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Volume 44 | Issue 1

Article 10

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2001

## Resource Reviews

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### Recommended Citation

Ellett, Robert O. (2001) "Resource Reviews," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 44: Iss. 1, Article 10.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1843>

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# The Christian Librarian R E V I E W S

**Reaching for the Invisible God,**  
Philip Yancey. Grand Rapids, MI:  
Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.  
304 pp. \$21.99. ISBN:0-31023-531-6

*Reviewed by Kristi Cobb, Assistant  
Director Practicum/Internship, External  
Degree Program, M.A. Counseling,  
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Life is not easy. Suffering, disappointment, and pain are all too frequent reminders of the imperfect and uncertain nature of the world in which we live. Heartbreak, illness, and death come to each and every one of us – Christian and non-Christian alike. In the wake of such a reality, maintaining faith in a loving, caring, personal God is sometimes difficult. Believing in a loving, caring, personal God who is also invisible and sometimes silent is, at times, practically impossible.

In response to this dilemma, Philip Yancey writes *Reaching for the Invisible God*. Doing so, he takes his readers along with him on a personal journey toward understanding faith, doubt, and our relationship with an invisible God in a sinful world. Exploring issues such as who God really is, what faith means, what a personal relationship with God looks like, and what we should expect of different stages of spiritual growth, Yancey strikes at the heart of one of the most poignant and uncomfortable issues for a number of today's Christian believers: failure to experience the deepest, most convincing personal relationship with the One in whom we claim our assurance rests. While Yancey offers an excellent discussion on suffering, injustice, and the existence of ambiguities in understanding some of our most perplexing theological issues, his most interesting commentary, in my opinion, is his dialogue on doubt. I found his definition of faith, and

subsequent affirmation of doubt, an intriguing and enlightening description of what belief in God in the real world really is. I also fully appreciated his unfolding demonstration of movement away from the questions themselves and his ensuing movement toward a focus on the One who is the rightful recipient of our unquestioned faith, honor, and adoration – in essence, the ultimate answer. Using captivating examples, common experiences, current events, and quotations from some of our most revered Christian leaders, Yancey takes us from the past to the present to show us that even though we can't always see an answer or purpose to immediate situations, we can always look upon answered prayers and miracles of the past to uphold our faith in the One who never lets us down. Writing from the first person point of view in a steady stream of conscious thought, Yancey writes in a clear, comfortable flow that makes the journey through such poignant questions and issues quite easy and enjoyable while still challenging and rewarding.

Because it is written in a very personal, as opposed to technical, format, the reading is fairly quick and easy; it is neither indexed nor written for reference. However, this is not to say that the book doesn't have scholarly merit. Over the course of his book, Yancey draws support from a number of outside sources and respected Christian pillars of the faith, ending up with almost 300 footnotes. Exploring such an uncomfortable but critical topic, he adds perceptive insight and Biblical understanding to a difficult and controversial issue, but in doing so, never forsakes traditional evangelical Christian faith or crosses the boundaries into spiritual heresy. Because of the relevancy of the book's content and Yancey's well developed, stimulating perspective, I would highly recommend

that this book be part of any graduate or undergraduate library that supports religious and theological studies. As it is easy flowing, practically relevant, and perfectly suited to tackle some of the most pressing theological questions of current society, I would also recommend this book to public libraries.

**Telling the Truth: Evangelizing  
Postmoderns**, edited by D.A. Carson.  
Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000. 416 pp. \$27.99.  
ISBN: 0-31023-432-8

*Reviewed by Michael A. Cobb, Systems  
Librarian, Liberty University,  
Lynchburg, Virginia.*

The book *Telling the Truth* is a collection of papers presented at a conference held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School from May 13-15, 1998. The Conference was primarily sponsored by Trinity, but co-sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Navigators, the Billy Graham Center Institute of Evangelism, and the Bannockburn Institute for Christianity and Contemporary Culture. And, as you could guess from the co-sponsors, there was a heavy emphasis on evangelism. It does a decent job at organizing the presentations into different categories: Opening Plenaries, "The Challenge", "Critical Topics", "Crucial Passages", "Church, Campus, Ethnicity", "This Relational Age", "Experiences and Strategies", and Closing Plenaries".

According to D.A. Carson in the preface of this book, "Anyone interested in evangelism in the Western world will read these chapters with delight and profit." (p. 10). I would wholeheartedly agree. But, anyone interested in the foundations of postmodernism or postmodern thinking



would not read these chapters with delight and profit, for I did not find the work to deal as much with the foundations of, proponents of, and thinking of postmoderns and/or postmodernism as a separate entity. Certainly interwoven into the papers were statements of fact for how postmoderns think and why certain techniques work best in reaching them.

One of my favorite "features" of the book was the in-depth description of the authors. There are 27 contributors, 24 men and 3 women, who are an assortment of pastors, professors, and staff of evangelistic organizations.

In my opinion the book is ideal either for a church library or for an undergraduate university. The writing is fairly straightforward, and I did not find it overly complicated. The one section on the two main philosophers of postmodernism (Richard Rorty and Michael Foucault) was the only area that I found difficult to follow: "Epistemology at the Core of Postmodernism: Rorty, Foucault, and the Gospel", by Jon Hinkson and Greg Ganssle.

It is not my intention to criticize the book for focusing too much on evangelism. I merely intend to enforce that the focus, as I understood the papers after reading them, was on the practical means used for reaching people in a postmodern society. The reader is left to assume that the person describing their method for reaching the lost postmoderns does understand who they are and how to reach them. And, based upon the papers that seems to be a safe assumption.

I found most of the papers to fit into the eight formatted parts listed above, but two specifically were quite focused and would not as directly apply to a wider audience. These papers were "Penetrating Ethnic Pluralism: African-Americans", and "Reaching Out to Postmodern Asian-Americans". While certainly legitimate topics, they were not as broad and inclusive as the others in the book.

There is an index of subjects and names, plus a scripture index at the end of the book. Also, the references at the

end of each paper could be helpful for those wishing to follow up on the ideas given in the paper or for librarians looking for possible book purchases.

**Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period** edited by Jacob Neusner and William Scott. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996. 693pp. \$59.95. ISBN 1565634586.

*Reviewed by Dr. Dennis Ingolfsland, Director of Library Services, Associate Professor of Bible, Bryan College, Dayton, Tennessee.*

The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* is a one volume quick reference to topics related to ancient Judaism. The book covers a time period extending from about 450 BC when according to the editors, the Pentateuch was formulated to AD 600 when the Babylonian Talmud was finalized. According to the introduction, this dictionary was designed to cover terms likely to come up in the Bible and related writings.

The scope of the book is actually somewhat broader than the title suggests, however, since the book covers much more than just Judaism. Also covered are non-Jewish military, political and religious leaders, religions and philosophies, weights and measures and even selected matters relating to the New Testament and the early church.

Although the introduction says the dictionary provides only short lexical definitions, the length of the articles varies from a couple of sentences to about three pages. This dictionary includes maps and is 693 pages long with over 3,300 entries. Seventy Jewish, Catholic and Protestant scholars wrote the articles from the U.S., Canada, Britain, Europe and Israel. However, none of the articles are signed even though some of the contributors are world-class scholars.

Although *The Dictionary of Judaism* is generally an excellent reference source, coverage of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Old Testament was

disappointing. After selecting 20 rather obscure Old Testament terms from the *New Bible Dictionary*, the reviewer found that only four of them were discussed in *The Dictionary of Judaism*. And while the *New Bible Dictionary* provided information on authorship, dates and outlines for each of the Old Testament books, few of those books were even discussed in *The Dictionary of Judaism*. Nevertheless, *The Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* is an excellent reference source for terms specifically relating to Judaism and is a handy source for some related information as well. As a result, it is highly recommended.

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