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Henry's "Flashes of Grace: 33 Encounters with God" (book review)

Rory Patterson
Liberty University

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Book Reviews



Henry, P. (2021). *Flashes of grace: 33 encounters with God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 298 pp. \$20.00. ISBN 9780802878649

Henry provides a book like no other. Except for the first chapter, the chapters are five to eight pages, grouped in sets of three to five chapters around a theme, and each chapter ends with a metacognition statement, “I encounter the [adjective] grace of God when I...” With 25 pages of endnotes, “Flashes of grace” is well documented of the ideas and topics addressed, but it is not a normal scholarly work. It is about Henry’s life, but it is far from an autobiography. The short, focused chapters with the theological metacognition endings could lend it to be a devotional. The foreword says “Flashes of grace” is an attempt to follow Socrates’ call to live an examined life, and considering that, this book is an excellent example of teaching metacognition for information literacy classes. Thirty of the chapters providing a wide range of topics (music, science, pop culture, television, plants, et al.) that librarians could use as short readings and prompts for students to think deeper about their research and their integration of faith into learning and life.

Henry is locally famous in Minnesota, but for the rest of his audience, he taught at Swarthmore College for over fifteen years, and then was the executive director of the Collegenille Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research (in Minnesota) for twenty years. After retiring, he writes monthly columns in the local, small city newspaper. This book draws from those decades of writings in scholarly articles, edited works, and newspapers, to provide sixteen of the thirty-three chapters. The adapted chapters allow Henry’s insights to find a wider audience than the original works, and they are edited to fit better into the flow of “Flashes of grace” so that it builds a fuller work.

Henry’s first chapter sets up the book by both providing glimpses into his history and by demonstrating this is not a normal autobiography. It starts with an event in 2001, circles to his youth in the 1950’s, returns to 2001, jumps to the 1980’s, goes in further gyrations, and ends in 2001. Henry’s “In a word” metacognition statement ties it together and demonstrates this is a work like no other. The writing is clear, fun, a bit quirky, but all moving each chapter and section towards those ending statements. This engaging and thoughtful work is recommended and leads to rereading so one can mine it for further times of thinking deeply.

Reviewer

Rory Patterson, Liberty University