



Books Worth Reading

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THE AMAZING CROSS

Jeremy and Elizabeth McQuoid (IVP, 2012, £8.99, 192pp ISBN: 9781844745876)

The cross of Christ is, of course, at the heart of Christian faith: “the place where our sin collided gloriously with God’s grace.” In this readable and accessible volume an American-trained husband and wife team, who minister in Scotland, explain the meaning and implications of the death of Christ for us. They do this in some eleven chapters under the subtitle ‘Transforming lives today.’ For some reason (not explained; someone’s masters’ thesis?) the book is connected with the well-known Keswick Convention in Britain; Keswick piety meets Trinity Evangelical Divinity School evangelicalism; warm hearts meet sound theology. The stories that illustrate the book’s message are sometimes a little distant or distracting (especially the American ones) but the overall impact is a constantly challenging mix of biblical teaching and practical application. The four parts of the volume outline the ground covered: What happened at the cross? What difference does the cross make to me? How can I live a cross-shaped life? The resurrection factor. An excellent resource, with constant emphasis on personal transformation, and very suitable for a preaching series, or for next year’s Lenten studies, or even a textbook for Laidlaw College!

CHRIST OUR RECONCILER

J. E. M. Cameron (Editor) (IVP, 2012, £12.99, 224pp ISBN: 9781844745777)

The late John Stott was a key leader and promoter of the Lausanne movement that seeks to resource global evangelicalism. This volume (subtitled ‘Gospel, Church, World’) assembles the key addresses at the third ‘Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization’ held in Cape Town in late 2010 and attended by some 4000 invited participants from 198 nations. As well as the

fine daily studies on Ephesians from some gifted exegetes, addresses challenge readers about such topics as the irresistible Christ, truth, the growth of Islam, the growing challenges of urban mission, human sexuality, the biotech century, the workplace, the prosperity gospel, racial and ethnic challenges, the ‘new atheism’ – and so on. And all of this as part of a call for creative, strategic and thoughtful evangelism. Anglican evangelicals are represented in its pages (I noted Benjamin Kwashi, Michael Ramsden, Vaughan Roberts, Antoine Rutayisire, Chris Wright and others) as well as other global Christian leaders, both men and women. Overall, a moving collection of studies whose highlights might well be found in the concluding addresses that call the church back to humility, integrity, and gospel simplicity and partnership. Buy as a Christmas present for summer reading.

THE BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR CARING FOR CREATION

Dick Tripp (Avery Bartlett Books, 2011, NZ\$25 (+ \$3.30 p&p from Dick Tripp, R.D.1, Lyttelton 8971), 158pp ISBN: 9780473193744)

Dick Tripp is well-known in Latimer circles and offers here a comprehensive outline of the biblical mandate of caring for God’s creation. He provides a detailed biblical approach to the growing crisis in our environment, its causes, and the role of the Christian church in responding. Some of his chapter titles give the flavour of the book: ‘The growing crisis,’ ‘Causes of the problem,’ ‘God’s covenant with Noah,’ ‘Lessons from Israel,’ ‘Christ and creation,’ ‘The church and creation,’ ‘The renewal of creation,’ ‘The new heavens and earth.’ And the theologian in me warmed to Dick’s fine discussion (based on Genesis 1–3) of lessons that flow from humans as both made in God’s image and yet harming the creation as that image is spoiled. This is a well-researched and clearly-written volume about an increasingly important topic.

ATHEISM'S NEW CLOTHES

David Glass (IVP, 2012, £16.99, 336pp ISBN: 9781844745715)

The 'new atheists' are those unbelievers such as Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens who stridently push their convictions that belief in God is both a delusion (because it is based on unsupportable faith and because science has removed the need for God) and a danger (because it is responsible for much human suffering, past and present). In the opening chapter, Glass (who is a university lecturer in Ulster and has a PhD in theoretical physics and an MA in philosophy!) explains the problems the new atheists have with faith. His second chapter – 'Is faith irrational?' – responds to their claim that faith itself is the problem. But even in this chapter the book begins to display its true colours: it is, in fact, an outstanding volume of well-informed apologetics. I'm not sure about the commendations that say that it is the best reply to Dawkins and company and that's partly because it deals with much wider issues and some chapters have few references to them. His chapter 3 ('Does science undermine belief in God?') shows that science, far from undermining belief in God, provides some of the best reasons for such belief. So, my only disappointment is with the title (and subtitle: 'Exploring and exposing the claims of the New Atheists') which might lead people to miss its much wider value. It's not that Glass doesn't deal with the new atheism – he does, especially by showing that the new atheists fail to engage seriously with the best, and widely known, theistic arguments (chapters 4 and 5) – but the book is much, much more than that. After two outstanding chapters on the evidence for God – working from the existence and beginning of the universe, the order of the universe and the existence of conscious minds – he has excellent chapters on 'Evolution and the origins of religion,' 'Religion, morality and evil,' 'God and revelation,' 'Jesus, the Gospels and the resurrection,' before concluding with a short chapter on 'Science, God and the meaning of life.' This is an outstanding defence of the Christian faith. As one reviewer puts it, this book is a "solid case for Christian theism

as rationally sound, evidentially supportable, explanatorily powerful, and existentially relevant." Carefully recommend it for purchase by your local libraries.

THE GOLDEN CORD

Charles Taliaferro (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012, US\$29.00 (paper), 216pp ISBN: 9780268042387)

The title of this stimulating volume refers to ancient stories of those who are on a quest and must follow a cord or string in order to find their way to happiness, safety, or home. Taliaferro (an American evangelical Lutheran philosopher) applies this to the evidence found in the created world which, if followed, can lead to God. We evangelicals have generally been suspicious of the ultimate worth of general revelation (though that is changing). Taliaferro uses the metaphor of a golden cord to link what we see, feel, and do with deep spiritual realities that can disclose the living God of Christianity in everyday encounters and events that flow from the One who is the source of all goodness and the subject and object of our best love. Scripture, human experience, and philosophical and literary reflections on truth, goodness and beauty as alternatives to materialism and naturalism make up this golden cord. Poetry, philosophy, and literature (Coleridge, W. H. Auden, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, Teilhard de Chardin, and J. R. R. Tolkien) abound in this volume. As one other reviewer has commented, "Taliaferro doesn't merely wander the edges; he plunges into core issues of our human existence, inviting his readers to wade into the great sea of divine love."

CONNECTED

Sam Allberry (IVP, 2012, £7.99, 160pp ISBN: 9781844745883)

This reviewer's memory of Sam preaching (at St. Ebbe's, Oxford) is entirely positive: clear,

passionate, warm and funny – and without compromising a whole-hearted and biblically-driven message. This book (subtitled ‘Living in the light of the Trinity’) has the same characteristics as he explains and applies the life-changing nature of the living God known as Trinity. There are compelling chapters on the Trinity and identity (humans made in the image of this triune God), church life, discipleship, and prayer. Having said that, not all evangelicals will warm to Sam’s attempt, in his chapter on gender, to use supposed subordination within the Trinity to keep women in their place (they might prefer the universalising principles of Galatians 3:28 and Jesus’ non-condescending attitude to women) but – at least for this reader – this is the only flaw in a heart-warming account and one that will be added to reading for my students.

EMOTIONS

Graham Beynon (IVP, 2012, £8.99 176pp ISBN: 9781844745890)

One of the more pointed criticisms of us evangelicals is that our evangelism and preaching appear to see humans as little more than “brains on sticks” as one contemporary Calvinist philosopher chides; this reduces the gospel to a form of gnosticism. It is a painful accusation when set over against the Bible’s insistence that what it calls the heart is the actual centre of human decision-making. A further corrective is offered by the realisation that God has given us emotions and this experiential dimension of what it means to be human is the subject matter of this book, subtitled ‘Living life in colour.’ The book is in two parts (‘Understanding emotions’ and ‘Emotions in practice’) with chapter titles such as ‘Getting to the heart of emotions,’ ‘Putting emotions in their right place,’ ‘Emotions and the Bible,’ ‘Emotions and God’s praise.’ His long second chapter (‘What do perfect emotions look like?’) is all about Jesus. But what the chapter titles don’t disclose is Beynon’s constant appeal (I suppose to reassure suspicious readers) to evangelical heroes of faith. Here, in order, are those he cites in his first five chapters

(besides biblical sources): Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Don Carson, B. B. Warfield, John Calvin, Augustine, John Wesley, and several minor Puritans; no one else is mentioned. A final appendix on the relevance of all this to Christian ministry appeals to Broughton Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Spurgeon, Richard Baxter and Isaac Watts. I like what a British Christian psychiatrist says about the volume: “In a field prone to controversy and extreme attitudes, Graham Beynon has written an admirably balanced book. Solidly founded on a biblical framework of emotions, it provides a very practical approach to the place of feelings in everyday life and, in particular, in our Christian experience. I cannot think of a better book to understand, to appreciate and to recover the value and the joy of emotions.” And an Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry adds: “Only recently have we begun to explore the world of positive emotion; the language of joy, gratitude, optimism and what makes us ‘well’. In the same way, church teaching has often focused on the pain, conflict and dangers that lurk in human emotions but neglected the positive side of human flourishing. Graham Beynon’s book, an important corrective full of practical wisdom, introduces us to the full kaleidoscopic range of emotions that lie at the very centre of what it means to be made in the image of God himself.” This seems to be an important and balanced book.

INTERPRETING THE PARABLES

Craig L. Blomberg (IVP, 2012, £19.99, 440pp ISBN: 9781844745760)

Jesus had only one message, the Reign of God, and the synoptic Gospels make it clear that parables (full of emotional detail; a point overlooked in Beynon’s otherwise excellent book reviewed above) are the main way that he announced this. Here we have a new and second edition of what has become the standard evangelical work on the parables. This is more of a textbook than a preaching guide but it does provide valuable surveys not just of individual parables but of the point of them: what God’s kingdom is like, and who it is (the teller of the stories) that ushers it in.