

Book Reviews: Parting the Waters

November 28, 2008

***Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* by Taylor Branch (Simon & Schuster)**

Twenty years after its publication, this Pulitzer Prize-winning book gains new relevance as the United States anticipates the inauguration of its first American-American president. Looking back 50 years, at a time when people of color in the United States were denied basic rights, gives much-needed perspective to appreciate at least some of the reasons many Americans view Barack Obama's election as a cause for celebration.

Quite rightly, the life story of Martin Luther King Jr. emerges as the centerpiece for recounting the Civil Rights Movement's history. But Branch also gives due attention to Vernon Johns, Fred Shuttlesworth, Ralph Abernathy, Stanley Levison, Bayard Rustin and a host of other instrumental and heroic figures.

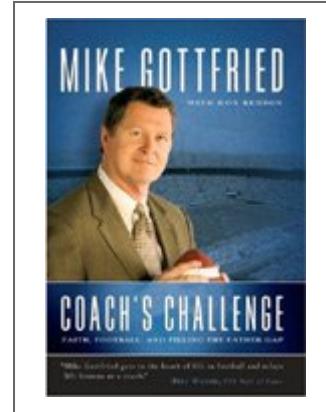
Branch offers an honest picture, showing them as flawed and fallible human beings. Likewise, he does not back away from recording the infighting and jockeying for power that occurred among leaders within the Civil Rights Movement.

But while he avoids portraying those leaders as angelic, Branch also makes one thing clear: When it came to the struggle for racial justice in the United States, there's no doubt they were on the side of the angels.

Ken Camp, managing editor

Baptist Standard, Dallas

***Coach's Challenge: Faith, Football and Filling the Father Gap* by
Mike Gottfried (Howard)**



Mike Gottfried grew up with an overriding dream in his life—to coach college football. That is just what he did, and very successfully, until he was fired unexpectedly after a winning season and just days before his team played in a bowl game.

After that, he went to work at ESPN. But at the end of a stint as a college football analyst, when colleges again offered elite coaching positions, he discovered something greater than a passion—a purpose.

Gottfried started and continues to head an organization that seeks to fill the hole left in a boy's spirit when he has no father. Gottfried knows that hole well. It is one he has himself. When he was 11, his father died of a heart attack. A number of coaches, a brother and other men helped fill that void in his own life, but he knows many boys are not so fortunate.

Gottfried makes it plain he knows what he does is a ministry—the purpose God put on his life. This is an excellent testament to how God can use a person's hurt to bless someone else, and they both win.

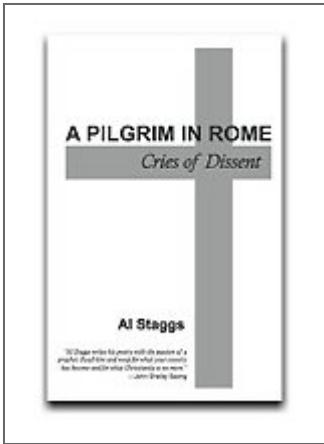
No doubt, Mike Gottfried's heart beats for boys without fathers active in their lives. It has made me more aware of young men in my life who also

have no father and made me more attentive to times when I can give them the attention and encouragement they need.

George Henson, staff writer

Baptist Standard, Dallas

***A Pilgrim in Rome: Cries of Descent* by Al Staggs (Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America)**



After 24 years as a Baptist pastor, Al Staggs has turned to poetry. In *A Pilgrim in Rome: Cries of Dissent*, Staggs aims his pen at peace and poverty, and the power that denies one and drives the other.

"We are the oppressors," he writes, "the children of the One who came to bring peace on earth."

Fearing a national descent into barbarity, Staggs writes of the idle in Zion who fatten themselves on the produce of oppression. As an army veteran and father of a career soldier, Staggs possesses a soldier's abhorrence of torture and of American Christians who are unable to see the crucified Christ in the faces of helpless prisoners.

"How can you be a Christian and not be transformed?" asks Staggs, who earned degrees from Hardin-Simmons University, Southwestern Seminary, Harvard University and Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Difficult to accept, impossible to deny, these are prophetic poems for meditation, teaching and preaching.

Robert Flynn

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