

The book is well organised, and divided into two parts. Firstly, the initial three chapters consider and explore ‘The way of the cross,’ the path walked by Christ, and considers carefully some of the key questions that arise around the ‘event’ of the atonement. MacLeod is deeply scriptural, thoughtfully pastoral, and provocative in the present context. The second part, comprising chapters four through eleven, delves into the ‘word of the cross,’ which explores the wide range of implications and challenges that the message of the atonement can be seen as spelling out in the New Testament, and implying for disciples of Christ in the present day.

Comparisons could be drawn, perhaps, to Stott’s magisterial *The Cross of Christ*, but this is a different beast. Drawing from both Scripture and a life lived in the light of the truth proclaimed here, MacLeod’s contribution is a welcome reminder of the doctrine of the atonement, and a provocative challenge to those who would silence the roar of the heart of the gospel.

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TRUE DEVOTION: In Search of Authentic Spirituality

Alan Chapple

London: The Latimer Trust, 2014 238pp £10.99pb
ISBN: 9781906327279

Converted at college, discovering Christian biography, doctrine, apologetics and commentaries, your friend has been active in church-based service and evangelism ever since. But in recent years you detect a ‘moving on.’ Those evangelical books have been supplemented from the groaning shelves of the ‘spirituality’ section, from medieval mystics to contemporary gurus of intimacy who are less cerebral or academic. More wary of labels, they speak rather through feelings, silence or repetition, open to multiple religious insights relating to the whole person and leading us into unsuspected depths of soul and self. Petition, even intercession, is now looked down on as somewhat inferior, so even the Lord Jesus (‘When you pray, say...’) becomes unwittingly marginalised.

If this sounds familiar, this excellent book could be just the one to read, lend, or give; it may help some travelling in the opposite direction, or others who are vaguely uneasy without being sure why. With firm biblical roots, its Australian author sets about these subtle new/old diversions

with pastoral skill. He clearly distinguishes the often illusory world of ‘contemplation’ from the simple but searching discipline of Scripture-based meditation, with a working example from Psalm 77.

While the author’s targets include some expected names, some from the average church bookstall may be more surprising and all the more necessary. Yet the book is both humble and humbling, breathing the sweetness of Christ rather than landing hammer-blows to trounce the enemy.

Dr Chapple quarries the Reformers and Puritans for some pithily apt quotations (he prefers Flavel to Foster, Goodwin to Gillett, Manton to Merton), but only as supporting evidence, never as alternative sources of truth. He too has a gift for the punchline: ‘A crucial mark of authentic spirituality is that it is robust enough to deal realistically with suffering’; ‘To have this Saviour is to have everything that God has to give us—but to have everything without him is, in the end, to have nothing.’

There is a good summary but no index. My only reservation is the number of footnote references; even to follow up the thousand-plus texts referred to suggests a study-course rather than a useful read. Without any dumbing down, might a slimline version be provided which that friend would be more likely to open?

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READY, STEADY, GROW!: Equipping Today’s Gospel Churches

Ray Evans

Nottingham: IVP, 2014 224pp £10.99 ISBN: 9781783591138

My training incumbent and I independently discovered this book around the time of its publication as we were thinking through how to develop the church in which we serve. Ray Evans helped us to understand that our church was awkward. This is not by any means a description of the church members, but rather a term that describes the particular challenges associated with our size.

Evans helpfully distils wisdom and research on the dynamics of differently sized churches: small (<50), medium (<150), large (>400) and the ‘awkward’ size in between those latter two. We learn of how relationships, communications and structures that once facilitated growth can end up hindering the very growth they have produced.