between a preparatory chapter on the “Logic of Renewal” and a final chapter offering his own proposals. After helpfully defining renewal as the “recovery of the apostolic life and identity of the church,” he suggests criteria for measuring the practical and theological adequacy of our conceptions of such renewal. He ends his first chapter by encouraging his readers (and I think rightly so) to take the journey through the terrain he surveys and avoid skipping immediately to the last chapter.

His first pair of contrasts introduces us to a fundamentalist and a charismatic who open up significant questions about authority and the role of the Holy Spirit in renewal. He next tells “A Tale of Two Bishops.” The two main characters are Lesslie Newbigin, representing a robust orthodoxy, and John Shelby Spong, who represents a radical revisionism. These two Christian leaders demonstrate the deep division within Christianity itself, yet they exhibit the common feature of thinking “that the fundamental problem is intellectual in nature.” The third contrast pairs two Roman Catholic visions of renewal in response to Vatican II: feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther and Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI). Here, Abraham deals thoughtfully with the question of many disappointed Protestant renewalists: “Why not return to Rome when faced by the schism represented by Protestant bishops like Newbigin and Spong?”

Before turning to his last three pairs of contrasting proposals, Abraham provides an interlude (“Dying for Renewal”) on a pair of complementary proposals, Martin Luther King, Jr.,

and Archbishop Oscar Romero. He describes this move as a "turn to the moral renovation of the tradition" and necessary "for any healthy vision of the church for the future." The comparison of these two martyrs of renewal opens up several crucial issues of justice in relationship to God's kingdom. He explores the significant role of base communities and parish groups in retrieving and inventing practices that embody healthy changes for renewal, and, finally, warns of the dangers of self-deception when renewalists "cast virtually every issue in the church as one of justice."

The final three polarities examine (1) liturgical renewal, (2) the church's encounter with postmodernity, and (3) the abandonment of renewal altogether. In the first, Eastern Orthodox Alexander Schmemmann is contrasted with Gilbert Bilezekian, resident theologian of the megachurch, Willow Creek. Calling these two immigrants "Trojan Horses from Paris," Abraham offers fascinating contrasts between an Orthodox vision of liturgy and a Congregationalist view of catechesis. The former calls for an ecclesial consciousness shaped by a return to the "ancient and normative practices of the eucharistic liturgy"; the latter aims at a "biblically functioning community" by an emphasis upon spiritual formation, liturgical innovation, and every-member-ministry grounded in spiritual gifting. Finding strengths and weaknesses on both sides of this polarity, Abraham provides a significantly larger context for understanding many of the dynamics of the contemporary "worship wars."

The encounter with postmodernity is charted in the work of two Anglicans. Atheist Don Cupitt popularizes a post-church, post-dogma Christianity in which the kingdom message of Jesus is portrayed as the divine emptying itself into secular and profane culture. Edward Norman, who sharply criticizes the church's "internal secularization," calls for a recovery of the church's "intellectual nerve" and the development of an authoritative teaching office. Although these figures may not be familiar to American renewalists, Abraham's account performs two important functions. First, it prepares American Christians to see in stark outline the polarized

extremes that arise when a thoroughly secularized culture confronts a church in radical decline. Second, it depicts the kind of "impasse" that calls forth the two responses in Abraham's final pair of renewal options.

"Quaking in the Ruins" presents "romantic" and "despairing" visions. C. Peter Wagner's "new apostolic reformation" effectively abandons all attempts to renew traditional forms of Christianity. R. R. Reno, in his book, *In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity*, announces the failure of all renewal strategies and sees no hope beyond dwelling faithfully in the ruins of the modern church, "retrieving and implementing the practices of the faith." Wagner is "radically optimistic" about new movements of the Spirit in a post-Pentecostal world while Reno is "sober and realistic." "In both cases," writes Abraham, "the possibility of renewal has been abandoned."

Before turning to Abraham's own proposals, it is worth noticing three recurring themes that appear in his survey: catechesis, epistemology, and the work of the Holy Spirit. First, his attention to catechesis and the spiritual formation of new believers in the faith is a continuation of the emphasis of his earlier book, *The Logic of Evangelism*. Second, his repeated emphasis upon epistemology, i.e., the means by which we know that something is true, may seem elusive to some readers, but it is Abraham's unique contribution to the discussion of how the church renews itself. Over and over again, he shows how various models of renewal try to establish finality by turning some "means of grace" into an "epistemic mechanism." Thus, for example, papal infallibility for Ratzinger and women's religious experience for Reuther become the privileged foundations for "securing the right interpretation of the gospel." Interested readers will find his epistemological arguments laid out much more programmatically in the book *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*, and more pragmatically in his *Awakening From Doctrinal Amnesia*. Third, Abraham's repeated attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in renewal comes across as solid, discerning, and hopeful. Indeed, he argues in his final chapter



that the "root cause" of all failed renewal is a "willful or unintended narrowing of the working of the Holy Spirit." All this is to say that the "logic" of Abraham's understanding of renewal is part of the larger framework of his theological writings.

If the reader is still looking for a programmatic solution or an intellectual system with which to engineer renewal, the last chapter will prove disappointing.

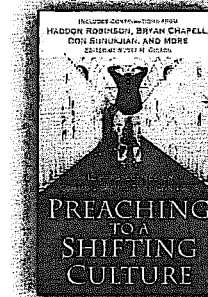
It may also reveal that the reader was an inattentive pilgrim on Abraham's journey through the trajectory of recent renewal history. To such readers, I recommend a rereading of Abraham's humorous parable (in chapter eight) on the "doorknob theory of renewal" in which he offers pointed warnings against various attempts to "fix" the church.

On the other hand, Abraham's "outline of an alternative vision of renewal" could all too easily be dismissed as a Methodist appropriation of Eastern Orthodox "inspired traditions," especially since he is the Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at Perkins. This would be a serious misunderstanding of Abraham, only made possible by ignoring his previous epistemological critiques of the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" as developed by Outler and contemporary United Methodism. Yet, Abraham would considerably strengthen his vision in persuasive power, I believe, if he were to develop a more fully expressed trinitarian ecclesiology.

This book should be read especially by renewal movement leaders, pastors, and (if only they would!) denominational bishops, moderators, and executives.

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**PREACHING TO A SHIFTING CULTURE:  
12 PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATING  
THAT CONNECTS**

Scott M. Gibson, editor  
Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004  
192 pages, paper, \$14.99

Scott Gibson, professor of preaching and director for the Center of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and editor of these essays on preaching, explains his organizing purpose. His goal is "to explore some of the issues confronting evangelical preaching at the turn of the millennium. These essays presuppose an audience of evangelical pastors and preachers. Gibson also assumes that the book will help readers who sense that the new millennium brings new, distinctive challenges to communicating the Christian good news. Gibson makes clear that the essays he gathered address only some, not all, of the issues which our post-Christian, postmodern, "cultural turn" millennium presents to Christian preachers. He does not think the book is a cure-all for contemporary preaching, but an aid.

Gibson pursues this purpose by collecting essays that can be grouped, with some overlap, into three bins. One is the content bin: What should sermons communicate today? The second bin is the context bin: What are salient features of the emerging culture which do/should challenge Christian preachers? The third bin is the construction bin: How should one shape a sermon to achieve a desired communication aim in preaching?

In the first, the content bin, belongs Ray Lubeck's essay. Lubeck is professor of Bible and theology at Multnomah Bible College, Portland, Oregon. He lists reasons why people today may ignore the Old Testament in preaching. The second half of his essay helps the reader engage the Old Testament in preaching by providing specific points and information. For example,

he summarizes some ideas from speech-act theory and helps the reader apply this theory to sermon preparation.

A second essay fitting snugly into the content bin is Vic Gordon's contribution. Gordon, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, in Huntington, California, underscores that the gospel writers present Jesus as a preacher; indeed, preaching is the center of Jesus' ministry, according to the Gospels. This leads Gordon to explain the focus of Jesus' preaching, i.e., the kingdom of God. He ends his essay by drawing some implications for preaching today from this biblical witness to Jesus as preacher.

Bryan Chapell, president and professor of practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, in St. Louis, Missouri, contrasts the pluralism of Western culture, of the Western church, and of biblical culture, with the exclusiveness of Jesus. Proclaiming that eternal salvation comes through Jesus alone is either arrogant, religious imperialism or, if true, a Christian duty, he writes. The core of the content of Christian faith, and therefore of Christian sermons, is the necessity of atonement through Jesus Christ. Christian preaching is "about confessing the need of God to provide a way to himself by a redeeming sacrifice we could neither provide nor deserve." He makes the valuable point that ideological pluralism, i.e., philosophical relativism (in contrast to descriptive pluralism), demeans people by saying cultural differences are incidental and only secondary. He also argues that Christian content can be preached without demeaning beliefs and values that are dear to other people in their cultures.

Clearly falling into a different bin is the essay by Jeffrey Arthurs, associate professor of preaching and dean of the chapel at Gordon-Conwell. Arthurs' focus is the postmodern mind, e.g., its epistemological and moral relativism. He also provides specific principles for preaching in this context.

Timothy C. Tennet provides an essay about the context of contemporary preaching. Tennet, who is associate professor of world missions at Gordon-Conwell, describes the global, multi-polar shift to the southern hemisphere in our contemporary world and draws implications for contemporary preaching.

Scott Gibson, professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell, addresses the anti-authority mood of the present age. His essay, thus, is also about context, and he draws three implications for preaching in the light of its global context.

Yet another essay belonging in the context bin is that of David Hanson. Pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Hanson underlines the importance of knowing one's audience. He says, "[T]he preacher's decision about the life and values of listeners qualifies everything in the sermon."

Alice Matthews, associate professor of educational and women's ministries at Gordon-Conwell addresses the "feminization of the church," the trend that the great majority of contemporary sermon hearers are women. Her purpose is to raise the reader's awareness of the gender gap in the church and to explain its sociological causes. She also wants to address how preachers can address men in contemporary society. Drawing on the work of Leon Podles, she identifies initiation, struggle, and brotherly love as three facets of masculine lifestyle and suggests them as guides for sermon content that will appeal to men, and perhaps also to women.

The third bin is the construction bin. Here are essays about the strategies of sermon construction. Haddon W. Robinson, professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell, dedicates his essay to expository preaching. His premise is that Christian preaching should be biblical, a premise most accept but few either actually follow or really know how to follow. Robinson explains six ways a biblical passage can thoroughly shape a sermon. His discussion of expository preaching could greatly help a preacher who wants to preach biblically but who struggles with how to translate that intention into specific ways to interrogate a text and construct a sermon.

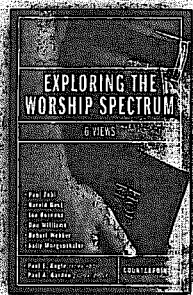
In his essay, "The Shape of the Sermon," Donald R. Sunukjian describes different strategies for organizing the biblical author's flow of thought, the single sentence that states the message in a nutshell, and relevant points of contact with the audience. Sunukjian, teacher of homiletics at Talbot School of Theology in California, illustrates these strategies by outlining three sermons based on Acts 6:1-7.

Rodney Cooper, professor of discipleship and leadership at Gordon-Conwell, addresses how preachers can draw on the insights of psychology to counsel members of the congregation who listen to sermons. Cooper warns against a simplistic view of psychological health; he gives reasons why preachers should shape sermons with therapeutic aims, and he lists destructive principles that can injure people in their relations to others. Finally he offers several principles and a sample sermon outline illustrating the construction of a counseling sermon.

These essays clearly accomplish editor Scott Gibson's aim. Almost all the essays could help preachers to move from the Bible through a sermon to proclaim the good news to contemporary people. The authors offer to the reader a wealth of experience in the difficult but exalted task of preaching, and they know how to communicate their wisdom in ways that learning preachers can put to work. Any preacher, motivated to reach contemporary culture while letting God's Word be heard through the preached biblical message, could benefit from this volume.

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**EXPLORING THE WORSHIP SPECTRUM:  
SIX VIEWS**

Paul A. Basden, editor  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004  
272 pages, paper, \$16.99

Styles of worship have changed significantly since the 1960s, especially in North America. I write from Britain, where changes have been less dramatic but still substantial. We may in Britain have escaped the worst of the "worship

wars," but at the same time we have ducked constructive debate on the key issues. At least our North American brethren have here given us a modest contribution to that debate.

Paul Basden has brought together for the Counterpoints series six contributors representing different approaches to worship. These are described as "Formal-Liturgical" (from Paul Zahl), "Traditional Hymn-Based" (from Harold Best), "Contemporary Music-Driven" (from Joe Horness), "Charismatic" (from Don Williams), "Blended" (from Robert Webber), and "Emerging" (from Sally Morgenthaler). The use of unusual and somewhat bland terms like "emerging" and "blended" illustrates the difficulty of identifying these forms of worship precisely. Each reader will have his or her own way of describing the variety of outlooks presented here.

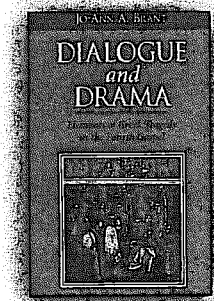
Apart from the friendly interaction between the contributors, the book's great strength lies in its fascinating insights into those historical, social, and spiritual factors which have moved individuals and churches to change from one style of worship to another, or indeed to prefer the style in which they were brought up against substantial innovation. We are, for example, guided through different phases of the charismatic movement. We are also taken into the mind of the leadership at the well-known Willow Creek Community Church as they strove to fashion worship services suitable first for outsiders and then for believers.

It is appropriate to be honest about the aspirations for cultural relevance and for existential authenticity which have driven the changes in patterns of worship. But it does mean that the biblical teaching on true worship and its strictures about false worship are downplayed. True, Basden in his preface does give some passing comments on biblical teaching, but he leaves the impression that, in Scripture, worship is something of a potpourri of initiatives by different individuals at different times. There is no underlying rationale. It becomes almost inevitable that he should conclude in his final remarks that "the human worship of God is too profound to be captured in one particular approach" (256). Does this really do justice to the teaching of Scripture?

It may be significant that there is no contribution from someone who holds to the Regulative Principle. This cannot be because such a position is non-existent in North America. On the contrary, there has been lively debate on the way this Principle may best be formulated and on its implications. There need have been no fear that a contributor from this angle would have argued for a uniform approach to worship regardless of context or culture. Such a contributor would surely have produced a deeper reflection on scriptural guidelines.

Despite this reservation I would recommend reading this book, because the irenic, personal tone of all the contributors does turn the spotlight on those issues that press most immediately on people today. Above all, perhaps, it focuses on the contemporary pull of musical concerns. Here the question is not simply the longstanding debate as to how far the church should reflect secular tastes in music, but whether church worship should endorse a prominent outlook in modern Western society that the music is the message. Much more thought will have to be given by Christians on all sides of this debate on the role of music in society and on its role within the churches. This is both urgent and difficult, just because music has become so important.

GRAHAM KEITH  
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*DIALOGUE AND DRAMA: ELEMENTS OF  
GREEK TRAGEDY IN THE FOURTH  
GOSPEL*

Jo-Ann A. Brant  
Hendrickson Publishers, 2004  
320 pages, paper, \$19.95

What are the three most important factors in determining the value of a house? Location, location, and location. And what are answers to the first three questions one must ask when seeking to interpret any piece of communication? Genre, genre, and genre.

The United States Constitution, for example, will divide those who concern themselves with interpreting genre into two general camps. There are those who, on the one hand, seek to understand, through a careful study of the words used and the manner in which they were arrived at during the debate in which the document was forged, exactly what was the intent of the original authors in including each phrase. Then there are those who, on the other hand, insist that we cannot tell for sure the intent of the authors and that indeed we do not need to. Calling it a "living document," they choose instead to interpret the Constitution according to the contemporary standards of the day. The latter insist that every new generation has a responsibility to redefine and reinterpret the Constitution for itself. The former group of exegetes uses a conservative hermeneutic and the latter a liberal hermeneutic, but each group bases its hermeneutic on the way it defines the genre of the Constitution. At its core, Constitutional debate is a debate about genre.

Likewise, the major disagreements over the best understanding of the creation account usually stem from prior disagreements over what genre it should be read as. If it is straight history, then it should be read as such. If, however, it is mythological in the popular sense of the word, that is, if it is a made up story that the Hebrews told to each other so that they could give their tribal god credit for making all the gods of the other nations, then it would be silly to ascribe much theological importance to individual portions of it, such as the unique relationship that God established between himself and humanity during creation. Others may hold that the creation account, while not true in a woodenly literalistic manner, establishes the valid point that Yahweh is the owner and master of the whole universe. Still others would read it as a highly stylized story giving spiritual truths

couched in the metaphor of physical language.

Each of these groups will understand the Constitution or the creation account in extremely different ways, and each will likely view the other interpretations as being silly at best, demonic lies at worst. What is more, differing understandings will often provoke accusations that others do not take the Constitution or the Bible seriously. Genre disputes often display both a practicality and a brutality that modern folklore denies to academia. In this regard, *Dialogue and Drama* is a welcome relief, arguing strenuously yet irenically for a particular genre in which to read a book that has been at the center of an ongoing and often heated debate.

Few pieces of literature have endured as much sustained controversy concerning the genre in which they were written, and consequently the correct hermeneutic for reading them, than the two longer works by John the apostle: the gospel of John and the Revelation. Modern criticism has increasingly questioned whether the fourth gospel was indeed the work of the apostle John, suggesting that instead it might be the work of a body of John's disciples written some time after his death. Some of these critics read the book more as an allegory for the experience of John's faction of Christianity in the world rather than as a strictly accurate account of the work of Jesus. By contrast, the typical Protestant reading treats it much as a newspaper account, albeit an accurate one.

In *Dialogue and Drama*, Jo-Ann Brant argues for a genre as radically different from the newspaper as it is from societal allegory. The fourth gospel, Brant argues, bears more resemblance to the Greek tragedies than to any other genre extant at the time of Christ. It is not a full tragedy, she admits; it simply makes extensive use of the same literary techniques and conventions.

How differently would we read this gospel if it were understood to be written as a script for dramatic performance rather than as a newspaper account, as many evangelicals read it, or as an allegory? Indeed, that would provide a radically different hermeneutic—one might even say a dangerously different hermeneutic. Brant will need to present a solid case

before many will abandon their more customary methods of reading the gospel. And she does.

I picked up *Dialogue and Drama* skeptically, but as surprisingly many aspects of the Greek tragedies were displayed in the fourth gospel, her thesis became increasingly difficult to set aside. John seems to be structured as episodes, or scenes, between which the "stage" is cleared. This series of scenes is encapsulated between a prologue and an epilogue, each bearing a tone markedly different from the rest of the "play." These seem to serve, as in Euripides' tragedies, to transition the audience from their lives into the world of the play, and then back from the play to their own settings at the end.

Action and setting are very often explained not by a narrator but by the characters themselves. On stage, one does not want a narrator popping out to explain to the audience, "Now this stage is a hilltop and over here is the wall of a castle, see, and you must imagine that a breeze is blowing." Instead, these details will all be put into the mouth of one of the characters, thus supplying the necessary information to the audience without interrupting the flow of the action and the dialogue. When Mark Antony addresses the Roman mob, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears," he is, on one level, addressing the crowd before him. But on another level, the actor on the stage is also filling in the audience as to who the actors milling around him are supposed to be. He is giving them an identity without resorting to the interruption of a narrator.

In like manner we find vital information on the lips of the characters of the fourth gospel more often than we do in the other gospels. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" "They have no wine." "Put your fingers here and see my hands." "Do not hold on to me." Action, the meaning of actions, the setting, and the identification of characters are all explained to the recipient of John's gospel through the mouths of the characters much more consistently than in the other gospels. This is in perfect keeping with the Greek stage traditions and with the needs of any stage performance.

In a variety of other ways Brant demonstrates that the

fourth gospel conforms to the patterns of Greek tragedies and makes use of the same tools and customs. On the whole she has made what seems to me to be a very compelling case. Accepting such a thesis would invariably lead one to study John in a very different light, employing more of the tools of the literary analyst and considering it as a work of art as well as a work of history and a didactic foundation.

Accepting Brant's thesis would not, however, require one to set aside the foundational expository principal that recognizes inerrancy and perfection in all of God's word. This is a point that Brant herself does not seem to have sufficiently grasped, although she carefully avoids a flat denial of inerrancy. And perhaps rightly so, for this is a book dedicated to considering the genre of John's gospel rather than to dissecting its doctrinal or historical import. Indeed, in those instances in which Brant veers into expositional rather than literary analysis, we find that she makes very few useful observations but uses such opportunities to express her disfavor with reading a work of art for any didactic meaning. *Dialogue and Drama* is an "exploration of what the language of the fourth gospel does as opposed to what it means" (258). As long as Brant keeps within her expressed boundaries, she succeeds; it is when she roams outside those boundaries that I would find need to dispute her conclusions.

Concerning Plato's dialogues, she says:

The dialogues do not invite their readers to adopt propositions but rather to stand as critical witnesses to dialogues that end without coming to a conclusion, so that the reader then becomes a participant by continuing the dialogue. There is no authoritative interpretation of the dialogue or answer to the questions, and so the reader must continue asking questions about love, knowledge, justice, and goodness (200).

John's gospel, she argues, should be read similarly. "The manner in which the Fourth Gospel ends anticipates an ongoing dialogue about who Jesus is, and its references to other stories invites their telling" (202). So far so good, but she goes

on to infer that such dialogue should be open-ended and should not reach any solid conclusions. "The gospel's indeterminacy opened a space for the creedal debates of the early church, but the mistake that the church made was to hold councils and promulgate doctrine to end them."

Brant has evidently fallen in love with the gospel as a work of art and wishes to admire it solely on those grounds without letting it be sullied by the utilitarian work of deriving doctrine from its pages. In so doing she is like the devotee of pure mathematics who is disappointed to discover that some technician has put his brilliant mathematical theory to practical use. To Brant and to the mathematician this seems like a man taking a delicate antelope and harnessing it to a plow and whipping it like a mule to make it pull. Indeed, both Brant's and the mathematician's perspectives can be instructive to those who manhandle the Word of God, prying proof texts from the passages in which they reside and flinging them at theological enemies. It is not, however, the whole truth. John's gospel is a deer that can plow, graceful and beautiful yet powerful and dangerous. There is room both to love the artistry and the magnificent storytelling and also to find in it rock solid truths taught with absolute clarity.

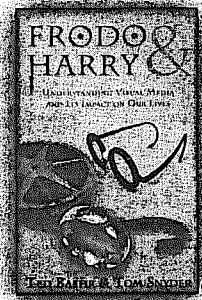
Nevertheless, forgiving a certain tendency to interpret from a liberal perspective, Brant's main thesis concerning the genre of John deserves to be considered. To look at John as a stage play rather than as a legal document or a newspaper account, or even an allegory, would radically alter the expectations and understandings that we would glean from it. Perhaps Brant is right that the greatest manner of appreciating the fourth gospel is to come to it as "a congregation to engage in a corporate act of remembering" (260). Such an approach to John would be worship indeed!

A slight weakness that one might hope to see strengthened in a revision is that although there is an abundance of material from the Greeks and from John establishing their similarities, the reader could benefit from a more consistent contrast between these points and the other gospels. How, for example, do the similarities between the naming of Jesus in

John and the naming of Oedipus in Sophocles differ from the naming of Jesus in Mark? Unless one is comfortable with the Greek New Testament, one will not find it easy to make such comparisons, but such comparisons end up being important to an evaluation of Brant's thesis. If the other gospels display too much of the same characteristics without also sharing the basic dramatic structure, then her argument would be considerably weakened. Further study is definitely warranted.

While other scholars have noticed the dramatic structure of John's gospel, they have tended to compare it to Shakespeare and other English playwrights. Thus they may discern the influence John had over later authors but not the reverse. *Dialogue and Drama* is, I think, the first major study comparing John to its literary predecessors, the Greek dramatists. This has proved a much more fruitful study both because the idea is to consider what literary influences may have contributed to the gospel, and because the resemblances have proved to be more abundant and more compelling.

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**FRODO & HARRY: UNDERSTANDING  
VISUAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON OUR  
LIVES**

Ted Baehr and Tom Snyder  
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003  
196 pages, paper, \$12.99

If I had the time and would be allowed the space, I could go through this book page by page (almost paragraph by paragraph) and rant and rave over every false statement and every ignorant claim.

For starters, they make friends of their readers by assuming at the outset that every person who does not share their

conclusions is obviously not really a Christian, or at best is a very ignorant and blind Christian.

It is understandable that people whose worldviews are not rooted in the Bible would scoff at any concerns about witchcraft, since they do not know God's teachings on this subject. It is surprising, however, when people who *identify themselves* as believing Christians do not take a stand against the witchcraft in Harry Potter (18, italics added).

Having begun by welcoming dialogue, it is no surprise that in the last two sentences of the book they encourage further give and take by responding to the author of another biblical critique of the Potter books (one who did not share their opinion) with this warm wish:

I (Ted) find it a wonderful relief to discover the free gift available in Jesus Christ. We hope that Mr. Granger will find that gift, especially since he is an ordained reader in the Orthodox church (196).

Two men who take such a stance had best be above reproach in terms of their treatment of the work that they critique; however, they display an extreme lack of integrity as they consistently misrepresent even simple facts of the Harry Potter stories. I assume they do not think that their readers will have read the Potter books; they seem to rely on an audience that only wants their ignorance confirmed.

Even if Baehr and Snyder had done their homework and had written an excellent piece of literary criticism, even if they had nobly defended the faith against heresy, I would have little patience with such arrogance. It is one thing to doubt the validity of the profession of faith from someone who denies the deity of Jesus. It is something altogether different to doubt that a person is a Christian simply because they differ on a matter of literary criticism. Maybe they would have us begin splitting each of the thirty-some thousand Christian denominations between those who prefer Rudyard Kipling and those

who prefer William Blake. Well, give me John Dryden any day, so I'll be a denomination of one.

If this book had been turned in by one of my high school literature students, some of its weaknesses could be overlooked, although we would have to work through a few difficulties. But this comes from two men who make their livelihood critiquing films from a Christian perspective. From them we have the right to demand more.

Their major premise is that Harry Potter is evil, and *The Lord of the Rings* is a Christian allegory (66). Either these two professional critics don't know what an allegory is, or they haven't read Tolkien's books, for they are not allegory. They make a great story, perhaps the greatest story written in the twentieth century, but not an allegorical story. We can tell that they are not allegory because kids read Tolkien without being forced to.

But their ignorance goes far beyond misusing literary terms. Having read the Harry Potter books twice before picking up *Frodo & Harry*, I have to doubt that the authors even read them once. So many of their judgments and statements about the stories are simply false that I think they must have only watched the films, and then gotten the books to verify the spellings of names.

For instance, they claim that "in the stories the more powerful and more attractive wizard, Harry, defeats the less powerful, less attractive one, Lord Voldemort." Harry wins, yes, but not because he is more powerful; he is not. Nobody, least of all Harry, thinks that he is more powerful than Voldemort, whom many believe to be the most powerful wizard in the world. Rather, he defeats Lord Voldemort for a number of reasons that seem to have escaped Baehr and Snyder: most commonly Harry is defended by the implanted love of his mother who died to rescue him, or he is helped by friends who willingly face terrors and even death because they love him. For instance, he survived a fight with Voldemort when only a year old—hardly a mighty wizard yet, because his mother had given her life to save his, which love was unfathomable to Voldemort and thus not able to be overcome by the evil sor-

cerer. Incidentally, Harry does the same both for friends and even for enemies, another fact that seems to have gotten by our critics. The charge that Harry wins because he is attractive is even less credible.

One of their more audacious claims (repeated in various ways in different parts of the book) is that Harry is attracted to the occult from an insatiable lust for power over other people. Nothing could be further from the truth. He begins training at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft primarily because his dead parents had gone there. As a student, he exhibits no particular drive to master the subjects, except when he or his friends are in danger and they need to learn enough to protect themselves. Usually, this also entails each of the three chums, Harry, Hermione, and Ron, risking their own safety to secure the same for the others.

But I need not go on mentioning every point at which I disagree with their analysis of Harry. I need not even mention that the theme of what it means to be the image of one's father, to honor one's father, is a dominant theme running through all of the Harry Potter books (five of the six being out as I write this), nor that this intensely biblical theme is treated with more integrity and insight here than in any other fiction book that I could name.

But Baehr and Snyder loved the *Lord of the Rings* books, as do I. Surely the sections dealing with Tolkien would be more enjoyable to read.

I wish they had been. Unfortunately, just as their disapproval of Harry caused them to go to extremes to condemn his books, so their approval of the *Rings* trilogy went too far. As mentioned above, they call the trilogy an allegory. Now, an allegory is a work in which there is a one-to-one correlation between characters, places, and settings on the one hand and the persons, concepts, and truths to which they symbolically correlate. In other words, there is an equivalence between each aspect of the story and some greater truth, which is the greater story under the surface story.

And this, in fact, seems to be nearly how they read the *Lord of the Rings*. Gandalf, they say, is an archangel, and Frodo is a



Christ-figure; Aragorn, ironically, they see also as a Christ-figure in his refusal of his crown more than in his actual kingship.

If we read these characters as the equivalent of Christ, or of an archangel, if we read them as allegorical figures, then the Rings trilogy is far from the Christian literature that they would make it. Did Tolkien mean to portray Jesus (Frodo) as nearly succumbing to the seduction of sin, but finally destroying it accidentally through the wiles of the devil (Gollum)? Did an archangel die for his friends and get resurrected? If we were to read Tolkien's books as Baehr and Snyder repeatedly suggest, we would have to say that they are seven times the devil that Harry Potter ever could have been.

But they had to exaggerate the Christian symbolism that beautifully exists in the Rings books in order to properly contrast it with the exaggerated dangers of the Harry Potter books. The truth is that the thematic parallels between Tolkien's books and Rowling's are quite extensive, and could hardly be coincidental. Unfortunately, *Frodo & Harry* so misrepresents both sets of books that these parallels have been lost.

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