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Book Reviews

THE COMPASSIONATE MIND. By Donald L. Deffner. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1990. 192 pages. Paper, \$14.95.

As the subtitle *Theological Dialog with the Educated* suggests, *The Compassionate Mind* provides both rationale and method for evangelization of the educated. Donald Deffner wants to construct in us “a *compassionate mind* to reach the *educated adult*, not a condescending mind, but a mind as Christ Himself had, who ‘beholding Him, loved Him’ (Mark 10:23)” (p. 15). In the course of the book we journey with Deffner, and so the first part of his tale is appropriately called “Odyssey.” The first chapter gives us our moorings—“Who Are the Educated?” Deffner shows a compassionate mind by defining the educated as “those—with or without a university education—who grapple with the great questions of life: who are you? where are you going? what is the meaning and purpose in life?” Deffner is speaking here not of the Ph.D.’s who teach at universities or consult with multi-national corporations, but of the literate who read and think and reflect on major ideas and world issues. All of us know people who fit this definition. Who does not, at some point or other, ask himself these questions and suffer from loneliness, alienation, fear, anxiety, tension, stress, et cetera.

In the second chapter, “Books to Make Us Think,” Deffner uncovers his major thrust—evangelism of the educated. What Christian pastor or layperson is not interested in the mission of the church? Deffner uses a series of books to lay the groundwork for developing a mission strategy for the educated adult, namely, Joel Nederhood’s *The Church’s Mission to the Educated American*; Anthony Padovano’s *The Estranged God: Modern Man’s Search for Belief*; John Powell’s *A Reason to Live! A Reason to Die!*; selected writings from C.S. Lewis and J.B. Phillips; Chad Walsh’s *Campus Gods on Trial*; William Diehl’s *Christianity and Real Life*; J. Russell Hale’s *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*; Edward Rauff’s *Why People Join the Church*; and Richard Lischer’s *Speaking of Jesus: Finding the Words for Witness*. By pointing us to books which may be new to us, or books we may have read already but forgotten, he provides the context in which one evangelizes the educated, using various approaches to reach them with the gospel. Deffner gleans from each book exactly what we want to know and, in a subtle but persuasive way, convinces us that the educated are a subgroup within our culture, that there is a legitimate mission to them, and that the concerns of the educated which the church must address are essentially the concerns of everyone in this world, whether educated or not. “Approaching the educated must be marked by boldness without dogmatism, authority without authoritarianism. Above all, the Christian is compassionate and humble rather than clever, while learning the art of loving listening” (pp. 44-45).

The odyssey continues with the chapter "Modern Literature and the Educated." Here Deffner discusses such diverse people as Dante and Milton, Camus and Kafka and Sartre, Hemingway and Faulkner, Jack Kerouac and Tennessee Williams, Ingmar Bergmann and Kurt Vonnegut and J.D. Salinger's *A Catcher in the Rye*. And this is only a partial list. Deffner should not dismiss so quickly, however, the Christ figure in *A Catcher in the Rye*, especially in the light of Salinger's other books and stories. The book's main character, Holden Caulfield, sees himself as saving children from falling off a cliff in a field of rye. This is exactly the kind of Christ figure that Salinger's generation demanded. This is *not* the humble, self-sacrificing Christ of the Gospels. Holden Caulfield is, as Deffner describes him, a "defiant young man rejecting everyone around him as frauds and phonies and attempting to be his own savior or a (strange) type of self-styled savior to others." Such a person was the inspiration for thousands of high school and college students who saw the Holden Caulfields of this world as the image of what they aspired to be.

The genius of Deffner's discussion of modern literature lies in its diagnosis of the neuroses of an entire generation by analyzing the literature of that generation. Preaching the law effectively requires identifying a culture's or generation's false gods that lead to its rejection of the gospel. Such preaching includes the identification of pet sins, but it is more poignant when one is able to show how those sins reflect an attitude that rejects the necessity of living a life of suffering in view of Christ's suffering. Deffner not only diagnoses the human condition, thereby enhancing the preaching of the law, but also reveals that this generation needs all the *compassion* Christians can show as it continues to search for meaning in life. The educated sometimes differ from those in our culture whose only goal is to avoid suffering. A look at their favorite books shows that they may exult in suffering and its consequences: *Look Back in Anger*, *The Stranger*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Dead*, *East of Eden*, *No Exit*, and *Nausea*. But when, like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, they look over the edge into the darkness, all they can see is "the horror, the horror!" (A lacuna in Deffner is Joseph Conrad and the British novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.)

Deffner's tour of the literature provokes painful memories in those who have struggled with the ideas promoted by the literate of this century. But before turning to methodological questions in Part II, Deffner speaks to this generation of the hope that is within him by contributing to its literature three short pieces of his own. In *Descending to Transcend*, *The Pizzeria*, and *The Long, Dark Tunnel* Deffner offers us his own powerful tales of how some have overcome the darkness and, in looking over the edge, saw the horror of the cross and, beyond that, the dawn of a new world through the empty tomb.

This reviewer would not dare retell Deffner's stories and spoil them for others—they are worth the price of the book. In these pieces Deffner is both pastor and artist, priest and storyteller—the *compassionate mind*—sharing with us his vast experience as a thoughtful and humble proclaimer of Christ to the educated for more than forty years.

Part II of the book is entitled "Dialog," and it is completely different from Part I in tone and purpose. Not intended to involve the reader in the mystery of a literary journey, it is no less valuable. Here Deffner does the work of a professor, constructing a program of ministry to educated adults. The chapter titles speak for themselves: "Characteristics of the Educated Adult: Implications for the Church's Ministry," "Preaching to the Educated," "The Educated and the Bible," "The Case Study" (a fascinating and enormously effective pedagogical approach to the educated that Deffner utilizes in the classroom), "Building Trust with the Educated," and "The Educated Today." Deffner skillfully helps us think through what is necessary to set up a program for reaching the educated adult; every pastor should read carefully and inwardly digest this material. In my experience, it is the best theologically practical approach to evangelizing a specific target group within our culture. A few appendices are a bonus. One catalogues useful student projects which Deffner has tutored over the years; another conveys the results of a survey he conducted of campus pastors and their insights; and a third is a list of trends in campus ministry provided by Rev. Edward Schmidt, Campus Ministry Counselor of the LCMS.

A final word—everyone should read this book and the books Deffner evaluates in *The Compassionate Mind*. He analyzes the thinking of a world without Christ. We who feel a passion to reach this world with the gospel must know what this world is thinking. Deffner knows and he cares. And that is the best reason for buying and using this book. Concordia Publishing House should be commended for offering *The Compassionate Mind* to the church in its ongoing mission to the lost generations of this world.

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LEARN NEW TESTAMENT GREEK. By John H. Dobson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988. 306 pages.

For laymen contemplating a theological education or pastors reinforcing theirs, the prospect of (re)learning Greek can be a terrifying one. It is not surprising, then, that authors have searched for innovative methods whereby the fabled agony of such study might

be avoided. John Dobson's latest work is another of these efforts. In *Learn New Testament Greek* Dobson presents all the subject matter contained in most beginning grammars, but with an approach far different from the traditional paradigmatic method. According to Dobson, "Experience has shown that to use grammatical terms and lists at an early stage seriously hinders this [learning] process."

In Dobson's approach information is introduced in very small portions. Chapter 8 covers only the masculine and nominative forms of present active participles. As a result of such small units, paradigms are seldom found and are usually incomplete. To compensate for this absence the vocabulary is necessarily laborious, with each new inflection treated as a separate vocable. Rather than using grammatical terms such as "imperative" or "adjective," the text uses Greek forms for chapter headings. In keeping with simplicity Greek accents are not used except where they affect the meaning. Verbs are analyzed by augment, stem, and ending with no consideration of the connecting vowel between stem and ending. In general the author's concern for eliminating lists of rules, terms, and forms has resulted in a system where exceptions are portrayed as the rule.

Dobson's text does have several commendable features, however. English derivatives of the Greek vocabulary are given through chapter 13. *Aktionsart* is given due, albeit limited, attention. The three-part layout of exercises is very helpful with individual sentences, paraphrased blocks of Scripture, and actual readings from the Greek New Testament. Chapters 44, 46, and 48-51 offer much useful material, including lists dealing with word families and several interesting excurses on New Testament translation. Lastly the final twenty-five pages offer three refreshingly structured appendices: an "Appendix on Accents," an "Index to Grammar and Constructions," and a brief "Reference Grammar." Though valuable in some respects, the approach of Dobson's grammar causes more confusion than it removes. Regardless of his time constraints, the serious student of Scripture who is interested in reading Greek more for nuance than quantity would still be better served by one of the more widely recommended grammars.

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