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EDITORIAL <i>D. A. Carson</i>	1
MINORITY REPORT: Why Should Thoughtful Evangelicals Read the Medieval Mystics? <i>Carl Trueman</i>	2
Blondel Remembered: His Philosophical Analysis of the "Quest for the Historical Jesus" <i>Paul Hartog</i>	5
Nonviolence in the Ancient Church and Christian Obedience <i>Kirk R. MacGregor</i>	16
Truthfulness in Usefulness: Stanley Fish and American Literary Pragmatism <i>Dane C. Ortlund</i>	29
An Augustinian Mindset <i>Peter Sanlon</i>	39
Mission: A Problem of Definition <i>Keith Ferdinando</i>	46
PASTORAL PENSÉES: How a Mega-Church is Rediscovering the Gospel <i>Joe Coffey</i>	60
Book Reviews	63



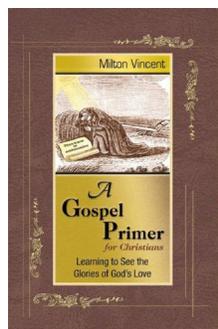
divine impassibility gravitated in the opposite direction. This, perhaps surprisingly, was linked with a near neo-Platonism and an errantist rationalism in his exegetical method. As such his analysis can sometimes seem sub-culturally defined and, frankly, wrong. His discussion of prayer for the dead may also fail to win over the doubters.

While all this is true and while Owen's style might cause the inattentive reader to miss the deep warmth of the author's spirituality, this is a most useful little book that the reviewer expects to consult regularly. If others need to be convinced of its value, then here is an enticement:

Prayer . . . is a unique and irreplaceable part of our response to God. Most obviously it is so in the sense that in it we are responding to him in ways appropriate to his being and self-revelation. In prayer too we are responding to God in ways appropriate to our own nature as creatures who are made in his image and meant for eternal life with him. Prayer is furthermore a response to God's invitation. God desires us to pray in order that by praying we may enter into communion with him and so fulfil his purpose for us. Prayer therefore is a wholly natural activity because it is in accordance with the nature of God, the nature of human beings, and the nature of that relation that God wills to establish with us. This does not mean that prayer is always easy. . . . Yet it remains a profoundly natural act that, as such, ought to be marked increasingly by spontaneity and joy (14).

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Milton Vincent. *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love*. Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2008. x + 97 pp. \$10.95.



Vincent has pastored Cornerstone Fellowship Bible Church in Riverside, California since 1992, and he formerly taught Hebrew at John MacArthur's The Master's Seminary. His *Gospel Primer* is a concise, inviting, accessible, devotional, penetrating gospel-centered resource for Christians. It is theologically akin to C. J. Mahaney's *Living the Cross-Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (2006) and Jerry Bridges's *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (1994), *The Gospel for Real Life: Turning to the Liberating Power of the Cross . . . Every Day* (2002), and "Gospel-Driven Sanctification" (*Modern Reformation* 12.3 [May/June 2003]).

I first heard about this book when my pastor, Mike Bullmore, enthusiastically recommended that the church carefully read it. Bullmore humbly recounts in the foreword how much he has benefitted from Vincent's *Gospel Primer*, and he offers wise advice to readers:

This book was written slowly. It savors of a slow cooking. I believe it will be best read slowly. Take your time with it. Let its truths drip down deep. And return to it often. Let it regularly help you preach the life-giving, soul-reviving, heart-rejoicing gospel to yourself. Keep it close by your bed or the place of your time alone with God. It is, quite simply, one of the most spiritually useful books I've read (4).

I followed Bullmore's advice, thoughtfully reading just a couple pages each morning, and I heartily concur with his seasoned perspective. I also profited by reading this book out loud (as Vincent recommends on page 7).

Vincent testifies in the introduction,

After years of frustration, fits and starts, and exhausted collapses in my Christian walk, I have come back to a focus on the gospel and have found its sufficiency for daily living to be truly overwhelming. After years of church attendance, university and seminary training, and countless hours of Bible study in preparation for preaching many hundreds of sermons, I have found nothing more powerful and life-transforming than the gospel truths affirmed on the following pages. Rehearsing these truths each day has become a pleasurable discipline by which I enjoy God's love and maintain fresh contact with His provision and power for daily living (5–6).

The slim book has four parts, and everything in parts 1–3 is written in the first person singular; 290 footnotes fill about the bottom third of each page in parts 1–3 with nothing but Scripture quotations, mostly from the New American Standard Bible.

Part one presents thirty-one (one on which to meditate each day) biblically informed reasons that Christians should regularly rehearse the gospel to themselves. Reasons include the following: The gospel contains the power and glory of God in their highest density. It “nullifies sin’s power over me” by removing its guilt (19). It “reminds me that my righteous standing with God always holds firm regardless of my performance” (20). It stimulates love, forgiveness, evangelism, humility, and obedience. It offers the right perspective of trials, increases my yearning to be with Christ in heaven, satisfies me and inversely mortifies my flesh, enriches my thankfulness by relief, supplies boldness, and glorifies God.

Parts 2 and 3 are stirring prose and poetic versions of a gospel narrative. They start by exulting in God's glory and then meditate on my sin against God and God's work on my behalf. “I don't deserve any of this, even on my best day” (65). “Yet I could not fail God much worse than I've done. / Ignoring His glory, for mine I have run” (72). “My foolish rebellion gives God ev'ry right / To damn me with haste to the mis'erable plight / Of terrible judgments in His Lake of Fire, / Where wrath is most fierce and will never expire” (73). “But wonder of wonders, so great to behold, / My God chose to save me with method so bold. / What I could not render, God fully has done, / And doing, He rendered it all through His Son. / He sent Christ to die on the cross for my sin / To suffer my anguish, my pardon to win” (76). “He shattered sin's chains which had held me before, / And thus made me free not to sin any more” (81).

Part 4 tells “the story behind the primer.” Vincent confesses, “I labored for most of my life to maintain my justified status before God, and I was always left frustrated in my attempts to do so” (91). “I guess I treated my justification as some sort of legal fiction that had little direct bearing on the mechanics of how God related to me and how I related to Him. I suppose I would have imagined God saying, ‘Yeah, technically you're justified, but I'm angry with you anyway for what you did today!’” (94–95). The gospel liberated Vincent from his “performance-based relationship,” and by God's grace Vincent's *Gospel Primer* will help others do the same.

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