



Rev. Dr. Bob Robinson

New Books Worth Reading

THE GOSPEL IN THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

Paul Copan and Kenneth D Litwak (IVP, 2014, £11.99, 180pp, ISBN: 9781783591282)

We meet daily reminders that our country and our wider world is multi-cultural and multi-religious—rather like the world the apostle Paul lived in. In this stimulating and accessible study (subtitled ‘Paul’s Mars Hill experience for our pluralistic world’) the authors show how Paul’s speech to the Athenians in Acts 17 provides a practical model for today. The writers challenge Christians to be “more biblically informed, culturally astute, and creatively engaged to winsomely challenge the idols of our time and to point contemporary Athenians beyond ‘an unknown God’ to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL

Mark Lanier (IVP, 2014, £7.69, 240pp, ISBN: 9781783591466)

Those who have welcomed Ron Hay’s *Finding the Forgotten God* will also appreciate this helpful American volume of evidence-based apologetics written by someone called by the publishers “one of America’s top trial lawyers.” Your reviewer agrees with what a British Judge says: that the volume “skilfully blends legal rigour and theological acumen in this imaginative and compelling defence of Christian truth. He is just the kind of advocate any judge wants in a case! As he sets out the evidence, calls his witnesses, develops his arguments and invites a verdict, there is not merely mastery of his brief and meticulous analysis – with difficult questions faced – there is also passion, clarity, intelligence and persuasiveness. Lanier is at the top of his game professionally, confident of his case philosophically and theologically. It’s a winning formula!”

PREACHING MATTERS

Jonathan Lamb (IVP, 2014, £9.99, 192pp, ISBN: 9781783591497)

This fine volume, tellingly subtitled ‘Encountering the living God,’ anticipates preaching that demonstrates the power both of God’s Word and Spirit. The author is Director of the global ‘Langham Preaching’ ministry for training preachers and has strong links with the Keswick movement. One feature, not usually found in books about preaching, is that it not only describes how to preach but it also shows how to listen. There are eleven chapters that describe preaching (and hearing) followed by seven very practical sections on how to prepare, deliver and evaluate. Your reviewer thinks this is one of the very best books on preaching that he has ever read.

PSALMS

Tremper Longman (IVP, 2014, £14.99, 479pp, ISBN: 9781783591633)

Most of Scripture speaks to us; the book of Psalms also speaks for us—hence its centrality in worship and our speaking about the living God. As the proven Tyndale commentaries are updated, this new commentary on the Psalms has been completed by a very fine American exegete. Longman not only carefully explains and summarises each psalm, but also reflects on its significance from a NT perspective, especially when a psalm anticipates Jesus Christ in some way. He also includes a “meaning” section that offers pertinent application. There are some large multi-volume commentaries on the Psalter, but this is surely now the best of the more compact commentaries.

WHAT YOUR BODY KNOWS ABOUT GOD

Rob Moll (IVP, 2014, US\$11.20, 217pp, ISBN: 9780830836772)

“Fearfully and wonderfully made” says the old translation in Ps 139—and this book illustrates its truthfulness. In fact, the volume (subtitled ‘How we are designed to connect, serve and thrive’)

argues, that since we are created in God's image, then it is not surprising that our minds and bodies are designed to enable us both to perceive and experience God. Rob Moll, a very competent journalist, gathers biblical teaching, scientific analysis, and the research of neurologists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and molecular biologists to affirm the orthodox Christian understanding that we are designed to relate both to God and to other people. At the same time, it is also clear that Moll's concern is practical, not theoretical (though he does deal to the 'reductionism' that says religious experience is *nothing but* brain activity). In the words of a notable NT scholar (Scot McKnight): "God, in effect, has wired us to love God, to love ourselves, and to love others—and this book explains how God did the wiring."

STRESS

Simon Vibert (IVP, 2014, £8.99, 192pp, ISBN: 9781783591527)

We know that everything is under the wise sovereignty of the living God. But Christian people still experience stress. This book (subtitled 'The path to peace') offers biblically-directed practical guidance about coping with such stress. Most of the twelve chapters conclude with quite detailed 'Getting personal' sections and the endnotes offer helpful resources from Vibert's thoughtful and wide-ranging reading, and his own life and ministry (he teaches at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford). The book deserves a place on every Vicar's bookshelf—and on many others as well.

HEART ATTITUDES

Graham Beynon (IVP, 2014, £8.99, 176pp, ISBN: 9781783591718)

According to the Bible, the human heart is where all of life's decisions and the development of our character are made. This book, by a vicar in Cambridge, UK, points out that we do not always like what we find in our hearts—and neither does God. The heart, and not just what we know, or what we do, discloses who we are; which is why the introduction to the book is called 'Welcome to heart surgery.' The nine chapters that follow then proceed to 'open-heart surgery' as the author works his way through what the Bible and wise Christian counsel have to say about love, fear, joy, peace, humility, confidence, thankfulness, contentment, and hope. This is an uncomfortably challenging but potentially transforming book!

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

David Bentley Hart (Yale University Press, 2013, US\$17 (p.back) 376 pp, ISBN: 9780300166842)

The name David Hart is not familiar to most evangelicals—but perhaps it should be. Hart is probably best known for his demolition of the 'new atheists' in his *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (2009). This new book continues his deconstruction of unbelief in several new and even surprising ways. He starts by arguing that the word 'God' is so poorly defined, both in unbelieving as well as in some Christian circles, that the very word itself can be hopelessly vague (the reason Christians can sometimes say to atheist or agnostic caricatures of 'God': "I don't believe in such a being either!"). Hart then works hard in his book (subtitled: 'Being, Consciousness, Bliss') to try to show how the word "God" actually functions in the world's major theistic religions and concludes that there is an essential continuity between humanity's actual experience of reality and the ultimate reality to which that experience clearly points. This is not the usual evangelical starting point although some 'evidentialist' apologists use it. The word 'experience' in the book's title will also worry some evangelicals, but what he means is that the common human experiences of being, of consciousness, and of bliss or enjoyment or love are completely inexplicable in a world of sheer materialistic naturalism. So, why read the book? It contains a powerful demolition of naturalism: the philosophical faith-assumption that nature is a closed system whose every feature is caused by and explainable by materialism. Hart believes that, "Evidence for or against the reality of God ... saturates every moment of the experience of existence, every employment of reason, every act of consciousness, every encounter with the world around us." But one consequence of this very totality is that it prompts our dreamlike neglect. For Hart, what is most revealing about the arguments of the new atheists is their dreamlike but needy laziness, desperation and even smugness: "Popular atheism is not a philosophy but a therapy." This is why unbelief "is a diverting alternative to thinking deeply. It is a narcotic. In our time ... irreligion is the opiate of the bourgeoisie, the sigh of the oppressed ego, the heart of a world filled with tantalizing toys." No wonder a commentator in the liberal *Guardian* newspaper (Oliver Burkeman in January 2014) headlined his blog with 'The one theology book all atheists really should read'!
