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Resource Reviews

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Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith, by Shane Hipps. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2009. 198 pp. \$16.99; ISBN 978-0-310-29321-7.

Reviewed by Terri L. Bogan, Reference & Instruction Librarian, Hope International University, Fullerton, CA

Shane Hipps is currently a Teaching Pastor at Mars Hill Bible Church and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. Hipps was formerly a strategic planner in advertising and worked for several years on the communications strategy for Porsche Cars North America. Experience in advertising contributed to Hipps' understanding of the media/culture relationship and resulted in the writing of two books on the topic. *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture* (2006) is aimed at people in church leadership. *Flickering Pixels* (2009) "appl[ies] insights about media and technology to some of the basic issues of ... faith and life."

The author states that "Christianity is fundamentally a communication event" and with this focus he goes on to explore the hidden power of media and technology and its influence on the communication of God's message. By claiming that the medium is indeed the message, he challenges the idea that the methods change but the message stays the same. Method affects the message, thereby allowing media and technology to subtly (or not so subtly) shape us and our faith.

The author does not present the reader with a moral judgment of media and technology, but does point out that we should think about these ever present influences on our lives. Media and technology might inevitably affect us, but the outcome of that influence does not have to be inevitable. By having an "intentional relationship to our technologies," by studying and understanding them, we minimize their power over us.

People with an interest in the religious aspects of media and technology as well as those libraries that support curriculum in these areas would find this book to be a welcome addition to the collection. End notes and a list of resources round out the academic usefulness of *Flickering Pixels*.

Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ, by Eugene H. Peterson. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2010. 290 pp. \$24.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-2955-9.

Reviewed by Steven Paschold, Research Services Librarian, John Brown University, Siloam Springs, AR

Eugene Peterson, pastor, professor, and prolific author, perhaps best known for his contemporary Bible paraphrase *The Message*, now presents the fifth and final book in his "Conversations" series on spiritual theology. Taking his title from a poem by Wendell Berry, Peterson brings the series to a meaningful and helpful close, as he discusses how "practicing resurrection" means maturing in the Christian life, "growing up in Christ." As in the previous volumes, the style and tone of the book suggest that Peterson seeks to enter into "conversation" with the reader, relating scriptural exegesis and theology to spiritual formation, and he succeeds in his aim of writing a guide to practical Christian living.

In the discussion of maturity, Peterson uses the Book of Ephesians as his primary text, and in fact the single Library of Congress subject heading assigned to the book denotes it as a commentary on Ephesians. Although it does cover virtually all of Ephesians, the book is, nevertheless, much more than a commentary. Peterson has the pleasing ability to introduce themes, and then to rework and embellish those themes in later sections and chapters. In addition to the resurrection motif, the book deals with the role of the community in ordinary church life, the relation of grace to works, and the calling of God, themes that Peterson develops as he encourages his readers to grow up in Christ. As in earlier books, Peterson delights in his explication of metaphor as found in scripture and literature.

For the academic library, *Practice Resurrection* is a worthy addition to the Eugene Peterson canon, and is especially recommended for libraries that hold the previous four volumes in the "Conversations" spiritual theology series.

I Told Me So: Self-deception and the Christian Life, by Gregg A. Ten Elshof. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009. 142 pp. \$15.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-6411-6.

Reviewed by Amy C. Rice, Coordinator of Technical Services & Systems, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA

All people have deceived themselves at one point or another, and if they deny it, they are deceiving themselves right at this moment. Gregg Ten Elshof describes the often complex system of self deception and its many manifestations. For the operation to truly be successful, the self deception has to be such that, on some level, the person should not know that it is happening. Ten Elshof asserts that self deception is such a prevalent problem precisely because it has been given more importance than is due. People go to great lengths to prove they are not deceiving themselves because self deception is the opposite of authenticity, the virtue to self deception's vice. Therefore, in denying that one is employing deception, that person is already creating another instance of self deception.

Humans are designed with the capability to deceive themselves using many different methods: perspective switching, attention management, and procrastination, and others. In addition to describing the undue negative attention self deception receives, Ten Elshof spends a portion of *I Told Me So* discussing the ways in which self deception can actually be a force for good. Perspective switching, for example, can either be used by a person to justify his or her wrong actions, or it may be employed by a person seeking to empathize with another, which requires seeing the other person's view of the world, no matter how mistaken or skewed it is. Ten Elshof concludes by listing three things a person should try to avoid, now that he or she has this new insight into self deception: hyper-authenticity; focusing on others' faults rather than our own; and succumbing to self doubt. *I Told Me So* is part philosophy and part self help, grounded by scripture and may be well used in a public or academic library.

A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go by William a. Dyrness Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2009. 154 pps. 978-0-8028-6038-5, \$18.00.

Reviewed by Donald Dean Smeeton, Retired.

Fuller Theological Seminary's William Dyrness has added to his earlier publication, *Senses of the Soul: Art and the Visual in Christian Worship*, by the release of this broader survey of the fundamental issues of Christian worship. Given the various definitions of worship and the emotion generated by the recent "worship wars," his irenic tone and broad understanding of various traditions allow readers to benefit from his insights without being offended by dogmatic evaluations of any given form. He by-passes the "personal piety" versus "public performance" debates by defining worship as a corporate expression of repentance, reconciliation, thanksgiving and praise.

Using a historical survey, Dyrness reviews how worship has evolved through the centuries, sometime by sensible transitions and sometimes by over reactions, often gaining new understandings and often losing earlier elements. In spite of the breath of this historical progression, Dyrness identifies and affirms the commonalities that should unite the faithful in worship rather than divide them. Rather than affirming a particular form or forms of worship, Dyrness invites his readers to think theologically about worship, to appreciate the various traditions and to benefit from the experience. He gives background and assessment, then offers questions for further thought and conversation. In fact, each chapter ends with a list of discussion questions that invites both further thought and application. The text has minimal documentation and lacks an index, but could be the foundation for thoughtful, theological and practical discussions about making our corporate worship experience meaningful for everyone. Recommended as an introductory text for undergraduates or adult Sunday School class.

The Myth of a Christian Religion: Losing Your Religion for the Beauty of a Revolution, by Gregory A. Boyd. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2009. 223 pp. \$19.99. ISBN 978-0-310-28383-6.

Reviewed by Donald Dean Smeeton, Retired.

Some consider Gregory A. Boyd to be prophetic; other say he is simply pathetic. In either case, he is provocative, maybe even polarizing.

The work reviewed here is a sequel to the author's *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church* (Zondervan, 2005) in which Boyd affirms that the Kingdom of God mirrors Jesus, not a political agenda, party or nationality. In his earlier work, he uses historical examples to show that attempts to identify America as a Christian nation (or any prescribed set of political issues) have done the Kingdom more harm than good. This is a hard message for many Americans who fail to distinguish between God's Kingdom and one's country. This message alienated about one quarter of the congregation of Boyd's Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, MN.

Continuing from where *The Myth of a Christian Nation* ends, Greg Boyd extends his critique of Christianity by warning against the danger of confusing religion with a relationship. He invites his readers to join in a beautiful revolution against all forms of idolatry (wanting one's own way), judgment (criticizing others), individualism (a basic American value), nationalism (nationalistic idolatry), violence (justified since Augustine by the "just" war theory), social oppression (classifying people by any standard other than God's), racism (unconscious institutionalized privilege) abuse of creation, secularism and so on. This book, however, is not a mere jeremiad. It is an appeal for a radical life of love, servanthood, non-violence and humility – in short, a life like Jesus led. Boyd addresses the pervasive social issues of the day and calls on those who claim to be "in Christ" truly to be part of the "Giant Jesus." Christians, he says, should lead "outrageously impractical" lives characterized by washing the feet of those who are unloving – even those who seek to do harm. Unfortunately, Christianity as a religion has adopted worldly means to achieve godly ends. Power – personal, institutional, political – does not make right; in fact, it always makes wrong. The alternative proposed by Boyd is not passivity but an active Christ-like life that is a counter-cultural revolution against religion. It is a hard message – provocative, but hard.

Like the prequel, this book has a study guide located at the back of the book that invites the reader to unpack and apply the principles of each chapter. The questions could be posed to oneself, but could also be an effective conversation starter for a small group or adult Sunday School Class. One would have to know the group well lest members prove Boyd's point by allowing their religion to ruin their relationship with others and, thereby, with God.

The Attentive Life: Discovering God's Presence in All Things, by Leighton Ford. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press Books, 2008. 225 pp. \$18.00. ISBN 978-0-8308-3516-4

Reviewed by Amy VanHuisen, Fort Wayne, IN

"This book is about attentiveness, not simply as a path to self-fulfillment but as the very essence of our journey to the Center – as the way home to our own heart, the way of making our heart a home for God." (p. 12) With that stated goal, Leighton Ford (Leighton Ford Ministries, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) has written a partly biographical, partly devotional, partly theological work that invites readers to "explore ... attentiveness as a special lens through which to look at our lives." (p.13)

The books' structure parallels the classical Benedictine prayer "hours". Within that framework, Ford defines each particular hour in its classic sense, then goes on to draw meaning, illustration, and application from Scripture and life, much of the latter his own. Liberally sprinkled throughout the text, and adding a haunting quality to it, are poems and prayers spanning a wide swath of history. Each chapter ends with a brief biographical sketch or anecdote of "One Who Paid Attention"; C.S. Lewis, Mother Teresa, and Henri Nouwen walk into the spotlight of these sections along with lesser-known but no-less-significant pilgrims.

If a reader picks up this book expecting to read the Billy Graham evangelist version of Leighton Ford, he will likely be disappointed, perhaps even shocked. Think of watching an artist pouring out his soul and passion as he paints before his easel day after day. At times one would not know whether to look away from such an intimate act or to linger in a long depths-plumbing gaze as the masterpiece rises from the canvas. A reader might well find such ambiguity of spirit in reading this book. Ford has made himself completely vulnerable as he recounts what amounts to almost a rebirth of his spiritual life. Some readers may find the mysticism of his experience a bit off-putting; others will be refreshed and quite possibly overwhelmed.

The Attentive Life lacks an index but the end notes, though not extensive, are thorough where they need to be and will lead a serious reader to solid sources and seminal resources. Most Scriptures quoted in the text are given with references. At first blush, this volume would be an excellent addition to a church or personal library. A closer look highlights meatier substance that would give it a deserved place in a college library collections as well. It would definitely provide a fresh look for evangelicals seeking insight on the topic of prayer or spiritual formation.

The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World, by Jacqueline Novogratz. New York, Rodale, 2009. (9781594869150)

Reviewed by Brad Doerksen, Library Director, Briercreech College and Seminary, Caronport, Saskatchewan, Canada.

How can those in the wealthy industrialized world provide effective and sustainable assistance to those in the developing world? This is the question that Jacqueline Novogratz seeks to answer in *The Blue Sweater*. She does so in the form of autobiography. However, while her own story makes for an engaging narrative that keeps the reader interested and turning pages, it's much more than just an account of her life and adventures, primarily in Africa. She uses her story of failures and successes to illustrate her argument for how the developed world can and should offer respectful and sustainable help to those in the developing world. Rather than continue with traditional models of foreign aid, she argues for what she terms "patient capital," which can take a number of forms including microfinance and grants/loans to "social entrepreneurs." Along the way the reader meets some amazing and resilient people, culture shock, poisonings, failed foreign aid projects, the Rwandan genocide, and whole villages transformed through simple projects based not on handouts, but "patient capital" and market forces.

The book deals with issues from a big picture perspective and is written by someone who runs a large and relatively well funded philanthropic organization, so the reader shouldn't expect a how-to guide of small and simple hands-on ideas that the average North American can do at home to make a difference around the globe. The book will be helpful to those wrestling through questions of policy for foreign aid and philanthropy or writing papers on the topic of socio-economic justice. It will also be helpful to general readers looking for a book to challenge their thinking about these topics.

Is There a Meaning in this Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge, by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2009. Anniversary ed. (Landmarks in Christian Scholarship) 496 pp. \$29.99 9780310324690

Reviewed by: Grace Veach, Dean of Library Services, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL.

Kevin Vanhoozer, Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, has written here a landmark volume in contemporary hermeneutics. Although many authors of hermeneutics texts may be tempted to ignore recent developments in literary theory and literary hermeneutics, Vanhoozer engages figures such as Jacques Derrida and Stanley Fish full-on. This book, a revision of the 1998 edition, takes on deconstruction, reader response, and new historicism as it weaves a complex theory of Trinitarian hermeneutics. Vanhoozer first explains these movements in language that is fully understandable for the engaged layperson, giving theorists credit for insightful ideas as well as pointing out where their reasoning falters. The second half of the book lays out Vanhoozer's own hermeneutic, which owes a debt to Levinas' respect for the other. By acknowledging the author's intent to instill meaning into the text, the reader is enabled to encounter the text respectfully; while no reading will achieve a perfect interpretation, adequate interpretation is not only possible, but achievable under the circumstances Vanhoozer describes. While Vanhoozer spends some time on general hermeneutics, his real focus is biblical hermeneutics. Although he writes from a Reformed perspective, there is a definite Pentecostal influence as he introduces the assistance of the Holy Spirit into the Christian reader's encounter with Scripture. Vanhoozer's writing style is clear and easy to follow, unlike many of the critics he references. *The Validity of Interpretation* by E. D. Hirsch and *Is there a Text in this Class?* by Stanley Fish are the two texts which Vanhoozer interacts with the most. While familiarity with them will make the ideas in this book easier to apprehend, the reader needs no qualifications other than the willingness to spend many hours grappling with the questions of interpretation in the postmodern age to enjoy this book.

Baptists in Israel: The Letters of Paul and Marjorie Rowden, 1952-1957, by Rebecca Rowden. Nashville: Fields Publishing, Inc., 2010. 424 p. ISBN 978-1-57843-075-8.

Reviewed by W. Terry Martin, Director of Library and Professor of Library Services, Louisiana College, Pineville, LA

Baptists in Israel: The Letters of Paul and Marjorie Rowden, 1952-1957 arrives just in time for the 100th anniversary of Baptists in Palestine/Israel. A ministry that in 1920 became a part of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (now the International Mission Board, SBC). The author and her family spent the years 1952-1957 as missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention serving in several towns including Haifa and Nazareth. The letters included in this volume tell of the experiences the family had during those years. The years 1952-1957 was a time in which the newly formed country of Israel was defining itself as a nation and defending its right to be a sovereign country.

The story of the Paul and Marjorie Rowden's ministry and family is told through selected letters they wrote to family and research done by their oldest child Rebecca. The letters reveal the joys and heartaches the family experienced as they left their home in Georgia, and began a ministry in Israel. They tell of Hebrew lessons, new friends, war, daily life and death. Added to the details in their letters is the background research done by the author to explain the historical setting in which the Rowdens lived and worked. The book is obviously a project produced by the love of a daughter for her parents and a desire to make known the story of work done by many others. The book is well written and documented for historical accuracy.

This book is not just another chapter in the on-going work of Southern Baptists in Israel, but it is also the story of many individuals beyond the Rowden family including other Christian missionaries, Jews, and Arabs. Individuals reading this book should be inspired by the faith of these missionaries working in the new country of Israel. I recommend it for personal, church, school, and academic libraries.

This reviewer must acknowledge that because of personal connections with the author of this book, we were members of the same college graduation class, her sister, and several former missionaries to Israel, Jordan, and the Gaza Strip the

reading of this book became extremely personal. Even if I had been first introduced to the people in this book by having read it I know, without a doubt, it is still a work worthy reading. It is a story of what ordinary people can accomplish when they follow God's will in their lives.

Watch Over Me: A Novel, by Christa Parrish. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009. 349 pp. \$13.99. ISBN 978-0-7642-0554-5.

Reviewed by Amy C. Rice, Coordinator of Technical Services & Systems, Whitworth University, Spokane, WA

Watch Over Me opens on Deputy Ben Patil as he responds to a call by local teenagers who stumble upon an abandoned newborn. While he investigates the abandonment and awaits a permanent home for the baby, he takes the baby home to his wife, Abbi, who is not particularly pleased about the task. Ben and Abbi are barely on speaking terms, and the presence of the baby (named Silvia) sometimes forces them to deal with their marital issues. As they care for Silvia together, Abbi and Ben slowly begin to repair their relationship, but they know that she is not their baby, and they will not be able to hold on to her forever.

In another part of town, Matthew Savoie lives with his aunt and cousins, and he tries valiantly to ensure his cousins stay out of trouble, something he admits is an uphill battle. He is tentatively embarking on his first romantic relationship, one of his main sources of comfort in his otherwise bleak life. Matthew agrees to help Abbi with some household chores because he is saving for a trip to visit his heretofore unknown father to ask for a kidney.

Christina Parrish has created fully-drawn, realistic characters in a believable setting. Though the characters are dealing with some serious problems, the overall tone of the novel is one of beautiful redemption. Some hardships are the result of poor choices; others are not. Ben, Abbi, and Matthew learn to rely on each other, and on their friends and family, to help them through what is happening in their lives. Watching the characters as they learn to trust and to express their love to each other and to God really sets this novel apart from others in its class. Appropriate for libraries that have a popular fiction collection.

Worship Africa I and II [DVD]. Worchester, PA: Distribution by Vision Video. 2008. \$19.99 each. 43 and 40 min. respectively. . www.visionvideo.com.

Reviewed by Donald Dean Smeeton, Retired

Contemporary worship songs are combined with video clips of African landscapes and animal life in this set of DVDs. With the possible exception of *Jabulani Africa*, all of the songs are all of western origin and will be familiar to those whose worship is “contemporary” rather than “traditional.” The songs include, for example, “I Love You, Lord,” “He Reigns,” “Morning into Dancing,” “Open the Eyes of My Heart” and “Let Your Glory Fall.”

Accompanying the music, the visuals capture stunningly beautiful landscapes, seascapes, horizons, cloud movements, rainbows and sunsets. (Oh, the splendor of an African sunset!) The variety of African fauna and flora are illustrated by wildlife ranging from the jungle, the veldt, the seashore and even under water. The springbok and the spider, the humming bird and the hippo, the gnu and the giraffe are all present along with a host of unnamed birds and insects. What does one say about a herd of wildebeest, a pride of lions, a pod of dolphins or an endless field of wildflowers except “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High”? How does one respond to a mother lion lounging with her cub except “Great is the Lord”? An elephant gives himself a mud bath and leopard leisurely licks herself clean. The calf follows her mom, the bee extracts nectar and the rapture glides down to its next meal. “What a Faithful God Have I.” Each DVD comes with a complimentary CD of the music.

The cinematography ranges from panning mountains from their base to aerial flyovers, from wide angle landscapes to close-up so intimate that one can see the gnats on the lion’s face. Some were shot through filters; other captured the contrast of natural color. Some scenes are repeated but not within the same song. There is a menu option for English subtitles with large easy to read lyrics so an individual or congregation can sing-a-long or simply listen to the instrumentation of each song. The impression, however, is that Africa is simply wildlife with only the occasional rusting hulk of a ship or a few African huts. On these videos, one will

see more lions than most Africans will see in their lifetime. These resources are about American worship, not African music. There is an obvious disconnect between the African wildlife and the western hymnody but maybe it works for those who have never worshiped by dancing to an African beat of the shakere (gourds with beads), the traditional bala (xylophone) and kwela (tin whistle).

Of course, these choruses are sung in some congregations in Africa, but if one wants to really understand the place of African music in African life, one might select *Throw Down Your Heart* that traces the journey of Bela Fleck with a banjo – associated with Appalachian bluegrass – through Uganda, Tanzania, Gambia and Mali that takes the instrument back to its African roots. Here one can see indigenous music created on indigenous instruments expressed from African hearts. African music is not about lions, its about life.

INTERESTED IN REVIEWING A TITLE?

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