
Book Reviews

Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities, edited by Wes Avram, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004. 224pp., \$18.99.

The Bible and Other Faiths, by Ida Glaser, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005. 256pp., \$18.00

The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and its Environment, by Peter Balla, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005.

Concord Makes Strength: Essays on Reformed Ecumenism, edited by John W. Coakley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 194 pp.

Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry, by Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline R. Wenger, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. 257 pp.

The Religious Nature and Biblical Nurture of God's Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers, by Jack Fennema, Sioux Center: Dordt College Press, 2005. 292pp., \$18.00.

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Anxious About Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities, ed. Wes Avram, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004. 224pp., \$18.99.

This book was written in response to *The National Security Strategy for the United States of America* released by the White House on September 20, 2002. The document is included as an appendix to *Anxious About Empire* and should be read before engaging the responses of the thirteen contributors.

The first section asks, "Is It Time to Pay Attention?" Robert Bellah outlines the likely consequences of the "Bush Doctrine." The president's intention is to "rid the world of evil," a goal even God has not succeeded in doing. Wes Abram contributes, "Getting Past the Preamble," and suggests that we should give the White House credit for offering such a document to ponder and critique.

The second section begins with the question, "What Must We Know?" David Johnston offers some suggestions on loving our Mideastern neighbors. Michael Budde looks at how the government uses the military to inculcate patriotism and similar issues.

The third part asks, "How Might We Talk?" Stephen Chapman addresses the matter of imperial exegesis, "When Caesar Interprets Scripture." He quotes Senator Fulbright: "power tends to confuse itself with virtue and a great nation is peculiarly susceptible to the idea that its power is a sign of God's favor."

Section four responds to the question, "And If There's No Going Back?" Jean Bethke Elshtain writes, "Internal Justice as Equal Regard and the Use of Force."

The final section wonders, "Whither the Church?" Allen Hilton asks, "Who Are We?" What does it mean to be a Christian in an age of Americanism? Dutch-Canadian Arthur Paul Boers considers what it means to lead pastorally during these times, and Lillian Daniel links worship with national life.

I found it difficult to put this book down. So many voices offer such cogent insights. The footnotes offer further suggestions for reading. I recommend this volume as a thoughtful introduction to what it means to be both American and Christian in the current context.

—Robert J. Hoeksema

The Bible and Other Faiths, by Ida Glaser, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005. 256pp., \$18.

Ida Glaser is a “Jewish Christian called by God to reach out to Muslims” and to the rest of the world with the love of Jesus (p. 197). Glaser addresses important questions that Christians should be asking. Some of these questions are:

Who are we as Christians in relationship to God, to people of other faiths, and to people of no faith at all?

What does God want me to do and be in a world of religious?

Has God given up on the Jews?

How can we as Christians live and speak the cross and resurrection of Christ in a multifaith world?

Glaser approaches these questions from a hermeneutical survey of the books of the Old Testament, Intertestament, and the New Testament. Reading the Bible as a window, a picture, and a mirror, she concludes that all human beings are sinners in need of a Savior. There is only one Savior and that is Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the cosmos. God who created all human beings loves them, hears their prayers, desires to save them and bless them through Christians, those who have responded in faith. It is therefore the mission of Christians to take seriously the great commission of Matthew 28:16-20 and the Ten Commandments. Christians are called to give total loyalty to God, to be holy, and to bless and love all people the God has created by sharing with them the gospel of Jesus and praying for them. Glaser holds that prayer “is the most fundamental thing we should do in relating to friends and enemies alike” (p. 240).

The Bible and Other Faiths provides a fresh look at the Ten Commandments from a multifaith world view as well as an excellent study on Genesis, the Beatitudes, Gnosticism, and prayer. It can be used for personal study, for an aid in sermon preparation, and in group Bible study settings.

—Carl E. Gearheart

The Child-Parent Relationship in the New Testament and its Environment, by Peter Balla, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005.

Motivated by the importance of family in his own life, Balla writes to answer the question: How did children honor their parents in the New Testament and its environment? Balla wanted “to find out what is shared by the first Christian generations with their non-Christian neighbours, Jewish and pagan, and what may be called Christian characteristics in which they differed from their

surrounding world (if in fact they did differ)” (p. 3). Uniquely, he approaches his task from the point of view of the child. [It is important to note that the term “child” (Gk: τέκνον) refers to the relationship between child and parent and not the age of the child.]

Balla’s research is extensive. Prior to commenting on what is found in the New Testament regarding the child-parent relationship and the assumptions and duties that lie therein, he carefully examines classical Greek sources, Greek and Latin sources from the Hellenistic period to the third century CE, and Jewish sources in the centuries around the turn of the era. In so doing, he establishes the “environment” (hence the book’s title) of the New Testament times, commenting on the various expectations and traditions that had been passed down from generation to generation, eventually influencing early Christian mores. In this environment (both pagan and Jewish) Balla finds a strong expectation for children to honor their parents. There are both similarities and differences between the pagan and Jewish environments.

With the environment established, Balla proceeds to the heart of his inquiry: the child-parent relationship in the New Testament. He begins with the gospels and progresses through the Pauline corpus (undisputed and pseudonymous) and the remainder of the New Testament texts.

Balla’s particular concern in his discussion of the gospel tradition focused on some of Jesus’ “radical” statements as they relate to child-parent and family relationships and the cost of discipleship (cf. Matt. 8:21-22, Luke 14:26). The question is “whether these texts show that Jesus and his first followers taught or acted against children’s duty to honor their parents” (p. 116). Balla walks through first the Synoptics (comparing parallels when possible) and then the fourth gospel; finally concluding that Jesus’ teachings, and, indeed his own way of life, do not deny the validity of this rule. Rather, they only set certain limits to it, and these limits are consistent with those found in the environment. Simply stated, God comes first. Much like the gods in ancient paganism and the Lord in Judaism, Jesus and the reign of God require that priority is given to them in Christianity. Regarding the natural tension that arose when some disciples chose to follow Jesus itinerantly, Balla asserts that it was not Jesus and his disciples who initiated separation; rather, they suffered the tension and separation as a consequence of family members’ unbelief (p. 155).

After discussing the letters of Paul and other parts of the New Testament, Balla returns to his opening question and determines that, despite confusion surrounding some of Jesus’ radical statements regarding the cost of discipleship, the early Christians conformed to the standard expectations of their environment and taught that children had a duty to honor their parents (p. 229).

On the whole I found Balla's work to be a helpful addition to Christianity, particularly to parish pastors who will most likely find themselves preaching and/or teaching on the aforementioned "radical" sayings of Jesus and to academics who discuss the theological significance of all. On the surface Jesus' words seem to call for the division of the family; but this is not the case. Balla's research reveals that the honoring of father and mother is an important Christian teaching, and the fact that it was heavily influenced by its environment diminishes neither its strength nor its authority in household and community.

– Angie L. Mabry-Nauta

Concord Makes Strength: Essays on Reformed Ecumenism, ed. John W. Coakley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. 194pp.

The title for these essays derives from the Reformed Church in America seal and construes *Eendracht* as "concord" in place of the more familiar "union." Contributors include many well known Reformed Church in America clergy: Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, John Coakley, Paul Fries, Lynn Japinga, Gregg Mast, Douglas Fromm, Allan Janssen, and Herman Harmelink III.

Three themes thread through the work. One is the ecumenical implications of the growth of the Christian church, especially in the southern hemisphere. A second theme stresses the significance of the Reformed witness within ecumenical conversations and commitments. The third theme shows how inherent divisions in the Reformed Church in America underlie quarrels over ecumenical relationships.

Reading this volume renewed my appreciation for those in the Reformed Church in America who have contended for ecumenical involvements, involvements that have enlarged our vision and enriched our life. Frequently noted is the way in which ecumenism is moving from denominational involvements to the cooperation of local congregations.

As Gregg Mast reminds us, "The future we seek is not for ourselves but for the world God loves. We need to feel again the common water of our baptism glisten with grace and hope."

– Robert J. Hoeksema

Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry, by Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline R. Wenger, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. 257pp.

There are various reasons why pastors leave local ministry, some voluntary and others decidedly involuntary. The body of this book is devoted to the results of research accomplished through reviews of questionnaires submitted by pastors who underwent such experiences.

Seven main motivations are found for such traumatic action being taken by pastors: (1) preference for another kind of ministry; (2) need to care for children or family; (3) conflict in the congregation; (4) conflict with denominational leaders; (5) burnout or discouragement; (6) sexual misconduct; and (7) divorce or marital problems. Tables, figures, and graphs abound, as the authors set forth the data relative to their discoveries and conclusions. Toward the end of the book, Hoge and Wenger say, "Conflict, burnout, feeling unfulfilled, and experiencing family and marriage problems are the main culprits in draining the supply of parish ministers" (p. 198).

Not wishing to conclude their writing on too negative a note, the writers go on to offer the following suggestions. First to denominations: (1) seminaries should do more to prepare their students for the practical aspects of ministry; (2) the call process needs to be improved; (3) there is a need to provide ongoing support for pastors; and (4) more support for pastors in conflict or crisis needs to be given. Then, to congregations, the authors would suggest: (1) let your congregational goals be clearly articulated; (2) be realistic about your expectations; and (3) provide reduced workloads when pastors are facing conflict or crisis.

Today's seminarians should be aware that this research is available. It may help them avoid sleepless nights, realize that they are not alone, and cope with what life in a pastorate can really be about, warts and all.

— Burrell Pennings

The Religious Nature and Biblical Nurture of God's Children: A Guide for Parents and Teachers, by Jack Fennema, Sioux Center: Dordt College, 2005. 292pp., \$18.

It is important for any potential reader of Fennema's book to understand that when Fennema refers to "God's children," he is literally referring to children, not to believers in general. A devoted academic of the Christian educational realm, Fennema writes with a deep passion for children, both their existence in this world and their interaction for the way they interact with all that surrounds them.

Fennema begins his work with a series of questions: Who are God's children? What is God's purpose for their lives? Looking through an obvious biblical lens,

the author believes that these questions are only answered when one understands the creational context of the universe, the people created to reside in that universe, and the task that molds the universe and the people together. Fennema devotes three chapters to discussing exactly it means to have been created in the image of God.

While the first half of the book deals primarily with religious *nature*, the second half takes on biblical *nurture*, specifically in spiritual development, admonition within the family, instructive and corrective nurture, and restorative admonition. This order proves to make the most logical sense, since any parent or teacher must first recognize the nature of children and then move into a more capable nurturing of those children.

All in all, Fennema does us a great service by reminding us to see young children in quite different frame of reference from the one we are used to employing. In times when exploring. Where we seem to view children as difficult or seldom able to understand deep and intimate relationships with God or those they call “neighbor,” Fennema offers us a fresh and unique perspective.

– Amy E. Avery

Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation, ed. Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann Rigs, Telford, Penn.: Cascadia, 2004. 260pp., \$22.95.

In 1998 the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches called for a Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). This book contains a response to that call from representatives of the historic peace churches: the Church of the Brethren, the Mennonites, and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Section one examines the World Council’s relationship to the historic peace churches, globalization, and the peace churches’ understanding of faithfulness in Christian peacemaking and reconciliation.

Section two contains essays on globalization and power from the perspectives of biblical studies, theological ethics, and historiography.

Section three provides reflections on peace and justice and violence from African, South American, and North American contexts. J. Denny Weaver addresses relationships among various views of atonement and a gospel of peace. He quotes James Cone, who sees resistance to the rule of God in the American system that makes heroes out of rich capitalists and in the Pentagon which

attributes atrocities to the accidents of war. In, "The Dynamics of Violence in Columbia," Alix Lozano finds the cause of growing poverty and marginalization in privatization, which is presented to us as an indispensable component of openness and globalization."

Section four, "Building Cultures of Just Peace," asks, "Did Jesus Love His Enemies?" It includes a discussion of conflicts in Canada between "First Nations" peoples and the successors of newcomers.

I recommend this volume to those interested in promoting peace as followers of the Prince of Peace.

—Robert J. Hoeksema

Where is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering, by Warren McWilliams, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005. 258pp., \$16.95.

In spite of the fact that the title is taken from a severe scolding by Malachi denouncing the ancient Israelites for their impudence in the face of an offended God, the author hopes that his readers will understand it in a positive sense. God is sympathetic with our human frustration in the face of ubiquitous human suffering.

In part 1, the author discusses perennial questions that afflict us all. Is suffering a punishment for sin? Does God cause tornadoes? And does God suffer? In part 2 he takes up almost every kind of distress, including animal suffering, infertility, illness, disability, poverty, hunger, and aging. You name it—it's there!

McWilliams is a thorough-going evangelical. Where the Bible speaks, McWilliams speaks. Where the Bible is silent, he acknowledges its silence. In other words, he is careful to avoid ill-grounded opinions. McWilliams also quotes extensively from C.S. Lewis as an authority.

In his final chapter McWilliams is at his best discussing "reverent creativity" in the face of seemingly unanswerable problems. For example, if our suffering is in the arena of infertility, we need not resign ourselves to accepting it as "the will of God." We should feel free to seek out what science and technology have to offer and use the helping professions. These too can be gifts from God.

I recommend this book to pastors and counselors who find themselves confronted by the plethora of human woes and are hoping to be pastoral in the best sense of the word.

– Burrell Pennings

Why the Rest Hates the West: Understanding the Roots of Global Rage, by Meic Pearse, Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004. 188pp.

Pearse's introduction states: "The truth is that we, in our hyper-prosperity, may be able to live without meaning, faith or purpose. . . .Normal people (that is, the rest of the world), however, cannot exist without meaning, without religion anchored in something deeper than existentialism and bland niceness, without a culture rooted deep in the soil of place where they live. Yet it is these things that globalization threatens to demolish. And we wonder that they are angry?"

Why suicide bombers, he asks? Because we are considered barbarians. We have no respect for the past, rigorously exclude religious issues from public life, are shameless about sex and careless with family ties, and have no sense of honor. Furthermore, "we have excommunicated all cultures but our own."

In chapter two, "On the Importance of Being Ernest," Pearse refers back to the Reformation's emphasis on honesty, integrity, and plain dealing. The problem is that "integrity has slowly ceased to mean primarily a conformity of the inward person to outward morality." Today there is no standard to live up to, only superficiality and relativism.

Pearse concludes by saying we need to reverse our birth rates, reintroduce the language of duty to public discourse, challenge public officials to uphold morality, and stop penalizing marriage through the tax and benefits system. We need to turn away from self-absorption, pursue truth and trust, live with less entertainment, become more informed about the world around us, act with greater humility, learn more about non-western cultures, and engage in personal contacts with non-Westerners.

This is a thought-provoking work that carefully examines "Why the Rest Hates the West."

– Robert J. Hoeksema