

1-1-1990

Gentle Persuasion: Creative Ways to Introduce Your Friends to Christ, Joseph C. Aldrich

Charme Robarts

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robarts, Charme (1990) "Gentle Persuasion: Creative Ways to Introduce Your Friends to Christ, Joseph C. Aldrich," *Leaven*: Vol. 1: Iss. 4, Article 16.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol1/iss4/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.



Jack Reese, Editor

GENTLE PERSUASION: Creative Ways to Introduce Your Friends to Christ, by **JOSEPH C. ALDRICH**, Portland, OR; Multnomah Press, 1988. (Paperback - \$10.95)

Continuing his appeal for lifestyle evangelism, Joseph Aldrich calls Christians to “love people until they ask you why.” He employs witty, imaginary dialogue between himself and the reader to answer objectives of the would-be evangelist who personifies the fears attendant to the idea of soul winning.

The premise that God intends to use people according to their own gifts, even if those gifts don’t include formal teaching, forms the backdrop for insistence that all Christians take their place in the evangelistic process. It is noted that research indicates that most evangelistic training classes present methods suitable to the gifts of only about 10% of the people. Aldrich seeks to support that group while helping the other 90% to use their own gifts for redemptive purposes.

Aldrich is careful to emphasize that lifestyle evangelism is not merely a pleasant sounding designation with no real expectation of results. “Evangelism is not throwing a hamburger in a fan and hoping someone opens his mouth.” One must have deter-

mined strategy. The strategy is enumerated by noting various points taken from Jesus’ sending out of the seventy-two in Luke 10. There is some room for criticizing his exegesis and the organization of his points, but they are nonetheless encouraging reminders to live as light in the world, to allow the glory of God to determine our priorities and to focus on being redemptive persons.

Thoughtful attention is given to the reality that not all soil is good. Still the evangelist is called to cultivate, sow and reap. Aldrich is realistic about the time commitment needed for these three things to be accomplished. His advice is to work in one’s web of relationships with awareness of different types even of good soil. Evangelism, he says, should be tailor-made.

The value of the book is on two levels. First, the reader is presented with a case for self-examination. Here is exhortation to personal holiness and self-sacrifice. Second, valuable observations about the non-believer give guidance as the Christian plans and implements the task of bringing him to the Lord. Each of these emphases is underscored with recognition of God’s sovereignty in the process.

Charme Robarts
Abilene, Texas

Jack Reese is the Director of Graduate Studies and teaches homiletics in the College of Biblical Studies at ACU.

MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY: A JOURNEY INTO THE EVANGELICAL SUBCULTURE IN AMERICA, by **Randall Balmer**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 246 pp.

Most of us find media depictions of conservative religion rather repugnant. The general American population would be hard pressed to give an accurate or realistic assessment of evangelical Christianity.

Randall Balmer, a church historian in the Religion Department at Columbia University, provides glimpses into several evangelical sub-groups within American religion. His perspective is sympathetic—his own roots are Christian fundamentalist—but he is not uncritical of the failings of conservative groups, especially their exclusiveness and tendency toward polemics.

Rather than providing a macro-analysis of evangelicalism as a whole, Balmer gives almost an anecdotal picture. He examines a wide variety of settings, all of which he would classify as loosely evangelical, including the vestiges of the Jesus Movement at Calvary Chapel in Southern California, the doctrine and influence of Dallas Theological Seminary, fundamentalism at a Bible Camp within the sheltered hills of the Adirondacks, the campaign workers of Pat Robertson, a holiness camp meeting in Florida, missionary work on an Indian Reservation in the Dakotas, a Trinity College extension program in Oregon, and more.

While many will be uncomfortable with a definition of evangelicalism so sweeping, most will be fascinated with Balmer's investigative work and tight writing style. And his indictment of evangelical "sanctification of American consumerism" may hit close to home to many of us.

HOW DOES AMERICA HEAR THE GOSPEL? by **William A Dyrness**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990. 164pp.

No one can completely escape his or her own culture. How we receive information, how we understand truth, how we respond to the gospel, are influenced in subtle ways by perspectives we have learned from our culture.

William Dyrness examines the American cultural context which shapes how we understand faith and Scripture. He focuses on three dominant American values—pragmatism, optimism, and individualism—and shows how each impacts Christian discipleship.

Dyrness analyzes the works and ministry of two prominent religious spokesmen, Walter Rauschenbush of the 19th century, and popular preacher and

author Robert Schuller. While obviously diverse in their religious orientation and methods, both Rauschenbush and Schuller attempted to use relevant cultural forms in communicating the gospel. Dyrness is generally critical of both.

Dyrness attempts to establish a methodology for allowing the gospel to impact cultural values, and he offers churches and individuals some specific directions for becoming more faithful disciples in our pagan American culture.

THE STRUGGLE FOR AMERICA'S SOUL: EVANGELICALS, LIBERALS, AND SECULARISM, by **Robert Wuthnow**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989. 189 pp.

Robert Wuthnow, in a sterling book, examines the influence of secularism on conservative and liberal American religion. As a sociologist (and professor of sociology at Princeton University) he has a keen grasp on the social forces which are significantly influencing American religious life.

He examines several of the social and political battles that religious liberals and conservatives have fought in recent years, including prayer in public schools, abortion, equal rights for women, nuclear arms negotiations, nominations to the Supreme Court, and others.

Wuthnow then focuses on three areas that impact American religion: the state, the mass media, and higher education. He demonstrates how these affect American religion and how religious groups use theme for their own purposes.

His analysis is crisp. His understanding of the complexity of religion and secular life is broad. His suggestions (though not far-reaching enough) are helpful.

DEFENDERS OF GOD: THE FUNDAMENTALIST REVOLT AGAINST THE MODERN AGE, by **Bruce B. Lawrence**. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Bruce Lawrence, professor of the history of religion at Duke University, chronicles the rise of world fundamentalism in these last years of the 20th century. This rise of fundamentalism can be witnessed not only in American Christianity but also within Judaism and Islam.

Lawrence suggests that these movements have common roots and intellectual orientations. In his words, "Fundamentalists do not deny or disregard modernity; they protest as moderns against the heresies of the modern age." They oppose rationalism and

relativism, pluralism and secularism and call for values and practices that the modern world finds outdated.

Lawrence's work is thoroughly researched. He is able to clarify issues within American religion through comparisons with similar developments within other religious movements across the world.

He is not particularly sympathetic to the motives and values of fundamentalist groups, but his work should be helpful to leaders within conservative Christian groups in describing the radical extremes, in methods and philosophy, to which fundamentalism is prone.

CONGREGATION: STORIES AND STRUCTURES, by James Hopewell, Fortress Press, 1986.

Hopewell served as the Director for the Center for Congregational Studies at Emory University's Candler School of Theology until his recent death. This work is Hopewell's signature on an expanding discipline that one might term "congregational studies." This discipline is concerned with understanding the components that go into the making of a congregation, or as Hopewell might say, a congregational culture.

Hopewell begins *Congregation* by comparing congregational analysis to the purchasing of a home. When one purchases a home several factors enter into the decision. There are contextual matters to consider. How is the neighborhood? What kind of schools will our children attend? Are there industrial areas nearby?

There are mechanical factors to consider. Does the roof leak? Is the foundation cracked? How is the wiring? In other words, will this house perform the functions required of it in a satisfactory manner?

There are organic matters. My wife likes to sew. Will there be an area that will allow her to cut patterns, etc.? Will our three children have to share bedrooms? Are there areas where the family can be together to read, watch television, play games? In other words, will this house support the relationships that constitute our family? Can this house become a home?

There are symbolic matters to consider. What does this house say about me? This is the hardest factor to quantify. Yet, it is a common experience for one selling a house to hear the buyer exclaim, "Now this house is me!" In fact, while being the hardest factor to quantify, the symbolic nature of a home may be the most determinative in the selection. The same is true for congregations.

For the most part, persons who have studied congregations have been concerned with contextual and mechanical aspects of congregational life. What are the demographics of the neighborhood surrounding the church? Is the church sign visible from the street? Are classes easy to find? Is there enough parking to facilitate growth? These are the kinds of questions that have been the primary focus and concern of the church growth movement.

While some have been concerned to study organic aspects of congregational life, the symbolic world of a congregation has gone largely ignored. Hopewell is convincing in establishing this factor as the most significant aspect of congregational identity. Each congregation creates a culture full of meaningful metaphors and symbols that constitutes what Hopewell calls a congregational idiom. One of the tasks of ministry is to uncover and understand the idiom of a congregation so that the gospel can be proclaimed in a more effective and powerful manner.

The last half of *Congregation* focuses on discovering a congregations worldview. Borrowing archetypal categories from literature and anthropology, Hopewell invites observers of congregational life to the task of uncovering the root metaphors of the congregations of which they are a part.

This book is extremely valuable for those who lead churches because it expands our concepts of what makes a church tick. The new preacher who comes in and makes some mechanical decisions as to where furniture might be placed in the "auditorium" may find himself in contempt of the congregation's symbolic world. It is not enough to know a few generalized characteristics of "successful" churches so as to impose them on every congregational setting. Leaders must value a congregation's idiom, or way of being, if they are to transform a congregation's existence. While mechanical considerations have their place in congregational evaluation, Hopewell's work removes the need to define success in exclusively mechanical and numerical terms.

The second half of the book is interesting though not as useful to members of the Churches of Christ. Our world view is much more uniform than what one might find in a mainline Protestant church, thus making many of the observations irrelevant to our congregational settings. While Hopewell's book introduces us to the need to understand the symbolic stories and structures of our congregations, it does not provide those in the Churches of Christ with many useful tools for uncovering these aspects. Thankfully, however, this book has generated a great deal of thoughtful discussion on how a congregation's symbolic world can be understood.

Mark Love
Gresham, OR