

June 2011

Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/elevol1iss2/5>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

2011. "Book Reviews." *Eleutheria* 1, (2). <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/elevol1iss2/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Divinity at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eleutheria by an authorized editor of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

Book Reviews

Abstract

Review by Shane Kraeger of *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Colossians and Philemon*. by Murray J. Harris. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. xxxii + 272 pp., \$24.99.

Review by Joshua C. Stone of *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* by James Davison Hunter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 358pp., \$27.95.

Review by R. Lee Webb of *Interpreting the Psalms for Teaching and Preaching*. Eds. Herbert W. Bateman IV and D. Brent Sandy. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010, 292 pp., \$34.99.

Review by Roberto Rodriguez-Nunez of *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* by Edward L. Smither. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009, 264 pp., \$12.23.

Keywords

Smither, Augustine, Harris, exegetical guide, New Testament, Greek, Colossians, Philemon, James Davison Hunter, change, book review, Psalms, Bateman, Sandy

Cover Page Footnote

Various authors.

Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Colossians and Philemon by Murray J. Harris. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. xxxii + 272 pp., \$24.99 USD.

The *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Colossians and Philemon* is the first installment in the series of twenty projected books that attempts to bridge the gap between exegesis and translation of the Greek text of the New Testament and exposition.¹ The stated purpose of the present volume is to “close that gap between stranded student . . . and daunting text and to bridge that gulf between morphological analysis and exegesis” (p. xiii). It furthermore seeks to “provide in a single volume all the necessary information for basic understanding of the Greek text and to afford suggestions for more detailed study” (p. xiii).

The author of this book and editor of the series, Murray Harris, is professor emeritus of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. As should be expected of a B&H product, this book stands strongly in the conservative evangelical tradition, arguing only briefly in favor of Pauline authorship of both letters (pp. 3, 207). His tone is largely unapologetic in his conservative views and assumes that the reader has access to more substantial commentaries that address issues related to inspiration and authorship.

This is in agreement with Harris’ own purposes and limits of his work. It is important to note that this is not intended to be a standalone volume. If one approaches this book as an exegetical commentary, one would be certainly and quickly disappointed. If, however, one recognizes that the book is intended as an exegetical aid (note the series title, with an emphasis on the word *guide*), the real value of the work becomes readily apparent. If your purpose is research, perhaps you are in the process of building your theological or pastoral library, other exegetical commentaries would be much better suited. On the other hand, if your purpose is to work your way as a Greek student through Colossians or Philemon, in or out of the classroom, or if you are a pastor who is trying to become more adept through application, then this book may be for you. The book is intended for anyone with an intermediate grasp of Koine Greek to enable them to work with the text in more detail than would otherwise be possible without an aid.

The very practical purpose of the book is its strength. For example, the thorough bibliographic lists in the *For Future Study* sections, after every passage, are potentially quite helpful for students and pastors who want to study a specific issue addressed in a given passage. Similarly, the *Homiletical Suggestions*, again given at the end of a passage, are small outlines that are likely to benefit pastors who want to exposit the text. Harris usually gives more than one possibility in approaching any passage in these homiletical suggestions. The translations and expanded paraphrases, found at the end of the respective exegetical analysis of both books, are interesting and practically oriented for the student or pastor. He also provides good exegetical outlines and structural analyses throughout the book (e.g. pp. 5, 13, 25, 38, et. al.). Finally, the glossary of terms in the back of the book will

¹ At the time of this review, B&H has published two volumes in this series. The second volume is Douglas Moo’s analysis of the book of James.

certainly aid the Greek student as a quick reference with certain necessary and esoteric terminology that Harris uses throughout.

The weaknesses of the book relate primarily to literary structure and consistency. The book frequently reads as it were still in its drafting stages, with little regard for readability. Unfortunately, this tends to distract as it is sometimes difficult to determine how the overall argument is related to a specific clause or phrase. Harris begins many paragraphs by parsing a word, but he does not identify which word is being parsed. This causes the reader to pause in order to determine the word under discussion. This may be fixed by simply adding the inflected word at the beginning of the sentence. Regarding consistency, he refers to various Greek words as one would rightly expect, but they are not consistently cited; he sometimes cites just the primary forms and a gloss (“Ὁρατός, -ή, -όν, visible,” p. 41), sometimes includes parentheses (“Εἰκὼν [-όνος, ἡ, image],” p. 39), and sometimes includes more (“Κληῖρος, -ου, ὁ, means ‘[apportioned] lot, inheritance,” p. 31). There are various other ways in which Harris cites lexical data, but the point is that this is indicative of the larger issue of consistency and readability, and this extends into several areas of the book. Put simply, it reads frequently as if the book is still in its drafting stages due to (1) its inconsistent data entry with (2) its frequent failure to identify the antecedent of a parsed word (and similar problems) and (3) its admixture of dictionary-entry style of writing with that of an exegetical commentary.

Harris has provided an interesting and insightful edition for students and pastors who are already somewhat capable with Koine Greek. While these insights are sometimes overshadowed by the weaknesses mentioned, it seems that this will be a valuable product for students, pastors, and teachers who are working through Colossians or Philemon. One hopes that a second edition as well as future volumes would remedy the weaknesses to highlight its very practical strengths.

Shane M. Kraeger
 Liberty University

To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World by James Davison Hunter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 358pp., \$27.95.

James Davison Hunter, the LaBrosse-Levinson Distinguished Professor of Religion, Culture and Social Theory at the University of Virginia, has done much to critique, assist, and offer constructive ways forward to the Evangelical Church of our day. Few other social critics have compelled the Evangelical Church to self-inspection as much as Hunter. His recent book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, has drawn both accolades and criticisms within evangelicalism for its view of the way culture is and is not changed.

Hunter presents his book in three essays focusing on how culture is changed, the means by which culture is changed, and a Christian alternative to the prevailing method and cultural emanation of our day. Hunter's thesis is that the way to change the world is not working to change the hearts and minds of the populace but is done by establishing a faithful presence of Christians within the networks of elites and the institutions that make culture. This faithful presence is enacted by conceiving of a "new city commons" whereby Christians work to enact the shalom of God within the culture in toto, not simply in a non-physical, spiritual way. In the past six decades or so Christians have sought to change the culture by changing the hearts and minds of individuals, referred to as values. These values are what shape worldview, and the goal of Evangelicals has been to develop a Christian worldview that will permeate the larger American culture. The exemplar of this perspective, for Hunter, is Charles Colson, and it is this perspective that is "almost wholly mistaken." The old view is influenced heavily by Hegelian idealism which purports that the nonphysical is the primary reality. The correct view of culture and culture-making is found in eleven propositions which support the claim that culture is produced by networks of elites and the institutions they occupy, thus Hunter's assertion that "Culture is rarely, if ever, changed from the bottom up." These networks of elites and their institutions have undue influence in culture-making, and Hunter uses both Jews and homosexuals as examples to exhibit his notion that very small groups within society can influence culture in very significant ways.

The cultural problem Evangelicals face is that very few are in the center of culture-making networks and are often in the outskirts of the periphery, thus lacking any significant "symbolic capital" to leverage within society. This is why Christians have a "weak" culture. Evangelical aesthetics, scholarship, and cultural expression are primarily "low-brow" and "mid-brow," and Evangelicals rarely have significant contributions to "high-brow" areas of culture-making (visual arts, classical music, academic think-tanks, elite magazines and journals, etc.). Because of this, evangelicalism's influence has been waning, and its response has been to turn its efforts toward the political arena. The Christian Right, Christian Left, and neo-Anabaptists are all chasing cultural myths and have turned their efforts toward politics to bring to fruition those myths. Because of the focus on the political as culture-changing and making, the primary witness of the Church to the culture is a political witness. The culture sees the Church primarily as a political entity with a political agenda. This has severely damaged the witness of the church, and the recourse is to begin to untangle the "twisted branches of political and public" so as to reestablish the Church's public witness. This is done by Christians entering public spheres of society that are not inherently political ones.

Evangelicalism is grappling with dissolution and difference in the post-Christian and pluralistic culture of America. The three responses that have developed to deal with "ressentiment" are the "defense against," "relevance to," and "purity from" paradigms. The "defense against" paradigm, common in mainline Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, creates institutions that are parallel to the

larger pluralistic ones which do not intersect with the culture which, in turn, do not change the culture. The “relevance to” paradigm seen in theological liberalism, the Emerging church, and the seeker movement all look to be connected to the issues of the day. Eventually, the “relevance to” paradigm becomes so similar to the prevailing culture that it becomes almost indistinct from American culture. The “purity from” paradigm of the new monastic movement and the house church/hypercommunity-oriented Christians hope to retreat from culture and keep their communities pure from culture, thus rendering them insignificant and irrelevant to the American culture writ large. The alternative is a “faithful presence within.”

Because of the Church’s misreading of culture, it has focused its energies and attention on secondary and tertiary problems as well as false solutions. Instead, the Church must have the desire to enact shalom in all areas of culture by using the affirmation/antithesis dialectic whereby it affirms what is good within culture but also offers a better and God-centered way. The antithesis recognizes that “all social organizations exist as parodies of eschatological hope” and Christians must work to create a “constructive subversion of all frameworks of social life that are incompatible with shalom.” The incarnation of Christ into the corrupted world is the example for Christians to incarnate within corrupted areas of society to establish a faithful presence within so as to enact God’s shalom within culture and the world, resulting in human flourishing in all areas of society.

Anyone concerned with Christianity’s interaction with the changing American society must understand what Hunter is suggesting. If his premises are true, then Evangelicals’ methods of culture-changing and making are askew and need redirecting. Other than a few anecdotes, there was little discussion on how his theory plays out practically, on how it is seen in action. There also needs to be discussion on the place and purpose of defense, purity, and relevance within culture. Hunter’s premise that culture is changed by networks of elites and the institutions they occupy, and that Christians should thus turn their attentions toward faithful presence in elite networks and institutions seems to be an elitist strategy. Hunter recognizes this perception but denies that a Christian should follow an elitist method of culture change, though he does not offer substantiation of why his view is not elitist. Christ’s method and ministry was primarily concerned with establishing the kingdom of God with economically, culturally, and socially marginalized people, namely the “low-brow” socioeconomic strata. How then does Hunter’s method and message align with Christ’s? Though this issue was addressed to some degree, it needs much more substantiation. All in all, this is a well-researched, persuasive, erudite, and weighty book whose shockwaves will be felt into the future and remain one of the most profound books written on the topic for years to come.

Joshua C. Stone
 Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Interpreting the Psalms for Teaching and Preaching. Eds. Herbert W. Bateman IV and D. Brent Sandy. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010, 292 pp., \$34.99.

The book of Psalms is, perhaps, the most beloved book of the Bible. The richness of its metaphors and its raw emotion have warmed the hearts of countless generations. However, the significance of the Psalms extends beyond the comfort and encouragement that they bring. The Psalms also guide the worship of Israel, from the time they were written, right up until today. The early church followed the example of Jesus (Mt. 21:16, 22:44, 26:64; Lk. 20:42-43; 24:44) in using the Psalms to express their deepest emotions and worship in prayer and praise. Despite the importance of the Psalms, the church today has too often neglected them, as it has the rest of the Old Testament. This book in part has been written to correct what Walter Kaiser observes to be “a distressing absence of the Old Testament in the church.” In order to accomplish this, editors Herbert W. Bateman and D. Brent Sandy have brought together a diverse collection of evangelical scholars “to enable teachers and preachers to offer informed teaching and faithful preaching of the psalms.”

The book is divided into three parts. It opens with three foundational chapters which explain the framework for the entire book. The first chapter by Brent Sandy and Tiberius Rata presents key insights for understanding the Psalms. They point out that while the psalms seem randomly arranged, they were actually arranged according to theme: Book 1 (Ps. 1-41) emphasizes God’s covenant with David; Book 2 (Ps. 42-72) displays God’s faithfulness to the Davidic covenant through his descendants; Book 3 (73-89) gives a detailed explanation of the Davidic covenant; Book 4 (Ps. 90-106) affirms that Yahweh is King, and that Israel can find refuge in Him and be blessed; Book 5 (Ps. 107-150) celebrates the renewal of life with God in control. The treatment of the psalms in section 2 follows this pattern. It is also noted that to correctly interpret the Psalms, one must recognize a three-phased trajectory of meaning: the response to the Israelite community (contextual meaning), the selection and order of the psalms as placed in the Psalter (canonical meaning), and the messianic importance of the psalms as they foreshadow the life of Jesus (the typological or Christological meaning). Stress is appropriately made that interpreters are not free to apply the Psalms today without first taking into account the original meaning of each psalm in its setting. While there are messianic implications of many psalms, none of them were *exclusively* messianic – that is, referring *only* to the coming messiah. While this may be debated by some, this view guards the text from hermeneutical overreach.

The second chapter by Robert Chisholm presents a methodology to correctly interpret the Psalms. His approach involves asking five questions: (1) Why did the author compose the psalm? (2) How did the author express his ideas? (3) What are the important interpretive issues? (4) What was the author seeking to communicate? (5) What is the significance of the psalm for preaching and teaching? Examples are given for each of these questions, further illustrating the usefulness of this technique.

Timothy Ralston presents helpful insights on preaching and teaching the Psalms in the third chapter. After reminding his readers of the challenges of the task, he presents four steps for teaching and preaching the Psalms: (1) Discover the purpose; (2) Define the journey; (3) Design the sermon; (4) Translate the images.

The largest section of the book is the second section which includes thirteen chapters showing how interpretation for teaching and preaching of the Psalms can be done using the principles suggested in the first three chapters. Instead of organizing them by type of psalm (lament, royal, declarative praise, wisdom, etc.), the Psalms are treated in chronological order as they appear in the five books of the Psalter. A good representation of psalms is included, with chapters addressing psalms 1 and 2, 19, 46, 63, 73, 89, 99, 103 and 104, 110, 116, 130, 135, and 148. The overarching question that guides each exposition is, "What are the most important things Christians need to know to understand and be transformed by the Psalms?" Chisolm's five questions provide the structure for each chapter, and helpful illustrations are given which further demonstrate ideas for how to correctly communicate the theme of each psalm.

Interestingly, Psalm 1 and 2 are presented as not only the introduction for the first section of psalms, but for the whole book of Psalms. Glen Taylor points out that not only is Psalm 2 a messianic psalm, but "through its introductory role, it may paint the entire book of Psalms with a messianic brush." Later, he writes, "Psalm 1 is a doorway through which the messiah must first successfully pass," highlighting the importance of God's law for even the future king. Subsequent psalms highlight the nature of the Davidic king as suffering (3-7; 12; 13; 22; 25-28; 35; 38-40; 42-44; 51; 54-57), and reigning eternally and universally (72, 110, 132). Following Psalm 90, the emphasis moves away from the kingly rule of the son of David towards a focus on the king as Yahweh himself. Thus, Judaism in Jesus' day did not expect a messiah who would be both human and divine.

Space does not allow a summary of each chapter; however, each section does an exceptional job of drawing out the major interpretive issues and providing ideas for how to present the major idea of the psalm.

The book concludes with four chapters which focus on applying the psalms. A somewhat unexpected chapter is included by Marion Ann Taylor on the application of the Psalms by women of the nineteenth century. This history has often been neglected in studies on the interpretation of the Psalms, yet there is much there to offer those who will listen.

With contributions from such scholars as Walter Kaiser, Richard Averbeck, Eugene Merrill, and Richard Patterson as well as many others, this book blends solid scholarship with practical application. Included are helpful charts on the big picture of the Psalms, and the classification of Psalms by categories and by titles. The fresh insight provided by this volume will greatly help all those who communicate the Psalms, whether in the classroom or in the pulpit.

R. Lee Webb
 Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders by Edward L. Smither. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009, 264 pp., \$12.23.

Edward L. Smither, Ph. D., an assistant professor of Church History and Intercultural Studies at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia, has offered a vast wealth of wisdom and insight on mentoring for twenty-first century pastors and spiritual leaders in *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders*. A well-researched work of scholarly repute, he skillfully presents “his concern with mentoring spiritual leaders, that is, shepherding those who shepherd the Lord’s flock” (p. v). This book is the fruit of his research for his dissertation in Historical Theology, later published as a separate book. From this strong background, he develops the basic thesis of *Augustine as Mentor*: analyze and articulate Augustine’s approach to mentoring church leaders.

The concept of mentoring has been around for millennium and is an ancient discipline. Smither points out, “Though the contexts and the cultures may vary, mentoring in essence means that a master, expert, or someone with significant experience is imparting knowledge and skill to a novice in an atmosphere of discipline, commitment, and accountability” (p. 4). Smither has put pen to paper and has fine-picked Augustine’s writings, sermons, and other collateral material to weave a scholarly tome replete with anecdotes and principles to highlight the significance of mentoring in today’s evangelical Christian circles. Unlike the many scholars who missed the quality of pastoral ministry and theology (p. v), Smither takes the approach of a pastor mentoring others using Augustine as a guide. An enjoyable, informative, well-researched, and handy work, Smither did not leave any stone unturned to bring the nuggets of wisdom to a subject that has been in vogue in North America in recent years.

In chapter one, “Mentoring in the First Century,” he builds his thesis from early texts, mostly from the New Testament (p. 4), and using Jesus and Paul as mentoring men, he lays a foundation before delving into Augustine’s practical theology to develop his concept of mentoring. His primary emphasis in this chapter is the notion of “disciple” (*mathētēs*). In chapter two, “The Mentoring Matrix,” he takes us back to the mid-third century and introduces Cyprian of Carthage (195-258), the Egyptian monk Pachomius (290-346), Basil of Caesarea (329-279), and Ambrose of Milan (340-397) as paragons of mentoring to the Christian movement, thus showing that Augustine’s mentoring was not developed in a vacuum but in the presence of great men whose primary influence is still felt today. In chapter three, “Who Mentored Augustine?” Smither’s question takes us back to Augustine’s upbringing and the great influence his mother Monica had on his life. He writes in the *Confessions*, “My mother did all she could to see that you, my god, should be more truly my father than he [Patricius] was” (p. 93). In this chapter, Smither tells of the many close friends Augustine had who influenced and mentored him in his journey to faith (p. 101). One man who profoundly touched him and mentored him was Ambrose. In his *Confessions*, Augustine introduced

Ambrose as a mentor: “So I came to Milan and to Bishop Ambrose....Unknowingly I was led by you to him, so that through him I might be led, knowingly, to you” (p. 103). It is interesting to note that although Augustine and Ambrose had little personal contact, Ambrose was able to mentor Augustine through his sermons and letters (p. 106). In chapter four, Smither lays a strong foundation for mentoring by presenting “Augustine’s Approach to Mentoring.” He goes on to say, “This chapter will treat in detail the most significant, repeated approaches to mentoring observed in Augustine’s relationship to the clergy” (p. 125). Augustine was a very busy man during his tenure as bishop of Hippo, but “[t]hrough [his] multifaceted approach to mentoring, he provided spiritual direction and encouragement, rebuke and discipline, practical advice for dealing with church matters, exhortation toward maintaining sound doctrine, as well as theological and exegetical help to teach the Scriptures and fight heresy” (p. 212). In chapter five, “Augustine’s Thoughts on Mentoring,” Smither concludes the book by articulating Augustine’s thoughts on mentoring (p. 213). In the epilogue, Smither succinctly encourages mentors to be disciples (p. 258). His advice is to be always learning and to share experiences with one another through “e-mail, voice mail, or text messaging” (p. 259). He advocates a personal relationship: “since the church is a body of people, this Augustinian value of friendship and community should take priority over all other work” (p. 259).

Three areas of strength in Smither’s work are particularly noteworthy. First, supported by his extensive scholarly research and his passion for Augustinian studies, he makes a strong case for Augustine’s mentoring principles. Chapter two is particularly interesting and could serve as another source for a book on the mentoring principles of the patristic fathers that took place in the church in the third and fourth centuries. On a personal note, in my studies of Augustine I was more informed about his philosophy, theology, and his influence on the Christian church—dismissing his pastoral and mentoring principles—Smither’s well documented and researched sources, which gives solid credence to his work, won me over to look more closely to this colossal leader for inspiration and guidance in the area of mentoring.

Second, by using a plethora of references based on Augustine’s letters, sermons, and collateral sources to build his theme, the book is an intellectual tome for evangelical leaders, especially for avid readers of leadership in search of a source steeped in pastoral ministry and theology. Therefore, it is a bulwark against feeble and thinly researched material found spewed out by many charlatans today. Third, his chapter “Augustine’s Approach to Mentoring” (pp. 125-212) is the gist of the book and builds Smither’s overall thesis on mentoring. A great resource for pastors, lay leaders, students of leadership, and leaders at-large, it reads like a breathtaking tale about the deep roots of mentoring.

Finally, Smither closes his book with a short epilogue calling for leaders to reexamine the bishop of Hippo’s thoughts on mentoring (pp. 258-259). In particular, to go back to the Bible principles that deeply influenced Augustine to be a successful leader.

I have, overall, praise for Smither's work; however, I would like to point a few things that I feel would have been appropriate for our leaders today. First, he goes on and on detailing enormous amounts of information about Augustine, thus having the tendency to become tedious. Leaders want the bottom line; what's the point?

Second, his epilogue's brevity leaves one wanting more. After reading all 257 pages of details and the copious references, he ends with a two-page epilogue that seemed to defeat the purpose of his overall theme. He should have devoted more thought about his experience and others on the applicability of the principles in a current context.

Third, Smither's well-researched and interesting work seemed to be written for a high level of leadership instead of down where the rubber meets the road, the average church leader hungry for guidance in a world full of confusion and overwhelmed with information. If he would have done this, it would have been a more effective book on leadership and mentoring.

Roberto Rodriguez-Nunez
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary