



*Reformation*  
**REVIVAL**  
*JOURNAL*

REVIVAL:  
A SOLUTION  
OR A PROBLEM?

*A Quarterly for Church Leadership*

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VOLUME 11 · NUMBER 3 · SUMMER 2002

## **BOOK BRIEFS**

*John H. Armstrong*

### **GRIEVING A SUICIDE**

Albert Y. Hsu

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2002)

180 pages, paper, \$12.00

One million people die by suicide every year. Every seventeen seconds an American dies by suicide. Most of us have either known someone who took his or her life or we know of someone who has been touched by this profoundly heart-wrenching trial. After the suicide of his father, Al Hsu, experienced the shock and pain associated with this trauma. The usual questions came with great intensity. Why did this happen? Why didn't we see this coming? Could this have been prevented? How do we face the future and go on? Suicide survivors need a basis for facing the future. They need to draw upon the grace of God in the midst of their unmingled sorrow. This book was written for both counselors and those grieving people who have tasted this bitter experience.

What happens to Christians who commit suicide? (I think Hsu's moral and ethical answers are quite balanced.) The fact is that the Christian church has never given a uniform answer to this question. In the process we have often failed to know how to respond to a family touched by suicide. This book offers profoundly personal help in a distinctly Christian way. It is a gripping story told well. I highly recommend it.

*PRAYING THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD*

Rosemary Jensen  
 Grand Rapids: Kregel (2002)  
 176 pages, paper, \$9.99

Rosemary Jensen, a gifted thinker and teacher, offers a simple, useful and immensely practical little book that links the spiritual disciplines to the character of God. Each study, which could best be used privately, takes one of the divine attributes and relates them to the well-known acrostic on prayer: ACTS. The author's desire is to lead the reader into deeper worship of the true God. She has accomplished her purpose in a most excellent way.

*APPEALING TO SCRIPTURE IN MORAL DEBATE*

Charles H. Cosgrove  
 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)  
 224 pages, paper, \$22.00

Among those who take the Bible's authority seriously the most pressing issue of our time is hermeneutics. How do we arrive at moral decisions? How are ethics determined by our appeal to Holy Scripture? Cosgrove, a professor of New Testament and Christian ethics at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary employs a wide range of literature, both biblical and extra-biblical to arrive at a conclusion that will not satisfy everyone but should profit all who wish to delve into the subject seriously.

Cosgrove presents five basic hermeneutical perspectives ("rules") to direct the discussion of textual understanding. The work is a contribution to the subjects of both ethics and hermeneutics. Cosgrove interacts with major thinkers in the field and the result is a book that will reward those who are serious students.

*PROTESTANT THEOLOGY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*

Karl Barth  
 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)  
 652 pages, paper, \$45.00

This new edition of Barth's well-known work, first published in 1959 in English, is valuable for several reasons. First, Barth studies are experiencing a needed resurgence in the academy and the church. Many evangelicals are discovering for themselves that the Karl Barth of Cornelius Van Til, Gordon Clark, and Charles Ryrie is not the real Barth. Second, the introduction to this new edition, by Professor Colin Gunton, is very important. Gunton recontextualizes Barth for our generation. He writes: "[This] is historical theology in the best sense, a history of theology which uses theological criteria for all the varied judgments that it makes" (xv).

Gunton tells the reader that this work is classically Barthian since it is "unsparing in [his] criticism of anything that appears to undermine the historic faith of the church" (xv). This is the real Barth that few conservative ministers were introduced to by their formal education. If you want a good sense of liberal theology, both its roots and trajectories, this is an important place to get a good road map.

*PREACHING GOD'S COMPASSION*

LeRoy H. Aden and Robert G. Hughes  
 Minneapolis: Fortress (2002)  
 176 pages, paper, \$18.00

Most of us who minister to the people of God struggle with how to preach and counsel with compassion. We often know the right words but we are unsure of how to say them. We sense that there is an appropriate way to help but we are not sure of the right context for the action we wish to take. What do you say at the bedside of a suffering believer? What do you say to grieving family members and to those who are filled with fear?

This helpful and wise book provides samples of pastoral preaching and good counsel. It draws heavily on some of the best literature on the subject and will reward the pastors who wish to improve their ability to relate to people with God's compassion. I wish I had read something like this long ago.

### *THEOLOGIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*

Erhard S. Gerstenberger  
Minneapolis: Fortress (2002)  
358 pages, cloth, \$30.00

The emphasis of this work is to be seen in the title. The author believes there is no one single systematic theology in the Old Testament. This conclusion, which is a radical departure from traditional approaches to Old Testament theology, will trouble many evangelicals. At the same time I would argue that the thesis does not mean the book is not of profit for careful readers.

Gerstenberger believes that various theological voices are rooted in quite different social settings within ancient Israel. These include the family and clan, the village, tribal alliance, and the kingdom. He concludes that our theologies should be both contextual and ecumenical. I would disagree with some of his conclusions, though the road he travels has promise for richer understanding of the Old Testament itself.

### *THE SUPREME HARMONY OF ALL: THE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS*

Amy Plantinga Pauw  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)  
196 pages, paper, \$22.00

The life and theology of Jonathan Edwards is of great interest to many readers of this journal. This is a comprehensive account of Edwards' trinitarianism. It engages the present trinitarian renewal with both clarity and profound depth. The

author, who is professor of doctoral theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, argues that Edwards was a maverick in terms of traditional Reformed thought on the subject. (I would add that this is not the only place where Edwards was a "maverick," to use Gerald McDermott's word!)

There has been a virtual renaissance of Edwards' studies in the past decade or so. Some of that work is a bit strange and stretched. This work is neither. It is richly textured and could well profit all who want to reconsider the relationship between the inner triune life of God and our Christian life. Add this to the more fruitful studies that have been written on the thought of Jonathan Edwards. If you only know popular works on Edwards then this would provide a serious place to go further.

### *WALK ON: LIFE, LOSS, TRUST, AND OTHER REALITIES*

John Goldingay  
Grand Rapids: Baker (2002)  
200 pages, paper, \$16.99

How do we rejoice in suffering? Closer to the experience of the minister, how do we do ministry in the context of human weakness? These themes are, of course, quite biblical. Just read the Psalms again, or the prophecies of Jeremiah. Yet these truths are too infrequently considered by modern church leaders.

For some years I have been asking, "How can I glorify God in the midst of chronic physical weakness?" Goldingay's reflections are both practical and spiritually rewarding. The author is a distinguished Old Testament professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a noted commentator on several Old Testament books.

**EVANGELICALISM: THE NEXT GENERATION**

Does Conservative Protestantism Have a Future?

James M. Penning &amp; Corwin E. Smidt

Grand Rapids: Baker (2002)

203 pages, paper, \$21.99

Twenty years ago University of Virginia sociologist James Davison Hunter wrote an oft-cited and classic study of the future of evangelical Christianity, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*. Hunter contended, based upon interviews with students on evangelical campuses, that the coming generation would be more accommodating to culture, less religiously distinctive, and more tolerant of things that would erode Christian influence. Hunter's view is generally one that is cited in rather pessimistic interpretations of where evangelicalism is going in the coming decades.

This volume argues, based upon different data, that the future may well be much brighter than Hunter's thesis assumed. This is important reading for those who reflect upon the impact of evangelical higher education in general and the coming generation in particular.

**HANNAH'S PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER: AN EXPOSITION FOR BIBLE STUDY**

Ronald S. Wallace

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)

113 pages, paper, \$14.00

Ronald S. Wallace is an author whose work has long occupied a place of great interest in my thinking. He is both an able scholar as well as a popular writer who speaks to ordinary people. In this work he examines the prayer of Hannah and thus addresses the issue of prayer's efficacy. It is a fine exposition of 1 Samuel 1-6 and will pay great dividends to both ministers and general readers. In the light of the phenomenon of *The Prayer of Jabez*, one can hope that serious Christians will read books on prayer such as this.

**WORLDVIEW: THE HISTORY OF A CONCEPT**

David K. Naugle

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2002)

408 pages, paper, \$26.00

Understanding Christianity as a "worldview" has been an important development in Christian thought over the past 150 years. Naugle, a professor of philosophy at Dallas Baptist University, shows the ways that the idea of worldview has developed in evangelical, Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions and then properly grounds the term in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Naugle also shows the role this concept has played in both natural science and social science.

In philosophical terms, Naugle argues that a worldview affects the way we reason, interpret and understand. In Christian thought, a worldview is a function of the heart and thus becomes central to the image of God in man. This is an extremely useful undertaking, and I know of nothing else quite like it. Many who popularly refer to "worldviews" in their preaching should spend some time in this wonderful book.

**A FOUNDATION FOR LIFE**

Michael A. G. Haykin, editor

Dundas, Ontario, Canada: Joshua Press (2002)

140 pages, paper, \$14.99

Michael Haykin, a contributing editor to this quarterly, is both a prolific writer and creative publisher. This present volume is a collection of popularly written chapters on key Christian doctrines. It undertakes to deal with controversies but in a studied pastoral manner. Contributors include several who have contributed to this journal in the past, e.g., Jim Elliff, Jerry Marcellino, Stephen Wellum and Fred Zaspel.

It seems to me that this book will be especially valuable to pastors who wish to instruct new believers in the basic doctrinal teaching of the Bible. Haykin's chapter on worship is wise

and displays a proper economy of words, thus becoming one of the very best in the volume.

**CHERISH THE WORD: REFLECTIONS ON LUTHER'S SPIRITUALITY**

Tomas C. Peters  
St. Louis: Concordia (2000)  
126 pages, paper, \$13.99

This little book is an exploration of major themes of Christian living: faith, forgiveness and patience. Peters argues that we should not be distracted by abstractions but guided by the Word of God alone. He approaches his subject using insights gleaned from Luther's sermons. The approach is both popular and devotional.

**THE LONG TRUCE: HOW TOLERATION MADE THE WORLD SAFE FOR POWER AND PROFIT**

J. Conyers  
Dallas, Texas: Spence Publishing (2001)  
266 pages, cloth, \$27.95

Professor Conyers, a teacher at George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, might be known to some readers as the author of several useful books on biblical subjects. The argument of this present work is very germane to the church in the West—namely that toleration is grounded in the quest for power and will eventually become a new guise for persecution. Conyers shows that this happens when the quest for toleration generates a fresh longing for mass social conformity which in turn seeks to concentrate power in the state rather than in independent social authorities or non-state institutions.

Conyers, in my estimation, clearly shows that early modern Europe developed a novel version of toleration based upon an indifference to all values other than political power

and material prosperity. Our modern problem arose as a result. But what is the answer to this problem? Conyers believes we need to restore pre-modern concepts of toleration which are anchored in a quest for the human good not for toleration as post-Kantians define it.

**MONSTERS FROM THE ID: THE RISE OF HORROR IN FICTION AND FILM**

E. Michael Jones  
Dallas, Texas: Spence Publishing (2001)  
298 pages, cloth, \$27.95

Perhaps no genre of literature and film is more popular in our time than horror (e.g., Stephen King, Anne Rice, etc.). Did you know that horror arose in the sexual decadence which followed the French Revolution? This context leads Michael Jones to argue that horror is a product of a guilty conscience that will not own up to its wrongdoing. In short, Jones argues that the Enlightenment sought to destroy religion and morality only to see them return in the form of monsters and evil. The antidote, according to Jones, is a fresh acknowledgment of the demands of an objective moral order.

E. Michael Jones, a Roman Catholic, is the editor of *Culture Wars* magazine. He earned a Ph.D. in American literature at Temple University and taught at the university level before he became an editor. Jones is also the author of the highly acclaimed trilogy on modernity: *Degenerate Moderns*, *Dionysos Rising*, and *Living Machines*.

**REFLECTIONS ON THE MOVIES**

Ken Gire  
Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor Books (2000)  
215 pages, cloth, \$19.99

Ken Gire is a wonderfully creative writer. He is also a student of the movies. He knows how Christians have

often approached this genre of art, usually with a variety of negative attitudes and emotions, and he helps the reader get to the real issue—what is the story the movie tells and what difference does it make to us?

Stories are as old as humankind. We use them to teach, to encourage and to relate to fellow humans with meaning. Whether we like it or not movies are the favorite way our culture tells stories. Gire believes modern movies are best understood as parables of our culture. Sometimes these parables touch upon ultimate themes and have meaning far beyond what most Christians can see. Reading this book will help correct a number of false ideas and will help you watch movies with a more positively critical perspective. I recommend it very highly.

#### *PASTORAL THEOLOGY IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION*

Andrew Purves

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox (2001)

137 pages, paper, \$16.95

Contemporary assumptions about ministry are often without a serious or theological foundation. We need desperately to hear the past in order to have a fresh and meaningful response to the present. This book does exactly that by covering two thousand years of thought in a short span and then by showing what it all has to do with modern ministers of the gospel.

Purves, who teaches pastoral theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, uses five role model pastor-theologians to develop his overview; Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Great, Martin Bucer, and Richard Baxter. The final section develops pastoral theology in the "classical tradition" and then includes a moving ordination sermon.

#### *1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS: GENEVA SERIES COMMENTARIES*

Patrick Fairbairn

Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth (1874, reprint 2002)

451 pages, cloth, \$27.99

The Banner of Truth has done serious readers a great service by reprinting some extremely useful older works. This commentary, dated in many obvious ways, is still superb. Patrick Fairbairn, a Free Church of Scotland theologian, was gifted to write academically and pastorally, which makes these particular commentaries even more valuable.

This series, called the New Geneva Commentary, by the publisher includes some other excellent volumes from Protestant and Reformed writers of the past. There are three appendices in this particular volume, each unique in its own way. Both pastors and lay teachers will benefit from this particular commentary.

#### *THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE: TEXTS AND HERMENEUTICS*

Robert A. J. Gagnon

Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press (2000)

520 pages, cloth, \$49.00

A number of writers have weighed in on the present debate about homosexuality and the Christian ethic. There is a wide range of positions, from left to right if I may be allowed those unfortunate labels. No serious Christian reader/leader can afford to discuss this subject in the future without taking into account this encyclopedic and well-researched book.

Gagnon, a professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, has written an encyclopedic book that professor James Barr correctly calls "brilliant, original, and highly important, [and] displaying meticulous biblical scholarship." In short, Robert Gagnon demonstrates that contemporary attempts to show the Bible's rejection of same-sex relationships

irrelevant fail to do proper justice to the texts themselves. Even if you are utterly convinced of your own view on this troubling issue, read this book!