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**Joshua T. Searle, *The Scarlet Woman and the Red Hand: Evangelical Apocalyptic Belief in the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Pickwick, 2014), 276pp.**

Joshua Searle has emerged into the apocalyptic-studies scene over the last two years as a serious scholar with much to offer. Leaving a full review of his co-edited volume *Beyond the End* to others, I will here offer some comments on his own chapter in this fine collection of essays. But first, I will introduce his recently published doctoral thesis *The Scarlet Woman and the Red Hand*, where he explores in detail the relationship between ‘hope’ and the apocalyptic tradition.

According to Zachary Hayes, apocalyptic eschatology is the language of human hope, and Joshua Searle takes this insight and grounds it in the hope-sapping context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. This, he asserts, is within the tradition of other revolutionary apocalyptic thinkers across both religious and geographical boundaries; so from Abraham to Karl Marx, the true home of eschatology has always been with the politically radical, and it is only in this context that it can be properly understood. It is in the framework of such radicalism that the text is seen as an active agent, rather than as a passive object in the hermeneutical process.

Searle sees human existence as something which is inherently orientated towards eschatology, because it is an emerging reality rather than something fixed or static: all of us have a finite future, and the question of what that future will be is at the heart of the apocalyptic trajectory. The hopes, dreams, and fears for the future, that come to us all in the night, are the stuff of eschatology; and an engagement with them reveals the heart of our humanity. Searle also makes asserts that ‘interpretation matters’, and his engagement with the apocalyptic tradition in the context of the Troubles is a case study not only in human violence, but also in interpretation-wars. What people think the text is saying is not, it seems, an isolated academic exercise: it matters, because it sets ideological trajectories and affects consequent behaviour.

It is well known that the Troubles in Northern Ireland were not merely political, but religio-political. The boundaries were drawn not merely along geographical or ideological lines, but also along religious lines. The focus of Searle’s thesis is the role that apocalyptic eschatology played in this conflict, focussing particularly on the convictions of the evangelical-Protestant community. Through detailed engagement with a variety of primary sources, including the sermons and writings of Ian Paisley, Searle offers a compelling analysis of the various ways in which apocalyptic language shaped the fears of certain expressions of Northern Ireland evangelicalism, giving imaginative shape to the deepest fears many held regarding the rise of the Antichrist, Mystery Babylon, and the one world Religion of the Beast. Searle’s contention is that apocalyptic eschatological language was not so much a response to the crisis as it was a means through which the events of the crisis were conceptualized.

It is on this basis that Searle then turns to ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ to consider the Troubles from the perspective of apocalyptic hope. He notes that alongside the language of Antichrist, Whore of Babylon, False Prophet, and Great Tribulation, Protestant Evangelicalism also spoke of the messianic Lamb of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new heavens and the new earth. Searle notes that ‘the most fearful expressions of anxiety and dread could coexist with the most radical declarations of hope and messianic expectation.’ (p.130). Crucial to this ‘hope’ that suffused even the worst of the Troubles was a belief in the sovereignty of God. However bad it might be in the present, there remained an underlying conviction that God would ultimately

intervene on behalf of the righteous. Thus the 'second coming' of Jesus was looked to as the end of current tribulation. Whilst premillennialism was the default position, Searle suggests that it needs to be considered alongside the emergence of a transformative eschatology which articulated a vision of hope for transformation in the current order. There were those who, through engagement with texts such as Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, looked for a hopeful future this side of the *eschaton*.

This is an important book, and will be of interest not only to those who wish to know more about the Northern Ireland Troubles, but also to those who care about the way in which texts shape societies, and those who have an interest in the 'real world' life of the Book of Revelation.

Searle, Joshua T. "The Future of Millennial Studies and the Hermeneutics of Hope: A Theological Reflection." In *Beyond the End: The Future of Millennial Studies*, edited by Joshua Searle and Kenneth G.C. Newport, 131-147. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012.

This chapter is predicated on a key assertion, articulated by Richard Landes, that 'hope is the key to understanding the apocalyptic mindset.' Searle shows how the apocalypse seeks to transform the object of fear into the site of hope. By this understanding, millennialism is not about carnage; it is rather concerned with setting forth an evocative vision of human flourishing and fulfilment. Searle recognises the ready historic association of millennial belief with appalling acts of power abuse, militancy, and genocide, and notes that the wars of the last century have destroyed any confidence in millennial belief to deliver the new Jerusalem. From millennial terrorism to the millennial inspiration for the thousand year Third Reich, Searle points out that apocalyptic visions have inspired many destructive political ideologies, with Jonestown and Waco confirming this apocalyptic condemnation, along with the killing fields of Rwanda, Cambodia, and the sarin attacks in Tokyo - all millennially inspired. So, one might ask, where is the hope?

Well, Searle suggests that millennialism provides an auspicious ideological habitat in which the most extravagant affirmations of human hope *can* coexist with the most fearsome expressions of inhuman terror and brutality. To this end he cites Paul Ricoeur: 'evil and hope are more closely connected than we will ever think them'. The purpose of this chapter then is to assemble a hermeneutics of hope from 'the smoke, dust and rubble of shattered millennial utopias'.

A hermeneutic of hope, Searle suggests, has the following characteristics: Firstly, it is orientated towards eschatology, which he describes as the grammar of human hope, supplying the conceptual resources through which utopian impulses are articulated and enacted. Secondly, it has social consequences that can transform cultures and alter the course of world history. Thirdly, across religions, it manifests an orientation towards the transcendence of death, articulating the possibility of the transfiguration of present circumstances into a greater state of existence. Fourthly, it presents a vision of cosmic consummation in which humankind overcomes its alienation from God and creation. And finally, the vision of the New Jerusalem forms the 'end' of the apocalypse, both temporally and spatially, because the ultimate meaning of a text such as Revelation is only revealed by its end, the point at which the narrative culminates in hope.

By this understanding, millennial texts such as Revelation offer a conception of history as what Pannenberg describes as 'a totality presented from the perspective of



an end'. The ultimate meaning that is invested in a text is thus a function of the culmination towards which it points. As Gerhard Ebeling says, 'we do not get at the nature of words by asking what they contain, but by asking what they effect, what they set going, what future they disclose.' This hopeful understanding of texts requires the active participation of the reader to achieve it's fruition.

The *hermeneutic of hope* interprets apocalyptic eschatological texts neither as blueprints for a sequence of events that are to take place in the 'end times', nor as devices for the uncovering of the supposed 'true' identities of contemporary individuals, movements or organisations; but as presenting a universal vision of salvation which enjoins their readers to work creatively towards its realisation. In such texts, the divine presence is not the oppressive imposition of ideologically contrived systems of domination, but the powerless presence of divine compassion, in which the apparent power narratives of warring beasts and dragons collapse into a peaceable vision of eschatological culmination.

The *hermeneutics of hope* interprets the millennial texts of apocalyptic eschatology in light of the end of the narrative. It is a means with which to humanise eschatology by applying millennial discourses to human interests, speaking to the human condition, not just to those of a particular faith tradition. Millennial studies can thus be a voice to the wider scholarly community, that the study of human nature must take seriously the role of dreams, visions, and the imagination as basic realities governing human volition. Hopeful hermeneutics opens up the imaginative potential of the apocalyptic texts. They outline a new way of being in the world, they enlarge our horizon of existence. The apocalyptic language thus becomes a site of hope, creating new meaning, and expressing a passion for the possible, which is transformed into a realisation of the possible. And thus the new world comes into being.

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**Stanley Hauerwas, *Approaching the End. Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics and Life* (SCM Press / Eerdmans, 2014), 251pp.**

After 45 years of teaching in the academy, Hauerwas is about to retire. His self nomination is as a teacher, but most will know him best from his writing. I hope that the fate of the writing will not go the way of the 'day job', although being a teacher will not come to an end with retirement from Duke, for sure. With retirement fast approaching on the horizon, Hauerwas turns his thoughts to eschatology in this latest book.

The 'End' of which this book speaks is ambiguous: it is about the end of all things, eschatology proper, and its importance in discovering how we negotiate living as church in the contemporary world. It is also about 'the end', or *telos*, purpose of the church. What is it for? A question, Hauerwas notes, is asked also of that institution he has served for much of his working life, the university, and the answers to which no one much likes. The answer given by many to the question 'what is the end of the church?' is clear: its demise. That it still seems to be thriving in many of its expressions, 'We may well have already seen the end of many churches that bear the name Christian while failing to recognize that we have done so because those churches still seem to be in business. But the business they are in may have only a

very accidental relation with Christianity' (p.x). Ouch! It's good to see Hauerwas is not mellowing in old age. The recovery of an eschatological perspective is crucial to how we live "between the times", and another end that is approaching (one welcomed by Hauerwas) is the end of Christendom.

The other great ultimate that this book is about is death. 'If we are to be human, we are in the business of learning to die' (p.xvii). The essays in Part 3 are concerned with medicine and ethics and dying. If, as Hauerwas asserts, Christianity is about learning to be human, and if learning to be human is learning how to die, then Christianity is about learning to die, and to die well. This is deeply unfashionable, yet was the focus of faith for over three quarters of the history of the church, and learning to die well is forcibly addressed recently by Alan Verhey. Hauerwas is of an age when death seems closer, and so this book is also a personal exploration of the end.

Part 1 handles theological matters. Hauerwas is the least likely theologian to write a systematic theology: his method might almost be said to be an eschewing of method (he is aware of the criticism) and instead he sees theology as 'an exercise in practical reason' (p.5) and his method of doing theology as seeing in what way Christian convictions shape the way we see the world, and seeing the world in the light of Christian witness transforms the one who sees. In the opening chapter this method is related to the substantive argument: through Barth's doctrine of creation, and Jean Porter's use of creation to sustain a natural law ethic, Hauerwas shows how the purpose of creation can only be understood eschatologically. Hauerwas' debt to Barth is not always obvious in his long career, but here it surfaces with clarity: all that exists by grace, and that anything exists at all is derived from the inner-Trinitarian life of God. We exist in time and space, and cannot conceive of life otherwise, but Barth declares, 'God's time and space are free from the limitations in which alone time and space are thinkable for us. God is Lord of time and Lord of space' (*Dogmatics in Outline*). The One who is gracious to us in creation is the same One who is gracious to us in Christ: creation only makes sense because we have seen the end, and that end is Christ, preceded by the history of Israel, and followed by the story of the Christian Church.

Jean Porter is critical of Barth's rejection of natural law, arguing he confuses natural law (an attempt at ethics devoid of Christ) with the way the scholastics understood it: a theological construal of the moral significance of human nature based on the doctrine of creation. Hauerwas reads both together to see that the purpose of our existence as creatures is to glorify God.

The two other essays in this part concern sacrifice and participation on war (a constant theme of Hauerwas in this book, as elsewhere, is his defence of pacifism) read through Yoder, and what it means to bear witness.

Part 2, Church and Politics, the same theme of pacifism occurs again, but this time in the context of the conviction that 'the church is a magisterial reality that must resist the domestication of our faith in the interest of societal peace' (p.69). The liberal state has a huge stake in domesticating Christianity, making it just another life-style choice. Churches have acquiesced in this politics, and the result has been the eclipse of our ecclesial reality, and finding our purpose in serving the state's projects and aspirations for 'cohesive communities.' This chapter, 'Church Matters: On faith and Politics', is worth buying the book for alone. He demonstrates how the church has lost its power to challenge the imperial pretensions of the modern state, and why we have lost the

ability to say why what we believe is true, and so why such a faith is worth losing your job for, or worse, dying for.

The second essay in this part, 'The End of Protestantism', explores why Hauerwas believes we live in the age when we are seeing Protestantism coming to an end (and that includes our own Baptist expression of that.) In its place has come a religion of consumer preference (and as such he argues, Catholicism in the United States has become a form of Protestantism.) A further sign of this demise is the loss of leadership (Bishops see themselves as CEOs of dysfunctional companies) and our obsessive scratching at the problem of homosexuality, neatly confined to the world that the secular state has told us is 'private,' when the moral question of the age is all about war. This chapter is replete with wonderful Hauerwas -isms, which make this chapter also good enough on its own to fulfil the promise that your spending a few pounds demands. 'Being wealthy makes those who possess wealth stupid, and America is very wealthy' (p.90) or 'I am not convinced that President Bush or the Christian right is an indication of the continuing power of Christianity in America. What needs to be said is that no doubt George Bush is a sincere Christian, but that is but a reminder of how little sincerity has to do with being a Christian' (p.92).

Two further chapters discuss Christian unity, and war and peace. Full of wisdom, quiet humour and profound commitment to the truth. These are 'vintage' Hauerwas essays.

The third Part moves to questions of life, or more particularly, death. The most important essay, perhaps, is the Presidential address he gave to the Society of Christian Ethics in 2012, and draws profoundly upon J.M. Coetzee's 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello*, and her struggle to bear reality (especially the horrors we do to animals.) In this essay upon 'Bearing Reality' (its title) he accounts for why Christians must refuse to ignore reality, in all of its terrible and cruel ways. It was T S Eliot who noted that humankind cannot bear too much reality, but Hauerwas wants Christians not only to bear it, but to also to go on living and not make our wounds and those of others the reason to attempt to remake ourselves invulnerable. It means bearing the difficulty without engaging in false hopes. 'To be a Christian has never meant that we cease to be human beings. To be a Christian does not mean we are endowed with virtues that empower us to bear the terrors of this life without difficulty. We are human beings' (p.157).

The next essay, 'Habit Matters: The Bodily Character of the Virtues', engages with Aristotle, Aquinas, and, of course, Alasdair MacIntyre in discovering just how we 'put on virtue', while the final four essays focus more particularly on issues of medical ethics: revisiting *Suffering Presence*, disability and in 'Doing Nothing Gallantly', an engagement with Barth again, this time about sickness.

Hauerwas remains a voice that the church should pay careful attention to. He calls us time and again to be true to what it means to follow Jesus Christ, to be Christian. In a day when the mission of the church has replaced the life of the church as its supposed priority, Hauerwas identifies this obsession as just another way we have become seduced by the age we live in: one in which military intervention has become habitual, consumer preference ideological and the church barely distinguishable from liberal democracy, not because that culture has drawn close to the God revealed in Jesus Christ, but because the church has taken leave of what it means to be the church of the living Christ. The result may well be terminal in the West, but then, dying was



always part of life, and learning to die well as church might sow the seeds of our resurrection.

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**Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation (A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World Vol 1; Eerdmans, 2013), 467pp.***

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is probably not a name quoted regularly in sermons, not least because quotations in sermons are increasingly reduced to sound-byte witticisms or internet sourced wisdom. Still, I know one or two preaching friends who like the challenge to include exotic names or obscure words, and I can think of occasions when the challenge to dovetail the mentioning of Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Antione de Saint-Exupery in a Sunday sermon were successfully completed. More seriously, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is a name well worth mentioning, because his theological work is building towards an important and substantial corpus of writing with a distinctive approach to systematic theology.

There are several reasons for the growing significance of Kärkkäinen's voice. He is a trained ecumenical theologian, he is multilingual, and his teaching experience spans three continents, Europe, Asia and North America. He has an already established corpus of theological writing distinguished by its ecumenical and inter-faith engagements. Titles such as *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (2007), *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Context* (2009) and a number of other theological monographs which include the words 'ecumenical' and 'global' in their titles, indicate his theology is sourced and resourced from an unusually diverse and wide ranging field.

In particular Kärkkäinen returns to the scandal of cultural particularities that inevitably accrue to theological discourse, style and content dictated largely by dominant Western construals of Christian faith, its doctrine and practice. The major loci of systematic theology such as Christology, Trinity, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology are given substantial coverage and in each of them he is eager to hear, then to engage with, the diversity of expressions of Christianity in other cultures. He is an ecumenist not as mere theological preference or personal disposition. His is a passionate commitment to a Christian faith which, while rooted in the evangelical tradition, (he is Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller), seeks to be humbly alert to and intentionally inclusive of the insights and experiences of other Christians. from other places and cultures, and to understand and learn from the particularities of their worship, witness, discipleship and theological discourse.

His theology has been described as "done in a postmodern key yet remaining faithful to the treasures of our pre-modern and modern past." In the background but fully visible from the foreground, is Kärkkäinen's missional concern for Christianity to be a responsible global presence in a religiously plural world, to be able to dialogue by combining conviction with humility, demonstrably ready to listen as well as proclaim, and open to the Spirit without dictating in which cultural contexts the Spirit is allowed to be open!

To be in full and attentive conversation with global Christianity and world religions, is to stand before a mighty cataract of cultural traditions and spiritual experiences, to encounter a plethora of sacred texts and commitments, and to seek to be hospitable to an all but overwhelming diversity of thought forms and linguistic distinctives not one's own. That probably reads like an overstatement. But in fact Kärkkäinen's current theological project is seeking to accomplish precisely what I have just outlined. *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, will attempt to reconceive and reimagine a Christian theology adequate to our contemporary context. To achieve this Kärkkäinen will engage with the deep, diverse and wide flung Christian tradition across two millennia and extending across a global field, he will dialogue with the four living faiths of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism in an exercise of comparative theology, and he will enrich the conversation by covering a range of disciplines including biblical studies, natural sciences, contemporary philosophy, cultural studies and social sciences.

You might well ask (I do!) can one mind effectively and adequately straddle such a cluster of knowledge fields and disciplines? What does he hope to achieve? In an interview, he explains, with more than a hint of self-deprecating eye-brow raising, that he hopes to address the global Christian theological academy, Northern and Southern Hemisphere, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox, conservative and liberal. He hopes that reviewers, whether they agree with him or not, will recognise that he has changed the rules of the theological enterprise by demonstrating the imperative from now on, for Christian theology to interact with the global, pluralistic context. And if his answers are wrong, at least he is asking the right questions. On his brighter days, "I imagine a Muslim or a Jewish scholar might even read what I have written...." I did say Kärkkäinen is an ecumenical theologian.

The metaphor of hospitality is an important framework within which he does much of his theologising about the Christian gospel as it relates to this pluralistic, complex, culturally evolving and God-loved world. Unquestionably he demonstrates a mind itself remarkably hospitable to those philosophical strangers, inter-faith sojourners, Christian saints and upstarts who make up the world of theological and religious ideas, and with whom the Christian mind must come to terms, and do so while retaining its own confessional integrity.

The success or otherwise of Kärkkäinen's theological vision will become apparent as the 5 projected volumes are published and reviewed, and read, and opened to the wider critique of "global Christian academia". The five projected volumes are: 1. Christ and Reconciliation. 2. Trinity and Revelation. 3. Creation and Humanity. 4. Spirit and Salvation. 5. Community and Future. This is not a Summa or a systematics, Kärkkäinen is quite insistent on that. These are more like Moltmann's 'contributions' to theology in that each volume can stand alone. Nevertheless together they constitute a distinct methodological style of theology - consistently ecumenical, openly dialogical and culturally hospitable. Indeed Kärkkäinen's own definition should be clearly understood from the outset in order not to misunderstand what he is doing.

Systematic / constructive theology is an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in the light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical) and in the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures and living faiths. It aims at a coherent, inclusive, dialogical, and hospitable vision (*Christ and Reconciliation*, p.13).

Christology is both the starting point and the reference point for the entire project. The first volume, *Christ and Reconciliation* immediately plunges Kärkkäinen into questions both contested and urgent. Refusing to be tied to Christology from below, or from above, and equally uneasy about ontology and functionality reduced to categories in collision, he argues for a much more dynamic Christology which takes the Jewishness of Jesus seriously, and allows the worldviews of the New Testament writers to be important hermeneutical clues—unsurprisingly Tom Wright, James Dunn and Richard Bauckham are in the footnotes here. It is Kärkkäinen's clear intention to address fairly the dogmatic concerns of the 'from above' impulse, while also hearing those critiques which accuse higher Christologies of treating the ministry and teaching of Jesus as all but incidental. It is, he argues, the liberation theologies of the Global South who articulate most strongly a Christology with feet dirty on the dusty roads of Galilee, and with healing hands grubby with touching people, and accompanied by disturbingly authoritative words about God.

The historic tendencies of a Christology from above to encourage a spiritualised and dogmatic theology, careless of historical particularity and practical consequences, are further critiqued by for example black theology. These voices urge a corrective focus on the historical Jesus, as one of those living in solidarity, then and now, with those who daily face the real events of oppression, poverty, institutional violence and the costs of speaking truth to power, an approach which more adequately roots Christology in the historical realities of the people. While upholding the ecumenical consensus of the tradition, and safeguarding the dogmatic parameters of classic Christology, a contemporary Christology must therefore attend to, and be responsive to, the living, continuing, contextual corrective of the lived experience of Christ's followers today, as they too read and seek to practice the gospels, or in the jargon, engage in Christopraxis.

The remainder of Part One has chapters dealing with a range of traditional categories including the two natures, humanity and divinity, incarnation, pre-existence, sinlessness, virgin birth and the constitutive nature of the resurrection. Kärkkäinen true to his methodological intent opens these key theological concepts to examination in the light of the contemporary concerns of a pluralist post-modern world. Incarnation, pre-existence and particularity, for example, create a nexus of tensions within which the contemporary Christian theologian must seek to be critical but faithful to the horizons of a tradition powerfully shaped by Western categories of thought. This is made more complex still by a required responsiveness to the current reality of a global faith, richly diverse in its interpretations and experiences of Christ as these have blossomed in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Two important chapters address head on the place of Jesus among the living faiths of the world. In 'Contra Pluralism' Kärkkäinen offers a well-grounded critical account of the pluralist theologies of Hick, Knitter and Pannikar, showing why they fail in their attempts to overcome the scandal of incarnational theology and dismiss its indissoluble link to Jesus of Nazareth. This is a reassuring chapter, an exemplary statement of a Christian theology of religions, showing that Kärkkäinen is serious about working within the parameters of classic Christologies, by refusing to remove the tension between the uniqueness and universality of the Incarnation. His judgement on Hick is quite decisive. 'Hick's reformulated Christology suffers from a number of theological, historical, and epistemological liabilities that also tend to lack of hospitality, even to "imperialistic" and violent notions toward the other.' In this chapter Kärkkäinen clearly exposes the theological distortions required to remove the

scandal of particularity embedded in the Christian doctrine of the Eternal Word made flesh, as derived from the foundation historical events of Christian faith.

The final chapter of Part One is 'Jesus Christ among Religions' and this is the more constructive and suggestive response of Kärkkäinen to the challenges posed by Christology to Christian relations to other faiths. The chapter represents three conversations with three living faiths. The contrasting core convictions about the Messiah create a theological and cultural force field within which Christians and Jews should converse, explore and learn, but not at the cost of core identity on either side. In relation to both Judaism and Islam it is obvious the lower the Christology the less radical the degree of theological disagreement between the three Abrahamic faiths. But this must not become a temptation to reductionist accommodations, Kärkkäinen warns. Rather, respectful acknowledgement of real difference creates the opportunity for growth in understanding, allows exploration of the continuing and legitimate disagreements, and ensures each has understood the other. This is a fine exposition of dialogical theological reflection, enriched in tone and nuance by Kärkkäinen's ecumenical style of theology and widely divergent experience.

Part One explores the Jesus in relation to Incarnation, and Part Two in relation to Reconciliation, both are integral to a Christian soteriology. A brief tour through biblical 'metaphors, symbols, images and testimonies', and a compact discussion on several historical interpretations, shows Kärkkäinen to be sensitive and alert to the diversity of perspectives and views which are validly there in the Christian tradition. A full chapter on 'Violence, Cross and Atonement' discusses and makes room for contemporary concerns in atonement theology. He explains fairly recent critique of notions of atonement that are rooted in violence; rejection of the notion of a God who requires or initiates violence, contemporary understanding of the dynamics of violence as destructive cycle including notice of the thought of Girard; feminist and womanist theologies of protest at how violence at the core of Christian faith legitimizes violent abuse with religious validation. Kärkkäinen recognises that issues of violence have to be made congruent with the Christian doctrine of reconciliation, and that views of the atonement must relate to a Trinitarian communion theology in which the relations of Father and Son are properly articulated within the life of a God characterised by mutual love, dependency and salvific purpose.

An important area of discussion is the nature and use of metaphor. Kärkkäinen is comfortable with atonement metaphor 'guided by the conviction that behind them is a "true" narrative of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus' (p.325). The criteria of validity in regard to atonement should be 'Their frequency and usage in the biblical canon, alignment with Christian tradition, and theological coherence' (p.326). Reconsideration of received metaphors should be alert to the cost and consequence of removing important parts of the narrative because it doesn't fit with contemporary sensibilities. From this point, the chapter 'Towards a Contemporary Trinitarian Theology of Reconciliation' develops into a fascinating discussion of incarnation and reconciliation, suffering God and suffering Messiah, Christ as sacrifice and representative, the Trinitarian work of salvation, the new life and ascension and cosmic rule. This is a rich, informed and careful composition with a variety of largely contemporary voices interacting with traditional ones; thus Boersma, Crisp, Tanner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Ruether, Volf, play alongside Augustine, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzus, Aquinas and Calvin.

Once reconciliation is theologically grounded in Trinitarian theology, Kärkkäinen's next move is to show that reconciliation is the most constructive and relevant gospel

reality as the Church approaches her mission in the contemporary world – globalisation, pluralism, ecological crises, religious conflict, polarised conflicts – it is hard to disagree. Indeed reconciliation has for some time now been my own preferred model for mission, and I found Kärkkäinen's emphases on restored relationships, proclaimed conciliation and actions towards liberation to be convincing affirmations for living the Gospel in today's world.

Volume one gives a full and engaged example of what it is Kärkkäinen is attempting, and I found his voice persuasive, reasonable, wise, and rarely strident. This is ecumenical theology in the service of the world church, yet seeking to remain critically faithful within the parameters of Bible, tradition and contemporary global context. As to his overall project, I have two reservations which will await the completion of the series. The first is a question: How does a sophisticated theology of religions and comparative theology, constructed by an ecumenical theologian in dialogue with other living faiths, change the entire approach to academic theology? To do so it must be read, heard and heeded. Yet the range of knowledge fields, cultural education and ecumenical urgency represent a particular style of theology, a way of doing theology not all will so eagerly embrace. But in fairness to Kärkkäinen, he claims only to be asking essential and urgent questions. His disclaimer is attractive and as to the answers, "People more brilliant than me can perhaps provide better answers" (I love the genuine humility in that comment).

My second hesitation is also a hope. The ubiquity of the word missional as the definitive descriptor of the church, at the very least obliges the church to understand the world to which it belongs, to serve the times in which it lives, and to respect the neighbours who share the planet with us. This is a generous theology, which, by attentively listening to the others amongst whom the church lives and moves and has its being, demonstrates how faithfulness in all this complexity will require of us new adventures in hard thinking, cultural encounter and imaginative evangelism. The question for those who read and heed Kärkkäinen is how such a broadly based approach to theological refreshment can be distilled into a missional theology that can be practiced, and preached.

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*Aberdeen*

**Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Eerdmans, 2013), 679pp.**

Prof. Francis Watson makes a productive habit of writing significant books. *Gospel Writing* is no exception. In a little over six hundred pages, this *tour de force* attempts to rewrite the story of the origins of the gospels, and to redirect the standard approaches to this story. Along the way, Watson offers often novel conclusions to some of the biggest questions in gospels studies, including the Synoptic Problem, the quest for the historical Jesus, and the relationship between canonical and non-canonical gospels. This list gives some idea of the enormous scope of this work.

However, although this is a lengthy book, with very detailed sections at times, the argument is straightforward. The book is divided into three sections. The first section indicates the problems with the established story of gospel origins, with its focus on the differences between the four canonical gospels as a *problem to be solved*. The

story begins with Augustine (in chapter 1), whose solution is to seek to harmonise them, and continues with post-enlightenment biblical criticism (e.g. Lessing and Reimarus, in chapter 2), which promotes a search for the story *behind* these evidently contradictory and therefore historically unreliable texts. The two particular failings of this account, which Watson seeks to overcome in the rest of the work, are the view that differences represent problems, and the focus on the gospels as canonical texts, at a time when they were not yet canonised.

The second section begins the work of building Watson's alternative story, focussing on the gospels prior to their canonisation. In particular, this section addresses the limitations previously mentioned, by highlighting (1) that what are now judged as non-canonical gospels had just as much a part to play in the gospel story, and (2) that a better paradigm of 'difference' is that of interpretation (= reception), where each subsequent gospel engages in the work of reinterpreting the traditions of Jesus. Watson achieves his first aim through exploration of the relationships between the gospels of *Thomas*, *Peter*, the *Egerton Gospel* and what became the canonical gospels (chapters 6-7). His point is that there is no intrinsic difference between these texts, and that they seem to have a complex interrelated history is evidence of this. Therefore, any attempt to explain this early gospel story with respect, *a priori*, to the 'canonical' gospels is flawed from the start. His second point builds on the first by demonstrating in detail the problems with the 'Q' hypothesis (i.e. that Matthew and Luke were written independently, but shared a common source, 'Q', in addition to Mark). Instead, Watson advocates a synoptic history in which Luke used both the gospels of Matthew and Mark (chapters 3-5), a hypothesis that has a growing following in the UK. The consequence of this is that each gospel written (whether it subsequently became canonical or not), was a *reinterpretation* of the tradition that had gone before. Thus, the story of the gospels is a story of ongoing interpretations of Jesus. The implication is that 'the fruitless quest for an original uninterpreted object' should be abandoned (158). In other words, we can only ever know the interpreted Jesus.

This much is confirmed by the third section, which moves from the 'precanonical phase' to the 'canonical', and from the gospels to the fourfold gospel. The section builds on the earlier story by indicating something of the process of canonisation and its implications (chapters 8-9). Watson describes this process as 'normativization', since '[this] fourfold textual object stipulates that each of the texts it comprises must be read in the light of the other three ... and that it must not be read in the light of apparently similar texts outside the canonical boundary' (p.406). This act of 'communal self-definition' (p.515) creates a new hermeneutic, exemplified by Origen (chapter 10), where texts are now related in a way they were not before, both offering and requiring new readings across the canonical gospels. However, in the fourfold diversity of this gospel, differences can now be seen as 'promising rather than threatening' (p.552). The diverse nature of this fourfold gospel points beyond mere facts, which are presented differently by each evangelist, to a greater 'truth' (p.550): to the person of Jesus to whom the gospels together bear witness. And the canonising decision that a pluriform gospel is necessary to reveal the truth of Jesus for the church suggests that a singular picture of Jesus is insufficient, and '[t]hus the fourfold gospel marks the end of all attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus' (p.550).

The final chapter (11) is a rather surprising one, and the closest to what might typically be understood as 'reception history'. It records some examples of visual representations of the 'living creatures' who became associated with the four evangelists and thus the fourfold gospel. These late antique and early mediaeval



representations show how popular Christian culture continued to explore the meanings of this canonical decision, and its implications for the origins of these texts. Thus, the story comes full circle, with the canonical phase giving expression to the precanonical. The book ends with seven theses ‘in lieu of a conclusion’ which, while significant, do not quite feel sufficient to do justice to the scope of the argument here briefly described.

Any comments that I now make, short of praise, should be considered merely insubstantial straws before the strong wind of Watson’s well-justified claims. However, I am struck by the apparently hard boundary that is drawn between the ‘precanonical’ and ‘canonical’ phases. The problem is, of course, that there is no, one point at which the gospels are suddenly and universally regarded as canonical. Watson makes this point himself, saying, ‘[f]rom the later second century onwards, a gradual consensus formed around the fourfold gospel in the West and the East’ (p.493). Given that this is so, there must be a significant blurring of the boundary, that might be considered a ‘becoming canonical’ phase. How does this less well-defined period, with mixed status for the gospels, affect the story and hermeneutic? Moreover, does not the very term ‘precanonical’, although strictly accurate from a historical point of view, make the same kind of forward looking assumption about canonicity that Watson is so keen to avoid? Very little mention is made in this work of the genre of the gospels (but cf. 413-4), and it seems to work with the not unreasonable assumption that anything that could be called ‘gospel’ was a gospel. Yet the ‘normativization’ stage expresses a clear choice in favour of narrative gospels with a particular form, over against, say, gospels like *Thomas*. This development seems like it should make more of an appearance in the story than it currently does, as it may well be relevant for the hermeneutic that is implied.

More could be said, but these simple reflections serve to indicate, not so much weaknesses, as the kind of stimulus prompted by Watson’s work. While *Gospel Writing* cannot be said to be essential reading for every minister, there is no doubt that it is essential reading for all who want, henceforth, to engage with any aspect of gospel origins.

*Ed Kaneen*

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**Michael S Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (SPCK, 2014) i-x + 335pp.**

Michael Northcott builds a persuasive case for the root of climate change in political liberalism and control and abuse of the natural world expounded in the philosophies of Bacon, Grotius, Descartes, Kant, and Locke. He contrasts these with the more positive alternatives of Luther, Giambattista Vico, Blake, and Whitehead.

Woven into the text are some of the frightening statistics of current and predicted climate change through global warming brought about by a rapidly increasing level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Perhaps in the light of his central thesis that global capitalism and its support in western political institutions is the cause of global climate change, the most significant statistic lies at the end of the book, when he records that the IPCC predicts that the ‘business as usual’ approach will see a 7<sup>0</sup> C rise in global surface temperature

by 2100, and this will not lead to a new world, but one in which global capitalism will have collapsed, with the world's major cities under water.

Northcott commences his exploration with something akin to the parable of the frog in water, which is being gradually heated, the end result of which is a frog that is boiled alive. He speaks of the geopolitics of a slow catastrophe because the rate of climate change is slow in terms of one generation to another let alone a 4-5 year term of an elected government.

He notes that those who resist climate science are largely in the Anglo-Saxon countries of Australia, New Zealand, UK, USA and Canada, where influential media support comes through *Fox News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and in UK *The Daily Telegraph*. He identifies the main climate change denialists as Nigel Lawson and A W Montford in the UK and Fred Singer and Steve McIntyre in the USA.

Northcott uses the term the 'Anthropocene' to indicate the post Copernicus human control over the world. With earth no longer at the centre of the universe and the rise of science we see the separation of nature and culture (belief), of bodies and souls, and control of the natural processes which moves from God to humans.

The Industrial Revolution was driven by coal, which led to the control of nature, economic and technical processes, and to the mechanistic cosmology of Newton. Coal remains the largest reserve of fossil fuel, and as such is the greatest potential threat to humanity. It contributes the most to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with about 2300 current coal-fired power stations and a further 2000 planned in the next ten years, mostly in China and India. Annual coal exports have grown from 2.1 million metric tons in 2000, to 176 million metric tons, in 2010. Such increases alone will take global climate change to catastrophic levels and Northcott calls for a ban on the burning of coal.

The UK was the first coal economy and the USA the first oil economy. Oil as the basis for travel, especially air travel, has become fundamental to industry and geopolitics. The search for oil in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has seen colonial expansion, international political action, and war. We have considerable pollution caused by burning oil and gas, the ecological destruction caused by exploration, and the potential increase in these from shale oil and gas.

The developing arguments of the Enlightenment believed that human progress and betterment came through discovery, experiment and the resulting dominion of nature. Political ideals and scientific development aided this, and Northcott notes that Bacon saw this dominion as salvation, linking it to his Christian understanding. Northcott creatively draws a parallel between the OT story of Eden to Exile, where God is ignored and human control is sought, with the Baconian salvation story where scientific control is sought and our relationship with creation and the Creator is broken.

Northcott introduces Whitehead's view that Cartesian dualism and Newtonian physics led to an 'enfeebled thought', which failed to take account of the implications of rational scientific and technical action. Northcott notes that for Whitehead the better metaphor for metaphysics is *organism* rather than *mechanism*. So we see experiences shared by all entities, and identify ecosystems as communities. He observes that

corporate profit making does not contemplate ecological and social conditions, and even seeks to promote scientific deception in the form of climate scepticism. The Kyoto Protocol has failed. Growth in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has speeded up from 2ppm/yr in 2000 to 3ppm/yr since 2009, and now the total has exceeded 400ppm in the atmosphere. The export of industrial processes to developing world countries and emissions trading by western industrialised nations has led to a rise in global GHG emissions. Only a reduction in the extraction of fossil fuels will reduce emissions.

Northcott contrasts the concept of commons - communal sharing with that of sovereignty - ownership. While we can speak of air and ocean as commons, limits on pollution infringe property rights of corporations - the result is a move to emission credits and permits, which give a market price to pollution. Sadly the modern state is first and foremost a protector of property rather than of global commons, but in the OT and NT the land is God's. In this context Northcott contrasts Luther's view that God's grace is sufficient to need with Locke's view that products of the land can be stored as money. The intrinsic relationship between fossil fuels and capitalism is seen in the counting of reserves of fossil fuels in the stock of wealth of global corporations. The stark problem for controlling climate change is that if these stocks were written off as not to be used, there would be a global financial crisis of greater proportion than that in 2008.

Northcott is critical of the USA, who refuse to mitigate climate change because of the interests of economic corporations, being prepared to promote the fair sharing of climate burdens, but not accept the historic responsibility for its causation. Europe is no better. He presents a long exploration of Kantian based reason, which he believes contributes in no small way to the approach taken by western politicians and corporations. He contrasts this with the Eucharist as the paradigmatic meeting for NT Christians, where the 'distinctive feature of the Christian polity is that the normal hierarchy of strong and weak, wealthy and poor, is reversed in the body of Christ, so that the weak are given greater honour than the strong' - all are to eat the same food, and care is taken of the sick, money and food provided for the poor, orphans and widows.

He states that 'this contrast society was not only a social but a cosmopolitical community which joined Christians and Christ with the Creator of heaven and earth' (p.197). The restoration of Paradise on earth was, for more than a thousand years, seen to be the role of the Christian Church. But science led philosophers such as Kant to see the relocation of the quest for progress (paradise) move from the embodied life of Christians to the life of the human mind. Drawing on the work of Carl Schmitt Northcott notes that climate change is a crisis that threatens borders - where the distinction of friend-enemy defined by territorial borders is lost. While the biblical picture of Babel and Pentecost sees the fall and then restoration of God's universal fellowship of peoples, the lawful governance of countries always has land as its precondition.

Following Schmitt's analysis Northcott notes the importance of the Monroe Doctrine (1850) for US policy in world politics. The objective of the Monroe Doctrine was to free the newly independent colonies of Latin America from European intervention and avoid situations which could make the New World a battleground for the Old World powers, so that the United States could exert its own influence undisturbed. Northcott extends the separation of space to develop national interests and the rule of law to the effect of war in the air, which has led to a deeper separation between the

combatants and the civilians caught up in the war. He likens GHG emissions to drones in such a spatial separation.

He critically comments that the USA reserves the right to target ‘terrorists’ on the soils of other nations, and similarly pollute the atmosphere because ‘its economic interests are superior to the United Nations’ quest, through UNFCCC, for a global bracketing of greenhouse gas emissions’ (p.232). It is national governments who must restrict extraction and replace with alternative sources of energy. The control of fossil fuel extraction and its use goes against liberalism and free-market economics. Control over nature (Bacon) or people (Hobbes) or international rule of law (Kant) all rule against our relationship with God and care of creation. All of this is counter to the biblical view of covenant: God, humanity and land.

For Northcott the answer to climate change is a new political covenant with a rebalancing of unjust asymmetric relationships between rich and poor nations, but what we actually have is a fact-based, target-based control of emissions by UNFCCC, which does nothing to prevent the powerful continuing to extract, market, and make money from fossil fuels. However, if there are ecological and physical limits to consumption (and associated atmospheric pollution), these only become knowable and real when they are acknowledged in the political and economic sphere. The scientists pass on their results and predictions to politicians, who because they wish to hold on to political power, make decisions in the best interests of profit seeking corporations. Although consumers and voters are often blamed for not being prepared to make sacrifices, the failure lies with the political judgement which fails to act for the common good of present and future generations.

Northcott appears to agree with Blake’s view of industrial capitalism as an empire of the imperial antichrist, and that building the new Jerusalem involves the spiritual battle of dethroning the empire. If this is a concept that interests the reader, then this reviewer would suggest engaging with Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, (IVP, 2004) and Woodman, *The Book of Revelation. SCM Core Text* (SCM, 2008).

This is no doubt a *tour de force* bringing together politics, philosophy and science in the development of a clear argument. However, I suspect that those who will be convinced by these arguments and explanation of the current failure to address the global climate crisis, will already hold these views. I suspect that Northcott in this sense will be ‘preaching to the converted.’ Sadly, those whose attitudes and decisions need to be changed - the global corporations, the free-market espousing politicians, and climate change deniers - are unlikely to read this book.

*John Weaver*  
*Bedford*

**Richard Horsley and Tom Thatcher, *John, Jesus and the Renewal of Israel* (Eerdmans, 2013), 207pp.**

NB This is not a book about John the Baptist, but about reading John’s gospel as a source for the historical Jesus. But there is no mining for nuggets of core historical tradition or a defence of John’s eyewitness testimony: because the gospels developed in a culture which prized oral communication more highly than written texts, the authors claim that the gospels *as whole stories* are more reliable as early sources than

particular sayings or episodes. Thus they use a wide-angle lens to look at John's gospel as a historical story of Jesus, portrayed as a popular prophet and king/messiah engaging in a rurally-based renewal movement of the people of Israel against the 'Judaicans' who are synonymous with the high priests and Pharisees, the 'rulers' of the Jerusalem temple state, and against the Roman authorities who placed them in power.

The book is easy to read, if a trifle repetitive. It provides an insightful introduction into the growing understanding of the oral development of the gospels and embeds this effectively in a plausible portrait of an antagonistic relationship between rural Galilee in the north and the religious establishment in Jerusalem. The book offers a filter that highlights the historical background to Jesus' ministry as this is portrayed in John's gospel. but also maybe obscures other aspects of the gospel narrative - you won't find much on the Last Supper Discourse or the resurrection. If anyone is inclined to dismiss John's gospel as a valuable source of information about the historical Jesus and his mission, reading this book may make them think again.

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**Andrew T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, tradition and theology* (SPCK, 2013), 322pp.**

This book is not for the faint hearted – it goes at a sprint all the way! Yet although there is no let-up in intensity of content throughout the volume, I was absolutely gripped. It addresses the anxious questions about the virgin birth that I have stored away over the years, and does so in a thorough and rigorous theological manner, drawing on many of the 'giants' on whose shoulders we stand. Furthermore, the recommendations on the back cover are outstanding.

Lincoln's method is to conduct a dialogue between Scripture and theology. He starts off by making the obvious point (so often overlooked in our enthusiastic familiarity with the birth narratives of Jesus) that a human birth is only interesting if it is exceptional – a 'normal' birth is unremarkable. Usually the significance of a birth becomes more fascinating in the context of an interesting life. Lincoln argues that while being faithful to the revelatory nature of Scripture we need to remember that at the time of writing, the authors of the gospels were trying to work out exactly who Jesus was in the light of the resurrection, and to defend his significance against assault in a hostile climate. Ancient biographies often included birth narratives that prefigured the 'hero' in some way. To read Jesus's tentatively assumed divinity back into his birth narrative would have made good sense to these early apologists.

The massive breakthrough for me in Lincoln's argument was to be shown that the NT is itself not monolithic in its view about the virgin birth. Until now my questions about Jesus' virginal conception have originated from outside the Scriptures (for example, from mere biological arguments!), and so I have always carried that anxiety about failing to interpret Scripture by Scripture - it felt very naughty to ask questions about this key event, which made it into the creeds! After all, we all know that *two* gospels - Matthew and Luke - contain explicit accounts of the virgin birth (although Lincoln also identifies a minority view that Matthew's account could be about an illegitimate, rather than virgin, birth). Two witnesses surely cannot be wrong.

Lincoln explains that because these stories have been part of the canon and creeds for centuries, there is a danger that we prioritise them and selectively deafen ourselves to the alternative and less obvious voices that exist within the NT. Paul, for example, one of the earliest NT writers, never refers to the virgin birth – and quite possibly he did not even know the story. Mark makes no reference to this tradition. John certainly testifies to the divine nature of Christ, but never mentions the virgin birth – rather, he plays on the paradox of Jesus's earthly origin and divine mission, and mentions instead the importance of 'the seed of David' to establish Jesus's lineage (as do other NT writers). Lincoln argues that for centuries we have simply prejudiced the view from Matthew and Luke that Jesus was born of a virgin and eisegeted that into the rest of the NT.

Chapter by chapter, Lincoln unpacks steadily the scholarship behind the various arguments and somehow succeeds in holding the tension until towards the end of the book. He explores the witness of the NT in careful detail and interacts with the theological tradition to make his case, but also gives a good outline of the logical reasons why a virgin birth could actually undermine the person and work of Jesus by diminishing his humanity. Scientifically, where did the Y chromosome come from? If God placed it there miraculously then whose DNA was it? If it is divine DNA then Jesus is certainly not human like us (see Hebrews 2:17), and that is only the beginning of the problem!

Lincoln's final chapter is masterly in its exploration of this issue, making the key point that it is the whole life and work of Jesus that makes him saviour, not just a miraculous conception (and, virginal or not, the incarnation is still miraculous). Everyone in ministry should try to read at least the first and last chapters of this book. It is reverent and respectful of the tradition while challenging the centuries-old view that Mary was a virgin when she conceived. The Jesus who emerges is, in my view, even more worthy of our worship and even more evidently the Son of God.

However, I won't be excising *Silent night* or *O come, all yet faithful* from my carol services any time soon....

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**Stephen I. Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller* (SPCK, 2014), 220pp.**

As someone who has had the privilege of being taught by Stephen Wright at Spurgeon's College and in more recent times have used his previous books as an aid to my own preaching, it would be fair to say that I came to this book with a predisposition that it would be good. Thankfully I was not disappointed.

The book is laid out in four sections and the purposes of these are carefully explained in the introduction. For Wright, his hope is to make a connection between the historical person of Jesus and the stories he shares. He starts by methodically detailing the developments in scholarship regarding the parables of Jesus. For me this was the most difficult part to read as it was crammed with detail from various authors, although the issue of my concentration might have been something to do with my neighbour's midmorning dance party. The second section had a marked shift in tone as Wright moved onto the parables themselves, taking each of the synoptic gospels in



turn. He points out the subtle distinctions of each gospel, from the immediacy of Mark, the measured realism of Matthew, to the sheer volume of story found in Luke and expounds upon them, pointing out details which are often missed by the generally accepted understandings of the most well known parables.

Section three was quite different again as this time Wright sought to look at each of the parables as their original hearers would have done. The parables were now separated as to where they were located by the synoptic gospels and categorised in three broad terms; Galilee, 'on the journey' and Jerusalem. It is here that I think preachers and those wishing to study the parables within a church context will find the most value as each parable is carefully detailed in an easy to read format and which are listed separately in the index so can be quickly looked up. A particular highlight of this third section is the benefit to the reader of Wright's extensive knowledge; both of the whole of the scriptures and scholarship which he adds for each parable. Although it is interesting to explore this section, we must note Wright's caution that it is of course not possible to fully be sure of what Jesus meant and so we must practise humility in transmitting their meaning to others.

Section four sums up the previous three by coming back to focus on the person of Jesus and to ask what the stories looked at might now tell us about the character and nature of Jesus. Wright once again looks to the themes of the parables, now noting the strands running through them as a whole group, the themes of hierarchy and social status, violence, wisdom and folly, and the reversal of fortune; themes which were told through stories which would have made sense within the every day lives of those who heard them.

In *Jesus the Storyteller* Wright has written a book that will appeal both to the interested academic scholar and the pastor/preacher (acknowledging that the two are not mutually exclusive), as well as the Christian who is neither of those but simply wishes to understand more of the words of Jesus.

*Sarah Crane*  
*Milton Keynes*

**Margaret Barker, *King of the Jews: Temple Theology in John's Gospel* (SPCK, 2014), 638pp.**

Margaret Barker's temple theology is a long-term project attempting to piece together the religion of the first (Solomon's) temple in order to ascertain its influence on the early Christians. In many respects, it is a speculative and even controversial endeavour. Barker devotes her energies to teasing out ambiguities and anomalies in biblical and other ancient texts, which leads her to draw conclusions many will find extraordinary. *King of the Jews*, Barker's seventeenth book, is no exception to this rule, and it proves to be an irresistible study of John's Gospel.

*King of the Jews* is divided into two sections. The first is a four-chapter account of the theological background to John's Gospel, in which Barker draws largely from her previously published research to paint a picture of first-temple teachings that, she supposes, are reflected in the gospel. More specifically, Barker builds on her long-held view that Josiah's reforms involved the abolition of the religion of the first temple. The Law of Moses was introduced at the time of Josiah, and the established

temple practices (which included the worship of El Elyon, God Most High, and his firstborn son, Yahweh) were forcibly abandoned. This is why, Barker reasons, there is conflict between ‘the Jews’ and Jesus in John’s Gospel: ‘the Jews’ sought to uphold the Mosaic traditions, but Jesus, as the actual embodiment of Yahweh and the promised final priest-king of David’s line, had come to restore the rituals of the first temple. Barker substantiates her claims through deep engagement with a variety of ancient texts, including some of the more cryptic psalms and passages from Isaiah where the extant manuscripts appear to contain scribal curiosities that allow for diverse readings. There is little doubt that Barker has an impressive command of ancient texts and no small level of philological ability, but the sheer amount of material she references to make her case occasionally threatens to overwhelm, and its relevance to John’s Gospel could sometimes be made clearer.

The second, longer section is Barker’s analysis of John’s Gospel itself. Each chapter of John is taken in turn, and Barker detects and explores parallels between John and other biblical and extra-biblical texts that help to illuminate the meaning of the former. Moreover, she almost delights in making fascinating connections that few would deem significant or even dare attempt. John’s Prologue, for example, is not simply the story of God’s Word becoming flesh, but of how Yahweh, the LORD, became flesh, echoing the symbolism of the coronations of priest-kings in the first temple (Psalm 2; 110) – and Jesus, the incarnate LORD, is later seen (John 14) revealing the ‘secret things’ (the suppressed first-temple traditions) of which Moses had spoken (Deuteronomy 29:29) to his disciples. Even when one doubts the legitimacy of Barker’s interpretations, her ability to find at least plausible-sounding answers to the questions posed by textual peculiarities or puzzling biblical passages is surely to be admired.

*King of the Jews* is an original contribution to studies of John’s Gospel. Its flaws are those to be found throughout Barker’s works: Has she made too much of textual discrepancies? Is her reconstruction of pre-Josian religion too extreme to be credible? And how does this reconstruction align with creedal Christianity, which seldom accounts for the sociological development of belief? The persuasiveness of Barker’s readings of John will depend on the extent to which her readers can agree with or accommodate her presuppositions about the first temple. Those who do so will be rewarded with some challenging and refreshing angles on arguably the most mysterious of the four gospels.

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**E. Anne Clements, *Mothers on the Margin? The Significance of the Women in Matthew’s Genealogy* (Pickwick, 2014), 310pp.**

That there are women in Matthew’s genealogy has long intrigued scholars and general readers alike; that they are these particular women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, ‘she of Uriah’, as well as Mary the mother of Jesus – is cause for more theological head scratching. In this book, based on her doctoral research, Anne Clements seeks to justify the presence of the named women by demonstrating that they anticipate the main themes of Mathew’s gospel and that far from being a problem for readers, they are exemplars of all that Matthew wants to say about Christian discipleship.

She succeeds in this very well; I found her arguments convincing, impressively researched, and written with confidence. She begins by discussing the purpose of biblical genealogies, and outlining the traditional views for the inclusion of the women, ranging from their presence as role models for ancestral motherhood, to proving that no-one is beyond the scope of God's saving grace, however sinful or marginalised they may be. Clements dismisses much of this shallow stereotyping (women as outsiders, powerless, sinners, child-bearers) as well as challenging more recent feminist interpretations, which surprisingly reduce them to a traditional submissive, child bearing role. For her, the women are indeed the 'mothers on the margin' of the title, importantly foreshadowing Mary, the mother of the Messiah. But the question mark indicates that they are much more than that.

The main body of the book tells the stories of the women in the Hebrew Scriptures and shows that each one in turn embodies virtues that are defining to Israel, and essential for Christian discipleship. Thus Tamar takes her place alongside Abraham and Noah as one of only 3 characters in Genesis to be described as 'righteous'. Her story challenges traditional definitions of righteousness, a theme explored throughout Matthew's gospel. Rahab, heroine of the story of the Canaanite spies, grasps the political and military situation better than they, and thus demonstrates faith in Israel's God. Her story asks questions about covenant identity and faith - who is in or out in both the nation of Israel and the kingdom of God, another of Matthew's key themes.

Ruth, as the devoted daughter-in-law who finds favour with the kinsman redeemer Boaz, exemplifies loyalty and faithfulness, key qualities of discipleship, as well as also challenging traditional ideas of identity. And Bathsheba, 'she of Uriah', plays a central role in the ancestry of Jesus, while her story questions the behaviour of David, the insider who abuses his power.

All these women anticipate a similarly important role for women in Matthew's gospel; what Clements calls a 'positive gyno-centric counter-narrative.' But more than this, their example as women of righteousness, faith and loyalty (or mercy) foreshadow not only Mary, but the Messiah himself, and anticipate Matthew's emphasis on these themes throughout the gospel.

These are ambitious claims that Clements develops convincingly in the second half of the book, by a detailed analysis of Matthew's gospel. She demonstrates, for example, his emphasis on questions of true righteousness, outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, set against the false righteousness of the religious establishment, and embodied in Jesus as 'a righteous man', who came 'to fulfil all righteousness'.

For Matthew, Clements argues, it is often the despised outsiders, men and women, Gentile and marginalised Jew, who illustrate true faith and claim a right to be included in the kingdom of God. She cites the stories of the Magi, the Canaanite woman, the Centurion at the cross, the woman with a haemorrhage, as examples of those Matthew brings into the orbit of his good news, whose faith is often contrasted with the unbelief of the chosen 12.

This is a balanced, scholarly book, but one that is also accessible to the readers Clements describes as Matthew's 'competent, real readers'. It celebrates the women without being strident; and offers insights into Matthew's gospel that are challenging and inspiring for both scholar and disciple alike. I recommend it.

*Jenny Few*  
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**David J. Downs and Matthew L. Skinner (eds.), *The Unrelenting God: God's Action in Scripture: Essays in Honor of Beverly Roberts Gaventa* (Eerdmans, 2013), 323pp.**

This collection of essays in honour of Beverly R. Gaventa centres in the concerns of Gaventa's work in Luke-Acts, conversion in the New Testament and Paul's theology. Gaventa is one of today's most important New Testament scholars, and there is much anticipation with regard to her forthcoming commentary on Romans, as several of the essayists indicate. In amongst the essays are offerings from Richard Hays, Joel Green, Francis Watson, Douglas Harink, L. Ann Jervis and Katherine Sonderegger.

Hay's offers reflections on the translation work that he and Gaventa did on Romans for the *Common English Bible* (CEB) which was ultimately largely ignored – 'bore only a slight resemblance' (p.84). This demonstrates the gulf between biblical scholarship and the Bible translations of those in the pew. The final text of the CEB 'opt[s] for muting Paul's apocalyptic tone' (p.85) that Hays and Gaventa sought to make clear in their translation. This is most clearly seen in their attempt to capitalize 'Sin', especially in Romans 6 and 7, demonstrating that Paul 'depicts Sin as a personified power' (p.87), which Gaventa has argued for in a number of places. The CEB final translation ignores every single one and returns to a lowercase 'sin.' Hays' argument is that issues of translation are 'deeply *theological* in character' (p.88). Hays goes on to explore other places where their translation was altered and concludes that the CEB's final text to be 'disappointing' and 'has domesticated Paul's gospel' (p.101). These are important issues, for many times those of us who preach have to say that the way a particular word is translated in the Bibles that churches use fails to translate well a New Testament author's meaning, this is especially the case in the area of Paul's apocalyptic gospel.

Francis Watson asks whether Paul is a covenantal theologian, and says no, he is a scriptural theologian and so seeks to tread a different path between the likes of the covenantal school represented by N. T. Wright and James Dunn and the apocalyptic school represented by Douglas Campbell. Watson explores Paul's use of scripture in Romans 9-11 argues that it is a deep engagement with scripture that is at heart of the argument and not the theme of covenant.

Douglas Harink offers a convincing case to see Romans as political theology, but he sides with John Barclay over against N. T. Wright on how that politics is construed. Wright sees Paul always in engagement with the Roman Empire, Barclay suggests there is a broader presentation of the gospel's politics, centred less particularly on Rome. Harink demonstrates the '*political* universalism' of Paul's gospel, which is so often missed. Again his chapter highlights the gulf between academy and church, where it so hard to help congregations see for the New Testament there is no separation of politics and religion, public and private.

In highlighting these three chapters I hope to have suggested that there is lots to learn from these set of essays, which both engage and extend Gaventa's work and demonstrate the importance of biblical scholarship for those of us who preach and teach in the church.

*Andy Goodliff*  
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**Melissa A. Jackson, *Comedy and Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible: A Subversive Collaboration* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 288pp.**

I recently saw a tweet from someone who was writing a book review, asking how one writes a review for a book that is filled with important information, but deathly bring to read. When I saw the tweet I felt a certain amount of pity for the writer, but mostly I felt sheer glee that such is not the case here. In fact, Jackson's book is a delight to read. Indeed it seems appropriate that a book about comedy should be so littered with the same.

The text begins with a raft of explanations of comedy and feminism. In fact if there was one drawback to the whole book it would be the amount of time spent on drawing parameters and giving definitions. However I can see no other way to proceed with such a book, and with a light-hearted tone, Jackson makes even these formalities pleasant to read. She outlines the difficulties in using comedy as a lens for interpretation and for the most part does an excellent job of sweeping them away with one hand whilst using the other to show the opportunities presented by employing such a lens. I would say the only sticking point here is Jackson's argument around subjectivity.

Each of the following chapters deals with the women's stories themselves, not necessarily looking for individual episodes or moments of humour, but instead focusing on how the tools of comedy are used. The first of these tackles some of the most overlooked biblical characters, the women of Genesis, the trickster matriarchs. It is here that the pattern is set. Each chapter explores the journey of the characters in question and sets it against the comic rhetoric with which it fits. It is important to note that only on very few occasions do the stories actually fit perfectly within their comedic arc. In the situation of the trickster matriarchs, for example, the arc of the stories should start with the character in a low position, using their trickster wiles to improve their position, being found out, and finally end with the character returning to their previous low position. In nearly all of the biblical examples of the trickster story, however, the women enjoy their improved status permanently, albeit the improved status sits within the Patriarchal status quo. Despite this, Jackson shows these texts for what they are, truly subversive, challenging the perceptions of the people they were written for, pointing toward inclusiveness, rather than unfounded prejudices against women and foreigners.

I have heard on countless occasions that the Old Testament is not a 'safe place' for women, that it contains the stories of men, portraying women as subjugated, downtrodden and weak. Jackson's book dispels this myth one and for all, colouring the stories of the Old Testament in a new light. She highlights the roles of women; sexy savvy women who use what they've got to get what they need and are blessed by God for it. These are women who overcome men time and time again, outsmarting them and securing their own place in the narrative, on their own terms.

Whilst there is not room here to expound the merits of each chapter in turn, I think it is important to mention Jackson's handling of stories of violence - it is much more difficult to find the humour here, and many may find it distasteful to include these stories in a book about comedy, attempting to find the comedy within them. However, as Jackson has noted, violence has a constructive role within comedy; "it becomes another vehicle through which the comedy delivers its punch." It is a necessary

contrast to the outcome. It is also perhaps important to note Jackson's earlier comments on subjectivity. Comedy is highly subjective, and there are pastoral problems with presenting some of these stories as humorous as it is important not to make light of the seriousness of violence against women that is portrayed in the pages. However, coming from a background of domestic violence I can see the merit in Jackson's perspective; using the lens of black comedy to view these stories makes them in some ways more approachable, easier subjects to broach.

I tried really hard to find fault with Jackson's work, in order to give a rounded and fair review (after all, she was my first Old Testament tutor). But the truth is I couldn't. Perhaps some might feel that she spends too long in explanations of comic and comedy, and certainly if you are using her work as a preaching tool, you could probably get away with skimming this part, however it is such a delightful and familial subject area that you might sorry you did. She throws new perspectives onto ancient concepts and helpfully draws parallels between the comedy of the Greeks and the comedy of Basil Fawlty.

This text is a must for any student of feminist theology. It can only be compared favourably with its contemporaries; Ogden Bellis' *Helpmates, Harlots or Heroes* is similarly a useful book for feminist theology, its downfall is that the women who feature are given personas only in the perspective to their relationships with men, in much the same way that the biblical authors have done. Jackson definitely tries to combat this, giving these women personalities in their own right, painting them as comediennes, temptresses, intellectual heavy weights, and most importantly, people rather than props, each with their own story that is worth telling.

For this reason, Jackson's book is also a must for preachers. She comes at these stories with a new and necessary perspective, not simply viewing woman as victim or perpetrator. If those who told the stories of these incredible biblical women week by week used this lens of comedy, then the role of biblical women within the sermon and indeed the role of women within the church would be turned upside down. Jackson shows that women need no longer to be seen as props or plot development in the great stories of men, but instead as having a valid and important message of their own, and often one dripping in humour.

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**Walter Brueggemann, *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks* (Eerdmans, 2014), 179pp.**

It is often remarked that the terrorist attacks of September 2001 have become for a new generation what the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the Aberfan mining disaster was for their parents: a marker in time, an indelible memory. The effects of 9/11 are still unwinding in the American social and political context and in the international political sphere. In *Reality, Grief, Hope* Walter Brueggemann turns to the biblical texts to explore an analogical relationship between the 'defining dislocation' that has followed the events of 9/11 in contemporary America and that experienced in the ancient world after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. It is a sustained exploration of a premise that previously appeared in Brueggemann's earlier work such as *Like Fire in the Bones*. The book's discussion of the American political



and religious context requires British readers to continue its trajectory by doing a careful work of translation, but as an example of how to use the biblical text today it would be a good resource for any community asking ‘what is the prophetic calling for *our* context?’

Brueggemann’s analysis rests on his identification of a link between Israel’s notion of chosenness and America’s commitment to an ideology of ‘exceptionalism’ (accompanied by its ‘sense of entitlement and privilege and a distorted view of reality’). The contemporary prophetic calling, he proposes, is to mirror that of the biblical prophets in giving voice to *reality* when overconfidence holds sway, *grief* when denial is the only response to loss, and *hope* when despair fails to deal with emotional, political and theological change. In this pattern, Brueggemann offers an alternative way to consider the process he is well known for in his work on the Psalms: the movement from orientation through disorientation to new orientation. Three chapters exploring the ‘urgent prophetic tasks’ each follow the same clear structure, beginning with the biblical situation and prophetic challenge followed by the analogous contemporary situation and suggestions for a prophetic response. A fourth substantial chapter considers the two contradictory metanarratives with which the contemporary church must struggle: making the case for a ‘narrative of neighborly particularity’ (realism, grief, hope) in the face of the ‘totalizing narrative of the empire’ (ideology, denial, despair).

*Reality, Grief, Hope* contains Brueggemann’s customary and creative combination of attention to the detail of the biblical text with a breadth of contemporary reflection on the material at hand: ranging from poetry expressing contemporary lament to Jonathan Lear’s philosophical anthropological study of the Crow nation of Native Americans. For Brueggemann, the prophetic practice of the church ‘is indispensable for the future viability of our society. It is, moreover, work that is likely to remain undone until it is undertaken by a faithful, courageous, emancipated church’ (p.3). *Reality, Grief, Hope* continues Brueggemann’s consistent challenge to take this prophetic calling seriously.

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**Walter Brueggemann, *Embracing the Transformation*, edited by K.C. Hanson (Cascade, 2014), 102pp.**

This is a selection of essays (undated) from the *Journey of Preaching* with an address the author gave in 1998.

The purpose of the collection is to support his contention that preaching is the chance to *summon and nurture and alternative community with an alternative identity, vision, and vocation, preoccupied with praise and obedience toward the God we Christians know fully in Jesus of Nazareth.*

For a new reader of Brueggemann this would be an introduction to his idiosyncratic use of the English language, his passion for the Old Testament and in the title essay a superlative exposition of the preacher’s task. Alongside this there is material for preaching at Advent, the notion of blessing and the relationship between social media

and preaching. The latter shows up the datedness of the material because it was written before the advent of Face Book and so on; although his points still abide.

For experienced readers this will contain little that is new. However, what it does raise for the preacher in this country are three questions:

What is the socio-politico-ecclesial culture in which the preacher speaks in the UK- because it is certainly not like that of the USA which his material assumes?

What is the rationale for 'preaching' that makes you stand up each Sunday morning?

What is the relationship between the preacher, the sermon and the congregation?

This final question for me is the most important and I would wish to hear him more on this. For instance in 'Some Missing Prerequisites' he writes: *those who listen to preaching either have accepted baptism or are being invited to baptism*. There's the starter for a discussion of the relevance of the sermon at a Church Meeting. For if the premise for preaching is the creation of an odd or alternative community; then such a community needs time to know this and consider the importance of the voice of the preacher in their midst. This voice was deeply influential in shaping the identity and mission of Non-Conformity. Does it still?

This is the book's virtue – it finds questions in you that need attention.

*John Rackley*  
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**Rowan Williams, *Being Christian* (SPCK, 2014), 96pp.**

It is difficult not to agree with the common theme of the comments that adorn the covers of Williams' latest book: it is on the one hand accessible and concise, surely in part the result of its origin as a series of lectures, yet it is also profound. Williams first sets out to distill what it means to be a Christian, opening as he does with the question 'What are the essential elements of the Christian life?' (p.ix) Exploring the answer is not in itself the subject of the book and indeed Williams gives the answer at the end of the first paragraph as baptism, Bible, Eucharist and prayer. Rather, taking these four elements as a starting point, Williams leads us into an exploration of each in the life of the Christian.

The chapter on baptism begins conventionally enough, connecting the experience of the believer's immersion with that of Jesus being 'swamped' by suffering and death, and connecting the waters of creation with those of new creation. Yet swiftly Williams takes us deeper into the metaphor of watery chaos. As Jesus stepped into the chaos of the world, so the baptised must be found in the vicinity of chaos, of the troubled, marginalised and suffering, both within our communities and within ourselves. In relating the baptised not only to the experience of Jesus but to all humanity, Williams alludes to a theme found in his earlier book, *Silence and Honey Cakes*: the Christian life is not about solitary salvation as much as solidarity with others and it therefore makes little sense outside community.

The centrality of community is also a feature of his chapter on Eucharist, where Williams reminds us that as much as we are welcome guests at Christ's table, so too

are others, including the 'unsuitable' (p.42). The Christian community is therefore a community in need of re-creation and sharing a meal together is where this begins. Finding God in the darkest recesses of human experience is one of William's recurrent themes and in this chapter he points to Jesus giving God thanks even on the eve of death. Williams leaves us in no doubt that the Christian life is not for the faint-hearted but that the Sacrament can lead us to see all things sacramentally. It is an important reminder, even for the experienced Christian, that we must look for signs of transformation in the world.

Each chapter ends with some questions for reflection and throughout the book it is clear that Williams wishes to give his readers room to think for themselves. This is particularly evident in his second chapter, on the Bible. He begins by positing Christianity as a listening faith in which we hear God speaking to us through the Bible. Unsurprisingly, Williams is at pains to point out the complexities of this and makes reference to the ways in which the Bible has been used to condone various atrocities. To Williams, the Bible is a collection of writings from a variety of genres, all of which God wants us to hear but not uncritically. Thus we are asked to think of the Bible as the stories of those who have heard and responded to God in some way, to ask ourselves where we are in relation to this, and to make our own response. Crucially, our response must be made through the lens of Jesus' life and message, with Williams making clear that he regards the New Testament as qualitatively different in terms of historical accuracy than the Old. Tantalisingly, he makes reference to 'that bit in Leviticus and that bit in Ezekiel' (p.35) as they might relate to Jesus though he does not elaborate, further evidence of Williams' desire to make the reader do some work.

The final chapter on prayer has a greater focus on the individual Christian than is the case with any of the others. At the heart of this chapter is prayer as God working in us as opposed to us communicating with God. Williams takes the writings of three Church Fathers on the Lord's Prayer, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and John Cassian, and uses them to explore the ways in which prayer can transform both us and the world. The chapter (and the book) ends with Williams commending a silent, breathing prayer to the reader: all the thinking and reflection this book encourages can wait until we can simply 'be' before God. Williams has not set out to provide an exhaustive or definitive volume on the topics in question but to offer the reader something of significant depth whilst also inspiring further exploration. Wherever we are in our Christian life, this book will us to move on. Williams has been able to bring fresh insights to these familiar topics and has challenged the reader to ground their faith in the complex, difficult and very real world.

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**Emma Percy, *Mothering as a Metaphor for Ministry* (Ashgate, 2014), 184pp.**

Let no one in ministry, especially non-mothers, be deterred by the title from reading this book! Ashgate's propensity for their titles to 'say it as it is', usually helpful, may have done it a disservice, since it is not gender-specific but pertinent to every minister. Emma Percy makes an important and novel contribution to the growing corpus of academic writing exploring the generic practise of ministry in these changing times.

Amid the plethora of metaphors commonly used for the role – and way of being – of a minister, mothering does not feature, surely because of its (supposed) femaleness, and overtones of domesticity, servitude and hiddenness. Yet it is precisely these features that inspired Percy's academic research out of which this book comes, for through her long experience of both ministry and mothering grew an awareness of the similarities: language is significant here as her use of 'mothering' rather than 'motherhood' focuses our minds on a practice, unlimited by physical maternity. Illustrating the commonality between ministry and mothering, she sets up a conversation between the two which leads to her conclusion framed in the book's title. What gives her work originality and wide relevance is her argument that mothering is a universal skill which can be learned.

For Percy, whatever else ministry might be about, it is at its heart pastoral, and involves caring for and nurturing a particular group of people towards spiritual maturity. As such, much of it is hidden, of little apparent value, and with largely unquantifiable results. This resonates with much of the experience of mothers, whose core work is commonly minimised as unskilled, irrational and instinctual. Society affords low status to both, and herein lies a problem for many ministers who may have given up higher status professions to follow God's call to ordination.

Keen to establish a universal frame of reference, Percy looks to history, philosophy and psychology as well as theology to provide a strong theoretical foundation for her argument. She begins by exploring traditional maternal imagery for the church and for the function although not the gender of the minister, then moves to a discussion of mothering as both relationship and activity, a skill not essentially innate but which can be learned. She draws heavily on two resources. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* fuels her discussion of mothering as a complex practice requiring cognitive as well as affective skills. Then, to understand the nature of mothering in relation to other forms of 'work', she draws on Hannah Arendt's threefold categorisation of all human activity in *The Human Condition*. Percy combines her 'labouring' (understood as the cyclical, repetitive servicing of human needs), with 'action' (which creates 'webs of human relationships', the highest form of work) to characterise mothering.

In her concluding chapters, she faces squarely the psychological and vocational dilemma of ministers who, like mothers, are undervalued by society. She warns that the frustration of powerlessness, loss of a sense of self worth and public status can lead to an inappropriate exercise of power over a congregation at the expense of generative power-sharing. To counter these complex ills is, she argues, to conceive of ministry on a different model with specific skills, a habitus to be learned, both by practising ministers and by their supervisors whom she encourages to place more emphasis on ministerial care and support.

The nature of ministry into the 21st century is currently a 'hot' topic of conversation in our Baptist family, along with discussion of modes of leadership appropriate to the role. Much of this debate is covertly or openly gendered. It is in that context that Percy's book is important, to encourage us all, men and women, to place value on aspects of ministry (which if we're honest comprise most of our everyday activity) that are simple and unobtrusive, repetitive and confidential, reflective and prayerful, such that we often bear the accusation of 'doing nothing' through the week.

Being an adaptation of a doctoral thesis, some of Percy's writing is unnecessarily cumbersome and repetitive despite humorous touches, and her regular use of split infinitives a hindrance to the reader. As the work of an Anglican priest, the book takes

as normative the structures of the established church: while in some ways this limits its relevance to Free Church experience, it would still repay careful (maybe sabbatical) reading by ministers reflecting on their practise and by those in training, alerting them to the need both to learn and to be content with vital but seemingly insignificant activity. Increasingly, this work is being recognised as the heart of mission.

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**Alan Billings, *The Dove, the Fig Leaf and the Sword* (SPCK, 2014), 192pp.**

At a time when our nation is increasingly being drawn into every type of commemoration of the First World War, this book is a timely offering that seeks to summarise varying and fluctuating Christian attitudes to the issue of conflict. It is largely a historic overview, using the three metaphors – dove, fig-leaf and sword to define and describe how the Church's thinking and responses to war have developed. The dove and the sword most obviously describe pacifism and participation respectively. "Fig leaf" refers to a number of contexts in which Christian theology and the institutions of the Church have provided a degree of moral and pastoral justification for war, without being combatant or perpetrator. What is particularly worthy of note is that Christian thinkers have managed to align with all three, at different periods in history, with equal conviction.

In recognising this, the author challenges any simplistic ideas that the Christian attitude to war can always be assumed as one of straightforward opposition, but he equally challenges any notion of unquestioning support. He traces developments and fluctuations in Christian thought which not surprisingly encompass the emergence of the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades and more recently World War 1 and American action in Vietnam. What is perhaps disturbing is to recognise the ease with which Christians in almost every era have assimilated their religious beliefs with their own interests within the political context in which they find themselves. It serves though as an equally poignant reminder that Christian theology cannot be undertaken in a political and historical vacuum, particularly brought home as he reflects on the writings of German theologians in the run up to the Second World War.

The book began life as a series of lectures to military chaplains, and in this respect suffers at times from not naturally translating into a single narrative, which at times verges on the repetitive. It is first and foremost a history of Christian thought, so those who are looking for straightforward applied theology may well come away disappointed. However it contains a great deal that would enable the reader to develop and define their own thinking, and usefully reminds them that this cannot be achieved in isolation from contemporary and historic reality. This was particularly brought home to me in that I read and reviewed this title against the backdrop of significant Israeli action in Gaza and the shooting down of a civilian plane over disputed Ukrainian territories. In consequence I found it at times difficult to remain focussed on the text, being constantly drawn to apply it to what I was hearing in regular news bulletins. While being a distraction for a reviewer – I would suggest it more importantly illustrates the relevance and usefulness of a book like this.

The author begins by outlining pre-Christian understandings of war and combat, and in particular how this related to society's understanding of deity. This in turn is recognised as being formative of the early and later Church's attitudes and perceptions. As he nears his conclusion, one cannot help but recognise the significance of the First World War in shaping the thinking of our modern age. It is increasingly clear that the church's attitude to war and conflict cannot be held in isolation from its attitude towards society in general - and of course that the experiences of that particular conflict have significantly impacted both. It is also sobering to read his summary of the thinking of Ivan Bloch, who more than a decade before its prosecution, predicted the scale of the carnage that have now become synonymous with Verdun and the Somme.

Billings concludes by suggesting a number of ways in which these various strands of Christian thinking can help inform our response to present-day conflicts, though his sobering conclusion expressed in the last sentence of the main text, is worthy of significant reflection: *"The church's rediscovery of the tradition of non-violence was as much a sign of its own weakness as the recovery of lost virtue"*

*Phil Jump*

*North West Baptist Association*

**Martyn Percy, *Thirty-Nine Articles: An Anglican Landscape of Faith* (Canterbury, 2014), 193pp.**

Martyn Percy is always an interesting theologian to read and this latest offering is no different. The title *Thirty Nine New Articles* obviously is a reference to the Thirty Nine (original) Articles of the Anglican church written in 1662. However is not interested in a historical study, but in offering 'thirty-nine new articles that are centred on the preaching and proclaiming the Christian faith today' (p. vii.). Percy writes as an Anglican – he has just been made Dean of Christ Church in Oxford, after being Principal of Ripon College, Cuddesdon for a number of years – but there is much to enjoy and engage with for those of us non-Anglicans.

Percy divides his thirty-nine articles into four parts reflecting the original Thirty-Nine articles – A Catholic Faith; Personal Religion; Corporate Religion; and Miscellaneous People. A Catholic Faith has articles on the Trinity, Christ, the passion, the resurrection, the Holy Spirit, the scriptures, vocations, and on believing in the church. The section on Personal Religion has articles covering sin, fathering, mothering, children, ministry, patience, interruption, transformation, identity, and healing ministry. The section on Corporate Religion has articles on prophetic gestures, Remembrance, Candlemas, thanksgiving, religion and nationalism, the unity of the church, the unity of all the churches, appreciating differences, homosexuality, church disagreements, Anglican foundations, women bishops and on Richard Hooker and participation in Christ. Part four on Miscellaneous People has articles on St Columba, St Barnabas, St Matthew, Evelyn Underhill, Thomas Ken, St Alban, Edward King and George Herbert. Percy is a committed Anglican, but one happy to break the mould, and so he adds only final part called 'On Good Measure with an extra three more articles on commemoration, parting (a funeral address) and on being together.

Each of the articles has their origins in short essays for newspapers or radio and in homilies given at Cuddesdon. This gives the pieces a conversational style. The articles



are not an academic treatise in dogmatic theology. For example the article on the Trinity begins by referencing the film *The Matrix* and the article on unity in all the churches begins with a set of ecclesial jokes – one being Methodists are Baptists who have been taught to read! This makes the book very readable and this is reflected in the broad range of articles. The articles on fathering and mothering are connected to Father's Day and Mothering Sunday and whilst this reviewer finds these days full of sentimental consumerism, Percy at least provides some Christian reflection that affords the opportunity to give these days a richer meaning.

Percy is always a pleasure to read, whether it be his more academic work around Christianity, church and culture or these shorter pieces that demonstrate a generous and open faith that is committed, but doesn't take itself too seriously and offers hope for the future of the church and its proclamation of the gospel. Percy's vision of the church is of course contested and in the article on appreciating differences recognises that 'the Anglican family name could, in the future, be used like the Baptist family name – the shared essence continues, but the prefix (American, Southern, Reformed, Strict and Particular and so forth) indicates the flavouring' (p.95). I might question whether there is the same shared essence amongst all Baptists! Anglicans need people like Percy, and us non-Anglicans appreciate people like Percy who offers us a way of being Christian rooted in God and engaged with the world.

*Andy Goodliff*

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### **Roger Standing, *Mosaic Evangelism* (Grove Books, 2013), 28pp.**

This new book in the Grove Evangelism Series begins with a reflection on the evangelistic models that have been fruitful in past generations. It then explores the more complex contemporary context and the suggestion is that whilst Christian Britain *is* being redefined, it has not yet been relegated to the history books. Drawing on the 2011 census figures it is noted that 59% of the population still indicate some level of "brand loyalty" to Christianity, and Standing contends that the recent tendency to make a distinction between the de-churched and the non-churched is too simplistic. The influence of black majority churches is also considered, as too are the implications of an individual's family history of church attendance. The result, we are told, is the need to move away from a simplistic 'one-size-fits-all' evangelism to a more 'bespoke' approach.

The theological nature of the gospel and conversion are then explored with particular emphasis upon the personal dimension. It is argued that in a culture that increasingly values its 'right to choose', offering individuals the 'choice to follow Jesus' is as relevant as ever. The impact of 'contextualisation', 'integral mission' and the role of the Holy Spirit are also briefly explored before reaching the conclusion that a complex context requires "lots of different evangelistic activities and initiatives". Some examples of churches engaging in new and varied approaches are given along with a list of implications that need to be taken into consideration by church leaders.

Early on the author tells something of his own conversion and call as an evangelist during the 1970s and I feel that this particular perspective influences the tenor of the book. Despite references to 'integral mission' and 'whole-life evangelism' the gospel is defined as personal whilst evangelism is generally referred to as a corporate

activity. In addition, whilst advocating creativity and diversity in evangelism, it feels that the focus is largely upon established models of church. On a personal note I feel that the discussion of 'fresh expressions' of church could have been more positive, and perhaps the impact of 'missional communities' upon evangelism also considered. That said, the Grove booklets offer only a limited amount of space, and there is only so much material that can be included. I found the chapter "So, Who Are Our Neighbours?" (which explores the contemporary context of the British church) to be most helpful, particularly the reference to study by Francis and Richter that listed the reasons why people have left the church. All in all, this book would be a useful read for ministers of churches that are grappling with the task of evangelism in the midst of our rapidly changing society.

*Simon Goddard*  
*Eastern Baptist Association*

**Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post Secular Age* (SCM, 2013), 256pp.**

This book is a response to the growing questions about the place of religious belief in the public sphere. Recognising the friction that exists when personal faith has a public expression, particularly one that is visible in the political sphere, Graham offers a well crafted book to consider the various issues at stake and equip the reader with a comprehensive understanding.

Graham skillfully unpicks the argument for the privatization of belief and its avoidance in the public sphere. She argues persuasively that in this post-secular age the presumptions of secularization which pushed religious beliefs out of the public sphere no longer hold sway. Instead she seeks to establish a new direction of Public Theology that takes account of a resurgent religious expression in the public sphere and the continued questions about its legitimacy in the public sphere. Graham sees this 'post-secular' age as presenting unique challenges for public theology, as it must learnt 'to negotiate between the 'rock' of religious revival and the 'hard place' of secularism.

In scope for the book is not merely how to speak out publicly from personal convictions but the necessity of there being a public expression for personal (Christian) religious belief. Along this line Graham explores different approaches to the public expression of Christian convictions. There is also a careful exploration of whether those holding to Christian religious belief should be engaging in politics on societies terms or its own. In chapter four Graham explores 'radical-orthodoxy' as a way of engaging in the public sphere, offering a helpful consideration of its merits.

The book explores some of the recent cases of alleged religious discrimination and the rise of 'Identity Politics'. This chapter (Crusades and Culture Wars) was a particular highlight, respectfully dissecting the approach and bringing to light the underlying theology of such public engagement. There is also a helpful consideration of public engagement as apologetics, exploring the biblical and historical traditions of apologetics in the public sphere, before engaging with contemporary approaches to apologetics. The book concludes with an excellent chapter on public theology as the seeking of the common good. Here Graham lays out the different ways the common good may be sought and the underlying theology expressed in their practice.

Throughout the book Graham's disciplined approach engages with other significant thinkers in each of the areas she is addressing, hence this book also offers an introduction to a breadth of views. For those readers not familiar with the area of Public Theology some sections will be a little harder to digest, as it does at times assume a grasp of concepts not perhaps familiar to those new to the subject.

This book is a very helpful contribution and offers intelligent, well argued and diligently researched views on the place of faith in the public sphere. I'd recommend the book as a helpful addition for anyone seeking to have a considered approach to their involvement in society and also who want the theological understanding to respond to how others are engaging in the public sphere.

*Anthony Gill*

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**Wayne Morris, *Salvation as Praxis: A Practical Theology of Salvation for a Multi-Faith World* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2014) 197pp.**

The book is divided into two parts: Part One asks *Why a practical theology of salvation?* Part Two looks at *Salvation as Praxis*. It begins by looking at the way Christian theology has so often focused solely on the afterlife. Morris traces salvation theories within Christian tradition and then deconstructs them followed by a review of contemporary theologies of religions. Morris argues that these approaches to salvation and religion have had too narrow a view of salvation and that whilst they can be creative they can also be divisive and destructive in interfaith dialogue.

He argues that whilst there have been multiple perspectives on salvation, the dominant perspective that has historically shaped Christian praxis in the West has been destructive towards people of other faiths. He particularly examines the notion that salvation has led the attempt to 'normalise' others to the dominant Western expectations which he sees as sinful because it is oppressive and contrary to the gospel of liberation. Drawing on the insights of liberation, black, feminist, womanist theology, as well as his own expertise in the area of disability, he tries to recover traditions of salvation that provide a way of speaking about transformative Christian praxis. He traces salvation as: freedom from slavery, liberation, and healing, and suggests these ideas could shape our dialogue in a more positive and constructive way.

Morris reminded readers that Christianity began in a multifaith, multicultural context and we have forgotten the feeling of being a minority. A discussion follows of Christian doctrine that has ranged from narrow exclusivism to almost complete universalism examines. Alan Race's threefold typology of pluralism, inclusiveness and exclusivism is examined and extended. Morris considers marginalisation, colonisation, globalisation, political and economic exploitation which so often results in the 'fear of the other', especially of Islam in today's complex religious and political situation.

Finally, he explores salvation as Deification, Sanctification, Justification, Healing, and Liberation. He uses these categories to explore what impact such theologies of salvation could have on the present, and future, of this world. We are justifiably reminded that people of other faiths bear wounds and scars that they received at the

hands of Christians throughout history and we need to find a different approach both for the sake of the gospel and the peace and well-being of our world.

As Morris himself states this book does not claim to offer complete soteriology but rather attempts to redress a balance in debates about salvation and people of other faiths, especially where this has contributed to the often destructive ways Christians have engaged with people of other faiths. This is a very dense and complex book which requires from the reader a deep understanding of the breadth of Christian doctrine and his conclusions will be up for long debate but it opens up ways for Christians to engage positively in a multi-faith world that might bring peace instead of war and so is worth the effort required.

*Julie Aylward*

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**Rick Axtell, Michelle Tooley, and Michael L. Westmoreland-White (eds.), *Ethics as if Jesus Mattered: Essays in Honour of Glen H. Stassen* (Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 234pp.**

Glen Stassen, who sadly died aged 78 in April this year, was giant of Christian ethics. Students (like the present reviewer) who had the good fortune to have attended Professor Stassen's classes cherish fond memories of his warmth, generosity, integrity, wisdom and charisma, as well as his piercing intellect. He had a rare gift for communicating his ideas – both in his classes and in his writing – in a way that was simple yet profound. His book, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age*, is a superb example of how Jesus' life and teachings connect transformatively with the major public policy issues of our times.

The book under review is a collection of essays written with the intention of introducing Stassen's work to those who are unfamiliar with it and to honour his life and legacy with a view to 'advancing dialogue and debate in Christian ethics and more faithful discipleship' (p.5). The volume is to be welcomed in so far as it helpfully elucidates key aspects of Stassen's theological reflections and disseminates his ideas to a wider readership. The chapters offer well-informed clarifications of various strands of Stassen's thinking on issues ranging from the exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount to the problem of international conflict.

The volume begins with two excellent chapters by Michael Westmoreland White and Michael Willett Newhart. The latter's chapter, entitled, 'Stassen on the Mount', admirably sets out Stassen's radically Christocentric approach to ethics. Stassen's method, Newhart explains, "is Christocentric, and his Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount". Newhart laments that "most New Testament scholars writing on the Sermon are not saying anything about Stassen's work" on the spurious grounds that Stassen, as a Christian ethicist (despite his deep knowledge of the biblical languages and his publication in leading journals such as the *Journal of Biblical Literature*), is still regarded by Biblical studies establishment as an "outsider".

After David Fillingham's admirable chapter on Stassen's debt to the Niebuhr brothers, Joon-Sik Park offers a lucid account of Stassen's ecclesiology and the impact that H. Richard Niebuhr and John Howard Yoder had on Stassen's conception of the church's prophetic social and ethical imperatives.

Another highlight of the book is Tina Pippin's chapter on 'Nuclear Jesus'. Pippin inveighs against the doomsday speculations of premillennial Christians and considers how Stassen's incarnational approach to ethics can be applied to the issue of what she calls "the nuclear madness" that poses an apocalyptic threat to all human life. Pippin's chapter on nuclear weapons is particularly pertinent to a volume dedicated to Stassen, who himself was a scientist trained in nuclear physics. He therefore understood at a deep level the lethal destructive potential of nuclear weapons and this made him all the more ardent in his advocacy of proactive peaceful and non-violent transforming initiatives as the means towards the resolution of international conflicts.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Stassen devoted his whole life to serving the cause of peace. It is fitting, therefore, that the final chapters of this collection are devoted to Stassen's engagement with his Just Peacemaking (JP) initiative. Aldrin M. Penamora offers an insightful summary of the main ideas and practices of JP and how they can be applied to prevent – rather than abolish – war and explores how the principles of JP can be applied to contexts of conflict, oppression and the struggle for justice in relation to the Filipino Christians.

All the chapters can be read with profit and each illuminates an important aspect of Stassen's thought. If there is a possible shortcoming, it would be the conspicuous lack of European contributors. Almost all of the contributors are based in North America and none are from Europe. Although Stassen himself was born, raised and spent most of his working life in the USA, he continues to have an important influence on the shaping of Christian ethics (particularly among Baptists) in Europe, most notably through the close connections he had with the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. His book, *Kingdom Ethics* (co-authored with David Gushee), has been translated into Bulgarian and he supervised the PhD theses of various significant Christian leaders throughout Eastern Europe. He has also been involved in various Just Peacemaking initiatives throughout Europe. Therefore, although the preponderance of American voices is understandable, it may have been appropriate to have included a chapter from a contributor based in Europe. Moreover, given Stassen's 'lifelong fascination with Anabaptist theology and its influence on early Baptist life' (p.11), it may have been fitting for the volume to have included a chapter that offered a distinctively anabaptist perspective on Stassen's theological vision.

In conclusion, this book is a very welcome addition to our understanding of Glen Stassen's generously evangelical approach to ethics. Much like Stassen's own written work, the contributors to this volume generally succeed in combining passion and verve with critical rigour and clarity of expression. As such this volume is a fitting tribute to a man and a scholar whose works will continue to encourage and inspire theologians, ethicists, policy-makers and all people of good will to engage proactively in transforming initiatives that build the peaceable Kingdom, which Stassen taught and embodied throughout his life.

*Joshua T. Searle*  
*Spurgeon's College, London*

**Brian R. Talbot (ed.), *A Distinctive People: A Thematic Study of Aspects of the Witness of Baptists in Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, Paternoster, 2014), 270pp.**

Subtitled “A Thematic Study of Aspects of the Witness of Baptists in Scotland in the Twentieth Century”, this is an important book, especially in a field where the dominant narrative often seems to be a ‘progress model’ version of the English Baptist story.

Rather than a wide-ranging chronology, this carefully researched, and extensively referenced, collection of essays explores a number of discrete topics; it may be interesting even informative, to speculate what has been excluded and why, but this in no way detracts from the book's significance. Each author brings their own style and approach, adding colour and variety to the collection. This book can readily be ‘dipped into’ with each essay complete in itself; indeed it may be better read in this way as sequential reading reveals significant, at times tedious, overlap between chapters.

The book is divided into three distinct thematic sections. The first, entitled ‘The People’, comprises three essays. A chapter on key leaders presents short, eulogistic accounts of the work of the various General Secretaries. Next is an extensive account of the contribution of lay men – mostly middle class professionals – both within and without the local church. By contrast, and to me disappointingly, the chapter on the contribution of women is divided between the stories of the wives and daughters of notable Baptist men and the lamentable story of the road to ordaining women in Scotland, virtually ignoring ‘ordinary’ women (so out of balance with the chapters on men).

The second section, ‘Relationships with Others’, comprises four essays. Relationships with the BUGB, BMS, European and world wide Baptists are described honestly and with gracious, good humour, showing overall a more positive trend over time. By contrast, the essay on ecumenism is an equally honest and deeply troubling account of the withdrawal of the Baptist Union of Scotland from the ecumenical movement. The chapter on theological developments describes the work of some notable Baptist scholars and the influence on thinking of external factors such as the two world wars, before concluding with some thoughts on Baptism. This section concludes with a careful account of the emergence of a charismatic stream within Scottish Baptist life, and its relationship to other similar movements across the UK and beyond.

Finally, the section entitled Mission identifies and explores three distinct themes. The essay on war, which recognises the vital role of military chaplains during two world wars, charts a trajectory similar to that observed in other traditions and geographical locations, with a move towards peace-making, peacekeeping and pacifism. Next an essay on home mission (nothing like its English namesake), with a very clear focus on past evangelistic enterprises, especially those to fishing communities, and often led by women! Finally, the essay on social action is wide-ranging illustrating the huge diversity of projects established and successfully run by Scottish Baptists to serve those who were most vulnerable.

I commend this book to a wide audience – to Scottish Baptists who may be unaware of the rich and complex story of their tradition, to Baptists elsewhere in these islands who often unquestioningly assume the dominant English narrative, and to Baptists

beyond these shores who would gain a greater sense of the diversity of Baptist life that can co-exist in a geographically small area.

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**Jonathan Lawson and Gordon Mursell, *Hearing the Call: Stories of Young Vocation* (SPCK, 2014), 128pp.**

This short book explores different stories of young vocation. It intends to be a helpful resource for young people discerning whether or not they have been called to be ordained, and the laity and clergy who support and nurture them. The Rt Revd Gordon Mursell, retired Bishop of Stafford, a writer and lecturer, reflects on examples of young vocation in scripture. These reflections complement case studies provided by Rev Jonathan Lawson, collected from his experience as a counsellor and mentor to those discerning their vocation. Lawson is chaplain at a Durham University College and part of the Young Vocations Strategy Group of the Church of England.

Therefore all of the examples used come from within the Church of England, and the discernment process faced by the young people 'hearing the call' is the Anglican model. From a Baptist perspective there is an important element of call discernment lacking, due to our different ecclesiology, and that is the requirement of a vocation to be confirmed by the call to settle in pastorate by a local church. However, despite the many Anglicanisms, 'Hearing the Call' still warrants reading in a Baptist setting, and could be helpful to all those reflecting upon their vocation, including older and experienced ministers.

It features reflection and commentary on eight different passages from across the breadth of scripture, starting with the calling of Samuel in the night (1 Sam 3:1-20) and closing with Jacob's wrestling through the night (Gen 32:22-31). The callings of Moses, Jeremiah, Ruth, Jonah, Mary and Isaiah are also used to help explore the subject. The book captures well the difficulties faced by those who hear a call to ministry, focusing on issues faced especially by those with a calling early in life. It gives advice on how to explore and hear God's call on our lives, covers the subversive nature of a call to ministry in the society we live in, and acknowledges that it can be a difficult thing for family, friends and some in the church to understand. It also highlights points in scripture where God works through young people, giving a scriptural basis for young vocations. Lawson's contributions to the book are enlivened by the many testimonies given by women and men who have been called to ministry at a young age, and these shared experiences will help reassure and comfort young people facing similar situations as they explore their call. Added depth and understanding is given by the commentary sections by Gordon Mursell, which give valuable insight to the scripture passages used, giving context and much food for thought.

There is an endnote to the book that features two stories designed to prompt our imaginations. One concerns the story of a monk trying to advance in standing in the monastery he has joined, and the other depicts a world where it is the norm to be homosexual rather than heterosexual. They are both certainly thought provoking, and challenge both how we think about vocation and the way in which we see the world, however they do seem to be a pretty random addition to the end of the book.

In conclusion I'd recommend this book for young people exploring a call to ministry, and for those who take part in the discernment process of ministerial recognition, but also to anyone who wishes to reflect upon the nature of God's calling upon their life.

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**Michael Paterson and Jessica Rose (eds.), *Enriching Ministry: Pastoral Supervision in Practice* (SCM, 2014), 234pp.**

Following on from the excellent *Pastoral Supervision. A Handbook* (SCM 2010), this collection of essays attempts to root the growing practice of pastoral supervision from the accusation that it is simply a baptism of a secular practice. The more immediate context is the work of the still-newly formed Association of Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE), which is rapidly establishing itself as the professional body for pastoral supervision.

Widely practiced in the social sciences, and mandatory in counselling and psychotherapy, supervision of practitioners is no longer deemed a luxury for those who can afford it. It is now recognized as vital and normal for those working in the caring professions to subject their practice to professional supervision. This has not spread to the clergy, however, where supervision is still regarded with a great deal of indifference or suspicion. After all, why is it necessary when we've got the guidance of God? Well, it is very necessary, and I would want to see supervision in some form or other become normative for all those engaged in pastoral ministry. I certainly valued supervision, both as a local minister with a small counselling practice, and more recently in my role as Head of Ministry at the Baptist Union. Privatized and unaccountable ministries run all manner of risks. Into this vacuum has come the new discipline of pastoral supervision, aimed specifically at faith practitioners.

Michael Paterson grounds the practice of pastoral supervision in Paul Tillich's 'method of correlation.' Insights from faith are engaged in conversation with those from social sciences and psychology. This begs the question as to the relationship of divine revelation and human understanding, and this is recognized by Paterson. He argues for a genuinely 'theologically and psychologically bi-lingual' form of supervision, which avoids simply sprinkling an existing humanistic practice with some piety. He describes supervision as vocational, contemplative, vision-focused, spacious, redemptive and sabbatical. I hope in another context Paterson might be able to considerably expand and deepen these categories: they deserve almost half a book to themselves.

Jessica Rose attempts to frame the theology of supervision in the love of God, utilising two 'key Christian concepts', Trinity and Incarnation. I am not sure she is sufficiently versed in theology to quite pull this off, but at least there is some attempt at a theological account of what supervision seems to be doing.

Other chapters Charles Hampton explores language, with a case study to accompany the exploration; tell stories of supervisory experience (David Carroll and Tony Nolan); and place supervision in specific contexts such as ministerial formation (Jane Denniston) spiritual direction (Lynette Harborne) and health care chaplaincy (Michael Paterson.) Diane Clutterbuck considers the relationship between coaching and



supervision for church leaders, while Margaret Bazely and Ruth Layzell (good friends and former colleagues of mine in both the Continuing the Journey Conferences and counsellor training at St John's Nottingham) look at the experience of training.

Part Four gives a model for pastoral supervision revised by Michael Paterson from his earlier work. Appendices are drawn from the work of APSE.

For all those engaged in some form of pastoral supervision this will be a book not to be missed, and any minister considering whether to dip their toe into the stream (yes, do it, and then plunge in!) will find something to grapple with here as they consider the support and challenge that supervision brings. I heartily commend this book, and look forward to further work from this stable, especially in the theological and contextual dimensions.

*Paul Goodliff*  
*Bicester*

***Sally Nash and Jo Whitehard (eds.), Christian Youth Work in Theory and Practice – A Handbook*** (SCM, 2014), 192pp.

One of the great strengths of Sally and Jo's ministry as trainers and equippers of Christian youth workers is that they have a very inclusive and collaborative approach to everything they do. In the interests of full disclosure I should say that I have been the beneficiary of this way of working both during my training at Midlands Centre for Youth Ministry and as a tutor and lecturer at MCYM since. This approach is rooted in their understanding of the Christian faith as a community activity as well as a personal journey, and Christian youth work as something that takes place within a community of practice and a culture that is at the same time both part of the wider Christian community and distinct from it.

They have sought to model this community approach in various ways, including in this latest book in which chapters are written by practitioners from all around the world. Each chapter is then followed by a response to it by another practitioner. This structure means that the book benefits from a global perspective and a range of voices. The dialogical approach also draws the reader in to reflecting on youth work practice generally, and their own practice in particular, offering a range of theoretical and theological models and lenses to enable this.

Although the book focuses on ministry with young people many of the questions explored have relevance for wider ministry, particularly in pioneering settings. Some chapters offer practical input into important aspects of ministry: Sam Richards' chapter on appropriate relationships encourages workers to reflect on managing boundaries with young people, whilst Colin Bennett reminds us that young people come as part of a family package and encourages us to work holistically. Paul Nash's chapter on ethical dilemmas offers different ways of working through the challenging questions that working with people often throw out. Chapters on Curriculum and Management, whilst mainly practically focused, also encourage the reader to think theologically about these often neglected topics.

Other chapters offer more nuanced and theological discussions. Jeremy Thomson's chapter on 'Theological Inquiry in Christian Youth Work' encourages the worker to engage in theological reflection, but then further encourages the worker to help young

people become theologians in their own right, and this is arguable applicable to the whole church: Thomson cites the Iona Community's understanding of theology as "the people's work." Jo Whitehead's chapter examines the role workers and the wider church play in the faith formation and spiritual growth of young people and asks whether a more affective, embodied approach would encourage the development of lifelong disciples rather than consumers of an entertainment based programme. Andrew Smith's chapter on inclusive ministry raises some interesting questions about how to work with people from other faiths and offers a more complex approach rooted in ideas about challenging injustice and making peace as opposed to the usual binary responses of acceptance or proselytization. Terry Linhart's chapter on Mission explores what it means to work missionally amongst young people with an examination of the tension between proclamation and cultural engagement.

None of the chapters and responses offer a single answer or model; the many voices and visions offer a more realistic viewpoint, namely that youth ministry, and indeed ministry more generally, is always about holding contrasting and conflicting ideas together in tension with one another and finding ways of working in those places of tension.

As a youth pastor I often have conversations with other youth workers about how their work is viewed by their church employers, ministers, other leaders and the wider congregation. It seems to be often the case that a church employs a worker who has often (although not necessarily) spent three years studying the art of youth ministry but then doesn't have a clear idea of what they expect that worker to do, or how they will know if the worker has done what was expected. Churches often have vague ideas that more young people will start coming on Sunday mornings but have given little thought to how this might be achieved, whether it is the most helpful thing to happen and what the meaning and implications of that influx might be for themselves. In churches without a youth minister, pastors and leaders might be aware that they need to engage with younger people, inside and outside the church family, but have little idea what that could look like, or the much wider range of styles and approaches that are possible, and might be more effective in their context. In both cases this book might be a helpful tool to enable discussion and reflection so that youth ministry can be shaped to more effectively meet the needs of young people and the whole church.

In considering the usefulness of this book it might also be helpful for ministers more generally to help them to take a fresh look at the work they do. Andrew Root, in his chapter on Youth Culture, argues that youth culture is a hermeneutical location, because it functions as a commentary on our shared culture rather than something separate from it and I wonder whether the same might apply to youth ministry culture. The tasks and attitudes of general ministry can seem clearly defined and possibly even well worn and perhaps asking the question "What can I learn from youth ministry?" might offer ministers some new insights into their work. Even the multi-voiced, dialogical, collaborative structure of the book itself offers a different model to the single voiced, "from the front" pattern prevalent in many churches and so might offer a new way of approaching ministry.

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**Lorna H. Murray, *Swimming Pigeons. Community Well-being and the Role of the Church* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 279pp.**

“Community well-being” could be shorthand for that rich, accommodating and promising Hebrew blessing word, ‘shalom’. Lorna Murray has spent her vocational life committed to precisely that broad and hospitable view of human beings which understands the cruciality of community for human well-being, and affirms the obvious but often ignored reality that every human person is shaped, defined, and formed in their identity by that nexus of relationships within which they live and move and have their being. In other words the most important kind of connectivity is not, emphatically not, our capacity and facility with online social media; true connectivity is human community where people intentionally and personally interact and relate in multitudes of social situations of encounter, presence and availability.

One of the key theological terms in this book is the word care. Not the most exciting piece of practical or applied theology jargon, but a crucial four letter word; to be useful it needs reprimed with the human depth and emotional resilience that contains intentions of accompaniment, committed presence as help, and communication of one self to the other. This book tries to do that. The particular focus of care is on mental health and well-being. Care is understood by Murray as proactive (caring about) and reactive (caring for), and in a Christian context the aim is ‘to ensure that everyone can experience the love of God’ and flourish.

The title *Swimming Pigeons* is deliberately playful; you wouldn’t be surprised at such a title on a children’s book. But it has serious purpose that title, with hints of a Zen koan! When it comes to human community, made up of different people, with varieties of gifts, unique personal experiences, diversity of life story and therefore their own peculiar history and potential, Murray insists from the outset that a community, working together, can do what an individual cannot, on their own. Every true community is made up of people who are each unique, yet in this uniqueness each is the same, and brings their own gifts to share. A community is an organic set of inter-relationships in which people complement each other, cover for each other, respect and, yes, care for one another. The title points towards that complementarity where one member’s strength makes up for another’s weakness, and where a group commitment to one who is struggling provides a rich adaptable corporate care. The word is deliberately chosen; care of the body by the body.

The book is in four sections: the first, “Love your neighbour – just as we are”, majors on issues of acceptance of others and self, uniqueness and value, needs as integral to human experience, and a fine chapter on listening and looking which explores acceptance, welcome and inclusion as integral to a caring community. The second section, “Love your neighbour – journeying together” begins with a chapter which can stand as a good example of Lorna Murray’s combination of no nonsense truth telling and imaginative compassion, two key qualities which fill out with substance the otherwise fluffy nature of the word caring. “What if...” is a fine piece of reflective writing on regret and longing as dispositions that, left unattended, are deeply subversive of mental health. This is a chapter which deals with expectations and frustration, the unrealism in the first and the self-limitations of the second. On the way, she talks immense sense about discerning the way ahead, the importance of trust and that so neglected spiritual response, just getting on with it, finding the right balance between risk and opportunity, learning to live with mistakes which, with

hindsight, are perceived as steps that are often as ‘right’ as other decisions that turned out right, but from which we learned much less.

The particular strength of Murray’s approach is her combination of stories and reflection. The most formative pastoral responses tend to emerge when the lived experience of real people becomes the context for reflection, prayer and action. The third section, “Faith and Life – Being God’s People” explores this from a number of perspectives. The chapter “Only One Magpie” begins with a patient who is depressed and fretful, but moves from there into a study of pastoral hermeneutics. The exploration of Bible stories and their use or abuse in pastoral care displays distilled wisdom from years of experience and more conversations than can be counted. This chapter alone would make for a ding dong discussion in a pastoral care seminar. A one liner that illustrates all this, “The best way of telling people that they are loveable, and loved by God, is to love them.” It isn’t exactly the stuff of postgraduate discourse on the methodologies and hermeneutics of practical theology as academic discipline – thank goodness. Murray can do that with the best of them, but chooses to use her own voice, and talk the talk that shows those who aspire to “encourage and enable the well-being of individuals and of communities”, how to think and reflect in ways that make that goal practicable and achievable.

The final section “Faith and Life – together in community” is more of the same. This time with considerable reflection on Murray’s experiences in Nigeria and South India. Churches looking for an example of collaborative caring in their community will find encouragement, wise caution, and hopeful advice in the chapter “Drop-in for Friendship.” Those looking for good examples of cross-cultural theologies of caring will enjoy the two chapters on Nigeria and South India.

The book could be subtitled a theology of collaborative caring from a Christian perspective. It highlights the importance of relatedness and mutual commitment. It hangs together on stories of kenotic love suspicious of any equation that calculates the personal benefit of the carer. It shows the importance of the underpinning of biblical story and theological insight, and throughout, you become aware of the look you in the eye honesty of someone who, when it comes to mental health and pastoral and community care, gets it!

This is the second book I’ve read this year that has been an eye opener, as I’ve reflected on my own ministry. The first was *Practical Theology. “On Earth as It Is in Heaven* by Terry A Veiling which enabled me to understand some things in a new way. This book, with its funky title, and well-argued chapters, is also an eye opener, particularly nudging those of us comfortable in our competences, and showing why the church should know better, and do better, in the Christ-like ministry of embodying the kind of community care that promotes and sustains human wellbeing.

*Jim Gordon*  
*Aberdeen*

**Curtis W Freeman (ed.), *A Company of Women Preachers: Baptist Prophetesses in Seventeenth-Century England: A Reader* (Baylor University Press, 2011), 750pp.**

At around 750 pages, this is a somewhat intimidating volume! At the same time, it is a precious and vital (both essential and lively) resource for anyone who has an interest in Baptist history or women's preaching. The vast majority of the book comprises carefully transcribed versions of original seventeenth-century manuscripts, with minimal emendation other than where this aids contemporary readers, for example the replacement of ampersands ('&') which were frequently used in printing at the time with the word 'and'. As someone who values primary texts, this seems to me a legitimate and worthy enterprise, increasing the accessibility of the works without losing their essential seventeenth-century feel. Anyone who has spent time in the Angus, John Rylands or British Libraries poring over the fragile copies of early texts will surely appreciate the careful reproductions here – and the freedom to make margin notes on these intriguing and challenging texts!

In reviewing the book, I confess that I have not read it all – it is not the kind of book designed to be read sequentially front to back, rather it is more of a library, a collection of works which can be read and engaged with individually, allowing the reader the freedom to explore the writings of a particular woman or on a specific topic. It is a fascinating and diverse collection.

Freeman's introductory essay is essential reading, clearly describing the religious and political context in which the women lived, and from which their writings emerged. The whole question of what constituted 'preaching' and who may be permitted to preach, even among men, is outlined, with reference to well-known (at least among lovers of Baptist history) English congregations such as Bell Alley in London and Fenstanton in Cambridgeshire. From Mrs Attaway, who led controversial and lively mid-week meetings at Bell Alley, to Anne Trapnel, whose trance-induced writings suggest more of a medieval mystical experience, and many others, seven women have been identified and works published by them reproduced. The writers are identified as 'prophetesses' rather than 'preachers' and their texts are offered with only minimal introduction.

I think that this is an important book; a book that supports my view that primary sources offer a rich resource to present-day Baptists as we reflect on aspects of life and witness. It is important because it recovers voices that have been suppressed for too long, in a tradition that continues, if we are honest, to have a somewhat ambivalent attitude to the role of women in ministry. The recognition of the wisdom and wit (some of it is incredibly clever!) of these women, and of their diverse spiritualities and personalities is helpful, especially in a tradition dominated by expository preaching. Above all, it is a much needed companion to the endless, male-dominated Baptist histories that dominate the shelves of ministers and academics alike.

Very much a specialist work, but one I hope will find its way into the libraries of our colleges, and the hearts of Baptist historians.

*Catriona Gorton*  
*Hillhead Baptist Church, Glasgow*

**Eugene Peterson, *Holy Luck: Poems of the Kingdom* (Canterbury Press, 2014), 104pp.**

Eugene Peterson, whose writings have influenced many Christians has published a collection of captivating and striking poetry, *Holy Luck: Poems of the Kingdom*.

A prolific author, he has written on spirituality, theological reflection and pastoral practices together with his biblical commentaries and arguably his widest influence, his paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*. I've been indebted to his writings throughout my many years of ministry but confess that apart from deploying it to shock and provoke, *The Message* (finding the 'Americanisms' quite jarring) is not my translation of choice. However, with most others things he has written, I have been enormously informed, enriched and inspired in my own spiritual formation and leadership ministry.

To read his poems in *Holy Luck* has been a great blessing. The collection contains 70, mostly short poems, written over a period of 50 years.

Peterson's poems succeed in drawing the reader into both an exploration of the mysteries of life and faith and an observation of the ordinary and every day, with the hints and traces of the kingdom of God on every page. Using rhythm, image and metaphor, the poems stimulate thinking and feeling and spark the imagination. Good poetry is embodied language, not just ideas or abstract truths and Peterson takes the reader on a journey that inspires and illuminates ways of exploring and encountering the kingdom of God.

They are poems that come from the heart and pen of a great caretaker of language, a shepherd of words. He is a great wordsmith and his careful crafting of the poems reflects a depth of spirituality and an invitation for the reader to reflect and meditate.

You can trace the influences of George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wendell Berry in his poetry but perhaps the greatest influence upon his writing is the many years he has spent in pastoral ministry. You sense that he is drawing on life and ministry's observations and experiences. A writer and scholar who has the heart of a pastor, his poems revealing a depth of listening and understanding, a reflective heart and a creative, fertile imagination.

It's no surprise that he is a poet or that his poems are seeped with a love of Scripture. His poetry is gentle, attentive and reflective. The poems are mostly brief, yet reflect the human experience and nature simply and poignantly. For those of us whose calling involves words; praying and leading, teaching and preaching, it is good to read good poetry, where words are beautifully crafted and carefully deployed and are devoid of cliché and manipulative language.

To journey with Peterson through the poems in this book takes us to a reflective place, an attentive and deeper place. I recommend it, even to those for whom poetry is unfamiliar.

*Roy Searle*  
*Northumbria Community*

**Martyn Percy (ed.), *The Brighter Field: Meditations and Reflections for Ordinary Time* (Canterbury Press, 2014), 282pp.**

This is companion volume to the *Darkness Yielding* which offers reflections on the major Christian seasons. *The Brighter Field* provides a set of meditations, sermons, poems, liturgies for ordinary time. Paul Gooder provides a foreword, John Pritchard a preface and then in amongst other contributors there are sermons from Martyn Percy, Sam Wells and Rowan Williams and prayers by Jim Cotter (who sadly died earlier this year). This book is a treasure trove for the preacher and leader of worship, as well as, those who are looking to be nourished in faith.

The first part of the book contains a set of reflections written by Percy and Jenny Gaffin. Percy's emerge out of a pilgrimage he was part of through the Holy Land. We are invited into his reflections which in different ways pull us into his experiences. Gaffin's reflection are shaped by nature, reflections generated by oak trees, carrion, rock, wind, wildflowers and more. Part Two is compiled by Geoff Miller and provide a bible reading, a short reflection and a prayer to be used through the weeks of the Trinity season. Parts Three and Four are collection of sermons by Percy, Williams, and Wells – three preachers who demonstrate the skill and gift of speaking with and our of scripture. There are sermons here on various texts that appear during Ordinary Time, as well as, those that are related to particular days – Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity, Harvest, All Saints, All Souls, and Remembrance. Part Five are two orders for Compline and some seasonal prayers written by Cotter.

This is a book to keep picking up, allowing it to feed the soul, stimulate the mind, and perhaps aid the preacher, in what John Pritchard calls, 'the elusive art of seeing both clearly and deeply.'

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