

Visit the Sick

Ministering God's Grace in Times of Illness

By Brian Croft
Reviewed by Paul Martin

Brian Croft graduated from Indiana University in 1997 with a B. A. in Sociology and did some graduate work at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served in pastoral ministry in some manner for over 12 years and is currently in his 5th year as Senior Pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. He and his wife, Cara, have 4 children: Samuel, Abby, Isabelle and Claire. His hobbies include sports (golf, tennis, racketball), playing music (piano and guitar), reading (especially biographies and American history), teaching self-defense classes and teaching his children sports and music.

Day One is publishing a great series of smallish books under their "Ministering the Master's Way" banner. This one, by Pastor Brian Croft is a fine edition to the series and deals the entire gamut of ministering to the sick.

After the foreword by Mark Dever, Croft writes a chapter explaining sickness from a Biblical Theological perspective. This immediately elevates the book from a simple manual, to a helpful theological contribution. Have we really thought through the theology of visiting the sick? Is it an unfortunate expectation on pastors or a central element of our calling? He concludes this brief, but thorough review by noting:

Understanding this unfolding storyline of the Bible is essential not only for grasping God's design and plan for his creation, but also for comprehending God's eternal purpose in the reality of sickness, disease, pain and affliction in the world. In the midst of the sickness or affliction that someone in our church may be experiencing, we

have the glorious privilege of pointing to a greater, divine and more significant reality than that person's physical circumstances. We can point to sickness and affliction as results of the Fall and to our dying bodies as reminders of our birth in sin. We can remind others that sickness was a means for God to discipline his chosen people that caused them to long for a Redeemer. We can rejoice that the signs of God's kingdom coming were the healings and restorations by the authority of the Son of God—a foretaste of what we will experience in full when Jesus returns and resurrection becomes a reality.(28)

The rest of the book overflows with excellent counsel on how to serve the sick. He includes sections explaining what kinds of Scripture to read; how to pray the Gospel; as well as encouragement to affirm the sovereignty of God and remind the sick of the promises and character of their Saviour.

There is no shortage of wise pastoral advice in the book. Croft rightly promotes pastoral ministry



to the sick and shifts it from duty to spiritual service. He notes some of the powerful effects such ministry can have in the life of struggling saints, and how the entire church can be edified by a pastor's care of the hurting. Perhaps best of all, he writes of the joy that almost always comes to the pastor as he seeks to serve. How many times have we gone to a hospi-

tal or sick room only to leave a few minutes later feeling we received all the blessing!

For the younger pastor (I trust) there is plenty of good practical advice, from making deliberate eye contact to remembering to freshen your breath!

All in all, this is a fine volume and a welcome addition to any pastor's library.

Croft, Brian. *Visit the Sick: Ministering God's Grace in Times of Illness*. DayOne Publications, 2008.

Ten Significant Christian Publications - 2008

By Keith Mathison

The year 2008 witnessed the publication of a large number of Christian books. Deciding which to include in this list was no simple matter. I've included titles that I believe will have a lasting influence for one reason or another. I have not listed these publications in any particular order.

Herman Bavinck. *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 4* (Baker Academic). In 2003, Baker published the first volume of the new English translation of Herman Bavinck's classic *Reformed Dogmatics*. In 2008, the fourth and final volume was finally published. Bavinck was a very influential Dutch Reformed theologian, but until 2008, his complete magnum opus was available only to those who could read Dutch. This classic work was long overdue to be translated.

Douglas F. Kelly. *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1* (Christian Focus - Mentor). In late 2008, the first volume of a projected three volume systematic theology by Douglas F. Kelly was published. When complete, this

work will be the most thorough Reformed systematic theology to have been published since Berkhof. In this volume, Kelly, who teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, shares the fruits of over three decades of teaching theology.

Michael Horton. *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Baker). Michael Horton's new book *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* is a very important wake-up call to a church that has effectively substituted therapeutic moralism for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a book that ought to be read, and read carefully, by every pastor and seminarian.

David F. Wells. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Eerdmans). In 1993, David Wells published the modern classic *No Place for Truth*, the first in a series of five very sig-

nificant books. It was followed by *God in the Wasteland* (1994), *Losing Our Virtue* (1998), and *Above All Earthly Pow'rs* (2005). In 2008, the final volume in the series, *The Courage to Be Protestant* was published. The final volume is a fitting conclusion to a series of works that call the church back to a biblical view of God, of truth, of man, of sin, and of salvation.

James T. Dennison, Jr. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume I, 1523-1552* (Reformation Heritage Books). For several years I had heard rumors that Dr. Dennison was working on a multi-volume work that would include English translations of every significant Reformed confession. In 2008, the first volume was published, and it was worth the wait. Including every significant Reformed confession produced between 1523 and 1552, this 800 page first volume is a treasure trove. I eagerly look forward to the publication of the remaining volumes. When complete this will be an important reference work.

J. V. Fesko. *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (P&R). J.V. Fesko's book on justification is the most exhaustive Reformed treatment of the subject to be published since the work of James Buchanan in 1867. It is a significant update in that it deals with issues that have arisen since Buchanan's work was published, such as the New Perspective(s) on Paul. It should become a standard work for years to come.

R. Scott Clark. *Recovering the Reformed Confession* (P&R). *Recovering the Reformed Confession* is Clark's hand-grenade thrown into the playground of (minimalist) Reformed theology. This

provocative work, calling us back to a genuine confessional Reformed theology and practice, will hopefully bear fruit for many years.

William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells. *The Design of Life* (The Foundation for Thought and Ethics). The new book by Dembski and Wells, *The Design of Life*, is probably the best, and certainly the most interesting, critical evaluation of neo-Darwinism to have been published since John Lennox's *God's Undertaker*. It is a very thorough critique. If there is a weakness in the book, it arises when the authors argue that certain biological systems were designed because they are irreducibly complex. This tends to imply that the non irreducibly complex biological systems were not designed. Still a significant and important book.

Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Baker Academic). All I can say about this book is that if you love the Gospel of Jesus Christ, read it. The Gospel that Luther proclaimed in the sixteenth century is always in danger of being obscured in our thinking. Kolb and Arand use Luther's writings to demonstrate once again the nature and importance of the Gospel of Christ.

Thomas Schreiner. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Baker Academic). In 2008, Thomas Schreiner of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary published his long-awaited *New Testament Theology*. This work builds on his earlier books dealing with the law in the New Testament and the theology of Paul. Schreiner approaches New Testament theology from a thematic and topical perspective, so his work nicely complements those works that deal with

the same subject from a canonical book-by-book perspective.

These ten books were not the only significant works published in 2008. Others that might have been included include the following: In addition to *Christless Christianity*, Michael Horton published his book *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology*. This completes his four-volume project, which included *Covenant and Eschatology*, *Lord and Servant*, and *Covenant and Salvation*. The late Thomas F. Torrance posthumously published the lecture notes he used at Edinburgh from 1952-1978 under the title *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*. Torrance was a Barthian, and in this book he espouses Barth's erroneous

view that the Son assumed a fallen human nature, but Torrance was one of the most significant British theologians of the twentieth century, and this book will likely be highly influential in many circles. Any new commentary by Douglas Moo is always significant, and in 2008, Moo published his commentary on Colossians and Philemon in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series. Like his other commentaries, this one will likely become a standard work. In 2008, P&R published the English translation of *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* by J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema. Originally published in Dutch in 1992, this is a significant contemporary Reformed systematic theology.