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Life in the face of death: the resurrection message of the New Testament

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Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament

Richard N. Longenecker, Editor

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998

322 pages, \$35.50 Softcover

Excellent! – scholarly and accessible, biblical and pastoral, homiletical and theological, educational and devotional. These adjectives aptly describe the latest book edited by Richard Longenecker in the McMaster New Testament Studies Series. For the last three years McMaster Divinity College (Hamilton, Ontario) has convened a New Testament Symposium by inviting prominent scholars from around the world to present papers on a New Testament theme. These papers are responded to and revised as necessary before being collected into the published book form. This current volume on death and resurrection in the New Testament contains twelve essays from such authors as Richard Bauckham, Joel B. Green, Murray J. Harris, William L. Lane, Andrew T. Lincoln, and Allison A. Trites.

The overall tone and theological emphasis of the book would be classified as evangelical. It doesn't seek to advance new, controversial theories for New Testament scholarship as much as it tries to validate the Gospel message ("Jesus rose from the dead and offers eternal life") as central to the New Testament and our lives today. The book is full of solid scholarship with plenty of footnotes, bibliographies, and indexes for those who want to study issues further. Pastors will be interested to know that all the research is used in the service of affirming and deepening the faith of readers. A key question looming behind each essay is, "how can this help readers to embrace resurrection life in the face of death?"

Section one contains four essays which survey the views of death and afterlife according to ancient cultures (Ugaritic, Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Roman), the major world religions (Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) and prominent contemporary worldviews (Humanism, Reincarnation, Platonism, Christianity). This is the most informative section of the book as it gives readers a historical, international and holistic backdrop to see how the New Testament's message of bodily resurrection is unique. This first section asserts that across most cultures

in most periods of history death is seen as a tragedy, an inevitable enemy that cannot be defeated, and a mystery that cannot be fully understood. How to cope with death is the universal problem of life. Christianity alone offers a unique and satisfying solution – because Jesus died and conquered death, in his resurrection we too shall live.

The rest of the book focuses on death and resurrection specifically in the New Testament through the Gospels (section two), the Pauline Epistles (section three) and the books of Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation (section four). Through these excellent biblical book studies the reader is left with the overwhelming impression that the resurrection of Jesus and subsequent granting of eternal life to his followers, is the central doctrine of the New Testament, the cornerstone of Christianity, and *the* event that separates the ages into “old” and “new”. As a result, this reader has begun looking at his own and others’ preaching in a new light, to see how implicitly or explicitly the good news of resurrection life is mentioned. After reading this book, one will be more inspired to believe and preach the foundation of our faith.

While the book is strong in its biblical, theological, and historical portrayal of death and resurrection, it does not help readers to see the daily practical consequences of this belief. Pastors and lay people who struggle to know what resurrection life means in the here and now will have to figure it out themselves or read another kind of book. Another minor criticism is that with so many authors the book does not flow as well chapter to chapter. Arguments do not build on each other, many facts are repeated throughout, and the writing style is necessarily uneven. Still, the overall theme unifies the work and the reader has the advantage of being exposed to twelve different writers. This makes it a very worthwhile read!

Mike Rattee,
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Kitchener, ON.

From Our Mothers’ Arms: The Intergenerational Impact of Residential Schools in Saskatchewan

Constance Deiter

Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1999

100 pages

“The schools forcibly removed these children from the influence of their parents and community, and their gentle teachings. Once at school, the children