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Let the Whole World Know: Resources for Preaching on Missions (Book Review)

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ticipating 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

Texts (15-85); (2) Illustrating Missions (87-154), (3) Translation Treasures (155-196); (4) Mission Mottoes and Quotations (197-203). The last three sections are intended as sermon illustrations with "reference to the actual experiences of missionaries (10)." While this book is written for pastors, a lucid writing style and some moving stories make it worthwhile reading for a person who has not had a formal theological training.

DeRidder and Greenway offer sixteen homiletical outlines which, however, are not intended to be used slavishly. All of these are preceded by a brief paragraph on the passage's central idea and a discussion of the text's background, context, and/or other matters. My reaction to the homiletic outlines is mixed. While some of them are insightful and helpful (e.g., Matthew 28:19-20, John 10:15-16, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16), I found others disappointing. Several outlines have too many points for a sermon (six or seven points). More seriously, although DeRidder and Greenway do not make any unbiblical claims, their outlines often assume an exemplaristic exegesis which does not evidence asking whether a biblical author intends a character to be understood as an example. Furthermore, occasionally the connections between the outline and the text are superficial. At times, it seems that a text has been chosen to fit the authors' agenda.

Here are some examples of my criticisms. The authors claim that the central idea of Gal 2:1-10 is that God's people are story tellers with a truthful message. That truism has little to do with Paul's purpose in narrating his relationship with the Jerusalem apostles. It is claimed that the central idea of Jonah 3-4 is: "God cares about cities." Jonah in the homily symbolizes a person who is overwhelmed by urban difficulties and consequently wants to go only to small towns. This alleged central idea of Jonah 3-4, which is actually eisegesis, disregards the text's critique of Israel's failure to carry out her mission and its powerful mission message that God's mercy extends to all peoples. On an Acts 1:8 homily, one reads that the Jerusalem church is a model church, instead of how Acts 1:8 is the programmatic statement for the whole book of Acts and the history of the church which extends beyond Acts.

In regard to the homiletical outlines, I might note three other concerns. First, a homily is presented on Mark 16:19-20, which is designated as the alternative ending of Mark. But that designation does not adequately address

The Nag Hammadi Library in English: Revised Edition, James M. Robinson, General Editor (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). 549 pp. + v-xv, \$24.95.

The Jesus of Heresy and History: The Discovery and Meanings of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library, John Dart (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). 204 pp. + v-xvii, Paperback \$10.95, Hardcover \$18.95. Reviewed by Gerald W. Vander Hoek, Assistant Professor of Theology.

Both of these books deal with Gnosticism and a fourth century Gnostic library. Since Gnosticism is not a

household word, my review will begin with some explanatory comments. The English term Gnosticism is the fact that Mark 16:19-20 is part of one addition (vv. 9-20) to the Gospel by manuscript copyists. Although the other scribal addition has rarely been included in English translations, would one preach a sermon on it? Secondly, a homily which is said in the table of contents and in the book's body to be based on 1 Corinthians 1:8-11 appears actually to be based on 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. Finally, the first section of this book would have been improved greatly by more exegetical notes, as is done in the better homiletical outlines.

The book's second section contains thirty-eight illustrations. Many of these are anecdotes about conversions or effective witnessing in mission situations. While not all of these stories are actually drawn from missionary experience (e.g., 123-124), many of them are moving stories of the power of the Gospel and would be very helpful for sermon illustrations.

Twenty-seven items are included in the book's third section. These are all based on texts which reflect a key biblical concept. DeRidder and Greenway report on what we can learn from Bible translators' attempts to find accurate expressions to convey these concepts in the many languages in which the Bible is being translated today. In addition to their use as sermon illustrations, DeRidder and Greenway state that this section can also be used as the basis for short devotional talks. Apart from the authors' tendency to moralize, most of these examples are interesting and would be helpful in making sermons.

Sections two and three could both have benefited from bibliographical references, none of which are provided. Some preachers probably would want to do further reading on some of the material in these sections before using them.

Section four contains mottoes and citations from the Bible and leading missionaries in the history of the church. This section would be more useful if it had bibliographical references for the citations and brief introductory remarks on the people cited. Unless a reader is extremely well read, one is left to guess what precisely is meant by a motto and the identity of some of the authors.

In short, I would not say that this book is a gold mine or a treasury. It needs more work before it could be called such. Nevertheless, it can be used as a resource for sermon preparation. Its greatest contribution is its second and third sections. Even the weaker homiletical outlines can be used as a catalyst for sermon ideas.

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