

Tips for Writing a Review for The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

September 7, 2017

Book reviewers play a vital, though unheralded, role in the academic community. The evaluation by a reviewer, meaning you, can help researchers become aware of new works as well as advising them on whether or not this particular book is worth a further look.

So what makes for a good book review? Here are some tips that you should keep in mind as you create your review.

- Balance description with assessment. Good book reviews describe the contents of the book as well as evaluate the content's relative worth both in readability and substance. The best reviews are able to combine both in each paragraph.
- Major on the majors. Every book has a typo or misstated comment. Discuss the author's major ideas first. If you have space, then mention the small errors that so frequently annoy academics.
- Be charitable. If there are two ways to interpret a comment, choose the one that is most favorable for the author. By all means point out the ambiguity, but be sure to not let it distract you from the book's major message(s).
- Be critical. Critical here is not the petty finger pointing of an angry person. Critical means to evaluate the substance of the book, both good and bad. Did the author prove her case? Did the evidence point in a different direction? Were the arguments valid? Cogent? Warranted?
- Is the book compatible with a biblical worldview and the historic teachings of the Church? E RTP is an Evangelical journal. Though our editorial board contains a broad spectrum of viewpoints, it remains committed to the key Evangelical principles of 1. Authority of Scripture 2. Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, alone, 3. Acceptance of the historic Creeds of Christendom (e.g. Nicaea and Chalcedon), and 4. Adherence to the historic mores of Christianity. We accept the reformational notion of always reforming, but we also believe that those who seek to "correct" the Church's historic understanding of a belief or practice must bear the burden of proof.
- How does the book compare with other works on the subject? Does it extend the discussion or just rehash old ideas? If the latter, does it do a better job at describing the key issues and thus possibly be a good candidate for a classroom text book?
- Judge the book in accordance to what the author intended to do. If the author wanted to be an introduction to a subject, then judge her on that basis. Do not evaluate a book written for undergraduate students from the perspective of its worth for a Ph.D. seminar.
- Evaluate the practical implications of the book. This is particularly true of the political works. Too often academics get a bit carried away with describing utopia, if we would just follow the plan he lays out. Be sure to evaluate the likelihood of that scenario.

- Reviewers should add the bibliographic details at the opening of their review. For example:

Mark R. Amstutz. *Just Immigration: American Policy in Christian Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017. pb, pp. xvi, 224, \$21.25, £21.99. ISBN 978-0-8028-7484-9. Reviewed by, [Name]. [academic location]

Most of these details can be found on the publisher/imprint page near the title page in the book. Some details can be gleaned from “Amazon” but don’t use the Amazon ISBN (often called an AISN) as it is often not the publisher’s ISBN but an Amazon internal number for stock control (!).

- Don’t worry about formatting – this will be sorted out when typeset according to the journal’s house style; but do include words in italics if you are to use them.
- Send finished review to the Book Review Editor: Stephen M. Vantassel at svantassel@kingsdivinity.org