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Book Reviews

***The Letter to Philemon.* By Joseph A. Fitzmyer. The Anchor Bible Commentary. Volume 34C. New York: Doubleday, 2000. 136 pages.**

Fitzmyer has provided an excellent resource for the scholar and pastor eager to research the intricacies of the small, but significant, book of Philemon. The author has included lengthy bibliographies, thorough indices, and a fresh translation complete with commentary. The survey of scholarly opinions is both broad and fair, presenting the strengths and weaknesses of the differing positions. The work draws on both biblical and secular parallels to shed light on every aspect of the text, from the connotations of the vocabulary to the cultural background.

The book also summarizes a fruitful argument regarding the relationships between the Apostle Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. Fitzmyer argues convincingly in favor of P. Lampe's proposal, that Onesimus sought out Paul in order to plead for his intercession as an *amicus domini*. Onesimus has not run away from Philemon to run into Paul, his master's teacher. Rather, as a slave who has fallen into his master's disfavor, he visits a man who has influence with his master in order to gain a fresh start in his place in the home. To illustrate that this option stood available to slaves in the ancient world, Fitzmyer marshals evidence from Roman jurisprudence and private letters. It also fits well with what is known of ancient customs of patronage.

It is telling that the biblical text most cited in this commentary is Galatians 5:6, "faith formed by love." Taken as an interpretive key for Philemon, it focuses on the faithful and grace-filled response that Paul's letter would elicit from the Christian master. One would do well to add John G. Nordling's articulation of the vicarious and intercessory role taken on by Paul as the true christological center of the book. Still, those who approach Philemon with a Lutheran hermeneutic will find themselves indebted to Fitzmyer, who both generously quotes the good doctor of Wittenberg and does not hesitate to define grace as "the divine favor by which Christians are saved . . . not relying on their own deed or merits" (90). Christ is clearly identified as the motivation for Christian life.

This commentary invites the reader to deeper reflection on the cruciform shape of the Christian life. Without turning the letter into a sounding board for Christian or Pauline views on slavery, Fitzmyer highlights the central theme of faith transforming inter-Christian relationships in its grateful response to Christ's love. The distinctions of the created order persist, but the formation of a new brotherhood in Christ opens eschatological possibilities of mutual love, acceptance, and service. There is enough grist in these twenty-five Scripture verses that one might imagine a parish pastor developing little Philemon into a several week Bible study or a vibrant Advent series.

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Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter. By C. Clifton Black. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. 327 Pages.

D. Moody Smith has struck upon an interesting idea. Instead of presenting yet another commentary series on the books of the Bible, why not instead put together a series of books based upon the individuals who wrote and were written about in those books? This he does in the series *Studies on Personalities in the New Testament*. The goal of the series is to spark the imagination of today's students, so that they begin to see the New Testament characters as flesh-and-blood people, with real-life challenges and distinct personalities. By encountering the various personalities of the New Testament, students are further invited to enter into the world of Jesus and the early church. So far, the series includes books on Herod, Mary the Mother of Jesus, James the Brother of Jesus, as well as Peter and John, among others.

C. Clifton Black's *Mark* is a fine example of what this series has to offer. To be sure, Mark is a somewhat shadowy figure, known as an evangelist, a friend of Peter and Paul, and perhaps also the young man who fled away naked at the time of our Lord's betrayal. Black seeks to fill out this sketchy portrait. From the beginning, Black offers a justification for his work, arguing that critical scholarship has often unduly doubted the traditions and stories about Mark. Although Black has by no means shed himself of the tenets of critical scholarship, he is at least critical of it, and desires to "give full weight to the traditions associated with Mark" (11).

In the first chapter, Black draws from the book of Acts, and adroitly pictures Mark as a "Wayward Attaché," the son of a wealthy patroness of the church who caused the breakup between Paul and Barnabas (25). As Black demonstrates, however, Mark's name is redeemed in the New Testament letters, where again and again he is depicted as a "Beloved Junior Partner" to the two great apostles. It would seem that, like his mentor Peter, he faltered, but he also recovered.

The book continues to read like a mystery novel, as Black uncovers evidence of Mark's legacy in the early church. Adroitly, the author leads us through a recounting of Papias' remarks concerning Mark, especially concerning the assertion that he served as "Peter's interpreter" (83). Justin Martyr's and Irenaeus' comments on Mark's role as an evangelist are also recorded and evaluated.

We should also note that this book can be plain fun, especially in its attention to detail. Black makes particular note of the early-third century writer Hippolytus who labeled the second evangelist "Mark the stumpy-fingered" (116). Through church history this sobriquet became Mark's title, and may refer either to fingers too small for his hand, to the story that he cut off his own thumb in order to make himself ineligible for the priesthood, or to the fact that his gospel is, in fact, somewhat truncated. In any case, it is a joy to see the early church fathers struggle to make sense of things, even as we do.

In sum, C. Clifton Black has offered for us a winsome, well-researched

exploration into the personality of Mark. If it leads readers to look into the New Testament and early-church writers for themselves, it will have provided a useful service.

Peter J. Scaer

Introducing the Reformed Faith: Biblical Revelation, Christian Tradition, Contemporary Significance. By Donald K. McKim. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. 261 pages. \$27.95.

To most Lutherans, "Reformed" refers to those Christians whose theology grew out of the Protestant, though not the Lutheran, Reformation. Although unintentional, they often classify Calvinists and Zwinglians, Arminians and Wesleyans into one generic and indistinguishable category. Dr. Donald McKim, an articulate theologian, prolific author, and gifted editor, provides an indispensable resource for understanding the peculiarities and distinctive emphases of Reformed theology in light of contemporary and ecumenical perspectives.

In his introduction, McKim places Reformed theology into its larger biblical and historical context. This common Christian perspective leads naturally into the Reformation claim of participating in an evangelical and catholic heritage. Orthodox and confessional Lutheran readers will recognize how we share many similar Protestant perspectives on the biblical foundations and historical backgrounds of Christian doctrine and also on some common contemporary concerns as McKim sets them forth in this richly readable reference resource.

McKim examines the biblical, historical, and (if unique) Reformed perspective on fifteen key doctrines of the Christian church in nineteen clearly organized and carefully expounded chapters. He provides a wealth of material on Scripture, Trinity, creation, providence, humanity, sin, person of Christ, work of Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, church, baptism, Lord's Supper, Christian life, and the reign of God—along with an introductory chapter on being a "confessional" Calvinist. In his three final chapters, he describes the distinctive emphases of the Reformed faith, giving answers to "some common questions," and even offering a "Catechism of Christian Faith and Life," which he prepared with the hope that others might adopt or at least adapt it. This book has helpful study questions at the end of each chapter, fifty pages of notes, an index of non-English terms used in the book, an index of names, and a well-prepared subject index.

One of the particular emphases that grows out of reading this book is the oft-forgotten fact that Calvinism is a distinct form of Protestant theology. Strongly influenced by Luther and Calvin, Reformed theology has been significantly modified by later reformers, who provided it with peculiar facets and distinguishing features. While giving characteristic Reformed perspectives on Christian doctrines, McKim shies away from several unique, yet controverted Calvinistic topics, particularly predestination and millennialism. He admits that

there are a variety of millennial views held among teachers in the various Reformed churches. He only adverts to the distinctive double-predestinarian view held by most Calvinists, yet spends almost no time on explaining this teaching's historic foundation in Reformed perspective. This is somewhat disappointing, since he is rather thorough in so many other areas.

The nuanced position of John Calvin as he differed from other Protestants on the Lord's Supper, especially Luther and Zwingli, in light of their rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, is addressed unequivocally. McKim forthrightly articulates Calvin's exceptional, albeit not always comprehensible, explanation of Christ's spiritual presence in the sacrament. Christ is "spiritually present, though not physically or locally present," notes McKim (150). His multi-page presentation on this topic is remarkably careful, yet the subtle distinctions and lucid commentary only underscore the subtle vagaries that have haunted Calvinists since the sixteenth century. Of these ("Sacramentarian") distortions the formulators of the Book of Concord said, "Many important people were deceived through their magnificent, alluring words (FC SD VII 6)." So it can still be seen in contemporary ecumenical circles when one Lutheran body affirmed the *Formula of Agreement* with several Reformed denominations a few years ago.

Hermeneutical foundations of Reformed doctrinal positions also become evident in McKim's writing. For example, the Reformed interpretation of the Lord's words regarding the Lord's Supper comes from a less-than-firm commitment to a grammatical-historical hermeneutic of Scripture, as McKim discloses in earlier chapters. Concomitantly, throughout the work there is a noticeably weak Christology that unwittingly separates Christ's two natures, rather than seeing the humanity and divinity of Christ as relating effectively and biblically in the shared characteristics of the whole divine-human person, Christ Jesus.

Lutheran pastors should read up a book from an articulate theologian of another denomination every year. This present work provides a helpful guide for pastors when questions turn toward the beliefs of Presbyterians, members of the United Church of Christ, and other non-Arminian Reformed churches (McKim lists the twenty-three denominations that fall under his more specific label of "Reformed"). McKim's book is a pleasure to read, review, and recommend for careful appraisal by all Lutheran parish pastors. Pastors who have opportunities to study and work with Reformed colleagues will enjoy the discussions that will inevitably arise over our confessional distinctions, as well as appreciate the resulting necessary return to the Lutheran Confessions for clarification and explication of our foundational biblical Lutheran faith.

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On My Heart Imprint Your Image: A Collection of Hymns for the Christian Year. Kathryn M. Peperkorn, soprano / Rev. John M. Berg, organ. Christ Lutheran Academy: Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, 2003. \$14.00.

Audio recordings of hymns and hymn settings have—thankfully—been increasing in recent years. The newly-released CD, *On My Heart Imprint Your Image: A Collection of Hymns for the Christian Year*, is distinctive among other such recordings. Whereas collections of church music and hymns recorded by choirs abound, it is unusual to find a CD of hymns as sung by a soloist.

The professional, operatic quality of Kathryn M. Peperkorn's voice is evident, as well as pitch accuracy and sensitivity to the text. The fact that Peperkorn chose to record such a collection is a testimony to the strength of Lutheran hymnody and her dedication to it. There are professional singers who would consider a collection of hymns to be beneath their capabilities. Not so here. Instead of attempting to demonstrate vocal skills with difficult arrangements or key modulations befitting a trained soprano, Peperkorn beautifully lets the hymns speak (or rather, sing) for themselves.

The instrumental accompaniment is also simple, but not simplistic. The alternate harmonizations are chosen (or improvised) by Rev. Berg with care, so they do not detract from the hymn. Christa Hegland's cello and Stacy Peterson's flute are implemented well and played skillfully. There is a variety of texture within the music by any and all combinations of organ, cello, flute, and voice. The best tracks are hymns that lend themselves to a lighter treatment, such as "Christ Be My Leader," "Abide With Me," and "Jerusalem, My Happy Home."

The biggest strength of any recording of hymns, of course, is its content. The hymns in this volume are chosen from a wide variety of sources, from early Latin sources, to Reformation chorales, English, Irish, and American hymn writers. Of course, some will always suggest that more or fewer hymns from particular genres or eras should have been recorded. More importantly, it is commendable that the selected hymns are representative of all three current hymn books of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), *Lutheran Worship* (1982), and *Hymnal Supplement 98*. This demonstrates a discernment in hymn selection which is all too uncommon—to recognize the gift of hymnody as an ever-expanding, not static, tradition and repertoire.

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The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present. Edited by Richard Lischer. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. 496 pages. \$29.00.

If one would like to get into the mind of a theologian and disseminate his thinking, then read the proclamation of law and gospel in one of his sermons. In

so doing, the preacher's theology is laid bare for a thorough inspection. Granted, for an investigation to assess and describe accurately any theologies woven into the preacher's declaration to his people, then more than one sermon should be scrutinized. Nevertheless, the sermon is a window into the pastor's faith and into the faith that this same pastor lifts up before his parishioners as truth.

This unique volume draws on the proclamations of fifty-two noted theologians, Christian thinkers, and preachers – both women and men – from across the ages in order to present a broad-stroke and informative collection of insights on the art of preaching. Gathering the writing of figures as diverse as Augustine, John Chrysostom, Jonathan Edwards, Gardner C. Taylor, and Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Company of Preachers* provides an insight on various preaching styles and on the various theologies of these same diverse authors. Editor Richard Lischer has distilled the vast quantity of representative sermonic material from all the preachers in order to present an "unbiased" snippet of each of them. At the end of each introduction, the source and original title of the selection is indicated as precisely as possible and, where applicable, according to the directions of the publisher holding the copyright, making it a valuable resource for a more in-depth investigation to occur.

The book is arranged in seven divisions, each covering a central component of Lischer's view of the preaching task: I. What is Preaching? II. The Preacher; III. Proclaiming the Word; IV. Biblical Interpretation; V. Rhetoric; VI. The Hearer; VII. Preaching and the Church. Lischer's main criterion for selection in this anthology is theological. Does this piece contribute to a clearer theological understanding of preaching? Much could have been chosen from the fields of rhetoric, communications, cultural studies, and history, but to have done so would have created a very different book, one that focused on the sermon's satellites rather than the integrated act of preaching itself.

In the section titled "Preaching and the Church," the reader will find discussions of the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, and theology, all of which are present within the life of the church. A thematic and historical collection such as this presents a fascinating case study in continuity and discontinuity in theology. Another example is the practice of allegory in interpretation and preaching, which is an issue that appears to have been resolved, first by the sixteenth-century reformers and later by modern, nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical methods of interpretation. Yet the debate over "meaning" in texts is far from over, as postmodern interpreters have made clear. Theological interpretation is once again displaying the riches of patristic exegesis, including allegory.

For more than a millennium it appeared that Augustine had relieved the church's agony over the use of secular rhetoric by "baptizing" Cicero in Book 4 of *On Christian Doctrine*. But the issue was revived among the Puritans, whose corrective – "plain and perspicuous" English – was itself yet another rhetoric of preaching. In the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries the concern has resurfaced in a different form, namely, the debate over technology and religious

values. Television can simulate “church” in the family rooms of millions of television viewers. How is this modern communication technique—and the preaching it conveys—to be evaluated over against traditional ecclesiology, which presupposes the fellowship of Word and Table? How has television had an impact on the Sunday sermon?

Today, both in the Missouri Synod and beyond, the question of law and gospel in preaching does not enter in the foray, at least not as pervasively as it once did. Luther’s passion for the gospel ignited the discussion, and the abiding danger of moralism—the confusion of God’s grace with the moral, religious, social, or political rectitude of its recipients—has kept the question alive in some (Lutheran) quarters. The law-gospel debate was taken up by Wesley, Edwards, Finney, Barth, and many others who attempted to define the terms and formulate their co-existence in the sermon. It continued less explicitly in Bultmann and the school of the New Hermeneutic (represented in this book by Gerhard Ebeling), and one still hears its echoes in treatises and sermons of liberation (see Oscar Romero, “A Pastor’s Last Homily”).

But on the whole, the new interest in narrative preaching has changed the terms of the law-gospel paradigm. For in narrative preaching, the mode is less proclamatory, less existentially decisive. The preacher does not explicitly rivet the hearer with God’s judgment in preparation for the gracious news of the promise. Instead, preachers such as Taylor, Lash, Craddock, and Campbell envision the sermon as a means of enrolling the listener into a larger consciousness or group. In this genre, the sermon is better defined as a narrative process than a proclamation, whose end is self-recognition, repentance, and participation in the church and her gifts. The word does not knife downward through history toward its target as much as it rises out of the shared humanity and the Christian identity of its hearers.

Finally, this brief volume reveals the various answers to the question asked by all preachers: “What are the most appropriate responses to the preached word?” Is it the life of Christian freedom in service enjoyed by one who, said Luther, is *semper justificandi*, always under the necessity of being justified? Or is it something else, from somewhere else that has crept into our own preaching? Read these examples and measure your own preaching for the sake of the clarity of the word and the proper application of that same word, for the sake of Christ’s bride and her eternal hope.

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Books Received

Benson, Clarence H. *Biblical Faith*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003. 112 Pages. Paperback. \$10.99.

Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003. 144 Pages. Paper. \$14.99.

Bulgakov, Sergius. *The Friend of the Bridegroom*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 190 Pages. Paper. \$28.00.

Childs, James. M., Jr., editor. *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. 132 Pages. Paperback. \$9.00.

Clark, David K. *To Know and Love God*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003. 464 Pages. Paperback. \$35.00.

Daley, Brian E. *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2003. xiv + 303 Pages. Paper.

Ettinger, Gerard H., translator. *Theodoret of Cyrus*. The Fathers of the Church, Volume 106. Washington, District of Columbia: Catholic University of America Press, 2003. 281 Pages. Cloth.

Geisler, Carol. *A Garment Woven in Victory: Lutheran Comfort in the Resurrection*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003. 106 Pages. Paper. \$11.99.

Graumann, Thomas. *Die Kirche der Väter: Vätertheologie und Väterbeweis in den Kirchen des Ostens bis zum Konzil von Ephesus (431)*. Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 2002. Cloth.

Hoffman, Bengt R. *Theology of the Heart: The Role of Mysticism in the Theology of Martin Luther*. Minneapolis: Kirk House, 1998. 297 Pages. Paper. \$26.00.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 2003. 264 Pages. Hardcover. \$40.00.

Lose, David J. *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. viii + 264 Pages. Paper. \$27.00.

Moore, R. Laurence. *Touchdown Jesus: The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History*. Louisville, Kentucky and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. 195 Pages. Paper.

Morgan, Robert J. *Evidence and Truth*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003. 128 Pages. Paperback. \$10.99.

Østrem, Eyolf, Jens Fleischer, and Nils Holger Petersen, editors. *The Arts and the Cultural Heritage of Martin Luther*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2003. 208 Pages. Paperback. \$20.00.

Scobie, Charles H. H. *The Ways of Our God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 1038 Pages. Paper. \$45.00.

Thomsen, Mark and Vitor Westhelle, editors. *Envisioning a Lutheran Communion: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*. Minneapolis: Kirk House, 2002. 160 Pages. Paper.