



ADVANCING THE
CHRISTIAN TRADITION
IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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BOOK BRIEFS

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG

*CREED WITHOUT CHAOS: EXPLORING THEOLOGY IN
THE WRITINGS OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS*

Laura K. Simmons

Grand Rapids: Baker (2005)

222 pages, paper, \$19.95



Twentieth-century theology and apologetics was powerfully shaped by a sterling group of lay English writers, including C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and J. R. R. Tolkien. Dorothy Sayers must also be included in any list of important thinkers who left a deep and impressive mark upon the church through writing. Simmons, a professor at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, gives us *the* book for understanding and reading

Sayers wisely. She interacts not only with Sayers' published work but also her numerous letters.

Dorothy Sayers authored popular novels, dramas, translations of Dante, and well-written lay theology. She also conducted a very wide correspondence. In this moving treatment of all her written work, the ordinary reader, as well as the specialist, now has a significant way to follow her comprehensive thought. For Sayers, everything she wrote became "variations upon a hymn to the Master Maker." I pray to God that more popular and literary figures would do the same in our time. This book might well foster such a reformation in popular writing that takes truth seriously and comprehensively.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF DIVINE REVELATION

William J. Abraham

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2006)

212 pages, paper, \$20.00



Current theories in philosophy and theology, profoundly rooted in modern epistemology, assume a general theory of knowing and a minimal version of theism. William Abraham suggests a very different approach, one that is rooted in ancient Christian arguments. He thereby challenges the two modern assumptions about knowing, arguing rather that epistemology must begin with what he calls the “canonical theism” of the early confessional Christian church. Abraham’s vision has some common threads with the better-known Reformed epistemology but ultimately reflects his own non-Reformed synthesis.

For several decades now Abraham has advanced a challenging argument for a way of understanding both Canon and revelation that is rooted in the consensual Christianity that flourished before the great schism of the East and West. His thesis is calculated to disturb modern rationalistic thinkers, but it offers a window into another age and time that will thrill many who are willing to engage his brilliant analytical mind. This work is not intended for readers who are new to this subject.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN—MISSIONARY THEOLOGIAN: A READER

Paul Westin, compiler

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2006)

287 pages, paper, \$16.00



No single writer in our lifetime has done more for the modern *missional* movement than the late Lesslie Newbigin (1909–98). Newbigin, an internationally esteemed British missionary, pastor, apologist, and ecumenist, served as an evangelist in India, the bishop of the Church of South India, and as associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches. He is best known, however, for his numerous written works. His best-sellers include several books that are mandatory reading in my own classroom instruction: e.g., *Foolishness to the Greeks*, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, *The Open Secret*, and *A Proper Confidence*.

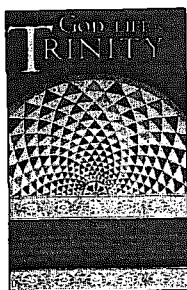
This reader includes a short biography of Newbigin, by compiler Paul Weston, and a discussion of his major theological and missiological themes. This alone is worth the price of the book. This volume serves a great purpose for either the first-time reader of Newbigin or the person who has read him deeply for years. It includes selected readings, in context, with brief introductions. It also offers suggestions for further readings from the corpus of Newbigin’s prodigious work. By this means it provides what every teacher of Newbigin has long desired—a comprehensive introduction to the man and his legacy. I highly recommend this book to every pastor, apologist, evangelist, and missionary.

GOD'S LIFE IN TRINITY

Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, editors

Minneapolis: Fortress (2006)

262 pages, paper, \$24.00



The recovery of Trinitarian thinking in the West has been a great blessing to many of us, both in our personal life and in the church. New books on the subject abound, with some rising to the level of immense importance for serious readers. This lively and diverse collection of eighteen essays by an esteemed group of theologians should be placed on that growing list of such books. Included in this volume are chapters

by well-known theologians and philosophers such as John Webster, Nicholas Wolterstorff, John Polkinghorne, Miroslav Volf, Gerald O'Collins, and Harvey G. Cox, Jr.

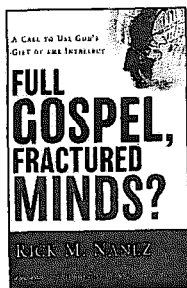
This fine collection is both an engagement of the ideas and a celebration of the eightieth birthday of Jurgen Moltmann (April 8, 2006). No one has impacted theology internationally in the twentieth century, at least since Karl Barth, quite like Moltmann. This is a worthy tribute to a great thinker.

FULL GOSPEL, FRACTURED MINDS?

Rick M. Nañez

Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2005)

267 pages, paper, \$18.99



How often does a Pentecostal missionary write a clear-headed, convincing, and passionate defense of the intellect? I'm not sure, really, but I am sure that in this readable, insightful, and well-written book the author, who is an Assembly of God minister, accomplishes exactly that. In so doing he gets commendations, rightly so, from within and without the Pentecostal establishment, including a foreword by Stanley

Horton and a cover statement by Mark Noll.

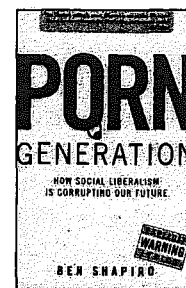
Nañez believes that the Pentecostal movement has brought fresh vitality to the church, but it has also carried a strong anti-intellectualism with this renewing force. In this wonderful survey of both historical issues and present concerns, he explores the roots of this problem and shows us why the intellect is God's gift and thus should be developed as an essential part of the *imago Dei*. This is a first-rate work that should be read by all, both pastors and non-pastors.

PORN GENERATION: HOW SOCIAL LIBERALISM IS CORRUPTING OUR FUTURE

Ben Shapiro

Washington, D.C.: Regnery (2005)

232 pages, cloth, \$27.95



Ben Shapiro is a young man (born in 1984) who is in a hurry. Not one to shy away from a fight with elitist culture and educational hegemony, Shapiro sees things that trouble him deeply in our culture that have come about as a result of our collective loss of values. In this, his first book, he takes aim at the "porn generation," which he defines as one which takes life's expectations from Victoria's Secret, Internet titillation, and modern sex education.

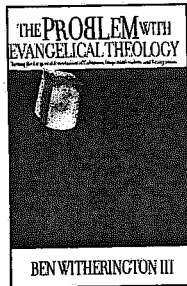
Tom Wolfe has shown us how far moral relativism has really gone on the modern college campus in his novel, *Charlotte Simmons*. As a member of this generation, Ben Shapiro reveals the actual damage done by this oversexed narcissistic crowd. Does Shapiro have any good news? Yes, in fact, he does. He believes disease, despair, and depression have set in and that many in the porn generation are beginning to awaken to their tragedy. One can hope that this realization might prepare the way for a real spiritual awakening again on college campuses in America. It has happened before.

THE PROBLEM WITH EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Ben Witherington III

Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press (2005)

294 pages, paper, \$29.95



Ben Witherington believes that modern evangelical theology has one major problem—it is not “nearly biblical enough” (xi). He writes that “Evangelicalism has lost touch with its Reformation principles and in particular with its necessary rigorous attention to the details of the Bible and the need to stick to the text and the battle cry ‘sola Scriptura.’ It is my hope that those who read the following critique will understand

why I am concerned about, and will perhaps take up that other cry of the Reformation—‘semper reformanda’” (xi). I believe he is right, and that is precisely why this critique is so vital to our present attempts to renew the church.

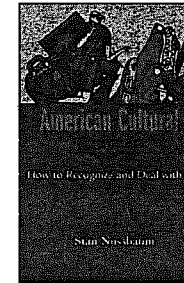
Witherington is a Methodist biblical scholar who engages in first-rate research and writing, who wants us all to test the exegetical foundations of our modern evangelical systems: e.g., Calvinism, dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism. In doing so he jars and troubles just about every proponent and defender of these popular traditions. The result is an equal opportunity critique that is bound to make many of us uncomfortable. This is exactly why I think this is an important book for both pastors and lay readers. It is extremely readable, though dense.

AMERICAN CULTURAL BAGGAGE:**HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND DEAL WITH IT**

Stan Nussbaum

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis (2005)

160 pages, paper, \$15.00



Stan Nussbaum believes that as long as you live in the United States you can get along with being conscious of your own culture, but when you go into a different culture your American assumptions simply do not work well. The aim of this book is to “help open your eyes to your own American culture” (9), but most of us do not even know that our eyes are closed. We have never discovered our wide-ranging biases and frankly do not wish to. Nussbaum will jar you if you allow him to teach you.

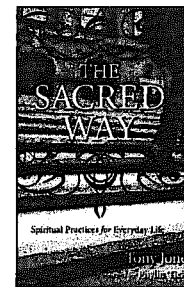
This book provides what one reviewer has called a “special kind of mirror,” allowing the reader to look behind the common assumptions of American culture. It also allows non-Americans to see what makes us tick. It is humorous, insightful, and rich reading that should be required for anyone who wants to truly understand American culture and how to think about it as a Christian.

THE SACRED WAY

Tony Jones

Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2005)

222 pages, paper, \$12.99



Tony Jones is a big name in what is called the emerging church, or Emergent. He is also a prolific writer and an academic who is a doctoral candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary. This present book is his description of his own journey into Christian spirituality. What it is, and how you practice it, underscores the burden of the author. After introducing the subject, Jones approaches spirituality in two ways:

via contemplativa (i.e., contemplative approaches to spirituality) and *via activa* (bodily approaches to spirituality). The first includes subjects like silence and solitude, sacred reading, The Jesus Prayer, centering prayer, meditation, and The Daily Office. The second includes practices such as the labyrinth, the stations of the cross, pilgrimage, fasting, the sign of the cross, and Sabbath. He concludes with a great list of book and Web resources.

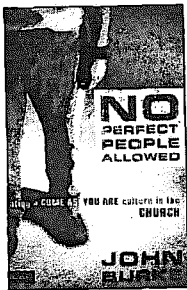
While most evangelicals have been uncomfortable with many of these practices for several centuries, there is undoubtedly a recovery movement going on at the present time. This book provides a kind of road map for evangelicals who are pursuing the ancient-future paradigm advanced by theologian Robert Webber. It is a well-written book, using informal style well, and generally helpful in the overall thrust of the thesis. Short of reading the actual classics of spirituality, it is a good way to get younger readers into the Christian mainstream.

NO PERFECT PEOPLE ALLOWED

John Burke

Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2005)

329 pages, cloth, \$16.00



John Burke, the pastor of Gateway Community Church in Austin, Texas, is one of a growing list of writers and Christian leaders who believes that America is a post-Christian nation. Because of this, Burke also believes we must rethink both ministry and evangelism, adopting a missional mindset toward both people and culture. This is neither novel nor debatable in a very obvious sense. However, the question of what we are to do about this shift is fiercely debated. Burke is a fresh voice, providing insights that must be read more widely.

Burke argues that there are five great struggles that need to be bridged if the church is to reach emerging generations. These struggles provide the major sections of his book. They are the struggle with trust, tolerance, truth, brokenness, and aloneness. You may not agree with Burke, indeed many will feel deeply chal-

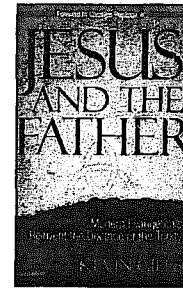
lenged by him, but you should not ignore his challenge. If you want to understand the emergent debate, this book is highly recommended.

JESUS AND THE FATHER: MODERN EVANGELICALS REINVENT THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

Kevin Giles

Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2006)

320 pages, paper, \$24.99



The modern debate over the role of women in the church, especially in evangelical circles, has generated some odd theological emphases. None, suggests Kevin Giles, the vicar of St. Michael's Church in North Carlton, Australia, is more seriously flawed than the idea that the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father. This "subordinationism" error has been popularized by several modern evangelical writers who wish to use it to provide theological support, in the doctrine of God, for the subordination of the wife to her husband.

Is the Son eternally subordinated to the Father in function? Are the Father and Son divided or undivided in power and authority? And is the Father-Son-Spirit relationship ordered hierarchically or horizontally? Giles addresses these and a healthy list of other important theological issues that touch on the nature of God. The big question, much debated, is this: Does the Father-Son relationship in the Trinity prescribe male-female relationships in the home and the church?

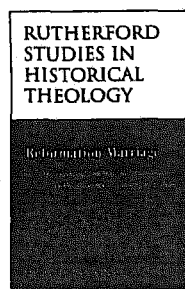
There are several serious problems that have surfaced on the so-called complementarian side in the modern debate about the role of women. Perhaps none is more consequential, and thus vital to the life and health of the gospel, than the issue of the Trinity. Giles has rendered a great service to the church by writing this very important book. Anyone who engages this subject should make it a priority to read it. It will be discussed and debated, rightly so, for some time.

**REFORMATION MARRIAGE: THE HUSBAND
AND WIFE RELATIONSHIP IN THE THEOLOGY
OF LUTHER AND CALVIN**

Michael Parsons

Edinburgh, Scotland: Rutherford House (2005)

386 pages, paper, 19.99 (UK)



If you are as disturbed by the sweeping generalizations and huge categorical mistakes that are made by scholars in our time regarding the views of the Protestant Reformers on a subject like marriage and the relationship of husband and wife, then this is the book you have been waiting for. It is a sturdy academic work, well researched and eminently fair-minded, that demonstrates that the idea that the Reformation

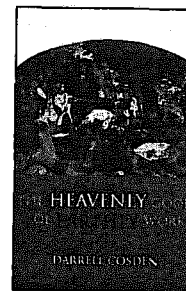
was about sex is modern revisionism of the worst sort. If you want to really hear Luther and Calvin *in their own context*, and thereby wrestle with their biblical interpretations of vital social and family issues, then Parsons will be your book. The end result is a book that is historically realistic while it is, at the same time, an important contribution to all modern discussion of reformation. Parsons, who taught at London Bible College, is now a professor in Perth, Australia, at a Baptist theological college. The book can best be ordered from www.rutherfordhouse.org.uk.

THE HEAVENLY GOOD OF EARTHLY WORK

Darrell Cosden

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson (2006)

149 pages, paper, \$17.95



I have increasingly found it necessary, in pursuing reformation in the church in the West, to regain a healthy theology of work and vocation. People simply do not know why they work and what importance their daily work has for eternity. And few pastors offer convincing arguments to support the saints in their struggle to obtain meaning and direction in life. Can ordinary work actually be part, perhaps even a major part, of

how we participate in God's mission in the world?

Cosden is a lecturer in theology and ethics at International Christian College in Glasgow, Scotland, and is also the author of the book, *A Theology of Work*. This work is genuinely creative, constructive, and provocative. It offers non-ministers something desperately needed for mission in the present time. Pastors might even better serve their flock by reading this trenchant little work, too.