

Books Worth Reading

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The Universe Next Door

Jim Sire (5th Edition; IVP, 2010, £11.99, 296 pp
ISBN 9781844744206)

In a world of ever-increasing diversity, the nicely-titled *The Universe Next Door* offers a unique resource for understanding the variety of worldviews that compete with Christianity for the allegiance of minds and hearts. This is the latest edition of what has become the best Christian survey of the worldviews by which people live—and written in a readable, fair and accessible style. In this new fifth edition, still subtitled *A basic worldview catalogue*, all the previous articles are updated (theism, deism, naturalism, Marxism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern monism, New Age philosophy and postmodernism) but with a new chapter on Islam and a clearer layout. Ideal for students and the curious of all ages.

Christianity & Western Thought

Padgett and Wilkens (IVP, 2009, £22.99, 448 pp,
ISBN 9781844743889)

As the subtitled *A history of philosophers, ideas, and movements* indicates, this is part of a survey of how the faith has intersected, sometimes painfully, sometime fruitfully, with western thought. This is volume 3 in the series and it tackles the Journey to postmodernity in the twentieth century. The authors are two philosopher-theologians. This hard-back volume will be a little too expensive for some, but for some university students it might make an appropriate gift.

God is Great, God is Good

Craig and Meister, editors (IVP, 2010, £12.99,
272 pp, ISBN 9781844744176)

One feature of the 'new atheism' of Richard Dawkins and others is not only that it does not believe in God, but that it feels compelled to attack all those who do. Subtitled *Why believing in God is reasonable and responsible*, this substantial collection of essays assembles

these contemporary complaints against belief in God and answers them both intelligently and passionately. The contributors are mostly American Christian academics but John Polkinghorne and Alister McGrath are also included. There is a devastatingly sharp response to Richard Dawkins' *God Delusion* by Alvin Plantinga, and an interview with the noted British academic convert from atheism to theism, Antony Flew. Highly recommended; buy and lend!

Last Things First

Graham Beynon (IVP, 2010, £7.99, 176 pp,
ISBN 9781844744121)

One worldview issue that Sire touches on is fatalism: why think about the future if 'what will happen will happen'? Beynon explains the many dangers of this attitude—especially given that Scripture puts last things first with the gospel centred on what is to come. Subtitled *Living in the light of the future*, Beynon shows that God has a plan for where he is taking this world, and his people are called to live in the light of that future. How we understand God's future purposes should shape how Christians live life in the present. Christians are those who look back (to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus) but they are also to look forward to what God will do in finishing his plans for his creation through Christ. Beynon brings out the practical implications as well: godliness, how we handle money, our service of others, speaking about Jesus, faithfulness to him, and our response to suffering. A fine book.

The Last Days of Dispensationalism

Alistair Donaldson (Wipf & Stock, 2010,
US\$16.80—publisher's web-price, 184 pp,
ISBN 978-1608995158)

A New Zealander has also waded into the debate about the future—but with a specific audience in mind. Since the publication of Hal Lindsey's, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, many Kiwi Christians have accepted a narrow

fundamentalist understanding of the 'end times' including decidedly unbiblical views of the so-called 'rapture.' Subtitled *A Scholarly Critique of Popular Misconceptions*, this volume carefully unpacks the theological novelty called 'dispensationalism' and offers an alternative: the Bible's vision of a salvation narrative that leads not to the 'rapture,' Armageddon and unthinking support of present-day Israel, but to salvation accomplished in Christ. As one scholar comments on the relevance of the issue to Middle Eastern politics, "This is a much-needed corrective of an unbiblical stance on Israel that actually causes considerable global harm to Western interests. The book is cogently but charitably written, well-argued, and, above all, biblical in its conclusions."

The Art of Curating Worship

Mark Pierson (Augsburg Fortress, 2010,
US\$16.99, 240 pp, ISBN 9781451400847)

Worship services are a form of mission: they either bring people into the presence of God, or they do not. In this book, written by the church relations person at World Vision NZ (in which capacity he's seen many churches at worship), Pierson blends theory, theology, practical advice, ideas, examples and challenges. Subtitled *Reshaping the Role of Worship Leader*, he offers thoughtful stories illuminating the process of creating significant, transformative worship experiences. Many practical examples are used to illustrate ways in which worship in regular services as well as in specially designed spaces inside and outside the church building can be designed and delivered for spiritual formation and mission. Our Anglican embrace of liturgical form is more not less reason to buy and read this book.