



Reformation
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**JUSTIFICATION:
MODERN
REFLECTIONS**

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BOOK BRIEFS

John H. Armstrong

In one of his earliest writings, Paul uses the enormously important phrase "work of faith" (1 Thessalonians 1:3). This would most naturally be understood as implying a genitive of origin, that is, "work which comes from faith." Faith is such that it does not merely produce obedience (Romans 1:5 speaks of the "obedience of faith", that is, assuming a genitive of origin, the obedience which comes from faith) but also activity. Believers are justified on the basis of faith, seen not as an expression and result of the grace of God. And believers are judged on the basis of their works, seen as the natural outcome, result and expression of justifying faith. Believers are justified by faith and judged by its fruit. There is a strong connection between the past and future elements of justification, embracing faith and its outworking. Works are the visible demonstration of a real and justifying faith—not the dead faith of which James complained (James 2:14-24). And so these two moments of justification coinhere (see James and Paul).

ALISTER E. MCGRATH

A SCIENTIFIC THEOLOGY: NATURE (VOLUME ONE)

Alister E. McGrath

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)

325 pages, cloth, \$40.00

This is the groundbreaking first volume in a projected three-volume systematic theology by the esteemed Oxford evangelical theologian Alister McGrath. (The two remaining volumes are *Reality* and *Theory*.) What is the relationship between Christian theology and the natural sciences? The attempt to answer this question has produced as much intense debate among Christian theologians as perhaps any theological question over the past two hundred years. McGrath enters the fray well-armed, having been trained in both the natural sciences and theology. As a result of this academic background McGrath is well prepared to engage in both disciplines with keen insight and deep reflection.

McGrath admits his debt to Thomas Torrance, who follows Karl Barth to a greater or lesser degree, and contends that there can be a defensible natural theology within the scope and framework of a revealed knowledge of God. Such natural theology does not act independently of biblical revelation by the Spirit but within it. In short, nature must be read as a work of creation and creation is a biblical truth revealed to us by the Spirit. If we keep this perspective we can engage in serious scientific theology which does not deny the effects of sin or the need for revelation which is in Christ alone.

*A VISIT TO VANITY FAIR: MORAL ESSAYS
ON THE PRESENT AGE*

Alan Jacobs
Grand Rapids: Brazos Press (2001)
173, cloth, \$18.99

What role does the “moral essay” play in the lives of evangelicals? At one time it was a major part of Christian formation. Now it appears to have gone the way of the dinosaur. Alan Jacobs, professor of English at Wheaton College, has come to the rescue. Here he shows how to read the Bible (or Harry Potter) with our children, how to watch television documentaries, or how to pay attention to those we love. The loss of moral imagination and the kind of writing that employs it is a sad reality of modern Christian life. Jacobs offers fresh recovery for those with the will to recover.

THE OLD RELIGION IN A NEW WORLD

Mark A. Noll
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)
340 pages, paper, \$24.00

This survey of Christianity in North America is simply one of the best conceived and clearly written volumes of its kind. Noll goes beyond the usual chronological account of events that make up most histories and thus leads the reader on a journey into the European past of American Christianity and ends with the present. The next to last paragraph gives some idea of how he sees the North American scene in terms of the big picture:

In specifically Christian terms, the American situation can be evaluated positively, as an instance of an incarnated faith carrying the message of a God incarnated in human flesh into its surrounding society. Or it can be evaluated negatively, as a peculiar instance of secularization where an anthropocentric religion of

self-realization and salvation through productivity replaces a theocentric religion of divine revelation and salvation in Christ (280-91).

This wide-ranging account engages the reader at the point where history ought to engage us—namely who are we and how did we become what we are? Noll’s account is succinct, readable, and very helpful. I highly recommended this immensely helpful book.

*EYES WIDE OPEN: LOOKING FOR GOD
IN POPULAR CULTURE*

William D. Romanowski
Grand Rapids: Brazos Press (2001)
171 pages, paper, \$12.99

How do you evaluate popular culture seriously? Masses of evangelicals accept popular culture “baptizing” it as Christian in the most uncritical ways. Neo-Reformed critics generally trash popular culture, opting for some type of “high” culture from a previous European era. The members of your church swim in it but few ever think about it beyond simplistic “yes” and “no” responses. How do you help them? How do you help yourself? Romanowski’s readable book is a wonderful analysis that offers hope and Christian response. He engages the movies, music and literature of our time with thoughtful Christian conviction rooted in a theology of culture. This book would make for good reading among church staff members and lay leaders both.

*KNOWING THE TRIUNE GOD: THE WORK
OF THE SPIRIT IN THE PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH*

James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago, editors
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)
293 pages, paper, \$29.00

Kevin Vanhoozer, professor of theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, says, "[This book] is the newest, and probably the best, exhibit of the promise of 'catholic and evangelical' theology for the contemporary Christian church, and it appears not a moment too soon" (from the back cover). I share his warm commendation of this fine book. The recovery of classical trinitarian theology is crucial for the health of the church. These essays root this recovery in the classical worship and ecclesiastical practices of the whole historic church. The way to know the triune God is by sharing in the life of his church. This "novel" idea for most modern evangelicals is nothing less than serious, biblical, historic Christianity. May God use such volumes as this to help lead a recovery of this true faith. This is another of the excellent volumes produced by the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, Northfield, Minnesota.

*CHRIST, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS:
PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF JUSTIFICATION*

Mark A. Seifrid
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2000)
222 pages, paper, \$19.99

Seifrid, a professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, provides a readable work on the "new perspective on Paul" from a fairly standard viewpoint, yet with some helpful New Testament reflection that goes beyond the particular of common defense of the view. He surveys Romans as well as the entire Pauline corpus on the subject of God's righteousness. He counters

Sanders, Dunn and Wright throughout but fails, I believe, to adequately answer several of the important questions placed before us by the current debate. This is certainly an important work; all who would engage in the modern discussions seriously should read it very carefully.

THE GLORIOUS PURSUIT

Gary L. Thomas
Colorado Springs: NavPress (1998)
191 pages, paper, \$12.00

Gary Thomas is the founder of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality who has contributed a number of written works to the subject of spiritual discipline and formation. He is a good writer who is theologically careful and biblically saturated.

In this work he discusses Christian character by focusing upon Christ rather than externals. He underscores the place of the Christian virtues by stressing how we experience Christ rather than how we perform daily routines. This is a most practical and sane book.

EPHESIANS

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld
Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press (2002)
40 pages, paper, \$24.99

This wonderful new commentary comes from the Anabaptist tradition. Do not allow this to put you off. It is one of the most engaging works on Paul's letter that I have come across in years. I am reading it carefully and slowly as I write and finding much profit. Neufeld, listening to the epistle itself, sees worship and work as one.

A strong note sounded here is Paul's treatment of the "powers." Neufeld believes, in a most powerfully stated way, that the church still engages the principalities and the powers

(Ephesians 6 comes to mind of course). This is done by embracing the reconciling work of Christ in the Spirit as a new community. This particular insight is bracing and much needed in the modern setting where the powers seem to drive a great deal of the agenda of the successful church syndrome. Pastors, get this and use it before you preach Ephesians, especially 6:10-20.

A PELICAN IN THE WILDERNESS

Isabel Colegate
Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press (2002)
284 pages, cloth, \$25.00

I have only recently discovered Counterpoint Press through some online research. It would appear this is a publishing venture committed to books that make a contribution to serious cultural renewal. The author of this particular volume has thirteen previously published works of fiction and lives in Bath, England.

This work deals with the desire all of us have for a life of contemplation and solitude. Colegate surveys the lives, anecdotally, of various mystics, hermits and solitary figures in history. Some are saints, others are frauds, but all sought solitude in the midst of busyness. Isabel Colegate is an elegant writer who stirs the imagination deeply. I think I shall look into her fiction next. I get the distinct impression it will be worth my time.

THE DISCIPLINE OF SURRENDER

Douglas D. Webster
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)
130 pages, paper, \$10.99

For some time Douglas Webster has been a favorite author. This new book does not disappoint in any way. He treats the images of the Bible carefully and thereby shows

us how they communicate powerful insights into Christian discipleship. As an example, what does a thorn in the flesh communicate by way of imagery? What difference does it make to living as a follower of Christ?

Are you tired, like me, of simplistic formulaic Christian living that misses the reality of the world you actually live in? If so, Webster will prove most useful to you. This could be a fine discussion starter and small group study.

DICTIONARY OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGION IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Christopher Partridge, general editor
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2002)
390 pages, cloth, \$24.99

This new addition to the growing line of useful dictionaries from InterVarsity Press explores the faiths that are currently practiced in postmodern Western contexts. It is not so much a dictionary of religions as it is an overview of the landscape of religious ideas and practices, which makes it a singularly useful and readable book.

Entries include, among scores of others, blasphemy, atheism, mysticism, apocalypticism, Christian attitude to non-Christian religions, religion and psychology, religious experience, etc. Even the martial arts warrant a helpful entry. The selections are not brief but they are succinct and useful. Anyone engaging the present Western world evangelistically would benefit from this volume. Highly recommended!

*IN THE SHADOW OF THE TEMPLE:
JEWISH INFLUENCES ON EARLY CHRISTIANITY*

Oskar Skarsaune
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2002)
455 pages, cloth, \$29.99

Written for the general reader, this work makes important background material accessible to a wide audience without becoming simplistic and trite in any sense. The Jewishness of early Christianity was lost by the second century and has only recently been taken seriously again by Christian commentators and theologians. This is a tragic loss for careful interpretation.

Professor Skarsaune teaches church history at the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, Oslo, Norway. This work transcends the ordinary distinctions between scholars of this era and thus gives the Christian leader a book which will reward diligent pursuit.

*NICENE CHRISTIANITY: THE FUTURE
FOR A NEW ECUMENISM*

Grand Rapids: Brazos Press (2002)
Christopher R. Seitz, editor
240 pages, paper, \$18.99

It was privileged to personally hear the chapters of this fine volume given as papers at an Episcopal studies conference in Charleston, South Carolina, in January, 2001. I was profoundly stimulated by the lectures but I am even more excited about this book. If you want to grasp the fundamental importance of Nicea and its Christological importance for modern Christianity this is a great place to begin.

There are seventeen essays here, including work by William J. Abraham, Carl E. Braaten, Douglas Farrow, Colin Gunton, Robert W. Jenson, Philip Turner, Alan Torrance, John Webster, Thomas Smal, and Susan Wood, to name only

some. What was the relationship of the early church to creeds and Scripture? This vitally important question is answered very helpfully by this new book.

*STANDING FORTH: COLLECTED WRITINGS
OF ROGER NICOLE*

Roger Nicole
Inverness, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications (2002)
492 pages, cloth, \$24.99

Roger Nicole, a contributing editor for this quarterly journal, is no stranger to most of our readers. Until now we have had very little of Dr. Nicole's various written articles in print. Christian Focus has remedied this loss, and thereby made a wonderful contribution to the leadership of the church, by taking the collected works of Dr. Nicole, compiled over a period of nearly sixty years, and now made them available to the present generation. A subsequent volume of sermons and more popular addresses will also appear in 2002.

James I. Packer fittingly writes that this work is done by "a masterful systematic theologian, poised for logical-exegetical pincer movements against muddles and mistakes." Dr. Nicole will soon appear on the pages of this quarterly again, including an interview to be published in a forthcoming issue. This volume is a fitting tribute to Dr. Nicole's faithful service to the church.