

Without question, Oliphint's translation of Van Til's apologetic would serve well as a text in an apologetics course, and his generous use of sample dialog makes it accessible to a wider audience than his otherwise technical arguments might permit.

Michael P. Riley

Good News to the Poor: Social Involvement and the Gospel, by Tim Chester. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 214 pp. \$15.99.

In *Good News to the Poor*, Tim Chester presents a look at social involvement in light of the gospel. Chester (Ph.D., University of Wales) is a pastor at The Crowded House in Sheffield, UK and the curriculum director of The Acts 29 Oak Hill Academy. He was previously Research and Policy Director for Tearfund, a UK Christian relief and development charity. He has authored over thirty books, including *From Creation to New Creation*, *Delighting in the Trinity*, and *You Can Change*.

Chester begins with four fictional people that characterize different approaches to social involvement among nominal evangelicals: the post-evangelical who favors social work over evangelism, the conservative evangelical who thinks social action is heresy, the evangelical who pushes back against the conservative position and does not want to favor evangelism or preaching over social work, and the evangelical leader who fears the lure of post-evangelicalism so wants to emphasize the centrality of the Word. He believes the final two best represent the Bible and largely agree with each other but may not realize it because they are fighting against opposite opponents. Thus, Chester seeks to offer a perspective that “urge[s] conservatives not to marginalize those who uphold the cause of the oppressed and to urge social activists not to go down the blind alley of theological liberalism” (14).

The first two chapters argue for the necessity of social involvement for believers. After highlighting the examples of earlier Christians, Chester offers three reasons for Christian social involvement in chapter 1: the character of God, the reign of God, and the grace of God. In the second chapter, he discusses the objection that Christian faith is not meant for the public sphere, tracing the idea to the Enlightenment's exaltation of human reason. However, he argues, Jesus is meant to be Lord of every aspect of human life, so Christians cannot limit their faith to the private realm.

The third chapter emphasizes that humanity's greatest need is “to be reconciled to God and so escape his wrath” (56). Chester argues that eternal needs matter more than temporal needs. Thus, the proclamation of the gospel “must be at the heart of all that we do as Christians and as churches” (65). Chapter four considers the relationship of social involvement and gospel proclamation. Chester proposes that social activity is a consequence of evangelism, a bridge to evangelism, and the partner

of evangelism. He further clarifies that evangelism and social action are distinct activities with proclamation being central, but that the two are ultimately inseparable since proclamation is best understood in the context of loving actions and a loving community.

In the next three chapters, Chester goes deeper into the relationship between social action and evangelism. Chapter five addresses the confusion of social progress with the coming of the kingdom, arguing instead that the kingdom comes secretly, graciously, through God's Word, and in glory when Christ returns. The church now stands as a picture of the future kingdom. In chapters six and seven, Chester considers the implications of the gospel for the poor and for the rich, respectively. For the poor, the gospel is good news because it offers freedom from bondage, both personal and social, though it may not be in this life. The gospel also offers salvation by grace rather than by our own ability, and a loving community of redeemed people. For the rich, the gospel is good news because it puts to lie the promise of consumerism, instead allowing believers to be content and to have God's values replace the world's values.

The next three chapters offer some practical advice for how Christians can carry out social involvement. Chapter eight looks at the nature of poverty and the various factors involved in it, including marginalization in society. Chester proposes that one of the best ways for churches to combat poverty is by being the kind of welcoming and gracious community God intends for it to be. Chapter nine addresses the powerlessness of poverty by ensuring the poor are able to participate in the efforts to address poverty. In chapter ten, Chester looks at the corrupting nature of power—arguing that the church fails when it seeks power and prestige rather than the path of the cross.

In the final chapter, Chester asks the question, "Can we make a difference?" He cautions against those who assume every new development in poverty relief provides the missing ingredient to eradicate poverty. Because we live in a fallen world, we will never be able to eradicate poverty, but we can still care for the poor while calling them, and everyone, to be reconciled to God.

Good News to the Poor offers a helpful perspective on the issue of the Christian's social responsibility. Overall, Chester's approach is in line with those seeking a balanced perspective of evangelism and social work. However, I will offer three criticisms of the book.

Chester does not consider any distinction between the responsibility of the church *qua* church and that of individual Christians. Instead, he seems to assume that the church can and should be engaged in all levels of social involvement. Without the distinction between the church and the Christian, some of his exhortations can create confusion. It is certainly wrong for the church to seek political power, but should individual Christians also eschew this pursuit?

Though he rightly emphasizes the centrality of gospel proclamation, Chester is hesitant to state it has priority since that might imply that social action is less important and, thus, may not be fulfilled. Instead, social involvement and evangelism are inseparable activities (74–75). Yet

if, as Chester elsewhere affirms, eternal needs matter more than temporal needs, then surely evangelism must take priority over social action. That does not mean social action should be neglected, but it does mean that if we are forced to choose between the two we should choose evangelism.

Finally, Chester overstates his concerns with wealth. It is not helpful to teach that “every time we spend money, we are making an ethical decision. We are deciding not to spend it on helping the poor or furthering the gospel” (112). That statement implies that those are the only two concerns for Christians, when the Bible exhorts believers to do a host of others things, including caring for their families and enjoying the good gifts of God. Chester’s statement can produce a false sense of guilt every time we spend money. Chester also compares someone in the church sharing that he is having an affair with someone sharing that he is going for a better-paying job, rebuking us for wanting to condemn the first and congratulate the latter (128). But the first is clearly sinful, while the second is only sinful if a person is motivated by greed or self-glory. Chester is right to warn against a greedy and idolatrous culture that worships riches, but it is unhelpful and unbiblical to condemn wealth itself.

Despite these criticisms, I believe Chester’s book is a helpful read for Christians wrestling through the relationship of social involvement and the gospel. This book will help point those searching in the right direction.

Benjamin G. Edwards

Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman. Nashville: B&H, 2015. xxiv + 397 pp. \$44.99.

The study of Baptist polity has been greatly enriched in the past fifteen years thanks to a series of publications from the folks at 9Marks under the capable leadership of Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. When Dever took the leadership at Capitol Hill, he encountered a church with a very weak ecclesiology and a bloated membership roll of inactive members. He led the congregation to regroup and renew its commitment to a membership covenant and subsequently purged the roll of inactive members via church discipline. His experience led to the inauguration of the 9Marks ministry and to the numerous publications about Baptist church life for which he has become known.

This current title continues that tradition with a detailed study of Baptist ecclesiology written from a Reformed point of view. The book consists of nineteen essays written by a strong lineup of eleven, mostly Southern Baptist authors, the lone exception being Canadian Baptist Kirk Wellum, principal of Toronto Baptist Seminary. The work covers the standard Baptist views on congregationalism, the ordinances,