
Book Reviews

Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel, by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2008, 224 pp., \$ 22.00.

Herman J. Ridder: Contextual Preacher and President, edited by George Brown, Jr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xv, 461 pp. \$39.00.

The Reformation for Armchair Theologians, by Glenn S. Sunshine, illustrations by Ron Hill, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 247., \$14.95.

The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church, edited by Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 488pp., \$35.00.

Why Would Anyone Believe in God, by Justin L. Barrett, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004. 160pp., \$19.95.

Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel, by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2008, 224 pp., \$ 22.00.

Father, Son and Spirit, is intended to explore the theme of the Trinity and its activity within the Gospel of John. In order to highlight the importance of the Trinity to the structure and character of John's message, the two authors utilize some of the newest and most exciting scholarship regarding Second Temple Judaism and the origins of the church's trinitarian dogma.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part situates John's Trinitarian teaching within the context of Second Temple Jewish monotheism. Here the authors draw upon the recent works of Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham. These two authors have demonstrated in their pioneering studies that Trinitarian theology stands in profound continuity with both Second Temple Judaism and the earliest discernable Christological confessions of the church. Our authors also use the works of A. H. I. Lee and Bauckham to demonstrate that the Trinitarian theology of John is an accurate representation of the self-consciousness of Jesus, of which John is a witness.

Part two describes John's use of the teaching of Jesus and the Old Testament in order to construct his narrative around the unfolding of Triune agency in the event of redemption. The narrative of the Gospel is seen as a revelation of the grace and goodness of the three persons within the drama of the salvific event of the cross and the empty tomb. Triune agency becomes the matrix within which John understands the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church. The church mediates the message of Jesus redemptive act in the power of the Spirit. Similarly, the church mirrors the unity and diversity of the Triune life.

Part three deals with the implications of Triune agency in John's Gospel for the Christian systematic theologian. This section appears primarily to have been written by Swain, who is a systematic theologian. The question is raised as to whether or not the eternal *taxis* of the persons of the Trinity finds its proper expression in the temporal manifestation of Triune persons. Swain believes that eternal *taxis* expresses itself in the *missio Dei* to creation as John portrays it. This means, (following Rahner and Moltmann) that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. This also leads to a greater appreciation of the classical Reformed doctrine of the *pactum salutis* in light of John's Gospel. Even though theologians like Karl Barth have criticized this doctrine for viewing the inner life of the Trinity in a quasi-mythological fashion, Swain believes that the relationship between the persons of the Trinity within John's Gospel gives expression to their covenantal relationship established for the sake of the *missio Dei*.

Overall, this work is a very helpful resource for those wishing to study John's Gospel. It is filled with many fascinating insights into John's doctrine of God and understanding of Triune agency.

Herman J. Ridder: Contextual Preacher and President, edited by George Brown, Jr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xv, 461 pp. \$39.00.

Herman “Bud” Ridder was indeed a “knight” in the Reformed Church in the second half of the twentieth century. A denominational executive, seminary president, pastor and preacher, he embodied the spirit of the RCA during this period. This volume includes not only a sketch of his life, but an important essay by Norman J. Kansfield on Ridder’s presidency of the Reformed church seminaries and an essay on preaching from Ridder’s former colleague, George Brown, Jr.

The majority of the volume, however, consists of Ridder’s sermons, most of which were preached at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. “Engagement” was an important notion for Ridder and these sermons are fine specimens of the sermon as engaging the congregation in its context. In fact, Ridder initiated the practice of sending sermon manuscripts to congregants *prior* to their delivery, thereby deepening the engagement between preacher and congregation.

Although good, these sermons were nevertheless preached in a particular context. For that reason, the contemporary reader may not be as engaged. They do, however, offer a glimpse of a particular era in the Reformed church in both style and content. Here are a couple observations from this reader.

First, the content of most sermons reflects the soteriological tone of a church that emerged from the context of both Dutch pietism of the second immigration and the evangelical heritage of American Christianity. The sermons expand from a narrow pietism on the one hand, and no longer follow either an older dogmatic nor expository style on the other. One imagines them as liberating and inviting for the congregations that heard them. Nonetheless, with few exceptions, the topics have to do with personal faith engagement, and in the best sense, they can be read as pastoral. It is not that they do not sometimes engage public events, or that they are not courageous when they do. Such is not, however, the main theme of the sermons.

Second, the sermons live within the context of Scripture, but do not engage in Scriptural interpretation for the congregation. One can correctly assume that the congregations to whom Ridder preached were well-versed in Scripture’s story. Thus the sermons reflect an age that we have just passed. It is difficult to imagine such sermons in the context of the early twenty-first century when congregations need once again to be constituted, challenged, and inspired by the “strange new world of the Bible.”

For those who knew Bud as pastor, mentor or friend, this book will evoke important memories. For preachers, the book will provide material for “how he did it.” And for historians and theologians, it offers a view of Reformed life and thought as it found its way through the turbulent years that followed post-war normalcy.

– Allan Janssen

The Reformation for Armchair Theologians, by Glenn S. Sunshine, illustrations by Ron Hill, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 247., \$14.95.

The Reformation for Armchair Theologians, by Glenn Sunshine, is one in a relatively new series of short cartoon illustrated works from Westminster John Knox Press on the history of Christianity. The intent of this series is to give brief overviews of major topics in church history for laypeople. Previous works in the series have focused primarily on major theologians (notably Luther, Aquinas, Calvin, and Wesley). Therefore this volume represents a break with previously published volumes in that our author focuses on a period of church history and not on an individual thinker. This break is deepened by the fact that Sunshine makes the driving force of his narrative the need for certain political, ecclesiastical, and social reforms between the mid-fifteenth century and the thirty years war. Nevertheless, the views of individual theologians are not totally excluded from the story; rather, they are merely deemphasized in favor of a description of political conflicts.

Though intended to be a light overview of the period, the book itself is full of useful information about how the Reformation really unfolded as a social and political movement. Unlike many introductory texts books, Sunshine does not just give us a series of unrelated facts, but rather delineates clear causal connections between various situations, persons, and events. The book is also very easy to read and clearly written in a conversational style without being overly informal.

This text would serve well within the context of an adult education or introductory college course on the Reformation. It will be particularly useful to Reformed pastors and university professors in these settings. The book gives a strong impression of being written from a Reformed point of view. This can be most strongly felt in its implicit criticism of Luther and the Lutheran Church and its overall focus on Calvin and the southern German Reformers the expense of the Wittenberg Reformers. Therefore, as an introduction to history of the Reformation, this is an excellent work and is highly recommended to Reformed pastors and laypeople alike.

– Jack Kilcrease

The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church, edited by Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 488pp., \$35.00.

Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner's anthology weaves together thirty essays written by twenty-seven leading scholars from various theological disciplines, offering a plethora of paradigms of evangelism. Dividing the essays into six parts, editors provide a short but very helpful introduction to each section. These illuminating introductions not only provide previews to the chapters in each part but also skillfully stitch together essays which otherwise are only loosely connected to each other.

Definitions of evangelism offered in the first part identify different dimensions of the practice and attest to its complexity and richness. In the second section, authors probe the biblical basis for the practice of evangelism and analyze how its perceptions and practices are shaped by culture. The third part examines the relationship of evangelism with the study of theology and themes, such as Christology, soteriology, and worship. The fourth section locates the practice of evangelism in relation to other ecclesial practices, such as catechesis and pastoral care. The fifth part surveys how different confessional families – Orthodox, Pentecostal, Catholic, Evangelical, and Ecumenical – perceive and practice evangelism. Calling for paradigms of evangelism that are culture-sensitive and yet prophetic, the authors in the final section illustrate how evangelism can be interpreted and practiced in Asia, Latin America, Africa, as well as in the North Atlantic region. The “afterword” brings into the conversation the voices of women, immigrants, and ethnic minorities. It argues that liberation, social justice, and hospitality are inextricably linked to evangelism.

Although the authors differ in their stances toward the tasks of mission – proclamation of the gospel, inviting persons to Christ, disciple-making, witness to God's Reign, and welcoming God's merciful justice – they recognize evangelism as an integral ecclesial practice. They agree that the *evangel* is holistic and multi-faceted. The editors have done a commendable job in compiling these rich resources that are scattered in as many as fifteen journals and four monographs, written over the last thirty-five years and originating from five continents. It is like a melody made out of discordant voices sung on different notes and to varying audiences. Teachers, students, and practitioners of the science and practice of evangelism will find it very helpful.

–James Elisha Taneti

Why Would Anyone Believe in God, by Justin L. Barrett, Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2004. 160pp., \$19.95.

Justin Barrett's book is written to a wide audience of both believers and atheists. He presents his arguments from a scientific standpoint, with conclusions drawn from

extensive research on the psychology of belief. But while his expertise is psychology, Barrett writes like a philosopher in the formulation of arguments, even using Turabian-style citations instead of the APA-style typically used for psychology. The entire seventh chapter is dedicated to “God and other minds,” a classic philosophy of religion argument explaining how belief in God is truly rational belief. The book is properly psychology for philosophers of religion.

Barrett makes no assumptions about the faith of his readers. He spends a good deal of time establishing the process by which human beings form beliefs, supporting his claims with an impressive body of research. While sympathetic with the arguments of atheists, however, his conclusions are definitively on the side of theism. The final sentence of the book sums up his approach well: “Why would anybody believe in God? The design of our minds leads us to believe” (124). The structure and normal functioning of the human mind naturally forms belief in a super-powerful, supernatural God. More specifically, Barrett argues that human minds have the simplest time forming belief in the sort of God found in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three faith traditions hold ideas of the divine that are compatible with the way young children form beliefs about other people. Believing in the theistic God of Abraham readily forms in young minds, requires little effort, and achieves longevity from an early foothold. If they are not placed in an environment with specific influences that counteract these impulses toward faith, people are naturally inclined to believe in God.

In the eighth chapter, Barrett lists those environmental factors that best counteract the mind’s natural inclination toward belief in God. If you are an atheist who wants your children not to fall under the spell of believing in God, there are good tips for helping you choose where to locate. As a pastor, I also appreciated the fifth chapter, where the author explains how certain activities and elements in worship services help strengthen belief in God. Overall, the most remarkable feature about the book is not the conclusion that human minds are designed to believe in God. (This notion can be found in John Calvin and in contemporary philosophers of religion.) What is remarkable about Barrett’s book is the way he supports this conclusion with extensive psychological research.

— Aaron Vriesman