

# REVIEWS

## Having Begun by the Spirit

*Being a Child of God: Your Guide for the Adventure*, by Warren W. Wiersbe. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996.

**B***eing a Child of God* by Warren Wiersbe aspires to bring its readers into the realization and experience of what it means to be born of the Spirit into the family of God and to grow unto maturity in the Christian life. The author is commonly acclaimed as a pastor of pastors, and the presentation and tone of this book bear the stamp of his shepherding gift. The book's purpose is subjective, for the believer's living and experience. The teaching it contains is warm, and its manner is pleasant; it is anecdotal, yet liberally salted with Scripture references.

The "adventure" of the Christian experience, we are informed, is structured around three themes or stages: life, growth, and maturity. The tenet of the first theme is remarkable in its insight, but the progress in the following two sections falls sadly short of the truth of God's New Testament economy.

### The Stage of Organic Regeneration

In the first section on life, the book's presentation of the truth of the divine birth is enlightened, perspicacious, and above all, organic. Consider the following:

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to impart the life of God to the believing sinner who turns to Jesus Christ for salvation....If we don't possess the life of God within, we have never been born of God....Being a Christian means possessing the life of Christ within, being able to boldly say, "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). (4)

In *Being a Child of God*, as in the Word of God, the divine, uncreated life of God, which is God Himself, is the central factor of the new birth; to be born again (regenerated) is to receive the life of God. Concerning our entrance into the kingdom of God through the divine birth (John 3:5), the author makes a truly remarkable observation:

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Minerals can't transform themselves into plants, but plants can reach into the mineral kingdom and transform mineral into vegetable. Animals eat the plants and transform vegetable into animal, and humans eat animal flesh and transform it into human flesh. In salvation, God reaches down into the human kingdom and lifts believing sinners into His divine kingdom. (5)

**B***eing a Child of God* opens to its readers the New Testament truth that the kingdom of God is not merely a governmental realm but a sphere of life, the divine life of the begetting Father. According to this view, the divine birth is the *transformation* of the life of the human kingdom into the higher life of the divine kingdom, as "animal flesh" is transformed into "human flesh" through the operation of metabolism. What a keen, organic view of regeneration! In the stagnant sea of detached, objective doctrine that characterizes so much of evangelical Christianity, such an organic view of the divine birth is a refreshing wave of insight.

"This life-giving birth," the book continues, "determines our nature. Those who have been born again are 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4)" (5-6). Peter's definitive word concerning the believers' participation in the divine nature is the banner verse of the author's view of becoming a child of God. He reminds his readers that the genetic structure we possess determines our membership in a *familia*. He develops this point by noting that it is the divine seed which abides in those who are begotten of God (1 John 3:9) that determines their spontaneous living and expression. He says, "Cats act like cats because they have a cat's nature; dogs act like dogs because they have a dog's nature; and Christians act like Christians because they

have God's divine nature within" (6). "God has planted His divine nature ('God's seed') within us" (14), and this divine nature of which we partake determines our appetite, our preferred environment, our associations, and our abilities. "Since I have God's nature within," he summarizes, "all that He is and all that He can do are available to me" (7).

However, even in this section of life we see the first blemish in this book's view of God's salvation. Affirming that

those who are born again possess the life of God “within” and that Christ lives “in me,” the book fails to state the particular location of Christ’s indwelling. John 3:6b says, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Our human spirit is the organ of our inner being to receive and contact God. Regeneration is accomplished in the human spirit by the Holy Spirit of God with God’s life, the uncreated eternal life, causing the human spirit to become the “beachhead” for Christ’s subsequent spread into our entire being. The failure to see the human spirit as the seat of Christ’s indwelling is a crack in the foundation of the book’s theology, which eventually causes the whole structure to be compromised.

### The Stage of Self-cultivated Growth

The latter two sections, the greater part, of *Being a Child of God* concern the growth and maturity of the believers. These sections, which focus on the believer’s living and experience, are unwaveringly subjective, emphasizing devotion, prayer, studying and musing on the Word of God, and the learning of many lessons. The book’s repeated and consistent theme is that “we grow from within” (chapter five). Related to growth and maturity, this volume employs the organic language of the New Testament, speaking of *spiritual nourishment* (1 Pet. 2:2), the *inner man* (2 Cor. 4:16), and *conformation to the image of Christ* (Rom. 8:29). To be accurate and faithful, however, we must examine the meaning of these terms as they are employed in *Being a Child of God*. In brief, the concept of growth and maturity found here is little beyond the perfection and cultivation of our natural God-created humanity. As such, the turn in *Being a Child of God* from the section of regeneration to the sections of growth and maturity displays an abrupt departure from the organic to the inorganic.

The central factor of Christian growth in the book’s pastoral theology is the development of the believer’s character. “Character,” we are told, “is the basic building block of the Christian life,” and the inner growth of a Christian is a matter of “building godly character” to “cultivate the inner person [the character]” (42, 45). The author strengthens this theme by quoting Bishop J. C. Ryle, who defines Christian perfection as “an all-around consistency, and a careful attention to all the graces which make up the Christian character” (256). Such growth and perfection is achieved by, among other disciplines, maintaining “balance” (chapter six), exercising self-control (69-71), carrying out good works in the community (127-128), cultivating righ-

teousness according to the Sermon on the Mount (216), and even exercising ecological prudence (231).

This is quite different from the teaching of the apostles in the New Testament. According to the divine revelation, growth is by the divine, eternal life which we received by our new birth. The life which we have received through regeneration is the divine life, the divine element of the Triune God Himself (John 3:15; 1:4; 11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:2). It is by this life, that is, by the element of the Triune God, that we are nourished (John 4:14; 6:35; 7:38), it is in this life that we are being saved, daily and organically (Rom. 5:10), and it is in this life that we live (John 6:57), walk (Rom. 6:4), and reign (5:17). Therefore, true growth is the “growth of God” (Col. 2:19), the metabolic increase of God’s element in our being for our full participation in God’s divinity.

The divine revelation concerning human character indicates that the human soul—the mind, emotion, and will—has been corrupted in its life and nature by the element of sin through the fall. As such, it is the self (Matt. 16:24), the natural man (Gal. 2:20), the old man (Rom. 6:6), and the flesh (Gal. 5:24), which have been crucified with Christ and which we are called to deny that we may be conformed to the death of Christ by the power of His resurrection (Phil. 3:10). If we do not know the termination of our natural life by the cross, the perfection we attain to, and indeed the perfection *Being a Child of God* teaches, could be a perfection only by self-cultivation, rather than through the denial of the self. Such a Christian perfection is the product of the natural life and is not according to God’s New Testament economy. In the Christian life it should no longer be our old crucified “I” who lives, no matter how perfected it is, but Christ who lives in us.

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As we have seen, a root of the book’s misaiming concerning spiritual progress is the failure to see the human spirit as unveiled in the Scriptures. For the author, the whole of the inner man is the mind, emotion, and will (52), which is the primary factor of Christian living (144). To equate the soul and the spirit (255, note 2) is to take a decisive step away from the true nature of life and growth. The secret of the believer’s experience of the organic aspect of God’s salvation is the divine Spirit with our human spirit. It is our spirit as our true inner man (Eph. 3:16) which has been indwelt by and mingled with the divine Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and it is in our spirit that we were regenerated (John 3:6), walk (Rom. 8:4), worship (John 4:24), serve (Rom. 7:6), and

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know the operation of the Spirit (Rom. 8:16). Moreover, our human spirit must be discerned and even divided from our soul (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12).

### The Stage of Human Maturity

The book goes on to present a view of Christian maturity that is markedly and almost entirely human in nature. In its theology, Christian maturity is, in nature and effect, human maturity, including such humanly perfect characteristics as knowing and accepting oneself, working harmoniously with others, acting responsibly, being weaned from childish things, and coming into greater degrees of submission, trusting, obeying, hoping (for heaven), sharing (of God's creation, the joy of human living, ourselves, and our time), and delighting (in God, His creation, and His people) (chapters thirteen through twenty). Maturity is the perfection of our "growth in character" (198) through which we take on a "Christlike character and conduct" (114). Genuine maturity in the New Testament, however, is our full conformation to the image of Christ by the spread of His intrinsic life element through our entire being. Such a genuine maturity, as the full "growth of God" (Col. 2:19) within us, causes us not only to be *like* Him but to be exactly the *same as He is* in life, nature, and in expression (though not in His position or Godhead).

**T**he book's teaching concerning growth and maturity, though often under the cosmetic of organic, scriptural language, reflects a cultivation of the self and a building up of the natural man. In its manner of theology, the goal of the Christian life is the perfection of the character in human virtues, and so clearly so, that the book often invokes the earthy wisdom of psychologists, pediatricians, philosophers, and secular authors, including Mark Twain (43, 114), Edmund Burke (114), Aristotle (109), and, most notably, Thoreau (45), who because of his simplicity and wisdom "had the right idea about life" (209). For one seeking to know God as life, to grow with the growth of God, and to mature by becoming full-grown in life as a God-man, *Being a Child of God* is ultimately disappointing. The reader is carried high into the divine realm of life only to be dropped to the earthly realm of self-cultivation. The book's trenchant view of regeneration is truly a beginning by the Spirit (although marred by the misunderstanding of our human spirit). However, the book seems to suggest that its readers can be perfected by self-effort (Gal. 3:3). As a whole, the teaching of Christian growth and maturity in *Being a Child of God*, though appealing in its devotional tone and emphasis on the perfection of human character, neglects the heart of the scriptural truth concerning the organic aspects of God's complete salvation.

*Reviewed by John Campbell*

### Kinship with the Triune God

*Destined for the Throne*, by Paul E. Billheimer, with a foreword by Billy Graham. Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers and Christian Literature Crusade, 1996.

**W**ritten as "a study in Biblical cosmology," the late Paul Billheimer's *Destined for the Throne* begins by posing the question of what is the ultimate goal of the universe and proceeds to examine the Scriptures to find that the church, the bride of Christ, is the "central object and goal of history." This short volume contains many fresh and vibrant expressions to awaken the believers to the implications contained in the biblical utterances concerning our status as sons of God and our destiny as the bride of Christ. After reading the manuscript, Billy Graham declared that he had been "inspired and challenged by the insights and fresh interpretations of the Scriptures regarding prayer, praise, and the church's place in the world" (13).

Chapter two, entitled "God's Purpose for the Church: Supreme Rank," contains considerable insight into God's intention in His creation of man and into the goal of His regeneration of man. Billheimer confesses that many of the ideas contained in the book "were, at first, so startlingly unconventional and sometimes so overwhelmingly astounding to the writer as to stagger his imagination and boggle his mind. It may, therefore, not be surprising if others find the viewpoints equally astonishing" (7). Indeed, Billheimer's expressions may stun believers who are unfamiliar with the power of the Greek text of the New Testament. Reverently and seriously taking the New Testament revelation that believers have been genuinely, not merely metaphorically, born of God Himself, literally possessing His life, His nature, His seed, and by implication, His "genes," Billheimer explores the "*divinely conceived genetic process* known as the new birth" that makes the believers "'next of kin' to the Trinity, a kind of 'extension' of the Godhead" (33, 35).

In order to give the reader a fuller appreciation of the riches found in this book, some of the more striking paragraphs from this remarkable chapter are quoted at length:

Created originally in the image of God, redeemed humanity has been elevated by means of a *divinely conceived genetic process* known as the new birth to the highest rank of all created beings. "He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16)....No other created being approaches the capacity of the human being to "contain and utter God." Only man has a nature in which God can become incarnate. God "tipped His hand," so to speak, in the Incarnation.

By this He dignified the human race and elevated redeemed humanity beyond the highest ranking angelic star in the radiant canopy of the firmament....

No angel can ever become a congenital member of the family of God. They are created, not generated, beings; therefore, no angel can become a blood-born son of God. Angels can never have the heritage, the “genes” of God. They can never be partakers of the divine nature.

None can ever become a member of the Bridehood. These marks of privilege and rank have been reserved for redeemed humanity alone....

### The Redeemed an “Extension” of the Godhead

But this is not all. We tread softly here. With bated breath we read in 1 Corinthians 6:17: “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” This union goes beyond a mere formal, functional, or idealistic harmony or rapport. It is an organic unity, an “organic relationship of personalities” (Sauer). Through the new birth we become bona fide members of the original cosmic family (Eph. 3:15), actual generated sons of God (1 John 3:2), “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), begotten by Him, impregnated with His “genes” (No physical relationship is implied.), called the seed or “sperma” of God (1 John 5:1, 18 and 1 Peter 1:3, 23), and bearing His heredity. Thus, through the new birth—and I speak reverently—we become the “next of kin” to the Trinity, a kind of “extension” of the Godhead.... (33-35)

While the above language may seem stark, it merely elucidates the meaning inherent in the Greek text. For example, the word *seed* in 1 Peter 1:23 is the Greek word *spora*, whence we derive our word *spore*, and *seed* in 1 John 3:9 is the Greek word *sperma*, from which we derive our word *sperm*. Both refer to physical entities conveying genetic material from parent to offspring and clearly imply the analogue of the transmission of God’s spiritual “genes” to us. These are not just metaphoric expressions but literal descriptions of the spiritual reality of the impartation of the divine life and the divine nature with its divine “genes” into the believer through regeneration. Indeed, according to the clear revelation of the New Testament in such verses as Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:5; 9:23; 10:1; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Galatians 4:24; John 6:32-35, 48-51, 55, it is not

that spiritual and heavenly things are metaphors with the corresponding physical analogues serving as the realities but vice versa! The physical universe is a reflection of the spiritual reality of God, bearing the impress of Christ, having come into existence through Him, and now being sustained by Him (Heb. 11:3; Col. 1:16-17). Since the physical examples used in the Scriptures—birth, food, water, air, light, etc.—have objective and real existence, how much more do the spiritual realities they reflect have objective and real existence! In particular, God is more genuinely a believer’s Father than is his or her human father. Even though Christians readily acknowledge God as the Father of humanity by virtue of His status as the Creator, most are reluctant to afford Him the status of Father of many sons except through the legal contrivance of adoption. Not only does this deprive the believers of their heritage in life, but it also insults the Father, who is the fountainhead of life. He is literally our Father in the spiritual realm by regeneration (John 1:12-13; 3:6). To imply anything less of regeneration is to declare God the Father incapable of making His life available to His many sons.

Fortunately, Billheimer has allowed the New Testament text to speak for itself in all its power. He goes on to correctly note that the redeemed and regenerated believers are in fact a new species:

### The New Species

Here is a completely new, unique, and exclusive order of beings which may be called a “new species.” *There is nothing like it in all the kingdoms of infinity.* This is the order of beings which

God envisioned when He spoke the worlds into being. This is the order of beings which Paul called “the new man” (Eph. 2:15), the “new humanity” destined through the new birth to be the aristocracy of the universe. They form a new and exclusive royalty, a new ruling hierarchy who will also constitute the Bride, the Lamb’s Wife....

### A Congenital Family Circle

Nothing can ever dim the fact that infinity separates the Creator from the created. Christ is the eternally unique and only begotten Son, “the brightness of [God’s] glory,” and “the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). But from all eternity God purposed to have a family circle of His *very own*, not only created but *also generated* by His own life, incorporating His own seed, “sperma,” “genes,” or heredity. “Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us

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to be *his very own* [in a genetic sense], through what Christ would do for us" (Eph. 1:4; also 5:25-27, 32 *LB*). In order to obtain this personal, organic family relationship, God conceived the infinitely vast and infinitely wise plan of creation *plus* redemption through the new birth, in order to bring "many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10). "For from the very beginning God decided that those who came to him...should become like his Son so that his Son would be the First, with many brothers" (Rom. 8:29 *LB*). In other words, Christ is the Prototype after which all other sons are being fashioned. In John 1:12-13 we learn that the plan of redemption was inaugurated to set up *a unique and original generative method* by which these "many sons" would be born and progressively disciplined by a sanctifying process in order to bring them to glory. "But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). *Here is a distinct reference to two parallel generative methods, one human, the other divine.* In and through Christ alone does God realize and fulfill His paternal longing for a generic family relationship. *But for this plan, God's family relationship would have been forever confined to the Trinity.* (35-37)

**N**ot only so, but the divine birth is only the start of a long process to conform us "to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). Billheimer continues to examine God's purpose in regeneration—to make us duplicates of Christ:

Those who have worked on an assembly line know that a prototype is first designed, handcrafted, and tested before it is committed to the assembly line. They also know that the purpose of the assembly line is to produce exact duplicates, perfect copies of the original. This is God's purpose in the plan of redemption—to produce, by means of the new birth, an entirely new and unique species, exact replicas of His Son with whom He will share His glory and His dominion, and who will constitute a royal progeny and form the governing and administrative staff of His eternal kingdom.

While we recognize the infinite distinction between the Eternal Son and the "many sons" born into the family, yet such is their heredity as the result of the new birth that He recognizes them as bona fide blood-brothers. And according to 1 John 3:2 that is just what they are, true genetic sons of God and therefore blood-brothers of the Son. Christ is the divine Prototype after which this new species is being made. They are to be exact copies of Him, true genotypes, *as utterly like Him as it is possible for the finite to be like the Infinite.* As sons of God, begotten by Him, incorporating into their fundamental being and nature the very "genes" of God, they rank above all other created beings and are elevated to the most sublime height possible short of becoming members of the Trinity itself. (37)

While preserving His personhood and deity and maintaining the distinction between Creator and created, between the infinite, transcendent God and the finite, limited man, God has opened the possibility for men to become "exact copies of Him, true genotypes, *as utterly like Him as it is possible for the finite to be like the Infinite,*" through His condescension and marvelous economy. As Billheimer notes,

By these means God has exalted redeemed humanity to such a sublime rank that it is impossible for Him to elevate them any further without bringing them into the inner circle of the Godhead itself. In the Beloved we have been accepted into the very bosom of the Father (John 1:18), and by virtue of our union with Christ we are accepted upon the same terms as He (Eph. 1:6 and John 17:23). (38)

The language used in this book is quite strong, and Billheimer is conscious of the difficulty that many may have in accepting the unadulterated truth:

This brings us to such dizzy heights as to merit the charge, not only of megalomania (illusions of grandeur), not only of hyperbole, but of blasphemy itself, if these conclusions are invalid. *God has exhausted human language to open our eyes to the immensity of His plan for the redeemed.* Unless the words of inspiration are meaningless, the preceding is no exaggeration. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Hallelujah! (38-39)

**I**nfluenced by the Reformed emphasis on the transcendence of God, embodied in books such as *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer, many believers through a false humility shrink from acknowledging and embracing a full view of God's organic salvation. As Billheimer notes, this is not due to a genuine respect for the Word of God but rather to the inability of the natural mind to fathom God's mysteries (1 Cor. 2:11, 14):

Although the inspired words of the Biblical vocabulary are so pregnant with unequivocal meaning, the natural mind is overwhelmed by their implications and is tempted to qualify them by treating them as fantasy, purely as symbols, or as figures of speech. This is the way unbelief frequently emasculates the Word of God. One rule of Biblical interpretation holds that the Word must be accepted literally unless it is clearly figurative or symbolical. Doubtless the reality behind the Biblical terms is far beyond the capacity of human imagination, *yet these terms are valid as far as the mind can comprehend.* To accept them as less than a faithful representation of heavenly reality is to rob them of their content. They were meant to be accepted, not as fantasy, but literally. Therefore, in God's eternal vocabulary, the rank of the redeemed is literally and truthfully "but little less than God." (39)

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**W**e must beware of “emasculating” the Word of God. Unfortunately, the revised 1996 edition of *Destined for the Throne* appears to be guilty of this very thing. The general editor, Edwin Messerschmidt, in his preface states that “prior to his death Mr. Billheimer expressed concerns that some of his statements had been taken to unbiblical extremes by readers of *Destined for the Throne*.” Hence, the 1996 edition seeks to “clarify points found troublesome” and so undertook to revise the original book to supposedly “more precisely convey his [Billheimer’s] views” by underscoring “the distinction between God and His creation, both in the present world and during our eternal reign with Christ.” Whether or not this is faithful to the author may be hard to determine since Mr. Billheimer died in 1984, and this edition was revised twelve years after his death. Hence, Mr. Billheimer never reviewed the new edition.

We find it doubtful, however, that the author would have consented to such a wholesale emasculating of his presentation of the truth. Instead of simply strengthening the truth concerning the distinction between the Creator and the creation, which the original, in fact, clearly affirms, the 1996 edition of the book stripped out the references in chapter two to the words *seed*, *genes*, *genetic*, *generic*, *generated*, and *congenital*. Every reference to us as a “new species” was also stripped away, even though it is clear that we are called “the race of God” in creation (Acts 17:28-29). Rather than removing references “found troublesome” to some, a determination should have first been made as to whether Mr. Billheimer’s words were in accord with the divine revelation. Had this been done, perhaps a suitably placed caveat would have obviated the perceived need to completely remove references to key concepts. But this did not occur, as the following comparison illustrates. The following two paragraphs, including the headings, are taken from the first and second editions of *Destined for the Throne*. The first paragraph is from the 1975 edition. Deleted portions have been highlighted in bold. The subsequent paragraph is from the 1996 edition. Added portions have been highlighted in bold.

### A Congenital Family Circle

Nothing can ever dim the fact that infinity separates the Creator from the created. Christ is the eternally unique and only begotten Son, “the brightness of [God’s] glory,” and “the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). But from all eternity God purposed to have a family circle of His *very own*, not only created but **also generated by His own life, incorporating His own seed, “sperma,” “genes,” or heredity.** “Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be *his very own* [in a genetic sense], through what Christ would do for us” (Eph. 1:4; also 5:25-27, 32 LB). In order to obtain

this personal, **organic** family relationship, God conceived the infinitely vast and infinitely wise plan of creation *plus* redemption through the new birth, in order to bring “many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10). (36)

### The Family Circle

From all eternity God purposed to have a family circle of His *very own*, not only created but **born again through the life of His Spirit, partakers of His nature.** “Long ago, even before he made the world, God chose us to be *his very own* through what Christ would do for us” (Ephesians 1:4; also 5:23-27, 32 TLB). In order to obtain this personal family relationship, God conceived the infinitely vast and infinitely wise plan of creation *plus* redemption through the new birth in order to bring “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). (36)

**I**n examining the differences between the two versions, it is interesting to note, among other things, that the 1996 edition in fact deletes two sentences specifically devoted to “underscor[ing] the distinction between God and His creation” that the general editor said he wished to preserve! The original version makes it abundantly clear that there is an infinite gulf separating creatures from the Creator, and it also underscores the fact that Christ alone is the only begotten Son of God. If the editors were desirous of safeguarding against unbiblical extremes, these two sentences should have been most helpful in their endeavors. Furthermore, the deleted phrase *incorporating His own seed, “sperma,” “genes,” or heredity* is in fact merely a restatement of the force of the Greek word for *seed* in 1 John 3:9. The editors should not have so easily shied away from disclosing the force of the original text.

We see no problem with the stated desire to preserve the distinction between God in His transcendence from His creation, which is clearly affirmed by Scripture, reason, experience, and Billheimer’s first edition. Neither do we have a problem with the desire to guard against taking statements to unbiblical extremes. The real problem is with the attempt to achieve these aims by denying the clear implications in the Word of God’s organic salvation, that is, God imparting His very life and nature to make us duplicates of His Son, to the extent that “it is possible for the finite to be like the Infinite” (37). The 1996 edition appears to lack the clear vision possessed by Mr. Billheimer, and because of its misguided attempt to “protect God,” perhaps influenced by a deficient theology, readers of the second edition of Mr. Billheimer’s book will be deprived of much of the freshness and power contained in the first edition.

*Reviewed by John Brooks*