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## Resource Reviews

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# Resource Reviews

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*Compiled by Phyllis Fox  
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**Mere Humanity: G.K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien on the Human Condition**, by Donald T. Williams. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006. 212 pps. \$14.99

*Reviewed by John E. Shaffett, Director of Library Services, Baptist College of Florida, Graceville, FL.*

Donald T. Williams is the director of the School of Arts & Sciences at Toccoa Falls College in Georgia. He wrote *Mere Humanity* to answer two basic questions— What is man? What is the purpose of this life on earth? I thought of the book of Ecclesiastes while reading it. He examines the doctrine of humanity as set forth in the writings of Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien.

In addition, it is a response to naturalistic materialism or reductionism. It seeks to show that humans cannot be adequately described in purely materialistic terms. The book also illustrates the danger of departing from a belief in a sovereign and personal creator and his moral law.

*Mere Humanity* includes selections of Williams' original poetry and an appendix that discusses the relationship between Christianity and literature. Williams shows the positive contributions that literature can make to the Christian life. Literature can enlarge "our world of experience", open our eyes to biblical truth, provide positive role models, and cure us of "chronological snobbery."

If you are already a fan of Chesterton, Lewis, or Tolkien, you will enjoy reading this book. The book is written well, and the author demonstrates a good grasp of the writings of Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien. It will encourage the reader to read these authors for themselves. I recommend this book for college and public libraries.

**Upgrade: 10 Secrets to the Best Education for Your Child**, by Kevin Swanson. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006. 211pp. \$14.99. ISBN 0805440305.

*Reviewed by John E. Shaffett, Director of Library Services, Baptist College of Florida, Graceville, FL.*

Kevin Swanson serves fifteen thousand families in the Rocky Mountain region as the executive director of Christian Home Educators of Colorado. He has degrees in mechanical engineering and ministry, and serves as pastor of Reformation Church in Castle Rock, Colorado. Kevin and his wife homeschool their five children.

The book is intended for parents who are interested in providing the best education possible for their children. Kevin describes ten principles for providing our children with a successful education: character, one-on-one instruction, protection, individuality, rooted in relationships, emphasizing the basics, life integration, maintaining the honor and mystique of learning, the right foundation, sequential processing. These principles are based on biblical teaching and scientific research.

*Upgrade* is well written, interesting, and contains information that is applicable for parents interested in providing a good education for their children. The principles are particularly applicable for home education programs, but it is also applicable for students who attend public or private schools.

The principle of one-on-one instruction is important because in a typical classroom a child might get "six to seven minutes of one-on-one time with each student" on a daily basis. Kevin Swanson believes that one-on-one instruction is essential for helping a child reach his her potential. The principle of individuality focuses on the fact that all children have different gifts,

abilities, and potentiality for learning. A recent study released by the National Institute of Literacy found that half of American adults were unable to read at an eighth grade level, thus the need to emphasize doing the basics.

The author accomplishes what he sets out to do. He provides ten essential elements or tools to provide our children with a quality education. This book is recommended to all libraries that provide parenting books, or books for homeschoolers.

**Teach With Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students**, by Rosanne Liesveld and Jo Ann Miller with Jennifer Robison. New York: Gallup Press, 2005. 205pp. \$24.95. ISBN 1-59562-006-0

*Reviewed by Liz Leahy, Associate Dean of University Libraries and Chair, James L. Stamps Theological Library, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.*

What makes a teacher great? The authors contend that teachers who understand their natural talents and utilize them well are happiest and are the most influential in the lives of their students. Based upon the Clifton StrengthsFinder survey, the authors give a brief overview to the StrengthsFinders program, targeting each of the 34 strengths specifically to the teacher and present practical ideas on how each of the strengths might be observed and nurtured in the classroom.

Many readers may already be familiar with the StrengthsFinders program. This is a web-based assessment instrument that measures talents from the perspective of Positive Psychology, wherein emphasis is given to the encouragement and development of individual strengths. The tool measures talents in 34 areas or themes. The Gallup Organization defines these talents as “naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied” (49). Effectively, these lie in the essence of who you are – the way you behave instinctively. The authors write that talents, combined with relevant skills and knowledge, equate to strength; while true talents are innate, they can be identified and nurtured.

The book provides a single user access code to take the 30 minute online test. Results for the individual’s top 5 strengths appear at the conclusion of the test. The majority of the text involves a review of each of the strengths, beginning with a background statement to familiarize the reader on the strength, action items in developing this strength in the classroom, and then two brief examples from teachers who have this strength so a reader can view a short practical application.

Although the book seems to be designed more towards the K-12 teacher (through the use of examples of great teachers), it also provides helpful materials for newer college classroom faculty and may be an encouragement for librarians who have regular instruction assignments in the classroom. It might also serve as an excellent classroom tool for educators who mentor future teachers. The book is appropriate for personal development collections, as well as for public and academic libraries. As only one access code is provided per book, it will be most helpful to library collections where there is an awareness of the StrengthsFinder program.

**Iron Scepter**, by Andrew M. Seddon. XLibris, 2000. 262 pp. \$19.79. ISBN 0-7388-3812-8.

*Reviewed by Werner A. Lind, Asst. Library Director, Bluefield College, Bluefield, VA*

British-born medical doctor Andrew Seddon is (or should be) already known to readers of serious Christian science fiction for his novel *Red Planet Rising* (Crossway, 1995) and for his short stories, published in such venues as *Dreams and Visions*. His contributions to the genre continue with this excellent novel.

Many works of modern science fiction posit a far future of wide human galactic colonization under the aegis of some vaguely-described secular humanist super-government, with, of course, wonderfully “benevolent” ends and “enlightened” means –cosmic domination with a smiley-face sticker. Seddon peels off the sticker to give us a realistic picture of what such a galactic super-government, run by fallen humans with all the flaws of unregenerate

natures and responsible to nobody, would be like; his clear-eyed social world building extrapolates directly from the present (where governmental hubris and brutality are already apparent enough), without the usual naive positing of an engineered future revolution in human nature.

In 2495, narrator Major Karel Novacek of the Hegemony's Political Bureau is in charge of the "re-integration" of the independence-minded colonists on the planet Lenore. But the major is an internally conflicted man; and his job is about to be complicated by the discovery of another intelligent space-faring species in the galaxy, and of a hidden agenda on the part of his superiors. (And the plot twists only begin there.)

Explicit references to Christianity here, though crucial, are few, and Christian jargon is avoided; this allows the novel to reach non-Christian readers instead of preaching to the choir. Genuine ethical questions are raised, and sensitively explored. As usual with him, Seddon's credible characterizations include several thoroughly competent females. A disciplined writer, Seddon displays his sound literary instincts and skills throughout this work. Highly recommended!

**Relationship-Empowerment Parenting: Building Formative and Fulfilling Relationships With Your Children**, by Judy and Jack Balswick, and Boni and Don Piper. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003. 204 pp. \$12.99

*Reviewed by Peter Sherry, Acquisitions Supervisor, Bethel University, St. Paul, MN*

Though I was not familiar with Boni and Don Piper prior to this book, it is my second exposure to Jack and Judy Balswick, who strike me as simultaneously approachable and authoritative in their writing style. It is with this style that the authors present the unique contribution that this book makes, including a discussion of "four essential aspects of effective parenting that [they] find lacking in current parenting books."

These four (a broad biblical model, evidence from social science that supports this model, practical insights from experiences from parenting stages, and wisdom based in the expertise of the professional roles of the authors) are followed by the pointed statement that "relationships can't be prescribed through techniques" – a justifiable criticism, leveled at "typical" family relationship texts.

In this eschewing of formulaic methods of discipline so commonly presented elsewhere, the authors demonstrate a keen awareness of the challenges of parenting in postmodernity. All of which is not to suggest that the authors offer little in the way of practical instruction – far from it. Rather, their method – that the most fruitful model of parenting is responding to children "as gifts from God," encouraging a partnership of creativity between parents and children – offers a great deal of freedom for situational adaptation. This measure of adaptability is, I think, a great contribution to the current literature, as parents may utilize more specific steps within the overarching context of Relationship-Empowerment Parenting.

This book is obviously appropriate for a parents' home library, but would also be particularly appropriate for a marriage and family therapy or pastoral care collection within a seminary library.

**The Story of Amy Carmichael and the Dohnavur Fellowship**, DVD produced by The Dohnavur Fellowship, Tumil Nadu, South India and distributed by Vision Video ([www.visionvideo.com](http://www.visionvideo.com)), Worcester, PA. 50 minutes, color and black and white.

*Reviewed by Donald L. Tucker, Academic Dean, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, VA.*

This video documentary is a powerful testimony to the life and service of missionary Amy Carmichael and her establishment of the Dohnavur Fellowship in south India. Born in Ireland in December 1867, the oldest of seven children, Amy Carmichael feels a call to missionary service as a young girl. She leaves

home at eighteen, after her father's death, to become a missionary to Japan. After contracting illness, she returns to England and is sent as one of the first missionaries to India supported by the Keswick Mission Committee. She arrives in South India in March 1901.

The story of Dohnavur is told through the reflections of current Dohnavur staff, retired missionaries who served with Carmichael, previous "children" who now work for the fellowship, and vignettes from biographer Elisabeth Elliott. The video is interspersed with words and excerpts from Carmichael's own writings. A prolific author and composer, Carmichael wrote more than thirty books of poems, songs, missionary narratives, and reflections on Christian life. Though bedridden the last twenty years of her life after being severely injured by a fall into a pit, she maintains a sense of joy and purpose. She dies in India at age 83 after fifty-five years of life as a missionary and "mother" to thousands of children.

The video is uplifting and motivational. Games, songs of praise, and smiles are abundant. You are not left emotionally drained, but joyful, pleased with the results, sympathetic with the cause, and applauding the efforts and positive influence of Amma. The narrative moves back and forth between spectacular scenery, the story of Carmichael, the unique and complex culture of south India, and the mission and ministries of the current Dohnavur fellowship.

This documentary is a brief but effective introduction. Those interested in more detail about her life and missionary work should consult one of the several biographies such as Frank Houghton, *Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur: The Story of a Lover and her Beloved*; Elizabeth Ruth Skoglund, *Amma: The Life and Words of Amy Carmichael*; the *Heroes of the Faith* series by Sam Wellman, *Amy Carmichael*; or Elisabeth Elliott, *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael*.

**The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World**, by Marva J. Dawn. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006. 327 pp. \$ 16.00. ISBN 0-8028-4459-6

*Reviewed by Dr. Donald L. Tucker, Academic Dean, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, VA.*

Marva Dawn, an award-winning author, has written extensively on matters of spirituality, Christian life, and practical ministry. As a teaching fellow in spiritual theology at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia and founder of *Christians Equipped for Ministry* she writes from a well-informed biblical and practical perspective. This book is written as an encouragement and motivation to anyone involved in professional church ministry and to all Christians trying to live a life of faithfulness to the call of God.

In her 1989 book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*, Marva Dawn proposes important and helpful ideas for renewing the spiritual discipline of Sabbath keeping. She suggests that the observance of such a day of rest and restoration is the foundation upon which the spiritual disciplines can flourish. *The Sense of the Call* widens this discussion to incorporate, not just an individual Sabbath day, but an ongoing Sabbath life as the true calling of every Christian. In this sense, it is a call back to the basics of the Christian life – to proclaim the Word, be steadfast and patient, teach others, live a life of self-control, maintain courage in the midst of evil and suffering, listen, serve, and use our gifts for the sake of the Kingdom.

In summary, the author suggests both at the beginning of the book and at the end that "the sense of our call is that God's Kingdom reclaims us, revitalizes us, and renews us and thus reigns through us before others, on behalf of others, sometimes in spite of others, and always with others (p. 13, 294)." Understanding these seven foundations form the basis for "a Sabbath way of life."

The author offers helpful ideas (and cautions) for individuals and communities of believers striving to practice this call. The book is useful for any Christian, but is especially directed to the professional ministry context. She does not hide her social and political leanings but leaves it to the reader to agree or disagree. She is provocative and insightful, sometimes irritating, but always thoughtful and thoroughly biblical. There are numerous references and footnotes to her other publications. The book includes a twenty page list of helpful further readings categorized by topic.

**Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment.** General editors Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004, 256 pp., \$19.99. ISBN 0875523722.

*Reviewed by Freeman Barton, director emeritus of Goddard Library, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA.*

What happens to an unbeliever after the judgment? This question has stimulated a stream of articles, books, and internet entries in the last twenty years. This book is scholarly, fair, and interesting, although the arguments differ little from those of the last two decades. Its nine contributors, all eminent scholars, set out to defend the “traditional,” “historic” view of hell: “everlasting conscious punishment away from the joyous presence of God” (p. 12). “Hell is under fire” by a “disturbing” number of evangelicals. The alternative “aberrations” are universalism and annihilationism (conditional immortality). Universalism gets some attention, but the main target is conditionalism. Peterson (Covenant Seminary) has been on a crusade against it in lectures, articles, and books. Two decades younger, Morgan (California Baptist University) has taken up the cause in ETS lectures, a review in JETS, a book on Jonathan Edwards, and this book.

Of the ten chapters, three are rather skimpy surveys: Albert Mohler’s “Modern Theology,” Morgan’s “Biblical Theology,” and Sinclair Ferguson’s, “Pastoral Theology.”

More in depth are hell in the OT (Daniel Block), Jesus (Robert Yarborough), Paul (Douglas Moo), and Revelation (Gregory Beale). Peterson approaches the subject somewhat differently than previously in “Systematic Theology: Three Vantage Points of Hell.” J. I. Packer deals with universalism. Morgan’s “Annihilationism” and the Selected Bibliography prove his mastery of the subject.

This book is worth serious attention. Note, however, that the linking of universalism and conditionalism is unfair to the latter, as John Stott has pointed out. And at a time when evangelical unity is especially important, Roger Olson states wisely: “Annihilationism does not strike at the heart of the gospel or even deny any major Christian belief.” The attempt to “marginalize” these evangelicals “hardly seems like a valuable expenditure of time” (The Mosaic of Christian Belief [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002] 329).

**Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?** By Wayne Grudem. Wheaton, Ill. Crossway Books, 2006. 272 pages. \$15.99. ISBN 10: 1-58134-734-0.

*Reviewed by Freeman Barton, director emeritus of Goddard Library, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA.*

Dr. Grudem of Phoenix Seminary writes clearly and with passion. He is concerned, along with many others, about the tendency of Christians to conform to their culture at the expense of biblical principle. It is easy to adopt unconsciously the ways of the world. Is evangelical feminism doing that? In four parts with thirty-six short chapters, Grudem repeatedly insists that it is.

Part 1 shows that feminism is particularly congenial to liberal Christianity and should therefore be suspect. In part 2 Grudem lists 15 things feminists do that undercut Scripture: dispute Paul, choose “calling” over Scripture, excise problem verses from the Bible, etc. Each chapter begins, “Some evangelical feminists . . .” Part 3 attempts to demolish ten “untruthful or unsubstantiated claims” about the women in

the Ephesians church, about the word “head,” and about Christ’s relationship to the Father.

Part 4 warns against the directions in which evangelical feminism is headed: androgyny, God as mother, and tolerance of homosexuality. Concerning this last, Grudem might have mentioned that one of his least favorite evangelical organizations, Christians for Biblical Equality, emerged from the Evangelical Women’s Caucus specifically because Catharine Kroeger and the other founders of CBE objected to the increasing tolerance toward lesbianism of the EWC.

Dr. Grudem makes a good, although not decisive, case for complementarianism as he does more thoroughly elsewhere. His concern that prominent evangelicals (he names among many others Patricia Gundry, Catherine Kroeger, Aida Spencer, Jack Hayford, Walter Kaiser, Roger Nicole, and Grant Osborne) are moving conservative Christianity toward liberalism may be misplaced.

**Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die**, by John Piper. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books , 2006. 127pp. \$9.99 ISBN: 1-58134-788-X.

*Reviewed by James L. Sauer, Director of Library, Eastern University, St Davids, PA.*

Pastor John Piper offers us another solid text from his prolific pen. He opens this straightforward doctrinal and devotional book with the rhetorical comment: “The most important question of the twenty-first century is: Why did Jesus come and die?” He then proceeds to list for the reader fifty reasons why Christ died followed by supporting Scripture texts. Explication of those texts follows in a clear, direct, and orthodox manner. The goal is to make us stand in sacred awe at the gracious work our Savior has accomplished on our behalf.

Piper’s reasons are not in alphabetical order by concept, nor organized conceptually by topic; two obsessive organizational mechanisms dear and loved by librarians. Instead, we are confronted with fifty good, but random reflections on the work of Christ for us. There is no index or list of Scriptures cited. (The

book is printed irritatingly on paper with a gray tinted edge). The book closes with a prayer—reflecting its primary evangelistic and devotional tone. Finally, there is a short bibliography on the historical reliability of the Scriptures and an explanation of his ministry organization, Desiring God. If a book brings you to worship and wonder at the work of Christ, then this small book accomplishes that goal. Recommended as a good title for doctrine, devotion, or evangelism.

**Iraq: Babylon of the End Times?** by C. Marvin Pate and J. Daniel Hays. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003. 143 pp. \$12.99. ISBN 0-8010-6479-1.

*Reviewed by Freeman Barton, director emeritus of Goddard Library, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA.*

Pate and Hayes begin their book by sketching the background of popular prophetic interpretation, including the Left Behind phenomenon, the displacement of Communism by Islam as the main threat to Israel, and of “Babylon” as the symbol of evil. They critique the overly literalistic interpretation of apocalyptic symbols by some futurist interpreters. “... the fall of Babylon was a real event that they [the prophets] predicted and announced, but the description of that fall is clearly figurative” (42). The authors insist that the ancient destruction of Babylon fulfills the predictions of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The identifications of Gog and Magog are major points in eschatological scenarios.

Throughout history interpreters have identified them in terms of their own historical situation. So do LaHaye and Jenkins in *Are We Living in the End Times?* (1999) and later works in which they predict a Russian led Arab Muslim invasion of Israel. Pate and Hays examine their views and conclude that they are exegetically and factually mistaken. “LaHaye and Jenkins clearly misunderstand and misrepresent numerous well-known, current-day situations, and their dogmatic statements about current geopolitical reality are wrong” (62). The same is true concerning “Babylon as a Symbol of Evil,” Hussein’s ambition to be a second

Nebuchadnezzar, and the expectations for a revived Roman Empire. Pate and Hays examine the key passages of Scripture, and they conclude that neither the European Union nor the United Nations fulfill the ancient prophecies. They also examine "Rome and the Rise of Babylon in the Book of Revelation." Conclusion: In Revelation 17-18, "Babylon" is Rome.

In chapter 8 (113-127), Pate and Hays summarize the modern history of the state of Iraq. They conclude that Hussein's Babylon Project is not the fulfillment of prophecy. "And in all probability, if and when Saddam is removed, the Babylon project will recede into the background." (127). In the last chapter, the authors point out that some Christian truth needs to be set forth dogmatically, but not so the details of biblical prophecy. The tendency of current popular prophetic interpretation is to produce a "doom and gloom" perspective that tends to a hopeless inactivity. Russia is not about to invade Israel, the European Union is not a revived Roman Empire, and Hussein's Babylon "has nothing to do with end-time prophecy" (136).

Whatever one's view of prophecy, this popular book needs to be reckoned with, and it should be in every Christian college library.

**The Message of Heaven and Hell: Grace and Destiny.** By Bruce Milne. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002. 351 p. \$17.00. ISBN 0830824065.

*Reviewed by Freeman Barton, director emeritus of Goddard Library, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA.*

Having read Milne's *Know the Truth*, I was prepared to dislike this book. Actually it is elegantly written without being pretentious. It is very readable, although its 351 pages of fine print are a little intimidating at first. It consists of three parts of about a hundred pages each, plus a 16 page study guide. The first part, "The Dawning of Destiny: Heaven and Hell in the Old Testament," considers Genesis, Psalms, and Daniel.

Part two, "Destiny Determined: Heaven and Hell in the Gospels," considers particularly

the eschatological parts of the synoptic plus John 20 and 21. The author's depth and quality are well illustrated by his treatment of Mark 9:42-48 (chapter 8. "So what about hell?" pp. 144-161). In his exposition of these seven verses, Milne shows clearly the relationship of the future life in the present. He does an extraordinarily good job of dealing with the thorny debate between traditionalists and conditionalists on the nature and duration of hell. Although his conclusion is different from that of this reviewer, he is consistently fair, nuanced, and irenic. He includes a very helpful list of 14 points on which the two groups agree.

Part three is "Destiny declared: heaven and hell in the rest of the New Testament." Milne focuses on several key passages of the New Testament, including Romans eight, first Corinthians 15 and Revelation 20 and 21. The way in which the Spirit assures us of our "share in the heavenly glory" (Rom 8, p. 230-231) demonstrates again the author's practical pastoral sensitivities of this longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Vancouver.

**The Human Personality in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century,** by James R. Beck and Bruce Demarest. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005. 428 pp. \$24.99 ISBN: 0-8254-2116-0.

*Reviewed by Jeff Gates, Head Librarian, Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA.*

The authors have written this book as a handbook for those interested in the Christian view of human persons and issues in modern psychology. They also hoped it would influence those outside the discipline of theology. It would be useful for college students and educated lay persons.

Beck and Demarest admit in their introduction that they have followed the approach of *A System of Biblical Psychology (1855, 1861)* by Franz Delitzsch. The book is organized into four sections, i.e. origin and destiny, substance and identity, function and behavior, and relationality and community; and each of these sections contains three chapters. The

first chapter presents a conservative historical and theological perspective, while the second chapter presents a contemporary snapshot of psychology. The third chapter gives a brief essay of how theology and psychology relate to each other in these areas and includes “Christian certainties” and areas of further research.

The authors are evangelical: Beck graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and Rosemead Graduate School; Demarest is a graduate of Wheaton College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and earned his doctorate in biblical and historical theology at the University of Manchester, where he was mentored by Professor F. F. Bruce. In this book they attempt to present an integrated approach to many of the issues common to theology and twenty-first century psychology. The work is well supported with biblical verses and secular literature. Though only selected issues are addressed, they are relevant and are treated rather thoroughly.

**Parables of Jesus: Through the Lens of Bible Times (DVD), Part 3 in the series: People Who Met Jesus**, Produced 2005 by International Media Ministries, Madrid, Spain, Released and distributed Spring 2006 by Vision Video, Worcester, PA. 58 minutes \$19.99.

*Reviewed by Jeff Gates, Head Librarian, Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA.*

According to the IMM website, Parables of Jesus was produced to assist people in understanding the customs and cultures and let them feel the impact of Jesus’ words. This DVD contains seven short dramas portraying the following parables: The Good Samaritan, Unmerciful Servant, Treasure and the Pearl, Lost Son, Midnight Visitor, The Dinner (The Great Supper), and the Manager (The Unjust Steward). The special features include “Director’s commentary for each story” and scene selections. A Leader’s Guide by Dawn Moore and the staff of Christian History Institute is available from [www.imm.edu](http://www.imm.edu) that includes the following for each of the seven parables presented in the DVD: scripture reference, theme, questions to use before viewing the parable, questions to use after viewing the parable, heart questions, and

“odds and ends from the director” (historical and cultural background of the parable with occasional citations).

The scriptwriter, director, and host of this presentation is Christopher Gornold-Smith, who taught Educational Media Development at ICI University in Brussels, Belgium and was involved in co-productions with IMM for broadcast on national television in Slovakia. Gornold-Smith and the rest of the staff of IMM are missionaries from the Assemblies of God in the United States who serve for a four year term and then return to the USA for one year of raising support before returning.

The presentation is of high quality. The content is accurate and insightful. The acting, props, and costumes are authentic. The only shortcoming is that the whole production is narrated, even when the parables are being acted out. Parables of Jesus is recommended for laymen, but the “director’s commentary for each story” on the special features option and the “odds and ends from the director” on the Leader’s Guide make it appropriate for those who wish to do further study.

**Kregel Dictionary of the Bible and Theology: Over 500 Key Theological Words and Concepts Defined and Cross-Referenced** by Henry W. Holloman. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005. 600 pp. \$32.99 ISBN 0-8254-2795-9.

*Reviewed by Jeff Gates, Head Librarian, Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA.*

This book has hundreds of entries that give a brief definition and concise survey of how a word or concept is used in the Bible. Each subject word or phrase has a thorough list of relevant Bible references, and many entries include pertinent Hebrew or Greek terms, bibliographies, and ‘See also’ references to related subjects.

Holloman has a Th.D. from Dallas Theological Seminary, teaches systematic theology at Talbot School of Theology, and has a dispensational perspective. He refers to several standard scholarly works, such as A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early

Christian Literature (BAGD), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, and Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, but writes for educated laypersons, pastors, and Bible students. This work would be very helpful in sermon or Bible lesson preparation.

**Meet Me in Managua :The Powerful Story of Nicaragua Reborn.** Wendy Murray Zoba; Photos by Steve Sonheim. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, c2005. 127 p. ISBN 0825441609.

*Reviewed by Jo Ann Rhodes, Library Director, Columbia International University, PO Box 3122, Columbia, SC.*

The small Central American country of Nicaragua has a long history of warfare from pre-Colombian intertribal rivalries to Spanish domination to leadership by tyrants to rebel insurgence. Along with such a long history of violence is an additional history of the hardships imposed by poverty and illiteracy.

Into this somber Nicaraguan picture stepped Keith Jaspers, a wealthy businessman from Springfield, MO, and his Rainbow Network, an NGO that Jaspers started in 1995 in an effort to aid needy Nicaraguans. Through the Rainbow Network, monies are funneled to local needs in the form of medical care, education, food and micro-business loans.

Meet Me In Managua is the author's attempt to put a "face" on the Rainbow Network and the benefit it has served for the people of Nicaragua. The first part of the book gives an overview of the country from historical and sociological viewpoints, providing a backdrop for the Rainbow Network. This is followed by a history of how the Network came into being. The last portion of the text is a series of testimonies from Nicaraguan beneficiaries of the Network.

There are many photographs throughout the book. However, many of them are thumbprint size and thus too small to see well and are without descriptive text, leaving the reader to wonder just what he or she is seeing.

After reading through the entire book, the reader is left wondering just exactly what Rainbow Network is doing. The book does not effectively clarify either the spiritual or the sociological value of the Rainbow Network. The author has written a sentimental book that gives the reader "warm fuzzies" until the cover is closed and one looks back over the experience and realizes that he/she has not really learned much about anything.

Meet Me In Managua might be a good book for a personal or church library but is not recommended for college or school libraries.

**The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus.** by Brennan Manning. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2004. 192 pp. \$12.99. ISBN 0800793390.

*Reviewed by Sharon Hinton RN, BSN, LP, Librarian, First United Methodist Church, Floydada, TX.*

By far the best Christian Living book I have read in a long time, Brennan Manning's *The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* is an encouraging and pleasing read.

The author uses story and observation to encourage the reader to explore the concept of the nature of Jesus. Sections include *Experiencing Jesus*, *Jesus at Easter*, and *Jesus at Christmas*. I particularly appreciated Chapter four: *The affluent Poor* because of the author's vivid discussion of the concept of being a child of God. "Children don't try to control reality: They embrace what is." (p. 63) Manning, a former Franciscan priest and accomplished writer, encourages the reader to internally read the book by pausing frequently for prayer and meditation with a group if possible. Each chapter reinforces the concept that God is love and that our compassion must start with ourselves. Reflection questions are included. This book is appropriate for all personal, congregational, and academic libraries and would work well for small group studies.

**Short History of Christianity**, by Stephen Tomkins, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005. 256 pp. \$15.00; ISBN 0-8028-3382-9

*Reviewed by Jo Ann Rhodes, Library Director, G. Allen Fleece Library, Columbia International University, Columbia, SC.*

One has only to read the author's opening preface paragraphs to understand that his claim to an entertaining, storybook-like history of Christianity is going to be just that ... an easily-read glimpse at "what has been going on round here for the last 2,000 years" (p.8).

This short history is obviously not intended for anything more than a way to learn some of the basic historical facts surrounding the development of Christianity since the birth of the church in 30 A.D. The historical narrative has been broken up into four parts: the beginning years (30-630), the rise of the Roman Church (630-1516), the Reformation (1517-1660), and globalization of the Church (1609-2000). Its thirty-seven short chapters each open with a relevant quotation from (or about) the era under discussion.

The author admits to passing over some events and people that others would consider important, doing so for the sake of space and entertainment. This makes for truly entertaining yet informative reading. There is a less-than-complete index and a helpful glossary of basic terms of value for the knowledge of Christian history. It is disappointing that there is no bibliographical information for quotations and other pertinent information in the text.

This book is recommended as supplementary material for undergraduate libraries of all kinds and particularly for non-theological students, but it will be of little value for research.

**God and Country: How Evangelicals Have Become America's New Mainstream**, by Monique El-Faizy. New York: Bloomsbury, 2006. 262 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-58234-519-2.

*Reviewed by Steven Paschold, Instructional Services Librarian, John Brown Univ., Siloam Springs AR.*

God and Country is a book about current American evangelicalism, written by a widely published journalist, from the perspective of an outsider to the culture. Monique El-Faizy is also a former insider: raised in a California evangelical church, she left it during her college years, apparently confused over what she really believed. The subtitle suggests the thesis of the book. Whereas in the past evangelicals have created their own culture largely isolated from the rest of society, in the last few years they have sought in many ways to "mainstream" themselves within society, and their projects now often mirror those of the larger culture.

Following a summary of evangelical beliefs and history, the author effectively defends her thesis by discussing a variety of topics, including megachurches, the Christian publishing and music industries, higher education, and of course, politics, although she does not devote much more attention to this issue than to others. Using the observational and interviewing skills of her profession, El-Faizy presents a well-researched and deftly written account of evangelicalism. She nuances her discussions to show how some evangelical projects are currently more "mainstreamed" than others are. Because she feels that despite wide media coverage many people still do not understand evangelicalism, the author's intended audience is outsiders, but Christians should read this book as well. First, in its own right, God's Country provides an interesting overview of evangelical culture. Second, and more importantly, Christians can read this book from the perspective of the outsider, and so gain some awareness of how others view the world that is so familiar to many of us. The book is recommended for academic libraries, and especially for persons engaged in studies of Christian ministry, urban missions, American culture, or religious journalism.

**Concise Encyclopedia of Church and Religious Organization Marketing**, by Robert Stevens, David Loudon, Bruce Wenn, and Henry Cole New York: Haworth Reference Press 2005. 178pp. \$24.95 ISBN: 0-7890-1878-0.

*Reviewed by James L. Sauer, Director of Library, Eastern University, St Davids, PA.*

Can Jesus be marketed like a consumer product? Well, yes and no. He certainly can be, and has; but whether this is the proper way to do church work or not is another question. Say the authors: "This book is intended to be a basic reference guide to those interested in church and religious marketing." This book accomplishes its goal.

As a text on organizational marketing it is nicely organized. Topics are explained, given charts when appropriate, with each definitional essay followed by a small bibliography. There are two appendixes: one on Marketing and Religion, the other on writers and researchers on religious marketing. The writing style is one of clear managerial social science. Topics covered include things like: attitude measurement, brand equity, constituent analysis, environmental scanning, mission-based product mix, niche marketing. There are times when the business jargon applied to Christianity seems like a parody:

For instance, the section relating to Competitive advantage, reads "Having a competitive advantage, therefore, hinges on providing something that is seen as having greater value in the eyes of your target audience than anything else they could obtain from another source to address the need they are seeking to have satisfied. This thinking may be alien to most leaders of religious organizations ..." What this quote is saying, dressed up in marketing lingo, is that people will choose to go to one church over another based on personal choices. For some its doctrine, others worship style, others the nursery. The causes are great and sometimes incredibly trivial.

So, although I am troubled by, and even amused by the parody like nature of this text. I can see how certain business, statistical, managerial,

and relational, and ... forgive me ... consumer questions are very pertinent to the healthy life of any organization, including a church. In that sense, this is a helpful book. It would be a good addition to a pastor's library, a religious organizations resource room, and a College library involved with church growth issues.

**Esther**, by Linda M. Day. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005. 177 pp. \$24.00. ISBN 0-687-49792-2.

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

This volume from the Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries offers analysis and interpretation of the literary, historical, theological and ethical aspects of the Book of Esther. The main purpose of the commentary is to help readers understand the meaning of the biblical text within its social and historical context. Based on the Hebrew version of Esther, the story is interpreted episode by episode with specific attention to literary, linguistic, and exegetical aspects of the text.

An underlying premise of this commentary is that the Book of Esther cannot be viewed in isolation from its historical and cultural environment. The author characterizes the story as one of ethnic conflict and minority survival. The story is set well within biblical tradition and connects Jews in Persia with the larger story of Israel, yet it also deals with issues of identity and survival that connect it to contemporary culture. As the author notes, the story explores the challenges minority communities face within multiethnic societies. Esther has dual loyalties to the Jewish people and to the Persians with a stake in both communities. Issues of injustice and discrimination against minorities are presented. Questions about patriarchal societies and the role of women in positions of authority are raised.

One of the intriguing aspects of the Book of Esther and a debated point among interpreters is the absence of a divine presence. The focus of the book as a whole is on the human realm instead of the divine. The author points out that there is ambiguity with regard to God's

presence in the events of the story. God is seemingly inactive and unmentioned. Human initiative is the source of action rather than a deity. The commentary suggests that this theological ambiguity is an integral part of the book and reflects our human inability to know for certain if God is present but hidden or completely absent. The author draws parallels between the Book of Esther and the Holocaust and states that the book underscores human responsibility to resist evil when God seems absent.

The commentary also offers an insightful literary analysis addressing style, structure, character, genre, and themes in the biblical text. Through close attention to these elements, the author heightens our awareness of the artistry of the book.

The author received her Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary and has been a teacher for a number of years. Readers will appreciate her thorough knowledge of Esther studies and her acknowledgement of the work of other Esther scholars. The commentary draws on current scholarship and secondary literature, yet introduces fresh perspectives that relate Esther's story to contemporary concerns. In summary, this volume proved to be an engaging and thoughtful interpretation.

Designed for use by theological students, pastors, and upper level undergraduates, this commentary makes a solid, scholarly contribution suitable for academic and seminary libraries.

**Worship in Ancient Israel: An Essential Guide**, by Walter Brueggemann. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005. \$14.00 104 pp. ISBN 0-687-34336-4.

*Reviewed by Wendell G. Johnson, Social Sciences Librarian, University Libraries, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL.*

In *Worship in Ancient Israel*, Walter Brueggemann, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, describes the leading motifs of ancient Israel's worship tradition and seeks to relate them to contemporary practice.

According to Brueggemann, worship is a dialogical interaction in which the two parties, God and human worshippers, are present, fully involved, and to some extent define by each other. He notes that Israel's worship consisted of a regular public assembly characterized by two defining acts: the celebration of festivals and the offering of sacrifices. The liturgical calendar included Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Jubilee, Purim, and Hanukkah. These observances constitute the "Church year" (Actually, Temple year) in ancient Israel. Israel assembled regularly to hear God's commands and to listen to oracles of guidance and assurance. Worship, then as now, is a public declaration that life is a gift, and the life of the community is dependent on God. The purpose of worship is to generate a community of holiness that is completely devoted to God.

Brueggemann's study is an outstanding combination of scholarly research, written in narrative form, combined with applicability for today's Church. Particularly illustrative in this regard is Chapter 5, "Worship: Israel at Play," which portrays several dichotomies present in ancient and contemporary worship. One such example is "the play holiness and justice" (pp.65ff). Worship calls together a holy people with a concern for the poor. The worshipper's zeal for holiness must be combined with a passion for (social) justice. Other tensions "at play" in worship include obedience and freedom, Torah and king, presence and absence, praise and lament, and memory and hope. For each dichotomy, Brueggeman cites Old Testament precedent and provides guidance for contemporary practice.

Brueggemann's discussion of Israel's worship is based on Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis, and hence, may be confusing to readers without a background in Old Testament introduction. Those who have some familiarity with biblical criticism will find *Worship in Ancient Israel* to be an excellent discussion tool for Bible study and a worthwhile theoretical guide for contemporary worship. The book has endnotes and a Scripture index.

**Just Wives? Stories of Power & Survival in the Old Testament & Today**, by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. 136pp. ISBN 0-664-22660-4.

*Reviewed by Sharon Hinton RN, BSN, LP, Librarian, First United Methodist Church, Floydada, and RNR Parish Nurse Community Outreach Library, Floydada, TX.*

Sakenfeld, a professor of Old Testament literature, has taken the ancient stories of eleven Old Testament women and examined them for meaning applicable to women today. She examines each story from socio-cultural and literary aspects. Each chapter begins with a brief synopsis of the text to be studied and ends with questions for individual reflection or group discussion. I appreciated the author's attempts to bring the similarities and varieties of interpretation women worldwide bring to discussions of the Old Testament women faced. These diverse challenges are still relevant today.

Stories include Sarah and Hagar – ethnicity, status, and ability to conceive, Ruth and Naomi – poverty, hunger, and marriage, Esther and

Vashti – wealth and injustice, Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba – human motivation, Gomer and the ideal wife – perceptions. *Just Wives?* is a well written, interesting, and enlightening discussion of the many perspectives of women facing challenging circumstances. It is appropriate for personal, congregational and academic libraries and should be available to students of women's spirituality and leaders of women's bible studies.

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