

## Book Reviews

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*James A. Swanson (1937–2018), Covenant pastor, chaplain,  
and first chair of Covenant Disabilities Ministry Resource Committee*

*Robert McGee, PSWC children and family ministry coach,  
children's pastor, Life Community Church, Roseville, California*

*John E. Phelan, Jr., president and dean emeritus,  
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

**John F. Kilner, editor, *Why People Matter: A Christian Engagement with Rival Views of Human Significance* (Baker Academic, 2017), 223 pages, \$26.99.**

While many schools of thought affirm human significance, the philosophies underlying this affirmation vary greatly. Are all philosophies equally adequate and compatible with a Christian perspective? This is the primary question of this volume, edited by John F. Kilner. The book addresses five different outlooks, dividing them into those grounded in humanity—utilitarianism, collectivism, and individualism—and those grounded in science—naturalism and transhumanism. Christian ethicists interact with each of these viewpoints in turn, comparing them to a biblical outlook, noting both commonalities and differences.

Part one addresses secular viewpoints grounded in humanity. Gilbert Meilaender interacts with utilitarianism, arguing that, against utilitarianism's concern with the maximum benefit ("utility") for society in general, no individual's good is simply part of an aggregate good; each individual is distinctive, singular, and unrepeatable before God. Amy Laura Hall contrasts collectivism with the sanctity of each individual human being apart from any category or group. She reminds us, for instance, that during the Third Reich, science and popular writings encouraged humans

to see one another as a different kind of human. She also provides a military example of how one can be a part of a larger regime that renders the individual as a tool. Individualism roots human worth in individual values and preferences, which determine what is right for each person, writes Russell DiSilvestro. He reminds readers that from the Christian perspective all humans have worth and dignity that is based not in our individual selves but in God.

Part two turns to scientifically based views. Naturalism has no room for what is beyond the observable within the material world, such as a transcendent source, a soul, or the notion of the image of God. Scott Rae writes that naturalism is the dominant worldview but is limited by its inability to explain how consciousness, rationality, or moral reason could originate from matter alone. Transhumanism moves into the area of becoming more than human, seeking the acceleration of intelligent life beyond its current forms and limitations. The scope of transhumanism can vary from the radical extension of the human lifespan to super-intelligent machines that may seem humanlike but are not biological. Here Patrick Smith builds a case that people matter as they are, having a dignity from the creator, despite limitations and vulnerabilities that come with being finite, embodied beings.

Part three offers two chapters that seek to ground human significance not in humanity itself or in science, but in God, drawing from an explicitly Christian ethic. John Kilner expounds on the meaning and implications of humanity's being created in God's image, differentiating between Jesus *being* God's image and humans being *in* God's image. He notes that humanity's being in God's image is not determined by any particular attributes or abilities. A chapter by David Gushee builds arguments from both Old and New Testaments, showing that God is concerned with human dignity; with justice, love, and mercy; and with those who are vulnerable and victimized. Gushee highlights Jesus's inclusive and special care for those who especially need such inclusion and care and expounds on the ideal of shalom, where all people made in the image of God will finally come together in one peaceable community.

A summary chapter by the editor further develops the importance of a Christian ethic of human dignity, concluding that only a Christian outlook can adequately support the premise that people matter.

Reading this book illuminated for me different ethical perspectives, juxtaposed with a specifically Christian perspective. This book would be valuable for students of philosophy or ethics at the university level,

for those studying pastoral ethics at the seminary level, and for pastors and chaplains dealing with contemporary values and evaluating their underlying ethical presuppositions. In one sense the book might have been stronger if adherents of each position represented were able to write their own chapters, with responses from Christian ethicists. Such a format would offer an opportunity for further secular-Christian dialogue on human value. Perhaps the editor will someday convene such a symposium and produce a sequel book. The book is exceptionally well footnoted and is indexed by subject and person. Each chapter concludes with extensive documentation and helpful recommendations for further reading.

JAMES A. SWANSON

**Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Baker Books, 2016), 336 pages, \$19.99.**

In an age where scores of books on church growth are published every year, it is refreshing to read a book that focuses on a specific age group within the church. Countless studies conclude that “40 to 50 percent of youth group seniors—like the young people in your church—drift from God and the faith community after they graduate from high school” (p.17). Most pastors, leadership team members, and volunteers agree that reaching young people is a priority, but the path forward can sometimes be confusing. In *Growing Young*, Powell, Mulder, and Griffin offer an inclusive book that analyzes the generational gaps hindering spiritual growth in youth and suggests strategies for developing youth into lifelong disciples of Christ.

Each of the book’s “six essential strategies” encapsulates a multitude of small pivots that any church can apply at some level and, over time, see tremendous results in reaching young people. These strategies encourage the church, and every generation within it, to embrace change as it moves from good intentions to active participation: “It’s one thing to say a practice is important, another thing to be intentional to think and talk about it, but when we put our hands and feet to work, that’s when churches change” (p. 217).

And the changes are profound, perhaps more so for those further removed from youth culture. For instance, the authors are keen to point out that shared access to church responsibilities, such as holding keys to

the children's ministry closet or playing a major role in hosting events held at church, provides pathways for young people to commit to the church. The authors also recommend presenting a gospel message centered on the person of Jesus Christ and a clear mission that focuses on partnering with other organizations for social change in local and global contexts. In other words, greater responsibility for youth, a love for people, and the message of Jesus Christ can be just as attractive and effective in youth ministry as any new staff hire or building campaign.

Another essential strategy the authors emphasize is creating space for authentic conversation. In searching for the "right" answers, the church has often overlooked the fundamental issue surrounding youth ministry: the need to create space for dialogue. The authors argue that genuine conversations—where youth are able to ask questions and youth workers are willing to address these questions without judgment—yield significant benefits. Providing opportunities under the unflinching acceptance of Christ and the church creates the kind of "cultural warmth" that Christ always intended his church to convey—the kind of warmth that comes from people remembering the names of new families or supporting those who have faced specific tragedies. It is the incredibly simple task of making others feel noticed and known. This feeling of a church being a family—not an ancient institution—is something that resonates deeply with young people.

Developing such an environment often entails a change that requires a kind of "patience for the organic," a need for adaptive rather than technical change. "Most of the important obstacles faced by churches that want to grow young involve a shift in the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the people in the congregation" (p. 281). One wonders if understanding these changes deserves a book of its own. Instilling a new shared vision and the idea of vision-building *together with* intergenerational voices in leadership deserve more attention, as do testimonies of churches that represent the implications of not growing young.

The stories collected by the authors underscore the significance of their findings and make the book more a warm series of testimonies than an endless drone of data. The authors' findings are significant, but the book could have expressed greater urgency for their application today. I would recommend this book to everyone involved in ministry, not only to those who specifically engage with youth. It is trustworthy in its findings and will inspire readers to reach new generations of Christ-followers. The authors could have been critical of old-guard mentalities of church ritual

and tradition, or of older generations in general. Instead, *Growing Young* offers a fresh take on reaching and keeping young people in church. It may just be easier than you think.

ROBERT MCGEE

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (paperback, Penguin, 2005), 864 pages, \$24.

DM, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (paperback, Penguin, 2011), 1184 pages, \$28.

DM, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (paperback, Yale University Press, 2017), 704 pages, \$25.

DM, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (paperback, University of California Press, 2002), 302 pages, \$27.

DM, *Thomas Cromwell: A Revolutionary Life* (Viking, 2018), 752 pages, \$25.

Theological libraries require up-to-date commentaries and monographs on the biblical text; cutting-edge historical, theological, and ministerial resources; and grammars, lexica, and other tools for the reading of original texts. They should also include the best of contemporary cultural, political, and social thought along with a full complement of novels, poetry, essays, general history, and science. Preparation for preaching and teaching requires that a pastor be theologically learned, culturally informed, and engaged with stories, words, and wonder.

Within these larger groupings of resources, as a pastor and teacher I have found certain types of books particularly helpful. I am a great fan, for example, of dictionaries, both multivolume and single-volume, and they are often my first port of call in any task. I am also fond of one-volume introductions to topics and issues that could take up many volumes. The best of such works are comprehensive without attempting to be exhaustive. Unlike a dictionary, such introductions present a consistent narrative or outline that enables the reader to follow the author's argument without getting lost in the weeds—and they encourage the reader to want to learn more.

In this brief article, I recommend two important works in the category of one-volume introduction and three works written for those who want to learn more. All five books would make wonderful additions

to a pastor's library, and all were written by the distinguished historian Diarmaid MacCulloch. MacCulloch is professor of the history of the church at Oxford University and a deacon in the Anglican Church. In addition to his many award-winning books, he is highly regarded for his documentary and television work. The following paragraphs are not intended as reviews per se (some of these books I have reviewed elsewhere) but as an invitation to works I have greatly valued in my work. Several of the earlier works on this list have recently been reprinted in paperback, making them far more affordable.

The two general works I recommend are *The Reformation: A History* and *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. These are substantial books: *The Reformation* runs to 832 pages and *Christianity* to 1161. Don't be intimidated by their length, however; they are eminently readable. MacCulloch has an eye for a good story. He clearly knows how the personal narratives of the characters involved give the story depth and humanize it—and the Reformation is as much a story of the personalities and peculiarities of individuals as it is of a dramatic social movement. Because of the printing press, we know more about the personalities and thought of the key figures of the Reformation than their predecessors. (In the case of Martin Luther, we know rather too much!) I read *The Reformation* straight through when it first came out. I found it a lively and engaging read full of those robust characters that made Protestantism what it is, for better and for worse. I have since used it as a resource when I need to remember exactly who Andreas Osiander was or what really brought on the Peasants War. Just recently I consulted it on Luther's views on the Jews. The book was the winner of the National Book Critics Award in 2004.

*Christianity* is also an award-winning volume, having been awarded both the Hessel-Tolman Prize and the Cundill Prize in 2010. It contains the same lively storytelling and interest in individuals that I find so helpful in *The Reformation*. Protestant lay people, and for that matter students and pastors, may be familiar with church history up to the council at Nicaea at most. After that their knowledge lapses until Martin Luther, with perhaps side glances at St. Francis and John Wycliffe. Many of us growing up in Protestant congregations learned little or nothing about the rise of the papacy, the emergence of Islam, or Orthodox Christianity. *Christianity* covers the entire history of the church in manageable segments, with attention to the personalities and social contexts impacting the church in each particular area and era. I found the final section of

the volume, “God in the Dock” particularly fascinating. MacCulloch has an eye for what and why the western church is the way it is today. This is also a volume I have frequently consulted. I have found the table of contents and the indices very helpful whenever I have needed to refresh my understanding of a particular period, issue, or personality.

The three more focused volumes I would like to recommend are all concerned, more or less, with the English Reformation. The first volume, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life*, is a biography. Cranmer was the archbishop of Canterbury who led his church through the turbulence of Henry VIII’s reign and the all-too-brief reign of Henry’s unfortunate son Edward, and ended his life in a dramatic martyr’s death under Henry’s Roman Catholic daughter Mary. Cranmer was an erudite man, a careful and thoughtful man, and, when he needed to be, a bold man. To me he is one of the more attractive figures of the Reformation. Not perfect, certainly—he could be both gently compassionate and unnecessarily vindictive—but he gave us some of the most beautiful prayers in the English language through his editing and composing of *The Book of Common Prayer*. First published in 1996, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* remains the definitive biography of the reformer and a wonderful, engaging read.

The second volume of this triptych is *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation*, originally published in 1999. It is less of a biography and more a description of the efforts of the young king, Cranmer, and his associates to reform the English Church in ways not possible under the religiously conservative Henry VIII. This reform required a good deal of sparring with more conservative church leaders and restraining of the more radical reformers. Edward’s early death left the task unfinished. When his efforts to pass his crown to his Protestant cousin Lady Jane Gray failed, his older sister Mary sought to roll back the Reformation in blood and fire. Her early death brought the Protestant Elizabeth to the throne. She sought a middle way to hold her kingdom together. Had Edward lived, MacCulloch suggests, the English Church might have turned out more like the Reformed churches of Basel and Geneva—plainer, simpler, and stripped of rituals, ornamentation, and elaborate clerical garb.

The final work is the most recent: *Thomas Cromwell: A Revolutionary Life*. How does a biography of Henry VIII’s “fixer” belong on this list? Cromwell must be seen along with Cranmer as one of the architects of the English Reformation. His efforts on behalf of the king—engineering the break with Rome, dissolving the monasteries, and marginalizing

recalcitrant priests, monks, and bishops—stemmed from his Protestant convictions and not simply his support of the king. Already *Cromwell* has been called the definitive biography of this controversial and enigmatic figure. Cromwell has undergone of bit of a rehabilitation of late with the superb novels of Hilary Mantel and the miniseries based on them. *Cromwell* has all the superb storytelling and attention to personal detail I have loved in MacCulloch's other works.

So why should American Protestants, other than Episcopalians, be interested in the English Reformation? There is, of course, the fact that the Tudor period is inherently interesting and one of the great historical hinges of the English-speaking world. It is also a cracking good story! But for the American Protestant church there is more. The English reformers were impacted more by the Calvinists of France and Switzerland than by the Lutherans of Germany. The "Puritan" element of the Edwardian church asserted itself in the seventeenth century and became dominant under Thomas Cromwell's distant relative Oliver. Puritans had already made their way to America and were attempting to establish their new community as a "light on the hill." Oliver Cromwell would seek to establish in England a republic and a church that reflected a Puritan vision. The failure of the Commonwealth did not mean the failure of that vision. Oliver Cromwell became one of the heroes of the American revolutionary thinkers. A line can be drawn from Cranmer and Cromwell, through Edward and his church and Cromwell's Commonwealth, to the American Revolution and the formation of an American Church. For better and for worse, that legacy is with us to this day. To understand the conflicts and confusions of American Protestantism, we would do well to start with Henry VIII, Edward VI, Thomas Cranmer, and Thomas Cromwell. Diarmaid MacCulloch is a wonderful guide to them all.

JOHN E. PHELAN JR.