



Books Worth Reading

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John Stott: a portrait by his friends

Christopher J H Wright (IVP, 2011, £11.99, 224 pp
ISBN: 9781844745166)

John Stott's recent death makes this volume all the more poignant: thirty-five of his friends and colleagues from around the world open their hearts to share their memories of John. Many of the names are well-known to Latimer members: Michael Green, Timothy Dudley-Smith, Dick Lucas, Michael Baughen, Richard Bewes, Chris Wright and Andrew Kirk from Britain; Marcus Loane, Ajith Fernando, Samuel Escobar, René Padilla, David Gitari, Michael Nazir-Ali representing the wider world. And there's a Kiwi: Ted Schroder on 'A curate in need of restraint.' There are too many chapters to detail but the book is divided into four sections: Early years, All Souls and the wider Church of England, International influence, and Wider interests. One of the outstanding gifts that God gave to John Stott—observed by almost every contributor to this collection—was an incredible capacity for friendship. At his own insistence, it was to be a frank and honest portrait, and he also insisted that he did not wish to read any of the contributions himself, in order that people should feel free to speak the truth as they saw it without embarrassment. So: an inspiring account that also offers a kind of history of evangelicalism in the second half of the twentieth century.

Concise Theology: a guide to historic Christian beliefs

J.I. Packer (IVP, 2011, £9.99, 240 pp
ISBN: 9781844740512)

Here, over ninety-four concise chapters, are what Packer calls "the permanent essentials of Christianity, viewed as both a belief system and a way of life." He understands theology as "the activity of thinking and speaking about God" for doxology and devotion—that is, the praise of God and the practice of godliness. He arranges his material in four main sections that present God revealed as Creator, Redeemer, Lord of grace, and Lord of destiny. There is a solid biblical base: since "Scripture is indeed God

himself preaching and teaching, as the great body of the church has always held, then the first mark of good theology is that it seeks to echo the divine Word as faithfully as it can." One interesting feature is the book's quite frequent appeal to the Westminster Confession (the Presbyterian basis of faith). I'd forgotten that, as Packer puts it, "the Confession was intended to amplify the Thirty-Nine Articles, and most of its framers were Anglican clergy, and since it is something of a masterpiece, 'the ripest fruit of Reformation creed-making' as B. B. Warfield called it, I think I am entitled to value it as part of my Reformed Anglican heritage, and to use it as a major resource." An excellent book!

A Time to Care

Emily Ackerman (IVP, 2010, £7.99, 192 pp
ISBN: 9781844744879)

Subtitled 'Loving your elderly parents,' this is a book written when the author's own parents were becoming frail: "I felt isolated, worried and out of my depth." And, as she also asks: "Where was the support? Where were the equivalents of the toddler groups, the excellent resources on parenting, child development, diet and teenage traumas? Where were the sermons, study groups, Christian books, websites and magazines on caring for parents? Didn't we need support, love and encouragement too? Presently I asked if anyone knew of a good Christian book on caring for parents, to keep me sane when I got back home again. Everybody shook their heads. Underpinning it all is helpful advice from the Bible, for isn't it God who calls us to honour and care for our parents?" The result is a warmly-written but honest book about the emotional, practical and spiritual aspects of caring for parents.

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go

Nancy Guthrie, editor (IVP, 2011, £7.99, 160 pp
ISBN: 9781844745265)

This is a book about (as the subtitle puts it) 'Facing death with courageous confidence in

God.' For many modern-day Christians, death has become what Jim Packer calls "the great unmentionable."—even though our ancestors in faith never hesitated to remind themselves and others of its inevitability. The book is a compilation of some twenty-two meditations on how to prepare to die in faith. The authors range from the past (for example, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Jeremy Taylor, Richard Baxter) to the present (Tim Keller, Joni Eareckson Tada, Packer, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and others). Packer's opening chapter 'Only When You Know How to Die Can You Know How to Live' is only one of the many gems in this treasure-trove of encouraging and challenging writing.

Dig Even Deeper

Andrew Sach and Richard Alldritt (IVP, 2011, £7.99, 208 pp ISBN: 9781844744329)

What could the book of Exodus have to say to us in the twenty-first century? As one of the authors points out, "I have never seen a burning bush, have never suffered a plague of boils (even as a seventeen-year-old the acne wasn't that bad), have never parted my bathwater and walked through the middle, have never been to Mount Sinai, let alone heard God speaking from thunder on the top of it. What possible relevance does the book of Exodus have to me?" But then, of course, he and his fellow author go on to show the treasures waiting to be unpacked in the second book of the Bible. And showing, once again, that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). Definitely recommended.

A Gracious and Compassionate God

Daniel Timmer (IVP, 2011, £12.99, 240 pp ISBN: 9781844744992)

Another highly preachable Old Testament book is Jonah. This study by a scholarly commentator offers good exegesis—and considerably more. Jonah is a short book but one that raises many issues that Christians still wrestle with: mission, salvation, spirituality, God's unmerited grace to those who have sinned against him, religious conversion. And the book of Jonah seems also to have been written to bring about spiritual change in its readers as much as in the people of Nineveh. All of these themes are developed with theological skill and attention to the Bible as a whole—as well as through the exegesis of the book of Jonah.

Ecclesiastes

Douglas B. Miller (Herald Press, US\$24.99, 300pp ISBN: 9780836194913)

According to this fine new commentary, the writer of Ecclesiastes is describing a world of tragedy and chance, in which good things can be short-lived, and where treasured things can turn out to be of little worth. It is an honest approach to "the dark side of faith"—to life in a creation subjected to "frustration" (Romans 8: the only allusion to Ecclesiastes in the New Testament). In other words, Ecclesiastes offers realistic advice in a world of uncertainty, paradox, tragedy, and stressful challenge to the possibilities of hope and faith. It's a message that still applies today—and is especially relevant for our current postmodern situation with its characteristics of uncertain identity, a flux of worldviews, the apparent elusiveness of truth, and a widespread refusal to accept simplistic or merely comforting answers. Everyone, at times, faces the issues that are addressed by Ecclesiastes: the 'earthquakes' of lack of satisfaction or sense of purpose, financial catastrophe, personal tragedy, societal injustice, fear, frustration, chance, uncertainty, physical suffering, old age, and death. Miller's commentary clearly spells out Ecclesiastes' carefully-worded strategies for those who want to navigate this kind of complex world. Most of the book is straight commentary but it concludes with a series of short essays that helpfully sum up key themes. Highly recommended.

Naked Surrender

Andrew Comiskey (IVP, 2010, £8.99, 224 pp ISBN: 9781844744923)

Subtitled 'Coming home to our true sexuality,' this book competently attends to many of the sexual issues that trouble people around the world (Christians included), including sexual addiction, pornography, sexual abuse, and same-sex attraction. Comiskey does this by sharing the experience of six individuals—some married and some single—as they journey through to sexual healing. He offers biblical, theological and psychological principles for healing with each story, along with positive comments on romantic love, intimacy, solitude, and what a healthy sexuality might look like in an often confused culture. Those called to pastoral and counselling ministries (and others) will want to own, read and lend this book.