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Resource Reviews

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The Devil Reads Derrida: and Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts by James K.A. Smith. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 163 pp. \$18.00. 978-0-8028-6407-9.

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

James K.A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, is rapidly becoming a leading evangelical voice to the church in postmodern times. Some of his previous works have explored postmodern theory, formulated an evangelical hermeneutic, and questioned the relation of Christianity and culture. A collection of 29 essays ranging from two to ten pages in length, Smith's newest book, *The Devil Reads Derrida: and Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts* addresses these issues and more. Grouped into four sections dealing with discipleship, the university, politics, and criticism, the essays in the book have all been previously published and bear the signs of topical origins. Although the book has no overarching theme or continuous line of reasoning, Smith attempts to bring a unity of purpose to the essays; he sees his vocation as bridging the gap between Christian academics and average evangelical churchgoers. Smith bridges other gaps (i.e. Calvinism and Pentecostalism, the progressive Christian Left and the conservative Christian Right) as well. One of the strengths of this book, then, is to illustrate various possibilities for abandonment of either/or thinking in favor of both/and, or at least a third choice which avoids characteristic errors of extremism. Originally published in publications ranging from scholarly journals to the Calvin College student newspaper, the essays' diversity in occasions, audiences, and topics addressed leads to further unevenness. Although *The Devil Reads Derrida* contains some condescension and some unevenness in tone, it also exemplifies some very good thinking – though not enough sustained reasoning to satisfy the reader who would like to consider a topic in more depth. This book would be useful as an introduction to Christian cultural criticism, but be sure you don't neglect Smith's other books to buy this one.

Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ, edited by Paul Pettit. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008. 317 pp. \$22.99 978-08254-3469-3.

Reviewed by Garrett Trott, Instruction-Reference Librarian, Corban College & Graduate School, Salem, OR

The post-Christian individualistic culture often starves for a sense of community. Pettit's book, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation* lays biblical ground work on how community can be developed and practiced.

Community is reclaiming its importance, as it rightly should, in many Christian churches. This book argues that in doing so, the church is not simply following the flow of culture, but it is responding to a cultural need with a biblical concept. This book provides a firm biblical foundation on which these ideas should rest and also provides examples of what these concepts look like in practice.

Foundations of Spiritual Formation has two sections. The first section lays a biblical framework for spiritual formation. There are four chapters in this section, each touching upon how growth, worship, and community are foundational elements for a Christian to become Christ-like. The authors argue that without this framework a Christ-like community cannot be developed. These chapters provide an excellent analysis of the modern concept of community through the eyes of Scripture.

The second section discusses some practical elements of spiritual formation, giving examples of how this has been and can be accomplished. These chapters put the scriptural principles discussed in the first part of this book into practice.

Each chapter of *Foundations of Spiritual Formation* is authored separately. There are several reasons that books have separate authors for the separate chapters, one of those reasons is diversity. It is unfortunate however that more than half of the contributors of this book have affiliations with Dallas Theological Seminary, including the editor. This does not necessarily dampen the value of this book, however, it may have been interesting to see how other theological traditions handle the issues of spiritual formation and the development of Christian community.

In spite of this weakness, this book would be a good purchase for any library of an institute of Christian higher education. Community is a popular topic in today's church. Several books have been written about it and there will likely be several more. Where this book attempts to differ from many is that it does not simply talk about community, or give examples of how it should be done, but it lays the biblical framework in which community should be practiced and taught in the 21st century church.

Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to our Understanding of Christ, by Alec Motyer. Grand Rapids: Kregel. 2005. 255 pp. \$14.00. ISBN 0-8254-3169-7.

Reviewed by Sharon Hinton RN, MSN, FCN, Librarian, First United Methodist Church and RNR Parish Nurse Community Outreach, Floydada, TX

Alex Motyer is a retired pastor and former principal of Trinity College in Bristol England. This text is based on Isaiah 51:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:4. Both emphasize the Old Testament theology that Christ was and is the Rock. Motyer took the message of the scriptures and a five lecture series entitled “The Old Testament and our Understanding of Christ” to explore how both testaments point to the glory of Jesus Christ. Chapters include Christ as fulfillment, Christ as climax, Christ as revelation, Christ our life, and Christ our hope. Chapters are divided into short sections. The theology is intense, but understandable. The reader is encouraged to contemplate not only scripture theme, but also how the words of the Bible blend into one unified theme: Jesus Christ. This book is appropriate for clergy, congregational and academic libraries for theological studies as well as Christology.

Blood and Fire: Godly Love In a Pentecostal Emerging Church, by Margaret M. Poloma and Ralph W. Hood, Jr. New York: New York University Press, 2008. 256 pp. \$42.00. ISBN: 978-0-8147-6748-1.

Reviewed by Roderick T. Leupp, Adjunct, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

The Blood n Fire ministry started as an outreach to the poor in downtown Atlanta and eventually came to have a worldwide presence and scope. Blood n Fire was founded by David VonCronkhite, who unknowingly lifted the name of his organization from the motto of the Salvation Army. VonCronkhite had himself come forth from the Vineyard Church of John Wimber.

This short book applies the tools and techniques of the sociology of religion to Blood n Fire. Among Margaret Poloma’s previous work is a monograph about the Assemblies of God. Hence she has some familiarity with the signs and wonders approach to the Christian witness.

The most interesting part of this book is the various testimonies collected by the researchers. Anecdotally, these reveal that some lives were changed by the various training programs of Blood n Fire, although one is left to wonder about the permanence of the change. The testimonies also

recount, and to some degree clarify, the tensions between David the visionary leader and the overseeing board of directors. Ultimately, this led to schism. The first version of Blood n Fire lasted for 14 years, ending in June of 2004. A more modest version of this ministry exists to this day.

Pitirim Sorokin’s work *The Ways and Power of Love* is the authors’ chief resource when it comes to analyzing the dynamics of love at Blood n Fire. It may seem uncharitable to fault sociologists for not knowing theological literature, but engaging with such classics as *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis, and *Agape and Eros*, Anders Nygren, would deepen a work that lacks profundity, if not purpose.

Two comments are appropriate in closing. For one, the “methodological agnosticism” of the researchers, who used a variety of research strategies including both the qualitative and the quantitative, means there is no “pentecostal fervor” to this book, in spite of narratives about speaking in tongues. Second, for many readers David will come across as a grandiose hypocrite. While he was “passionate” about the poor, they almost never exerted real power in the ministry. They remained voiceless. David kept them at arm’s length. This book is clinical and antiseptic, not pulsing and living.

The Moral Teachings of Paul: Selected Issues, by Victor Paul Furnish. 3rd edition. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009. 172 pp. \$17.00. 978-0-687-33293-9.

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

Victor Paul Furnish is University Distinguished Professor, Emeritus, of New Testament at Southern Methodist University. The author provides the reader a truly new edition with his latest revision of his book. In the 3rd edition chapters 2, 3, and 4 are substantially rewritten and chapter 5 is entirely new. Although a bit shorter, than previous editions, chapter 1 is altered to include more extensive comments on differences that exist between Paul’s world and the present. True to his desire to provide the reader with an updated view of current scholarship the author has updated and expanded the section in each chapter entitled, “For Further Reading.”

The “Index of References” is more than three times the size of its counter-part in the first edition and includes references to Scripture as well as other ancient writings from Greek and Latin works.

Even though the reader is never in doubt that this is a scholarly work, it is written in a language and style that should appeal

to the scholar and the laity. The author progressively builds his case in providing the reader with valid evidence to prove his conclusions.

Some conservative readers may be offended with the author's statement on page 15, "To accept the Bible as in some way "inspired" does not require us to think of it as infallible ..." A careful reading of the book shows the author has the utmost respect of the Scripture and Paul's ministry. It must also be noted that the author does not accept as works of Paul 1-2 Timothy and Titus, choosing instead to attribute them to an anonymous Christian writer of the late first or second century.

The Moral Teachings of Paul is recommended for academic, church, and personal libraries. Ministers, students, and academics will find the book useful in understanding Paul, the world in which he lived and the relevance of the apostle's moral teachings in today's world.

Prophets of the Bible, by David Boersma. Bloomington: Xlibris, 2008. 386 pp. \$19.99 9781425738488.

Reviewed by Garrett Trott, Instruction-Reference Librarian, Corban College & Graduate School, Salem, OR

Prophets of the Bible provides a compendium of Scripture's teaching on prophecy and prophets. The author notes in the introduction that this book is not intended to be used as a book that is read from cover to cover. It is intended to be a reference tool for information about the biblical concept of prophecy.

The first chapter is a compilation of the Bible's direct teachings about prophecy. "Care is taken in chapter 1 to extract from the Bible only what it plainly says about prophecy, not to elaborate or develop a doctrine" (p. 13). The second chapter extracts what the Bible explicitly teaches about prophets.

Chapters three, four, and five comprise the majority of Boersma's book. Chapter three presents the 176 named prophets and prophesiers who are in the Bible. Chapter four touches on the anonymous prophets. Chapter five discusses false prophets.

The last two chapters of Boersma's book, six and seven, discuss musical prophecy and the historical progression of prophecy. Boersma states that these two chapters were not originally planned. Both of these topics arrived as a result of his study of biblical prophets and prophecy.

This book is unique. While there are resources that list the biblical prophets, give definitions, and define biblical prophecy, resources that compile these discussions in a single volume are few and far between. Unfortunately, in spite of the author's unique contribution, this book does have several limitations.

David Boersma has no formal theological or biblical training (p. 9). He has degrees in chemical engineering and business management. While this in and of itself should not detour someone from composing a book like this, his lack of formal education in this area and his very limited reference to scholarly resources makes an individual question the quality of Boersma's work. While it is true that Scripture does teach a lot about prophecy, it is careless to avoid the work of scholars, particularly evangelical scholars, who have poured their lives into understanding prophecy and the prophets.

A second component that weakens Boersma's book is the publisher. It was published by Xlibris. Xlibris is a print-on-demand publisher. An individual can pay a fee and Xlibris will publish a title and as many copies that one can afford. If it had been published by another publisher, such as Eerdmans or Zondervan, it would at least have a bit of endorsement to its value.

Boersma's work does have value. It may have value to the layman who is simply interested in biblical prophets and prophecy. However, for those doing research on a particular prophet or an aspect of biblical prophecy, this book has limited value. Because of this, in my opinion, an institute of higher education should exercise caution in purchasing this title.

The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology, by William C. Placher. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007. 163 pp. \$24.95 9780664230609.

Reviewed by Garrett Trott, Instruction-Reference Librarian, Corban College & Graduate School, Salem, OR

Idolatry. With the mention of this word, an image of a golden calf often comes to one's mind; rarely does one think about the trinity. In his book, *The Triune God*, William Placher argues that when one attempts to describe God, and particularly God's triune nature, idolatry often results.

In Placher's definition, idolatry occurs when someone lowers the character and nature of God to a concept that one can completely understand. He argues that "anything whose existence we can prove would not be God, but some sort of idol" (p.1).

This serves as an interesting opening for a book that is attempting to bring traditional Trinitarian thought to a more understandable level. Although this introduction suggests that Placher is laying grounds for contradictions, he does a commendable job of bringing the concept of a triune God to an understandable notion.

The author argues that when one attempts to understand God wholly and completely, heresy often results: Arianism being a classical example (pp. 124–125). When Arius stated that Christ was a lesser being and not equal to God, the danger this position took was not just in denying Christ's full divinity; but by making this statement, Arianism began taking the first steps to polytheism. He argues that if Arianism had not been counteracted by the Council of Nicea, the doors of many competing religions would have burst open and Christianity would have lost its exclusivity in the Greco-Roman world.

For under two-hundred pages, Placher does a commendable job of communicating such a complicated doctrine that carries a great deal of historical baggage. In this book, Placher accomplishes his purpose: to assist the reader in finding the balance between knowing and understanding the triune God. While this book is worthwhile, the reader must have some theological background to follow Placher's argument. This book would not serve the purpose of an introduction to theology proper. However, it would serve as an excellent overview of Trinitarian thought and its role in the development of one's concept of God.

Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate, by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. 240 pp. \$15.00. ISBN 978-0-8308-3359-7.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Pearson, Library Director, Montreat College, Montreat, NC

Co-authors Soerens and Hwang work for World Relief, a Christian ministry that serves refugees and immigrants in the U.S. In this book they bring an evangelical perspective to immigration and address the issues from a biblical worldview. Their focus is on the undocumented immigrant, and their plea is for more generous policies than currently exist in our country. The purpose of the book is to increase understanding of immigration issues, to consider how our Christian faith should inform our thinking, and to explore how the church and the government have responded.

Welcoming the Stranger offers an introduction to the many aspects of immigration and the controversies surrounding it. The first two chapters examine who undocumented immigrants are and why they have come to this country, immigration policies and how they have changed over time, and the history of our nation's immigration. Subsequent chapters address the legal, economic, and political aspects of immigration as well as biblical and theological perspectives. The final chapters look at how churches in the U.S. view immigration issues and offer suggestions for church involvement. An underlying theme is that we, as Christians, are called to love and serve our foreign-born neighbors in a spirit of generosity and compassion.

The co-authors present immigration as a complex, nuanced issue and capture the human face of immigration by including personal stories of immigrants they have come to know. A compelling case is made for comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration policy that provides a path toward citizenship for the undocumented. Soerens and Hwang support their argument with relevant statistics, review of current laws, examination of political and economic factors, and by underscoring the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger among us.

This informative overview of immigration will be particularly useful for readers who want to reflect on the issues from a Christian perspective. The appendices offer discussion questions, contact information and websites for organizations serving immigrants, and a bibliography of resources. This book is a worthwhile addition for academic libraries.

The Contested Public Square: the Crisis of Christianity and Politics, by Greg Forster. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008. 254 pp. \$24.00. ISBN 978-0-8308-2880-7.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Pearson, Library Director, Montreat College, Montreat, NC

Greg Forster is director of the American history, economics and religion program in the Kern Family Foundation and a senior fellow at the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. This book grew out of Forster's interest in the political thought of the American founding fathers. However, to explain how American political theory was influenced by the Christian heritage of the founders, Forster needed to reference the historical development of Christian political thought. Thus, *The Contested Public Square* provides a comprehensive and accessible history of Christian political

thought from the first centuries of Christianity through the twentieth century. By describing the process of this historical development, the author is able to explain how a concept like natural law was at the core of most Christian political thought and has been a major influence in the establishment of American political thinking.

The eight chapters of the book offer a chronological survey of the enormous range of political ideas that have influenced Western culture. The focus is on the political effects of the Reformation and the Enlightenment in Western Europe.

This book provides students with the larger historical context from which Christian political thought developed. The use of a number of primary sources adds weight to the author's thesis. Supplemental information on noted religious and philosophical thinkers and schools of thought is captured in sidebars throughout the text. The insights gleaned from this book will be helpful in forming a frame of reference for understanding ongoing tensions surrounding religious freedom and church and state. Overall, this work would be an interesting and thought-provoking addition for academic libraries.

Send the Light: TEAM and the Evangelical Mission, 1890-1975, by Jon P. DePriest. Bloomington, Ind: AuthorHouse, 2007. 216 pp. 978-1-4343-3978-2.

Reviewed by Laura Gayloe Coon, Library Director, Rio Grande Bible Institute, Edinburg, TX

Jon DePriest, professor and chair of history/social sciences at San Diego Christian College, began this book as a Ph.D. dissertation at Claremont University. His scholarly study into the history of the Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) demonstrates how the mandate for taking the Gospel to unbelieving people led Fredrik Franson to found the mission. For Franson there was an urgency to evangelize and a sense of the immediacy of the Second Coming. DePriest identifies the processes of securing an institutional foundation for continuing Franson's vision. He traces the organizational structural processes from the TEAM's beginning, to institutionalization, to Americanization, restructure, and finally bureaucratization. He carefully shows that the process was accomplished primarily through the leadership styles of the mission's directors.

This study of "The Scandinavian Alliance Mission," as TEAM was known until 1949, also augments recent scholarship on the fundamentalism movement, particularly in relation to missions and the American society. More attention was given in the work specific institutions such as TEAM than other previous works on the development of fundamentalism.

DePriest documented his study with numerous citations from TEAM publications and interviews, as well as from other authors on missions and fundamentalism. Having served with TEAM since 1970 I gained a greater understanding of TEAM's organization and history than from any other books I had read.

I would recommend this book for those libraries that serve clientele who study church and mission history; as well for courses in biblical studies, theology, and missions.

INTERESTED IN REVIEWING A TITLE?

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