

Reformation
& Revival



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Book Notices

Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It

Os Guinness
Grand Rapids: Baker Book House (1995).
160 pages, paper, \$7.99.

Again Os Guinness brings his searing searchlight to bear upon the seance of modern life. Most of this little book consists of a devastating expose' of modern life and the church's lack of or wrongheaded response to modernity. His chapter titles alone are provocative and interesting. There are three parts to this work: "The Ghost Mind," "An Idiot Culture," and "Let My People Think." He spells out "The Ghost Mind" in eight "Ps": Polarization, Pietism, Primitivism, Populism, Pluralism, Pragmatism, Philistinism, and, finally, Premillennialism. This section is particularly damning for the contemporary church, as Guinness shows how we, that's right, *we*, have not only fallen prey to these diseases, but have actually embraced and promoted them to the point of irrelativizing the church of today. The middle section dealing with our idiot culture is almost a Christian digest of the forces of modernism. He draws heavily from such thinkers and analysts as Postman and Ellul to paint contemporary culture in vividly sharp tones. There is an interesting aside in the middle section where Guinness is describing our visual culture as a possible factor in the rise in popularity of the visually oriented Orthodox church. Not content merely to cast stones at moderns or modernistic Christians, his last section urges a perspective of hopeful aggressive response and attack upon our temporal province. "Many evangelicals were rightly shocked [by] the liberal Protestant 'Re-Imaging.' ... yet what many evangelicals fail to recognize and protest is the similar movement growing in conservative circles.... Paganism is growing up in our churches.

Speculative gnosticism is resurgent in our own circles" (p. 131). Divided into short chunks, this book demands attention from our lethargic church.

Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.
Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans (1995).
202 pages, cloth, \$19.99.

Cornelius Plantinga is professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary and the author of five other books. His latest work is long overdue in evangelicalism. We have tended to shove sin aside, either in practice, or almost formally in some of the more extreme self esteem frenzies. Plantinga, as did Augustine, brings this distasteful subject to center stage. He deals subtly and carefully with the distinctions between sin, evil, and responsibility, but you will not find any weaseling here about the nature of personal responsibility. Sin is a personal affront to God; it is a vandalism of the Shalom of God. "Sin is any act ... that displeases God and deserves blame. Sin is both fatal and fertile ... tends both to kill and reproduce ... like cancer sin kills because it reproduces" (pp. 54-55). In the chapter titled "The Progress of Corruption" is an insightful treatment of terrorists who always see themselves as victims acting in a kind of self defense. Woody Allen's riposte that "'The heart wants what it wants,' ... is only a redescription of human sin, not an explanation of it" (p. 62). Not surprisingly, "pride is still with us. People still have affairs with themselves" (p. 82). Our ego-centered culture has led to our present crisis of self esteem. Plantinga probably has the best treatment of what David Wells calls our therapeutic culture that you will find. It certainly exceeds the popular responses to pop psychology. Sin, sin, sin, is the problem.

There is no sweeping it away. This book is a real gift to our church. It is both readable and profound. It is not just for theologians and pastors, but for the general Christian reader as well.

A Passion for Faithfulness:

Wisdom from the Book of Nehemiah

J. I. Packer
Wheaton: Crossway Books (1995).
224 pages, cloth, \$14.99.

This book is what we have come to expect from Dr. Packer—forceful, insightful, readable, and convicting. In a church that is awash with "how to" manuals on everything from church management to child rearing, it is refreshing to find a call back to the basics of what it means to be faithful. If you wanted a biblical Christian management treatise, this biblical study is for you. It is not a commentary, per se, but the whole book is treated in its historical context. Nehemiah was a dynamic leader, manager, organizer, astute politician, and tireless worker. Above all, however, Nehemiah was a man of deep and abiding prayer life. The great secret of Nehemiah was his prayers and prayer life. Read it! You'll like it!

Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity

Alister McGrath
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (1995).
209 pages, cloth, \$16.99.

The back cover gives the basic message of Alister McGrath: "The future seems to beckon to evangelicalism." Far from being a triumphalist piece, this book's thesis is that

transdenomination evangelicalism is the engine of the future of the church. Now, this means that our author recognizes a wide group of evangelical expressions of Christianity, and that warts and all, evangelicalism has triumphed in the Christian world. For the foreseeable future, evangelicalism will dominate Christian expression in all churches. Liberalism is dead, but some are merely unaware of its demise. He sees the flakiness at the edges as evidence of real life, just flaky life. Others see the flakiness as degenerative; things that have led to a slow leakage of evangelicals to Catholicism and orthodoxy. Do remember that McGrath is a fan of, and is steeped in, the thought of Calvin and the Puritans. He may be right, but it seems to me that the church that will be dominated by evangelicalism will be a weaker and smaller thing. Our only hope may be the resurgence of real evangelicalism outside the West. We in the West may be rescued by Second and Third World evangelicals. Whether you agree or not, this work is worth everyone's attention, if for nothing else than a look at an alternative view of evangelicalism.

Are Evangelicals Born Again ?:

The Character Traits of True Faith

R. Kent Hughes

Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books (1995).

158 pages, paper, \$8.99.

Kent Hughes is the senior pastor at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. This book was originally titled *Blessed Are the Born Again*. It is a helpful study of the Beatitudes. With the growth of mania for self-esteem and the tendency even within the evangelical church to see sin as some sort of loss of self-esteem, Hughes presents the beatitudes, not as choices in life,

but as tests. "They function as tests of spiritual life" (p.17). With Lloyd-Jones, Hughes sees the Beatitudes as convicting for the nonregenerate, but confessing, "evangelical." If you do not exhibit some of these traits in your life, it is unlikely that you are born again. Christianity is not an escape, but a way of life. Here is a thoroughgoing checklist and spiritual "physical" exam for you.

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