

Book Review: *Reckoning with Power*¹ by David E. Fitch

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Reckoning with Power by David E. Fitch is a loving, critical look at how the witness of the Church is destroyed when it fails to follow Jesus reversal of world-like power. Yet fortunately, the book is not simply a critique, but also offers clarity through penetrating questions and well-researched responses.

One of the immediate gifts readers will appreciate about this short book (just 6 chapters) is that he offers his readers a sort of “cliff notes version” of his book at the very beginning.

Like a well-written thesis, his *Introduction* outlines his logic, his assessment of the problem, and even a concise summary of the major points found in each chapter topic. The reader then has a picture of what the book is about and how Dr. Fitch intends to address the issues he raises.

Power – why we abuse it and how we can avoid abusing it is in the crosshairs of his keyboard. A timely subject, to be sure. Many have written on the topic (as he notes) but Dr. Fitch’s focus is primarily of how the American Evangelical Church has often been a major culprit in the abuse of power. Though much of his discussion involves how organizations do this, he also addresses (secondarily it seems) the personal use/abuse of power as well.

Overview

The author starts his argument by defining power. He then suggests that there are two different powers, not one. One is worldly, coercive, and is exercised “over” others and the other is divine, humble and lovingly serves others. He then warns us of the temptation to blur the two powers so that it becomes difficult, virtually impossible to not end up abusing it.

From there he writes of Christian Nationalism as exhibit A in our current cultural climate of how power has and is destroying the witness of the Church. He then broadens his aim and looks at more subtle versions of how we blur power by using it for evil in the name of the Good. He brings his thesis home by imagining what the Church might look like living under the power of God in this present day madness.

¹ David E. Fitch. *Reckoning with Power*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2024).

But Dr. Fitch isn't quite finished. He adds an epilogue to address the Church's' work of justice in the world and noting the lessons to be learned from the historical consequences of when it has operated from worldly power (abuse has been rampant) and when it works from divine power. (it has flourished)

One of the virtues of this book is that Professor Fitch acknowledges that, when it comes to the issue of power, the church does not always (one could argue - does only rarely) follow Jesus on this issue.

This accounts for his practice throughout the work of consistently offering Jesus and the power he exerts in his kingdom as the antithesis and the solution to the way most of the human race has thought of and used power throughout history. In his view, aligning with and living based in Jesus loving, humble, non-coercive power and being on the "right side of power" are synonymous.

Obviously, those who are "influencers" or find themselves in positions of leadership (especially in the Church) will find they relate to this topic more readily.

However, all of us exert power in our lives. And, others are exerting power towards us all the time.

If we ever hope to find peace and justice in the world, Dr. Fitch's words are both timely and instructive.