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BOOKS

► PROPHETIC EVANGELICALS

Envisioning a Just and Peaceable Kingdom

EDITED BY BRUCE ELLIS BENSON, MALINDA ELIZABETH BERRY, AND PETER GOODWIN HELTZEL (EERDMANS)

★★★★★ Evangelicals tend to reinvent themselves. The authors of this book are no exception. Unlike presumably Western, white, patriarchal, pietistic evangelicals, these "prophetic evangelicals" follow the *shalom* politics of Jewish prophet Jesus; emphasize deeds—"neighbor love, hospitality to the stranger, and the ministry of peace and justice"—over creeds; conceive of the church as *mission* more than *polis*; and envision a new social order, inspired by the abolitionist and civil rights movements, that challenges empire. Their minority report may be commended for its improvisational interpretation of Scripture and confession of Christian culpability in historic cruelties, but it goes overboard in its activism, reducing the biblical religion to a justice movement. —*Christopher Benson*

► THE EXPLICIT GOSPEL

MATT CHANDLER WITH JARED WILSON (CROSSWAY)

★★★★★ In his debut book, popular Dallas pastor Matt Chandler reaches out to those weaned on what Reformed theologian Michael Horton once called "Christless Christianity": the man-centered, semi-Pelagian, therapeutic pseudoreligion all too prevalent in contemporary evangelical churches. Shunning this false gospel of self-improvement starring Jesus as life coach, Chandler walks readers through the "gospel on the ground" (God's work to redeem sinners) and the "gospel in the air" (God's work to restore the entire cosmos). —*Matt Reynolds*

► WINNING THE FOOD FIGHT

Victory in the Physical and Spiritual Battle for Good Food and a Healthy Lifestyle

STEVE WILLIS WITH KEN WALKER (REGAL)

★★★★★ Pastor Steve Willis took it as a sign from God when celebrity chef Jamie Oliver brought his "Food Revolution" to Willis's small West Virginia community—one of the poorest and fattest in the nation. Faith-based diet books are nothing new for American evangelicals, but Willis breaks new ground by making the connection between poverty and obesity (as well as the unbalanced farm subsidies that make chips cheaper per calorie than carrots), and aiming more deliberately at masculine readers (he narrates a "battle" with 12 "rounds" in place of chapters). —*Rachel Stone*

MUSIC

BOWERBIRDS

► THE CLEARING

(DEAD OCEANS)

★★★★★ After a "disaster chapter" (so named in a video promoting this album), Phil Moore and Beth Tacular, better known as the Bowerbirds, have produced a memento of their experiences aptly called *The Clearing*. With lilting phrases, they create soundscapes sometimes stark and percussive, sometimes lush with haunting strings, guitar, and vocal harmonies, and always unfailingly organic and free. Exploring the duality of darkness and light, the nature of seasons, and the inevitable movement of time, they express an understanding that "I'm dust and you're dust" in "a world half-broken"—but its inherent beauty is no accident, and is meant to be savored. —*Kristin Garrett*

RACHEL HARLOW

► FEATHERS & TWINE

(RAINFATHER RECORDS)

★★★★★ Formerly of Mosaic, Nashville's Rachel Harlow continues in that group's folk/acoustic pop/Americana tradition, while evoking classic songwriters from yesteryear. Though the disc covers a few everyday subjects (marriage, brokenness), she also offers clever observations on the ordinary. With her gloriously earthy vocals and understated but often poignant instrumentation, Harlow goes out on a limb on several occasions—the scars of South African apartheid on "Cain" and the story of a foreigner who feels like a second-class citizen in "Noahemy"—all while balancing feelings of hope with empathy. —*Andy Argyrakis*

CHRISTOPHER PAUL STELLING

► SONGS OF PRAISE & SCORN

(MECCA LECCA)

★★★★★ Christopher Paul Stelling's album, both haunting and haunted, was recorded in an apartment above a funeral home that has been in operation since 1848. Apparently, the setting provided the perfect recipe for these intensely crafted grapplings with life and death. As for the title, it is more scorn than praise, more lost than found. Yet its doubts and laments are seasoned with spiritual yearning. Stelling mourns, "Ain't it a shame all the people on this earth they have to die" ("Mourning Train to Memphis"), but he also prays, "But if we must burn then, Lord, let us burn bright" ("Solar Flares"). His lyrics and delivery leave no doubt that he's willing to stare down the sun to come to grips with the forces of the universe. —*Jeremy V. Jones*

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Kent Allan Philpott

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