

Book Review

Geoffrey Thomas. *Ernest C. Reisinger: A Biography*, Edinburgh, UK/Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002: 262 pp..

This biography is a tribute to Ernest Reisinger, an influential layman and later ordained minister, who had a major role in the popular resurgence of Calvinism in the English speaking world, particularly among Baptists in the United States, in the last half of the twentieth century. Southern Baptists will be especially interested in this book for the background provided concerning Reisinger's role in the formation of the SBC Founder's movement. The author, Geoffrey Thomas, is, interestingly enough, a Welshman. Thomas' obvious admiration for Reisinger gives evidence of his influence on both sides of the Atlantic. The existence of this book is also all the more timely given Reisinger's death in 2004.

Reisinger was born and raised in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where, as a young man, he built from scratch a very successful construction business. This gave him material wealth, which he later used to fund various Christian ministries. Reisinger was saved as a young man by means of the persistent witness of a co-worker and was delivered from alcoholism. He left the mainline church in which he had been involved and helped to found an evangelical church, the Grace Baptist Church of Carlisle. Later, Reisinger and the church came to embrace the doctrines of grace and to abandon dispensationalism. It became one of the pioneer "Reformed" Baptist congregations in the United States under the leadership of Pastor Walter Chantry (the current editor of *The Banner of Truth*).

The book also details Reisinger's own call to ordained ministry as a mature man, a move that was opposed by the likes of his friend Martyn Lloyd-Jones who thought Reisinger would serve the kingdom best by remaining a layman! Reisinger eventually became the pastor of North Pompano Baptist Church in Florida. He worked toward the reformation of this Southern Baptist Church and from there he came to influence Southern Baptists through his role in the establishment of the Founder's movement and his support of its efforts to reclaim their Particular Baptist roots.

Reisinger was a lover of Christian books and the Puritans in particular. Many Southern Baptist seminarians of my generation received a complimentary copy of J. P. Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology* through his efforts. Reading Thomas' biography will inspire you to develop your own personal Christian literature distribution ministry.

Thomas does not make Reisinger out to be a cardboard cut-out saint. He deals forthrightly and honestly with some of the various difficulties Reisinger faced in his life, including personal challenges within his family. Reisinger's son, for example, was disciplined by the Grace Baptist Church after a marital infidelity but later repented and was restored. This episode, in itself, is a testimony to Reisinger's commitment to the Biblical practice of church discipline.

Once again, this book is to be recommended to those who would like to understand Reisinger's role in the resurgence of Reformed theology in SBC circles. There are a few points where the Welsh author shows some confusion about SBC polity. For example, in describing cooperative program giving, Thomas erroneously says it is "proportional to the membership roll of the congregation" (203). Still, these few flaws can be easily overlooked. This book would also be good reading for influential laymen on how they might use accumulated wealth in stewardship to the kingdom and become lay-theologians in their own right.

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