

White, James Emery. *What They Didn't Teach You in Seminary: Lessons for Successful Ministry in Your Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011. 188 pp. Paper, \$17.99.

James White is the founding and senior pastor of the Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, which has more than 5,000 active attendees. He holds M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and has pursued further study at Vanderbilt and Oxford Universities. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, he briefly served as the fourth president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is thus well acquainted with the syllabi, functions, advantages, and limitations of the traditional seminary preparation for ministry.

White is the author of more than a dozen books, including the Gold Medallion nominees, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) and *A Search for the Spiritual: Exploring Real Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). He was also the *Christianity Today* Book-of-the-Year Award winner for *Embracing the Mysterious God: Loving the God We Don't Understand* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003). Among his other publications relevant to church ministry are *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) and *The Prayer God Longs For* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005).

What They Didn't Teach You in Seminary is comprised of twenty-five relatively brief and engaging chapters dealing with a broad range of personal, spiritual, and practical issues faced by those entrusted with church leadership. White sets the stage for the issues dealt with in the Introduction, in which he describes his own experience in the transition from seminary to ministry: "It was assumed that . . . I knew what I was doing. I didn't. So in panic mode I ended up buying every 'minister's manual' the local bookstore offered. It didn't get any better" (14). He, then, describes the challenges and difficulties encountered, noting that "It was becoming painfully clear how little my seminary education had actually prepared me for the day-in, day-out, responsibilities of leading a church" (ibid.). It is not to be assumed, however, that he is negative about seminary education; rather, he confirms the value of his seminary experience, noting: "God bless professors, but most of them have never been the pastor of a church . . . [T]hey are, in truth, academics. They are not *practitioners*. We need them, and we need the academic education they give us. But we also need what they *don't* teach you in seminary" (15-16).

Issues addressed by White include personal emotional balance and survival, and care for the family, as well as the pastor's responsibilities for church growth, governance, finance, relationship with fellow workers, leading in worship, and communicating the gospel. White makes frequent reference to his personal experience, thereby giving the reader a sense of the reality of the issues he presents, an approach that this reviewer found positive and helpful.

White discovers an important lesson: we often learn more from patterns and functions of leadership that are different from our own than from those that are parallel. I highly recommend serious study of this volume to both seminary students and those involved in church ministry.

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RUSSELL STAPLES

Wiarda, Timothy. *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. 245 pp. Paper, \$24.99.

Deciphering clearly the intended point or points of a biblical narrative is a special challenge for anyone who reads the Bible, scholar and layperson alike. This is the challenge that Timothy Wiarda seeks to address in his book, *Interpreting Gospel Narrative*. Wiarda does not attempt a full introduction to narrative exegesis; rather he selects several main issues that he considers to “bear particularly rich exegetical fruit” and deals with them thoroughly. The detail with which he presents and illustrates his case makes the book somewhat heavy reading for the nonacademic whom he seeks to include in his audience. However, this is also a real strength, for anyone who reads the book thoughtfully should complete it with a much clearer idea of appropriate methods, and likely hazards, of Gospels narrative interpretation.

Chapter 1 addresses the Gospels’ interest in individual characters. Wiarda identifies four main ways in which the Gospels present characters, from the single-episode glimpse of a character to a character that develops and changes over the course of a Gospel. Wiarda works through examples of each and demonstrates how to identify what the author intends to be gained from each type of characterization. He also addresses the challenge of how to handle gaps in characterization.

Chapter 2 explores the dynamics that link story and theology. The impact of a story is argued to be achieved both by drawing readers into the story and by stating as precisely as possible the theological themes of the story. Wiarda seeks to demonstrate that careful attention to the story’s plot, characterization, emphases, and ideological point of view “leads quite naturally” to “legitimate pastoral/theological conclusions” (59). Recognizing the Gospel writers’ goal of describing historical events faithfully is seen as an important part of a balanced analysis of a story’s theology.

In Chapter 3, Wiarda examines symbolism, allegory, and theological wordplay, as well as OT and intra-Gospel allusions. Though admitting (sometimes apparently rather grudgingly) that these connections have their place, he insists that surface-level exegesis must come first and guide any symbolic or allusive interpretation. In Chapter 4, Wiarda comes back to individual figures in the Gospels, arguing for their value and pointing out