



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership
Volume 8 • Number 4 • FALL 1999

BOOK NOTICES

John H. Armstrong

***LIVING IN THE GAP BETWEEN PROMISE AND REALITY:
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ABRAHAM***

Iain M. Duguid

Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed (1999).

167 pages, paper, \$12.99.

Temper Longman III and J. Alan Groves have teamed up to edit a new series, designed for pastors and laypeople, titled *The Gospel in the Old Testament*. Their aim is to revive interest in showing how the Old Testament points forward to Jesus Christ. If the first two volumes in the series are any indication, this will be an extremely useful series for biblical preachers. Work such as this is long overdue to my way of thinking.

Particular help is available in this volume on Abraham. Duguid, who is an assistant professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, writes clearly and practically. He shows how Abraham points to Christ and is an important part of the larger story of redemption. He avoids moralizing the story and sees the big picture plainly. Highly recommended for careful preachers of Genesis as material that will stimulate both rich thought and Christocentric preaching, both much needed in our time.

*FAITH IN THE FACE OF APOSTASY: THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO ELIJAH AND ELISHA*

Raymond B. Dillard
Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed (1999).
168 pages, paper, \$12.99.

This is the second volume in the new series cited above. The late Raymond Dillard, a much-beloved Old Testament professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, who passed away in 1993, wrote this particular one. Dillard introduces the reader to the lives of Elijah and Elisha with the skill of an adept writer but with the sensitivity of a person who experienced in life the very lessons he draws from the text.

Ray Dillard had the uncanny ability to dig deeply, yet to speak plainly. I had the privilege to spend an interesting evening in his presence a few months before his untimely death. His gifts were both eminent and broad in scope. They shine brightly through this present volume. I encourage biblical expositors to read this book and use it to prime the pump for solid preaching.

*DICTIONARY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED
TRADITION IN AMERICA*

D. G. Hart, General Editor, with Mark A. Noll, Consulting Editor
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (1999).
286 pages, paper, \$16.99.

This appears to be a companion volume to an earlier InterVarsity work on the Baptists. Following a concise and readable format this volume is an extremely useful work which covers the ideas, events, people, movements, practices, institutions and various denominations that have

made up the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition from the earliest days of American history until the present.

Hart and Noll, both of whom worship within the Reformed tradition, are extremely capable and highly regarded scholars. Their ten-page introduction to this volume sets the stage clearly and helps the reader get a general overview of the subject. More than 140 contributors are listed as being involved in this project. Some of these are rather impressive figures in the world of church history and theology. Not all are affiliated with Reformed or Presbyterian bodies. Some are surprises, quite frankly, to this reviewer; e.g., Norman Geisler.

Articles on ministers, missionaries and evangelists; lay and denominational leaders; theologians, educators and writers, are included. In my brief check I found entries on virtually anyone I was interested in. In addition, beliefs, practices and confessions are presented, as well as institutions, denominations and associations. Entries on historical events, movements and struggles make this an even more valuable work for any interested user.

LEARNING IN CHRIST'S SCHOOL

Ralph Venning
Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth (1999).
304 pages, paper, \$6.99.

This little gem, another Banner reprint edition, is an extremely useful account of Christian growth as seen through four stages in the believer's life. These stages, following the language of the Bible, are (1) "babes," (2) "young children," (3) "young men," and (4) "fathers." Venning develops the final stage of Christian formation as "the academy of heaven," which is entered when Christ's followers enter into their eternal rest. Venning is a sweet writer

who encourages while prompting you to make serious attempts at growth at the same time.

Ralph Venning (1621-74) was born in Devon and educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He was forced from a ministry at St. Olive's Church, Southwark, by the infamous Act of Uniformity in 1662. Later he served as co-pastor of an independent congregation in London. He is the author of the classic, already published by the Banner of Truth, *The Sinfulness of Sin*.

PAINFUL QUESTIONS: FACING STRUGGLES WITH FAITH

Gary L. Watts

Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press (1999).

240 pages, paper, \$12.99.

Methodist theologian William H. Willimon, as astute an observer of the modern scene as there is, comments in the foreword of this book: "Here you will find life's toughest questions dealt with in a way that is engaging, readable, and comprehensible. More important, (Watts) deals with these questions in a way that is explicitly Christian."

Following in the same vein as C. S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*, Watts tackles the difficult issues of pain and evil with seriousness and care. Watts is professor and chair of the department of religion and philosophy at Jamestown (North Dakota) College. He also serves as the director of the Center for Ethics and Character at the same school. His background makes him well qualified to write this helpful book. He does not dodge the hard questions but communicates with a lucid and helpful style.

HATING WHITEY: LIBERALISM'S DIRTY SECRET

David Horowitz

Dallas: Spence Publishing Company (1999).

312 pages, cloth, \$24.95.

David Horowitz, author of the best-selling autobiography, *Radical Son*, and coauthor of *Destructive Generation*, is a former political leftist, who lives in Los Angeles and is president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture. What makes this new volume particularly intriguing to me is that Horowitz has maintained consistent views on racial concerns throughout his entire career, both on the left and now on the right. This is the burden of *Hating Whitey*.

Horowitz exposes the anti-white racism of the political and social left, a virtual taboo in the mainstream of our time. He does this as one who himself was once a confidant of the Black Panthers. He shows how the growing liberal attack on "whiteness" is, in actuality, a major battle in the war on the long-term values of America.

Horowitz shows, quite conclusively to my mind, that these modern leaders have betrayed the real legacy of Martin Luther King in an unholy alliance of black civil rights leaders and white radicals. This alliance now threatens to destroy our democratic foundations in the moral, political and economic institutions which make up our ordered society. Christian leaders should read books such as this to gain a better idea of the *real* and *destructive* social currents in our society.

THE AMERICAN WAY OF EVIL: NIHILISM AND POP CULTURE FROM THE EXORCIST TO SEINFELD

Thomas S. Hibbs

Dallas: Spence Publishing Company (1999).

208 pages, cloth, \$22.95.

The Christian Right often laments the portrayal of evil that pervades film and television. Is such evil an actual attack on the family? Does it really lead to violence? Hibbs attempts to demonstrate that this is really the case. He does so by linking the history of good and evil in film and television to the rise and spread of nihilism in our society. He shows that both Tocqueville and Nietzsche warned that democracies are particularly vulnerable to these dangers. Hibbs analyzes this fascination with evil in what is called the "comic nihilism" of *Seinfeld*. This portion of his treatment is particularly valuable.

Hibbs, a professor of philosophy at Boston College, pursues the themes of a number of films seeking to demonstrate his thesis. From *The Exorcist* to *Cape Fear* and *Silence of the Lambs* there is, Hibbs cogently argues, a preoccupation with the power of evil. But what happens when evil ceases to terrify us? Hibbs suggests it results in banality, which produces a comic view of meaninglessness in films such as *Forrest Gump*, *Natural Born Killers*, and *Titanic*, as well as television shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld*.

One does not have to agree with Hibbs on every point, nor agree with his critique of certain films (which I do not), to find his thesis helpful and convincing, at least in the larger picture of things. If you interact seriously with the culture, especially with its cinematic arts, you should consider reading Hibbs.

THE AMERICAN MYTH OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Kenneth R. Craycraft, Jr.

Dallas: Spence Publishing Company (1999).

226 pages, cloth, \$27.95.

This ambitious new publishing company has issued several dozens of excellent titles in the last two years. This one is not an exception. Craycraft, who holds a Ph.D. in theology from Boston College, is now a law student at Duke University.

Craycraft's thesis is actually quite simple. He suggests that we have read the Constitution incorrectly in terms of its treatment of religion. He uses the works of John Locke and James Madison to argue, conclusively I believe, that Enlightenment political theory is what really lies behind the Constitution's treatment of religion and politics. (Please note: This observation will not please some of the advocates of Christian America who presently lobby laypeople so stridently to help restore the "faith of our founding fathers.")

The framers' purpose was not to protect religion but to *insulate* the political sphere from its influence. These founding fathers were quite aware of the beliefs of their citizenry. And as a result, according to Craycraft, they carefully created a new order of things which would protect religion but would also leave it politically and legally marginalized. This is, quite simply, a sound reading of our political philosophy and one that desperately needs to be heard again.

Craycraft, a Roman Catholic, suggests real help can be found in Vatican II's declaration on religious freedom. Conservative evangelicals should not reject the value of this book because they do not share Craycraft's religious beliefs at this point. He adeptly shows that, on the one hand, the First Amendment is not a pro-religious statement recently hijacked by secularists. But on the other hand he also

demonstrates that those liberals who assure Christians the exile of religious faith from the public square is not to be feared are wrong headed in the extreme.

Get this book! It will fuel an important debate that might add a note or two of sanity to the church-state issue of our time. This is, after all, a debate that needs to be waged more intelligently by evangelicals.

*RESTORING THE CENTER: ESSAYS
EVANGELICAL AND ECUMENICAL*

Gabriel Fackre

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (1998).

179 pages, paper, \$14.99.

This is a little book that packs a few important lessons for serious evangelicals. Fackre, an emeritus professor of theology at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Massachusetts, spent his lifetime teaching and ministering in the mainline liberal United Church of Christ. He is an orthodox confessional theologian with ecumenical sympathies. This alone will put off some readers. But do not be put off. Fackre has something here to offend everyone. But he also has something here to help many of us who have a heart that still longs for meaningful dialogue across the differences that divide Christians.

Fackre openly longs to see the church recover its Christocentric emphasis, lost during this century. He laments the loss of systematic theology as a discipline and believes (correctly) that it is finally making a comeback. (Sadly, someone forgot to tell some of our more pietistic evangelical schools about this comeback!)

Fackre's insightful observations portray a hope that could use a bigger dose of the doctrine of the depravity of man at times. However, the strength of this hope is proper-

ly rooted in Fackre's understanding of the "not yet" of the kingdom of God. This volume has some extremely helpful bibliography in it.

OLD PATHS

J. C. Ryle

Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth (1999 reprint).

521 pages, paper, \$11.99.

An extremely useful reprint edition of an 1878 volume. Ryle adeptly handles subjects such as inspiration, forgiveness, justification, the cross of Christ, the Holy Spirit, conversion, the heart, faith, repentance, etc. Ryle refers to these chapters as "a series of papers, systematically arranged, on the leading truths of Christianity which are 'necessary to salvation.'"

Some of the best practical divinity you can read is found within the pages of this lovely and very lively book. Besides C. H. Spurgeon, I can think of no more readable and helpful nineteenth-century evangelical writer than J. C. Ryle, the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool.

THE QUEST FOR FULL ASSURANCE

Joel R. Beeke

Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1999.

395 pages, paper, \$14.99.

Finally, a thorough and well-written volume on the important matter of Christian assurance. Beeke approaches the subject, historically, through the lens of Calvin and his successors. He takes up the important texts and presents the classic Reformed view clearly. Particularly strong on showing the links between the Reformers and the

post-Reformation Reformed writers on this subject.

An extremely useful volume for pastors and interested historical/theological students. Beeke writes well and includes an excellent and impressive bibliography.