

StormFront: The Good News of God by James V. Brownson, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. 129. Price unknown, paper.

This book is one of six books published in The Gospel and Our Culture series by Eerdmans. The goal of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, and of this series of books is “to foster the missional encounter of the gospel with North American Culture.” The four authors are actively involved in this movement.

In this book, the authors target the way the North American church has domesticated the gospel in a consumer culture. The gospel has been reduced and reshaped to be a consumer item that improves one’s private life, enhances one’s self-esteem, and gives one a sense of purpose in life. Even when preaching of the gospel highlights, Scriptural benefits—such as forgiveness or justification—it turns them into consumer benefits rather than gifts that call forth missional obedience. In the first chapter, the problem of the domestication of the gospel is stated with clarity. To overcome this syncretistic accommodation, we must return to the person and work of Jesus, but so many different understandings of Jesus are on offer! The chapter proceeds on the correct assumption that Jesus can only be understood in the context of the whole story of Scripture. The remainder of the chapter offers a compelling and well-told summary of the biblical story that centers in the person of Jesus and highlights the missional place of God’s people to be part of God’s unfolding redemptive purposes. The second chapter seeks to articulate the gospel in such a way as to highlight that allegiance to Jesus means participation in his mission as part of the community he has formed. Solid New Testament scholarship undergirds this section, as it digs into the cultural setting of the New Testament, opening up images that show the participatory and social dimensions of the gospel. This line of discussion continues in the third chapter where incorporation into Christ’s mission is patterned after his death and resurrection. Again the historical and cultural background offered here effectively challenges a privatized and consumer gospel and makes this section come alive with relevance for today. The fourth chapter offers an insightful analysis of the powers in our culture and helpful direction for the church to encounter these powers. It focuses on the central powers of science, technology, politics, and economics. The church is called to fashion ways of life that challenge these powers. I continue to wonder whether or not the New Testament language of powers is the best way to get at these issues; creational ordinances and idolatry still get at the issues best for me. Nevertheless, there is penetrating analysis of this idolatry in this chapter. The final chapter mines the Sermon on the Mount for resources to equip the church in its task of challenging rather than accommodating itself to the powers. Here, although tantalizing and insightful forays into the implications of Jesus’ sermon for today are offered, one would have liked to see these resources brought more into direct conversation with the issues raised in the previous chapter.

This is a challenging and timely book. The writing is clear and inviting. It admirably achieves its purpose in challenging a privatized and consumerist understanding of the gospel with the gospel that is proclaimed in Scripture. The church in North American desperately needs to hear this message. Placing the gospel in the context of the whole narrative of Scripture, returning to cultural context of the original images used to communicate the gospel, opening up the first-century significance of the cross and resurrection, and returning to the original mandate of Jesus for kingdom life in Matthew 5-7 are all employed effectively to offer the church rich resources to recover the gospel and to engage the idolatrous power of science, technology, economics, and politics.

The overwhelming strength of this book is that it clearly articulates the gospel as a message that calls the church to a confrontation with the idolatrous powers that are at work in North American culture. The Western church has become comfortably established in its cultural setting and often has become salt that has lost its savor. The gospel has been reinterpreted to allow the church a comfortable cohabitation. This book is a powerful wake-up call to a syncretistic church by challenging the church that to be faithful to the gospel is to live at odds with its culture. This book needs wide circulation in church study groups so that this wake-up call is heard.

The question arises in my mind as to whether or not the book has offered sufficient guidance for the church to live at home in its culture. The strong countercultural stance, as refreshing and needed as it is, still needs a corresponding affirmation of the church's positive call to participate in the ongoing development of its culture. There is much creational good and the fruit of the gospel in Western culture. There are indications of this side of the church's mission, but the challenging, confronting, antithetical side of the church's mission remains dominant. Perhaps that is what is needed today. After all, when a fat man is sitting on one side of the teeter-totter one must jump very hard on the other side!

—Michael Goheen

A History of Preaching by O. C. Edwards Jr. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004. Pp. xxviii + 879. \$65.00 hardbound.

The jacket illustration for O.C. Edwards Jr.'s new *History of Preaching* is "St. Peter Preaching to the Multitudes" by Masolino da Panicale. In this famous painting, a haloed Peter gestures to a crowd of about eighteen listeners. Of this multitude, three are prominently snoozing, and three more have their eyes lifted to heaven, as if to plead, like a congregation suffering through a novice's efforts, "Help him, Jesus!" Is there a subtle message here about the need for a bracingly realistic homiletical history? Perhaps so, as this is what Edwards, former president and professor of preaching at Seabury-Western, has achieved. His *History of Preaching* is an ungilded examination of the preachers, movements, and strategies—some successful, some less so—that chronicle the development of preaching over the past two thousand years, one that demonstrates



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