

With this suggestion he does not underestimate the classical ways in which sermons are prepared, such as the use of Bible commentaries, the role of the Holy Spirit, personal experience gained in Christian ministry, and the thoughts of known theologians. Rather, he sees his suggestions as complementary to these.

Although the book's subtitle suggests that preachers must be in conversation with storytellers, biographers, poets and journalists, it is obvious that in most of this book the author leans on storytellers. Chapters are interlaced with literature from world-renowned authors. He often uses stories from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Hugo's *Les Miserables*, *Harry Potter*, works of Dostoyevski, Tolstoy, Khaled Hosseini, and others. He sees these works and authors as quality ones that can be used in constructing sermons. At times his recommendations sound like they are aimed at high schoolers rather than preachers. In addition to storytellers, biographers can also provide inspiration, mostly because listeners can easily identify with the characters in biographies. The author gives to poets the least of his attention, not because they are not important, but he believes it is hard to fit poetry into sermons. Preachers should rather use poetry to improve their verbal abilities.

In the end, this book can be reduced to a basic premise: Preachers must read. It is a way to enrich self and others. When Plantinga invites preachers to read, he does not imply that they are not biblically equipped or that they lack experience in their walk with Lord. He only wants to motivate them to give more attention to a world they may not have thought about. It is a world of storytellers, biographers, poets and journalists. It will enrich their sermons and help them to be more affective with their listeners.

Ivan Karadža

Brent A. Strawn (ed.)

The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness

New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 430 pp.

With such a straightforward title the potential reader is by no means left wondering what this book is about. Anyone interested in what the Scriptures have to say about happiness in general and the pursuit of it in particular will find it hard to leave this book on the shelf and continue searching for a more fitting volume.

The content is quite logically and expectedly divided into three parts. The first one deals with the Old Testament, the second with the New Testament, and the third steps outside the limits of the biblical canon and offers to connect the biblical data with other related disciplines.

Within the three parts themselves, the book covers the topic in a broad, yet effec-

tive manner. The individual chapters which deal with the Old Testament cover the theology of Creation (pp. 33-55), the Pentateuch (pp. 57-73), the Prophets—through a survey of Isaiah as a typical representative (pp. 75-94), the Book of Psalms (pp. 95-115), and the Wisdom writings (pp. 117-135). Happiness in the New Testament is explored via an examination of the Beatitudes in the Gospels (pp. 141-167), the text of Luke-Acts (pp. 169-185), the Pauline corpus (187-201), and the apocalyptic literature—not restricted to Revelation but with a brief survey of the intertestamental apocryphal texts (pp. 203-224). The bridge between the canonical investigation and its application to four other disciplines (viz. systematic theology [pp. 229-247], practical theology [pp. 249-261], and counseling psychology [pp. 263-286]) is built in the third part. The work ends with an epilogue (pp. 287-322) which tries to *connect all the dots* into a full picture, followed by an extremely helpful appendix (pp. 323-370)—a biblical lexicon on happiness (which goes way beyond just listing the occurrences of words like “joy,” “happy,” “blessed,” etc.). If for no other reason, this book is worth buying for the appendix.

While the promise of tracing the topic of happiness in the Bible seems like an almost impossible or at least a very difficult task, this volume delivers and fulfills what it promises on the front cover. A key reason for such a success might be what Brent Strawn sees as the unique nature of the volume—the use of the “Bible first’ approach” (pp. 8, 23). The editor himself admits in the introduction that the search for happiness in the Bible might seem like a dangerous one. The danger lies first of all in the very definition of happiness. There is a long history of the study of (and pursuit of) happiness. Laying the foundation for what follows, the introduction gives a brief survey of the influence of both ancient philosophy (via Aristotle as the most important contributor to the topic at hand) and modern positive psychology on the contemporary understanding of what a happy life consists of and what is/are the way(s) human beings can attain it. The material offered in the introduction should be very helpful to anyone who would like to begin the study of this topic but has no prior knowledge.

Almost all the chapters in this book are trying to either find balance between the *hedonic* and the *eudaimonic* views of happiness or discover which one is (more) biblical. The *hedonic* view is that happiness is a subjective, internal, this-worldly enjoyment of health, wealth, and other (usually) physical pleasures. On the other hand, *eudaimonia* is more connected with transcendent values and lasting (or even future) enjoyment of a holistic well-being. Surprisingly, the result of the quest presented in this volume seems to be that both are present in the biblical authors’ worldviews.

A strong point of this book is its ability to give the reader a broad picture of how happiness is portrayed in any portion of the Bible it deals with. For example, the experience of reading Isaiah, the Psalms, and the Book of Ecclesiastes will

never be the same for readers of this book. All three portions of the Scripture are usually seen as rather negative. This book changes that notion, which especially applies to Ecclesiastes whose display of the pursuit of happiness is nothing like the grim, despairing view on life devoid of any hope which imposes itself on the reader upon an initial reading of Qohelet's words.

Another benefit of reading this volume is a fuller understanding of the connection between God's ability to be happy and His desire for man to also be happy and man's corresponding quest for happiness. For this, the chapters by Fretheim ("God, Creation, and the Pursuit of Happiness," [pp. 33-55]) and Charry ("The Necessity of Divine Happiness," [pp. 229-247]) are very interesting and helpful.

An interesting thread connects almost all the chapters which give an overview of the New Testament teaching on happiness. Both Luke and Paul share the vision of happiness which is (not surprisingly) present in the apocalyptic genre also. Matthew joins Luke with his parallel account of the Beatitudes, and shows that Jesus' view was not different. The key element in all these is the dual nature of the happiness of someone who follows Christ—he might experience happiness now (although Jesus balances this with his warnings of prosecution and rejection) but much more in the life to come. This nature of happiness reflects and is tied to the nature of Christ's kingdom which *already is, but is not yet (in its fullness)*.

The footnotes are helpful in that they offer more insights while keeping the main body of the text easy to read. They also point the reader who would like to bring more depth to his or her study of this topic in the right direction by mentioning other articles and monographs which shed more light on the matters discussed in this volume.

More conservative readers of this book could perhaps object to its rather liberal views on the Bible—viz. the repeated questioning of the authorship of certain books of the Bible by the authors (which some might see as an attack on the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture) with the corresponding belief in late dates of writing and the constant attempt to integrate secular psychology with the Bible (which could be construed of as an abandonment of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture).

Also, the book could lose its appeal to readers who would like to understand the biblical teaching on happiness but who are not conversant with psychology and/or philosophy, since they might occasionally find the book to be too technical (especially in the third part). While the two parts which deal with the Old and the New Testaments respectively could please a broader audience, the last part is narrower in its reach.

In conclusion, this book is a resource which could prove itself useful to many theologians, preachers, and all Christians who desire to dig deeper into the Word

of God. Its value lies in its high level of scholarly investigation, which does not make it lose any of its practicality. Very insightful and stimulating, this book has much to offer. Still, it would be advised for potential readers to read it carefully with discernment, for the reasons mentioned above. Yet, the benefits of this book outweigh the detriment it could cause with its less than conservative views. If nothing else, it will make its readers more aware of just how much happiness is in the Bible. Reading God's Word will never be the same.

Mario Kushner

Stanko Jambrek

The Reformation in Croatian lands in the European context

Zagreb, Central Europe and the Biblical Institute, 2013, 464 pages

At the end of last year a new book appeared on the Croatian literary market, which talks about 16th and 17th century Reformation, in Croatian lands in particular. Its very appearance—almost 500 pages, hard cover, attractive design—as well as its ambitious title, made it obvious that this could be a significant intellectual and publishing event. Our linguistic and geopolitical area, which is usually not very familiar with this subject, is simply craving for good contemporary literature (which is objectively and scientifically supported) dealing with this subject, so the expectations of every interested reader who approached this work were (and are) quite great, and rightfully so. Did the book justify the expectations, and whose pen did it come from in the first place?

The author of this ample volume is Stanko Jambrek, who is definitely known to the knowledgeable reading audience. He is one of the rare living Croatian scientists who deals with themes pertaining to Reformation, and has done so for most of his career. It is enough to look at his basic biographical data to see that we are dealing with an author who is well- acquainted with the subject matter. His master thesis on the subject of church history, defended at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek in 1997, was published under the title, *Hrvatski protestantski pokret XVI. i XVII. stoljeća (The Croatian Protestant Movement in the 16th and 17th centuries)*, Matica hrvatska, Zaprešić, 1999. His dissertation for his doctorate in theology, defended in 2001 in the USA at the New Covenant International University, was published under the title, *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj (Reformation Heritage Churches in Croatia)*, Bogoslovni institut, Zagreb, 2003, while the research from his second doctorate, in history, defended in 2012 at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Zagreb, was published in the very book we are dealing with. In addition to these, he has published two more books, as well as a series of articles which deal with history, theology, and