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Reformation
& **REVIVAL**
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BOOK REVIEWS

Let us take care not to defend grace in such a way that we would seem to take away free choice; nor again can we insist so strongly on free choice that we could be judged, in our proud impiety, ungrateful for the grace of God.

ST. AUGUSTINE

The Christian belief in providence is faith in the strict sense of the term, and this means first that it is a hearing and receiving of the Word of God. [Belief in providence] is simply and directly faith in God himself, in God as the Lord of his creation watching, willing and working above and in world-occurrence.

KARL BARTH



THE CHURCH: SACRAMENTS, WORSHIP, MINISTRY, MISSION

Donald G. Bloesch

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press
(2002), 351 pages, cloth, \$27.00

Donald Bloesch's latest addition to his "Christian Foundations" series is a timely and prophetic contribution to the current debate on the Church. A theology of the Church that is founded on Scripture and a thorough dialogue with key theological movements, both historical and contemporary, has been more than adequately provided by Bloesch's *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission*. His coverage of Scripture reveals a concern to establish a teaching of the Church based on a theology of the Word of God. Consequently, Bloesch has once again given us a work that is thoroughly evangelical. Furthermore, his firm grasp of theological history and the theology of the wider Church has enabled him to produce a work that is both evangelical and catholic. In addition, Bloesch's new venture in theology demonstrates not only academic depth but also a significant measure of discernment and pastoral sensitivity.

Bloesch's rich theological background has left its mark on all of his theological writings. He was raised in a denomination espousing both Reformed Confessionalism and Lutheran and Reformed Pietism. This background partly explains his emphasis on Jesus Christ as the living Word of God, a respect for the confessions of the Church, and the conviction that the Christian life is to be lived in co-operation with the work of

the Holy Spirit. While studying at the Federated Schools of Theology at the University of Chicago, Bloesch rejected the neo-naturalism of his teachers and turned to the works of neo-orthodoxy, particularly Karl Barth. At that time he also found an affinity with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which regularly held meetings on the University of Chicago campus. These encounters have produced an evangelical theologian in serious dialogue with the evangelicalism of Barth.

The influence of Barth is apparent in most of Bloesch's theological works and again in *The Church*. Here Bloesch once more follows Barth in establishing a theology of the Word of God that is rich in historical sources, particularly the Reformation heritage. Like his mentor, Bloesch contends with theological liberalism, secular mythology, and the rationalism underlying most fundamentalist theologies. The influence of Barth can also be detected in Bloesch's Christ-centered understanding of the Word and his definition of the gospel. One notes Bloesch's frequent references to theologians who are generally considered close to Barth in one way or other—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Hans Küng and P.T. Forsyth. However, Bloesch cannot be described as totally Barthian. In the past Bloesch has made his appreciations and reservations clear. Moreover, Bloesch, due to the influence of Pietism, seeks to add to Barth's theology of the Word by wedding it to a theology of the Spirit. Bloesch's adherence to the unity of Word and Spirit and the influence of Barth's Christocentric doctrine of revelation are both evident in this definition: "Worship that glorifies God is animated by his Spirit and informed by the truth of his revelation in Jesus Christ" (118). One finds in *The Church* a dialectic of Word and Spirit that unites evangelical vision and catholic outreach.

Bloesch explains the meaning of a theology of Word and Spirit in the preface, where he points to the need for a theology that focuses on both Christian renewal and the Word of God. Indeed, the author exhorts us to "not only engage in the study of Scripture but also try to fathom what the Spirit is saying in the Scripture to the church in every age" (23). He takes this stand in response to the current perils of individualism

and the market mentality, which he sees as leading the Church away from its scriptural foundations. In contrast to these accommodations Bloesch calls for prophets who will demand a confessing Church, "one that will boldly confess the claims of Christ in the face of the heresies and heterodoxies of our age" (34). He elaborates on this dilemma by drawing attention to the problems of contemporary worship.

Bloesch is alarmed at the shift of emphasis from Word and sacrament to sharing, musical aids, and contemporary music. He laments that "instead of a careful exposition of God's Word, we are introduced to the spiritual journeys of people of faith. Drama begins to overshadow proclamation, and theatrics supplant liturgy, even in many so-called evangelical churches" (35). He argues that making worship more palatable to an increasingly secularized society is a sign not of spiritual sagacity but of spiritual rebellion. Such tactics tend to confirm people in their way of life rather than challenge them to "confess their sins and become light and salt in a society that sorely needs regeneration" (186). Here we encounter Bloesch's vision of a confessing Church that stands in contrast to a cultural Church. A cultural Church is willing to accommodate itself to the myths of the age, whereas a confessing Church will expose them in the light of the gospel.

Bloesch further deplores the absence of a proclamation that contains the gospel as its content. He complains that "too often it is assumed that the role of the preacher is to make the faith palatable to its cultured despisers rather than simply expound the good news, which itself creates faith through the power of the Spirit" (38). His contention is that communicating the treasure of salvation rests not on finding points of contact with our listeners but on "our reliance upon the efficacy of the gospel to deliver from sin and death, and such reliance is born out of faith in the living God and in his incomparable revelation in Jesus Christ" (179). At the same time, Bloesch warns the Church not to retreat into the past and become alienated from the culture in which it stands. While many expressions of contemporary worship might be gnostic and secular in their appropriation of the present, traditional

worship tends to be formalistic as it clings to the past. Alternatively Bloesch asserts that the Church must apply the truth of Scripture in its own age by opening itself up to the free movement of the Spirit, yet remaining theocentric in its emphasis. Consequently, he holds that biblical worship must have as its aim the glorification of God in response to his saving work through Jesus Christ. Bloesch advocates worship founded on the proclamation of the Word and the animation of the Spirit. However, this will take place only when we hear preaching of the Word that is done in the power of the Spirit among "a people who pray in the Spirit."

Bloesch finds a theology of Word and Spirit in the Reformers. He concurs with Luther that while the sacraments do not work automatically (*ex opere operato*), they can have a powerful effect when "united with the preaching of the Word and laid hold of by the Spirit as he communicates the meaning and impact of the Word to the hearts of believers" (49). Bloesch believes that Calvin also propounded this kind of theology—one in which the Spirit illumines the meaning of the written Word. Barth, too, is deemed a theologian of Word and Spirit with his perception that the preaching of the Word is an effective means of outreach when enlivened by the Spirit "who speaks and acts in conjunction with our speaking" (56). Bloesch acknowledges that he is close to Barth, since like him Bloesch holds that as we proclaim the good news we become instruments of the Spirit of God. A theology of Word and Spirit also impacts Bloesch in his discussion of Church authority and the marks of the Church.

Bloesch's theology of Word and Spirit leads him to the view that "authority is situated outside the self in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ" (94). This revelation is not accessible to natural reason; yet it makes contact with reason by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The typology of Word and Spirit, which shapes the Reformers' understanding of the marks of the Church, likewise appears in Pietism, the Anabaptist tradition, P. T. Forsyth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Building on these various sources Bloesch concludes that "the marks that define the essence of

the Church include the classical marks of oneness, catholicity, apostolicity and holiness together with the preaching and hearing of the Word, the fellowship of love and the practice of prayer. . . . The church exists . . . wherever people live in holiness and truth as these are defined in the Bible" (108). On these foundations Bloesch presents a discussion of women in ministry, which is one of the finest presentations of the topic currently available.

The author draws together the principal threads of his argument when he proposes "a theology of Word and Spirit that applies the truth of divine revelation, attested in the Scriptures, to the concerns of daily life in the modern world" (200). He summons us to strive for "an evangelical catholicity that draws upon the treasures of the historical Church in the power of the Spirit and through the lens of faith in the biblical gospel" (200). According to Bloesch what the Church most needs is not another array of survival mechanisms but the faithful preaching of the gospel and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community.

Donald Bloesch's *The Church* is recommended to all who welcome the challenge of reflecting on many of the key issues that face the Church today. The author is right in asserting that the lure of success on the world's terms had led to an erosion of the true foundations of the Church. Something had to be said about this accommodation, and Bloesch has said it with an argument characterized by thoroughness, depth, and prophetic conviction. Some will feel indignation at Bloesch's reprimands; others will be relieved that their concerns have finally been articulated by a mature theologian in his prime. Yet again there are those who will be profoundly moved to renew their faith in the living Word and face the spirit of this age in the power of the Spirit of God. All who seriously engage with this work, whatever their situation, will be richly rewarded.

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**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN:
LIVING WITH OTHERS BEFORE GOD**

Michelle J. Bartel

Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press (2001)

108 pages, paper, \$11.95

“Everything would be all right,” said Dudley, “if only people could learn to behave like human beings” (Cary Grant in *The Bishop’s Wife*). It may seem odd to begin a book on a profound theological issue with a quote from a secular movie. Michelle Bartel does not pretend to be writing a sterile academic dissertation of humanness, however. Her style is conversational and personal. At times, readers may feel like they are sitting on the author’s sofa, drinking a cup of coffee, engaged in a lively discussion of this topic.

Don’t let the style fool you. The assistant professor of theology and ethics at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota appears to be very conversant with the theological material on the subject. The Foundations of Christian Faith Series, however, is written for a lay audience, enabling “readers to learn about contemporary theology in ways that are clear, enjoyable, and meaningful.” Ms. Bartel’s book reaches that goal.

From the outset she does not shy away from tackling the tension involved in the discussion of humanness. “Invoking the ‘they’re only human’ clause when we sigh in resignation and shrug our shoulders at faulty behavior is to make two significant errors: To be human is defined by sin, and human sin is just the way things are” (1). We tend to find ourselves stranded in hamartiology when we discuss human nature, desiring to maintain our orthodox declaration of depravity. Yet, what effect does sin have upon the image of God that is imprinted upon every human? As Bartel points out, Calvin suggests that it *deranges* that image, rather than obliterating it. Consequently, she concludes, “our true nature is seen not in our sinfulness, but in the fact that God called us into existence and created us in the blessedness of true relationship

with God and others” (21).

Relationship lies at the heart of Bartel’s understanding of the divine image upon his creatures. Of course, we readily acknowledge man’s need for a relationship with his Creator, this being a primary purpose for creating the image bearers. What seems to have been lost in our culture of radical individualism is that man is also created for relationship with other humans, and the absence of mutually fulfilling human affinities impedes the image.

A second component to this image is freedom, but not in the sense of unrestrained independence. Bartel clarifies that our freedom is really defined by limits: God, other people, and the rest of creation (28). Our narcissistic society places the self at the center of freedom, defining it in terms of expanding choices that will most benefit the individual. On the contrary, God did not create man for himself. Our freedom lies in our ability to give ourselves in relationship in order to glorify God and serve our neighbor.

This leads Bartel to one of the most helpful discussions of the book, as she explores the value of conflict in human relationships. Conflict originates in diversity. The inescapable reality that differences exist between every human being means that there will be conflict. This conflict may be expressed sinfully or selflessly. As Bartel says, “Our differences are vast, rich and fruitful, and marvelous, but our differences don’t exist for their own sake. It’s not enough just to be ‘different.’ This difference, insofar as we are free to be different, is *for* God and *for* the other” (42). Once again we discover community restraining sinful reaction.

In her next chapter, “God Reaches Out to Us,” Bartel discusses the confirmation of God’s love through the sacraments, concluding the chapter with an examination of the Church as the Body of Christ. Even in the fellowship of our holy huddles, the image of God prohibits us from isolating ourselves from the non-initiates. Describing this fellowship, Bartel says, “*koinonia* is the community of individuals who together live in the world for the sake of the world, enjoying the world as God’s gift, and who work to serve the world” (77).

The chapter titled, "Goodness Outside the Garden," examines the providential work of God through his redeemed creatures to accomplish his purpose for all of creation. She briefly focuses on four qualities: joy, generosity, creativity, and compassion. In harmony with John Piper, Bartel claims, "The whole point of union with God through Christ by the power of the Spirit is to free us for the joy of being human—the joy of being human with God, ourselves, and others" (87). The overflow of that joy is generosity. Creativity is the means through which we express this joy and generosity. And compassion enables us to respond to the consequences of a fallen world that would discourage that joy.

A balanced view of humanness impacts the way we live in the world. The image of God will not permit a militant view of living in a fallen world and enduring coexistence with rebellious creatures. On the contrary, we learn from Jesus Christ how to bring the message of God's forgiveness through his grace to *all* people. We learn to navigate the narrow strait between undiscerning tolerance on one side, and a judgmental spirit on the other. Since it is Christ that defines who we are as Christians, we cannot afford to view any human being as beyond God's love—not the homosexual, not the politician, not the abortionist, not even the Muslim dictator. Bartel perceptively points out, "If any human being is beyond God's love, that is something that God sees, not us. For our vision of the world sees the world as belonging to God: we do not look at the world *as* God" (101).

Filled with personal anecdotes and practical illustrations, Bartel's book provides any reader with an engaging introduction into the dialogue on the image of God and humanness. It is certainly not designed to be a thorough treatise of this complex doctrine, but a "concise, readable, thought-provoking" treatment of the subject. The reader will not set the book down without being challenged to find the divine balance of behaving more like human beings.

STAN WEIDEMAN
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*FANTASY AND YOUR FAMILY: EXPLORING
THE LORD OF THE RINGS, HARRY POTTER
AND MODERN MAGICK*

Richard Abanes

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, 2002.

300 pages, paper, \$11.99

The longstanding debate in Christian circles over fantasy has heated up drastically since the appearance of the Harry Potter books. The issues have become exponentially more complex than in the good old days when the rival camps were enthusiasts for the particular truth and pleasure that the fantasy genre provides vs. conservative Christians who could not negotiate the supernatural trappings that are an inherent part of fantasy. Richard Abanes' book is an excellent initiation into both the controversial status of contemporary fantasy (and the Harry Potter books in particular) and the complexity of the issues involved.

Abanes' book steers a middle course between the poles of wholesale endorsement of fantasy on religious grounds, and wholesale condemnation of it, also on religious grounds. On one side of the long debate are the enthusiasts for fantasy who are so sympathetic to the presence of supernaturalism and moral concerns in fantasy literature that they baptize virtually all works of fantasy into the Christian faith. On the other side are those who take the Bible's condemnation of aberrant supernaturalism seriously, equate the magic of fantasy with aberrant supernaturalism, and become sworn foes of fantasy literature (in some cases even of C. S. Lewis' Narnia stories).

I have never sided with either extreme. Like any other literary genre, fantasy can express an unreliable world view, a false spiritualism, and an immoral ethical scheme as readily as a true world view, a true spiritual vision, and a moral code of behavior. The great error of the debunkers of fantasy as a genre is that they miss the essential principle of fantasy, namely, that the supernatural trappings (which literary critics through the ages have called the marvelous) are, in the formula of science

fiction writer Ursula LeGuin, *metaphors of the human condition and of reality*. No direct portrayal of supernatural reality is intended.

This general defense of fantasy, which is basically sound for classic fantasy stories like those by Lewis and Tolkien, yields a simple defense of the Harry Potter books if it is so applied. If fantasy is good in principle—if, in fact, its inclusion of the marvelous makes it a natural vehicle for portraying the Christian supernatural—then the Harry Potter books can sail under the banner of fantasy in general. On this logic, the Harry Potter books have as good a claim to be on a Christian's shelves as does *The Lord of the Rings*. This has been the basic line of defense by Christian defenders of the Harry Potter books.

The problem with this approach is that it is simplistic. It does not adequately inquire into whether *all* supernaturalism in fantasy is equally congruent with the Christian supernatural, or whether only *some* of it is genuinely congruent. The Christian defense of the Harry Potter books to date has not adequately considered whether *The Lord of the Rings* really is like the Harry Potter books, or in what ways the two are similar and in what ways they are different. The blanket endorsement of works of fantasy because they all use the same generic traits leaves untouched the question of how (for example) Tolkien's fantasy and the Harry Potter books are actually influencing young readers.

The Christian defenses of the Harry Potter books by writers like Charles Colson, Alan Jacobs, Mike Hertenstein, and Mickey Maudlin seem plausible enough until a book like Abanes' *Fantasy and Your Family* comes along. By the time Abanes conducts his thorough investigation of the complex issues, the simple defenses of Harry Potter on grounds of genre emerge as simplistic, sometimes uninformed, and sometimes actually intolerant and bigoted toward conservative Christians (the biggest loser by far in Abanes' book is Mickey Maudlin's piece in *Christianity Today*, a piece that emerges as a strident, name-calling, intolerant piece of polemic).

The most obvious virtues of Abanes' book are four in number. One is the scholarly rigor that Abanes brings to the task.

Everything in the book is copiously researched (something that the popular Christian defenses of the Harry Potter books are not). The book's title creates expectations of a fireside chat filled with exhortations and directives in the mode of Focus on the Family. In fact, the book is a triumph of scholarship. There are fifty small-print pages of notes! So far as I can tell, Abanes has uncovered everything about the Harry Potter phenomenon that has appeared in print and on the internet.

The book's second virtue is its thoroughness. Before rebutting the Christian endorsers of the Harry Potter books, for example, Abanes allots a whole chapter to reprinting excerpts from the respective articles. More importantly, the rebuttal takes every possible angle and is pursued in leisurely fashion. Before it is all over, thirty-two arguments have been painstakingly considered, and then the next chapter answers twenty-seven commonly asked questions.

The third virtue of the book is its fairmindedness and reasonableness. Abanes never resorts to the caricaturing and demonizing of his opponents that some of them have stooped to. Furthermore, Abanes sees both peril and profit in the fantasy genre. There is neither a blanket endorsement or blanket condemnation of fantasy.

This leads to a final virtue that I will note, namely, the rigor of analysis and careful discrimination that pervades the book. Abanes consistently pushes the analysis to a further analytic level than his opponents do. Instead of simply observing that both Tolkien and the Harry Potter books portray magic and then either embracing or rejecting them, Abanes conducts an inquiry into the precise ways in which magic appears in the respective authors.

Abanes has presented his case for why Tolkien is good reading for Christians and why the Harry Potter books are suspect. The ball is now in his opponents' court to see if they can refute his arguments. Their original arguments will no longer suffice. For me, three points were particularly compelling. One is the data that Abanes uncovers regarding the occult leanings of J. K. Rowling and the avowed fascination with the occult in readers of Harry Potter. The second is the

inherent difference between Tolkien and Rowling on the matter of what in literary circles is called aesthetic distance. By a variety of means, Tolkien's fantasy maintains aesthetic distance in such a way as to ensure that it will be understood as giving us *metaphors* and *fictions* of reality. But the Harry Potter stories remove such distancing and are accepted by many readers as *direct* portrayals of the supernatural and occult. Third, the treatment of magic is far different in Tolkien and Rowling; in the former, it is a literary requirement for fantasy; in the latter, it is an obsession.

Although Abanes does not overtly root his analysis in any particular literary theory, he actually engages in some very astute reader response criticism. By pressing his analysis in that direction, he presents a case that makes that of his opponents seem somewhat irrelevant to the real world and a bit amateurish.

The fact that Richard Abanes is a free lancer instead of an academician, and that Christian Publications is a little known religious press of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, should not be allowed to obscure the way in which this book does everything right in terms of a rigorous analysis of the fantasy writings of Tolkien and the Harry Potter stories.

LELAND RYKEN
Wheaton, Illinois

THE VALLEY OF VISION. A COLLECTION OF PURITAN PRAYERS & DEVOTIONS

Arthur Bennett, editor
Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975 (reprinted 2002), 405 + xxvi pages, leather, \$24.99

Traditionally, evangelicals have been very wary of written prayers. Many of our evangelical forefathers in the Puritan era strenuously objected to the liturgical format of the Church of England, in which the corporate recitation of set

prayers was a major element. For instance, a prominent item at the trial of John Bunyan (1628–1688) in 1661 was Bunyan's adamant opposition to the use of the Book of Common Prayer (which contained the order and prayers of every Church of England service). Genuine prayer, he maintained, could only come from "the motions of the Holy Ghost within our hearts." Indeed, one of Bunyan's earliest works was his *I Will Pray with the Spirit*, written in 1662, in which he developed at length the position he had maintained at his trial. Set forms of prayer, Bunyan argued, hampered and impeded the Spirit's work in the believer's heart. Rightly he asserted that only "the Spirit can lift up the soul or heart to God in prayer"! By and large Bunyan's plea for extemporaneous prayer has been heeded by successive generations of evangelicals.

However, while Bunyan was certainly right to stress the need for the Spirit to generate genuine prayer, even extemporaneous prayer has a way of becoming rote. Who among us has not had the experience, sometimes for a number of days, or even longer, of stale, lifeless prayer that repeatedly expresses itself in the same way and manner? Although we as evangelicals do not have a formal liturgical tradition, our individual prayer-lives all too frequently do, for often they fall into the same patterns of expression and petition, patterns that easily can become ruts.

It is at times like these that we could use some outside help, a boost to get moving again. Arthur Bennett's *The Valley of Vision* is ideal in this regard. In print since 1975—and reprinted twice, most recently in 1983—it has just been reprinted, this time in a handsome cabra bonded leather edition that is the perfect size for carrying in one's jacket pocket. Subtitled *A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, it contains prayers from the works of fourteen Puritan and Evangelical authors, including, surprise of surprises, Bunyan!

The word "Puritan" in the subtitle is clearly not meant to be taken in a strictly chronological sense. For Puritanism was historically a phenomenon of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rather, Bennett employs this term to refer to a form of spirituality that dominated English-speaking Christianity

from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, in which there was "the same spiritual language . . . the same code of values, . . . the same attitude towards the Christian religion, . . . the same God-centered aspirations" (Preface, page ix).

Bennett emphasizes that the book is not intended "to be read as a prayer manual." The prayers are best used as springboards for a believer's "communion with a transcendent and immanent God who on the ground of his nature and attributes calls forth all the powers of the redeemed soul in acts of total adoration and dedication" (Preface, page xi). The division of the prayers into a number of categories, such as "Redemption and Reconciliation," "Holy Aspirations," "Service and Ministry," and the fact that each prayer is given a title, greatly facilitates the use of the prayers. Moreover, Bennett has structured the prayers in such a way that they easily become the springboard for deeper reflection and worship that he desires them to be. As Dallas Theological Seminary historian John Hannah has commented about the book: "A wonderful aid in expressing our personal thoughts to God, a spiritual classic, both sober and inspiring." It is little wonder that this book has been the Banner of Truth's best-selling volume in North America.

MICHAEL A. G. HAYKIN
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**EVANGELISM OUTSIDE THE BOX:
NEW WAYS TO HELP PEOPLE EXPERIENCE
THE GOOD NEWS**

Rick Richardson

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press

(2000)

192 pages, paper, \$11.00

In the not too distant past a Christian evangelist/apologist could offer various types of rational argumentation for the reliability of the biblical account of Jesus and fairly safely

communicate the good news to ordinary people. Today, as most realize, truth is up-for-grabs (relativism) and data that seeks to argue the biblical case for Jesus has little or no effect. How do we tell modern people the ancient story if their mindset has changed so profoundly?

Richardson, a national field director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, is an accomplished evangelist who has thought deeply about the gospel and how we should communicate it more effectively. By "the box," he means those barriers and walls we construct that hinder how we actually do evangelism. Boxes, then, are "mental models of ministry and evangelism that keep us from pouring our passion into new ways of witness" (17). His concern is to answer the question: "How can we remove our boxes and bear fruit more effectively?"

The first box he removes is "our theology box." This will make people on both sides of the Calvinist/Arminian divide uncomfortable but his points are well made. Evangelism is not simply about faithfulness. We should desire to be fruitful if we care about making disciples. If evangelism is 100% God's work and none of ours we will do little to make new disciples. If evangelism is all our work and 0% of it is God's work then we will be inclined to excessive self-confidence. The model Richardson employs is incarnational. Just as Jesus was 100% God and 100% man so is our witness to Jesus. As William Carey once noted, "We should pray as if the entire work depended upon God and we should work [evangelize] as if it depended entirely upon us."

Another box we construct is the "sacred practices box." What is Richardson's solution? Distinguish between "sacred practices" and "core values" (23). We also tend to construct a "structure and strategy box" (25). Here he suggests we need to ask ourselves: "What structure and strategy are we using to reach pre-Christian people?" (26). From this helpful orientation Richardson lays out some of the most pressing questions being asked by unbelievers today. He suggests responses, develops a theology for reaching people and suggests the importance of things like team, friendship, prayer, etc.

The later chapters seek to show how the Church should

develop community with the intention of reaching out. How do we invite non-Christians into our circle of friendship and Christian worship? Should we even try since our services are for us, not them? How is a modern person transformed by the gospel and how do we not only get out of our boxes but stay out of them?

There are six appendices in this volume. Several are quite useful. One titled "The Rise and Fall of the Modern World" is insightful, and the one on building Bible study groups that attract and reach pre-Christians is worth the price of the book. All in all, this is a useful and provocative book that would benefit most Church leaders.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief

SIMONE WEIL

Francine Du Plessix Gray
New York: Penguin Putnam (2001)
246 pages, cloth, \$19.95

Simone Weil (1909-1943) was an enigmatic, complex woman who lived a great deal of life in a short thirty-four years. A French patriot, the second child and only daughter of a secular Jewish father and mother, she came to crave beauty and deeply longed to enter the Catholic church, which she never did. She aggressively flirted with communism for a time, identified with the social workers movement by working in harsh factory conditions, and finally died of complications related to anorexia. Her transformation from a rich Parisian student to a union organizer, social activist, prolific philosopher, and fairly orthodox Christian is actually a remarkable story, making this little book worth the time of any who are interested in getting a good overview of her life and thought.

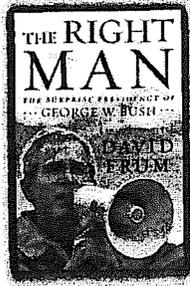
Within two decades of Simone Weil's death, T. S. Eliot wrote that she displayed "an almost super-human humility and what appears to be an almost outrageous arrogance" as well as "a kind of genius akin to that of the saints."

I first began to read Weil in recent years. I came to this little biography knowing that Pope Paul VI is said to look upon Bernanos, Weil, and Pascal (who also died quite young) as the three most important influences in his own intellectual development. Given Pope Paul's intellectual/spiritual trajectory this alone made me want to know her work better. (Pascal I have long appreciated but I intend to begin reading Bernanos very soon!)

Weil came to embrace Christian faith in her later years. She plainly embraced Manichaeian notions in her philosophical journey. And for all intents and purposes was a Marcionite, pitting the Old Testament God against the Father and his Son Jesus as revealed in the New Testament. At the same time she embraced Jesus as risen, glorified, and saving. Her Trinitarian beliefs were also substantial. To say that she is an enigma in these ways would be a huge understatement. Her soul seemed, on the one hand, to find rest in Christ but her mind never caught up.

It is not an overstatement to say that Simone Weil has been praised and condemned, commented upon, annotated, interpreted, and footnoted for decades. She was, to say the least, a most unorthodox person. Her writing, especially her Christian writing, will probably remain a useful resource for many struggling believers in the century to come.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief



**THE RIGHT MAN: THE SURPRISE
PRESIDENCY OF GEORGE W. BUSH**

David Frum

New York: Random House (2003)

303 pages, cloth, \$25.95

Immediate bestsellers are hard to judge. Popularity does not easily translate into value in modern publishing. In the case of presidential “tell all” books the landscape is littered with some very bad books. With David Frum’s well-written account of his twelve months as an economic speechwriter for the Bush White House the pattern is clearly broken.

The “surprise presidency” does not refer to the election itself. Frum’s subtitle is meant to underscore the moral courage and stature of Bush displayed since 9/11. He suggests that until that infamous day Bush’s presidency was not going well at all. He was stalemated by Congress, opposed by numerous special interest groups, and perceived as a lightweight with no serious ability to lead the nation. There was a general air of uncertainty about the first nine months of the Bush administration.

David Frum, the author of *Dead Right*, a highly acclaimed insider story of the modern conservative political movement, and *How We Got Here*, a very good history of the 1970s, is a contributing editor for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *The Weekly Standard* and Canada’s *National Post*. He was credited with creating the now-famous phrase “the axis of evil” which led to international headlines following the State of the Union address in 2002. (He tells about how he came up with this phrase and how Bush adopted it in the speech.)

Frum allows the reader to get a real inside sense of the Bush presidency in terms of its key figures (e.g., Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Karl Rove, and Karen Hughes). Bush is presented as a man of deep conviction with a clear agenda. The explanation for his determination to challenge Iraq must

clearly be found in his determination to never let another 9/11 happen without making every effort possible to stop it in advance. Whatever your view of the political issues in the present war on terrorism, George W. Bush is decisive in his determination to stop our decades-long policy of appeasement in the Middle East. Frum believes, and I share his belief, that if any world leader thinks that this president will not act consistently and courageously upon his moral principles, with regard to defending the homeland, they will be proven wrong. History will tell what this means, but Bush’s popularity is clearly linked to his decisive and determined style of leadership in international affairs.

Frum, a Jew who joined the Bush staff among great suspicions about the religious right’s influence in the White House, notes that on his first day in the West Wing he heard a staffer tell speechwriter Michael Gerson (a Wheaton College graduate and evangelical Christian) that he had been missing him at the morning Bible study. Frum notes that the comment made him “twitch.” He later demonstrates that the presence of Christian faith is in no way a hindrance to the operation of the Bush administration. President Bush’s prayers, which begin each cabinet meeting, are also cited with great respect.

Sigmund Freud used “the Latin pronoun *id* to describe the impulsive, carnal and unruly elements of the human personality” (55). Frum notes that the first President Bush seemed to have no *id* at all while Bill Clinton’s was given the run of the White House. But in this President’s life, Frum argues, his *id* was “captured, shackled and manacled, and locked away” at the middle years of his life (55). Frum demonstrates that the Bush he saw in the day-to-day work of the West Wing is a disciplined, focused, thoughtful leader who respects people and takes his job with great seriousness and deep commitment to the trust he has been given.

I saw David Frum interviewed on C-Span a few weeks ago, when this book first appeared. He was asked by one in the audience, “How do you explain a man who was a consummate playboy, a heavy drinker and a person with no moral compass in his life at all at age forty, becoming by his early fifties the

President of the United States with a deep sense of destiny and a moral conviction unmatched in decades?" Frum's answer, given without a great deal of doubt, was that only Bush could really tell us, if he ever chose to so in the far distant future, but he surmised the only explanation must be his most profound Christian conversion! The man, Frum clearly noted, simply gained a whole new perspective about life and now senses that God has placed him in this office as a trust which carries with it deep personal responsibility before God himself. Truly, this man believes he "has a charge to keep." For that we can be thankful even if we disagree with some of his political ideas and decisions. The contrast between this president and the previous occupant of the White House is striking. I for one am grateful. I prayed for Bill Clinton, as a Christian duty, but I pray for George Bush as a man who humbly listens to others and seems to have a single-eyed ambition to do what is right, regardless of the cost to himself.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief



JOSEPH SMITH

Robert V. Remini
New York: Viking Penguin (2002)
208 pages, cloth, \$19.95

The *Penguin Lives Series* has proven to be a worthwhile accomplishment in short and highly-readable biography. I previously read volumes on Woodrow Wilson and Pope John XXIII. Both were useful overviews that avoid the unnecessary details biographers often give to average readers. In this new addition to the series Robert Remini, one of our most highly-regarded historians of the Jacksonian era in American history, applies to the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith both his skills of insight and historical context.

Remini, a non-Mormon, does a very good job of presenting the story of Smith without prejudicial treatment. When he encounters a controversial element of Smith's story, and there are scores of them, to put it mildly, he allows the reader to make up his own mind without editorial bias. Smith is referred to as "the most important reformer and innovator in American religious history." Though I felt a bit put off by this statement at the outset, I think Remini makes a good case for his claim.

Most evangelicals do not realize that Smith was a not-so-unusual product of the Second Great Awakening. His faith was nurtured in the "Burned Over District" of upstate New York, left in the wake of the Finney revivals of the 1820s and 30s. Numerous sects and religious movements were birthed during this era, and a Jacksonian-era scholar was a great choice by the publisher to contribute this particular work to the developing series.

Stories from the era of Smith's childhood and teen years abound in revival literature. Says Remini, accurately of those years, "Emotional orgies resulted, reaching such heights that they generated wild scenes of men and women weeping and tearing their hair, vocally confessing their sins, beating their breasts, rolling on the ground, crawling on all fours like dogs, and barking at trees where they presumably cornered the devil" (1). Preachers from the era employed antics that matched their names—names such as Jumpin' Jesus or Crazy Cow or Mad Isaac.

Remini rightly suggests that numerous reasons existed at the time for this religious phenomenon—sudden change, war with England, economic uncertainty, and the steady development of government from a republic to a democracy. Remini writes: "The American people turned to religion to find stability, guidance, and comfort. Desperate and anxiety-ridden, they looked for divine help as they struggled to reshape and anchor their lives in a modern democratic society" (4). The age was much more attuned to romanticism than rational thought. The importance of human emotions was central to the general populace. The revivals took on this social dimension. In their wake emerged cults, indeed more cults than at any period in our col-

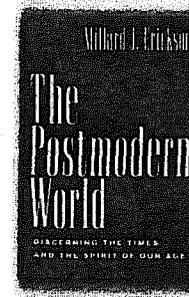
lective religious history. Joseph Smith cannot be understood except in this context. Remini gets this right and the reader is the beneficiary by the end of this little volume.

From the Puritan idea of a stern sovereign deity the preachers of the early eighteenth century stressed the free will of man and the need for a holiness that could be attained more immediately. Quoting Finney, professor Remini writes that Finney exhorted listeners to "aim to be holy and not rest satisfied till they are as perfect as god" (6). The religion of the era was a blend of faiths with the emerging democratic spirit. No one blended the ideas of Christianity, with decidedly Gnostic tendencies, quite like Joseph Smith, the seer of Mormonism.

Smith was, to any fair-minded reader, an amazing man. Mormons believe him to be a prophet. Evangelicals are inclined to see him as an instrument of the Evil One, leading countless people away from the gospel of Christ. Regardless of your belief about Smith, either as a faithful prophet or charlatan deceiver, his life is interesting and a sober testimony to the power of religious persuasion in the lives of people who desire to follow someone who has "answers." This tendency is clearly rooted in the lives of many and, though Smith was a man of his own times, the need for such figures will never go away. What makes his story so unique is that while scores of such preachers of the same era are forgotten, Smith is a figure now known throughout the world.

All who care about the prosperity of Christ's Church on the earth should consider the life Joseph Smith. What should we do with "new revelations" and "prophets" who proclaim that they are restoring the true message of Jesus in these last days? How do we deal with the bizarre element of modern revival movements? Are there lessons to be learned from our past? Remini does not provide a religious answer so much as a social and cultural one, but the answer he does provide is nonetheless quite important. All who are interested in both American history and spiritual awakening will profit by this excellent little book.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief



THE POSTMODERN WORLD

Millard J. Erickson

Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway (2002)

143, paper \$12.99

Postmodernism is often discussed but rarely defined. Is it merely a phenomenon in literature or does it impact religion and social science? Is it nothing more or less than relativism, as some argue? All agree that whatever it is, it permeates American life and thought, is influencing our colleges profoundly, and now it impacts everyday life in ways that few realize. Many believe we are passing through a paradigm shift of major proportions that will leave our culture marked by the postmodern worldview for centuries to come. Others see the influence of postmodernity as already failing and loosing ground. Erickson is of the latter persuasion.

Erickson links postmodernism with tolerance, pluralism, individualism and even casualness in style and dress. His desire is to equip Christians to respond to this philosophical phenomenon in a relevant and biblical way. His burden is to warn us of the dangers of this way of thinking and of how it can and does alter serious and orthodox thought among Christians. This is a strength of this rather simple overview.

The weakness of this approach, to my mind, is that Erickson sees little good in postmodernism for the Church in our culture. The death of modernity is not all bad news. Modernity, it should be remembered, gave us a plethora of rationalistic attacks upon Christian faith over the past three hundred years. It reshaped the ancient faith in ways that led it to move away from a sound view of faith and reason. Postmodernism will not inherently solve our problems, but it does bring us into a context much more akin to that of the early Church. My prayer is that bright, biblically-trained evangelists will take advantage of this paradigm shift in Western culture and make

disciples in ways that see greater fidelity to the message and method of the early Christians. Erickson does not share this optimism, at least not as I have stated it.

JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Editor-in-Chief

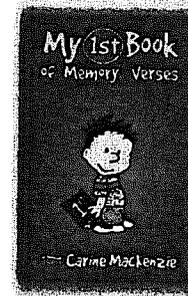
RECENT CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BIBLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: A FIRST CATECHISM

Carine MacKenzie
Christian Focus Publications, 2001
51 pages, paper, \$2.99

Reading this tiny book was like taking a trip down memory lane for me. Most days after dinner my husband would catechize our children. I recall our daughter at two, standing next to the coffee table with a bottle in her mouth and her stuffed bunny under her arm, listening to the question: "Can you see God?" She pulled the bottle from her mouth and answered, "No, but he always sees me," and then promptly put her cherished bottle back into her mouth!

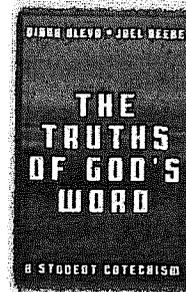
Carine MacKenzie's little catechism book is perfect for young children. It has 114 questions and answers along with Scripture passages to read with each one. Planting these seeds of Bible truths and doctrine in your children at very young ages, along with the accompanying memory verses, will possibly never be forgotten. I memorized many Scripture verses as a child, and even though I've memorized many more as an adult, it is those that I learned as a child in the old King James Version that pop into my mind now as a grandmother! Every one talks about "family time" and "family values" nowadays, but what could be *more* valuable than spending a few minutes each day catechizing your children?



MY 1ST BOOK OF MEMORY VERSES

Carine MacKenzie
Christian Focus Publications, 2002
www.christianfocus.com
62 pages, paper, \$2.99

This tiny book is a great companion to the above-reviewed children's catechism book. Each page has one Bible verse (in the King James Version) and a brief explanation of that verse. For instance, page 39 has Hebrews 4:16 on it: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The accompanying explanation says: "We should not be afraid to pray. Our loving, merciful God wants us to come to him. He gives mercy and forgiveness to the repentant sinner and love and grace to the needy person." Each page also has a small black-and-white illustration of a small child "acting out" what the verse says. If you would like your children to be memorizing Scripture but don't know where to start, this would be a helpful little teaching tool.



THE TRUTHS OF GOD'S WORD: A STUDENT CATECHISM

Diana Kleyn and Joel Beeke
Christian Focus Publications, 2002
57 pages, paper, \$2.99

This book has catechism questions that are divided among seven chapters. The chapters are: Who Is God?, Who Are We?, Who Should We Be?, How Can We Be What God Calls Us to Be?, What the Triune God Does to Save Sinners, The Church and the Sacraments, and Heaven and Hell.

Each chapter ends with questions for discussion which makes this an excellent book to use in a group setting, perhaps in a Sunday school class or church catechism class for youth, or even as a home school curriculum. An example of a question from chapter one is number 8:

Question: "Is God good, even when bad things happen?"

Answer: "Yes, God never does evil. God is good to us in showing us his salvation, though we deserve no good at all."

"Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way" (Psalm 25:8).

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

Though this catechism was written for elementary school-aged children, I think memorizing, or even meditating on, these questions would benefit *any* person. Look for it online at www.heritagebooks.org

"BIBLE ALIVE" SERIES: JESUS THE CHILD, JESUS THE STORYTELLER, JESUS THE HEALER, JESUS THE MIRACLE WORKER, JESUS THE TEACHER, AND JESUS THE SAVIOUR

Carine MacKenzie

Christian Focus Publications, (2002)

24 pages each, paper, \$2.99

The Bible Alive series is a collection of six children's books that tell stories from the Bible about Jesus' life much the same as a Sunday school teacher might paraphrase the Scripture. Each book is a factual account of God's Word accompanied by the detailed illustrations of Jeff Anderson. His pictures resemble those you would find in a flannelgraph story. These are charming little books for you to read to a preschooler or early elementary school-aged child, or for older children to read to themselves.

"FIND THE ANIMAL" SERIES: GOD MADE SOMETHING STRONG, GOD MADE SOMETHING CLEVER, GOD MADE SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL, AND GOD MADE SOMETHING QUICK

Penny Reeve

Christian Focus Publications, (2002)

16 pages each, paper, \$3.99

This series is delightful in every way. The illustrations by Roger de Klerk are adorable, and the print is large enough for even a grandparent to read without glasses! A child may enthusiastically interact with the reader because there are two fun and educational questions and a Scripture verse on each page. Children and adults alike will enjoy the colorful, whimsical pictures of animals and children. The stories are about an elephant, a dog, a peacock, and a lizard, and each book ends with a simple prayer. I'm anxious to read these books to my grandchildren!

ON THE WAY

TnT Ministries

Christian Focus Publications, 2002

88 pages, paper, \$11.99

This workbook-size book is designed to be an age-specified Bible Study for children and youth. It would be a valuable tool to use as a Sunday school curriculum, or it could be used as a Bible curriculum for home schoolers. The publisher's description on the contents page sums this series of books up best:

On the Way for 11-14s works on a three-year syllabus consisting of six books. It builds on the 9-11s syllabus and introduces young teens to study the Bible in a way which is challenging and intellectually stretching. Because they are often unprepared to take things at face value and are encouraged to question everything, it is important to satisfy the mind while touching

the heart. Therefore, some of the lessons are designed to introduce the idea of further Bible study skills, e.g., the use of a concordance, a character study, studying a single verse or a passage.

Lessons are grouped in series, each of which is introduced by a series overview stating the aims of the series, the lesson aim for each week, and an appropriate memory verse. Every lesson, in addition to an aim, has study notes to enable the teacher to understand the Bible passage, a suggestion to focus attention on the study to follow, a "Question Section" and an activity for the group to do. The Question Section consists of 2-3 questions designed to help in discussing the application of the Bible passage. The course can be joined at any time during its 3-year cycle.

All the books in this series allow you free license to copy visual aids and activity pages for use as class material. As a former Sunday school teacher, public school teacher and home school teacher, I am impressed with the possibilities of these workbooks as biblical educational tools.

ANITA R. ARMSTRONG
Carol Stream, Illinois