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BOOK REVIEWS

*MARTIN LUTHER: FAITH IN CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL—
SELECTED SPIRITUAL WRITINGS*

Introduced and edited by Eric W. Gritsch
New York: New City Press, 1996.
192 pages, paper, \$10.95.

Anthologies of Luther material abound. When one begins to deal with fifty-four large volumes of Luther material he will soon be struck by the sheer magnitude of time required to handle the extant writings of the great Reformer. As a result numerous anthologies have been prepared over the years. Such is this small new work, a practical anthology which emphasizes Luther's work as a theologian, exegete and pastor.

Eric Gritsch, professor of church history at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, is a member of the International Luther Research Congress, and has authored several important books, including: *Martin—God's Court Jester: Luther in Retrospect, Reformer Without a Church*, and, with Robert Jenson, *Lutheranism*.

Professor Gritsch generally chooses texts which provide a clear look at how Luther handled Scripture, basic theological affirmations and the discipline of spiritual formation and pastoral theology. He includes sections with clear and succinct quotations on "Righteousness," "Freedom," and "Personal Confession." The concluding section, on spiritual formation and pastoral care, includes material on baptism and the eucharist, as would be expected. What is

especially helpful, however, is the material under the headings of "Christ-Centered Living" and "How to Die."

This is a solid, well conceived, and extremely useful introduction for anyone seeking to get a handle for the first time on basic information about Luther and the Protestant Reformation. The material quoted is well documented so that the person who wishes to read the entire context of a statement may then go to the unabridged works of Luther and read the whole.

It is a promising and hopeful evidence of renewed dialogue, without the acrimonious passions of earlier centuries, that a Roman Catholic publisher has issued this particular volume.

EDITOR

*THE OPEN SECRET: AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE THEOLOGY OF MISSION*

Revised Edition

Leslie Newbigin

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1998).

192 pages, paper, \$12.99.

Published originally in 1978, *The Open Secret* has stood the test of time. It is an extremely useful introduction to the study of missions by one of the finest minds in the field of missiology in our century. Part of the material in this volume was originally given as a series of lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary in the summer of 1977.

Leslie Newbigin, who only recently passed away, served as the general secretary of the International Missionary Council and as associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches. He was a member of the United Reformed Church (UK) and spent some years in the Church of South India as a bishop.

Newbigin believes the question of authority must be the proper starting point for the missionary enterprise. If this ground is surrendered here the foundations will surely be shaken. "By what authority" do we take the message of Christ into all the world? "In the name of Jesus" is Newbigin's clear answer. But, comes the question, "Who is Jesus?" *The Open Secret*, in reality, is Newbigin's answer to this question. Moving from this answer Newbigin shows that "In the name of Jesus" must be expanded into "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" if we would be faithful to the revelation of God.

But *why* do we answer in this way? Newbigin writes:

My answer to this question is a personal commitment. I am—in Pascal's famous phrase—wagering my life that Jesus is the ultimate authority. My answer is a confession: I believe. It is a personal commitment to a faith that cannot be demonstrated on grounds established from the point of view of another commitment. . . . The Christian commitment is distinguished in that it is a commitment to a belief about the meaning of the whole of human experience in its entirety—namely, the belief that this meaning is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen, and destined to reign over all things. I make this commitment as part of and in dependence on the community of those who have lived by this faith from its beginning. The mission in which I participate is the continuing action of this community in living out this faith in wider and wider areas of experience (15-16).

Newbigin says that he makes this confession because in confessing that "Jesus is Lord" the New Testament is plainly saying that "Jesus is the supreme authority" (16). He concludes, "The Christian mission is thus to act out in the whole life of the whole world the confession that Jesus is Lord of all" (17).

Finally, the answer includes this confession because ". . . I

have been laid hold of by Another and commissioned to do so. It is not primarily or essentially my decision" (17). The way in which Newbigin works out the implications of divine election demonstrates a feature of his theological strength often missing in modern discussions. He concludes:

For no one who reads the Bible can be in doubt about the fact that it is God who chooses whom he will and calls them to his service. This doctrine of divine election has fallen into disrepute because those who were so chosen and called (the "elect") so often saw themselves as exclusive beneficiaries of God's choice, rather than as trustees on behalf of all the nations. But this disastrous misunderstanding, so manifest in the story of Israel and in the life of the church in all generations, cannot negate the fundamental truth of the doctrine of election. It is God who chooses, calls, and sends. When I am questioned about my right to preach Jesus as Lord among the nations, I can only reply that I am a simple servant of one whom God has chosen and sent for the sake of all—Jesus Christ (17-18).

Newbigin proceeds to work out this theological basis of authority for mission throughout his helpful book. He argues convincingly that the very *being* of the church must, by biblical definition, include mission; i.e., a church which is not "the church in mission" is really not a church at all!

But what is "the open secret"? Newbigin correctly shows that the "secret" is the gospel which is manifest, by the Holy Spirit, only to eyes of faith. This "secret" becomes "open" precisely because the church preaches it, in obedience to the commission of Jesus, to all nations. Echoing the great truth rediscovered by Luther and the Reformers, Newbigin demonstrates that this faith, by definition, must always be Christocentric and positioned in a strongly Trinitarian context.

Newbigin sounds a distinct trumpet call still needed

twenty years after the first edition of this excellent book was published. The church must again emphasize its missionary character if it is to truly be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the world of our time.

EDITOR

WHEN GOD MOVES: PREPARING FOR TRUE REVIVAL

John H. Armstrong

Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House (1998).

304 pages, paper, \$10.99.

This is, by far and away, the best book I have read on revival. I draw this conclusion for several reasons. First, most books on this subject induce guilt in the reader rather than earnest desire for a genuine move of the Spirit of God. Second, they unduly and unhelpfully criticize brothers and sisters in Christ who see things differently. Third, they often present revival as a man-centered work dependent upon us and not God. Finally, most of the books I have been exposed to over the years live so much in the past that the reader feels it unlikely—if not impossible—that God could truly move in a similar fashion in our time.

Somehow John Armstrong avoids all of these problems. While he wisely sets revival in a proper historical context, he doesn't stay there. He writes as one who sincerely believes that God just might revive His people in our own day as He has in a storied past. In the same way he takes issue with certain movements—especially those that seem to rely solely on emotionalism—without adopting a combative tone. He urges us to pray earnestly for revival without falling into the trap of saying that because we pray, God must send revival. Finally, he leaves the reader with a feeling of hope, not discouragement.

Although John has written many books, it may well be

that this one will be remembered as his greatest contribution to the wider body of Christ. He lives with one goal in mind—to see the true reformation of the church in our day and the genuine move of God's Spirit reviving the church and awakening the larger culture.

In recent years we've all heard a great deal about the coming great revival that will sweep the world into the last days before the return of Christ. Are we just around the corner from the Third Great Awakening? I cannot say if such a movement of God is indeed on the horizon, but I can say that it is desperately needed. The old gospel song reminds us that "mercy drops round us are falling, but for the showers we plead." The land is parched and the mercy drops seem few and far between. *When God Moves* will encourage the reader to seek God's face for genuine, Spirit-given showers of blessing upon the church of Jesus Christ.

I believe it would be good if this book were made available to every pastor and Christian leader in North America.

RAY PRITCHARD
Oak Park, Illinois

EXPLICITLY CHRISTIAN POLITICS: THE VISION OF THE NATIONAL REFORM ASSOCIATION

William Einwechter, Editor
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: The Christian Statesman Press
(1997).
280 pages, paper, \$14.95.

Whatever happened to the "Covenanters"? For me, at least, I remembered them as Scottish stalwarts of the faith who fought for the gospel of Christ against the encroachments of ungodly kings and bishops. Their heroism and faithfulness were legendary to be sure, yet I would have denied them any significant influence on the "Ameri-

can Experience," religious or otherwise, had you asked me for my opinion. How wrong I was!

The denominational heir of the Covenanters is the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Viewed perhaps as "quaint" by many, the RPCNA is a relatively small denomination now known more for practicing exclusive accappella psalmody because of their adherence to the *Westminster Standards* than anything else. I suspect that in the past they were viewed as more radical because, like today's Mennonites and Amish, they were known for their unwillingness to serve in government office or even vote, lest they be found supporting an ungodly system. Their ministers delivered many a sermon calling America to repent because its foundational document, the Constitution, did not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the nation's Lord and King and officially "covenant" with Christ after the manner of the "Solemn League and Covenant," hence their name. (Unlike past and present Anabaptists though, they did not always consider government service as illegitimate. What was illegitimate to them was serving in those capacities when the government in question was not explicitly subjected to Christ. While they wouldn't have liked Massachusetts Bay Colony's ecclesiastical congregationalism, they would have applauded its social "covenanting"!) The RPCNA—unlike the humanistic abolitionists of the time—did not consider the Civil War as a judgment on America because of the abominable practice of slavery. But they regarded the slavery problem and the war as an outgrowth of our country's lack of official submission to Christ.

While the denominational heirs of the Covenanters are today few in number, that is not true of their other heirs. Ideologically, the inheritance of the Covenanters extended to many Christian denominations in the last century and, to some extent, this one. By 1863 groups spanning far across traditional Protestant denomination divides gath-

ered in Xenia, Ohio, and Sparta, Illinois, to pursue "prayer and Christian conference" regarding the spiritual needs of the nation. In these meetings the distinctive "covenanting" concept of "Covenanter" theology was, in effect, embraced by many evangelical Christians of other denominations. By January 27, 1864, these believers had formed The National Association to Secure the Religious Amendment to the Constitution to implement the Covenanter vision on a national basis. As the vision of the organization enlarged to deal with other national moral issues, the name was shortened in 1875 to The National Reform Association (NRA) which remains the name today. So wide did the Covenanter vision spread, that the NRA's publication, *The Christian Statesman*, reached as many as 100,000 readers each issue, and ten- to fifteen-thousand Christians attended their annual meetings long before modern transportation was available.

In essence then, *Explicitly Christian Politics* chronicles this Covenanter influence with brief histories of the movement. Other essays in this collection expound a modern, multi-denominational, yet essentially Reformed social ethic related to the NRA's main concerns regarding national confession of Christ. Attractive to this reader was the fact that these essays were written by fairly typical members of this grass roots organization, including a physician, an economist, and two attorneys—not the usual array of theological "hired guns." Like most essay collections, the quality of individual pieces seems uneven at times, possibly because many of these articles were previously published in *The Christian Statesman* and not originally intended for publication in a symposium.

One might expect this work to be an apologetic for the Moral Majority or Christian Coalition. Instead, the careful reader will find numerous criticisms of these and similar groups as sub Christian cultural compromisers more inter-

ested in fostering "Ozzie and Harriet" 1950s style cultural comfort zones than promoting the genuine lordship of Christ. One might expect this work to rehash the naively uncritical "Christian America" theories which equate the founding fathers with the apostles themselves. This is precisely the opposite of what the first NRA espoused; from the beginning they stated that America was definitely *not* a Christian nation. Given our current cultural crisis where louts and rowdies are suddenly self-appointed scholars in patriotism and generals in their gun-toting militias, one might think that this work is some sort of "pro-militia" propaganda. Definitely not! Above all the Covenanters and their heirs respected lawful church and government authority and sought only to implement change in a peaceful manner through the declaration of God's truth. Every page is a slap in the face of pseudo Christian revolutionaries. Finally, one might think this is another unthinking theological tract where Bible texts are ripped out of context and used to prove text even the latest cures for bedwetting. Such thinking would not do justice to the spirit of these modern authors who—consciously or otherwise—are seeking to restate the Covenanter vision and the wisdom of our Reformed Confessions (Westminster, Savoy, London) which all, while recognizing the abiding instructive nature of the Mosaic Law, recognized that what remained was the "general equity" of this law, not every cultural specific.

For those interested in the "down stream" effect of Covenanter thought as it permeated other denominations, *Explicitly Christian Politics* provides an excellent insight into the lasting impact of the Covenanters on nineteenth-century Christians, and in a smaller way, on today's evangelical movement. Even then the majority of NRA activists were not the direct denominational heirs of the Covenanters. Today, the editor of the National Reform Association's publication, *The Christian Statesman*, is a Reformed Baptist who

graduated from a strongly dispensational Bible college and seminary!

For a modern, essentially Reformed, and usually winsome critique of the intellectually adrift "pop evangelical" political movements, one couldn't find a better analysis than this book. Still, many evangelicals will find this work troubling. Because it does not compromise with either our present political secularism or Christian pragmatism and posits a confident Christian alternative, some—perhaps many—evangelicals and fundamentalists will recoil at the political implications of Covenanter thought. Such fears, however, indicate how badly biblical Christians of every stripe need to have a constructive "meeting of the minds" on the issue of practical—and truly Christian—social theory. Perhaps this collection of essays will be the occasion for such dialogue.

CHUCK HUCKABY
Huntington, West Virginia

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE: HOW TO EVALUATE MUSIC

Two cassette tapes and booklet (49 pages)

Ron and Inge Cannon

Oak Brook, Illinois: Institute in Basic Life Principles

\$20.00

As the title implies, the authors believe that there is such a thing as excellent music. Whatever else may be said about this endeavor, it is clear that the authors are not relativists, that they believe that good music is good for people, that they believe that bad music is bad for people, that music is never morally neutral, and that goodness in music can be discerned.

The first portion of the presentation discusses the components of music—melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics,

form, and text. The discussion of melody set the tone for the whole project. First there were some technical observations about melody made admirably accessible to the uninitiated neophyte. The reader/listener then makes a towering leap from those truly good, technical observations to what constituted a good melody, followed by an audio sample of a good melody. I awaited this with baited breath. It was none other than "Jesus Is All the World to Me," by Will L. Thompson, 1904.¹ Oddly enough, had I been looking for samples of *bad* melodies, this one well might have stepped up in line. A Gregorian chant can be treated independent of harmony. It can even be arguably spoken of independent of rhythm. A revivalist melody, on the other hand, simply cannot be disembodied from its harmony and rhythm. In this case, both the harmonic progressions and the rhythm are trite. The melody was doomed from the outset. The high note reached by a fifth leap at the third to the last measure will invite the handful of vocal stars in a congregation to spread themselves while the less vocally facile will find the transmissions of their larynxes in pieces along the highway. A good time is had by all.

The above example is a microcosm of the strengths and weaknesses of the entire project. Roughly stated, Ron and Inge Cannon are very good at making basic music theory accessible. They are often correct in their criticisms of contemporary music. They almost always miss the mark with their applications. Held over the Bunsen burner long enough, what is left is something like, "Rock 'n Roll is bad; Sappy, self-centered revivalist music is good." It's almost as if that which is trite will become good if we just use a large enough choir, a pipe organ with enough ranks, and a large enough orchestra with lavish harp glissandi.

One of the most interesting (and probably controversial) segments dealt with psychoacoustics, a subdiscipline

of cognitive psychology. First off, I reiterate that we truly are fearfully and wonderfully made, and few things are more fearful and wonderful than human cognition. Psychophysics or psychoacoustics is a field very much in its infancy. The authors quoted a Dr. David Diamond, who claims that stopped anapestic rhythms alter brain waves so that there is a loss of strength, and, in some cases, cause seizures. They leapt from this data to the assertion that this rhythmic pattern is sometimes present in rock 'n roll. This was done without giving any audio examples. They also spoke of the presence of this poetic foot in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. They implied that the riot at its premiere might be linked to the anapestic rhythms contained therein. I will confess that I seldom know what kind of poetic foot I am hearing in the *Rite of Spring*, and I have more than a passing knowledge of the score. Beyond that, however, there are any number of potential causal factors to be eliminated before suggesting that anapestic rhythms incited a riot, factors such as a very poor performance and blatant paganism in the staging. Might we look for anapestic rhythms when Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am"?

The anapest is, hands down, the single and obdurate rhythm pattern of the first movement of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no. 3, in G major. The piece has been around now for more than a quarter of a millennium, and, with the number of performances and recordings this piece has had, we might expect a solid slab of usable data regarding loss of strength and seizures. I can't say with the force of a positivistic empiricist that there is no link between Bach's charming piece and seizures, but prudence leads me to believe that such is not the case. There really may be something to this psychoacoustic hypothesis, but it has a long way to go with lots of refinement before it can become dogma, and certainly it has no place in a brief and general work aimed at laymen.

Somewhat later, the authors discussed backward masking in recording, again with no compelling documentation and no tangible audio samples. There may be people who do perniciously employ backward masking, and the fact that music gains access to parts of our being that other media do not should make the specter of backward masking chilling. Still, it would have been best to give clear evidence or to have reserved that discussion for another day.

I found the aside about anapests regrettable because the following section treating volume was really quite good, and here, physiology and cognitive psychology have reached some maturity. We can say with some confidence that certain doses of sound delivered over certain amounts of time are permanently injurious to our hearing. This should concern Christians, for faith comes by hearing. That being the case, hearing is the most important of the five senses, for it is the difference between life and death. This is hardly to say that God cannot speak to a deaf person through sign language or printed words. Still, the biblical norm is that the gospel travels down the auditory nerve.

Not surprisingly, it was within the discussion of volume that the Cannons placed their fullest expose of rock 'n roll. They concluded that its chief features were "excessive repetition of melodic phrase, harmonic (chordal) pattern, or any combination of these, a dominant beat, often driving in nature, and intense volume." I add to their list "tawdry and predictable forms," but then we would have to turn the discerning eye upon other musics (such as revivalism). Beyond this, there are many fine classical pieces that are almost overwhelming in their repetition of surface elements. Several movements of the Brandenburg Concerti come to mind immediately. We could add Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" to the list along with the last movement of Beethoven's Third Symphony, the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the last movement of

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, Mussorgsky's Night on Bald Mountain, the first movement of Bartok's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste, and on and on. What is the difference between these and the rock 'n roll pieces? Well-designed form. Well-designed forms pay continual dividends to the thoughtful listener. Theodore Adorno said, "The higher music's relation to its historical form is dialectical. It catches fire on those forms, melts them down, makes them vanish and return in vanishing. Popular music, on the other hand, uses the types as empty cans into which the material is pressed without interacting with the forms."² We can say one of two things about the musician who employs trite forms: (1) he is slothful, and (2) his gifts lie in some other field of endeavor. Regardless of the trite form's root, it is not useful for a communal sacrifice of praise anymore than a three-legged bull was for an individual.

The discussion of syncopation contained a huge irony. Ron Cannon said that syncopation is not inherently bad. The issue is one of moderation. So far so good. In the interest of eradicating rock 'n roll, however, there was considerable discussion of what is wrong physiologically with a strong diet of syncopation. The musical examples included a large choral setting of Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" where the score called for some trendy rhythm patterns that might make that piece suitable for the "Lawrence Welk Show." Now comes the irony: That supposedly offensive setting was a good deal closer to the way Luther wrote it than is our present square and turgid practice. The authors complained that the syncopated music didn't serve the natural accentuation of the text. True enough. Luther, on the other hand, seems to have been almost completely unconcerned about this musical requirement, and in taking such a posture, lent a durable, peasant ruggedness to his texts that is regrettably lost in most English translations. The Cannons' view of syncopation has more to do with Pietism

and Romanticism than with musical practice that transcends the eons.

Finally, much of the project was reserved for an analysis of lyrics. This may be because that is the easiest aspect to analyze. It may also be because Christians have a specially vested interest in words. In either case, this is the portion of the presentation that Reformed people will want to scrutinize most carefully. I make this brief observation: The overall tenor of lyrics presented as wholesome was one of revivalism, of self-absorbed, decision theology. There was a continuous aroma of Cheswickian perfectionism. I nearly fell out of my chair when the authors spoke favorably of Pavlov and B.F. Skinner. For these reasons, I am very cautious about encouraging the use and distribution of these tapes. Some of the technical stuff on the first tape is useful, but it might be best to have a theologically discerning elder hold the hands of parishioners who feel the need to use this material. Beyond that, I suggest that there are other materials that, in the long run, may prove more useful, Victor Zuckerkandl's *The Sense of Music*, to give just one example.³

LEONARD R. PAYTON
Austin, Texas

Notes

1. No 653 in *Trinity Hymnal* (PCA, 1990); no. 161 in *Hymns of the Christian Life* (C&MA, 1962); no. 469 in *United Methodist Hymnal* (1989); no. 277 in *Worship and Service Hymnal* (Hope, 1963), no. 627 in *Hymns for the Family of God* (Paragon Associates, 1976), and no. 491 in *The Worshipping Church* (Hope, 1990).
2. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. (New York: Seabury, 1962), 26.
3. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959. Zuckerkandl's book was designed as the general, non-music-major curriculum for St. John's College, the great books school.