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Review: Life's Ultimate Questions: A Contemporary Philosophy of Religion

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many points superficial treatment creates misleading impressions. In their discussion of literary curricula, for example, the authors stress the arbitrariness of the traditional literary canon and argue (quite rightly) for openness to the importance of genres, media, and national or ethnic literatures, which have not generally been included. But by totally failing to mention the role of staying power as the most important criterion of canonicity they leave the impression that the traditional canon is much more arbitrary than it really is, and they also fail to give sufficient weight to the role of the canon as a preserver and transmitter of the central moral and cultural tradition of the west. With those who do not think such things are worth preserving and transmitting we have no argument, for one cannot argue with barbarians. Gallagher and Lundin are not barbarians, but they have left gaps in their presentation through which the hordes will be glad to swarm. And the "profession" (as English teachers like to call their collective ranks) is full of cultural relativists ready to do the swarming.

This then is a book with great virtues but also great failings. As a textbook for an introductory course in literary theory it would need to be used with great care.

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Life's Ultimate Questions: A Contemporary Philosophy of Religion. By John Newport. Waco: Word, 1989, 644 pages, \$16.95.

Newport is and has long been noted as a man who is concerned with life's ultimate questions. In the preface to this lengthy work he gives something of a chronicle of his own odyssey in the search for real answers. His chronicle includes not only educational locales, such as the universities of Edinburgh, Basel, Harvard, and Columbia, but also some of the leading philosophical and theological personalities of the twentieth century who personally played a major role in helping Newport and, through him, many others to find real answers to life's most basic questions. Newport has written numerous books and articles on these vital topics as well as engaging in an extensive speaking ministry to the many who are groping for truth. This book, as a bringing together of his mature thought on various issues, is Newport's *magnum opus* and the fruit of his own quest.

The work, a self-titled philosophy of religion, is unique as a work within that category. Most philosophy-of-religion volumes seek to be objective or less explicitly committed to a viewpoint. Newport's book is from beginning to end clearly reflective of his Christian perspective, though at the same time remaining appreciative of other relevant views. Further, the volume deals with questions and issues that are only barely touched upon or else ignored completely in most works on philosophy of religion. Again, unlike most texts within this category Newport's book is intended to have (and ought to have) a wide-ranging readership. Written in a semipopular style, it was meant to teach and to minister. It is easily accessible to most relatively educated persons. The usual philosophy of religion topics that are included and dealt with at satisfactory length are as follows: the meaning of religious and Biblical language (God-talk controversy), the question of evil and suffering, the relationship of faith and reason in the knowledge of God (including the question of the classical "proofs" for God's existence). But even as Newport wrestles with the common *topoi* in any treatment of the philosophy of religion he does so in light of his pastoral purpose.

Beyond the usual, though, are major sections on the Biblical worldview, the meaning of history, science and the Biblical worldview (including important and possibly controversial discussion on creation science and evolution), science, the Biblical worldview and the issues of prayer and miracles, the issue of demonic powers (including the question of evil), death and the afterlife, Christianity and other world religions, the problem of human morality, and finally Christian faith and its relation to the arts, to culture and to worship. Such inclusions themselves ought clearly to reflect the singular character and utility of this book.

Methodologically Newport comes to each major issue or question by first spelling out a foundational framework within which thinking and dialogue can take place. In this way he seeks to educate the neophyte in the numerous facets and questions that the particular problem entails. With this preliminary framework Newport tries to set forth both fairly and succinctly the alternative points of view that vie for a hearing. He avoids the unfortunate heavyhandedness of some and tries to maintain an irenic spirit throughout. After wrestling with the basic problems at the root of each ultimate question, and after setting forth the pros and cons of each opposing view, Newport begins to gather the affirmations together and carefully to show how the Biblical/Christian perspective is in fact the superior option. It answers the questions, issues and concerns most effectively. His method is itself hardly new, but Newport's style and concern for communicability in relation to God's truth make his handling generally very effective.

I found Newport's book on the ultimate questions of life on the whole to be quite satisfactory, even sometimes excellent. As such it will prove to be both stimulating and profitable. No one will agree with Newport on all points, but his stance on each major question is truly and committedly Christian and viable to say the least. His conclusions, while possibly controversial for some, are well thought out and should be given careful consideration. At some points he is clearly better versed than he is at others. This is easily discernible not only in his actual discussion but in his endnotes, where he seems to simply string the thoughts of various authors together one after the other. The careful reader may note what seems to be at least a superficial influence of Tillich (Newport and I are members of the Paul Tillich Society) in the title (cf. "ultimate concern") and in Newport's adoption of Tillich's "method of correlation" in handling such questions. Even here one sees Newport's discerning attitude toward various viewpoints (i.e. taking the true and good wherever it may be found). This may in fact be Newport's real message through his emphasis on the Biblical worldview.

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The Word of Life: Systematic Theology, Volume Two. By Thomas Oden. San Francisco: Harper, 1989, xxi + 583 pp., \$32.95.

In 1979 Oden proposed a reformation "in the direction of antiquity" for theology (*Agenda for Theology*). *Word of Life* tackles Christology and is the second volume of a three-part systematic theology that attempts to fill that prescription. The first volume, *The Living God*, covered God, creation and providence and was reviewed in *JETS* 31/2 (June 1988) 209-211, while volume 3, *Life in the Spirit*, will address the Holy Spirit, Church, sacraments and the Christian life.



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