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Review: Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did

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MINISTRY STUDIES

Why I Am a Christian, by John Stott. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003. Pp. 140.

This brief book by John Stott is written in response to the famous book by Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*. In it, he mixes apologetics, biblical exposition, and personal narratives in giving six reasons why he is a Christian.

Stott's reasons include the fact that he was pursued by "the Hound of Heaven," his belief in the truthfulness of the audacious claims Jesus Christ made for himself, the drawing power he sees in the cross of Christ, the biblical answer to the paradox of our humanness, the freedom found in Jesus Christ, and the way Jesus Christ alone fulfills our human aspirations for transcendence, significance, and community. Each chapter includes excellent summaries of biblical teaching, taught in a very accessible manner, but also incorporates interesting and enlightening illustrations from a wide variety of figures, Christian and non-Christian.

The book is adapted from some sermons preached by Stott at his church but seems to be written as an extended evangelistic address, with a concluding chapter presenting an invitation to receive Christ. It is an excellent tool to give to a friend who is interested in exploring Christianity, especially a well-educated friend who may have some intellectual or cultural objections to Christianity. Stott anticipates and answers such objections, in his typically humble but lucid manner. It is easy to read, with short chapters and numerous interesting stories and illustrations, but combined with excellent summaries of biblical teaching in support of his reasons for being a Christian. It is not a typical apologetics book, though it contains some standard apologetics arguments. Rather, the tone is more personal, and the narrative more conversational, while remaining intellectually respectable. He offers some intellectual food for thought in chapters on the cross and the truth claims of Christ, but also seeks to address people who may not be convinced by intellectual arguments because they question the relevance of Christ and Christianity to the existential questions of life. Chapters on the freedom found in Christ, and the Christian answer to the paradox of our humanness and human aspirations will appeal to such readers. In this way, it may be seen as an adaptation of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* to a postmodern audience.

I have long been an admirer of John Stott, and have benefited greatly from his works, especially those of biblical exposition (despite his unfortunate advocacy of conditional immortality). In this work he has given Christians an excellent evangelistic tool to give to a thoughtful, nonbelieving friend who is willing to consider some reasons for becoming a Christian. I highly recommend it.

JOHN S. HAMMETT



Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did, by Randy Newman. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004. Pp. 262.

Randy Newman serves on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ. *Questioning Evangelism* springs from his years of campus dialogues, witnessing encounters, and relationships. He contends that an often-neglected, essential, evangelistic skill is the ability to ask questions. Newman holds that in a pluralistic culture which denies spiritual absolutes, the Christian can communicate the gospel more effectively by entering a dialogue instead of presenting a litany of "facts."

Newman divides his text into three sections. Part 1: "Why Ask Questions?" lays the foundation for Newman's premise with three chapters. He then uses seven chapters to discuss part 2: "What Questions Are People Asking?" His final section, part 3: "Why Aren't Questions and Answers Enough?" recognizes that though promoting dialogue through the use of questions has its advantages, it does not suffice in all circumstances.

In an age where evangelistic programs are as numerous as declining churches it is refreshing to find a text that does not propose another memorized gospel presentation. Newman states, "The goal of Questioning Evangelism is to help people know how to think about an issue more than what to think." (15) "Why Ask Questions?" acknowledges that non-Christians often use their questions as smokescreens to sidetrack a gospel presentation. However, a greater problem according to Newman is the fact that Christians focus so intently on "presenting" the gospel that they do not engage the non-Christian in a dialogue. Instead of focusing on hearing the concerns of the non-Christian the Christian mentally races ahead in the conversation preparing for the next element of the "gospel." While useful, memorized presentations often convey a "canned" artificial quality that many younger people reject, Newman contends, "A better way exists, and it looks, sounds, and feels more like Jesus, the rabbi, than like Murray, the used-car salesman" (26).

Newman's "better way" involves answering questions with questions; not for the sake of evasion but to allow the non-Christian to discover the underlying issue. Newman states, "At times (far too many, I'm afraid), I've answered questions with biblically accurate, logically sound, epistemologically watertight answers, only to see questioners shrug their shoulders. My answers, it seemed, only further confirmed their opinion that Christians are simpletons" (27). Responding with questions reveals the person's assumptions and shifts the pressure to the nonbeliever. The witness does not have to have all the answers to all the questions, many of which are not crucial. Instead of having to be an apologist able to demonstrate the fallacies of evolution, the witness helps the questioner consider the ramifications of his worldview. Many people are living with values and philosophies absorbed from culture without examination. Questioning promotes a chance for honest evaluation instead of the usual entrenchment of viewpoints. Newman encapsulates his approach:

The task of evangelism looks different if we think in this transformed way. Rather than trying to learn all of the right words, have all of the right booklets, anticipate all of the right questions, and memorize all the right intros and Scripture, we should approach evangelism with wisdom. This means that we become people who incarnate the gospel and speak of it freely because our hearts and minds have been captivated by it. Becoming people of wisdom and compassion is prerequisite for any evangelistic technique. (40)

What Newman does not say is that his approach requires more thought than “presentation” evangelism. The Christian must not only hear the statement but must also understand the underlying assumption and then respond with a question which helps the nonbeliever examine his own beliefs.

In his second part of the text, Newman deals with some of the more common questions people ask. He does an excellent job of dealing with the question of evil, the suffering of innocents, and non-Christians’ view of Christians as intolerant, homophobic, and chauvinistic. His ability to move past the voiced question or statement to the underlying issue presents the reader with a model worth attaining. This section is worth the price of the text because anyone engaged in ministry is going to face these or similar questions. Though voiced by nonbelievers many Christians have the same questions. Instead of giving sanctimonious-sounding, pat answers, our people would be better served by our walking them through their crisis of faith by helping them explore the questions.

In the final section of the text, Newman deals with some of the internal obstacles common to the life of the Christian. There are occasions when Christians do not witness effectively because of a lack of compassion, an angry spirit, inattention, or inadequate relationships with the lost. Newman recognizes that questions are not always appropriate and that more traditional evangelistic techniques have their place, but he presents a solid case for the increased use of questions in evangelistic encounters. As stated above, the text is worth reading for part 2 alone, fortunately the other two sections are also worth reading.

WILLIAM E. BROWN

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Understanding the Koran: A Quick Christian Guide to the Muslim Holy Book, by Mateen Ellass. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. Pp. 192.

Elass grew up in Saudi Arabia. He is currently a Presbyterian pastor in the mid-West and has degrees from Stanford, Fuller, and the University of Durham. His Christian credentials are strong, and his background in Muslim culture gives him a credible basis for speaking to the issues. Ellass gives us an insider’s view of Islam by focusing on the Koran. This book rules the Muslim world. Most of us do not know what the Koran is, much less do we know what it teaches. Ellass surveys the Koranic versions of stories about biblical characters, but he also tells us what the ordinary Muslims understand about their Koran.

This is one of the most readable books I have come across. The content is interesting and relevant. So many Muslim priorities are similar to those in my own background. No book is ever placed on top of the Koran. It always has a prominent place in the home. It is a holy book and should be read literally. It is thought to be an infallible revelation of divine truth.

Elass tells us which Koranic chapters and verses are the best known and best loved. He tells us what the Koran says about Jesus. He mentions the evidence we have for sources (despite Muhammed’s claims to have had only one source, God Himself). Ellass lays it out clearly: this Book (the Koran) and this religion (Islam) are derivative. Christian truth is the only authentic Word of God.

I would strongly urge those working with Muslims (even the folk-Islamic peoples of the world) to read this book. It is more practical and helpful than many of the larger more scholarly works. The Koran is the heart of Islam. We will never reach the Muslim for Christ if we do not know how to deal with the Koran. This book is a quick read but a factual one. The Koran is thought to be the word of God manifested in a book. We serve the Word of God made flesh. Muslims can not see who Christ really is. They do not understand the Trinity. They deny that Christ died on the cross. They do not believe personal faith is possible. The Koran is at the heart of all of these errors.

Christian leaders should read the Koran itself so as to know what kind of book it is, but Ellass has given us one of the best secondary sources available to help us understand the Koran and thus the Islamic faith. This book comes highly recommended.

L. RUSS BUSH III

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Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey, by A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004. Pp. 349.

Three well-qualified mission scholars have collaborated to produce a valuable book that comprehensively introduces the subject of world missions. These scholars are: A. Scott Moreau who is professor of missions and intercultural studies at the Wheaton College graduate school and the editor of the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*. The next scholar is Gary R. Corwin who is associate editor of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and special representative with SIM. Finally, Gary R. McGee is Professor of Church History and Pentecostal Studies at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri. They have succeeded in presenting a biblical, historical, and practical survey that keeps these three areas in proper balance. There is no surprise to find an enormous amount of information in this book due to the previous research done for the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, but this time the material is structured with the view of a comprehensive guide for students of missions. The authors realized that a serious prospective missionary would like even more data on missions so they placed a CD in the book that contains the whole *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*.

Introducing World Missions is divided into five sections through which mission can be experienced. The first part is about encountering mission in the Scripture where the authors correctly find the foundation for winning people to Christ. Missions must begin with theology that does not neglect the evangelistic mandate given by Christ Himself. The second section deals with the historical activity of Christians who obeyed this mandate and went throughout the world to serve Christ. The third part begins the pragmatic material where the missionary candidate learns about the first steps, preparation, and charting the path from home into the place of future ministry. The fourth part uncovers the challenges that will definitely appear in the life of the one sent by God.

The whole process starts at home in the family. Once released, the prospective missionary encounters strategic and ministry issues as he relates to people of other cultures, churches, and other shareholders. The final section explores contemporary issues in the