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WHY BOTHER?

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BOOK BRIEFS

John H. Armstrong

Mission and theology are so closely related that they cannot be permitted to become divorced in the manner in which Western academic theologians have become accustomed. After all, in Jesus Christ God himself came down to earth, down to the level of us mortals, and it ought not to be beyond the capacities of theologians to do the same. Theology must come down to earth, to serve the church and its mission to the world—and if it will not come down to earth, it must be brought down to earth by marginalising academic theology within the life of the church that it ceases to have any relevance to that church, in order that a theology oriented towards the pastoral and missiological needs of the church may develop in its wake.

ALISTER MCGRATH
THE ENIGMA OF THE CROSS (1987)

We are compelled to attempt what is unattainable, to climb where we cannot reach, to speak what we cannot utter. Instead of the bare adoration of faith, we are compelled to entrust the deep things of religion to the perils of human expression.

HILARY OF POITIERS (DIED A.D. 367)

The best theology is compressed prayer.

P. T. FORSYTH

A FREE CHURCH, A HOLY NATION: ABRAHAM KUYPER'S AMERICAN PUBLIC THEOLOGY

John Bolt
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
502 pages, paper, \$38.00

This work, written by a professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary and the esteemed editor of the *Calvin Theological Journal*, is a *tour de force* in the political thought of the famous Dutchman Abraham Kuyper. Bolt weaves Kuyper's thought into an argument for how American Christians can develop a public theology for the present cultural struggle. Bolt draws comparisons between Kuyper's views and those of Alexis de Tocqueville, Lord John Acton, and Jonathan Edwards.

A wonderful interaction between Kuyper's views, those of modern neo-Calvinists, and Christian Reconstructionists makes this volume particularly useful for Reformed thinkers. If more of the debate on these issues had interacted as seriously with Kuyper's views as John Bolt does we would have avoided a great deal of the mislabeling and acrimony that occurred over the past thirty years. Any Christian who would engage modern political and social thought ought to read this extremely helpful volume.

BUILDING A HEALTHY CULTURE: STRATEGIES FOR AN AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

Don Eberly, editor
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
543 pages, cloth, \$35.00

The thirty essays of this volume show the current state of cultural decay in America and offer direction and models for transformation. Included among the contributors are a number of well-known writers and social/cultural thinkers—e.g. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Amitai Etzioni, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Charles Krauthammer, Terry Mattingly, Joe McIlhaney, Michael Medved, and Ken Myers.

The objective of this helpful collection is to start a process of cultural recovery by providing a meaningful discussion of long-term strategies. These strategies include some political models as well as the development of voluntary associations. Don Eberly is the founder of the National Fatherhood Institute and the Civil Society Project. He has written extensively on issues of culture and society for many years. This is a well done collection that would be of great value when placed alongside the aforementioned John Bolt work on Abraham Kuyper.

GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU

J. I. Packer
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway (2001)
223 pages, paper, \$15.99

This new collection of Packer articles includes fifteen chapters, some of which appeared in the 1987 book, *Hot Tub Religion* (Tyndale). Several of the entries have appeared in magazines and journals but appear here in book form for the first time. As always Packer is biblical, stimulating, and quite practical. The chapter "Know Yourself" helps us to see how we should properly think about self in a self-absorbed age. The one titled "Church Reformation" is most important for the readers of this journal.

PSYCHOLOGY & CHRISTIANITY: FOUR VIEWS

Eric L. Johnson & Stanton L. Jones, editors
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2000)
271 pages, paper, \$14.99

Several books of this type have been published over the last decade or so. Most have served a very positive purpose. This new "four views" approach should be welcomed by all who would like more light and less heat on an already emotionally charged debate in the church. The four contributors are David Powlison, the biblical counseling model (nouthetic), David G. Myers, the levels-of-explanation model, Gary R. Collins, the integration model, and Robert C. Roberts, the Christian psychology model. Each writer presents his own view and responds to the other views.

The editors, who have been eminently fair in putting this work together, also include an introduction to the history of Christians and psychology as well as a conclusion of what might unite the four views. They also show how the reader might evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each view. Anyone who engages in the current Christian debate over psychotherapy would profit from this book.

REFRAMING PAUL: CONVERSATIONS IN GRACE & COMMUNITY

Mark Strom
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)
255 pages, paper, \$17.99

This is, quite simply, a disturbingly important book! Strom, a business consultant in Australia, holds a master's degree in Old Testament and hermeneutics and a Ph.D. focusing on Paul and contemporary evangelicalism. With this background in the scholarship surrounding Pauline studies and the present English speaking world Strom contradicts the impression that Paul was an abstract theologian. In doing so he demonstrates just how wrong many of our modern views

are about Scripture and community.

Strom admirably and carefully draws the reader into Paul's context, showing how modern ideas of Paul and his theology fail us in our practice. If you struggle, as a church leader, with the issue of community (who doesn't?) then this is a marvelous place to go for help. I hope this book gets wide discussion.

SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
550 pages, cloth, \$35.00

Annually a series of prestigious lectures are held on the Calvin campus in October, named after Henry J. Stob (1908-1996), professor of philosophy at Calvin College and professor of philosophy and moral theology at Calvin Theological Seminary. This volume includes these lectures from 1986-1998. The contributors are theologians, ethicists and philosophers. The work of thirteen celebrated and respected writers is included. Among the contributors are Lewis B. Smedes, Peter Kreeft, Alvin Plantinga, Martin E. Marty, Nicholas Wolterstorff, George I. Mavrodes, and Eleonore Stump. These names alone would attract serious readers to this volume.

As with any such collection the work in this volume is uneven in quality, but certain lectures stand out as extremely compelling, thus making the volume well worth the investment of serious thinkers and librarians. Rarely will you find such stimulating contemporary academic material in such an accessible single work.

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE: HISTORY, THEOLOGY & CONTEMPORARY LITERARY STUDIES

James Callahan
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)
272 pages, paper, \$17.99

One of the great debates of the Protestant Reformation was the clarity of Scripture, called the doctrine of perspicuity. One evidence of the difficulty of the doctrine is how inconsistent are the definitions of what it actually means. Why, for example, are some portions of the Bible seemingly so clear and straightforward while others divide faithful scholars, as well as ordinary Christians, more than ever? James Callahan, adjunct professor of theology at Elmhurst College places this issue within the church's historical debate and shows how the doctrine has been understood over time.

This discussion is helpfully conducted in the light of contemporary literary studies. Callahan argues that Scripture must be viewed as a privileged text within a privileged community and interpreted with humility before God and one another. This is a remarkably good book and worthy of use by all who read the Bible reflectively and theologically.

THE LIFE OF A GOD-MADE MAN

Dan Doriani
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway (2001)
224 pages, paper, \$12.99

Taking his direction from David, the "man after God's own heart," Doriani, professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, shows how the goals of your life should be established on biblical principles rather than on a new list of rules. He challenges the reader to a life with God at the center of every area: fatherhood, work, friendship, money, love, identity, and more.

Doriani, a very excellent biblical expositor, is also a clear

and helpful writer. He has authored work on the New Testament and his entry into more popular writing should be greeted with much joy by pastors who look for sound books for lay readers.

SLAVES, WOMEN & HOMOSEXUALS: EXPLORING THE HERMENEUTICS OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS

William J. Webb

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)
301 pages, paper, \$24.99

Sadly, hermeneutics has little conscious role in much of the current debate over sexuality in the Christian church. Positions are generally formed because of background and personal political opinion. Wrestling with the issue of how to apply "cultural background" to the meaning of biblical texts is the better, but more difficult, way for us to deal with such painful struggles.

The far right could not care less about this debate while the far left has already made up its mind. A better approach to the text of the Bible is desperately needed to correct both errors. Even if you disagree with Webb on some details the larger view he presents is important.

SONG OF SONGS

Tremper Longman

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
238 pages, cloth, \$35.00

Tremper Longman, professor of biblical studies at Westmont College, is a scholar who has the special ability to relate to both academic and lay readership. This new volume in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament is superb in every way. The author refuses to be pushed into the typical categories of interpretation about this controversial canonical book. He treats the *Song* as an ancient love

poem, descriptive of male-female love within marriage, and as an analogy of God's love for his people. Surely this is the correct hermeneutical approach.

Longman structures the *Song of Songs* around its twenty-three poetic units and then explains the message verse by verse. He adopts an anthropological approach to the text and compares the Song of Songs with other ancient Near Eastern literature. One extremely helpful feature of the book is Longman's account of the history of the interpretation of this book, a history often characterized by discomfort with the actual language and meaning of the text itself. If you want one up-to-date, practical and readable scholarly commentary on the *Song of Songs* this is the one to get!

HOW TO READ T. F. TORRANCE: UNDERSTANDING HIS TRINITARIAN & SCIENTIFIC THEOLOGY

Elmer M. Colyer

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)
393 pages, paper, \$24.99

One of the foremost academic Reformed theologians of the last half of the twentieth century has been Thomas F. Torrance. Far too few ministers have read Torrance, the result being they have missed out on one of the most important voices for theological thought in our time. Elmer Colyer, professor of historical theology at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, provides in this impressive work an introduction to Torrance that allows the reader to engage the theologian in the most helpful ways.

This work is actually a definitive overview that provides a coherent introduction to contemporary theology itself. Colyer integrates the biblical, patristic, and dogmatic dimensions of the theology of Torrance and thus allows the reader to understand how Torrance's scientific approach to God's revelation can become a helpful way to understand dogmatics in general. Colyer, a student of the work of evangelical theologian Donald G. Bloesch, is also a most able student of T. F. Torrance.

*NOTHING GREATER, NOTHING BETTER: THEOLOGICAL
ESSAYS ON THE LOVE OF GOD*

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, editor
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
217 pages, paper, \$23.00

Sadly, little good work has been done in modern biblical and systematic theology on the doctrine of the love of God. Even sadder still is the benign neglect of this fundamental truth in much Reformed theology. This volume addresses a serious need in the thought of modern pastors and will pay great dividends to the careful reader. The contributors to this volume represent an international group of first-rate biblical scholars and theologians, including Trevor Hart, Geoffrey Grogan, Paul Helm, Tony Lane, Alan Torrance, and Gary Badcock.

A survey of how the love of God has been understood through the ages is followed by a careful construction of the doctrine, which is relevant for today. The approaches include biblical, historical, philosophical, and systematic theology. Jesus, both human and divine, is seen as the ultimate criterion for defining the love of God. The idea of divine love is often either ignored or misrepresented. This wonderful book will correct both errors. Read it prayerfully. Your life and ministry will be wonderfully enriched by such deep reflection.

*THE RACE SET BEFORE US: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF
PERSEVERANCE & ASSURANCE*

Thomas R. Schreiner & Ardel B. Caneday
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)
344 pages, paper, \$19.99

Is the Christian life to be motivated by the concept of reward? How do you understand the warning passages of the New Testament? Should we emphasize in our preaching the need to run the race as if the prize (salvation) might actually be lost? What does all this have to do with the common

expressed idea of "eternal security?" And what about real assurance?

These oft-debated issues have polarized believers for centuries. Now a long-needed solution to the polarization of the typical categories has arisen in this new and highly important book. All serious debates over the numerous texts related to this subject must reckon with this carefully reasoned work. This is biblical theology at its very best. I urge every serious reader to get it and wrestle with it with an open Bible. I warn you, however—your views may have to change!

*A REFORMATION READER: PRIMARY TEXTS AND
INTRODUCTIONS*

Denis R. Janz, editor
Minneapolis: Fortress (1999)
386 pages, paper, \$29.00

This is an excellent anthology of the most important documents of the Reformation. It is formulated for use in a university or seminary setting, though any serious reader would profit by having it on their shelves for frequent reference. Janz is a well-respected Reformation scholar and has edited or written much impressive material on the period. This book gives us a tool for understanding the original documents of the period without overwhelming the reader.

1 CORINTHIANS: CONCORDIA COMMENTARY

Gregory J. Lockwood
St. Louis: Concordia (2000)
648 pages, cloth, \$34.95

The *Concordia Commentary* series, previously mentioned in this journal, is the product of conservative Lutheran biblical exegetical scholars. Though the series intentionally reflects a distinctly Lutheran framework, it is of value for all serious students of the biblical text. This is particularly true of

this present volume on 1 Corinthians.

Lockwood, formerly a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, is a pastor in Bendigo, Australia. He also served as a missionary/theological educator in Papua New Guinea for seventeen years. The most important feature of this particular work is how Lockwood develops the "theology of the cross" from 1:18–4:21 and then applies it to the whole of the epistle. This distinctive Lutheran contribution is something other Christians need and thus this commentary is highly recommended.

THE SECOND ONE THOUSAND YEARS: TEN PEOPLE WHO DEFINED A MILLENNIUM

Richard John Neuhaus, editor
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
126 pages, paper, \$14.00

Arguably the story of the second millennium was the story of the rise of the Christian West. The editors of *First Things* explore this story by looking at ten culture shapers who left a large imprint upon the landscape of history. The result was a series of narratives that now make up this delightful book.

Surely no two people would agree on the ten most important figures in the West over a thousand years but the choices made are intriguing. They include Gregory VII, Moses Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, John Calvin, Blaise Pascal, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Abraham Lincoln, and John Paul II. What this readable and enjoyable book provides is a short, simple overview of where we are as we begin a new millennium.

NELSON'S NEW CHRISTIAN DICTIONARY

George Thomas Kurian, editor
Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers (2001)
983 pages, cloth, \$39.99

A comprehensive definition of over 10,000 Christian words, persons and places, this new resource meets a real need. Entries are brief but generally satisfying for common use. Included here are biblical words, theological doctrines and concepts, historical events, and important men and women. Pictures, charts, and illustrations make the book graphically appealing. This work will not satisfy the serious researcher but will help lay readers as a beginning point.

OPERATION WORLD: WHEN WE PRAY GOD WORKS

Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk
Minneapolis: Bethany House (2001)
798 pages, paper \$17.99

This is the definitive book on the state of Christian mission across the globe. This edition is subtitled: "Twenty First Century Edition." It is an update of the 1993 edition and subsequent updates and is *completely* revised. This is much more than an encyclopedia of the state of the church. It is a prayer guide to the nations, people, and cities of the world. The reader is given key background information for every country, major prayer challenges from Christian workers in hundreds of places, answers to prayer in the international mission of the church and new maps and cross-references. This comprehensive work has altered the prayer life of thousands of Christians and thus made a major impact upon the whole church. This new edition is warmly welcomed and should be used by leaders in churches everywhere.

READING THE BIBLE IN FAITH: THEOLOGICAL VOICES FROM THE PASTORATE

William H. Lazareth, editor
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
206 pages, paper, \$15.00

The thesis of this collection of short essays is precisely that of the editorial staff of *Reformation & Revival Journal*, namely that the "crisis" in the church today is neither organizational nor programmatic, but theological. The crisis, seen in this volume from a mainline denominational perspective, is one that affects all pastoral leadership across the entire spectrum of denominations and confessions. Unless our leaders engage the Holy Scriptures and churchly tradition with fresh eyes and ears the church will not experience much needed renewal.

The essays in this book are deeply rooted in the Bible and in pastoral experience. True ministry grows out of theological calling. All that pastors do needs to be rooted in careful biblical theology. This book will help the serious pastor rekindle this life-long journey.

GROWING PAINS

Randall Balmer
Grand Rapids: Brazos (2001)
142 pages, cloth, \$15.99

Randall Balmer is a hugely talented man. He is a frequent commentator on National Public Radio and the writer and host of some of the best documentaries on religion in America to appear on television. A professor of American religion at Barnard College, Columbia University, Balmer grew up in fundamentalism, rejected a good deal of the background, struggled with the trappings of faith for some years, and now expresses confidence in the evangel one again.

A perennial struggle for Christian families has been passing the faith on to the next generation in a healthy and

mature way. Randall Balmer's account of struggle with a strong father will offend some but the end result is a wonderfully readable, highly useful, and inspiring book. The saving grace for Balmer was his discovery of the unconditional love of a heavenly father who sent his son Jesus into the world to identify fully with it.

THE GOD WHO JUSTIFIES: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

James R. White
Minneapolis: Bethany House (2001)
394 pages, cloth, \$19.99

James R. White, apologist and author, is a clear thinker who writes for a wide audience of theologically serious Christians. Some of his best-written work deals with crucial doctrinal matters that often divide believers. This book fits that category. White only briefly touches upon the historical/theological debate of the sixteenth century. His primary thrust is exegetical. The book does a good job of presenting the historic Lutheran/Reformed view of justification by faith alone. If the reader is looking for serious interaction with contemporary issues this book is not the place. If one puts this volume alongside of James Buchanan's *The Doctrine of Justification* (an 1886 classic reprinted by Banner of Truth, 1984) you will have two clear traditional treatments of the doctrine.

REVELATION: NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

Simon J. Kistemaker
Grand Rapids: Baker (2001)
635 pages, cloth, \$39.99

Several decades ago the late Reformed exegete William J. Hendricksen began a helpful series of New Testament commentaries. When Hendricksen passed away the publisher enlisted Simon J. Kistemaker to complete the unfinished

series. With this volume on the Revelation the series is concluded. The series, designed for pastors and serious Bible students, meets a real need, and many of us who have preached have often used it with profit. This volume is a worthy companion to the set, and Dr. Kistemaker has proven to be a worthy successor to Hendricksen in completing this useful series. Kistemaker provides a very helpful overview of the various schools of thought about the interpretation of this apocalyptic book. Highly recommended.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: A SOCIO-RHETORICAL COMMENTARY

Ben Witherington, III
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
463 pages, paper, \$35.00

Witherington, professor of New Testament interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, is the esteemed author of numerous books, both technical and popular, on the life and ministry of Jesus and the writings of the New Testament. This is his fourth socio-theological commentary (Acts, Corinthians and Galatians). He draws upon dozens of ancient writers to show how they used form and function in their writing. With this background interwoven into his work he then interacts with the widest range of important New Testament scholarship on Mark's Gospel. This is a fresh, scholarly and impressive work. One does not have to agree with everything to profit from the big picture that Witherington paints in this work. This reviewer thinks a "real" book is cloth bound and is therefore disappointed to see more and more scholarly books issued *only* in paperback editions.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

James R. Edwards
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
552 pages, cloth, \$40.00

In the nineteenth century, New Testament scholarship began to accept the thesis that Mark was the first written Gospel. This view is widely held today by scholars of all types and backgrounds. The result of this acceptance has been a renewal of interest in Mark. No longer is the second Gospel viewed as a mere abridgement of Matthew. Articles and important works on the second Gospel abound. James Edwards has spent thirty years studying Mark and ably locates the Gospel within its historical and social context, thus providing a happy background of the study of the text itself.

James R. Edwards is a contributing editor of *Christianity Today* and a frequent contributor to academic journals. He serves as professor of religion at Whitworth College, Spokane, Washington, and is an active participant in renewal efforts in Presbyterian Church (USA). He authored the volume on Romans in the New International Biblical Commentary series and is a wonderful communicator, both as a speaker and as a writer. This is a highly recommended volume for pastors who would preach through Mark.