

RFPA book review of *Ecclesiastes: a Reflective Exposition* by Rev. Thomas Miersma  
Book reviewed by Rev. Ryan Barnhill

How much do you know about the book of Ecclesiastes?

All of you reading this know it is a book in the Old Testament, associated with the king of Israel named Solomon. Most of you know the well-known phrase found in it: “vanity of vanities”. Some readers could come up with a few passages found in the book: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (3:1); “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (4:12); “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (11:1); “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (12:1).

If pressed for more information about Ecclesiastes, you might admit that your knowledge of the book is limited to the above facts. You might also confess that you are slow to read this part of Scripture because some of its verses and themes puzzle you, and you struggle at times to understand its relevance.

However, giving Ecclesiastes only a glance or skipping it altogether, is a mistake. This portion of Scripture is loaded with many treasures. We can be glad that the RFPA has published *Ecclesiastes: a Reflective Exposition* by Rev. Thomas Miersma, a book which aids us in our study of Ecclesiastes and reminds us of its importance in the church and in the life of the believer.

What makes the RFPA’s newest publication attractive?

First, the book is reflective in nature, as the title itself indicates. Miersma’s work does not read like a dense, technical commentary, hardly understood by many. It reads as a devotional, which is the author’s purpose: “[This exposition] is intended to be read for spiritual instruction, reflection and edification rather than as a formal detailed commentary on the

book” (p. 1). You might consider having this book on your nightstand to be picked up and read for fifteen minutes each evening before bed.

Belonging to the reflective nature of this book is the comforting and soul-nourishing gospel that runs like a golden thread through its pages. Allow this sample to whet your appetite: “For one who walks as a sojourner in this life, seeking his life out of himself in God, there is a meaning and joy in this present life...All that cometh under the sun is indeed vanity. But what God has wrought in his saving work in Christ alone answers that reality of the present vanity under the sun. The light of the sun points to it. The days of darkness press upon us the need for that light of God’s Son and his salvation” (p. 225).

Also in connection with the reflective style of the book is its many searching and pastoral applications. Would you like to hear more about the tongue and its use? How about “200 percentism” in the church? Or marriage? Or the sphere of labor? Or a proper view of earthly prosperity? Or wisdom and its contrast to folly? The author addresses and applies these subjects, along with many more. Have you ever read the verse “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days”, and wondered what it meant and how it applied? Miersma gives clear instruction on and application of this verse, and so many other verses, always faithful to interpret them within their context. If you wonder whether applications are made also with young people in view, and whether this is a book they should read, the answer is: yes! The book of Ecclesiastes itself is in many ways aimed at the youth, and the commentary repeatedly calls attention to that.

Second, the attractiveness of *Ecclesiastes: a Reflective Exposition* is the worldview it gives. Being a faithful explanation of Ecclesiastes, Miersma’s book sets before the believer the

proper view of his life in this world. We need today more than ever, dear reader, to be reminded of our world and life view. The author says it best, encapsulating the main idea of Ecclesiastes: “God gave us the book of Ecclesiastes to instruct us in spiritual wisdom as those living in a world fallen in sin and under the curse...The Preacher searches the life of man under the sun, in order to give us to see with spiritual understanding the way of that life and its value and meaning in a world subject to vanity because of sin...[The book’s] purpose is not so much to give what is mistakenly called practical instruction or instruction on how to *do* something, but rather to give true practical wisdom by giving us to *see* the realities of life with spiritual discernment. The word of God in the book would give us glasses to see the reality of life under the sun” (p. 7).

If you want to look through those “glasses”, then read Ecclesiastes, and do so with this fine RFPA publication at your side.

Toward the close of Ecclesiastes we read, “...of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (12:12). This is true. But this does not apply to *the* book of books: inspired Scripture. Nor does it apply to the book presently under review, which is a faithful exposition of inspired Scripture. Buy it, read it, and profit from it!