EDITORIAL
D. A. Carson

MINORITY REPORT: Why Should Thoughtful Evangelicals Read the Medieval Mystics?
Carl Trueman

Blondel Remembered: His Philosophical Analysis of the “Quest for the Historical Jesus”
Paul Hartog

Nonviolence in the Ancient Church and Christian Obedience
Kirk R. MacGregor

Truthfulness in Usefulness: Stanley Fish and American Literary Pragmatism
Dane C. Ortlund

An Augustinian Mindset
Peter Sanlon

Mission: A Problem of Definition
Keith Ferdinando

PASTORAL PENSEES: How a Mega-Church is Rediscovering the Gospel
Joe Coffey

Book Reviews

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’rable 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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