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BOOK NOTICES

John H. Armstrong

***DEEPENING YOUR CONVERSATION WITH GOD:
LEARNING TO LOVE TO PRAY***

Ben Patterson

Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers (2001)

171 pages, paper, \$10.99

Ben Patterson, a pastor previously in New Jersey and California, is now campus pastor at Westmont College, in Santa Barbara, California. He is a frequent contributor to *Leadership* and is a person, and a writer, whom I always find both thoughtful and pastoral. In this little book he seeks to show how prayer can be moved from being a spiritual discipline we exercise to a much-anticipated delight we engage in with wonder and deep joy.

Serious prayer is not a special gift. It is a practical privilege that we can, and should, all engage in day-by-day. One of the unique delights of this book, for me, was its emphasis upon praying with others and the importance of the church seeking God in prayer as an act of community. This is not a heavy book but it is a delightfully helpful volume that would benefit most earnest Christians.

ESCHATOLOGY

Hans Schwarz

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2001)

431 pages, paper, \$26.00

When most conservative Christians in America hear the word eschatology their minds race to the apocalypse and related millennial concerns. This is both tragic and unbalanced. Recent Y2K fever should show just how unprofitable such idle speculation really is. What is needed is solid biblical, historical and theological work on this field of study. Hans Schwarz, professor of systematic theology at the University of Regensburg, Germany, provides just such a work. This is sane, careful, and readable theology.

Schwarz writes 307 pages before he even gets to a chapter helpfully titled, "Controversial Areas of Eschatological Hope." Most of what he says here is a much-needed corrective to the rampant dispensational remnants of an American approach to this area of theology. Most evangelical pastors will be forced, if they will read Schwarz, to grapple with a serious range of orthodox and heterodox thought prior to the rise of our popular systems of millennial madness, most of which owe more to heterodoxy than orthodoxy. Throughout this book the author is concerned to keep "hope" alive in the life of the confessing church. Schwarz writes: "If we abandon the hope for an actual transformation of our world into God's kingdom, faith becomes empty and meaningless and is hardly bearable" (368). Amen! This book should be read by serious leaders of the church at large. It is not too technical for many to profit by it.

**ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE:
OLD TESTAMENT I
(GENESIS 1-11)**

Andrew Louth, editor

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press (2001)

204 pages, cloth, \$39.99

Part of a unique, and extremely valuable, ongoing series from the publisher on the writings of the early church fathers on the Holy Scripture. This is not, strictly speaking, a commentary. It is, rather, a collection of comments. It is an extremely useful work for modern readers, who desperately need to be rooted in the life and thought of both biblical text *and* the ancient Christian faith and church.

Genesis 1-11 was a portion of the Bible often commented upon by the Fathers. Here they found and developed a profoundly Christian theology of creation, fall and redemption. Following Paul the fathers explored the analogy of Adam as a type of Christ, i.e., the second Adam. The comments contained here draw from Basil the Great, Ambrose, and Augustine in particular but extend from the first to the eighth centuries, including both writers from the East and the West. This whole series is highly recommended and this volume, like the rest, stands on its own as a resource of immense value to the student of Scripture.

THE CHRISTIAN TRAVELERS GUIDE TO GERMANY

Irving Hexham and Lothar Henry Kope

Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2001)

238 pages, paper, \$16.99

One of a new series that deals with what Christians can and should look for when they travel historic parts of Europe. The authors take you on a journey to the Christian

past, showing you Germany's Christian history with passion and delight. They survey not only the history, but also the literature, music, art and architecture of Germany, exploring over sixty specifically Christian sites. Like modern travel guides they even include a list of the "Top Ten" Christian sites to visit in modern Germany. Special attention, appropriately, is given to Martin Luther and sites related to his life and labors. A helpful glossary is included.

THE CHRISTIAN TRAVELERS GUIDE TO FRANCE

Mark Konnert, Peter Barrs, and Carine Barrs
Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2001)
222 pages, paper, \$16.99

Part of the series that includes the title above, this book covers a less well-known part of Europe to evangelicals. Included here are over ninety Christian heritage sites and another "Top Ten" list. The authors look at French Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, fairly. Having recently traveled through parts of France last year I wish I had read this guide first!

THE CHRISTIAN TRAVELERS GUIDE TO ITALY

David Bershada and Carolina Mangone
Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2001)
235 pages, paper, \$16.99

No one who would visit the "eternal city" or the Vatican should go without this little book. It lists and explains over fifty Christian heritage sites and includes the "Top Ten" list as well. Both saints and secularists, martyrs and kings, castles and cathedrals, are presented with much interest. Reading these books is fun even if you never go to

the actual places. Maybe you can read them and then talk your spouse, or best friend, into a tour.

THE CHRISTIAN TRAVELERS GUIDE TO GREAT BRITAIN

Irving Hexham
Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2001)
245 pages paper, \$16.99

Since I have personally seen more historic Christian sites in Great Britain than any other part of the world outside of North America, I found this volume especially interesting. The book begins with a simple but useful overview of British history and of the history of Christianity in the British Isles. Then it surveys literature, music, art, and architecture. After the list of the "Top Ten" it surveys nearly sixty Christian heritage sites, like the other volumes in this series. The reader who wants only the evangelical sites will be disappointed. Even Karl Marx is included in a sidebar. The reason for this inclusion is not hard to see if one thinks about the social and cultural impact of Marx upon Christianity, especially globally.

SEEING THE INVISIBLE: EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE OF EXTRAORDINARY FAITH

Faith Cook
Darlington, England: Evangelical Press (1998)
159 pages, paper, \$13.99

The author, a minister's wife in Derbyshire, England, is the author of numerous titles on biographical figures of the past and writes with a lovely and simple style. Here you read about the wife of John Bunyan, Elizabeth, and nine other extraordinary Christians, many of whom you

might not otherwise know about unless you read Faith Cook's accounts.

One account is of Lavinia Bartlett, of whom C. H. Spurgeon often referred to by telling people that "my best deacon was a woman" (116). Another amazing story is that of Leonard Dober, a refugee who fled to Germany and found asylum in Count Zinzendorf's Herrnhut community. He literally offered himself to become a slave in order to reach an unreached people with the gospel of Christ. A self-centered generation like ours needs stories like these to inspire it to fresh faith and acts of courage.

WHEN NO ONE ELSE SEES: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER IN AN AGE OF IMAGE

Os Guinness

Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress (2000)

329 pages, paper, \$15.00

It has been said that the true test of character is what we do when no one else is around. Personal character is a big issue in our generation. But what is it really? And why does it matter that we cultivate character? Os Guinness, senior fellow of the Trinity Forum, has developed this study series with the purpose of addressing the great classics of Western civilization and why they matter for Christians living in postmodern times.

Guinness shows the importance of character by citing various works, with his own comments and interaction, ranging from Alexander the Great, George Washington, James Madison, and Plato to the Hebrew Scriptures. He shows how character is formed in the crucible of life itself and then develops the idea of cultural erosions, the way character is broken down and destroyed by life around us. The spiritual foundations of character are drawn from G. K.

Chesterton, P. T. Forsyth (an English minister/theologian that more evangelicals should know), Augustine, C. S. Lewis, Abraham Lincoln and psychologist O. Hobart Mowrer. He concludes by citing the examples of character in terms of heroes who displayed what character was by the way they lived and died. Here he cites the life and work of Thomas More, Martin Luther, Le Chambon, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A Reader's Guide and a list of works for further reading is also included. The Trinity Forum series assumes the special need for, and the possibility of, a social and cultural renaissance in our time in history. If forthcoming volumes are as good as this one readers will benefit greatly by these books.

PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR PASTORS: WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND COUNSEL FOR A LIFETIME OF MINISTRY

Curtis C. Thomas

Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway (2001)

272 pages, paper, \$12.99

Curtis Thomas, after forty-four years of ministry, the last fourteen as executive pastor of The Bible Church of Little Rock (Arkansas), didn't just quit and go away. He decided to offer to his friends, and pastoral peers, a gracious and highly practical book. He discusses 106 areas of the everyday life of a church leader. Everything from the call to the ministry, personal accountability and the pastor's family, to personal devotions, efficient study habits and daily schedules are discussed in this practical, simple, and highly useful book.

Pastors could benefit from this book by working through it slowly as part of a daily routine or by reading it through several times. A slower reading is advised, since the

entries are brief and pregnant with possibilities for thoughtful action.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE: HOW CHRISTIANITY TRANSFORMED CIVILIZATION

Alvin J. Schmidt
Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2001)
423 pages, cloth, \$24.99

This book was long overdue. Schmidt, a Christian sociologist who teaches the subject at Illinois College in Jacksonville, shows how Western culture was built upon the foundational influence of Christianity. From education to women's rights, from personal health and economic developments, to social liberty, the culture we know today was built upon the influence of Jesus of Nazareth and the impact his followers have made upon society in general. Schmidt presents a comprehensive survey of how Jesus Christ, and those who have followed him, have shaped and developed what we call Western civilization.

There are some wonderful and surprising things to be learned in this volume. Historian Paul Maier writes: "These pages document [the influence of Christianity] showing with meticulous care how so many of our current institutions originated and developed within the church, and so many 'greats' in all branches of human culture were Christian" (8). The author warns us, however, that modern secularism and pluralism not only cover these facts but also threaten future liberties and advances. This is an exciting and eye-opening work!

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD: A CHRISTOLOGY FOR DISCIPLES

Jonathan R. Wilson
Grand Rapids: Baker (2001)
213 pages, paper, \$16.99

Wilson, a professor of religious studies at Westmont College, writes a clear, convicting, and creative post-modern primer on how to live in the present age by focusing upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is theology—theology for the life of the church as the community. Many talk about doing this. Wilson has given us a model of how to do it.

Wilson employs the narrative themes of the Bible in a way that opens new vistas of insight for modern leaders. This is a highly-recommended book for those who would interact with the modern scene the church must clearly face with a renewed theological vision.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE REFORMATION?

Gary L. W. Johnson and R. Fowler White, editors
Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed (2001)
339 pages, paper, \$15.99

A jeremiad which seeks to show what went wrong with the modern evangelical church, both when and how, this book is in the same genre as my own edited volumes, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (Moody Press, 1996) and *The Compromised Church* (Crossway, 1998). The contributors are all from the Reformed tradition, with the possible exception of one. The subjects are the ones usually addressed in such a volume: postmodernity, the battle for classical theism, the dangers of eclipsing the canon through private revelations, the ministry of the Word of God in preaching (not

enough emphasis here on the work of the Spirit), and evangelism, from a strongly Reformed perspective. As in all edited collections, some essays are vastly superior to others. The foreword by David F. Wells will make the editors at *Christianity Today* a bit defensive, if they get around to reading it. It is quite strong medicine, but the sickness is quite severe too!

I must, with sober sadness and holy devotion to the truth, agree that ours is clearly an age which is "characterized by a god who is confused about the future, needs our forgiveness, and is fabricated in our own images; by pluralism and therapeutic pragmatism that jettison essentials of saving faith; by attacks on Christianity from without and attacks upon the Trinity from within the church; and by a demoralized society." These words are used on the cover as an endorsement for this volume. One would think them written by a harsh overbearing fundamentalist. Not so. These are the words of Bishop C. Fitzsimons Allison (retired) of the Episcopal Church of the United States, certainly not a bastion of fundamentalist reaction. Evangelicals seem content, asleep, and impervious to the dangers of our time. May God use such a book to wake us up!

***AND THEN THERE WERE NINE: THE PLACE THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS SHOULD HAVE IN YOUR LIFE TODAY***

David Searle

Inverness, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications (2000)

192 pages, paper, \$9.99

A small book of immense value, this is not your ordinary treatment of the Ten Commandments. It pulsates with life and speaks to the present time with clarity. Searle understands our relativistic age and realizes that the answer is to be found in the law of God alone.

This book is both "pastoral and prophetic" as Jim Packer has written. And, in the words of Sinclair Ferguson, "Searle dispels the neurotic fear we Christians seem to have developed about God's law; he helps us to see its real purpose and its practical blessings." I would put this book in my top five on the Ten Commandments and tend to think a congregation in our time would immensely profit by using it as a study guide of some sort.