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What's Good about the Good News: The Plan of Salvation in a New Light (Book Review)

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participating in the orderliness of the temple cultus. As estimated by leading biblical scholars, the close proximity of the writing of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the beginning of the construction of the second temple (near the end of the sixth century B.C.E.) lends evidence for the close theological connection between the two.

Insofar as we Christians, both academics and laypersons, rarely, if ever, consult a Jewish interpretation of Old Testament themes, we fail to avail ourselves of op-

What's Good about the Good News: The Plan of Salvation in a New Light, Neil Punt (Chicago, Illinois: Northland Books, 1988). 142 pp. \$7.95. Reviewed by John Struyk, Professor of Foreign Languages.

Are the millions of aborted babies condemned to hell because of original sin? What happens to children who die in infancy? In the course of history millions and millions of children and adults have died who never heard the Gospel. Are these people eternally lost? These are the types of questions that are often raised in connection with the doctrines of election and reprobation. Typical answers to these questions range from "we don't know" to "we must trust that the Lord is just."

Romans 1:20-23 is often pointed to as an answer. There we read that people can know God from his creative acts and should therefore praise and thank him. Foolishly, people rejected God and chose to worship images of their own creation. These verses do seem to indicate that if humankind has no excuse then there is a possibility of being saved without knowing the Gospel.

In 1977 the Christian Reformed Church received a formal complaint in the form of an overture to Synod against some of the teaching as expressed in the *Canons of Dort*. What it came down to was that the *Canons* teach that people are "consigned to everlasting damnation before they ever came into being" (Punt, 21). In 1980 the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church came with the result of the study that was initiated after the 1977 overture on reprobation. Some of the statements of this report are very interesting: "God consigns someone to destruction only on the basis of what that person does." "The basis for that condemnation is to be found solely in the persistent unbelief and sin of those so condemned" (1980 *Acts of Synod*, Christian Reformed Publications, 593).

All these questions concerning election and reprobation Neil Punt deals with in his books *Unconditional Good News* (1980) and now in *What's Good about the Good News*.

Punt's basic argument is based on texts that speak of all persons coming to new life through the sacrificial blood of Christ, texts like John 1:9. John 3:17. John 12:47. Romans 5:18. In I Cor. 15:22 we read: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Punt says

Let the Whole World Know: Resources for Preaching on Missions, Richard R. DeRidder and Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988). 203pp. \$7.95. Reviewed by Gerald W. Vander Hoek, Assistant Professor of Theology.

In recognition of the need for biblical preaching to promote missions, DeRidder and Greenway have assembled

opportunities for enriching the understanding of our own faith. This book would allow Christians to become acquainted with an analysis of God's Word written from a differing faith perspective, yet one that equally seeks to discover the teaching contained in that text. Levenson gives us an intriguing contemporary Jewish interpretation of creation, evil, and God's omnipotence that challenges us either to rethink or to confirm our traditional theological assumptions.

that such texts have to be taken at their face value: "The universalistic texts speak of a certain-to-be-realized salvation in terms of all persons" (Punt 12). In other words, faith in Christ Jesus is not a condition of being saved but a result. Here are Punt's words:

True faith is a result or fruit of salvation, not a cause, prerequisite, or condition for salvation. Faith (as well as repentance and obedience) is absolutely necessary for all who hear the gospel because those who choose to remain indifferent or refuse to repent, believe and live in joyful obedience thereby reject God's will as he has made it known to them. (vii)

Punt of course realizes that the Bible teaches that many will be lost. He says that when the Bible talks about "all die," Christ is the exception. When the Bible says that "in Christ all will be made alive," this also is a generalization which has many exceptions. All who "willfully disobey" either the revelation of God's Inscripturated Word or his revelation of himself in creation, will be lost.

What does all this do for mission motivation? That question Punt anticipates by pointing out that Matthew 28 is clear: go out and share the Good News. He says that the Word of God *must* go out so that the man of God can be equipped for every good work.

Punt's book is a challenge to every biblical scholar and sincere Christian. It leaves many questions unanswered, especially questions related to texts that deal with "before the foundation of the world." But Punt's book is definitely worth reading and debating, although one does come away from the book a bit weary: it is very long for its 142 pages. Punt wants to make sure that he gets his main points across and he repeats them *ad nauseam*. However, buy it and read it. It will fascinate you and you will come away from it as either a friend or an enemy of the ideas, but keep an open mind.

some helps for pastors in sermon preparation. The book contains four sections: (1) Homiletic Outlines on Mission