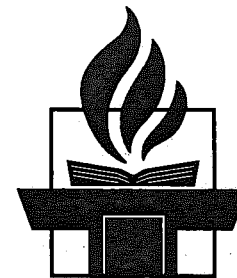


Reformation
& Revival



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Where grace exists it reigns; it is the dominant factor in the situation.

J. I. Packer

Saving grace makes a man as willing to leave his lusts as a slave is willing to leave his galley, or a prisoner his dungeon, or a thief his bolts, or a beggar his rags.

Thomas Brooks

God's grace is not only amazing grace, it is abounding grace.

Vance Havner

Grace is stronger than circumstances.

J. C. Ryle

Book Reviews

Putting Amazing Back Into Grace

Michael Scott Horton

Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson (1991).

263 pages, paper, \$9.99.

Many who have only recently come to know of Michael Horton (he edited recent bestsellers *The Agony of Deceit* and *Power Religion*) may be unaware of this volume in which he ably defines and defends the foundations of his theology. Subtitled, *An Introduction to Reformed Theology*, this very readable book sets the table for those who wish to sample Reformed thought. Informed readers will recognize the fabric of "the five points" woven skillfully throughout the chapters. Yet this book is not principally about the five points, but rather about the foundational issues of grace. In short, Horton has done Reformed theology a great service in preparing a volume which leads the reader past the labels and straight to the truth itself.

Unlike many books which attempt to describe the issues of grace from the Reformed perspective, this one does not retreat to the friendly confines of the sixteenth century. Rather, using contemporary language and illustrations, Horton takes the biblical truths of grace (most of which were rediscovered in the sixteenth century!) and presents them as understandable, and indeed, essential for citizens of the twentieth century. However, throughout his task of contemporizing the message, he never resorts to minimizing the truth. This is not to say that this book does not put the reader through his paces. As J. I. Packer says in his forward:

This book is a breathtaking workout for Protestant lay people, with a prospect of new health and strength for those who stay the course. Tough, genial, and encouraging (as

good trainers learn to be), Horton makes us pump intellectual iron as he puts us through the painful yet healthful discipline of relearning the Reformation's vital message of saving grace.

Horton begins his theological training with a brief historical introduction to the Reformation in which he presents the several "sola's" on which the Reformers built their theological houses. He then gives the reader an autobiographical peek at his personal theological journey during which he wandered, as a young man, into the dead end of what he refers to as the "evangelical ghetto" in which "the same cliches, slogans, and experiences which had provided a sense of being 'in' . . . began to appear shallow and trite." From this ghetto he escaped, by means of Paul's letter to the Romans, to find freedom in God's liberating grace. As he explains "God does it all and we contribute nothing but our sinfulness." From this point, the book's one purpose is to expose the reader fully to the brilliance of grace in hopes that it will produce the same wonderful effect.

The chapters cover the issues of grace beginning with Creation and the results of the fall, and moving through the issues of predestination, election, atonement, justification, sanctification, and the priesthood of believers. A later chapter also discusses the sacraments and their role in the spiritual growth of the believer. As stated above, however, these chapters are not filled with theological terms, but rather with insightful and simple presentations of the truths behind them. Study questions, designed to aid the reader in sorting out truth from opinion, are also found following several of the chapters. One wonders why they are not found after every chapter giving the help they provide the reader in personalizing the material.

An additional feature of this most helpful volume is the appendix in which Horton cites examples from both the Scriptures and church fathers which support his assertion

that the Reformed faith is none other than the truth of the Bible and the testimony of history.

While Packer suggests that this book is best suited to the layman, perhaps he gives the clergy too much credit. If those who fill our pulpits already know this material, they do a great job of hiding it. Everyone who is charged with preaching and teaching God's Word do well to devour this manual on grace. If history provides any pattern it is that revival is most often associated with a return to strong biblical preaching centered around the truth of God's grace. Though currently out of print, it will be reprinted by Baker Book House in March 1994. When the new edition is available, buy this book; in fact, buy two: one to read and re-read, and one to give to someone you are preparing for leadership.

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All of Grace

Charles H. Spurgeon
Chicago: Moody Press (n.d.)
128 pages, paper, \$3.99.

Spurgeon's little classic, *All of Grace*, should be known by all. It has had a historic usefulness ever since it was first selected by D. L. Moody for publication in 1894, and has been continuously in print ever since. Several publishers offer different printings and prices, making it accessible for distribution even today.

Since this little book is a classic, in the truest sense, the scope of my review is significantly narrowed. I dare not critique it in the normal sense that one does a new book. And the book scarcely needs this reviewer's commendation

to cause others to read it! One hundred years of enduring reader demand for this book commend it to anyone who loves the gospel of grace, and to everyone who would seek to understand better the essential nature of the saving grace of God.

All of Grace is pure gospel; a hearty dose of pure gospel I would add. It was written with an evangelistic purpose which its subtitle states very clearly: *An Earnest Word for Those Who Are Seeking Salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ*. It consists of twenty short chapters (two to ten pages each), which center upon the great truths of salvation. Throughout, an earnest plea is made with the reader to trust Christ for salvation. Early chapters elucidate the wonder of God justifying sinners, and the nature of saving faith. A chapter titled "Regeneration and the Holy Spirit" addresses the perplexity and hesitation of one who sees that the new birth lies beyond human ability, and so is at a loss to know how one can then believe. Spurgeon's closing words in this connection are, as usual, to the point and to the heart: "If you will not believe till you can understand all mysteries, you will never be saved. . . . Do not commit spiritual suicide through a passion for discussing metaphysical difficulties" (p. 90). How different, it must be noted, is this kind of counsel from that often given in *some* Reformed circles in the past where inquiring sinners were urged to "seek" *in order* to believe. Spurgeon seems much closer to the actual tenor of the New Testament itself in this matter.

Three subsequent chapters devoted to explaining the nature and necessity of true repentance are very helpful. As Spurgeon nears the end of his treatise, he is assuming that his reader has indeed come through to Christ (or certainly will!), and so offers instruction with a note of assurance.

Two distinct values of this book are readily apparent. As the tool of evangelism it was designed to be, it has lost very little of its "edge." To be sure, some of the illustrations and

language are dated, but the simplicity in which it was originally penned, and the warmth of the appeal to the heart which it breathes throughout will continue to be used of God to win souls for eternity. And this brings out another value. For the minister of the gospel, Spurgeon provides an instructive example of both labor and heart: That labor which expends itself at the task of stating truth as simply and precisely as one's gifts will enable, and the heart which has tasted deeply of grace and so longs for others to so taste. As pastors and church leaders we need to carefully consider such, since nothing less is required of us in this, our day.

Bruce Hollister
Joliet, Illinois

Saved By Grace

Anthony A. Hoekema
Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1989).
277 pages, cloth, \$22.99.

Saved By Grace is the third volume in a series of three doctrinal studies produced by the late Anthony Hoekema. This, his final work, is characterized by the same biblical fidelity and clarity as his two earlier works, *The Bible and the Future* (a presentation of Christian eschatology), and *Created in God's Image* (an explanation of the Christian doctrine of man). This book is devoted to soteriology, the Christian doctrine of salvation.

From the outset Hoekema articulates a perspective that establishes the tone for the rest of his work: a recognition that the God of the Bible is sovereign over all things, including our salvation in Christ. Unfortunately, many Chris-

tians fail to recognize this as the essence of the biblical understanding of grace. Hoekema properly begins with this premise, and everything that follows reinforces this *a priori* conviction: "We are saved wholly by grace, through the powerful working of God's Holy Spirit, on the basis of the all-sufficient work of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

This is not to say that Hoekema fails to acknowledge human responsibility. Quite to the contrary, he resists the temptation to resolve the mysteries left by the revelation given to us by God.

At the same time, however, the Scriptures teach that God saves us, not as puppets but as persons, and that we must therefore be active in our salvation. The Bible, in a way which is deeply mysterious, combines God's sovereignty with our responsibility in the process of our salvation (Prefix, xi).

Elsewhere, in reference to the legitimacy of the gospel call as it relates to the eternal plan of God, Hoekema writes:

We should remember that we cannot lock God up in the prison of human logic. Our theology must maintain the scriptural paradox. With Calvin, our theological concern must be not to build a rationally coherent system, but to be faithful to all the teachings of the Bible (p.79).

Oh, that our doctrinal convictions would be characterized by such integrity!

The key which unlocks the structure of Hoekema's book is his perspective regarding the *ordo salutis*, i.e., the order of salvation. While acknowledging that regeneration must have a causal priority over the other experiences in the process of salvation, Hoekema states that we should

... abandon the concept of an order of salvation as an attempt to impose a chronological order on a unitary work of God which does not admit of being divided into successive

steps. . . . It is true, however, that in applying to us the salvation we have in Christ the Holy Spirit does bring about various experiences which, though they may never be separated, must be distinguished from each other. . . . But, though we take them up one by one, we must remember that they never occur separately but always together (p. 15).

He then summarizes by saying: "We should think, then, not of an order of salvation with successive steps or stages, but rather of a marvelous work of God's grace—a *way of salvation*—within which we may distinguish various steps" (p.15).

The chapters which follow establish and explain from the Scriptures these various aspects of salvation: union with Christ, the gospel call, effectual calling, regeneration, conversion, repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and the perseverance of true believers. The chapter devoted to the gospel call is particularly challenging to the Reformed preacher who wonders about the integrity of indiscriminately urging men and women to be reconciled to God. The chapters on justification and sanctification are especially thorough in defining and distinguishing between these two aspects of salvation which have often been confused.

Given Hoekema's thoroughness one cannot help but be somewhat disappointed by what appears to be missing from this volume. He does not include a definitive explanation of the foreordaining work of God. Though it is an assumption referred to throughout this book, it does not appear to have been within Hoekema's scope to provide a biblical defense for it. Sadly, he does not include a defense of particular redemption, though many of his statements are predicated upon it. Of course, in fairness to the author, it must be mentioned that in his first chapter he establishes his own parameters:

In the present volume, however, soteriology . . . will be understood as including only the study of the application of the blessings of salvation to the people of God, and their restoration to God's favor and to a life of fellowship with him in Christ (p. 3)

Explanation notwithstanding it must be said respectfully that his dependence upon the electing purposes of God and the particular redemption of Christ are too foundational to his theology (and too controversial, in the event he hopes to persuade critics!) not to include a brief explanation of them in a soteriological textbook. And this criticism comes from one who shares Hoekema's convictions in this matter.

Finally, his outstanding chapter on regeneration leaves the reader with a few lingering questions: Did regeneration take place under the old covenant? Did the Holy Spirit indwell believers in the earlier age as He does in the new? And on what basis can we arrive at answers to questions like these? Are they theological inferences, or the specific results of exegesis? I mention these intended omissions, not to spotlight a deficiency in Hoekema's scholarship, but simply to express the disappointment of one who would have taken great delight in absorbing the fruit of his keen insight on these germane issues.

Some pleasant surprises meet the reader of this volume. Theological issues not typically studied in relationship to soteriology are explored. The carnal Christian theory is considered, as is the church's ministry of healing. Brief studies on the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are offered. The baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit are also examined. While none of these areas are treated exhaustively, Hoekema's conclusions are exegetically informed and communicated in a fair-minded spirit.

In a day when thoroughgoing study of the doctrine of salvation has been jettisoned as impractical and irrelevant by the church at large, *Saved By Grace* serves an essential

purpose. If you are looking for simple clichés regarding the essence of God's saving work, stay away from this book. A legion of other volumes will serve that purpose. But if you want your mind challenged by the lucid exposition of Scripture in relationship to the technicalities of God's saving work, if you want your passion rekindled regarding the manifold grace of God in the salvation of sinners, this book is for you. Buy it. Absorb it. Make its contents the preeminent message of your ministry.

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Letters Along the Way

D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books (1993).
288 pages, paper, \$11.95.

Rarely have I read a contemporary book on the nature of ministry and the Christian pilgrimage which has moved me like *Letters Along the Way*. Carson and Woodbridge have accomplished, with the use of fiction, something akin to the effect of John Newton's famous letters, *Voice of the Heart: Cardiphonia*, published first in 1780. Personal letters which speak to the heart seem to be a lost form of ministry in our day.

Letters Along the Way is written in the form of correspondence between two men, one an aging professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and the other a young man who begins the journey as a young convert. By the end of the fifteen years covered in the story, the younger man is a Presbyterian minister. The symbolism of the story is seen in the names of the two principal characters: Dr. Paul Woodson, the Trinity professor, a wise

and very human older Christian who loves Christ's church very deeply, and Tim Journeyman, who moves from conversion through early stages of growth, which include failure, struggle and then seminary and marriage. It becomes apparent that Paul writes to encourage young Timothy in his faith and to exhort him, much as the apostle did the young Timothy of the New Testament era.

These letters, like any collection of this kind, are of mixed usefulness, depending on the reader's background and experience. The 49 chapters of this book each contain practical wisdom about spiritual, moral, biblical and theological issues. Significant comment on modern evangelicalism is an added benefit of the book as well. I found myself making my own personal index at the back of my copy almost from the first letter. Some of the topics which I marked are: assurance of salvation, the lordship of Christ and the carnal Christian teaching, repentance, evolution, universalism, witnessing, the relationship between the weaker and stronger brother, expository preaching, the call to the gospel ministry, counseling and psychology, inerrancy, apologetics, and sexual sin and its dangers. In addition we learn a good bit about France, the Huguenots, British evangelicalism and its differences from American evangelicalism (one of the more helpful portions of the book to me), and American culture at the end of the century. Practical questions like: "How do you pick a seminary?"; "What requirements are there for the ministry of the gospel?"; and, "How important is doctrine?" are all very effectively addressed. The counsel offered in letters like these is clear, sound and to the point.

Pastors who have been in the ministry for years will find this book one which encourages them. Young men contemplating the ministry should read this book very prayerfully as they consider God's direction for their lives. New believers would receive great help in gaining perspective for solid

growth, while Christians in general would all find something here to interest them and help them think more clearly.

Editor

Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles

John F. MacArthur, Jr.

Dallas, Texas: Word Books (1993).

272 pages, cloth, \$17.99.

Dr. John MacArthur is the well-known pastor of Grace Community Church of the Valley, Panorama City, California, and the featured speaker on the "Grace to You" radio broadcast. In this recently released volume MacArthur has added an important new work to the ongoing "Lordship Salvation" debate (a phrase that MacArthur does not like but concedes because of its popular use).

Faith Works is a sequel to his earlier book, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Zondervan, 1988). *Faith Works* expands the discussion on the lordship issue, as well as provides a "Start from the beginning approach" (p. 11) to the doctrine of salvation.

In general, this volume seeks to expand the market of the earlier volume, which tended to reach pastors and academicians. While *The Gospel According to Jesus* was a bestseller, *Faith Works* is clearly more popular in style, thus much more readable, and much less of an "edited-sermon" book.

The chapter titled "A Primer on the 'Lordship Salvation' Controversy" was very helpful in laying the doctrinal-historical roots to the present dispute. The author is correct when he states that "Nearly everyone seems to know about the debate; few truly understand the issues" (p. 22). The reader is given the "big picture" concerning the subject

without getting lost in theological jargon. MacArthur also clarifies many of the misunderstandings that have been promoted by no-lordship theologians concerning his views on this subject.

From the beginning, MacArthur confronts the reader with the seriousness of this subject—this is not a seminary debate for a select few. This issue strikes at the very foundation of what it truly means to be a Christian. MacArthur writes, “. . . this is not theological trivia. How we proclaim the gospel has eternal ramifications for non-Christians and defines who we are as Christians” (p. 22).

The author continues with what I believe is the single most important issue in this debate—the nature of faith. He writes:

At the heart of the no-lordship error is a disastrous misunderstanding about the nature of faith. No-lordship teaching depicts faith as inherently inert—even antithetical to works, obedience, a surrender to the will of God. . . . No-lordship teaching is inclined at this point to two serious errors. First, it strips faith of everything but the objective, academic aspect, making the exercise of faith a simple head game. Second, it tends to pare down the objective content of faith to the barest minimum, making the ground of faith so meager that one needs not know anything about who God is or what Christ has done. It is the minimalist approach to believing that has no warrant in Scripture (p. 46).

In support of this comment, MacArthur quotes one writer from a no-lordship quarterly who states that “a person can place his or her trust in Jesus Christ alone without understanding precisely how he takes away sins—it is possible to believe savingly in Christ without understanding the reality of the resurrection” (p. 46). MacArthur, noting Romans 10:9, says, “Evidently he (the no-lordship writer) believes people can be saved who have never heard that Christ died for their sins” (p. 46).

One area where John MacArthur has received “friendly fire” (from those who generally support his position) concerned the need for better defining and distinguishing repentance and faith. At times in *The Gospel According to Jesus* the two appeared to be synonymous (see Michael Scott Horton, editor, *Christ The Lord*, Baker, and reviewed in *Reformation & Revival Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 128-131, 1993). In his chapter on repentance MacArthur clarifies the subject by writing:

Repentance is no more a meritorious work than its counterpart, faith. It is an *inward* response. Genuine repentance pleads with the Lord to forgive and deliver from the burden of sin and the fear of judgment and hell. It is the attitude of the publican who, fearful of even looking toward heaven, smote his breast and cried, “God be merciful to me, the sinner!” . . . Repentance is not merely behavior reform. . . . True repentance involves a change of heart and purpose, it inevitably results in a change of behavior (p. 75).

. . . Faith and repentance are distinct concepts, but they cannot occur independently of each other. Genuine repentance is always the flip side of faith; and true faith accompanies repentance (p. 77).

Another subject that is often misunderstood by evangelicals and poorly articulated by the no-lordship advocates is the distinction between justification and sanctification. MacArthur is careful to show his audience the importance of understanding the doctrine of justification from the doctrine of sanctification. In chapter Six, titled “Just by Faith,” he writes:

Justification is distinct from sanctification because in justification God does not *make* the sinner righteous; He *declares* that person righteous (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). Justification *imputes* Christ’s righteousness to the sinner’s account; sanctification *imparts* righteousness to the sinner

personally and practically. Justification takes place outside sinners and changes their standing; sanctification is internal and changes the believer's state. Justification is an event. Sanctification is a process. The two must be distinguished but can never be separated. God does not justify whom He does not sanctify, and He does not sanctify whom He does not justify (p. 90).

Writing on sanctification MacArthur contends that proponents of no-lordship theology hold to a "second-blessing," or two-level, approach to the Christian life:

According to no-lordship theology, it seems, conversion alone does not "provide the basis for . . . growth and progress in the Christian life" or "the basic foundation for sanctification" (a quote from Charles Ryrie). A second-level experience is necessary before practical sanctification begins. Thus, no-lordship theology divides Christians into two groups—the haves and the have-nots. . . . It sends Christians on a futile quest for an experience to supply what they already possess—if they are truly believers (p. 107).

The chapter I personally found the most helpful within this debate was on the perseverance of the saints, titled, "Kept by the Power of God." This, like the subject of "faith," is important in understanding the error of no-lordship theology. MacArthur correctly states, "No doctrine [perseverance of the saints] has been more savaged. . . ."

He writes that when you boil the whole issue down it comes to this one point—no-lordship theology is a *denial* of the doctrine of the perseverance of the believer (p. 177). The historic-Reformed view of perseverance is radically different from that promoted by the no-lordship writers who say that a believer can "drop out" of the spiritual growth process and even "cease to confess Christianity" (p. 178).

In Appendix 2 of *Faith Works* MacArthur reaffirms his dispensational presuppositions while seeking to separate

himself from the excesses of its more radical adherents, both in our time and in earlier times. Dispensationalism, says MacArthur, is one area that he has in common with both Ryrie and Hodges (p. 218). He makes it clear that his attack upon the no-lordship theology is not an attack upon the dispensational system as such, even though he gives a strong critique of one of its earlier apologists—Lewis Sperry Chafer. MacArthur cites Chafer as the one who laid the theological groundwork for the present day no-lordship position.

While this book, contrary to the public relations promotions given to it, will not end the debate surrounding the lordship issue, MacArthur has certainly made the defense of no-lordship theology much more difficult (and probably impossible) to defend biblically. A note to pastors: this book can be useful for introducing dispensational/non-Calvinists to the whole matter of God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners.

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Lord of the Saved

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.
Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company (1992).
104 pages, paper, \$6.95.

I believe it is agreed among most evangelicals that there are few issues facing the church today that are more crucial than the debate over what has been called Lordship Salvation. Indeed, the contemporary church has been divided on this issue. There are two groups recoiling from each other, each labeling the other as promoting unbiblical heresy.

On the one side, lordship advocates claim that Christ must be accepted as both Lord and Savior, while on the other side of the issue, opponents of lordship salvation claim that simple faith in Jesus alone is all that the gospel requires for salvation. These non-lordship advocates even suggest that lordship salvation teaches a type of perfectionism and works salvation. These are very serious charges, indeed.

For many Christians the debate is very confusing. A number of well-meaning leaders have taken different sides in this debate, leaving most wondering, "Which side is really correct?" Where should we as followers of Christ line up on this matter? These are the questions many earnest followers of Christ are wrestling with. The tendency even exists to ask, "Is this debate really all that important? Wouldn't we be better off promoting the things upon which we agree?"

Kenneth Gentry, Jr., in a short but quite comprehensive book, seeks to answer these types of questions. Gentry states his purpose:

The purpose of this book is that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ be properly and faithfully preached to a world of lost sinners. My concern is that an improper shallow presentation of the gospel is driving many to a merely psychological or emotional conversion (p. 3).

Gentry's purpose is not to further stoke the fires of controversy within evangelical circles, for indeed they are already stoked, but it is to promote the glory of God by protecting the church from further error.

Kenneth Gentry does not hesitate to take the side of the lordship advocates. And his book is (even in the words of some of his opponents) "A classic statement and defense of the lordship salvation position. . . . What is most commendable about Gentry's work is its clear and logical organization. . . . Here is as clear and concise a statement of the position as

can be found anywhere" (p. x).

Gentry's book contains six brief but excellent chapters that strike at the root of this terrible error, unfortunately referred to sometimes as "free grace salvation." In these six chapters, the main thrust is to discover the nature of the relationship between faith, repentance, Christ's lordship, and discipleship. Other issues are discussed, but these are the main points that Gentry focuses upon in his book. If one can grasp these points, he will have grasped the very heart of this complex debate. These chapters are then followed by a short appendix contrasting the positions of the non-lordship advocates, which take two different views in their own camp on the higher life. This little appendix is helpful because it reveals the fallacies and flaws of the non-lordship position on this point.

What is so commendable about Gentry's book is that although this debate is complex and often confusing he handles it both biblically and clearly. He has a gift of being able to clarify complex matters and pointing out the historical and biblical basis for requiring Jesus to be received as both Savior and Lord.

Lord of the Saved will not only help in clarifying the differences between the lordship salvation position and the non-lordship, or faith-only, position (so-called), but it will also cause the reader to really come to grips with the central issues that make up the gospel itself. It is my conclusion that if one were to read this book with an open mind, letting the arguments of Scripture speak for themselves, it would convince us that the biblical position is the one which states that Jesus must be received as both Savior and Lord. We would also be convinced that any other position, however sincere and regardless of how well-intentioned, is promoting a false gospel that is being used to deceive many people into a false assurance of salvation. Certainly then, this book is must reading for all those who are concerned with

protecting and promoting the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The book, although quite brief, is well documented with footnotes and references. It contains a wealth of material on this issue from both a historical perspective and from a biblical and lexical one as well. Read Gentry's book and you will understand why people who believe in what has been improperly labeled "lordship salvation" have concluded that any other position than the one historically held by the Reformers themselves is proclaiming a shallow message with a distorted view of faith that would not receive the approval of our Lord and His apostles.

Robert L. Dickie

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The Transforming Power of Grace

Thomas C. Oden
Nashville: Abingdon Press (1993).
208 pages, paper, \$16.95.

"They praised God because of me," writes Paul in Galatians 1:24. Any evangelical aware of Thomas C. Oden and his pilgrimage from Liberalism to the historical Christian faith must glorify God because of him. This pilgrimage is given theoretical shape by Oden himself in his *After Modernity . . . What? Agenda for Theology* (Zondervan, 1990). The personal and biographical contours are very ably drawn by his colleague, Daniel B. Clendenin, in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians* (Walter A. Elwell, editor, Baker Book House, 1993). Here we have the mental and spiritual history of Oden: raised in an evangelical Methodist family, trained in and embracing with passion the promise of theological modernism, reviewing the wasteland of that modernism—

both theoretically and practically, seeking confirmation of the ancient faith in the church fathers, and finding it, finally, when he renounces his former mistress with both ruthless resolve and tender compassion. The sentiments of Galatians 1:24 are altogether appropriate when we consider the life and work of Thomas C. Oden.

Since this major revision, Oden, who is Henry Anson Butz Professor of Theology at Drew University Theological School, has produced a voluminous body of work which attempts to set forth the ancient faith. "We seek to follow the scriptural teaching as consensually remembered by the sacred tradition of the Ecumenical Councils and the most widely received of the ancient Christian writers" in a contemporary and pastoral manner (p. 112). *The Transforming Power of Grace* is a recent contribution to this ongoing work.

The Transforming Power of Grace is a rare publishing event in 1993. It is a work of serious theological thinking. It is a book that pays no dues to theological novelties, whether they be academic or popular. It is concerned with a central biblical and church teaching: charismology, the doctrine of grace. It is unashamedly indebted to the past teaching of the church, from the Fathers to the Reformers to the Puritans and evangelical leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries down to Karl Rahner and Karl Barth in our time. Moreover, Oden's book attempts to be biblical and textual, even "proof-textual" (a cardinal sin according the ethos of modernism!).

The result is both exciting and gratifying, and disturbing and disappointing.

The excitement and gratification lie in the rarities mentioned above. Here we have, in plain American English, a fresh, stimulating exposition of the eternal truth of the Christian faith: the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is plain that Oden has himself discovered the fresh stimulating nature of this grace. He writes with passion, with heart, with

fire, and with a song that breaks through his 208 pages. Listen:

When sex is reduced to orgasm, spirituality to numbers, and politics to power, grace has been squandered and neglected. We treat spiritual formation as the baseball fan treats the statistics page or a broker treats computer readouts of stock averages, or television treats sweeps week, or educators treat grade point averages. Spiritual growth is reduced by some to a spreadsheet operation. Bean counters and number crunchers pretend to measure personal maturation, focusing on technique and quantification at the expense of spiritual empowerment.

Much in our cultural environment goes directly against the stream of the Christian teaching of grace. In an era of performance-oriented religion, the rediscovery of grace presents a profoundly subtle challenge. Teaching a religionist grace is like teaching a workaholic to relax. In a fast-paced, lonely culture of self-congratulatory striving, the Good News of grace is like a fresh breeze of relief. It is like gaining an unexpected helping partner in a colossal struggle whose outcome had remained doubtful. Unearthing the ancient teaching of grace is more like being discovered than discovering (pp. 16-17).

This is not the language of academe; it is the lyrical language of the heart aflame, the heart set free. It is the language of song, of Bernard of Clairvaux and Charles Wesley. Thus, when Oden deals with the broad parameters of his charismology, in the early chapters (one to four), and in the chapters dealing with the biblical-theological foundations of grace (nine and ten), we have a morning-fresh restatement of the biblical and theological faith of the Christian church. If men and women, liberal or evangelical, read this book and take its message to heart, wonderful things in terms of reformation and revival will take place in many places.

But such excitement and gratification do not quell the nagging doubts raised by other aspects of Oden's treatment of charismology. *The Transforming Power of Grace* is unabashedly a scholastic work. Indeed, it could be described as "a work of post-modern or post-critical [Oden's terms, see his *After Modernity* . . . *What?* passim] scholasticism." By "Scholasticism" I mean the dominant theological and philosophical school of the High Middle Ages, based on the Latin and Greek Fathers and of Aristotle and his commentators. Aristotle, especially, is too much present, albeit in a Geneva gown! The categories, definitions, distinctions, etc., are altogether too Aristotelian.

This becomes most apparent in Oden's treatment of the thorny issues of free will and election/predestination (chapters five to eight). While Oden draws heavily from the Fathers and councils of the ancient church, and even from the Reformers and their children, and while he criticizes Pelagianism and semiPelagianism with power and aplomb, his predisposition is to Arminianism, and his treatment of the Protestant Scholastic tradition on these points is far from detached. Indeed, it is only at the point of the Reformed treatment of free will and election/predestination that Oden seems momentarily to lose his customary irenicism.

An example of Oden's failure to grasp the genius of the Reformer-Calvinistic contribution on these matters can be seen in his treatment of "foreknowledge" (Chapter seven). In the final analysis, Oden can produce nothing better on this than the old Arminian chestnut, buttressed by such Wesleyan-Arminian theologians as Miley and Watson, viz., that election is based upon foreseen faith in the gospel; the sinner's response to the gospel is the basis of his election or reprobation. But, the gravest error in this is not its rejection of the Reformed consensus on the subject, but, rather, the biblical theological foundation that this consensus has in

the language, idiom, and genre of the Old and New Testaments. Oden's thinking at this point is Greek and Aristotelian rather than being Hebraic and biblical, (see *contra*. John Murray, *Romans*, on Rom. 8:29, "foreknew").

The same criticism could be leveled at Oden's doctrine of man's sin and ability and the freedom of the will, as well as his doctrine of the saving work of Christ. While appreciating Oden's respect for the ancient faith of the church and his attempt to support his contentions on texts, another tradition exists that is more thoroughly biblical in that it is built on the solid footing of biblical theology and exegesis. Perhaps the most impressive twentieth-century proponent of this school is the late John Murray, whose careful, reverent treatment of these subjects can be found in the second volume of his *Collected Writings* (Banner of Truth, 1977).

All of this is of interest for another reason. Oden's work, depending as it does upon "the consensual tradition of the Ecumenical Councils" shows us what an incredibly strong affinity there is between Roman Catholic and Arminian theology. This should serve as a strong caveat to any seeking a more fully biblical charismology.

Nor is this to suggest that Oden's doctrine of grace is not biblical. It is. To the degree that it is, we rejoice, for therein Christ is preached. But, to say that it is a biblical charismology is not to say that it is without its defects. Those defects lie in the area of total depravity and the doctrine of *de servo arbitrio* and the whole biblical insistence upon discriminate and sovereign election by grace alone.

We hope for, and indeed pray for, a growing and developing understanding on Oden's part in these areas. Thinking with him through *The Transforming Power of Grace* has had a positive effect upon my own mind, and growth. It will do the same for anyone who takes it seriously.

One parting shot may be in order. If we pay \$16.95 for a paperback book of only 208 pages, may we not expect

indices of subjects, authors, and texts? Such an addition in subsequent editions of this book will greatly enhance its value for the scholars and serious laymen for whom it was written.

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Amazing Grace

James Montgomery Boice

Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers (1993).

276 pages, paper, \$9.95.

Dr. James Boice, a skilled and widely known expository preacher, has given us a book of sermons which should be read by preachers, Sunday school teachers and Bible study group leaders. Don't let the fact that the chapters of this volume were first preached to live congregations keep you from benefiting from reading them. Though good sermons have the "fire and thunder" of the pulpit they often make for good reading when they are edited for a written audience as these sermons have been.

The grace of God is such a grand theme, indeed, the theme of the Bible. How can any preacher or teacher feed God's sheep without a grasp on this theme? This little book, popularly written and judiciously illustrated by carefully chosen anecdotes and stories, will provide resource for the wise Christian leader.

I recommend that part three be carefully read in a time when "easy believism" is rampant and, grace is abused and misunderstood. Boice does a good job showing how Christians "live by grace" as well as come into the kingdom by it. And his treatment of perseverance in grace reflects the best of Reformed thinking on this needed topic.

Editor

***Transforming Grace: Living Confidently
in God's Unfailing Love***

Jerry Bridges

Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress (1991).

207 pages, paper, \$6.95.

Jerry Bridges, best known for his helpful and popular books, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1978), and *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1983), wrote *Transforming Grace* as a response to the impact upon his own life of the study of God's grace. It led him to the "realization that my daily relationship with God is based on the infinite merit of Christ instead of on my own performance. . . . It is not meant to be a one-time experience; the truth needs to be reaffirmed daily. That is what this book is all about" (p. 12).

Bridges convincingly demonstrates from Scripture that God's grace not only saves but sanctifies as well. Whereas most recognize God's grace in salvation, not as many see their daily lives as being borne along by the grace of God. It is this *realization* of God's grace that Bridges' book serves to confirm. In each of the thirteen chapters, Bridges presents, as the foundation of God's grace, His initiative in salvation *and* sanctification.

In a very readable style, Bridges brings his readers along with him on a journey to a better understanding of God's grace. Below is just a sampling of what Bridges learned and shares with us, his readers.

God's grace presupposes man's guilt. Therefore, God's grace is needed by everyone. Because everyone is guilty before a holy God, all need the same amount of grace. "Neither our merits nor our demerits determine how much grace we need, because grace does not supplement merits or make up for demerits" (p. 32). Grace is given to us by

God's sovereign plan and purpose—not because of something we do or don't do.

Because God's grace is not dependent on our good or bad deeds, God does not withdraw His grace from us when we sin. Bridges uses Jeremiah 29:10-11 to demonstrate that "grace is no longer grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human demerit" (p. 53). In fact, where sin does abound, God's grace abounds all the more. Yet Bridges reminds us, as did Paul, that this truth is not an excuse to sin (Rom. 6:1ff.).

God's grace obligates Christians to a life of loving service. Our desire for zealous service to the Lord should flow, not from a belief that we can earn God's blessing by working out our salvation with fear and trembling, but from a heart of gratitude for all that He has done for us. God's goodness to us becomes the fountain from which springs our life of obedience. Bridges points out that Paul never commanded believers to do anything without first explaining, in glorious detail, God's infinite mercy and grace (Rom. 11:25-12:1; 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Bridges adds a helpful statement for those who are skeptical of his view of the obedient Christian life:

Let me be very clear at this point. I firmly believe in and seek to practice Christian commitment, discipline, and obedience. I am thoroughly committed to submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ in every area of my life. And I believe in and seek to practice other commitments that flow out of that basic commitment. . . . I am committed in these areas out of a grateful response to God's grace, not to try to earn God's blessing (p. 75).

Bridges goes full circle in this book, beginning and ending with the spiritual bankruptcy of human beings. He finishes with these words:

So I invite you and urge you to lay aside any remnant of self-goodness you may think you still have. Admit your total spiritual bankruptcy, and drink deeply from the infinite grace of God. And then in deep awareness of what you have received, extend that same spirit of grace to others (p. 207).

In an age when man's goodness is emphasized and self-help books proliferate, this book is soul-refreshing. Bridges does a fine job of stating his purpose and supporting it throughout this book. I recommend it for sheer reading pleasure and for growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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