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Mitch Stokes

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***Christian Encounters*, a series of biographies from Thomas Nelson Publishers, highlights important lives from all ages and areas of the Church. Some are familiar faces. Others are unexpected guests. But all, through their relationships, struggles, prayers, and desires, uniquely illuminate our shared experience.**

As an inventor, astronomer, physicist, and philosopher, Isaac Newton forever changed the way we see and understand the world. At one point, he was the world's leading authority in mathematics, optics, and alchemy. And surprisingly he wrote more about faith and religion than on all of these subjects combined. But his single-minded focus on knowledge and discovery was a great detriment to his health. Newton suffered from fits of mania, insomnia, depression, a nervous breakdown, and even mercury poisoning.

Yet from all of his suffering came great gain. Newton saw the scientific world not as a way to refute theology, but as a way to explain it. He believed that all of creation was mandated and set in motion by God and that it was simply waiting to be "discovered" by man. Because of his diligence in both scientific and biblical study, Newton had a tremendous impact on religious thought that is still evident today.

Isaac Newton Details

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From Reader Review Isaac Newton for online ebook

Christine says

Who would have known that Newton would be so interesting?! It's funny how similar he and Mitch are.

Lois says

One of a series of books on leading Christian figures, *Christian Encounters: Isaac Newton* discusses the philosophy, life and times of this eminent inventor, astronomer, physicist, and philosopher. In addition to exploring Newton's extensive writings on faith, he also shows how Newton used his grasp on theology to explain the scientific world.

Stokes includes fairly extensive quotes from Newton's leading biographers, William Stukeley and Frank Manuel, as well as excerpts from the philosopher's own writing. Of particular interest to me, as a retired librarian, was Stokes' description of the importance of Newton's notebooks, which he kept throughout his life, and which revealed "an almost obsessive organizing tendency" (nowadays such a tendency might, quite likely, be regarded as leanings towards OCD).

Starting with a lively description of Newton's childhood and background, Stokes goes on to explain how he narrowly escaped being forced to follow in his father's footsteps as a gentleman farmer. Instead, albeit grudgingly, he was allowed to take up more academic pursuits at Trinity College in Cambridge. Stokes disputes the claims made by "Freudians and other sensationalists" that sexual frustration was the primary motivator of Newton's intense study and contemplation, stating that "there's little to support it".

Stokes' style, though informed and informative, is never dull and prosaic. Apart from the biography being rooted in academically sound research (as can be seen in the annotations to all 15 chapters), Stokes makes Newton's life and times accessible and interesting to the contemporary reader. He is able to discuss the leading philosophical debates of the day in such terms that even those who know little of philosophy are easily able to understand the gist of his argument. The non-polemical narrative is straightforward and objective, taking into account Newton's own Christian orientation, without assuming that the reader is necessarily of the same persuasion.

Stokes allows his own authorial voice to emerge in such pithy sayings as "Good metaphors can outstrip literal descriptions", before explaining Francis Bacon's metaphor of God having written two books, *Scripture* and *Nature*, with the study of either leading to His glorification. Stokes not only refers to the metaphors of others, but also, when the situation suits, constructs his own in order to explain a particular concept. For instance, in partial explanation of the problem that was experienced during Galileo's time in explaining the phenomenon of motion, Stokes urges the reader: "Imagine a movie of an object flying through the air—a cat, perhaps. The more frames per second we have, the more of the cat's moments we capture, the more data we have. But if we wanted information about the cat at a moment in between any two of the frames, we would be forced to guess or approximate based on the frames before and after the missing moment."

Mitch Stokes, the author of *Christian Encounters: Isaac Newton*, is a Fellow of Philosophy at New St. Andrews College in Moscow, Idaho. After receiving his Ph.D. in philosophy from Notre Dame under the direction of Alvin Plantinga and Peter van Inwagen, Stokes also earned an M.A. in religion from Yale under

the direction of Nicholas Wolterstorff. [Reviewer for BookPleasures.com]

D. Ryan says

I recently reread this book and had to up my rating from four to five stars.

Stokes is the perfect person to write about Newton and the controversies surrounding his life. Newton had interests (and made great discoveries) in mathematics, physics, chemistry, theology, philosophy, etc., and Stokes' background allows him to address each aspect of Newton's life.

Newton was a skillful craftsman, a builder of ingenious devices for his experiments, and Stokes has a background in Engineering. Stokes' theological maturity and knowledge of the Reformed epistemological tradition allows him to interact with Newton's deep interest in theology. Stokes is not a biographer or historian by trade but rather a student of the mathematical/philosophical/scientific tradition. This makes him the perfect biographer for a man like Newton who is perhaps the greatest figure in that tradition.

Everyone should read this book.

Mary says

This book is one of a series entitled Christian Encounters. I was expecting a book about Isaac Newton's religious beliefs or lack thereof. I was pleasantly surprised when reading the book to find that it is a very good biography of Sir Isaac Newton with a subtle weaving of his beliefs woven very cleverly throughout the book.

I had never read a biography of Sir Newton. I learned so much from this book. Full of interesting facts, friendships, enemies, lifestyle, and more, this book was also a blueprint of the scientific world in the late 1600s.

Isaac Newton was an inventor, astronomer, physicist, philosopher and is credited with writing the greatest scientific work in history, Principia Mathematica. Many may find the book dry with explanations, scientific words, and natural philosophy. To be truthful I thought I would also feel that way. But at no time did I begrudge reading this biography.

I am looking forward to reading other biographies in this series.

Steve says

This corrected my view of Newton, less unorthodox than I had thought, and truly pivotal.

While we are at it, this whole series are intelligent, thoughtful biographies that don't oversimplify, neither do they wander off into 500 pages of exhausting and bearing-losing detail. They cover the topic in 150 to 200 pages.

Josh says

A brief biography of Newton, which is exactly what I was looking for.

Christopher says

This was a really good biography. Newton is an interesting character and Dr. Stokes presents him and his revolutionary ideas clearly and with dry humor. It was also nice to be able to read a biographer who is philosophically on top of it and took Issac Newton seriously, rather than treating him like a historical curio.

Also read in Spring of 2012

Jesse Broussard says

I picked this book because my math teacher wrote it, not out of any inherent interest in Newton. That lasted about the first two chapters. From that point on, I was fascinated with the little guy: obsessive, neurotic, reclusive, a genius with a few slight misanthropic tendencies--he really is an astonishing character. Nothing at all like I'd pictured him, and I highly recommend this book to anyone even remotely interested in anything at all (though it is somewhat weak on dragons).

Stokes obviously knows what he's talking about, and he does a magnificent job of getting a well rounded review of Newton into so small of a book. Not only do we get the big picture, but we get an enormous amount of personality as well, which is fairly unusual.

My one complaint would have to be the somewhat inconsistent prose: Usually an author has a particular tone that he maintains. You can tell the difference between a paragraph written by Jorge Luis Borges and one written by Oscar Wilde; between Chesterton and Tolkien. Stokes' writing seemed to vary a good deal: none of it was at all bad, but there is a difference between a well researched author, and a well published researcher, and Stokes falls into the latter category. But if you approach his book with that in mind, you will not be disappointed.

Abbie Riddle says

Isaac Newton, Mitch Stokes

What a profound man! I actually requested this book primarily as a resource for home school. I think it will serve as an excellent resource and that it should also be brought into the public school. I may have been more interested in the work and theories of Mr. Newton when I was in high school had I known the driving force behind them. It seems so often we focus on the discoveries, inventions, theories, and philosophies, and equations of man that we rarely take time to look at the man that made them and the questions that they asked in order to come to the conclusion they did. The book is short enough to read fairly quickly and though filled with very interesting facts can sometimes be a little dry and to matter of fact in it's presentation, taking

away from the “realness” of Isaac Newton as a person. I did find it rather interesting that Isaac Newton sought to discover the truth of things around him always holding to the ultimate truth of the bible. I did not know that he had an “unswerving adherence to the authority of scripture”, or that he believed religion was a “personal relationship with God /[he:] recognized God as his father”. It even said that these beliefs led him in his pursuit of knowledge as he believed all things were created and “set in motion by God and that it was imply waiting to be discovered”. His tenacity and fire are inspiring and the fact that although his accomplishments were great he did not struggle with pride because he held that he was to walk in humility according to scripture and recognized that all his accomplishments were built upon the shoulders of other great men. Excellent resource book for school and personal studies.

Thank you Thomas Nelson for providing this book for review. To become a book reviewer visit booksneeze.com

Brian Saul says

Mathematics in heavy syrup. Like many great minds, Newton was a rather rare bird. His life in all its intensity operated on a very different plane from mine- that's for sure! While I deeply appreciate his genius, I have a hard time relating to him. Well, I don't understand him. The biography was well-researched and well-written. It's a bit heavy for me, however.

Dan Glover says

I was pleasantly surprised by this brief biography of Isaac Newton. This is not the first book by Mitch Stokes that I have read, so it wasn't his abilities as a writer that surprised me. Stokes is a good writer and there are some truly memorable turns of phrase in this book which is something I haven't often found in biographies. He also traces some themes throughout which serve well to tie Newton's life story together. Rather, what surprised me was how good a feel one gets for Isaac Newton as a person and how good an overall appreciation of the many and varied areas of his life's work one comes away with from such a short study (less than 200 small pages). The other aspect of this biography that was surprising was how naturally Stokes seems to translate a broad overview of complex concepts that Newton laboured over into easily digestible language for the layman. Its one thing to understand these concepts, which the author's masters in mechanical engineering no doubt aids in, but its quite another to write in such a way that one's readers are not lost in the discussion, yet this is exactly what Stokes does. Stokes introduces the reader to the many fields of Newton's life work including natural philosophy (science), math, optics, alchemy (proto-chemistry), theology and biblical exegesis as well as his time as master of the mint, and he weaves the narrative of Newton's relationships, struggles and triumphs throughout, telling not two parallel stories (as some biographies do) but one integrated story. This integration seems only fitting as Newton himself treated his myriad fields of study as an integrated search for truth to help us understand the universe and thereby its Creator better. Contrary to the Newton reinvented by modern atheist scientists, the fictional Newton who distrusted the church and who privately rejected "religion" for the purely mechanical universe of hard laws, Stokes shows us the true Newton, who looked at his lifelong learning as a profound and sacrificial act of worship. Newton believed that the better he could come to understand the two volumes of God's revelation, God's Word and God's world, the more he could come to understand the Author of those two volumes and the more glory and honour would be rendered to God.

If Mitch Stokes' aim in writing this book was to entice his readers to further study of the life and works of Sir Isaac Newton, he has certainly succeeded in my case. I highly recommend this book even to those who have no previous interest in Newton. You won't be disappointed. (And how cool is it to say that you're reading a biography of Isaac Newton.)

Douglas Wilson says

I began reading this simply because a friend wrote it, but the hook went in early, and I found myself hauled into the boat rapidly. This book is just brilliant, engaging, productive, and fun.

Matthew Hurley says

Filled some unforgivable gaps in my knowledge of Newton and his aftermath (no pun intended). Stokes' critique of where we've gone from Newton is particularly telling.

P.S. Also, Hooke was kind of a loser.

Arno Rossouw says

This book gives a glimpse into the mind and character of one of the greatest polymaths in history.

Hostility amongst scientists and their discoveries was the norm in the 17th century.

There's also surprising discoveries about Newton interests, among them the fact that he was a prolific writer of theology and also dubbed as an alchemist.

I'm in awe that a person can specialize in so many fields with such skill. Highly recommend this book to any person interested in science.

Chris Comis says

Very fun read. Wrote a short paper on it for a class I took on modern theology. Stokes seems to get the science of the man and the times, but doesn't do as good a job engaging Newton's theological problems. It was a blessing to see that Newton wasn't a full-blown Arian, but I'm not sure Stokes represented the extent of Newton's Trinitarian problems.
