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BOOK REVIEW

G. Stephen Weaver Jr. and Ian Hugh Clary, eds. *The Pure Flame of Devotion: The History of Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Michael A. G. Haykin*. Kitchener, ON: Joshua Press, 2013. 512 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-894400-54-1.

In this tribute to Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin, over twenty of his former students and colleagues have collaborated in bringing together the divergent concerns of church history, Christian spirituality, and contemporary church life. Haykin's interests and publications throughout his career as a professor of church history (Central Baptist Seminary, Toronto, ON, 1982–2003; Toronto Baptist Seminary, Toronto, ON, 2003–2007; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 2007–current) have consistently reflected this integrative vision. According to the editors' introduction, the original essays compiled for this volume attempt to follow his lead: "more than a *Festschrift*, it is intended to serve as a model for students and educated laypeople for how to approach the history of Christian spirituality" (12). An expansive and yet spiritually discerning way of approach to the theological and devotional resources of history is the organizing thread that ties these twenty-three chapters together.

The essays have been assembled, for the most part, in chronological order. The first four studies concern the Patristic through Medieval era. The ongoing impact of Haykin's Patristic interests is reflected here in the work of Dennis Ngien and Keith Goad with the Cappadocian Fathers. The next five chapters draw from the time of the Reformation to the Puritans: Luther and Calvin, in stimulating fashion, but also William Perkins and John Owen. Four more articles span the Evangelical and Modern centuries. The heartbeat of Jonathan Edwards and B. B. Warfield frame this sampling of non-Baptist perspectives on the evangelical era.

The final cluster of seven essays focuses on exemplars of an explicitly Baptist spirituality; beginning with John Bunyan (1628–1688) and progressing forward to T. T. Shields (1873–1955). The range of selections is neither exhaustive nor intentionally constructed. Given its roots in the research interests of a primarily evangelical and Baptist confessional context, however, its breadth and scope is significant.

The majority of these chapters attempt, in various ways, to bring some available evidence of lived spirituality into dialogue with time-tested actions or teachings of theological significance. In some cases this provides a rich confirmation of familiar interpretations. Crawford Gribben, for example, sheds some interesting light on John Owen's passion for poetry and its subsequent approbation of his carefully nuanced Trinitarianism. In other cases the cross-fertilization of spirituality and theology suggests challenging perspectives on otherwise neglected material, such as David S. Hogg's discussion of the "christological centre of piety in the prayers of Anselm of Canterbury." Hogg reminds us that written prayers were not merely transcripts of more or less extemporaneous responses to God's felt presence. On the contrary, we should approach these written prayers as carefully crafted and theologically instructive means to the end of shared participation in the life of God. On this basis, Hogg offers his essay as an initial attempt "to redress both the lack of sensitivity to the pneumatologically illuminated character of Anselm's Christology in his prayers, and also this widely recognized lacuna in Anselmian studies" (84). Along the way, we are challenged to find the constructive christological center within some of Anselm's expressions of devotion that otherwise might not sit comfortably with evangelical sensibilities. Whether or not Hogg's argument is ultimately convincing, his determined effort to read together both the theological writings and the ecclesial practices of a pivotal and often contested figure like Anselm sounds the deeper note.

While historical research naturally tends to focus on unique personalities and perspectives, some of the chapters in this collection explore the equally important role of broadly felt trends and influences. Francis X. Gumerlock traces the commonly-held

view of a pre-conflagration rapture in the early middle ages. From its roots in the fifth-century collapse of the Roman Empire, Gumerlock traces this view right into the eighteenth century. While Gumerlock does connect a number of significant dots along the way, a culminating reflection on the implications of this doctrine for the devotional lives of its adherents is, disappointingly, left undeveloped. In a similar vein, Malcom B. Yarnell explores the common experience of martyrdom among sixteenth-century Anabaptists. Growing out of an ongoing research interest in the defining factors of Anabaptist identity, this chapter probes the cruciform shape of these dissenters' spirituality. In the process he suggests the presence of a remarkably holistic resonance between internal belief and external witness.

The topic is timely. Historical resources are urgently needed as we tend to the ongoing vitality of evangelical spirituality, so these are significant essays. Students of church history will, no doubt, begin to find them cited in the footnotes of essays yet to be written. The more ambitious task that this volume has set for itself, however, is to find its way into contemporary studies of Christian spirituality. On this front its contributions may not be so immediately realized.

A significant problem with this book is a taxing ambiguity of definition. As Simon Chan (among others) has suggested, terms like spirituality, spiritual formation, and spiritual theology are currently used in many different ways (Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998]). A substantial spectrum of this divergent use of terminology could be gleaned from *The Pure Flame of Devotion*. Some, like Dennis Ngien, work with the pneumatological-theological parameters of the concept of spirituality (or spiritual formation/theology). Here it is a conceptual recognition and volitional responsiveness to the work of the Holy Spirit that constitutes spirituality. Others, like Carl Trueman, work less formally from the human pole of "existential engagement with God" (117). Spirituality, under Trueman's skillful hand, becomes the capacity to grasp and pursue the counter-intuitive truths of God's Word as it is preached. Still others, like Douglas Adams, cut to the fine details of distinguishing between "tools" of an "otherworldly perspective" and "weap-

ons of a more carnal nature” (483, 489). Spirituality is about testing the fruit of complex internal and interpersonal processes. The majority approach, as represented by Donald S. Whitney, works with identifiable devotional habits and seeks to discern the interdependence of cognitive and affective factors within a person’s words and actions. Spirituality is holistic and consistent living.

All of these ways, and more, can contribute resources for the development of Christian spirituality. Without a consensual conception of the terrain of spirituality, however, the various contributors to this volume seem to return from their many explorations with different observations rooted in different kinds of curiosity. The gleanings, to be sure, are valuable but, taken as they stand, these chapters could be construed to contribute more to the confusion of terminology than to its clarification. Sean Michael Lucas’s introductory chapter, “Church History as a Pastoral Discipline,” seems to anticipate this very danger. The study of history is a valuable component of spirituality, he contends, because it chastens our pride, challenges our theological blind-spots, and teaches us to approach the complexities of intersubjective communication more carefully. “In doing all this,” Lucas observes, “church history offers its greatest gift: wisdom” (23). This is admirably said. But wisdom, like its cousin biblical spirituality, is not assembled by the mere acquisition of its parts. It is, as Jonathan Edwards argued, in the balance and symmetry of perfect proportion that theological and existential components take on the image and beauty of God’s holiness. The final outcome of this volume’s incorporation into the contemporary literature on biblical spirituality, in other words, may rest more with how it will be received than with how it was constructed.

The Pure Flame of Devotion brings together a very capable community of scholars to produce a very readable survey of some very hard-won theological insights. On these terms alone, it is a worthy addition to the library of most pastors, teachers, and students of the faith. Particularly for those who struggle with the complex processes of spiritual formation in the church, these essays further exemplify the challenge of constructing a conceptual paradigm within which to assimilate and arrange the diver-

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sity of resources. Spirituality, of course, is just not that easy, but because serious discussion partners are always welcome, I would recommend this book.

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