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## BOOK BRIEFS

*John H. Armstrong*



### *THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY*

Roger E. Olson

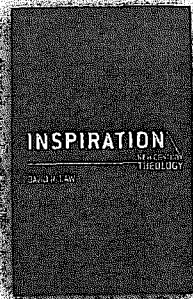
Louisville: Westminster John Knox  
(2004)

328 pages, paper, \$39.95

This is one of the finest overviews and introductions to the evangelical theological enterprise available. I agree wholeheartedly with Randall Balmer when he writes that it is "a monumental achievement." The volume serves as a handbook and a history and introduction. The author, a highly respected evangelical Arminian theologian himself, is judicious, fair, and balanced in his treatment, dealing with controversial issues in a consistently evenhanded way. His warm dedication of the volume to the irenic Reformed theologian Donald G. Bloesch, a contributing editor to this quarterly journal, underlines the tenor and approach Olson takes throughout.

Olson explores evangelical theology through five lenses, which become the headings of sections in the book: "The Story of Evangelical Theology," "Movements and Organizations Related to Evangelical Theology," "Key Figures in Evangelical Theology," "Traditional Doctrines in Evangelical Theology," and "Issues in Evangelical Theology." The essay on "The Story of Evangelical Theology" is, to my mind, the finest introduction I have ever read. Olson is especially adept at showing how evangelical theology has evolved within the

culture of the United States. To this end he includes chapters that address hot-button issues like "the boundaries of evangelicalism," "epistemology," "gender roles," and "open theism." In each case Olson has his own views but treats other views quite fairly. I highly recommend this outstanding volume.



**INSPIRATION**

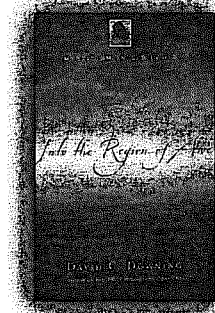
David R. Law

New York: Continuum (2001)

234 pages, paper, \$24.95

David Law, a lecturer in the history of Christian thought at the University of Manchester (UK), has written both an original and readable volume on the theory of inspiration. It may not please some conservative thinkers, but in my estimation it is an important volume for them to grapple with. It would, at the minimum, put the discussion on a new ground for further theological exploration.

Law begins with non-biblical literature and the way in which it can be said to be "inspired," and then proceeds to show how all human knowledge has limits beyond which only the transcendent finally exists. He shows how symbols, signs, and characters—he calls them "ciphers"—guide both religion and art. These ciphers always point beyond various human horizons. Law believes that the key to understanding the Bible, and its unique inspiration, is to encounter these ciphers, the most important of which is the historical Christ. He concludes: "The more we put ourselves to school under scripture, as Gore puts it, and employ it for our spiritual education, the more the inspired status of scripture will become apparent" (211–12).



**INTO THE REGION OF AWE:  
MYSTICISM IN C. S. LEWIS**

David C. Downing

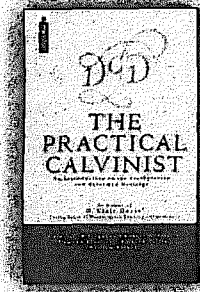
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press

(2005)

207 pages, cloth, \$17.00

David Downing, author of *The Most Reluctant Convert* (InterVarsity, 2002), a very good study of C. S. Lewis' journey to faith, in doing his research on the first book was so struck by how the contemplative side of things balanced the rational side in Lewis' pilgrimage, that he decided to write this second book. It ends up being one of the more interesting Lewis books in a field already crowded with new titles every year.

During a two-year period, after Lewis had embraced theism but not yet become a Christian, he read numerous books on Christianity with deep interest. What he read might surprise some, since these books did not include apologetics, theology, or church history. Lewis read George MacDonald, Dante, Thomas à Kempis, and Brother Lawrence, as well as the Gospel of John in Greek, as he worked his way toward real Christian faith. In this wonderfully readable book Downing explores how these particular mystical writings on Christian spirituality complemented C. S. Lewis' rigorous intellectual inquiry into the Christian faith. The result will be useful not only for gaining a new grasp of Lewis but of evangelism and apologetics as well.

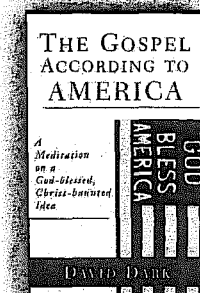


### **THE PRACTICAL CALVINIST**

Peter A. Lillback, editor  
Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian  
Focus Publications (2002)  
584 pages, cloth, \$37.99

This useful book is a collection of essays written and published to honor D. Clair Davis, longtime professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. It includes contributions by Sinclair B. Ferguson, Edmund Clowney, Richard Gaffin, and William Barker, all well-known Westminster names. It also includes a biography of Clair Davis and sermons he preached on the practical implications of the five points of Calvinism.

I confess that I have long appreciated Clair Davis as a fair and able historian. The writers chosen for this volume indicate the breadth and depth of his friendships and students. I found the essay by James Payton, "Drawn Eastwards: The Attraction of Eastern Christianity for Western Christians" magnificent and quite fair-minded. The section on Reformed and biblical hermeneutics includes good solid work by Vern Poythress and Richard Gaffin. There is much good material here to encourage Reformed and biblical Christianity.

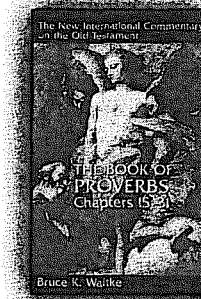


### **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO AMERICA**

David Dark  
Louisville: Westminster John Knox (2005)  
173 pages, paper, \$14.99

David Dark, a schoolteacher at Christ Presbyterian Academy in Nashville, Tennessee, is becoming an important voice for serious Christian faith in the public square. His writing in *Books & Culture* and *Christianity Today* has already established him as a serious contributor. The combination of social awareness with cultural sensitivity in this particular book is impressive and his writing style is remarkably fresh. The subtitle of this volume reveals Dark's direction: "A Meditation on a God-blessed, Christ-haunted Idea."

Anyone remotely interested in the American ideal and the kingdom of God, must read this book. It will help us think through the truth that there is a reality more important, more lasting, and more infinite than the cultures to which we belong, namely the reality of the kingdom of God.



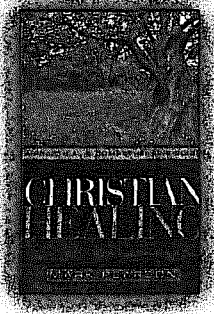
### **THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, CHAPTERS 15-31**

Bruce K. Waltke  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2005)  
589 pages, cloth, \$50.00

This commentary should become the outstanding work on Proverbs in the English language. It is erudite without becoming laborious or pedantic. And it is rooted deeply in respect for the biblical text throughout. It combines a rare devotional quality with solid academic insight, something far too uncommon in modern commentaries, even evangelical ones.

Dr. Waltke is professor emeritus of biblical studies at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Oviedo, Florida. His teaching, preaching, translating, and writing are all deeply appreciated. I have regularly profited from his labors for twenty-five years or more. I commend this

commentary, and its companion on chapters 1–14, to every serious biblical student and pastor.



**CHRISTIAN HEALING: A PRACTICAL AND COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE**

Mark Pearson

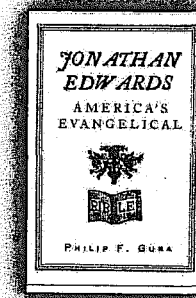
Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House

(2004)

327 pages, paper, \$14.99

This is an excellent introduction to the subject and offers both balance and pastoral wisdom. It answers the question as to why healing ministry is downplayed by some Christians and misunderstood by others. It answers questions like, “What is the devil’s role in healing?” and “What are the dangers and deceptions of the New Age in this type of ministry?” If you are ready to work for renewal in your own church in this area, then Mark Pearson will show you how to introduce a healing ministry.

Mark Pearson, an Anglican priest, and a leader of teaching and healing conferences around the world, has given to us what I believe to be the very best volume on this subject in print. It is written in simple English, is comprehensive without being laborious, and answers all the important questions. This is why I endorsed this book by writing: “I pray that a new reformation will include this important element of healing ministry in both liturgy and community life. I believe this book should become a reliable guide for those who desire a holistic biblical reformation.”



**JONATHAN EDWARDS:  
AMERICA'S EVANGELICAL**

Philip F. Gura

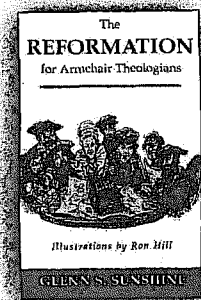
New York: Hill & Wang (2005)

284 pages, cloth, \$24.00

Another biography of Jonathan Edwards seems a bit unnecessary, especially given the award-winning treatment, *Jonathan Edwards* (Yale, 2003), by historian George Marsden. But Gura, a professor of American literature and culture at the University of North Carolina, has not attempted to write a “new” biography of Edwards so much as a personal “consideration” (Gura’s words) of Edwards that seeks to “locate those moments that suggest his largest significance to the twenty-first century reader” (271).

Gura succeeds admirably in attaining his goal. He writes, “[Like great poems] Edwards’s works stand before us as grand ciphers that await each generation’s explication of their truth” (xv). He adds, “I did not write this book apologetically but rather in confidence that with the nature of true virtue set before us, we can only do more good in the world” (xv). Gura concludes this readable, generous, and engaging book by writing:

Of course we have difficulty in facing Edwards. Reading him, we are forced to consider the immeasurable difference between sin and virtue and how far short we shall fall when we attempt to bridge that gap without the insight that Edwards terms grace. If, finally, we believe that someone such as Benjamin Franklin has more to offer us, we add only more proof to Edwards’s sense of the infinite distance between saint and sinner (238).



**THE REFORMATION FOR  
ARMCHAIR THEOLOGIANS**

Glenn S. Sunshine

Louisville: Westminster John Knox (2005)

247 pages, paper, \$14.95

This series, which includes similar volumes on Calvin, Luther, Aquinas, and Augustine, is magnificent. Designed for the non-expert, these volumes actually satisfy the more academic reader as well. The goal in the series is accurate and witty engagement with the high points in the story. What is provided is a clever and very readable series that should be used by churches, study groups, and college students.

This particular volume is a solid primer on the Protestant Reformation. It reads well, but does not skip important facts along the way. Sunshine, a professor of history at Central Connecticut University, has given us what I believe to be the best basic introduction to the Reformation we now have in print.



**REASON AND THE REASONS OF FAITH**

Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter,  
editors

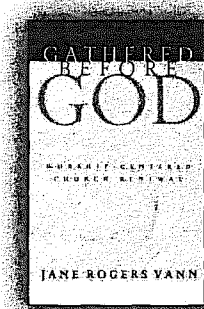
New York: T & T Clark (2005)

373 pages, cloth, \$49.95

Calls for the recovery of reason are becoming more and more prominent in serious Christian circles of thought. John Paul II led the way by his teaching in *Fides et Ratio*. But how do we use reason rightly? If God cannot, indeed must

not, be reduced to our thoughts, how do we engage in rigorous intellectual pursuit and real faith at the same time? The goal of this volume, which grows out of the Center of Theological Enquiry at Princeton, is to deepen and broaden the proper use of reason in service of true Christian faith.

The goal of this particular multi-author work is to offer theological resources that constructively address the double crises of faith in reason and reason in faith. This is done by first considering the theological constitution of reason. Then the authors inquire into how reason acts as one specific faculty of the human person. This is followed by a survey of the philosophical shifts of modernity and their importance to theology. Finally, the importance of philosophy for theological inquiry is explored. This is a weighty book intended for advanced readers who have some knowledge of both theology and philosophy. It includes essays by Alan Torrance, Robert W. Jenson, Bruce D. Marshall, Mark McIntosh, and the late Colin Gunton.



**GATHERED BEFORE GOD: WORSHIP-  
CENTERED CHURCH RENEWAL**

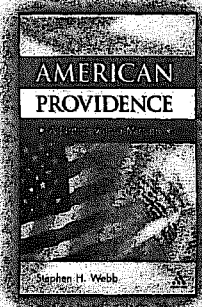
Jane Rogers Vann

Louisville: Westminster John Knox (2004)

192 pages, paper, \$19.95

Jane Rogers Vann believes that the central purpose of the church is to worship God. In this interesting study she shows how the renewal of the worship experience of ten churches—small, medium and large—led to new vitality and life in the congregation. Vann seeks to move the debate about worship beyond the contemporary versus traditional paradigms and into a call for making worship itself the central act of life together as Christians. By this renewal we express to the world more clearly what we confess about God, sin, grace, and the world.

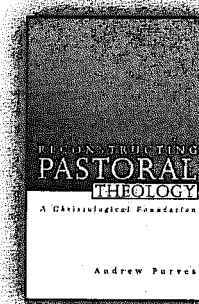
Vann is a professor of Christian Education at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. One of the several very positive benefits of this particular volume is how she links ministry and mission through worship.



**AMERICAN PROVIDENCE:  
A NATION WITH A MISSION**  
Stephen H. Webb  
New York: Continuum (2004)  
181 pages, cloth, \$24.95

The political and religious left has long set the agenda for academics who think at all about the role of providence in American life. The purposes of God in our history are viewed with a jaundiced eye, to say the least. Webb aims to challenge this regnant view and does so without falling into the simplistic thought of the Christian right on the other side of the road. He succeeds admirably.

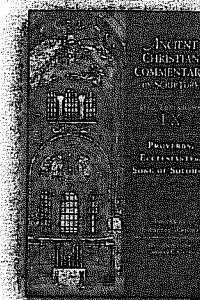
No one can read American history without seeing the prominent role the doctrine of providence has played in our nation's story. The present debate about references to God and providence in the speeches of George W. Bush has brought this discussion to a whole new level. Webb has no particular political agenda and thus succeeds wonderfully in showing how "liberal Christian Know-Nothingism" (as R. R. Reno aptly calls it) can be challenged by a vision that is both fresh and informed. This book needs to be read and debated by friends and foes alike. It is very important to the present cultural and political moment in American religious history.



**RECONSTRUCTING PASTORAL THEOLOGY:  
A CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION**  
Andrew Purves  
Louisville: Westminster John Knox (2004)  
236 pages, paper, \$29.95

Andrew Purves, author of *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*, adds to his already impressive corpus of work in this important field with this new volume. In this work Purves draws upon the Reformed tradition's central theme of union with Christ as the focus of Christian ministry. Preaching and pastoral care must be deeply rooted in Christ-centered theological conviction to be done well. Purves provides that emphasis in a refreshing way.

Thomas C. Oden refers to this volume as "the most significant and substantive reflection on the Christological foundations of pastoral theology in this decade" (back cover endorsement). Ray Anderson calls it a "seminal work." Neither scholar overstates his praise for Purves' newest work on pastoral theology.



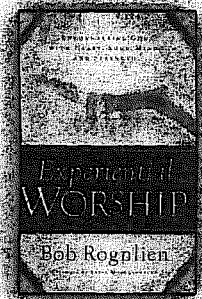
**ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY  
ON SCRIPTURE, OLD TESTAMENT  
VOLUME IX: PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES,  
SONG OF SOLOMON**  
J. Robert Wright, editor  
Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press  
(2005)  
434 pages, cloth, \$40.00

For those who have already used the several published volumes in this series this new addition will be welcomed with profound joy. For those who do not yet know the

Ancient Christian Commentary series, this particular volume would be a great place to begin.

No part of Scripture is more regularly abused or ignored than the Old Testament's Wisdom Literature. And no books were thought to be more important to the early church fathers, at least prior to the coming of Christ than these. The fathers saw types and images of Christ and of his church throughout these books. We have lost that perspective and are poorer for it. There is no better way to regain this hermeneutical insight than to read the comments of the fathers themselves.

This series makes accessible the earliest Christian commentary on the Scriptures. It covers the period from Clement of Rome (second century) to John of Damascus (mid-eighth century). The editor makes judicious choices for texts and includes a number of very useful resources in the volume besides the commentary itself. Biographical sketches of patristic contributors, a timeline of the patristic period, and a subject/Scripture index all add to the usefulness of this helpful commentary.



*EXPERIENTIAL WORSHIP*

Bob Rognlien

Colorado Springs: NavPress (2005)

233 pages, paper, \$14.99

**D**o you experience God in worship willfully, emotionally, intellectually, and physically? Rognlien believes all four must be present for there to be a meaningful and biblical worship service. He bases this argument on Mark 12:30 and thus argues that Jesus teaches us our worship must involve volition (heart), intellect (mind), emotion (soul), and body (strength). In this work the author, a Lutheran pastor in Torrance,

California, engages the whole of human experience in terms of worship so that the reader will enter into a complete, transforming encounter with the living Christ.

How do we integrate the great traditions of the church with the experiential and contemporary? How do we deal with worship across the many divides that threaten us today? This work provides some very satisfactory answers.