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Reformation
& Revival



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He leads none to heaven but whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit of dead members.

John Owen

Pray not only against the power of sin, but for the power of holiness also. A haughty heart may pray against his sins, not out of any inward enmity to them, or love to holiness, but because they are troublesome guest to his conscience. His zeal is false that seems hot against sin, but is key-cold to holiness. A city is rebellious that keeps their rightful Prince out, though it receives not his enemy in.

William Gurnall

It is absurd to imagine that God should justify a people and not sanctify them, He should justify a people whom He could not glorify.

Thomas Watson

There is a beauty in holiness as well as a beauty of holiness.

George Swinnock

Holiness hath in it a natural tendency to life and peace.

Elisha Coles

Book Reviews

A Plea for The Godly

Thomas Watson

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria (1994).

480 pages, cloth, \$32.95.

This scarce collection of sermons by one of the most beloved and well read of the English Puritans is a welcome addition to the already growing list of works published by Soli Deo Gloria. The book bears the name of the first of eighteen sermons by Watson which have not been reprinted since the seventeenth century. In selecting this title for the compilation of sermons, the publisher has crystallized the theme of these magnificent messages. While covering a wide range of topics, these precious jewels of instruction are really a plea for godliness on the part of God's people, the church. Upon the completion of the digestion of these eighteen morsels of edification, I personally experienced a sense of humble confidence in who God says we are, and what He has done to position us to live as His holy nation.

In addition to the value of the individual messages themselves, this work provides an excellent study in the art of sermon preparation perfected by the Puritans, who were often profound and penetrating. Watson employs the standard Puritan technique of basing his message on a single verse of Scripture. He then presents the doctrine associated with the passage followed by answering logical objections to the stated doctrine and concludes with uses or applications, often in the form of questions. In the opening sermon of the book, Watson bases his "A Plea for The Godly" on Proverbs 12:26 ("The righteous is more excellent than his neighbor") and proceeds to explain in fifty-four pages that "He who is truly righteous is far more excellent than any wicked person in the world whatsoever" (p. 3). With compelling conviction, Watson shows how a righteous man is more excellent than another by

giving twelve descriptions of “what he (the righteous) is,” eight insights into “what he has,” and concludes his first point with a summary statement of “what he shall have” . . . “he shall have a better reward. Both righteous and wicked are rewarded, but there is a vast difference” (p. 27). He then proceeds to examine his second point in the explanation of the doctrine: Why a righteous man is more excellent than another? The reason, states Watson, “is consanguinity; he is brother to Christ” (p. 28). He then shows with great pastoral affection that God bestows eleven more excellent titles on the righteous than on others and concludes with a series of practical uses (applications) highlighted by the eight marks of a righteous person. Of course, in typical Puritan style, there are numerous sub-headings under each of the main points listed above. But do not fear the theological verbosity of Puritan divines. The publisher has done us a great service by making formatted changes to the original text without violating or altering the content. In doing so, we are treated with an easily readable text with bold-faced paragraph titles and italicized sublistings.

The other seventeen sermons are constructed similarly and, when reviewed collectively, form a micro-work of theology. There are sermons designed for the individual, i.e., “The Happiness of Drawing Near to God” (Ps. 73:28), “The Good Practitioner” (John 13:17), and “The Sacred Anchor” (Titus 2:13). Others are specifically aimed at edifying the body of Christ, such as “Comfort for the Church” (Ps. 46:5). I derived much hope for the church from his insistence that “when she (the church) is most assaulted, she will be most assisted, God is in the midst of her” (p. 84). Still other sermons benefit the reader in being more confrontive by issuing serious warnings. “The Tongue a World of Iniquity” (James 3:6) exposes eighteen evils of the deadly poison of the tongue and ought to bring any sane person to a point of not wanting to speak without thinking, let alone to think about speaking.

In summary, Watson’s sermons are uniquely polemical but pastoral. A master of the comparative, his illustrations are full of practicality and color, some even humorous. For those readers familiar with his *Body of Divinity*, this work will make an excellent companion piece to demonstrate Watson’s keen ability to make the doctrines contained in that masterpiece logically defensible, easily digestible, and personally practical. In addition to the superb content contained in these messages, the structure of the book lends itself to being a mini-*Body of Divinity* as well as an excellent source for personal devotions. One could easily follow the paragraph headings or subheadings on a systematic basis, and over time, work through the entire set of messages without being overwhelmed by their content or length. These messages will accomplish what the great divine attempted to do, namely, “with all convenient brevity, to vindicate the true saint and take him out of the fog.”

Bruce Bickel

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Modern Myths

Alister E. McGrath

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company (1993).

241 pages, paper, \$14.99.

“It seems relatively pointless to extol the attractiveness of the Christian faith if this is not accompanied by a deadly serious effort to discover why it is so obviously *unattractive* to so many people” (p. 10). So declares McGrath in the introduction to what I believed would be a book that delved into man’s sinful, fallen nature, and the Christian’s response to God’s Word. I was wrong. What the author does in the book’s

seven chapters is to promote an apologetical methodology that encourages a response which uses a "Point of Contact" to ensure "that the gospel gets a sympathetic hearing" (p. 47). What is a point of contact? Actually they are numerous and are defined in Part One of the book which consists of three chapters under the general heading of Creating Openings for Faith.

He begins by dealing briefly with the role of natural theology and then moves on to an ambiguous discussion concerning human language. For instance, McGrath says, "Human words possess a capacity to function as the medium through which God is able to disclose himself and to bring about a transformational encounter with the risen Christ" (p. 19). Is the author referring to any and all words of the human language? Maybe not, for he writes, "The 'Word of God' is powerful and dynamic" (p. 19). Enlisting John Calvin for collaboration he says, "Calvin's preoccupation with human language, and supremely with the *text of Scripture* [italics mine], reflects his fundamental conviction that it is here, through reading and meditating on this text, that it is possible to encounter and experience the risen Christ" (p. 21). I agree wholeheartedly, but in one of several puzzling statements the author writes: "The drabness of our words is transfigured by grace, and their poverty turned into power by the presence and purpose of the Holy Spirit" (p. 22).

Is it the apologist's words, or the "Word of God" the apologist uses which are turned into power by the presence and purpose of the Holy Spirit? Unfortunately, the section leaves one with the impression it is the apologist's words. The chapter ends by stressing the importance of tailoring one's apologetical oratory to the audience.

Chapter Two discusses specific points of contact identified as unsatisfied longings, human rationality, the world's order, human morality, and existential anxiety and alienation. The author elaborates on each of these points of contact and

makes several provocative comments. One of them concerns reason which is admitted to be in the captivity and servitude of sin, but the full nouthetic effect is diminished. As McGrath says, "Though fallen, reason still possesses the ability to grasp and point, however darkly, toward the reality of God" (p. 37). If the author means reason can point to a god, then I might agree, but based on verses like Titus 1:15-16, I disagree that it is the reality of the God in the Old and New Testaments. In summing up the chapter, McGrath writes to the evangelist preacher: "Within the limits of time, it is helpful to provide as many points of entry as possible in order to involve the congregation in the task of correlating human needs—their needs—and the gospel proclamation" (p. 46).

As an aside, I note that advertisers employ this same approach, except they correlate human needs not with the Gospel, but with their product. A recent ad I saw demonstrated this; it stressed the unknowns and uncertainties of life (points of contact) only to promise peace and assurance if one were to purchase insurance from the advertising company.

In Chapter Three the author discusses the nature of faith; the origin of faith (which the author rightly credits to God and not apologetics); apologetical limitations, and the decision to believe.

Part Two of the book is based on the premise that "A central task of apologetics is to identify the general pressures that persuade people *not* to believe" (p. 63). That said, the author dedicates three of the last four chapters to this task. In approximately 120 of the book's 241 pages, McGrath focuses on barriers allegedly preventing people from coming to the faith, most of them intellectual, and deals with a gamut of topics ranging from enlightenment rationalism, Marxism, feminism, scientific materialism, religious pluralism and the New Age. His purpose is to provide suggestions for use in countering these barriers to render them less effective (p. 93). In implementing the suggestions one may find himself en-

gaged in a discussion on the absolute certainty of knowledge, about which the author writes, "All our knowledge about anything that really matters is a matter of probability" (p. 80). He utilizes principles from an adaptation of the Harvard Negotiation Project, which, McGrath asserts, "... do not present Christianity as being *right* (which immediately implies that your conversation partner is *wrong*, and thus provokes a confrontation). Instead, present Christianity as being *attractive*, explaining why" (p. 90) [author's italics]. Along the same line McGrath writes, "The Christian apologist should be able to present God in his full attractiveness so that his rivals in the world are eclipsed" (p. 178). How? By including the following elements in the presentation to your conversation partner: God's ability to satisfy the deepest human longings, God's love, and the idea that faith in God provides stability and purpose (p. 178). The apologist basing his presentation on this book will also find himself exclaiming that Christianity meets three central needs. The need to have (1) a basis for morality, (2) a framework for making sense of experience, and (3) a vision to guide and inspire people (p. 178). Before leaving this section of the book, the author deals briefly with sin and has this to say: "Sin is an underlying state of alienation from God" (p. 134), and, "The heart of sin is alienation from God" (p. 135). However, are we not alienated because of our rebellion, rather than rebelling because of our alienation? I mention this because the author stresses the importance of understanding and addressing the root problem of sin and not so much the symptoms that are manifested as a result. We should not then focus on our alienation, a symptom, but on our rebellion, the cause.

Having discussed the theoretical components of apologetics the author directs us, in the seventh and final chapter, to the practical components. To be an effective apologist we must listen like a sensitive doctor in order to determine the problem (barrier), and thus bring to bear our apologetical resources

upon the situation, says McGrath (p. 190). Staying with the medical model, McGrath looks for apologetical insight in words penned by Carl Jung, "Only the wounded physician can heal" (p. 191). That statement leads McGrath to write, "Effective apologetics at a personal level rests on an ability to relate to the problems faced by others as they contemplate Christianity" (p. 191). McGrath encourages the apologist to seek out other Christians with different conversion experiences in order to assimilate the feelings they had in the process of turning to Christianity. Doing so "will help you to think yourself into the situation of people who are close to faith, yet are held back by an obstacle" (p. 191). In commenting on modern apologetical writing McGrath suggests that one of the most powerful allies at the disposal of the apologist is neglected. Is it the Word of God? According to the author, it is the human imagination: "Commercial advertising discovered many years ago that it was not a closely reasoned and justified argument that sold products—it was superbly crafted images, making a direct and powerful appeal to the human imagination" (p. 194).

"Let us learn from Christ," says McGrath, seeking to support an appeal to the human imagination, "who opened his parables ... with an image" (p. 194). But listen to Christ explain to His disciples the reason for using parables in the first place: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given," and "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:10-11,13; cf. 13:14-17; Mark 4:11-12). Christ was not using an image to entice His listeners' imagination, for, without explanation, He knew they would neither understand or appropriate. In another interesting statement the author says, "The gospel is too easily made to appear a stranger to a culture; the apologist must ensure it is seen as a friend, interlocking with the ideas and values of that culture wherever possible" (p.

204). However, is not Christ a stumbling stone and rock of offense (1 Peter 2:8)? We must be wary that in our haste to befriend a culture we don't lose a Lord and Savior.

In his concluding remarks the author writes that apologetics is "a creative attempt to ensure that the gospel proclamation meshes as closely as possible with the needs and concerns of human existence" (p. 211). I believe the author has endeavored to do just that in this book, but in striving to accomplish that goal, he has written a book whose tone at times seems less theological than psychological with its constant references to man's needs, desires, longings, and feelings imbedded in almost every page.

The above criticism notwithstanding, whether this book is considered profitable or not will largely depend on your apologetical bent. If you believe that in relating the Gospel to your audience (one or many), it is necessary to pit your intellect against man's sinful fallen nature to destroy or weaken his "barriers," to soften him up prior to exposing him to the Word of God in a sort of one-two punch, then it is possible that this book will prove satisfying reading. If, however, you employ Paul's evangelistic methodology, evident when he came to the Corinthians not with superiority of speech or of wisdom, nor with a message and preaching containing enticing words of man's wisdom, but with a determination to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5), then perhaps you would do well to skip this particular work of Dr. McGrath.

Gary D. Schaap
Huntsville, Alabama

From Religion to Christ

Peter Jeffery

Amityville, New York: Calvary Press Publishers (1994).

83 pages, paper, \$5.95.

Peter Jeffery has given to us another tool to use in reasoning with those who say salvation is by works or by some man-made religion. Several of Jeffery's books have been written to those who know themselves not to be saved or, as in this look at John 3, to those who see themselves as good enough to be acceptable to God on their own. *From Religion to Christ* gives to the reader who is not saved a clear definition of what it means to be saved, or born again. For the reader who has been saved, this look at John 3 provides some much-needed simplicity in our arsenal as witnesses for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The author gives a clear picture of what man is and what man thinks of himself: without hope, confused, and empty. The need, says Jeffery, is to first understand who we are:

Man is a sinner and left to himself will always remain a sinner. He cannot change himself nor his offspring. Flesh is flesh. Educate it, cultivate it, put it in better surroundings but it will always remain human nature. It may be physically beautiful flesh or moral flesh, but it is still flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

Our writer explains in simple terms the need for salvation. For those who are not sure of their standing before God or are under false assurance, a look at a few points of assurance are also covered.

One of the main questions addressed by Jeffery is the simplicity of salvation. For the answer to this we are directed, as Nicodemus was, to Numbers 21. How sweet the simplicity of this call to look. As I read through this section, I was

reminded of the sweet love of God expressed in C.H. Spurgeon's conversion at hearing the quote from Isaiah, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else." Spurgeon says of that moment, "I looked until I thought I would look my eyes away." Indeed, what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, what Jeffery is telling us here in *Religion to Christ*, is that our God has taken into account our weakness, our inability and the impossibility to "work up" a salvation! Simply look and be saved. Christ has done it all, He was the one lifted up, He was the one who

endureth the wrath of God instead of us, and paid fully on our behalf the debt we owed to God for breaking His Holy Law. On the cross our Savior cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Mat. 27:46). The Holy God forsook His Son because He was our sin-bearer.... in other words, at Calvary our Lord made it possible for a Holy God to pardon us even though we were sinners and had broken His Holy law.... Specifically by punishing the only man that qualified to be our substitute by virtue of his sinlessness, and the only man who could, after enduring the wrath of God equivalent to our being in hell for all eternity, take up His own life again and rise from the grave, that is a man who was also God Himself.

With this foundation laid, the sometimes sensitive issue of election is dealt with in the question of who can be saved. For many, the sentence, "God so loved the world," can take our Reformed minds through the theological hoop as we try to reconcile it with Election and Atonement, yet our author takes us to the heart of the Gospel as he reminds us that indeed this is for all who call on His name:

For many reasons people seek to put a boundary upon God's love. Nicodemus as a Pharisee would have done so. To the Pharisees God's love was for the Jews only and not for the Gentiles. "Whoever" shatters that Jewish illusion. Some folk say, "My life is so rotten that God could not love me. I am so

wicked that there can be no hope for me." Sometimes Christians do the same thing and see some types of people beyond redemption. Whoever shatters this myth.

For many, the argument of the Atonement is used to excuse the lack of evangelism. However, as we are shown, this word whoever, to quote our author, "shatters this myth" as well. May this one word stir our hearts as we see the great hope held out in this wonderful word "whoever" and give us renewed faith and confidence in our God who is mighty to save.

This small work on John 3 is a useful tool for the Christian who desires to understand in a simple fashion the great work of Salvation, especially when reasoning with those who think Salvation is based on their righteousness and not Christ's. One final point of interest: Its simplicity makes this book readable by all, and does not read as something only Christians could understand. A plus for those who would like to pass this book on to the unconverted.

Andy Froiland
Visalia, California

The Almost-Christian Discovered

Matthew Mead

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria (1993).

166 pages, cloth, \$16.95.

In an age when evangelism is marked by technology, not theology, methodology rather than message, and compromise more than conviction, this reprinted jewel exposes the paucity of power in much of today's contemporary church. With a straightforwardness uncommon to all but a few pulpits, Matthew Mead reveals his passion for truth balanced by a deep compassion for those who are either misled or misun-

derstand the implications of the biblical Gospel. Consequently, he confronts the comfortable by addressing their undeserved security in hopes of removing the consequences of their counterfeit conversion.

Beginning with the premise that the heart of man is the greatest imposter and cheat in the world and that every grace has its counterfeit, Mead puts the almost-Christian on trial, much as an attorney would in a judicial setting. Examining the evidence from the professing believer's life, including motives as well as conduct, he exposes the guilt of those who say they do (believe) but don't (obey), revealing they're not (regenerate). The irrefutable verdict is that many are with a little of Salvation and, yet, shall never enjoy the least Salvation (p. 5). Recognizing that the content of his message may shake the weaker believer, he offers suggestions to help him not be discouraged by his discourses. I viewed this as an expression of his deep and abiding love for his flock and his effort not to wound the faint-hearted but to awaken the formal professors in their midst.

For some, this book will be hard to digest because it is so full of the rich food from God's table when compared to the pabulum offered in many of today's sermons or Christian literature. As in many of their more recent reprints, the publishers have aided the reader by breaking down some of the longer sections into subdivisions with bold or italicized print. This permits the reader to partake of smaller portions at their own pace without walking away from the whole meal. Soli Deo Gloria's first reprint of this volume was published in 1989 and did not contain these grammatical, spelling, or format changes. The 1993 version, without any change in content, is much more readable.

The author's balance of warning and warmth is witnessed in a letter to his congregation reprinted at the beginning of the book. Pastor Mead uses the conversation between Paul, Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the Council (Acts 26:28) as the

basis for his exposition. It is Mead's contention that many in the church are like Agrippa, who was so affected by the great apostle's plea that he almost embraced his doctrine, but stopped short and said, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." This book explores the tragic state of those who, like the learned Agrippa, have their conscience touched, though their heart is not renewed. Mead shows with meticulous scriptural insight how far a person may go to reach the heights of religiosity but never attain Christ. He then explains why they are only "almost Christians," and what are the reasons that people go so far, yet never go further than to remain "almost Christians."

This book will not make you feel comfortable, but it will bring you closer to Christ. For the reader who is in Christ, it will shed light upon the magnificence of grace in the Gospel by affirming that Salvation comes from the Lord (Jonah 2:9). For the falsely converted, it will render easy-believism, cheap grace and antinomianism to be man-made deceptions designed to provide man with the benefits of Salvation without any of the responsibilities. Any reader will have his faith tested; mine was. Don't read this little book unless you are ready to be spiritually examined.

Bruce Bickel
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Evangelical Theology

A. A. Hodge
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth (reprint 1990).
402 pages, cloth, \$20.95.

Evangelical Theology is a collection of popular theological lectures presented, not to a seminary class of theology students, but to a diverse audience in a hall in Philadelphia just prior to the death of Dr. A. A. Hodge in the late nineteenth

century. Although they were presented in a popular manner, their theological depth and precision make them valuable for the professor or Sunday school student.

One of the significant values of this volume is The Banner of Truth and Trust's inclusion of Dr. Francis L. Patton's memorial discourse concerning Archibald Alexander Hodge. Patton was a friend and fellow professor of Hodge. Among his peers, Hodge, the son of the famous and respected Charles Hodge, was admired as a great thinker and theologian. He was well known for his experience as a missionary, pastor and professor. Patton states:

Great talkers seldom write much. Dr. Hodge was a genius in oral expression, in this respect resembling Dr. Archibald Alexander. But he wrote easily and with a running pen.... These lectures are not simply illustrations of his academic power, though his pupils will recognize in them the manner with which they are familiar. Nor are they simply sermons, though his ordinary pulpit discourse possessed many of the qualities that are present here. The preacher and the professor are alike visible in these lectures, and both in their best estate (pp. xxvi, xxxiv-xxxv).

Hodge did have the reputation of being a great verbal communicator of the deep truths God has revealed of Himself in Scripture. Any reader certainly experiences this fact in *Evangelical Theology*.

Hodge addresses multiple categories of truth in these lectures. His presentations are consistently characterized by a strong theological approach. According to Patton, Hodge was very comfortable with the roominess of "the old-fashioned four-square house, consisting of Theology (Proper), Anthropology, Soteriology, and Eschatology." Concerning Theology Proper these lectures addressed God's nature and revelation of Himself, His divine providence, miracles, the inspiration and canon of the Scriptures, prayer, the Trinity,

and Predestination. There was only one lecture on Anthropology. However, Soteriology was addressed topically, concerning God's covenants with man and the church, the person of Christ, His offices, His kingly office, His kingdom, the law of the kingdom, and Sanctification. The lectures on Ecclesiology included the sacraments together and the Lord's Supper as a separate address. The final two lectures concerned Eschatology: man's state after death and the Resurrection, as well as man's final rewards and punishment.

Although these lectures were presented more than a hundred years ago the present day reader will find them current to the issues a Christian faces in today's world—both in the church and in a secular society. This reviewer, impressed with the style and content of Hodge's lectures, has read and frequently referenced Hodge's *Outlines of Theology* (Zondervan, reprint 1977), resulting in great personal benefit. Likewise, he has found these lectures to be extremely helpful in producing precision and clarity of thought and expression with references to the truths addressed.

Hodge addressed the nature of God and His relationship with the universe, presenting the true Christian teaching as opposed to the teachings of the agnostic, pantheist, and deist. His line of reasoning and expression of truth is as pertinent to our time and present concerns as it was to the nineteenth century. Because religious movements in America have become more and more characterized by pantheism, Hodge's contrast between pantheism and the Christian doctrine of divine immanence is helpful. Hodge said, "Pantheism in its very essence renders all morality and religion alike impossible.... The Christian doctrine of the divine immanence, on the contrary, is the very essence of all religion" (p.25).

Hodge's presentation on providence benefits any Christian searching the intricacies and difficulties of this great Christian doctrine. He states:

If even men comparatively ignorant and impotent can so wonderfully make the powers and laws of nature subservient to their own purposes without violating them, why cannot God at least do the same? Nay, why, since God's knowledge and power are alike absolutely limitless, should not the whole of nature be as plastic to His will as the air in the organs of a great musician, who articulates it into a fit expression of every thought and passion of his soaring soul? (pp. 39-40).

Hodge was adept at stating a deep truth in a simple fashion and then illustrating it in such a way that all his listeners could grasp what was stated.

There are a multitude of examples this reviewer could provide as a point of encouragement to others to read this excellent volume. Hodge's discussion of miracles motivates the reader to expand one's thoughts upon the subject. His presentation concerning "The Original State of Man" was valuable and also contains insightful observations concerning "evolution." He distinguished between evolution as science and evolution as philosophy. He said, "What you have been accustomed to call evolution is not science.... Do not fear evolution in the department of science, but do fear and oppose evolution with all your might when it is given to you as a philosophy" (p. 148). The modern fiat creationist may wish Hodge had used greater clarity and precision concerning his age-of-the-earth presentations, but for a man of his time he was certainly a defender of the Genesis record.

The Christological lectures are excellent. This reviewer was especially impressed with the lecture, "The Law of the Kingdom." Hodge offers an informative treatment of the relationship between Regeneration and Christian moral obligation. A reader of this lecture would think that Hodge was a contemporary addressing a current problem among twentieth-century Christians in the realm of orthodoxy and the practice of it:

And even among orthodox Christians, who are theoretically all right in their acknowledgment of all moral obligations, the least lapse of watchfulness will bring us in danger of a comfortable resting in the security of our position in Christ, while we neglect the full performance of all the moral obligations which spring out of our relations as Christians alike to God and man (p. 274).

Hodge was concerned that a major false conception among many "apparently zealous Christians" was an adherence to the validity of a religious experience which was "short of the love and practice of all righteousness." The reader will find this lecture helpful in addressing the same problem today.

This volume presents strong theological meat in an understandable and practical manner. This reviewer found himself wishing he could sit under the preaching and teaching of Hodge. Reading *Evangelical Theology* is the closest a twentieth-century Christian can come to sitting under the preaching of Hodge. Brethren, do not let this theological jewel escape your admiration and experience.

Patrick T. Stewart
St. Charles, Illinois

God Is King

Tom Wells

Durham, England: Evangelical Press (1992).

123 pages, paper, \$10.95.

Even as your eyes scanned across this title you may have heard a small voice saying, "Of course He is!" The haste with which we claim sovereignty for God concerns our writer. He suspects that many quickly affirm this truth, not because they grasp it, but because they fear being shunned as theological outcasts.

Is God dispensing His verdict when natural disasters pound our shores? Or, is His hand responsible only for the blessings that flow over us? Does He care for the atomistic details of my life? Or, does He intervene only when He wants to teach me something of significance? Tom Wells sets out on his journey by asking, "What does it mean to say God is King?" He charts his course the following way.

Part One: Getting started. Wells stresses "the importance of our standpoint." One woman quipped, "If there really is a God, why does He treat me the way He does?" Without devaluing our questions, the author cautions against a demanding posture toward God. We must humbly wrestle in the arena of two confronting truths. First, God is Creator. As His finite creatures, we cannot possibly see the big picture, nor expect that it revolves around us. But, we can rest in a Creator whose vision is unlimited and whose glory is the sun.

Second, God is Father. All who enter into God's kingdom call Him Father. This means we learn to live as children. When overwhelmed with confusion and grief we throw ourselves into the strong arms of our loving Father. His goodness, justice and wisdom will never fail us. We can find comfort in a God like this.

Part Two: God's kingship over circumstances and events. What does it mean to say that God is King? For the author it implies that He is a ruler exercising absolute authority. This is proven by the direct statements in Scripture. Consider the case of Job. Who caused his trouble, Satan or the Lord? The answer is an unequivocal yes. "The Lord said to Satan 'Behold, all that he has is in your power'" (Job 1:12). Yet, it is clearly God's purpose that is accomplished through Satan. Job declares, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" (Job 1:21).

Another line of argument comes from scriptural inferences, such as typology. Types, "a special kind of prophecy," are present when a person or thing from an early period of

redemptive history bears resemblance to a person or thing from a later period. For instance, the Old Testament sacrificial system prefigures the sacrificial death of Christ. For such a correspondence to find fulfillment, God's hand must have intricately woven it into history.

Finally, there is an argument from God's nature. Unlike us, His holiness, knowledge, wisdom and power are comprehensive. Consequently, "He can and does pursue a single purpose, or single set of purposes . . . through all of history" (p. 44).

Part Three: God's moral kingship and His kingship in the new creation. Here, Wells raises an important question. If God is a ruler who exercises absolute authority, is this present life all we can hope for? Why does the Lord's prayer ask, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10)? The author explains: "What is missing here on earth . . . moral sovereignty. By that I mean . . . God does not usually act as King over the motives of men . . . he gets His work done without making men have godly reasons for what they do" (p. 52).

Through Christ's sacrificial death, however, God has begun to exercise His moral sovereignty over the motives of men in an unprecedented way. His sovereign power is transforming the hearts of people so they will desire and do His moral purpose. He is forming a community prepared for His new world.

Part Four: Living with the sovereignty of God. The witty words our author pulls from Pascal sum up his view: "Had Cleopatra's nose been shorter, the whole history of the world would have been different" (p. 110). That God's rule encompasses everything should be a source of great comfort. "If . . . even tornadoes come from the hands of our Father then they lose their terror" (p. 108). However, he warns us against reading too much into the sovereignty of God. We must delineate between God's decretive will (what

He decrees) and God's perceptive will (what He commands). "To live our lives for His glory we must remember God's decretive will is His rule for His own activity; His perceptive will is His rule for us" (p. 101). We should, in other words, focus our lives on the clear commands in Scripture.

God Is King is written on a popular level. Although the prose could flow more smoothly, there is much for which to commend this book. The author is at his best when drawing on biblical illustrations. He reminds us that our theology must be rooted in the text of Scripture. Equally impressive is his style characterized by patient discussion rather than polemical badgering. This would settle well with someone struggling over the emotional challenges of the sovereignty of God. Many will appreciate his interest in wrestling with the inherent philosophical problems. Personally, I am grateful for the profound thought he has unearthed from Thomas Watson, which leads us from a posture of demand to worship:

We glorify God, when we are God-admirers; admire his attributes, which are glistening beams by which the divine nature shines forth; His promises which are the charter of free grace, and the spiritual cabinet where the pearl of great price is hid; the noble effects of his power and wisdom in making the world, which is called "the work of His fingers" (Ps. 8:2). To glorify God is to have God-admiring thoughts; to esteem Him to most excellent, and search for diamonds in the rock only (p. 113).

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Vanishing Conscience: Drawing the Line in a No-Fault, Guilt-Free World

John F. MacArthur

Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing Company (1994).

280 pages, cloth, \$17.99.

John MacArthur, best known for his polemical style, employs in this work not the sword, but a pen revealing an author's pain and concern for the moral decay of our nation, and the influence of sin within the church. His concern, however, is not a silent one or a subtle one. MacArthur "cuts to the quick" of the issue: "The church as a whole is growing less concerned with sin, and more obsessed with self-exoneration and self esteem" (p.11). "Where there is no recognition of sin and guilt, when the conscience has been abused into silence, there can be no salvation, no sanctification, and therefore no real emancipation from sin's ruthless power" (p. 34).

MacArthur's intent is not to merely report on the decay of society or the sad state of the church. "Nor is it an attempt to stir Christians up to tackle the impossible task of reconstructing society" (p.12). MacArthur's idea is a simple yet crucial and difficult message: "Awakening the church to the awful reality of sin is my only point of concern" (p. 12).

The book is divided into three parts: A Sinful Society, The Nature of Sin, and Handling Sin.

A helpful feature is a digest of each chapter's contents. In Part One, Chapter One, MacArthur illustrates the moral numbness of society. What is expected, both because it is MacArthur's pet peeve and because it is a critical issue of the times, is a diatribe against modern psychology and its aggressive, yet subtle, attack on society and unfortunately the church. No one will be disappointed who expects this. However, more than a catalog list of such heresy, MacArthur

writes to incite the reader not simply to an emotional response but to awaken within himself a sense of his own opinions and notions concerning his own subtle movement toward the ideology of the world. Rather than pointing fingers at the world, and at some "within" the church, MacArthur's writing pricks the heart of the reader.

In Chapter Two MacArthur defines the conscience each man possesses, and its function in our lives. He then describes various kinds of consciences (weak, pure, etc.) and how they are to be cleansed.

In the final chapter of this first part, the author explains sin's effects on the conscience. This is the most bothersome chapter because of the evidence of such effects within ourselves, our society, and, sadly again, the church.

Part Two deals with the theological notion of total depravity. MacArthur defines total depravity by what it is biblically, and also spends several chapters on what it is not. He describes how the world seeks to get rid of any notion of depravity through its incessant talk of self-esteem, self-love, and so on.

Thankfully the author does not end on the note of total depravity. In a very clear and logical manner, MacArthur unfolds the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Chapter Five. God's holiness is lifted to its rightful place as we find the law and the cross being transgressed and spurned, yet the necessity of both being all the more evident with the spurning.

In another equally helpful chapter (Six), Sanctification is defined and described by what it is and what it is not. Any Christian will find this helpful reading for his own life and also for an aid in explaining this to other Christians.

Perhaps the greatest value of the book is in Part Three—"Handling Sin." Most of us have an average understanding of conscience, Salvation, and Sanctification. However, recovering a bit of the Puritan heartbeat, MacArthur steps beyond the cognitive into the affective as he explains in very helpful ways

how to deal specifically with sin (especially Chapter Eight). This reviewer appreciated very much his use of John Owen's sixth volume (one with which all readers of this journal should be well acquainted) on temptation and sin.

The book ends with three appendices. Appendix One is a useful exposition of Romans 6. Appendices Two and Three are from two Puritan greats—Richard Sibbes' sermon titled, "The Demand of a Good Conscience," and Jonathan Edwards', "Christian Cautions: The Necessity of Self-Examination." Both works are paraphrased into modern English and will refresh the soul.

Though the book may not gain a wide audience because of its subject, those who read it will be challenged, and in MacArthur's term, awakened to the awfulness and subtlety of sin in our lives. I highly recommend this work for your reading and circulation among others.

For another helpful work on the conscience, read Ezekiel Hopkins' booklet, "Striving After a Good Conscience" (Faithful Sayings Publication).

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All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture

Kenneth A. Myers
Wheaton: Crossway Books (1989).
213 pages, paper, \$10.95.

Myers begins his book with the proposition that "*the challenge of living with popular culture* may well be as serious for modern Christians as persecution and plagues were for the saints of earlier centuries" (p. xii). The subjunctive mood ("may") is there for the sake of etiquette. The rest of the book

supports the proposition with an imposing show of force.

Myers is not another foaming-at-the-mouth fundamentalist aiming his howitzers on that devil rock 'n roll music and on the movies. No, for eight years he was a cultural editor for National Public Radio, and was (and remains) steeped in what the world is saying about popular culture. In a sense, he has the best training of the Chaldeans. The bibliography alone is a feast.

Myers (along with C.S. Lewis) points out that if we do not give thought to culture, we will still have culture, but it will be bad by default. That being the case, giving thought to culture is not an optional, hobby occupation. More recently, Martha Bayles said,

All of us need to change our tune about cultural matter. Instead of saying, "I don't know much about art, but I know what I don't like," we need to follow the cultural historian Jacques Barzun, who recommends learning how to say: "It is because I understand this work of art that I dislike it."¹

Certainly, such a stance seems in keeping with being "wise as serpents."

Myers divides culture into roughly three categories: high, folk, and pop. The distinction between folk and pop cultures may not have been drawn strongly enough, not because Myers does not understand them, but because they are so easily confused by defenders of pop culture. I think, for this reason, many have attributed obnoxious elitism to Myers, dismissing him as a propagandist for high culture. Folk and pop culture often look the same. The difference is in the means by which they are disseminated.

High culture is based on absolutes—on truth, virtue, and beauty. Folk culture emphasizes the values held by particular communities. Pop culture is designed to provide contentment for the isolated individual within the dehumanizing trends of modernity. It can be as easily packaged and marketed as

Barbie Dolls, breath fresheners, or spark plugs. Myers quotes Abraham Kaplan: "A taste for popular art is a device for remaining in the same old world and assuring ourselves that we like it."²

We Christians have difficulty embracing "the same old (sin-infested) world" in the same way that John Bunyan's Pilgrim/Christian could not be content with The City of Destruction and with Vanity Fair. How, then, have we come to take popular culture seriously? Because, most assuredly, we have.

In the 1960s, there was a shift in the pervasive worldview proportionate to continental drift. We moved, both in and outside the church, to the view that feelings are more authoritative than objective truth in defining reality. This has been a long time in coming, major road markers being William of Occam's nominalism of the fourteenth century, Pietism in the seventeenth century, romanticism in the nineteenth century, and now Pentecostalism in the twentieth century. Our 1960s seem to be the mature fruit of these various movements.

McLuhan's famous aphorism ("The medium is the message") may be controversial among intellectuals. In practicality, however, where feelings define truth, McLuhan is unequivocally correct, and the intellectuals are left standing irrelevantly pattering on the sideline.

Myers describes television and rock music as the two media of pop culture, and thus of modernity. His concern is that the sensibilities of these two media run afoul of Christian sensibilities. This challenges contemporary Christian music as well, which is, after all, pop music for Christians, all its best intentions notwithstanding.

Television presents a stimulus but makes no demands on response. Many Christians can accept this proposition with little difficulty. Billy Graham said: "Our young people, no matter where you go, are confronted with killing, murders of the most vicious sorts. I did not hear about that when I was a boy growing up. I am sure they happened, but we did not have

television to bring it to us instantaneously."³

In his song, "I'm the Slime," Frank Zappa spoke for television anthropomorphically in the first person: "You will obey me while I lead you, and with the garbage that I feed you, until the day that we don't need you. Don't go for help, no one will heed you.... That's right folks. Don't touch that dial."⁴

It is when Myers touches rock music that hackles rise, because rock's acceptance is staggeringly universal (even among Christians). Allan Bloom noted this with dismay (Myers, p. 136). Two Temple University social scientists in 1976 made this same discovery as they sought a test group of university students who did not like rock music, but could find none.⁵

At the most distilled level, Myers maintains that while there may be many kinds of rock music, there is just one rock music myth. "The essence of that myth was that rock would offer a form of spiritual deliverance by providing a superior *form of knowledge*, a form that was immediate rather than reflective, physical rather than mental, and emotional rather than volitional" (p. 137). What is so arresting about this assertion is that it is rock's most ardent adherents who are first to make this statement, not Allan Bloom, Neil Postman, and other tart old men. A "superior form of knowledge," really? No, nothing but garden variety idolatry.

Notice how conveniently such an aesthetic behavior reinforces a worldview in which feelings are more authoritative than objective truth. For precisely this reason, all sorts of Christians have sung John Wimber's "Spirit Song," which says: "Give him [Jesus] all your tears and sadness; give him all your years of pain, and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name." Astonishing! This is "another gospel" in the sense of Galatians 1:6, and yet we are so able to sing it even congregationally *because it feels good*. If you like the Carpenters, Barry Manilow, or Kenny G, you will probably like Wimber's "Spirit Song." Contemporary Christian music (which is all one or another sort of rock) is prone to fall prey to the same idolatry which

besets the larger pop music world *because the sensibilities necessary to enjoy the music also defy the accountability of reason*.

In order to evaluate Myers' book realistically, we need to treat its most immediate objections. Bill Edgar of Westminster Seminary said of the book: "The fundamental weakness of this approach is theological. There is a neglect of the doctrines of common grace and of the creation."⁶

In other words, Myers is a grumpy elitist who does not like TV and rock 'n roll, and who refuses to see the good in these human enterprises. Therefore, he suffers a theological deficiency because, apropos the doctrines of common grace and creation, nothing is completely befouled. We should expect to see the glory of the Creator even in popular culture. Wouldn't it be more constructive and less negative to look for the good things in popular culture rather than taking a fire-breathing posture?

On the face of it, Edgar's criticism has immediate appeal. On further reflection, however, a couple of details just do not add up. First, Myers has an M.Div. degree from Westminster Seminary, the institution where Edgar teaches. I suspect that their biblical understanding of common grace and creation would be very close, if not indistinguishable. Indeed, Myers claims: "You can enjoy popular culture without compromising Biblical principles *as long as you are not dominated by the sensibility of popular culture*, as long as you are not captivated by its idols" (p. 180).

No, Myers' and Edgar's differences are not over the doctrines of common grace and creation, but, rather, over the application of those doctrines, in other words, over sociological data. The appropriate question is not whether God's glory is seen in every aspect of His creation and whether common grace extends to even the most vulgar thrasher band, but rather, how much does popular culture facilitate the evil of our hearts which are desperately wicked and deceitful.

On this point we touch the dark side of common grace. Jesus said even evil parents would not give their children vipers and scorpions when the children had requested fish and bread. Common grace allows unregenerate persons to see evil with clear eyes. Frank Zappa was no paragon of virtue. Even Satan sees evil quite clearly. When Satan accuses the brethren, *it is for real sins*. Only the imputed righteousness of Christ nullifies those accusations. In light of this, isn't it interesting that there is rising concern *in the world* over the adverse effect popular culture exerts on society?

Rather than reel off a list of contemporary cultural observers (and there are many) who are blowing the whistle on popular culture, I would like to revisit the prophetic thoughts of that notorious God-hating existentialist, Aldous Huxley.

In Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), we are presented with a society in which the nuclear family is extinct, the government fosters unbridled sexual recreation, genetic engineering is employed for economic reasons, and euthanasia is a government policy. There is little correlation between gainful employment and the production of goods and services. Those who suffer psychological stress have recreational drugs at their disposal under the smiling eye of the government. ("Don't worry. Be happy!")

In 1994, we do not yet live in Huxley's brave new world. Still, the picture he painted in 1932 was probably perceived as fantasy then. Now it is frighteningly within the realm of reasonable imagination.

What is especially striking about Huxley's imaginary world is the means by which the sense of security is provided for the populace. In order to accomplish this delicate balance, "emotional engineers" eradicated religion and high art, and supplanted them with popular culture. Remember, Huxley was an existentialist. He did not necessarily see the eradication of religion and high art as bad. Huxley is evil, but his insight is "good" in the sense of common grace.

In our society, the worldview is being shaped more and more by popular culture, the same means by which the brave new world experienced security, or, in Francis Schaeffer's parlance, "personal peace and affluence." How can Christians be sanguine about this?

Nothing in creation can be so thoroughly corrupted by sin so as to obscure completely God's glory in that object. Beauty is one of God's attributes. It is, however, possible for salient characteristics of an object to overwhelm our perceptual faculties, our ability to respond to that stimulus in an upright manner. The nude woman in the porn magazine is beautiful. But how many of us are able to view that beauty objectively? Aaron's golden calf was probably beautiful. Nevertheless, idolatry renders aesthetic characteristics insignificant. Even God-ordained aesthetic objects can be turned into objects of idolatry. This happened with Moses' bronze serpent.⁷

It may be that excessive attention directed to the doctrines of creation and common grace lead to the neglect of a more fundamental doctrine. I am speaking here of the depravity of man.

Neville Chamberlain returned to England from his Munich meeting with Hitler saying those famous rosy words, "I believe it is peace in our time." In hindsight, we see that he underestimated the malevolence and deceit of Hitler. Christians who busy themselves looking for the good in popular culture may fall prey to the "peace in our time" mentality.

The weaknesses in *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* are more of degree than content. At one point, Myers says, "The main question raised by popular culture concerns the most edifying way to spend one's time" (p. 53). Moses, the man of God, said, "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years.... For soon it is gone and we fly away.... So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:10,12). The poet of Psalm 39 said that our days are only as wide as the span of our hand. Yet another

Psalmist compared our life spans to grass. The wind passes over the grass and it is gone (Ps. 103:15-16). When our pilgrimage is so short, who has time to anesthetize his heart, soul, mind, and strength with the vacuity of popular culture? I regret that Myers did not make this point with repeated hammer strokes.

Still, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* is a remarkable book with a wealth of insight on how to live with popular culture. Short of living the life of a hermit in central Nevada, there is no way to escape popular culture. Moreover, if we are to raise godly seed among the generation of Beevis and that other guy, parents, pastors, teachers, police, and youth workers will have to study popular culture with all the intensity they bring to any other realm of thought. After all, children are the heritage of the Lord. May they continue to be born to nuclear families which raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!

Endnotes

- 1 "How to Talk About Art," *National Review*, May 30, 1994, 65.
- 2 "The Aesthetics of the Popular Arts," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Spring 1966, 356.
- 3 "Can Revival Come?" *Southern Seminary*, Winter 1994, 4.
- 4 *Overnight Sensation*, Munchkin Records, 1973.
- 5 Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press), 9, quoted in Myers, 137.
- 6 *Westminster Journal*, Fall 1991, 379.
- 7 For a more thorough discussion, see Gene Edward Veith's *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Maplethorpe* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 222-27.

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The Holiness of God

R.C. Sproul

Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers (1986).

234 pages, paper, \$6.95.

There are two main reasons why this book is worth your time. First, it sticks to the point. How many times have you been enticed by a particular title, only to find that the subject matter covers something other than what you thought it did? Well, this is a book one can judge by its cover! From a simple glance at the title, to a perusal of the table of contents (six of the nine chapter headings contain the word holy, or some derivative thereof) one can expect to get exactly what Sproul delivers from the first page to the last—the doctrine of holiness.

Second, this book will hold your attention. I think it's safe to assume that since your nose is in this journal, you periodically have it in some technically tedious, theological tome. Unlike the sometimes overwhelming weightiness of such volumes, Sproul outfits his reader with an education in the doctrine of holiness that is intellectually compelling and highly practical. This is due, in large part, to the fact that Sproul knows his audience. He is not writing to the academy, though the academic credibility of his work is apparent, but to the parishioner. Thus, peppering each chapter with personal illustrations and examples, the Orlando-based theologian puts holiness on a level that people can readily understand and appropriate.

Sproul yanks the reader back to the genesis of his hunger for holiness at the outset of the book. Recalling a terror-filled midnight visit to the college chapel during his undergraduate days, Sproul recounts the compulsion that drove him there and the peace with which he was overcome during that spontaneous appointment. As he put it,

I was in a posture of prayer, but I had nothing to say. I knelt there quietly, allowing the sense of the presence of a holy God to fill me. The beat of my heart was telltale, a thump-thump against my chest. An icy chill started at the base of my spine and crept up my neck. Fear swept over me. I fought the impulse to run from the foreboding presence that gripped me. The terror passed, but soon it was followed by another wave. This wave was different. It was a flooding of my soul of unspeakable peace, a peace that brought instant rest and repose to my troubled spirit. At once I was comfortable. I wanted to linger there. To say nothing. To do nothing. Simply to bask in the presence of God (p. 13).

The residual effects of that moment have endured to the present. In fact, Sproul says that his lingering absorption with holiness has convinced him “that it is one of the most important ideas that a Christian can ever grapple with. It is basic to our whole understanding of God and Christianity” (p. 24).

So where does the Ligonier president take his reader to begin contending with this lofty tenet?

Meet Isaiah. A man of social greatness. A man of religious greatness. A man who, when confronted with the greatness of God, realized that his own greatness was nothing in comparison! In fact, whereas God’s greatness is described by the biblical superlative, holy, holy, holy (p. 40), the venerable prophet’s condition could be labeled guilt, guilt, guilt (p. 46). Sproul makes it clear that for one to comprehend the holiness of God, he must first acknowledge his own utter sinfulness. He must also know what holiness is.

Sproul defines holiness in Chapter Three as *something absolutely and transcendently separate* (pp.54-55). Thus, in relation to humankind, God is Someone unlike humans are or ever will be. Regarding this, Sproul includes three intriguing observations from Rudolph Otto’s magnum opus, *The Idea of the Holy* (pp. 59ff.).

The first thing Otto observed was that men have a difficult time describing holiness, thus leading him to coin a special

term for the condition—*mysterium tremendum*—the “awful mystery.” The German theologian concluded that with the *mysterium tremendum* brewing within, people are constantly overpowered with a profound sense of their creatureliness. This feeling engenders fear toward the holy, and sets Sproul up for one of the book’s most powerful and illuminating chapters, “The Trauma of Holiness.”

The professor begins by remembering Sigmund Freud’s postulate that humankind creates religion to cope with his fear of nature (p. 73). He then tests this assumption against some memorable circumstances contained in Scripture.

When a boat full of screaming disciples was tossed about on the tempestuous Sea of Galilee, how did the men respond when Jesus brought an end to it all? One would think with relief, but instead they huddled together, gripped by the *mysterium tremendum* and queried one another, “Who is this man that even the wind and sea obey Him?” (p. 73).

When Jesus commanded Peter to cast his net back into the sea after a night of unsuccessful fishing, how does the characteristically enthusiastic disciple respond to his net-breaking catch? One would think with entrepreneurial overtures for our Lord. But seized by the *mysterium tremendum* he calls back to the Christ, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (p. 78).

Sproul effectively illustrates how holiness drives men from God, not to Him. But even more than that, God’s holiness *in* man drives men away from their own kind. Take St. Stephen, for example. While offering his compelling apology of Jesus’ divinity one might have expected revival to break out. In stead, having been smitten by the *mysterium tremendum*, Stephen’s audience covered their ears, kindled their anger and killed him! The golfaholic author observes that same phenomenon occurring on a lesser scale when fellow linksters apologize to him for their coarse language upon finding out he’s a clergyman! The next chapter is wholly devoted to one man’s struggle with the *mysterium tremendum*.

"The Insanity of Luther" graphically unfolds the battle of this sixteenth-century German with God's holiness. It takes the reader from Luther's lightning bolt introduction to the *mysterium tremendum* to his bold defense of Justification by faith—all within the context of the Reformer's growing understanding of God's holiness.

Beginning with Chapter Six, Sproul starts to explore the peculiarities of God's holiness. Here he treats three Old Testament problem passages dealing with God's holy justice—the sudden death of Nadab and Abihu, who offered unauthorized fire to the Lord (p. 130), the immediate demise of Uzzah, who kept the ark from falling off of a moving wagon (p. 135), and the slaughtering of Canaanites upon Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

Sproul continues by setting God's justice up against His attributes of grace and mercy, concluding the chapter with an excellent illustration of the latter two characteristics (p. 166). This is the longest of the book's nine chapters and was somewhat laborious.

Chapter Seven features four sinful men who wrestled with, and then came to rest in the care of, a holy God. The story of Jacob depicts how God engages men in honest struggle (pp. 177-78). The life of Job shows how God answers strugglers, not in words, but with His Person (pp. 178-82). Habakkuk reveals that the cooling of one's anger toward God comes as he realizes the Lord's sovereignty (pp. 182-84). The realization of God's sovereignty most often occurs when one gets a glimpse of His holiness, such as Paul at his conversion (pp. 184-89).

Sproul concludes the chapter by noting that in each of the aforementioned cases, God is the One who brought peace. Only His righteousness can override one's unrighteousness and, specifically, offer righteousness in the person of Christ. Through Christ, an unjust man can have a relationship with a just God, or to put it as Sproul did, "We can be comfortable in the presence of God" (p. 196).

Having established Christ as the conduit for holiness between God and man, Chapter Eight is devoted to explaining one's growth in Christ. First, there is the transformation of the mind. Sproul powerfully and pointedly comments on this point by saying, "This means nothing more or nothing less than education. Serious education. In-depth education. Disciplined education in the things of God. We need to be people whose lives have changed because our minds have changed" (p. 210).

The second important aspect to one's growth in Christ is Sanctification. The mark of Sanctification is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), but if there is no fruit in one's life and, thus, no Sanctification, then one can assume neither is there any Justification.

Sproul ends this engaging work by describing the three major theological frameworks—Pelagianism (liberalism), Semi-Pelagianism (Arminianism) and Augustinianism (Calvinism). He notes that most evangelicals are living with a Semi-Pelagian view of God, that is, the notion that one has something, however small, to do with his Salvation and Sanctification. Sproul asserts that this is a devaluation of God's holiness. In fact, he says, "The failure with modern evangelicalism is the failure to understand the holiness of God" (p. 232).

Sproul ends the book by emphasizing that grace is the vehicle by which man receives the holiness of God. "A sound theology must be a theology where grace is central to it. Helpless sinners can only survive by grace" (p. 233).

From the dissonance of personal guilt in the early chapters to the consonance of God's grace at the end, Sproul's masterful treatment of the doctrine of holiness is as inspirational as it is educational. You will enjoy reading it as much as you will teaching it.

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Holy Sonnets of the Twentieth Century

Donald A. Carson

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.

120 pages, cloth, \$9.99.

When is the last time you grabbed a mug of tea, curled up on your couch with an afghan, and instead of reaching for the remote control to the TV, read through a book of sonnets? My experience with poetry has been quite limited. The last time I remember reading a selection of poems was in my high school English class. And I expect that most of us have about the same level of interest in the lost art of poetry. Thus, D.A. Carson opens his collection of twentieth-century sonnets with the following comment:

A preface to a book of sonnets published in the last quarter of the twentieth century will inevitably become an apology, or at the very least an explanation. For those who have abandoned the strictures of structure, this collection must seem an oddity, a throwback to an earlier age best left buried in college courses on Shakespeare. Why resuscitate a form no longer in vogue?

The collection of sonnets that follows, however, demands no apology. Rather, this book deserves to be read by a large audience, and those of us who have secretly cherished ill feelings toward this particular genre of literature need now to give it another chance.

Carson is best known for his extensive exegetical work in New Testament studies, and for his thorough expositions of Scripture. He is Research Professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, and has developed the reputation of being one of Trinity's finest. I have heard him preach on a number of occasions, and I can attest to the fact that his character and teaching reflect his deep love for God

and humble devotion to God's Word. He does not fit the common, but mistaken, stereotype of a theologian. We've all heard theologians being characterized as cold, formal, intellectual people whose hearts are cold toward God. Although that is sometimes true, Carson breaks the mold by showing us that a heart that is on fire for God, combined with a mind that has deeply reflected upon His truth, result in humble adoration rather than arrogant elitism.

Although Carson is a biblical scholar and a first-rate theologian, he has now proven himself to be a gifted poet as well. The fifty poems contained in this collection are all meditations upon one or more biblical texts. Carson quotes the text or texts from the New International Version on the left side, and the sonnets on the right. Divided into ten themes, each of these poems breathes the warmth of Carson's own reverent meditation on the Word of God.

One section contains "Seven Sonnets from the Cross," including this one which is printed on the back cover of the book:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come
To me and drink"—this drink that can't be sold
Or bought, thirst quenching nectar, spirit gold,
This fountain out of heaven, given, not won.
Beyond all praise, beyond all princely sum,
The heavenly draught bestows a wealth untold,
The life of God. The thirsty may be bold
To claim the gift held out by God's own Son.
A drink so rich could not be wholly free:
Fulfilling Scripture, Jesus speaks again:
He gives the draught—transcendent irony—
Who whispers, "I am thirsty," through his pain.
A human thing, this agony of thirst
By which the arid chains of death were burst.

In the section, "Tears, Suffering, Death," Carson shares his

poignant insights on the passage about Paul's thorn in the flesh, from 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. I found this poem to inspire a calmness of trust in God, despite the threatening taunts of sin and Satan.

The glorious revelations you've bestowed,
 Infallible displays of holy light,
 Call forth my joyful praise in sheer delight,
 A foretaste of my heavenly abode.
 Then why this ceaseless thorn, this painful goad
 Of Satan? Why not spare me pain, the blight
 Of persecution, malice, danger's fright?
 From what strange stream of love have nettles flowed?
 Sufficient is my grace for you: indeed,
 My power is perfected when you're weak.
 Will you for your own feeble prowess plead,
 When bankrupt weakness brings the strength you seek?
 Now insults, hardships, weakness are my song.
 My joy: for when I'm weak, then I am strong.

This book will ignite your imagination, restore to your eyes a glorious vision of our Creator and Redeemer, and stir your heart to sing His praise. I bought it strictly out of curiosity, but as my wife and I began to read it together, we found ourselves irresistibly drawn to read it more. Whether in the early hours of the morning in your own quiet time, or in a group of fellow Christians, or around your family's dinner table, as they are read, these poems will kindle love and adoration in your heart to the God for whom they were written.

David Sunday
 Roselle, Illinois

Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots

John Charles Ryle
 Durham, England: Evangelical Press (1979).
 350 pages, paper, \$11.99.

“He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness, must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of *sin*.” With these sober words, J.C. Ryle (1817-1900) begins the first chapter of his classic book on holiness. Words cannot express the power in this treatment of so vital a subject. As the writer to the Hebrews made clear, “Without Sanctification no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). Therefore, any book which can assist the people of God in the pursuit of this worthy goal is like pure gold, and such is this volume.

Ryle is likely known to the readers of this journal, but it may be helpful to some to give a very brief biographical sketch. John Charles Ryle was one of the greatest of Victorian evangelicals, and was described by one pastor as “a man of granite, with the heart of a child.” Spurgeon called him “the best man in the church of England.” J.I. Packer, in his helpful Preface, says,

A deep though private conversion experience when he was twenty-one, together with the subsequent traumas of poverty, family shame and chronic illness and death of two wives over a period of fifteen years, gave him an uncommon measure of authority when he spoke of Christ's power to meet human need. Insofar as Anglican evangelicals had one acknowledged leader for the last third of the nineteenth century, Ryle was that man.

Holiness was originally released in 1877 with an introduction and seven chapters. Two years later, due to the widespread acceptance of the book, the present enlarged edition

was sent to the press. By this time the volume nearly tripled in size and came to the present length with twenty chapters and an appendix with extracts from older writers. The selection of these older writers, Robert Traill and Thomas Brooks, demonstrates the leading influence of Ryle's life and thought, the Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The book is divided into two sections. The first consists of the introduction and seven chapters, which cover the subject from a doctrinal perspective. The short chapter titles are as follows: Sin, Sanctification, Holiness, The Fight, The Cost, Growth and Assurance. The second part consists of thirteen sermons and an appendix. These sermons are on Moses, Lot, Lot's Wife and the Dying Thief. They are also on Christ: the Ruler of the Waves, The Church Which Christ Builds, Christ's Warning to the Visible Churches, Christ's Probing Question, "Lovest Thou Me?", The Horror of Living Without Christ, Our Thirst Relieved by Christ, The Unsearchable Riches of Christ, The Great Want of the Times, and finally, Christ Is All. Each sermon is an exposition and application of a key text of Scripture; each penetrates to the very heart and core of practical Christianity.

Ryle wrote his book in response to the growing popularity of the Higher Life (or Deeper Life or Victorious Life) movement of his day. The main tenet of this teaching was, according to Packer,

the doctrine that immediate sanctification and holiness can be achieved, just as instantaneous justification and conversion are achieved, by one decisive act of faith and commitment to Christ. On this view, sanctification means a deliverance from the practice of known sin, a perfection of action which is God's free gift to all who will receive it.

Ryle's lengthy introduction is a masterful exposure of the unscriptural notions which lie at the foundation of this well-meaning, but dangerous teaching. He asks and answers seven

crucial questions in order to diagnose some of the problems with this holiness teaching. He answers each of his questions with the words, "I doubt it." He seeks to demonstrate from Scripture alone that the point at issue is not according to the mind of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of holiness. This material is absolutely crucial for addressing and correcting many popular notions about holiness in the modern church. Not surprisingly, the same errors continue to surface in the church generation after generation. Therefore, as long as sin remains in this world, this material will be relevant for the church.

Although the Keswick movement, as it came to be called, is not as well known today, the basic notion of Sanctification as a Let-Go-and-Let-God phenomenon is with us in great force. Pitifully weak teaching continues to pour forth from pulpits and pulp factories which declare or insinuate that any activity on our part is futile. Our one duty is to trust God to make us holy. Passive piety fails to produce the kind of men and women produced by older and wiser, biblically balanced teaching of the Puritans on the Christian life. And Ryle writes on this subject with the same nerve and verve which energized them. To read this volume is to place oneself in a different era. Anyone accustomed to reading any modern books will find himself shocked by the penetrating words of Ryle. It would not be unusual for one to be moved to lay aside the book in the midst of reading to search his heart and soul before the all-seeing God.

The best way to explain the power of this book is to allow the man to speak for himself. In the following quotes you will receive a sample which should whet your appetite for more.

Wrong views of holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption. The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Once let us see that sin is far viler, and far nearer to us, and sticks more closely to us than we supposed, and we shall be led, I trust and believe, to get nearer to Christ. Once drawn

nearer to Christ, we shall bring more deeply out of His fullness, and learn more thoroughly to "live the life of faith" in Him. Once taught to live the life of faith in Jesus, and abiding in Him, we shall bear more fruit, shall find ourselves more strong for duty, more patient in trial, more watchful over our poor weak hearts, and more like our Master in all our little daily ways. Just in proportion as we realize how much Christ has done for us, shall we labor to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we shall love much (Chapter One).

He who supposes that Jesus Christ only lived and died and rose again in order to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people, has yet much to learn. Whether he knows it or not, he is dishonoring our blessed Lord, and making Him only half a Savior. The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people's souls require; not only to deliver them from the guilt of their sins by His atoning death, but from the dominion of their sins, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them. He is, thus, not only their "righteousness," but their "sanctification" (1 Cor. 1:30) (Chapter Two).

This second quotation reveals unmistakably where Ryle stands concerning the modern controversy known as lordship salvation. We are given a complete Savior who came to bring a complete salvation. How tragic that respected schools and teachers are declaring and defending a view which divides our Savior. Reading Ryle will cure a man or woman of thinking that it is possible to have Jesus Christ as one's Savior without having Him as one's Lord.

Another benefit which comes from reading Ryle is that which is of particular usefulness to preachers and teachers of God's Word. Ryle was a master of application. He had a brilliant gift for taking truth and applying it to hearts in a personal and penetrating way. He will teach us how to teach and preach to the conscience. And this is needed perhaps more than anything in our day. Of the many weaknesses of the modern pulpit (and there are many), none is more pro-

nounced than this area of application to the conscience. How important this is was demonstrated by the words of John Brown of Haddington who wrote to his dear flock as he was about to pass from this world to the next:

With respect to your obtaining another minister, let me beseech you, by much fervent prayer, get him first from the Lord. And let it be your care to call one whose sermons you find to touch your consciences. May the Lord preserve you from such as aim chiefly to tickle your fancy, and seek themselves rather than Jesus Christ the Lord!

Ryle speaks to the conscience in a powerful way. You would be wise to purchase copies of this book to give to every pastor you know. It would have the potential to change his entire ministry.

We are modern people living at the close of the twentieth century. Books are pouring off the presses daily. Tragically, few of them are worth the paper they are printed on. C.S. Lewis gave some wise advice in an article titled "On the Reading of Old Books."

It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between.... The only palliative (to being trapped in our own days' weaknesses) is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books.

Life is short, my brethren. Time is exceedingly precious. Invest your time wisely by reading. In your reading be certain to read the very best books. Ryle on holiness is certainly to be classed in that category. May his challenge be heard in our day by those who have ears to hear.

Michael Gaydosh
Amityville, New York

Man's holiness is now his greatest happiness, and in heaven man's greatest happiness will be his perfect holiness.

Thomas Brooks

There is no holiness without a warfare.

J. C. Ryle

We do not suddenly become holy in one moment by making Christ Lord; we are to be holy moment by moment because He is Lord.

John Blanchard

The trouble with much holiness teaching is that it leaves out the Sermon on the Mount and asks us to experience sanctification. That is not the biblical method.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

I went on with my eager pursuit after more holiness and conformity to Christ. The heaven I desired was a heaven of holiness.

Jonathan Edwards

It is not enough to wish to be good unless we hunger after it.

Jerome
