

## **Book Reviews**

*Richard Furman: Life and Legacy.* By James A. Rogers. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001, xxxv + 335 pp., \$20.00 paper.

Originally published in 1985, this is the first biography since 1913 devoted to the life of the pioneer southern Baptist pastor and statesman, Richard Furman. It is a worthy addition to the growing body of literature on Baptist history and theology. The author, James A. Rogers, is primarily concerned with drawing a picture of the man and his historical impact on Baptist missions, Southern Baptist organization and Baptist education.

Furman was born into a Puritan family in New York shortly before their move to South Carolina in 1756. Converted under Baptist preaching in the early 1770s, Furman rejected his father's Anglicanism for Baptist views and was ordained within a few years of his baptism. During the Revolution, Furman had a price set on his head by the British General Cornwallis, who feared the prayers of Furman more than the combined might of two continental armies. Furman was an advocate of a pan-Protestant religious liberty, yet defended his own right as an ordained minister to be a political representative at the state level and argued for state funding of his religious school. In church government, he moved his congregation away from an aristocratic to a more democratic model. Furman showed some ability to adapt to varying cultures when he appropriated a simple vestment after moving from a rural church to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, an adaptability for which he was criticized.

A prominent leader in the Charleston Association, the first and leading Baptist association in the South, he believed revival would come to the churches as a result of ministerial education, lay indoctrination, attention to ecclesiology and pious commitment. During the Second Great Awakening, he lauded the movement's "great tendency to excite the attention, and engage it to religion," but warned about "some incidental evils," especially the loss of rational activity (108-9). Furman was not only a dedicated pastor, but also the first true denominational statesman among Baptists in the United States. In 1814, he was elected the first President of the Triennial Convention, the first national Baptist missions society in America. Soon after his 1817 address to that same convention on the need for ministerial education, Baptists established at least ten now-prominent Baptist colleges and universities. He was invited to preach before the President and Congress of the United States in 1814.

Unlike some denominational leaders then and today, Furman understood that Baptists must have a vote on those institutional decisions which affect the churches, something that even Luther Rice did not fully comprehend (179-85). While he could evoke awe among his ministerial colleagues, he still made time for the children. In her diary, Eliza Tupper remembered her pastor requiring children to memorize the catechism. She described how he would descend from the pulpit to quiz them: "I think I hear at this very moment the dear voice of our pastor, saying, 'A little louder, my child.'" (207).

Although he established a unique form of ecclesiastical structure with the constitution of the South Carolina Baptist Convention—a form that would empower the later Southern Baptist Convention to become the greatest missionary and educational denomination in the United States—Furman also had his faults. He had earlier denounced slavery, but came to defend it during the ideological buildup to the Civil War. His letter to the Governor of South Carolina defending slavery is reprinted in all of its misdirected eloquence with the eight appendices of original documents located at the back of the book. Perhaps it is fitting that this founder of Baptist conventions, missions societies, education societies and even of a college which later bore his name, delivered his final sermon on the divinity of Christ. After all, God became a man and died on a cross for Baptist icons, too.

Rogers is a capable historian but makes mistakes when foraying into theology. Without any historical evidence to support his claim about Furman's response to a question concerning his performance of a wedding ceremony for a fellow minister, Rogers asserts that Furman "demonstrated liberalism uncharacteristic then of Baptist conservatism" (81-82). Fortunately, Rogers focuses on the historical side of the discipline of historical theology. For those interested in the doctrinal contributions of Furman, Thomas J. Nettles offers a concise and well-written essay in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. by Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990).

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*The Glory of Christ*. By John Armstrong, ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002, 176 pp., \$14.99.

*The Glory of Christ* delivers a plea for the recovery—indeed, the rediscovery of Jesus Christ as the center of evangelical affection, obedience, and praise. John Armstrong, founder and president of

Reformation & Revival Ministries and editor of this volume from Crossway Books, cites the captivation of contemporary Christian attention by church growth methodologies, the psychology of self-esteem, political activism, co-dependency and a host of other concerns to justify the appearance of this collection of essays. Armstrong, along with three fellow reformed Baptists combine efforts to produce eight chapters treating various aspects of the glory of Christ.

In chapter one, Armstrong first gives attention to Christ's involvement in and significance for the created realm. Christ is sovereign in relation to the entire universe which he both created and sustains. Within the comprehensive scope of his reign, Christ asserts special lordship over His church within and through which His glory uniquely displays itself in the universal work of reconciliation. Christ's agency in creation, accomplishment of reconciliation, and lordship over the church both reveal and demonstrate the fullness of God in Christ. God's worthiness for praise finds its concrete expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus the path to reformation and revival among God's people involves essentially the glorification of Jesus Christ. Such a recovery of Christ's glorification should manifest itself in the church's stewardship of its time, attention, and effort. The pulpit is the place to start.

James I. Packer reviews the significance of the doctrine of the person of Christ in chapter two by exploring the meaning of the incarnation. In light of Christ's eternal divine nature in triune relationship to the Father and the Spirit, Packer concludes that the incarnation means mystery, union, addition, and mediation. Incarnation is mystery because it evokes both the confession that the incarnation has occurred and that its full meaning remains ineffable. While our reason rightly and happily pursues it in analysis, wisdom maintains that "when rational analysis can take us no further we turn to worship"(47). It is union because the divine and human truly and profitably unite not only without threatening their own distinctive natures but express themselves most purely just here, in him. Incarnation is addition because it secures even as it displays divine empathy for everything human. Finally, incarnation means mediation because through it, we sinners are truly brought into relationship with the living God.

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, considers Christ the Mediator in chapter three. In stunningly short compass Mohler surveys the great soteriological insights of the Reformation concerning Christ the suffering, sacrificial, saving, substitutionary, superior, supernatural, solitary, sufficient, and sovereign Mediator.

In chapter four, Jim Elliff, president of Christian Communicators

Worldwide, considers the glory of Christ the Lamb of God. Elliff points readers to the awe and splendor of Christ the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world as depicted in John's Revelation.

Armstrong revisits the scandalous glory of Christ crucified and its implications for preaching and the Christian life in chapter five.

James I. Packer considers the glory of the present reign of Christ in chapter six, identifying three permanent pairs of characteristics indicative of that reign. Christ, insists Packer, is permanent image and centrality, humanity and headship, union and communion. The staggering reality of Christ's present and his promised future reign as King ought to enthrall and then empower the church of Christ to deep worship of and clear witness to her ascended Savior and Lord.

In chapter seven Albert Mohler considers the coming Christ who will manifest his lordship to all of creation, end history, and inaugurate the new age in which the authority, judgment, and most significantly, the glory of the Son of God will be universally evident.

In the final chapter Jim Elliff explores the repercussions resulting from a faithful vision of Christ's glory in the life of his followers. Where Christ's worthiness for praise is known and embraced, believers will unashamedly declare his name, magnifying him and nurturing their own passion for him in themselves and in others.

These four authors recognize the exegetical, theological and cultural causes for the neglect of Christ within the church. They also identify resources for the corrections called for, not only among Reformation, but also among patristic Chalcedonian voices from the past. But, while this volume does not lack theological, historical, or exegetical insight, its true value is first doxological and then practical. It seems clear that the authors share a common grief and a common longing. They grieve over the neglect of their Savior by those called by his name and they long for a rediscovery of his glory in the church. This volume should offer encouragement to likeminded ministers and laypersons who find themselves and their brothers and sisters in Christ tossed about and distracted by one cultural, political, or theological fad after another.

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*Love in Hard Places.* By D. A. Carson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2002, pp. 208, \$14.99.

In John 13, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment: "that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you love one another" (RSV).

The Sermon on the Mount includes a more shocking demand: the disciples must love even their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Mt 5:43-48). Our Lord's standards are high, and yet they seem to be straightforward enough. We seek the welfare of our friends and foes alike, even at great personal expense. But this superficial clarity disappears once we press for specifics. Does Jesus expect us to love those who are, right now, plotting to kill us? Does he forbid all efforts to defend ourselves against deadly force? When the demands of justice and love apparently collide, which come first? If love requires enemies to reconcile, on what terms should they do so? Now we seem to know far less than we thought, as so many questions remain. But some of them, at least, are answered in D. A. Carson's latest work, *Love in Hard Places*, which addresses these and related concerns.

*Love in Hard Places* contains six chapters, the first of which recalls several claims defended in *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Crossway, 2000). As an example, Carson warns us again that to say what the Bible does about God's love will offend popular sensibilities. Modern people demand a god who is always of good cheer and who asks next to nothing of us (11-12). Consequently, they also expect Christians to adopt his uncritical ways. In the same place, Carson also discourages us from investing Greek words for love—e.g., *agapē*, *philia*, or *eros*—with technical significance, since the biblical writers use them too freely, as modern lexicons make clear.

We then find a section which identifies several types of divine love, each one differing from the others in terms of its object and/or practical effects. We know, for example, that God's intra-Trinitarian love could not compare directly to his providential love, as the latter entails the satisfaction of needs, while the former could never do so (14). The love expressed in John 3:16 may have little in common with the election love favoring Jacob in Romans 9:10-12 (15). We cannot unify these forms of divine love under a single, non-trivial definition of "love." Nor, Carson reminds us, must we formulate any understanding of God's loves with indifference to his other attributes. His maximal benevolence does not negate his maximal justice. The God who comforts also destroys (16).

The next step is to examine the double commandment of love, as found in Mark 12:28-34. Here Jesus answers a popular "exam" question of his own day. Which commandment is the greatest? And in response, Carson observes, Jesus combines two major traditions. One does not love either God or his neighbor—when all else fails—but both at the same time. Yet the commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5 comes first logically (19). The one, true God must have our supreme loyalty and affection, the latter aspect being a special emphasis of Carson's analysis. A man cannot regard himself as being fully in line with the *Shema* if he merely wills to

obey it without desiring to do so (20-21). Affective shortcomings fall short of God's glory, though Carson does not quite suggest how one is to confront this sin. Perhaps one minds his attitude as best he can, knowing that such a change must finally be heaven-sent. On any analysis of loving God, however, knowledge of him counts; and thus Carson calls us back to our Bibles and the intensive reading habits of earlier generations (30).

The commandment to love our enemies follows two antitheses which Carson interprets for the sake of context (chapter 2, cf. Mt 5:43-48). Jesus forbids oath-taking; yet the OT commands the Israelites to swear alright, and only in their God's name (Dt 6:13). He also forbids getting one's own back, notwithstanding the *lex talionis* of Exodus 21:24 and Deuteronomy 19:21. We have a formal contradiction before us, then, and Matthew 5:43-47 causes the same worry. After all, loving one's enemy and giving him his due tend in opposite directions—or so we might have thought. But Carson resolves this tension by noticing the different contexts of these commandments. Jesus forbids oath-taking just in case the use of oaths abets dishonesty. He forbids personal revenge, but not official retribution by the state. He allows the state to inflict deserved harm, while commanding his disciples to act benevolently within the bounds of justice. All of them are reasonable answers. Carson then contrasts our duty to love "little" and "big" enemies, in that order, doing the former with awful (yet somehow delightful) detail. Little enemies, i.e. irritators who do not attack us for our faith, require commonplace—and therefore less satisfying—forbearance. Big enemies, on the other hand, attack us because of our faith; and while not all killing of Christians counts as persecution (sometimes they are just murdered), the latter's incidence has risen sharply in this century.

Since we are called to love sinful people—there being no other kind—we must also forgive one another. Relationships will break down, and the resulting grievances hinder love. The chain reaction is inevitable, so Carson considers its special challenges before taking up the hard cases of racism and Islamic terrorism. First, then, comes the note that enemies may not always reconcile. If a guilty side denies all wrongdoing or refuses to repent, he decreases the innocent man's capabilities. But, Carson argues, forgiveness can happen unilaterally: we need not wait upon our enemy to do this much (71-72). We know that the Father forgives, if not in the casual way that satisfies the modern taste; and the Son forgives even those who crucify him. Indeed, the NT makes a willingness to forgive, after the divine example, an indispensable fruit of regeneration. The old man withholds it; the new man offers it freely. None of this, however, permits the state to forgive wrongdoers: "In other words, the state cannot afford the same luxury; it cannot display the same virtue of forgiveness. The state's virtue is maintained insofar as it

pursues justice. By implication, if the state's magistrate is a Christian, that Christian better remember which virtue takes precedence in his or her role as a servant of the state" (80).

Based on his prior remarks, one can anticipate how Carson will handle racism and Islamic terrorism. People in all ethnic groups must first confront some ugly realities, one of them being that racism is everywhere. No ethnic group specializes in it, leaving the uninitiated to congratulate themselves for their innocence; and slavery follows racism. That too has existed worldwide. We also must not assume that when any two groups fail to integrate, the majority has always prevented it. This conclusion follows, according to Carson, only if "racism" is defined prejudicially, i.e. so that only the powerful can be racists. At the end of the day, he argues, the Nixons on all sides must go to China, approaching people groups that they alone can address without appearing to surrender. African-American and European-American leaders should expose race-baiting on their own sides, not each other's (91).

Carson uses Osama bin Laden as a concrete image of Islamic terrorism, since the American Christian finds himself being of two minds regarding such a man. We want to see him converted and lethally injected, perhaps both in equal measures. The same tension existed in the Second World War: we planned to shoot "Hans" on Thursday, notwithstanding Wednesday night's prayers for his soul. So we are asking about just war theory, after all; and Carson resolves the tension in those terms, arguing that some wars can be not only consistent with love, but demanded by it. One loves the victims of Islamic and Nazi wickedness, for example, by restoring the balance of justice, even at gunpoint. And one loves the perpetrators themselves by staying within the bounds of justice, however blunt the instrument of warfare may be. Therefore, Carson argues, our country may justly attempt to capture Islamic terrorists and neutralize the threat of hostile countries (123). All these measures presuppose that we, as a country, did not have September 11 coming to us—as he also cogently argues.

The final two chapters of *Love in Hard Places* deal with each side of the tension between Christian purity—whether doctrinal or behavioral—and unity. These two priorities appear to conflict in some cases, because orthodox Christians recognize that they cannot have peace at any price. Some lines will have to be drawn. But line-drawing sets us against the modern praise of tolerance which approves all that differs, no matter its content. So Carson introduces the problem of church discipline with the reminder that tolerance presupposes negative judgments. We tolerate what is, from our viewpoint, the *wrong* side, not just the other one (141). And in Scripture, the same apostles who encourage forbearance may also

prescribe confrontation and exclusion. The events of Galatians 2:11-21 make this clear enough, as Carson points out in some detail (144-160).

According to his own reconstruction of that day, unconverted Jews had begun to persecute the church in Jerusalem, and this news reached Peter by way of men “from James.” They tell him to lower his profile as a free Christian, and he does so for fear of making matters worse back in Jerusalem. Paul, on the other hand, argues that this behavior suggests to gentile Christians that the latter’s faith in Christ is not sufficient (153). Accordingly, the *demand* coming from unconverted Jews, however implicit, makes all the difference as to whether Peter is guilty of “play-acting” (152). To obey it—or even seem to do so—concedes the theological point: they are right and the Christians are wrong. Therefore, the Pauline rebuke stays within the demands of love, because it defends the very basis of Christian fellowship.

The church at Ephesus suffers from the opposite tendency. These Christians have done many things well, having endured under strain and exposed false teaching (173). They have become appropriately angry and activated when wolves have tried to invade their fellowship. However, they have also fallen from great heights of love. Carson argues that both dimensions of love—viz. the attitude and its corresponding behavior—are lacking, with special emphasis upon the former. Even when they do “love,” it occurs without the underlying surprise and wonder that God has first loved them (178). Consequently, there comes the threat of this church’s extinction, portrayed as the removal of its lamp stand. The last “hard place” of love, then, is the battle-scarred church which has fallen into comfortable and routine civility (188).

As Carson himself notes, this book about love in hard places has really become a prototype textbook on Christian ethics, covering far more ground than its reader expects (10). And perhaps that was inevitable: for when an author can address so many topics in a helpful way, he is tempted to do just that. *Love in Hard Places* gets in something for nearly everyone, rather than defending a tightly focused thesis—which is no criticism of it, but rather a fair warning as to the type of book one has in hand. We note as well that the style of the book has been affected by its early life as lectures to Oak Hill Theological College in 2001 (9). Listing occurs throughout the work (i.e. “*First*, . . . *Second*, . . . *Third*,” etc.), and this tendency may put off readers who admire less mechanical prose. But these are minor points, as *Love in Hard Places* makes for entirely satisfactory reading.

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*Jeremiah*. By Terence E. Fretheim. Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary Series. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002, xx + 684 pp., \$65.00.

If a God as depicted by Fretheim in his commentary did not exist, no one would try to create him. Terence Fretheim, known to Old Testament students from his commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, and Kings and such writings as *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), recognizes that the portrayal of God in Jeremiah is particularly challenging (xiii). However, Fretheim is determined to take seriously the biblical book's words from, to, and about God. Fretheim does not attempt to side-step or to explain away even the most startling statements from or about the deity.

He does not ease Jeremiah's scandalous "confessions" to God. But to take seriously Scripture's statements about God in the book of Jeremiah, he calls into question many suppositions and theological positions. For instance, Bible believers joyfully affirm God's sovereignty over creation, Fretheim's all-encompassing term for the created order, nations, and history. When that sovereignty is limited by the tools God chooses to use, the notion of sovereignty becomes problematic. Yet Fretheim states God's free choices are constrained by relationships and related to powers available through which God can work (387). Additionally, in the disagreement among evangelicals over divine omniscience with regards to the future, Fretheim weighs in on the "open" side with such sidebar titles as "The Divine Perhaps" (377 on Jer 26:3) or "A New Day for God, Too" (467 on Jer 32).

Fretheim's theological struggles with Jeremiah's depiction of God is the most stimulating aspect of this commentary, but other features and positions are helpful, too. Fretheim reminds us Jeremiah is a book. It contains Jeremiah's preaching to 7th and 6th century Judah. But the book itself is written for a different audience, a later one, an audience that knew the historical fulfillments of the prophet's word. The book of Jeremiah, in its canonical form, then, is a coherent work that was compiled by editors or redactors some time after the prophet's ministry. (This is the mainstream view today). The compilation, while reflecting Jeremiah's words and deeds, is an intentional work addressed to a dispersed Israel and dealing with the exiles' questions (although the book may date to a period after the 538 B.C. return to Israel). Modern students of Jeremiah must read with both audiences in view.

Understood in this fashion, a reader expects the structure (rhetorical strategy) of the prophetic book to make an argument. Fretheim does not find any overarching logical argument when the book is viewed as a whole, even though he believes Jeremiah 25 is a "hinge" connecting two

halves of the completed work. (This writer finds Kathleen O'Connor's argument for structure to be more convincing; cf. her *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25*. SBL Dissertation Series. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.) Rhetorical strategy for Fretheim, then, is the prophet's use of images and language.

The commentary is commendable in Fretheim's attempts to avoid extreme positions on such matters as authorship (what is truly from the prophet himself), historicity, and the book's relation to the Deuteronomists. But he cannot satisfy everyone and his distinction between historicity and truth may unsettle some (cf. the sidebar "Truth and History," 12) although he argues for some link between Israel's actual history and confessed history (31). Additionally, perhaps out of a desire to link closely Jeremiah's world and ours, Fretheim makes much of human agency in accomplishing God's work in the world. This agency ranges from God's use of Nebuchadnezzar and others (cf. 35f. and the sidebar "Conformation of Divine and Human Actions") to God's hiding of Baruch and Jeremiah at the instigation of royal officials (510 on Jer 36:26).

Several features of the Smyth and Helwys' Commentary series are interesting and helpful for general readers. Some three-hundred colored sidebars throughout the volume deal with such matters as historical detail (Josiah's sons, 315), archaeology (Lachish and Azekah, 484), theological points (God's willingness to change, 377), and interpretive topics (Seventy Years, 356). Several sidebars are quotes from modern authors. These quotes range from Daniel Berrigan's poetry to three sidebars relating to Jeremiah 45 (quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gerhard von Rad, and H. Wheeler Robinson). Indices include a sidebar index along with lists of scriptures, authors, works cited, etc. Most helpful for the computer-literate is a compact disc included with the commentary. The CD repeats the words, pictures, etc. of the print volume but has also Adobe Acrobat 4.05 to facilitate searching the entire work for words, phrases, etc.

Fretheim's volume has a place between the technical work of John A. Thompson (*The Book of Jeremiah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) and the more application-oriented work of Ronald E. Clements (*Jeremiah*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) and is not as tendentious as Walter Brueggeman's work (*A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Fretheim masks his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek because of the commentary series audience. The commentary and bibliography indicate the author is familiar with modern works on prophets and prophecy, but he presents information on the role and function of a prophet, the prophets' typical speech forms, etc. in discussion of particular oracles, not as introductory

material. Each major text-portion has “Commentary” and “Connections” sections. The former is helpful; the latter less so. Intending to deal with theological issues and to make application, the “Connections” provide bridges to contemporary life. The volume has few typographical errors, although the heading on page 511 refers to encounters between Jeremiah and *Hezekiah!*

This commentary series is addressed to the general reader, attempting “to make available serious, credible biblical scholarship in an accessible and less intimidating format” (from the publisher’s web site). Terence Fretheim seems to have met that goal; however, the biblical book Jeremiah does not lend itself to the general reader because of the intense and disturbing pictures of God in the book. Consequently, while students and general readers will understand Fretheim’s clear writing style, the commentary will prove to be more helpful for preachers and teachers.

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*Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God.* By Marva Dawn. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.

*Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* is a clumsy title for a devotional book. But Marva Dawn wasn’t writing this work as a devotional book. For the past month, though, her book has stimulated and inspired my devotional time and helped me pray. Based on the 2000 Schaff Lectures at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Marva Dawn wrote a four-chapter work bringing together the concepts “principalities and powers” and God’s tabernacling in weakness. Then she looked at the church to see how believing communities deal with the unseen forces which affect and afflict our world. She asked if we are reflecting the presence of God by embracing our institutional weakness. Or, have we idolized and come to imitate the powers that seem to dominate human thinking and behavior?

Perhaps you have an adequate understanding of the divinely created, yet fallen powers that dominate life today. I did not and do not. But Dawn reminded me that we cannot simply ignore the drives and desires and needs that lie behind economic, political, pleasurable and knowledge-seeking activities. Nor can we make any progress by simply branding unethical and immoral activity “sin.” Instead, the church must face and witness to a powerful coalition of business, education, entertainment, political, and scientific interests, some of the current expressions of powers fallen but overcome in the coming of Christ.

Dr. Dawn's view that Jesus' atonement overcame the powers of this world is not new. Gustaf Aulen popularized the view in *Christus Victor* (MacMillan Publishing, Co; 1969 paperback edition); however, the New Testament view of principalities and powers as real, powerful, and significant has been demythologized by some and simply collapsed into their view of Satan by others. Dawn briefly surveyed the understanding of the powers prior to Walter Wink's books (e.g., Wink's trilogy *The Powers*, Fortress Press, 1984-1992 and *The Powers That Be*, Doubleday, 1999). She affirmed Wink's refocusing of the language and bringing the powers to our attention but criticized his view for identifying the powers as essentially "this world" and without significant spiritual dimensions. Most important, in chapter one Dawn underlined the importance of the church recognizing the powers today.

Chapter two is exegetical and conceptual. The author worked with the words and concepts of God's power (du/namij), human weakness (a)sqe/nea), and the finishing or perfecting of something (tele/w). All three concepts are important to Dawn's understanding of the role of the church. After studying the concepts, she brought them to bear on 2 Corinthians 12:9. In this passage, she translated the Lord's answer to Paul's prayer for removal of the thorn in the flesh as "My grace is sufficient for you, for [your] power is brought to its end in weakness." Likewise Dawn reminds us that Paul gloried in his own weakness (2 Cor 11:30). While these insights are not unique to Dr. Dawn, they are fundamental to the point she wanted to make. *The church must embrace its own weakness in order that the power of God might be evident.* She buttressed her position by discussing Jesus' tabernacling and what it means for his followers to live out their weakness, as Jesus did, for the glory of God.

The volume becomes truly convicting in chapter three entitled "Churches Being, and Acting as, Fallen Powers." Here the church, its congregations and leaders, are indicted for pursuing the same goals and using the same methods as the fallen powers with the result that churches become one of the fallen powers. (Warnings of the church's becoming "one of them" are reminiscent of Eugene Peterson, a popular writer with whom Dawn has work, taught, and written, cf., *The Unnecessary Pastor*, Eerdmans, 2000.) The remedy is found, in good evangelical fashion, in the description of the church in Acts 2. Here the author made her points about how the church can be something other than one of the fallen powers. This is where Dawn's work becomes practical in the best sense of that term, for ministers serving local congregations, seminary professors who care about the church and its leaders, and laypersons with an interest in what God designed the church to be and to do.

Dawn isolated “seven practices of the early church”: the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of *the* bread (her emphasis), prayers, signs and wonders, economic redistribution, and worship. She gave the greatest amount of space to the point about the apostles’ teaching, dealing with method and content and the “biblically-formed vision” of what the church should be. Again, while there is relatively little that is absolutely new in her treatment of these seven practices, there is much to think and to pray about when we compare the goals and methods that we promote in the church with where it all began. Conviction comes in reading this portion not because of what we don’t know with our minds but because of what we do not know by experience and what we do not try to do and to be.

Chapter four’s focus on the “gospel armor” of Ephesians 6 may be the least compelling portion of the book. The exegesis seems forced since, in my opinion, she uses the helmet, shield, etc. simply as vehicles to say what she needed to say. Still, this chapter has challenges for the church that seeks to give glory to God by showing that victories come through his strength married to the church’s embraced weakness. In all, Marva Dawn has written a book, as another reviewer phrased it, “not for the faint hearted [but] for those whose hearts have grown weary.”<sup>1</sup>

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*Can We Do That? Twenty-Four Innovative Practices That Will Change the Way You Do Church.* By Andy Stanley and Ed Young, Jr. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2002, 194 pp., \$16.99 hardcover.

This book provides a unique opportunity to listen to ideas from two very bright pastors. Andy Stanley is the son of Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, and Ed Young, Jr. is the son of Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist in Houston. What happens when the sons of two mega-church pastors grow up and start their own churches? In this case, Andy Stanley is the pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, GA. Begun in 1995, the church now averages approximately nine

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<sup>1</sup> See online review at [http://www.anglican.org.nz/News/Taonga/powers\\_weakness.htm](http://www.anglican.org.nz/News/Taonga/powers_weakness.htm) by Bryden Black. Accessed October 14, 2002.

thousand in worship attendance. Ed Young, Jr. serves as pastor of Fellowship Church in the Dallas Metroplex area. Begun in 1990, the church now averages fifteen thousand in weekly attendance. *Can We Do That?* provides an opportunity to peek inside the minds of these two “cutting edge” pastors.

The book contains twenty-four chapters and is divided into four sections. Section one is titled “Reaching Out” and discusses various evangelistic strategies employed by both churches. Section two is titled “Ministering to People” and focuses on various methods for discipleship. Section three is titled “Leading the Church” and deals with leadership and ecclesiology. Section four is titled “Getting the Message Across” and addresses worship and sermon preparation. The writing style is non-technical and the book itself can be read at a fast pace. The ideas springing from these two active minds come at a rapid-fire pace from beginning to end.

Stanley and Young should be commended for proposing many positive ideas that can contribute to an evangelistic atmosphere in a local church. Stanley summarizes the evangelism strategy for his church in a simple “invest and invite” formula. Instead of focusing on an evangelism training program, Stanley stresses that his church members should invest themselves in the lives of unbelievers and then invite their lost friends to church. Stanley summarizes the reason for this strategy when he says, “It is easier to invite people to an event than it is to confront them about their personal belief system. It is easier to include them in on something you are excited about than it is to convince them that their entire worldview is incorrect” (3). Young summarizes the strategy of Fellowship Church as “reach up, reach out, and reach in.” He emphasizes that the senior pastor must model evangelism and says, “Ultimately, senior pastors must be a model of evangelism. They must be willing to be put in situations with people in the community and be comfortable saying, ‘Hey, I’m a senior pastor. Come visit the church sometime’” (12).

*Can We Do That?* continues from the initial chapters on the importance of evangelism to give a potpourri of innovative ideas. In children’s ministry, Stanley’s church offers a “Kidstuf” service each Sunday which is designed for attendance by children and their parents (46). At Young’s church, if children trust Christ, their *parents* are contacted and invited to attend a class called “KidFaith” (59) where the parents are given help on how to disciple their children. Concerning invitations, Stanley will often conclude a service by saying “The person who invited you to church this morning would love to discuss [Christ] with you over lunch” (4). Young seems to have a grasp on the potential of the internet to reach lost people. Both churches engage in practices that are common to growing churches such as new member’s classes,

reviewing the worship services for improvement opportunities, and creating an atmosphere of excellence.

I confess that I enjoy listening to both of these men preach and that there are many ideas in *Can We Do That?* that I can embrace and suggest to others. That said, I also find some aspects of their approach with which I disagree. Foremost is an attitude that seems to emphasize the mindset that elevates the pragmatic at the expense of the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, Young repeatedly stresses the need for creativity in the church. This theme comes to a crescendo when he says, “Creativity brings people in the front door, and creativity keeps people from going out the back door” (149). While creativity is a wonderful character trait, is creativity all that brings people to the church? What about the work of the Holy Spirit convicting the lost of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8)? Integrating a well-rounded view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit could strengthen this book.

Both authors also seem to play a bit fast and loose with ecclesiology. It is not apparent that either church would fit into the traditional models of congregational, episcopal, or presbyterian ecclesiologies, though Stanley does offer an elder-led model. What is clear in both churches is that congregations are “staff-led,” which is not necessarily a bad thing. Neither church has deacons in any form. Both pastors seem to want to avoid the problems of “hyper-congregationalism” where leaders are micro-managed, a real problem in numerous churches. Young’s critique of micro-management is appropriate when he says, “Committees are, for the most part, sedentary bodies. The people on them are not usually active in the day-to-day operations of the church so it is next to impossible to instill in them the same drive and vision as the staff” (105). Well said. However, Young’s answer is to advocate what can perhaps be described as a “corporate” ecclesiology in which they have “no elders or deacons” (103). For his part, Stanley adds, “The problem with the term ‘deacon’ is that everybody who has grown up in church has a preconceived idea about what that role entails,” thus North Point has no deacons (115). What, then, is one to do with I Timothy 3:8-13? While most pastors can share stories *ad infinitum* about deacons who attempted to micro-manage the church, is the best response really to eliminate the office all together? Would biblical education about the role of a deacon be a better tact?

These ecclesiological issues demonstrate what I perceive to be a weakness in Stanley and Young’s approach: an attitude that if it works, it must be of God. Yet, methods are not neutral. Just because “we are not changing the message of Christ” does not mean that all methods are open to us. Biblical parameters for church life protect us from drifting from

methodological error to doctrinal error in the future. That said, I encourage pastors who want to grow a church to read this work for the sheer volume of ideas that flow from Young and Stanley. Adopt their evangelistic enthusiasm, but then add a healthy emphasis on the Holy Spirit and biblical parameters for methodology.

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