

Christian groups can enhance the church's overall achievement in the end. But he is steadfast in arguing that the "master story," the biblical narrative with its resurrection climax, determines truly faithful witness. Disciples are like athletes who "follow" the game—track the goings-on, relate them to the outcome, and play better for their "attentive perception." What disciples follow, though, is the master story; when they track these goings-on and live in their light, they witness best to the grand vision of God's will expressed on earth (3:353, 356, 362).

McClendon's systematic theology is the finest contemporary manual for following the story from the Radical Reformation standpoint. Catholic and Protestant readers will find much to challenge them and much, no doubt, to disagree with. But that goes, too, for Adventists, Baptists and others who inherit the radical standpoint. This trilogy, not least its last volume, crackles with jarring, passionately-defended insight, revealing much that denominations with roots in the Radical Reformation have repressed or denied.

Readers will find here an academic style that is at once elegant and compact. The latter necessitates straight-backed attention, and the preface to each (!) of the three volumes urges readers to proceed slowly. Those who refuse will likely fall by the wayside, but those who persist will find insight and inspiration for both theology and theology's point, the faithful practice of the Christian life.

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Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter of James*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xvi + 271 pp. Hardcover, \$28.00.

Douglas Moo's new commentary *The Letter of James* is an outstanding addition to scholarship on this brief but crucial biblical text. Moo, a Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, is one of the best younger conservative evangelical scholars and is known for his commentary on Romans in the New International Commentary series and a number of other books.

Moo's work on James is the sixth volume of The Pillar New Testament Commentary series, which is aimed at pastors and teachers. Like other authors of this series, Moo is familiar with the whole range of scholarly debate on the text, but his aim is exegesis and exposition without too much technical detail. It is not the book for those who are primarily interested in what others have said on a verse in question, nor for those who want a word-by-word exegesis of the Greek. D. A. Carson writes in the Series Preface:

The rationale for this approach is that the vision of "objective scholarship" (a vain chimera) may actually be profane. God stands over against us; we do not stand in judgment of him. When God speaks to us through his Word, those who profess to know him must respond in an appropriate way, and that is certainly different from a stance in which the scholar projects an image of autonomous distance. . . . If the text is God's Word, it is appropriate that we respond with reverence, a certain fear, a holy joy, a questing obedience. These values should be reflected in the way Christians write (viii).

Those who disagree will not want to read Moo's volume. Those who agree will

find it very useful, both in their knowledge of James and in their walk with God.

James is a controversial biblical book, but few are more important to a well-rounded understanding of the biblical message. Protestant scholars have never forgotten Luther's problems with it. To this day many commentators shy away from the clear meaning of certain verses. Consequently, as each of the many problematic verses came up, I found myself eager to get Moo's viewpoint. Time after time, I found either that our views were essentially identical or his were superior to mine. He is a careful reader, missing little. I never felt he was avoiding textual issues or imposing his doctrinal biases on the text. Furthermore, he bases useful insights on his superb understanding of the cultural setting of James and of extrabiblical writings contemporary with it.

My only disagreement was with Moo's speculation that James would have written differently if he had read Paul and, therefore, his letter must be early. I think it is quite possible that James chose to write according to his own understanding of the gospel after reading Paul, yet without explicitly interacting with him. We find the same approach in the Gospels.

Since my agreement with Moo's exposition is not necessarily sufficient evidence that you should read his book, I will present a few examples of his approach. First, Moo sees the central purpose of James as the pursuit and development of spiritual wholeness. For James, such wholeness includes humbly walking with God, seeking his will, and doing it. It embraces all aspects of life. Moo writes:

[T]he difference between "perfect" and "complete" is not very large. For the Christian who has attained "completeness" will also be "perfect" in character. James, we must remember, is presenting this as the ultimate goal of faith's testing; he is not claiming that believers will attain the goal. But we should not "lower the bar" on the expectation James sets for us. Nothing less than complete moral integrity will ultimately satisfy the God who is himself holy and righteous, completely set apart from sin (56).

Another example is Moo's treatment of James 1:13—"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone"—which has led to a great deal of scholarly speculation. Moo's solution is simple and neat: "But while God may test or prove his servants in order to strengthen their faith, he never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith. Thus, despite the fact that the same Greek root (*peira-*) is used for both the outer trial and the inner temptation, it is crucial to distinguish them" (73). He then quotes Sir 15:11-20 to clinch his argument with words that James may be paraphrasing.

One reason Moo handles the epistle so fairly is that he seems to be spiritually in tune with James. This speaks well of his theological balance, given his equal ability to be in tune with Paul in his Romans commentary. In response to the call in James 1:22 to not only hear the word but do it, he writes:

People can think that they are right with God when they really are not. And so it is for those people who "hear" the word—regular church attenders, seminary students, and even seminary professors—but do not "do" it. They are mistaken in thinking that they are truly right with God. For God's word cannot be divided into parts. If one wants the benefits of its saving power, one must also embrace it as a guide for life (90).

Dealing with 1:24, the rather difficult mirror metaphor, Moo writes:

Indeed, the success of James's analogy presumes that both the person who looks in the mirror and the person who looks into God's word are capable of two different responses. The "hearer only" is faulted for not acting on what he sees in the mirror (implying that he could act on it if he chose), while the "doer" of v. 25 is commended for putting into effect what he has seen in God's law (implying that he could ignore it if he chose). The key failure of the "hearer only," then, is forgetting (93).

The verse which has led centuries of Protestant theologians to shy away from James is, of course, 2:24: "You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." Many have seen this as a specific denial of Paul's teaching in Rom 3:28. Moo writes:

A more profitable approach is to compare the word "faith" in Paul with the phrase "faith alone" in James. The addition of "alone" shows clearly that James refers to the bogus faith that he has been attacking throughout this paragraph: the faith that a person "claims" to have (v. 14); a faith that is, in fact, "dead" (vv. 17 and 26) and "useless" (v. 20). This faith is by no means what Paul means by faith. He teaches that faith is a dynamic, powerful force, through which the believer is intimately united with Christ, his Lord. And since faith is in a *Lord*, the need for obedience to follow from faith is part of the meaning of the word for Paul. He can therefore speak of "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) and say that it is "faith working through love" that matters in Christ (Gal 5:6). This is exactly the concept of faith that James is propagating in this paragraph. Once we understand "faith alone," then, as a neat summary of the bogus faith that James is criticizing, we can find no reason to expect that Paul would have any quarrel with the claim that "faith alone" does not justify. . . . James and Paul use "justify" to refer to different things. Paul refers to the initial declaration of a sinner's innocence before God; James to the ultimate verdict of innocence pronounced over a person at the last judgment. If a sinner can get into relationship with God only by faith (Paul), the ultimate validation of that relationship takes into account the works that true faith must inevitably produce (James) (141).

Moo sees the sentence "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (4:3) as being far from a prosperity-gospel proof text. He writes:

What is it that James's readers want to have? He nowhere says in these verses, but the context suggests an answer: the kind of wisdom that will enable them to gain recognition as leaders in the community. James has rebuked his readers for wanting to become teachers (3:1) and for priding themselves on being "wise and understanding" (3:13). They apparently want to lead the church, but don't have the right kind of wisdom to do so. Moreover, James's language here reminds us inevitably of his earlier encouragement: "If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask of God" (1:5) (184).

A final difficulty in James is the meaning of his comments on anointing the sick and their healing. Moo analyzes the various viewpoints and presents his own position, which is faithful to the text:

A prayer for healing, then, must usually be qualified by a recognition that God's will in the matter is supreme. And it is clear in the NT that God does *not* always will to heal the believer [he cites 2 Cor 12:7-9 and Tit 3:20]. . . . The faith with which we pray is always faith in the God whose will is supreme and best; only sometimes does this faith include assurance that a particular request is within that

will. This is exactly the qualification that is needed to understand Jesus' own promise: "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:14). To ask "in Jesus' name" means not simply to utter his name, but to take into account his will. Only those requests offered "in that will" are granted (244-245).

Any scholar, student, or pastor who wants to know and do God's will as revealed in James will profit from Moo's *The Letter of James*. It belongs in all seminary libraries. Given the quality of the exposition and the reasonable price of the work at a time when many books its size sell for twice as much, the volume is a bargain.

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Myers, Bryant L. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999. 288 pp. Paper, \$22.00.

Bryant Myers's book *Walking with the Poor* addresses the core issues of understanding the concept of development and how to minister to the poor by describing "the principles and practice of transformational development from a Christian perspective" (1). He does that by bringing together three areas of thought and action that have shaped the development thinking today, such as the "best of principles and practices [from the secular] international development community," the thoughts and experiences from Christian development and relief agencies (NGOs), as well as a "biblical framework for transformational development" (*ibid.*).

Myers develops his holistic understanding of poverty by discussing a variety of factors which contribute to poverty, models used to conceptualize poverty, and traditional views of how to intervene in order to change poverty. Traditional development is about material and social change, which are often synonymous with westernization and modernization. Transformational development, he suggests, is about changes in the whole of human life, including the material, social, and spiritual spheres (3). Wrapped in these two concepts is the concept of Christian witness, which Myers sees as a declaration of the gospel through life, words, and deeds.

At the center of Myers's arguments is what he calls the "blind spot" in Western development thinking, where poverty is merely seen as a material condition, having to do with the absence of things, which can be solved by responding with material resources.

Myers sees in our world a "convergence of stories" (20) that are in competition with each other. The Enlightenment, communism, science, technology, and capitalism have all tried to contribute in their own way to our understanding of who we are and what our goal is, but "at the end of the twentieth century the authority of these stories is fraying in the face of broken promises" (21). The Bible is an important source for the understanding and discussion of development because it is the Bible that tells not only the origins but also the ending of humanity. In that sense, it is "the biblical story [which] provides the answer to how the stories of the community and the promoter may reorient themselves to that intended by their Creator" (12). Therefore, true meaning in development comes only from God's story