

## Book Reviews

*Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement.* By Sandler, Lauren. New York: Viking, 2006, 272 pp, \$24.95.

Another Great Awakening is about to roll across America and you should be afraid, very afraid. Thus self-described atheist Lauren Sandler warns her fellow secularists in *Righteous*. After traveling the country investigating, she stands convinced that the evangelical youth movement is more extensive, more radical, and more powerful than most people realize.

She calls them the “Disciple Generation”—people between fifteen and thirty-five for whom the Christian faith is an actual lifestyle. Many of them are outside-the-mainstream radicals. In an Illinois field, Sandler discovers them at Cornerstone, one of thirty-five Christian music festivals in 2005 that drew more than 5,000 youths (x). Among the 50,000 at Cornerstone she meets an army of passionate pro-lifers who promote their message through “Rock for Life” concerts. Traveling to Seattle, she finds them flocking to Mars Hill Church to hear Mark Driscoll, whom she calls the Jonathan Edwards of the approaching awakening. Viewing the Mars Hill phenomenon as a movement with far-reaching impact, she states, “To say that Mars Hill is just a church is to say that Woodstock (or Cornerstone) was just a concert” (45). In Iowa, Sandler connects with a group of poor, itinerant skateboarders who passionately and unselfishly bring love and the message of Jesus to forgotten children. Their sincerity touches her as much as the superficiality of a “Hollywood version” skateboard ministry repulses her.

Others in the evangelical youth movement seem more mainstream, but are just as committed to changing the culture. Across the country in Atlanta, the manipulation of prosperity teachers nauseates Sandler. Yet tens of thousands of young African-Americans flock to hear them. Fifty miles from Washington, D.C., she walks the halls of Patrick Henry College where former homeschoolers study, plan, and work to take over the United States government. She notes that homeschoolers number two million, their numbers are growing by ten percent a year (160), and homeschooled kids are fourteen times more likely to work for a candidate or a political party (174). From what she learns at a university in Virginia, Sandler exposes what she believes is the sinister plot behind the Intelligent Design movement—the promotion of divine creation. Finally, in Colorado Springs she discovers that three-fourths of the Air Force Academy cadets are evangelical Christians and one-fourth of them attend New Life Church whose pastor at the time, Ted Haggard, had a weekly scheduled telephone call with the White House (213–15). Interviewing several military leaders there, she is horrified to learn that

they believe the U.S. military presence in the Middle East is helping to open doors for the Great Commission and ultimately to bring about Christ's return.

As expected, Sandler's presuppositions rest on anti-supernaturalist foundations. She describes conversion as an emotional response to the crisis of loneliness and purposelessness. Spiritual awakenings emerge out of "widespread cultural disorientation and anxiety" (11). The current pre-awakening results from a desperate seeking of certainty in absolutes which arises from an uncertain, ever-fragmenting, chaotic world.

Two arguments run beneath Sandler's larger thesis that the evangelical youth movement is about to bring a Great Awakening. First, she argues that the movement is largely a rebellion against traditional American church culture. This is the youth rebellion of the sixties revisited, only this rebellion turns not toward sin, but toward a Savior who was not afraid to engage the culture. Second, Sandler argues that the failure of secularism has given rise to the Disciple Generation. Her frustration grows when she sees secularists offering no clear guidance, no community, and no agape love. She writes, "Until secular America strengthens its own front lines by developing strong communities and a culture that uplifts rather than invalidates, this army will have no viable opponent" (16).

Despite secularism's entrenched failures, Sandler ends her book with a stirring appeal to the Left to rise up and oppose the Disciple Generation. For her, the apocalypse is not the possibility of Armageddon, but the possibility of fundamentalist Christians controlling the culture. She calls on secularists to develop propagandizing concerts like Cornerstone, teaching communities like Mars Hill church, mission-driven schools like Patrick Henry College, even skateboarding itinerant secular preachers like those she met in Iowa. She concludes, "It's time for our own secular Great Awakening" (247).

In a surprising turn of events, an atheist has written a deeply significant book on what could indeed be the beginnings of a new Great Awakening. Sandler has provided important insight on spiritual awakening, the evangelical youth culture, and the church. As in previous times when an awakening was needed, the traditional church today has developed a fortress mentality and refused to engage the culture, instead developing its own subculture. To walk into many churches today is to walk into a museum displaying the culture of a forgotten era. So today's evangelical youth movement is taking Christianity outside the four walls of the traditional church to engage the culture. In doing so, it is imitating Whitefield and Wesley's field preaching during the Great Awakening. It is following the pattern of the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening and the prayer meetings in secular places of the Awakening

of 1857-8. As a result, the traditional church criticizes them, just like the “old lights” criticized the “new lights” in the Great Awakening, just like Finney’s “new measures” were criticized in the revivals of his day. Though not intentional, Sandler’s analysis implies that instead of criticizing, traditional churches should encourage the Disciple Generation and learn from them how to engage the culture.

Sandler’s sociological analysis intrigues her readers. She reveals stunning, even shocking information about the evangelical youth culture. The interaction of an atheist and that radical culture provides engaging tension and drama. Sandler is disarmingly frank about her ambivalent feelings toward these followers of Jesus—drawn by their love and commitment, repelled by their beliefs. She even describes a moment when she started weeping uncontrollably and almost put her faith in Christ. This page-turner just might help turn the church around and help it face the culture.

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*Women Leading Women*, by Jaye Martin and Terri Stovall. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009, 241pages, \$29.99 Hardback.

*Women Leading Women* establishes the framework for a women's ministry, but more importantly focuses on the ministry from the perspective of a leader and the role of a woman in church leading other women. This book was written by Jaye Martin (Dean of the Women's programs at Southern Seminary and creator of HeartCall, a women's evangelism ministry) and Terri Stovall (Dean of the Women's programs and associate professor at Southwestern Seminary) in a four part framework with each author contributing based on her field of study and experience. Stovall authors part one of this book establishing the biblical foundation for why women lead other women as well as discussing the role of women in church by evaluating the complementarian and egalitarian viewpoints. The second part of the book written entirely by Martin, focuses on the leader of a women's ministry and standards of leadership. The third part of the book, a shared effort by both authors, delves into the five tasks of women's ministry which are grounded in the five functions of the church. The last part of this book, written by both authors, summarizes all the foundational information into a praxis for women's ministry.

The book states that the purpose of *Women Leading Women* is to “paint a picture of what women's ministry should look like based upon Scripture” (xiii). This book is a biblical model for doing women's ministry within the local church and a straight forward attempt at

creating a foundational resource for women in leadership. This book is not a step by step process of how to accomplish women's ministry. A brief summary of each section of the book will give more insight into the portrait the authors intend to paint.

Stovall in section one of this book gives a survey of biblical manhood and womanhood. She begins her discussion from the Garden of Eden with the creation of woman (Genesis 1:27) and the roles that women have in the body of believers. She gives a brief survey of women throughout Scripture to show how God has used women of faith. In chapter two, she examines two views of women in ministry: egalitarian and complementarian. She evaluates both views with an obvious leaning towards complementarianism which she supports at each stage of her evaluation. The author and this reviewer realize there is little room in one chapter to completely discuss each viewpoint in depth. Through the complementarian lens, Stovall gives guidelines for determining appropriate areas of service for women in leadership positions such as "if it looks like Sunday morning then it should be men in leadership rather than women" (23). The last part of this section gives a theology of the church and how women's ministry can help fulfill the mission of the church.

Martin in part of two of this book uses three chapters to discuss the character and actions of a leader. In chapter four, she uses God's character to establish the standard of leadership and summarizes this chapter by stating "follow-ship becomes the great challenge. We need leaders who will follow the *Leader*" (60). In the next chapter, Martin uses what she taught about God's character as the standard to then evaluate the character of those in leadership. The last chapter of this section is reserved for how one serves alongside men in ministry stressing the differences between men and women and how one relates with someone of the opposite sex. As a point of disagreement with the authors, this reviewer sees this as an unnecessary and rather cliché look at men and women. There are underlying assumptions placed on a whole gender population. Although Martin seeks only to share her experiences through this chapter, it seems more in line with cultural stereotypes rather than biblical truth and the insights could be as easily applied to men working with other men.

The third section of this book reveals the task of women's ministry. Both Martin and Stovall contribute to these five chapters with each chapter explaining a different task and how that task is accomplished. The first task is reaching women for Christ which parallels the evangelism function of the church. "Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Mission is where you take the sharing of the good news"

(99). Using this definition, Martin explains a process that must take place within a women's ministry to be intentional about sharing the good news but also being on mission to take the good news. The second task, nurturing, parallels the discipleship function of the church. Stovall presents a biblical basis for creating disciples and teaching what Christ has commanded. She conveys tips for nurturing women in their faith. The third task of women's ministry is involving women in the work of the church. The foundation for this chapter is clearly stated by Stovall, "you can stand and try 20 different pieces in one spot before you find the one that fits perfectly. And when all the pieces are perfectly connected and no piece has been lost or forgotten, a beautiful picture is complete" (132). Finding the right women for the right job is time consuming but necessary. The fourth task, engage, speaks directly to the Titus 2 model to mentor those who are younger in the faith. This task parallels the ministry function of the church. This chapter, written by Stovall, establishes the why and how of girl's ministry. The last task of women's ministry is support. Martin stresses the important role that women's ministry plays in supporting the pastor, the staff, the church family, the ministries of the church, and the functions of the church. It is not nor shall ever be a stand alone ministry.

The last section of this book answers the question of how women's ministry is practiced. This section, shared by both authors, is a management style approach to women's ministry dealing with issues such as strategic planning, team enlistment, conflict resolution, and excellence in ministry. Each one of these topics is covered in depth in the last four chapters of this book. Stovall writes the last chapter of the book on excellence and summarizes all the information into specific guidelines for success in ministry.

*Women Leading Women* is for women in leadership who seek a better understanding of the Church and the role, function, and task of women's ministry within it. It serves the purpose of painting a portrait for the reader of the joy found in ministering to women with a focus on Christ and an understanding of the biblical foundation for women leading women.

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*Engaging Deconstructive Theology*. By Ronald T. Michener. Burlington: Ashgate, 2007, 259 pp., \$99.95.

Dr. Ronald T. Michener has written an interesting and engaging presentation on how evangelical theology can open a discussion with postmodernism, specifically academic postmodernism. The work stems

from Dr. Michener's doctoral dissertation and is entitled *Engaging Deconstructive Theology*, and is part of the Ashgate Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies series. The goal of the book is to open a dialog with postmodern thinkers in order to offer an apologetic for Christianity that pulls from multiple sources, including Scripture, experience, literature, and the imagination.

This book is neither for the faint of heart, nor for those who have little or no familiarity with the writings of the major postmodern thinkers of our time. It is a book that delves deeply into the works of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Taylor, Rorty, and Cupitt. If those names are not familiar to you then you may find this book to be quite confusing. If however, you are aware of these writers and their positions, then this is a book that you might find worthwhile reading. Let me give a brief overview of the book before offering a few concluding observations.

The book starts with a brief history lesson on the rise of postmodernism. Michener does a nice job of summarizing the rise of the postmodern movement from Francis Bacon to the six modern writers he investigates. He also lays out the various postmodern theologies that currently exist, from restorationist theology through liberation and process theology, to deconstructive theology, which is the focus of his book. Michener defines deconstructive theology as a "theology that attempts, through subversion, to bring about the self-destruction of the modern worldview into a non-worldview through its denial of objectivity" (11).

Having setup the history of postmodern thought, Michener then moves to investigate 6 representatives of deconstructive theology. The first writer he enters into dialog with is Jean-François Lyotard, and his call for the end of the metanarrative. Michener's interaction with Lyotard will serve as an example of how he treats the other five authors he treats. After outlining Lyotard's position on the elimination of the metanarrative Michener concludes that while Lyotard's position is helpful in some ways, such as helping us see how the metanarrative can take on a life of its own and be used to foster oppressive systems, that in no way should make us reject the idea of metanarratives *in toto*. Christianity presents a metanarrative and as such, evangelicals must not reject its metanarrative, but can allow Lyotard's position to allow us to question the metanarrative in order to make sure we have understood the narrative correctly. Lyotard's position can also help us to be humble in our acceptance of the Christian metanarrative. Michener employs the same technique as he dialogs with the deconstructionism of Derrida, the rejection of the Enlightenment Self in Michel Foucault, the nihilism of Mark Taylor, the pragmatism of Richard Rorty, and the theological necrophilia of Don Cupitt.

After presenting each writer's position, he then gleans from those writers what is useful for evangelical theology, but rejects those positions that conflict with the evangelical position. I am not sure if this constitutes a dialog as such, for it would seem that his rejection of the foundational position of the six writers with which he interacts would cut off dialog. It would be more accurate to describe Michener's work as a raiding party sent into the postmodern camp in order to carry off those things that are useful, but having carried them off to use them for a purpose that fits Michener's evangelical position. Michener argues that postmodernism has valid insights that evangelicals can employ as we seek to work out our own apologetic with the postmodern world. This is ultimately his purpose in writing the book. He wants to open a discussion with those who have embraced postmodernism, but he does not wish for a one-sided dialog. He seeks to step into the postmodern camp and insert an evangelical response to the postmodern worldview. Michener's response is based on a "soft foundationalism" that seeks to remain humble in our quest for truth and not let our quest for certainty be a substitute for the Truth.

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