

Anthony C. Thiselton. *Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 269 pages. \$24.

In twelve chapters, Anthony Thiselton considers such topics as death and judgment, the Return of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Beatific Vision in conversation with other disciplines such as J. L. Austin's work on performative speech. The interdisciplinary nature of the book enriches the author's argument and moves it far beyond more pastoral treatments and popular bestsellers. While this book may be a bit technical for general readers, it will be very helpful to pastors, homileticians and theologians seeking to explore last things from a unique perspective.

After a nearly fatal stroke, Anthony Thiselton's mind quite naturally turned to consideration of the Last Things in Christian theology. His background in New Testament hermeneutics serves his investigation well, as does his educated non-specialist approach to the more complex philosophical or theological material. By the time the reader approaches the end of the *Last Things*, he or she will have a solid grounding from which to think about, teach, and preach on these very commonly puzzling elements of Christian doctrine.

Each of Thiselton's twelve chapters is clearly named, and considers one or more of the traditional Last Things. These matters include not only death and judgment (as most Christians think), but also such issues as the Return of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Beatific Vision. Each chapter features a detailed description of biblical, traditional, and contemporary theological thinking on the issue, with the author's position clearly stated and identified. Therefore, Christians of every denomination will be able to find themselves in this book, even if they do not agree with the author's final resolution of each issue.

Thiselton's hermeneutical work depends often on linguistic considerations, such as J. L. Austin's work on performative speech. This book continues in that scholarly lineage, often basing his conclusions on insights gained from these other fields. The inclusion of this interdisciplinary material enriches the author's argument and moves this book on the End Times far beyond more pastoral treatments of similar topics such as Rob Bell's *Love Wins* or airport bestsellers like *Left Behind*.

For example, Thiselton's discussion of God's promises is particularly valuable for preachers and other theologians. Building on the linguistic theories of performative speech, Thiselton notes that God's promises are part of the act of creation, since to make a promise is to agree in advance to take some future action. For Thiselton, this is an important component of an answer to the question of doubt. In other words, those without faith, or those of faith who are experiencing doubt, can nevertheless rely on God's promises as expressed in Scripture, and thereby "see the magnanimity, graciousness, and sheer love of the God with whom we shall one day come face-to-face." (33)

Another example of Thiselton's contribution to the topic of Last Things is his distinction between the Resurrection and merely having one's life restored. Having survived his own nearly fatal stroke, Thiselton is particularly aware of the difference between life restoration (which might happen to anyone, and which would eventually be followed by another earthly death) and the Resurrection of those in Christ, which will be final and part of the End Times. This could also be a helpful distinction when preaching or teaching on the end of life and the life after life. Thiselton also considers purgatory, hell, heaven, and other complex doctrinal topics in a way that could help preachers and teachers.

Thiselton is careful to warn readers when his discussion becomes especially technical, suggesting in certain places that some readers may want to skip ahead a few pages. Whereas this

might serve a pastor or other theologically sophisticated reader, this book may not be suitable for general readers in an adult formation class or study group. However, for those who find themselves being asked about the End Times (and in this age of *Left Behind* and Harold Camping, which pastor is not frequently fielding such questions?), Thiselton's book is a much-appreciated compendium of theological wisdom. Preaching and teaching on the Last Things will be greatly enhanced by a careful reading of this book.

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