Clarion Review ★★★★★   **SELF-HELP**

Faith Hacker

James Wilcox
Covenant Books (Nov 5, 2021)
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Faith Hacker is a tech-savvy Christian text that mines the links between computer science and theology for meaning.

James Wilcox's *Faith Hacker* is inventive in its use of technology to promote a biblical approach to life.

Part testimonial, part extended thought experiment, this book combines personal anecdotes with biblical references to muse on the nature of God, faith, and religion. It distinguishes belief from practice, and bemoans the fact that practice often dominates. It calls for expansive expressions of faith instead. Such perspectives are supported with references to Wilcox's story: he reflects on his weaknesses, discusses geeking out on Christian scriptures, and draws on his coding background to support claims such as that human existence is a shared reality that's "manifested by love."

The book also takes a speculative approach to the divine, wondering what it would mean to "create" a god using insights from coding. With the flavor of science fiction, portions of the text imagine Asherah, a sentient artificial intelligence, into being; it's a "what-if illustration that runs parallel" to Wilcox's own Christian apologetics. Ultimately, though, this thought experiment becomes overly specific about the details of its coding, narrowing the book's prospective audience.

A question from Wilcox's grandfather about God is referenced as the impetus for him first going to the Bible for answers; in its testimonial portions, the book names stages of faith based on this progression, including curiosity, the trials of sin, and transformation and belonging. Later, observations from psychology are used to buttress the book's theological positions, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A firm sense of why connecting to God matters emerges.

Individualized insights into theology abound. The text discusses, among other topics, the nature of God, sin, and the power of faith. The connection between technology and theology is of intermittent strength; when the book describes how computers use symbols, and makes an analogy to faith symbols, it's a provocative moment. However, more frequent are testimonial snippets reflecting familiar theological positions without any fresh insights.

The book's final section deviates from the established track further to incorporate thoughts on the blues and psychology into its extended consideration of communion. While its tendency to mix a wide range of approaches into its interpretations of the gospels is consistent, and while its work is ably grounded in contemporary technology, from self-aware computers to social media, it is ultimately too disperse.

Faith Hacker is a tech-savvy Christian text that mines the link between computer science and theology, asserting that the Bible is strong enough to survive a technological age.

JEREMIAH ROOD (February 23, 2022)

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