

*Born For Our Salvation: The Nativity and Childhood of Jesus Christ*, Martyn McGeown, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019. 288 pages, hardcover, \$26.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Stephan Regnerus, pastor of Lynden Protestant Reformed Church in Lynden, WA]

Rev. McGeown's latest book, *Born For Our Salvation: The Nativity and Childhood of Jesus Christ* sets forth the rich and comforting history of the birth of Jesus Christ. We are all familiar with the narrative; most readers have celebrated the birth of Christ every Christmas for as long as they have been alive. So, the question may legitimately be asked: what is the value of a book recounting the birth of Jesus Christ? Allow me to give several reasons why I found the book enriching, and for which I trust that you, the reader, will also be blessed by it.

The book is comforting. The first part of the title is suggestive of this reality. Jesus was born, not to be a spectacle on this earth, not simply to admonish and correct the evildoer, but he was *born for our salvation*. In Jesus' conception and birth the Christian is given the hope that he will be delivered from his sins and the curse due to him for those sins. From the first chapter to the last, the book teaches in a warm and personal way the gospel truth that Jesus is the spiritual deliverer of God's people.

The book is doctrinal. To be sure, the book does set forth the history of Jesus' birth, and it does so in vivid fashion. McGeown writes regarding the nativity scene: "Mary gave birth amidst filth and squalor...No cradle was prepared; no nursery was decorated; no toys were laid out; no soothing music was played; no beautiful clothes were made ready for the babe to be dressed. Instead there were animals, dung, and vermin to greet the newborn" (80). But the book goes beyond recounting the history of Jesus' lowly birth; it also teaches the doctrines of Jesus' condescension and incarnation. In a day when many Christian books are filled with personal anecdotes and lengthy, distracting illustrations, Rev. McGeown's book sticks carefully to God's word, explaining and applying scripture throughout. The illustrations [maps] that he does use are tactful and helpful. The outstanding strength of *Born For Our Salvation* is its faithful commentary on the inspired scriptures.

The book is polemical. That is, it exposes and refutes false doctrines, which false doctrines would be used by the devil to deceive the very elect, if possible. Many Christians respond to false doctrine in one of two wrong ways. Some Christians pride themselves on being

compassionate and tolerant but are largely unwilling and unable to defend the truths of scripture. Other Christians are eager to defend and even argue about doctrine but lack the wisdom to do so in a loving manner. *Born For Our Salvation* walks the middle road; it uses the sword where necessary but not as an end to itself. It is evident that the author has intimate knowledge of Roman Catholicism, for many of the polemics refute Catholicism, against whom the true church is engaged in battle to this day.

Finally, the book corrects commonly held misunderstandings about the birth of Jesus. For example, McGeown writes, “You can be sure that, contrary to sentimental hymns, [baby Jesus] cried. How else would he indicate that he was hungry or dirty?” (81). Further, the author exhorts the reader not to romanticize the birth of our Savior: “We sometimes get quite sentimental about the nativity narratives. But we must remember that this is real human history, not a fairytale, and that the men and women involved in this history had their lives turned upside down” (60).

If you only have time to read one book this Christmas season, I recommend *Born For Our Salvation*. McGeown’s writing style is clear; his exegesis is sober; his applications are convicting and edifying. People of all ages, from young adults to elderly saints, will find the book understandable and encouraging. I trust God will use this book for the furtherance of his kingdom and the glory of his holy name!