

Worldlings on a Treadmill

Review of Thomas Miersma, *Ecclesiastes: A Reflective Exposition*. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2023. Pp. 246.

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To many, the book of Ecclesiastes may at best be a conundrum, at worse, a downer. We all know the happy ending, but an endless, dusty pathway of negativism to get there? Seems kind of like a sermon structure by negation: not this, not this, not this, but this!

Indeed, the book may not at first conjure up a heart-flutter like Joshua, Ruth or Philippians because that last chapter may seem a bit of a stretch, a Hail Mary, a going-for-broke. Every square inch of life is a dour organ dirge, so plug your ears and love God in spite of it all.

So what's up with Solomon anyway? Has he become a crotchety curmudgeon? Surely, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes is better than that.

Thomas Miersma knows there is much more here than first meets the eye of the unsuspecting reader. Evaluating by negation is “een goed begin” when you are analyzing our pitch-dark culture powered by human nature prone to hate God and neighbor. For no other book of the Bible views culture more dimly. It makes even the Judges look like grammar school teachers at a Sunday School picnic. And so, David's son dives in headfirst to splash some grace in this cesspool of utter depravity.

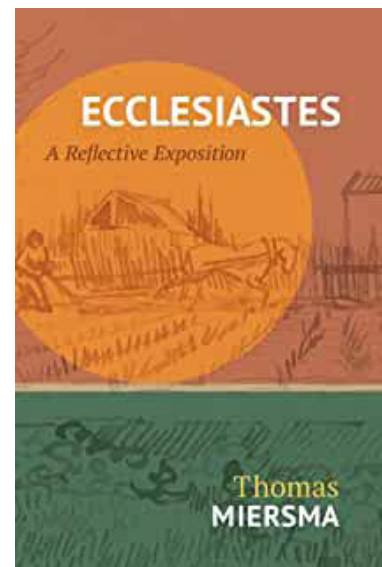
To open, Rev. Miersma writes, “As believers we walk in the world by faith as sojourners. It is especially a spiritual evalu-

ation of the life of men or wisdom that Ecclesiastes intends to give, for we walk in that world by faith and not by sight” (1). So if this world is your home, you'll never “get” Ecclesiastes. But if you are a Pilgrim, struggling on a pilgrim's path with your GPS set on the new Jerusalem, the book begins to make sense. You are watching the creature run “in a treadmill as in a ‘vicious circle’” (14). A tongue-in-cheek aphorism is that repeatedly performing the same foolish action with the same results is the definition of insanity. Ecclesiastes offers a guided tour of all-of-life irrational vanity, vanity and more vanity. An aside: in case you are captivated by worldlings within and without the church, heads-up that man's desires, ideas and plans are useless, heading nowhere except the abys' when their treadmill collapses.

That said, rather than “listen to the song of fools” (cf. 120), God's wisdom, knowledge and sovereignty lift his elect on high above the fray of foolishness.

Miersma's method is planting a few verses at a time, and then cultivating them as a unit. As in the title, he provides reflections on the consecutive kernels in the book rather than a strictly verse-by-verse exegesis.

In this manner he shows that there is more sunshine in and throughout this wisdom book than man's eye can take in. “The vanity of things under the sun cannot give an answer to sin and death. They can only



show the need to be reconciled to God” (245). We want to see Jesus, the Gentiles asked the disciples. Well, here he is. All along the way the author proclaims explicitly or implicitly how the Lamb turns nights into days, rainstorms into rainbows and swords into ploughshares – for his own. He streams, not plods, to the grand climax: “Fear God and keep. . . .”

Takeaways? The reflections are utterly positive! True believers can experience here their only comfort in life and in death. Conviction is bolstered. Commitment renewed. Communion nurtured.

Get ready for a symphony, not a dirge. The conclusion of the matter is that the book goes deep, but is certainly not a downer. Miersma's uplifting gift to the church is among the best on Ecclesiastes that this reviewer has come across. It succeeds at bringing a challenging book closer to your heart. RFPA did a more-than-commendable job producing this title. Without hesitation, recommended. ♦