

Reviews

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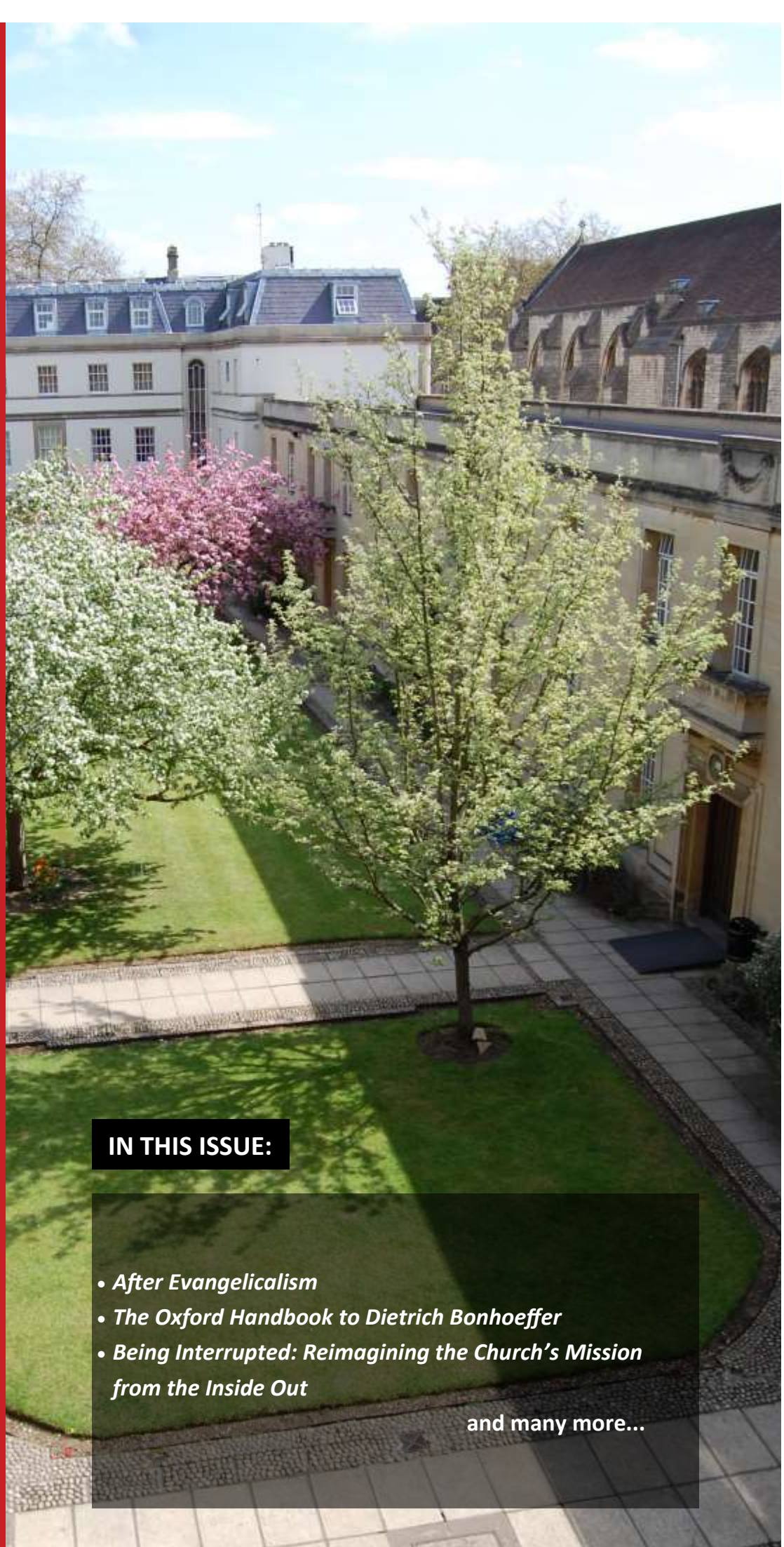


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Michael Mawson and Philip Ziegler (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Oxford, 2020)

Wow! This book is a beast of an introduction to the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It's well-known that Bonhoeffer has been plundered by nearly all streams of the church to serve different theological or socio-political agendas. As a result, he is a somewhat slippery theologian to interact with. In fact, even within the Bonhoeffer guild, there are tremendous conflicts over certain aspects of his thinking, or his identity. Therefore, an up-to-date presentation of this pastor theologian is necessary, and the *Oxford Handbook* does not disappoint. The only thing which is a shame is that it is really expensive, but the range and calibre of scholarship that has gone into it is tremendous. For example, one of my PhD examiners, Reggie Williams, contributes an excellent chapter on the theme of Bonhoeffer and race, drawing nuance out of his thought to prompt further reflection for today's situation as we navigate this subject. Furthermore, there are some brilliant historical explorations of Bonhoeffer's thought and emphasis as it developed contextually. There are themed chapters around his doctrine of God, the church, Christ, preaching etc., to mention a few. There are also a number of contributions that give different takes on his ethical thinking.

Apart from being immensely well informed and broad in its treatment of Bonhoeffer, there are two particularly good aspects of the book. First, the different contributors show a clear appreciation as well as disagreement with one another. This is helpful, because it gives a very easy introduction into some of the finer conversations going on within the Bonhoeffer guild (such as the supposed continuity or discontinuity of his thought, or the ethical import of understanding the Christ reality for action in the world). Second, despite the contributors being serious heavy-weights (most of these folks are well established as theologians in their own right), almost all of them write in a very accessible and easy to digest way. The book is deceiving. It looks intimidating and dense, but if you want to get an overview of Bonhoeffer, and can't be bothered to read all his volumes, you could do a lot worse than taking out a copy of this handbook, which offers, in my view at least, an unparalleled offering to understanding this intriguing man, whose life and thought inspires so many of us, but who ultimately points us to the reality of God in Christ. It makes me want to be a Christian.

Tim Judson
Honiton Family Church, Devon

Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (Bodley Head, 2020), xvii + 382 pp.

Michael Taylor's *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* tells the story of a disturbing episode in British history. This elegantly written volume concentrates on the turbulent decade early in the nineteenth century (1823 – 1833), when abolitionists campaigned to end slavery within the British Empire.

The author correctly points out that our grasp of Britain's imperial past is frequently distorted by cherished myths, which extol a supposed national benevolence in ending slavery. Many accounts of abolition in public discourse eulogize the endeavours of the abolition party, the campaigners determined to overthrow the institution of slavery through legislation in Parliament. Far less attention is accorded to those that actively resisted the abolition of slavery and sought to maintain a brutal institution, which generated enormous wealth. The parties at the centre of Taylor's story, opposed to abolition, were known collectively as 'The Interest' or, more precisely, 'The West India Interest', an alliance of slave holders in the British Isles and the Caribbean, aided and abetted by an assortment of members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, aristocracy, landowners, merchants, industrialists, bankers and clergy. Slavery enjoyed the ardent support of the Crown, Parliament, and the Church of England. The Interest did not simply influence the Establishment; they were the Establishment.

Taylor's chronicle builds on his own original doctoral research and draws from much recent scholarship into British involvement in slavery, including the Legacies of British Slave-Ownership project undertaken at University College, London. *The Interest* is a remarkable achievement. It compresses a complex story, cast of characters, and intersecting movements into a comprehensible and compelling account. Taylor makes excellent use of primary sources and synthesises a vast array of academic research. The bibliography is a treasure trove for the interested reader that wants to pursue key themes further.

The Interest elucidates the motivations and multiple strategies employed by both pro and anti-slavery parties to advance their respective causes in Parliament, through local voluntary associations across the country, and via publications. Of particular note is the West India Interest's deployment of a sophisticated and well-financed network of publications and purveyors of false information. The story Taylor unfolds has an eerily contemporary ring about it! Great effort went into propaganda to persuade the British public that the conditions slaves toiled under were humane and better than the conditions experienced by working people in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The accounts concocted by the emissaries of the Interest cynically misrepresented the terrible conditions that slaves in the Caribbean endured and perpetuated the idea that the enslavement of Black Africans by White British Masters ultimately served to civilise and improve those held in slavery. Echoes of these arguments appear in the report recently published by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021). Some ideas refuse to die.

A further important feature of Taylor's narrative is his examination of the use made of the Bible in both the justification and refutation of chattel slavery. These debates took place at a time when Protestant churches still largely read the Bible literally and viewed the Old and New Testaments as a 'unified whole' (p.91). Yet, literalism alone does not account for the use made of Scripture by the various parties engaged in the contest over slavery's future in the British Empire. Chapter five 'Deliver Us from Evil' illustrates that different interpretative strategies were applied to reading the Bible by slave holder, abolitionist and slave. Slave holders used the Bible to justify their

practice. Abolitionists appealed to the same Bible to argue against slavery. Slaves found in the story of the Exodus evidence that the Almighty was on the side of the oppressed.

Thomas Fowell Buxton, a lay Evangelical Anglican, acted as the leading agitator for an end to slavery within the British Empire in Parliament in the period 1823-33, picking up the baton from where William Wilberforce had left off. Quakers in business frequently paid the bills in support of the campaign for abolition. Baptist and Methodist missionaries were notable for their activities in the Caribbean among the slaves and alerting domestic audiences in Britain to the real horrors of slavery in the Caribbean.

Taylor recognises the importance of Black agency as a significant contributory factor in the demise of slavery. The testimony of Black slaves to the appalling conditions inflicted upon them captured the public imagination and helped to turn opinion against slave holders. Slave initiated rebellions also added to a growing sense that slavery constituted an untenable institution. The 'Introduction' recounts a rebellion in Demerara (now Guyana) in 1823 and Chapter Thirteen 'A Most Extensive Conspiracy' is a concise account and penetrating analysis of the General Strike (often referred to as 'The Baptist War') led by a Black Baptist deacon, Sam Sharpe, at Christmas 1831-32. Both rebellions were followed by brutal reprisals driven by a thirst for revenge and a desire to prevent future uprisings. The memory and myths associated with the successful Black uprising in Haiti (1791-1804), where African slaves had successfully achieved freedom against the imperial power of France, distorted the responses of White colonists in the Caribbean.

The Interest captures the conflicted witness of Christian churches during this period. In general, the Church of England functioned as a chaplain to Empire and apologist for slavery. Nonconformist missionaries were perceived by slave holders and colonial authorities as troublemakers, enemies of Empire, and opponents to slavery. They were blamed falsely for inciting slaves to rebel in Jamaica in 1831-32. White slaveholders in Jamaica found it difficult to comprehend that African slaves were capable of thinking for themselves. A particularly nasty Anglican clergyman in Jamaica, George Wilson Bridges, protested against any infringement upon the rights of slave holders and inspired the formation of the Colonial Church Union (CCU). The CCU consisted of White Members that pledged loyalty to the Crown and the existing social order in Jamaica. It acted outside the official structures of law and order to terrorise slaves and dissenting missionaries, notably Methodists and Baptists. Chapels were attacked and destroyed. Missionaries were threatened, beaten and tarred. The parallels with the Ku Klux Klan, subsequently formed in America, are striking.

The introduction and epilogue locate *The Interest* in relation to the present moment. Modern Britain is characterised by ongoing denial of the true nature of Empire and a refusal to acknowledge the debt owed to oppressed, exploited, and enslaved peoples stemming from a particularly sordid chapter in its past. Taylor paints a sobering picture of how money from slavery percolated into the financial,

commercial and built structures of nineteenth century Britain, bequeathing lasting legacies down to the present day. The British Government remunerated slave owners financially for the 'enforced' loss of slaves, paradoxically, signalling that slaves were property to be compensated for. In stark contrast, no serious thought was given to how formerly enslaved peoples might be helped to prosper and flourish after slavery ended. A sum of twenty million pounds (forty per cent of the British Government's annual budget in 1833) was set aside as compensation for slave holders. The equivalent value today is close to three hundred and forty billion pounds. To put this figure in perspective, the Institute for Government calculates the additional United Kingdom Government borrowing to fund measures during the pandemic in 2020-21 is three hundred and thirty-nine billion pounds. Taylor questions the British refusal to offer an apology and make reparations. It is impossible to reach the end of *The Interest* and not conclude that both are overdue.

Julian Gotobed
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**Anthony G. Reddie and Seidel Abel Boanerges with Pamela Searle,
*Intercultural Preaching, Congregational Resources Volume 1 (Oxford: Centre
for Baptist Studies in Oxford, 2021)***

The seeds of *Intercultural Preaching* can be traced to a series of three Multicultural Listening Days convened by Baptists Together (BUGB) over a three-year period (2017-19). 'Their purpose was to discern the support Baptist preachers need in order to enable them to preach in culturally diverse congregations' (p. 23).¹ This listening process identified several key themes important to those tasked with preaching in multi-ethnic congregations: Understanding the Congregation, Biblical Interpretation, Identification, Partnership, One Size Does Not Fit All, Speaking the Culture, and Decolonizing Preaching. These topics surface in subsequent chapters. Although originating in a Baptist context, *Intercultural Preaching* is offered as a gift to the wider church. To what extent does it succeed as a resource to help preacher and congregation?

Several individual chapters are informative and provide helpful insights for preachers. For example, David Wise distils practical strategies from three decades of ministry experience to enable preachers to understand multi-ethnic congregations. Anthony Reddie provides a concise introduction to postcolonial theory and outlines an activist approach to preaching that intentionally challenges unjust realities in the contemporary world.

Intercultural Preaching foregrounds the importance of context for theology, church and ministry, but strangely says very little about the cultural context/s multi-ethnic congregations inhabit in contemporary Britain. Black liberation theology is a persistent theme throughout *Intercultural Preaching* with consequent emphases on resistance to injustice, freedom from oppression, and preaching as speaking truth to power. Hence, an authentic preacher advocates for justice, challenges whiteness,

and deconstructs the legacy of empire and colonial thought. Appeal is made to the prophets of the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus to support this strain of thought. The problem is not what is included in such a notion of preaching, but what is omitted or fleetingly alluded to. The Old Testament prophets and Jesus in the world of the New Testament spoke truth to power, but also included elements of hope and redemption, albeit reached through suffering and adversity. Hope and redemption are not absent in *Intercultural Preaching*, but they are somewhat scarce. A chapter on Martin Luther King, Jr., goes a little way to correcting this imbalance. Richard Reddie, presents an excellent thumbnail sketch of King and his ministry, making clear that he challenged capitalism, racism, and militarism in an American context, and proclaimed hope and redemption grounded in a Christ-centred vision of God. But what might a preaching ministry that combines speaking truth to power and redemptive hope look like in a British context?

Intercultural Preaching presupposes the existence of mindsets and dispositions that result in unjust action contrary to the Gospel. The authors stress preaching as a catalyst for action but say very little about how preaching might speak to what Willie Jennings calls the 'diseased social imagination' or deeply embedded modes of thinking about self, others and God in the West that sustain and perpetrate notions of white superiority and practice of racial injustice. Few clues are proffered to help the preacher engage in this vital and difficult endeavour. If members of a congregation (perhaps, especially, white members) cannot imagine differently, how can they begin to act differently? How can preaching engage deeply held beliefs in such a way that, with God's help, they may be transformed more into the likeness of the Gospel?

Intercultural Preaching draws together an eclectic mix of disparate themes. A lack of overall design and coherence limits its usefulness as a resource for congregations and preachers. This volume would benefit from the inclusion of a glossary of key terms (e.g., postcolonial, intercultural, and multi-cultural, race, ethnicity, whiteness, etc.) to orient the reader unfamiliar with key concepts that appear frequently in its pages.

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David P. Gushee, *After Evangelicalism. The Path to a New Christianity* (Wesminster John Knox, 2020) 225pp.

This book is written under what the author sees as emergency conditions. Evangelicalism in its United States version is no longer a viable expression of morally responsible Christianity. White Evangelicalism has finally sold its soul by its uncritical support for all that the Trump administration and the Republican Party now stand for. In that sense this is a very American book. The history of American Evangelicalism, Gushee argues, holds within its DNA, certain attitudes, convictions,

prejudices and social goals that are inimical to the teaching and person of Jesus of Nazareth.

For those reasons white Evangelicalism is on the decline. The last lines of a book are often worth pondering as the most important final thoughts of an author:

This I know: many millions of young people got lost in that evangelical maze. They couldn't get past inerrancy, indifference to the environment, deterministic Calvinism, purity culture, divine violence, Hallmark-Christmas-Movie Jesus, rejection of gay people, male dominance, racism, God = GOP, or whatever else...I want to live for Jesus till I die. And I want to help other people find a way to do that too, if they are willing. (p.170)

David Gushee has spent 40 years teaching, preaching, and writing from within an American Evangelical context, much of it within the orbit of the Southern Baptist Convention. He writes out of a personal journey in which his mind has changed on a number of the key doctrinal and ethical issues he exposes and explores. Now a Distinguished Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University, this book is a long reflection on his relationship with the evangelical culture within which he came to faith, at times in the form of personal testimony. But the driving impetus comes from his search for faith and practice that is consistent with the Jesus of the Gospels and the Kingdom ethics presupposed in the life and teaching of Jesus.

The book has three main parts. Part I examines the origins and later developments of Evangelicalism in America culminating in its current alignment with Republican political agendas. One of the pillars of that alignment is an insistence on biblical inerrancy as fundamental to all else, and chapter 2 examines, deconstructs and critiques those claims, and the power games that underlie them. Chapter 3 is a reconstruction of authority, indeed authorities, in Christian faith and practice. What 'the Bible says' requires responsible interpretation, humble listening, communal discernment and an openness to the Holy Spirit leading into new or newly understood truth.

Gushee acknowledges he is virtually commending the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. But he is arguing for something more nuanced, a Christian Humanism which has the qualities of *Reason, Experience, Intuition, Relationships and Community*. This is both a searching and a generous invitation to followers of Jesus to move beyond a narrow '*sola scriptura*'. 'Given human limits – even as humans with Jesus in front of us, the Bible open before us, and the Spirit within us – I am rejecting any inerrant path to infallible doctrine' (p.45). To listen to God's voice, and discern God's will, requires the hard work of humble listening, open-ended risk taking in the presence of God, and communal responsibility in moral decision-making and lived by convictions.

Part II continues the critique and deconstruction of American white evangelicalism by examining the doctrines of God, Jesus and Church. Gushee's theology of God has six woven strands: Kingdom of God theology, social gospel theology, Holocaust theology, liberation theologies, Catholic social tradition, and progressive evangelical social ethics. Gushee is profoundly aware of the dangers attaching to claims of divine

sovereignty, linked to biblical inerrancy infallibly interpreted within a closed doctrinal framework, and reflecting the agendas of male white power at the centre of a faith tradition. He has lived through the negative consequences of that mix. As a scholar immersed in Holocaust history and reflection he insists that any Christian theology of God must stand questioned before Auschwitz, and the story of the Jewish people. He understands God in terms of the story of Israel, from which he draws this conclusion: the Hebrew Bible tells the narrative of *'divine love for covenant peoplehood and mission on behalf of humanity.'* (Italics original) Out of such reflection comes this: 'The idea of a God who risks trusting us with freedom, and suffers from the choices we make, is critically important in moving us away from theologically problematic and morally disempowering understandings of divine sovereignty' (p.80).

Using *Jesus According to the New Testament* by J D G Dunn as a starting point, the chapter on Jesus critiques 'Jesus according to white evangelicalism', as a pietistic, sentimentalised, prosperity Jesus, kept at a safe distance from the 'apocalyptic prophet, lynched God-man and risen Lord' of the New Testament. Gushee, like many of us, recognises the neglect and even silencing of Jesus in such an understanding of the Bible, God, and the Gospel. Those who suggest Gushee caricatures white evangelical portrayals of Jesus, may need to reflect more critically and honestly on the massive evangelical industry that lies behind the current dominance of the evangelical presence in current American politics.

Here again, Gushee blends testimony with critique, and his own past experience with his current thinking. Referring to the meaning of the Cross today:

'We kill one another. We killed our best. We killed God who came to save us. When we kill another, we kill the God who made them and loved them, who was in them and who came to save us. This is what I see these days when I look at the cross.' (p.99)

These words are fuelled by a lifetime spent within a tradition in which the cross is central to individual salvation but less prominent in discussions about injustice, poverty, racism, and environmental catastrophe. They are written by a Christian thinker steeped in Holocaust history and reflection, scarred by what he sees as the co-option of Jesus and the Christian Gospel for political ends, and in particular, a white supremacist understanding of human society and political vision; and these embodied in a Presidency and Administration given uncritical legitimacy by court Evangelical leaders.

The chapter on the Church gives a clear definition of what is needed: *'The church is the community of people who stand in covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ and seek to fulfil his kingdom mission.'* (p.104, emphasis original) This description is some distance from what Gushee and other ethicists, social analysts and theologians see as the characteristic forms and goals of American white evangelical churches, their leaders and their political spokespersons.

'Evangelicalism is a consumer culture ... What many heavily consumerized evangelicals understand church to mean has been taught to them through the most successfully marketed musicians, authors, trinket salesmen, and

parachurch groups. Evangelicalism is also a *brand*, a kind of proprietary product that those at the top defend for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they and their institutions have vested financial interests in doing so.' (p.108)

As a contrasting alternative, Gushee describes two church contexts with which he is familiar and within which he currently flourishes. In First Baptist Church, Decatur, he is a class teacher to a group of people who opt to meet every Sunday to explore, discuss and study the meaning and implication of Jesus and his teaching of the Kingdom of God. Then he tells of his regular attendance at Holy Cross Catholic Church, and his perception that in the United States the Catholic Church has so much more awareness of the multiracial and multi-cultural society of a country significantly populated by immigrants, and is itself 'richly global'. The balance and tension between these two regular encounters with people of faith, have in common a sense of covenant love for all humanity as the base line of Christian activism and ethical behaviour.

By the time we come to Part III, of *After Evangelicalism*, readers are already aware of the nexus of moral dilemmas and human suffering around three key ethical challenges: Sexuality and Gender, Politics, and Race. Given his own life story, Gushee speaks with considerable authority about the lived experience within and outside evangelicalism, and as one whose track record of ethical reflection and intellectual engagement is recognised and admired far beyond Christian academic circles. Those who have read his previous work will know where Gushee is coming from, and going to.

On sexuality and gender his previous books *Changing Our Mind*, and *Still Christian*, give a clear exposition of Gushee's theology and ecclesiology of inclusion and welcome of LGBTQ people. This book reaffirms that conviction, while also offering a critique of the attitudes and assumptions of white and patriarchal evangelicalism which underlie rejection of, and moral judgement of LGBTQ people. There are no easy answers, neither an ethic of sexual perfectionism, nor an ethic of libertinism; instead a humble discerning of what human love is, and the call to search for ways in which all humans can flourish in a covenanted community called together in the name of Jesus.

The chapter on Politics is an unsparing exposé of white evangelicalism's embrace of Trumpism. The writer tells of the watershed moment when Trump's election was confirmed, aided by 81 per cent of white evangelical voters. His own words are unsparing: 'The worst parts of Trumpism track closely with the worst parts of the long evangelical heritage: racism, sexism, nationalism, xenophobia, and indifference to ecology and the poor' (p.144). Gushee urges a Christian faithfulness that maintains a critical distance from all earthly powers, an ethical discipline provided by Christian social teaching tradition, a global perspective on concerns for the poor, the ecology of the planet, and peace issues, and a thoroughgoing repentance of racism, xenophobia or nationalism.

The closing chapter on race and racism is a cry of the heart. Rooted in a history of slavery and slave ownership in America, Gushee argues that enculturated and institutionalised racism are powerful strains in the DNA of American evangelicalism, and that racism is, in fact, doctrinal heresy. Racism in attitude, action and social structures is a doctrinal aberration that denies the *imago dei*, and rejects the full consequences of Jesus as the Word made human flesh, for our understanding of both humanity and God.

A painful section recounts the missed opportunities for evangelicalism to repent, to own the wrong and to change direction. Perhaps Gushee will have to write another book, devoted to the deconstruction of white supremacy, and challenging cultural and institutional racism with the full force of the Kingdom ethics of Jesus. Such a book would require a theology strong and wide and deep enough to make possible reconciliation and peaceful racial healing. Such a theology would also require to be substantial and durable, radical and prophetic, sacrificially repentant and costly, if it is to awaken hope for an end to systemic racism in those now tired of complacency in the forms of wishful thinking and disempowered anguish. Gushee has no time for virtue signalling; as a theologian and ethicist he is calling ex-evangelicals to form communities which in their performative practices are the living contradiction of racism, exclusion and discrimination.

I finished this book with a heavy heart; not because it was finished but because it had to be written, and has to be read. Yet it is a sustained effort at two things. An honest critique of the white evangelical tradition in the United States, and a courageous attempt at reconstructing a basis for Christian obedience in following Jesus and living the ethics of the Kingdom. White evangelicalism is on the decline in the United States; it may well be that its embrace of Trumpism will both hasten and harden the trajectory of its decline. Gushee's book is a long time insider's analysis of the weakening of what he sees as a fundamentalist hegemony. But in this book which combines personal testimony, ethical critique, reconstructive theology, and pastoral guidance to those who are ex-evangelicals, he is deeply concerned to offer some foundations on which to build a more inclusive community of faith that flourishes as the soil in which the seeds of the Kingdom can grow.

His last sentence in the book has its own poignancy, and latent hopefulness: 'If I have helped to provide, even for a few people, a way out of this lost place and a way ahead in the direction of Jesus, then all I can say is: *thanks be to God*' (p.170).

Jim Gordon
Aberdeen

Al Barrett, Ruth Harley, *Being Interrupted: Reimagining the Church's Mission From the Inside Out* (SCM, 2020), 262pp.

Being Interrupted is an insightful, at times invigorating, and almost always uncomfortable reflection on church and mission in contemporary Britain. Aimed at

the Church of England, in which Barrett is a priest and Harley and ordinand, the book explores the context of Brexit Britain through attention to the issues of race, class, gender and the environmental crisis. The book concludes with a postscript conversation between the authors on Covid-19, as the 'Great Interruption'. The Anglican framing is everywhere evident in the text, though the analysis of contemporary society, as well as the insights and provocations around both mission and ecclesiology, mean that there is plenty here for Baptists and others.

The book is divided into three parts: 'Where We Are?', 'Being Interrupted' and 'Reimagining'. The first section offers a series of brief reflections on the Windrush Scandal, Grenfell Tower, #MeToo and the School Strike for Climate. The analysis that follows retraces the root causes of these issues, and of Brexit, back through political, economic and immigration factors, to unresolved and largely ignored tensions of Empire and White Privilege. Barrett and Harley point out that the church has a history of collusion with the aims and dynamics of Empire and is implicated and shaped by White Privilege. This analysis informs the presentation and critique of two ecclesial economies that govern how the church engages with the wider world. These are termed 'counting in' and 'giving out' and will be familiar as something like attractational and missional models of church. The use of the term 'economy' rather than 'model' is perceptive. It enables Barrett and Harley to get beyond pragmatic issues of how we devise or borrow structures, or ways of working, to obtain desired and planned results. Instead, economies are systems we participate in and are formed by. The economies of counting in and giving out are rooted in a strange combination of privilege and anxiety. They perpetuate centralising concerns with control and power and tend towards obliviousness to the issues and gifts found among the marginalised and in local communities.

The second part of the book is a fascinating walk through Mark's Gospel with an eye to those who are on the margins and who interrupt Jesus. There is an abundance of good material here for preachers and for smaller groups who want to address the issue of privilege, and explore the possibilities for mission that takes its lead from the gifts found in local communities. Much of the commentary on Mark will be familiar. It is not a new insight that interruptions drive Mark's narrative, but here there is a sustained reflection on the interruptions, and crucially the interrupters, focusing on the gifts they bring and impact they have on Jesus. The build-up of this theme poses questions to the church's present practices of mission and suggests forms of attentiveness that could be transformative. Similarly, it is not novel to note the understated prominence of women in Mark's account, but the authors prompt us to honour them and learn from them. I had never considered the Syrophenician woman and the woman who anointed Jesus' feet as prophets. I will not read Mark's gospel again without pondering this as the likely best reading of these episodes. The last part of the book, Re-imagining, presents a theologically robust asset-based approach to community engagement. A third economy is introduced, that of Being Interrupted. Here the church engages in and with the community without a clear end product in mind, as a treasure seeker and a listener, more than a doer. This economy gives up control and focuses on attentiveness to the Spirit's way of being in

the world. There is crucial learning here for Baptists, with the rich exploration of receptivity offering a needed counterpoint to our traditions cherished voluntarism. The theological reflections are sandwiched between scenes from the church in Hodge Hill, where the authors are in ministry. These cameos not only give life to the wide range of academic references, they also provide a stimulus for Baptists and others looking to move beyond an emphasis on the gathered community to patterns of worship that affirm the gifts of God found in and through our neighbours.

Being Interrupted is an ambitious book and seeks more than a reading. Each chapter ends with further reading suggestions and questions for personal reflection or group discussion. The authors have packed a lot of material and resources into this book that will enable an engagement with the issue of privilege, maleness, and whiteness and how they have distorted the church's mission. It is a compelling argument, though not a balanced one. This is not a 'compare and contrast' approach to the legacy of empire or the problems of privilege. The authors are making a case, an impassioned plea, and it will be welcome to those who have been disturbed by these issues and have lamented the absence of theological resources for addressing them. The most enjoyable thing about the book is the pile up of fascinating thinkers and practitioners cited. It is both invigorating and consoling to reflect on mission in the company of those who belong to marginal communities and who have been attentive to what happens in the background and the on the margins of our society. De Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics, Nelle Morton's exploration of 'hearing to speech', Audrey Lorde's telling observation that the 'Master's tools will never dismantle the masters house', are just some of the insights that are compellingly presented as pertinent for mission.

The text is, though, an uncomfortable read. It identifies a critically important topic, not only for those concerned for justice, or left-wing politics, but also for those concerned with the future of the church and its witness. The authors call us to a task that will require renouncing much that provides certainty and comfort, as privilege and control do. It is uncomfortable also because the authors rightly are attentive to the nuances in their definitions of sensitive topics, minorities and marginalised communities. At times this comes over as walking on eggshells, which may reinforce anxiety in readers fearful of 'cancel culture', that a blunder in terminology could lead to accusations of deep-seated intolerances or obliviousness. Perhaps paradoxically, the text also reads as an exercise in mastery. The analysis is thoroughgoing, the terminology painstakingly qualified, the issues at stake dragged clearly into the foreground. There is at times a feeling that the presentation is at odds with the artful poets, theologians and activists that nourish the argument. To put the matter like this is harsh, as the authors have done a great service in presenting the issues clearly. It may be that the authors have turned the analytical gaze associated with Western privilege onto the topic of privilege itself. This may be a necessary task. Unless Audrey Lorde is right about the master's tools.

Mark Ord
Yardley Wood Baptist Church and BMS

Ian Randall, Phil Jump & John Weaver, *Love @ Work: 100 years of the Industrial Christian Fellowship* (DLT, 2020) x + 165pp.

I have to start this review with a confession that, despite being interested in Christian history and also labour and social history, I had never encountered the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF), before being asked to review this excellent book. Perhaps this is a failing on my part or perhaps it is also evidence of how one time high-profile Christian organisations are now pushed to the extreme margins of society – perhaps that is a discussion for another day!

The ICF's roots lie in two very different organisations. The Navy Mission Society (NMS), founded by the remarkable Elizabeth Garnett, had a clear outreach mission to one of the most marginalised groups in Victorian society. Garnett and her colleagues did not just preach at the navvies, but rather they advocated for their cause thus winning the trust of them. They also provided education, soup kitchens and other forms of practical help. The NMS went on to merge with the far more middle-class Christian Social Union (CSU). The CSU had a more academic bent to it and was a mixture of a reforming and campaigning organisation. On paper they were chalk and cheese, but the merger clearly worked.

Despite the phenomenal work of Garnett, the most famous figure to feature in the ICF's history would be Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, better known as 'Woodbine Willie' during his period as a First World War chaplain. Studdert Kennedy worked for the ICF as a Messenger (rather like a pioneer minister in today's language) and gave the organisation a high profile figure who was guaranteed to draw an audience whenever he spoke. Studdert Kennedy's remarkable ability to listen, communicate and relate to ordinary people was a great asset to the ICF.

The ICF has not been free of criticism in its history. There have been numerous criticisms, especially when it was a larger and more high profile organisation, that it was arguing in favour of socialist politics and was very much on the side of labour – both small 'l' and large 'L.' In 1938, a Church Assembly debate highlighted the unease at which a number of lay Anglicans felt towards the organisation's aims, however, it's worth noting that at the 1971 Cambridge conference there were only 10 representatives from trade unions, whereas 55 came from the 'professions'. A clear picture that both the ICF, and the society it existed in, were changing from the days when it sent speakers to labour conferences home and abroad.

As would be expected, the modern ICF is very different to that which existed in Studdert Kennedy's day. Long gone are the days of messengers working all over the country, large scale missions, and its place the 'top table' of public (or at least Church of England) life. The organisation, whilst much smaller, is more ecumenical – all three authors of this book being Baptists which includes the current Chair and Vice-Chair of ICF. It adapted the technological age well with online resources being put in place before they were commonplace.

It is clear that ICF has had a bumpy ride of its one hundred year history but has always endeavoured to be a prophetic voice speaking into and about the workplace. The organisation in 2021 is clearly very different than the one which started out working with navvies, but its story is one of adaptation, reinvention and survival. It has been shown a number of times to be head of its time, for example, it explored issues around the environment and also technology before they were 'trendy.' In an increasingly secular and fragmented employment world it will, no doubt, need to reinvent itself again and again, but after reading its history I have every faith it will.

The book is easily accessible, whether you know much of the ICF's work or nothing. The authors clearly have a passion for their subject and this passion does not mask an honest assessment of the organisation's problems and shortcomings over the years – various financial struggles are described, as well as an assessment as to whether, in its early days, the ICF did enough to tackle some of the underlying conditions which caused the problems it came across in navy camps.

I warmly commend the book which will be of interest to those interested in a variety of subjects, such as labour history, industrial history, social history, and practical Christian social engagement.

Ian McDonald
Shirley Baptist Church

Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fifty Lessons in Ministry: Reflections on Fifty Years on Ministry* (DLT, 2020)

This is an interesting format for a book. It is understandable given it was written to mark Paul Beasley-Murray's fiftieth anniversary of ordination, and clearly shaped by this. So it offers fifty chapters in just over 200 pages, and so with a format has some advantages and disadvantages. The book is very varied and creating fifty chapters allows Paul to discuss many different topics, and while there are some clear connections each chapter essentially stands on its own. There is some shaping of the chapters – Paul it would seem very intentionally begins by reflecting on how ministry is rooted in the call of God and ends with how it is rooted in God's grace – but most of the rest of the chapters could be read in any order. The chapters are short and the book is easy to read, so it is a book that can be dipped into, a chapter read and then pondered or maybe discussed with others. And this of course is one of the drawbacks of the format of book; you feel that the chapter is just getting going, there is lots more to talk about and then it stops. An inevitable drawback of the breadth is a sacrifice in the depth any subject is discussed – but the intention of the book seems to be to offer pithy ideas to reflect on rather than a detailed discussion of central issues in ministry.

The book does not offer an explicit and overarching theological rationale of ministry, and is very much based on personal experience, but an understanding of ministry can be discerned implicitly both through the choice of subjects for the chapters and

the way these themes are discussed. Although it is impossible to do justice to all the book contains in one word or description, and I am aware that to do so risks pigeon-holing others, it struck me that one way to describe the implicit ministry the book advocates is 'traditional', which generally I see as a positive not a negative description for we are all 'traditioned' in different ways. Paul I think is right in wanting to encourage us to look further back in the tradition of ministry than sometimes is the case. The picture of a minister who emerges from these pages is one who oversees and is deeply engaged in leading worship and who takes the lead in preaching – while encouraging and training others to share in this work; one who is active in regular pastoral care, again alongside others, and who understands being organised as an aspect of discipleship and spirituality; one who engages in mission as part of the wider ministry of the church; one who attends carefully to their own spiritual and intellectual development. In all of this Paul is deliberately, and I think helpfully, pushing back against some more recent trends in ministry that, for example, have handed over the leading of worship and pastoral care entirely to others and have located the work of ordained ministry elsewhere. In all of this Paul represents an important tradition that needs to shape all in ministry more.

One of those who commend the book suggests this is 'vintage Beasley-Murray – accessible, passionate . . . and just sometimes controversial.' As someone who has read most of what Paul has written over the years I would agree. So there are some of the themes here that certainly I have come to associate with Paul: the importance and centrality of leadership; the professionalism of ministry; the apologetic for large churches. These are perhaps some of the themes for which Paul is known to have strong views on. These themes don't dominate the book but are very much present as part of the implicit understanding of ministry, and these are some of the issues that Paul has explored elsewhere, the most recent substantial discussion being in the four volume work *Living out the Call*.

One of the areas that perhaps receives less attention than it might through the book, certainly if more general discussions of church are brought alongside, is that of mission. The importance of mission, and holistic mission, is discussed and the fact that the chapters that explore this are early in the book may also be significant, but in a context where almost everything tends to be seen through a missional lens the more limited stress on mission stands out. Again the impression given in the book is a more 'traditional' approach and this may simply be because this is Paul's experience, writing from being minister in larger town / city centre churches with significant programme based approaches. Again it is important to note that Paul is offering wisdom from his experience, and this may simply be an area where practice has become much varied. It would be interesting to hear a conversation between him and a much younger pioneer minister about mission.

Overall it is a book that will encourage, challenge and provoke and its particular format makes it a unique contribution to books on ministry, and one that is particularly accessible. Few would agree with everything Paul has written. I certainly don't and I have had some fruitful discussions with Paul about those issues. Just occasionally the tone feels a little more talking down than talking with, which I am

sure was not intended and may even be allowed after fifty years in ministry. I hope that the book is read widely by others, and if it encourages a renewed appreciation for some of the practices of ministry that are part of the longer standing tradition then it will have done a very important job.

Anthony Clarke
Regent's Park College, Oxford

Thomas Breimaier, *Tethered to the Cross: The Life and Preaching of C. H. Spurgeon* (IVP, 2020)

This first book from Thomas Breimaier, Tutor at Spurgeon's College, is a version of his PhD thesis undertaken at the University of Edinburgh. It is a fine addition to works exploring the life and theology of Charles Spurgeon. What Breimaier examines in his study is the many thousands of sermons by the great Victorian preacher seeking to explicate Spurgeon's biblical hermeneutic. This is done against the background of wider theological and biblical developments taking place in the nineteenth century.

Breimaier takes a biographical journey examining his early years prior to and ministry and his later years ministry and in the college of his name. In the middle of the book are a chapter on Old Testament interpretation and on New Testament interpretation. Breimaier argues that what becomes apparent is the emphasis on the cross and conversion as the key means of how Spurgeon's interpreted the Bible from the beginning to the end of his life.

This book will be of interest for those in the life and ministry of Charles Spurgeon, drawing the reader into a close context with the preacher. The also acts as a case study in understanding ministry and theology in the nineteenth century. It deserves to be read aside other recent works like Peter Morden's *'Communion with Christ and his People'*, as we continue to engage, assess and learn from Spurgeon. The book left me wondering how much of a Spurgeon hermeneutic remains today amongst Baptist evangelical preachers; Spurgeon's legacy was long, does it still continue today? And it also made me wonder if we examined other preachers, perhaps even our own sermons for those of us who preach, what kind of hermeneutic might become apparent?

Andy Goodliff
Belle Vue Baptist Church, Southend-on-Sea

Brian S. Rosner, Andrew S. Malone and Trevor J. Burke (eds.), *Paul as Pastor* (T&T Clark, 2018), 210pp.

The biblical witness to pastoral work is often assumed rather than explored and that makes this collection of essays on Paul as pastor worthy of examination. The essays are edited versions of papers given at a theology conference in Melbourne in 2014

and the majority of the contributors come from Australia. In their preface, the editors describe the book as an 'introduction and a collection of initial soundings' (p. xi) on the topic.

Of the 15 chapters in the book, twelve deal with the biblical text directly, with each author assigned one of the letters from the Pauline corpus, after an initial essay looking at the Paul whose portrait is presented by the book of Acts. The final 3 chapters expand the theme by relating it to quite different historical case studies, the development of the threefold-ministry in the Anglican Communion, the witness of Augustine of Hippo, and the relation of a Pauline model to the ministry of George Whitfield during his evangelical tour of North America. It is a shame that there is only one female author among the 15 but I wonder if that is as much to do with under-representation in the academy in Australia as anything else.

Having read all of the chapters, it seems to have been an unfortunate decision (I assume by the editors) to approach the subject in this manner. Although some of the authors do an excellent job with their allocated letter/s, others do little more than present a survey of the biblical material without much in the way of reflection, with the worst example of this being the chapter on the letter to the Romans. By asking the authors to discern Paul's pastoral model from within the confines of each letter, there is no attempt to draw out what the label 'pastor' or the pastoral task as a whole might have meant to Paul. As Robert Yarbrough observes in his excellent chapter on 'Paul as *Working Pastor*', different writers have tried to put Paul in every box possible, missionary, evangelist, teacher, etc. At times it felt like describing Paul as pastor meant whatever a particular author wanted it to mean in relation to the text at hand.

The weakness of this approach should not be allowed to detract from the fact that some of these essays are very good and well worth engaging with. The chapter on Ephesians explores the relationship between pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4.11, drawing the conclusion that pastors were/are a subset of teachers, with their role originally that of equipping the saints for ministry and only in more recent readings of the text doing the work of ministry themselves. The chapter on Colossians, to which the author adds a '?' to acknowledge the disputed authorship, is critical of pastoral readings of the letter, arguing that while the image of teacher is present there is no sign of the parent-child metaphor that might be expected. Evidently this author did not draw quite the same conclusions about the relationship between teachers and pastors as the previous one.

If we can draw out any useful terms for the pastoral office from Paul's letters then perhaps it is by engaging with the parent-child and brother-sister metaphors that are a feature of his writing and how he describes his relationships with the churches and those who are part of them. The chapter on Galatians takes the letter's use of maternal imagery to suggest Paul as a maternal figure, whose motivation for his polemical language is that he wants his children to grow up healthy. And in the chapter on Thessalonians, we find a helpful discussion of the plethora of images, nursing-mother, brother, sister, orphan, etc., which leads the author to conclude

that it is here that we find Paul 'at his most intimate, personal and relational' (p. 141).

Of the closing chapters, the ones on Anglican patterns of ministry and Augustine are interesting, with the former offering not just a reading of the Pastoral Epistles that suggests a two-fold ministry, but then, by tracing out the various sources of the Anglican ordinal, attempting to make the case that this model is in fact closer to that two-fold pattern than might at first appear. However, the last chapter on Whitfield seems to have only a tangential connection to the subject, and barely touches on Paul or the Pauline texts and how they might have been read by or how they might critique the ministry of the evangelist. The editors may have put this chapter last for that reason but it does mean that the book ends on an anticlimactic note.

In conclusion, I found reading this book to be a mixed experience, often illuminating but at times turgid and frustrating. That most of the chapters are fairly short means that they are easy to read and the book will probably best serve pastors (and those studying for pastoral ministry) who want to pick it up and explore one or more of the chapters in isolation rather than as a straight-through read. That the number of strong chapters far outweighs the weaker ones makes it a worthwhile buy for anyone interested in looking for readings of Paul as a pastor. However, there is much more that could and perhaps should be done, not least in examining the texts in the light of one another, for readers to get a fuller understanding of what Paul might have meant a pastor / pastoral work to be, and how that can be developed as a tool for interpreting the pastoral office in Baptist and other contexts today.

Ashley Lovett
Socketts Heath Baptist Church

Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker, *Imagining Mission with John V. Taylor* (SCM, 2020)

In pioneering Christian mission there is sometimes a tendency to prize the latest programme or concept that promises to deliver the greatest gain in church growth. Each year new books are published offering the latest "magic bullet" or decrying a continued reliance on outmoded approaches or understandings of society and religious trends. The most immediately refreshing aspect of *Imagining Mission with John V. Taylor* is that it rediscovers and explores afresh wisdom from a great missional thinker of the 20th century.

John V. Taylor is a towering figure in modern Anglican missiology. In 1959 he was appointed Africa Secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), following ten years' theological teaching in Uganda. In 1963 he succeeded as its General Secretary, remaining in post until 1974. In this role he travelled the world and experienced not only a wide range of cultures but also the localised Christian responses in different contexts. While serving with CMS he wrote the deep and enduringly influential theological work, *The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*.

This work – still in print 50 years later - continues to justify its place on the study shelves of (mainly older) ministers to this day but it would richly repay reading by today's lay and ordained Christians alike. Taylor was later appointed Bishop of Winchester, from where he continued to publish works of theological significance. The authors of this work, Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker, enjoy a reputation amongst pioneers for the quality of their missional thinking, reinforced by personal experience. Baker is director for mission education at CMS, while Ross is head of pioneer mission leadership training in the same agency. Having discovered the detailed diaries kept by Taylor during his period of service with CMS, Baker and Ross rightly discerned some treasures from the 20th century which can continue to challenge and encourage the missionally minded well into the 21st. It is evident throughout the book that the authors have delighted in reading Taylor's creative wisdom and his imaginative thinking.

This book draws upon a selection of concepts from Taylor's diaries, structured in three parts. The first concerns the church and invites the reader to deconstruct preconceptions about the centrality of church as the purpose for mission. What if church is not the point of church? If its true purpose is to participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world and if we respond to that call with rigour, we might find that the church began to look quite different from its current manifestations. The reader is invited to explore Taylor's challenging phrase for the church to 'leap over the wall or perish'. The way to do so, he suggests, is to exercise imagination for the sake of mission and to conceive church anew from different standpoints.

The second main section concerns mission. Taking two of the key concepts of Taylor's thinking - that mission is incarnational and be highly localised - we are led to consider that mission is best done by insiders or by local people themselves. While the gospel itself may be universal, the way it is communicated and expressed will vary from place to place and at different times. This is contrasted with a persistent and unhelpful universality of outlook about mission and church, distrusting the local and the culture-specific. In exploring this, the authors draw on some examples from Taylor's own missionary experience. In Pakistan in the 1960s, Taylor is challenged how best to communicate the gospel using signs and symbols. Many Muslims tended to be intolerant of the public display of the cross. Aside from representing an alien religion, the cross evoked centuries old animosity and more recent memories of inter-community violence. Taylor, with no loss of reverence for the cross as a universal symbol of faith in Christ, then considers a complementary symbol found in many Christian homes in Pakistan: a short-handled broom. At that time, 45% of Christians in that part of Pakistan were sweepers and another 35% belong to the poorest section of society: landless serfs. The short-handled broom carried a similar sense of de-humanising humiliation as did a cross in 1st century Palestine. Therefore, the broom could also serve as a symbol to contextualise the gospel in that place at that time.

The final section of the book relates to how mission speaks to society and the authors draw on Taylor's view that the Kingdom of God attends to every aspect of creation, not simply the salvation of souls. Brokenness in the world is seen in terms

of the whole of creation, echoing Hans Küng's definition of the Kingdom of God as 'creation healed'. Yet mission in Taylor's terms is not simply restricted to souls and creation. He directs the attention of the reader at economics and the evil of unrestricted consumerism, as well as a theology of right relationships. Interestingly from someone who expressed his faith throughout his life within the context of the Anglican church, with all its advantages deriving from being at the centre of civic society, Taylor prizes the importance of Christians remaining in a minority and with the focus on the local, the neighbourhood, apparently small gains and time invested in building relationships across cultural divides.

Each chapter in this work carefully references the specific entries in Taylor's diaries from which it draws inspiration. Each part is helpfully followed by some exercises which lend themselves both to individual reflection and as the basis for small group discussion.

I found this book to be refreshing and challenging, not least because it celebrates enduring wisdom from the past rather than casually disregarding such in favour of the latest missional fashions. The authors treat their source material with a justified respect. Here are two of today's cutting-edge missional thinkers highlighting and celebrating the still penetrating insights of one who walked the road before them. I commend this work to Christians seeking to reflect seriously upon the foundations of their understanding of mission.

Ivan King
Southend-on-Sea

Mike Higton, *The Life of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford, 2020), 275pp.

This is a fascinating study of the Christian doctrine, which uses Higton's own ecclesial context, the life of the Church of England as a case study. One of the best things I enjoyed were some great turns of phrase, sentences that jumped off the page, arresting the mind. He sets out to answer two questions: what is the relationship between doctrine and ordinary Christian life? And what do we do about the fact that any true knowledge is mixed with ignorance, misunderstanding and the deliberate refusal of knowledge? The book also comes in two parts. Part One explores doctrinal theology in the Church of England and Part Two provides some resources for answers the questions Part One inevitably raises.

Higton recognises that some — i.e. non Church of England people — many want to skip Part One and jump straight to Part Two. This I think would be a mistake because in exploring the place of the doctrine in the Church of England, it causes this Baptist to wonder and consider the place of doctrine amongst Baptists. There is also throughout an acknowledgement from Higton of what he calls 'an odour of smugness' that Anglicans have sometimes (?) demonstrated and he seeks to challenge that. Higton's account is an honest and sobering one.

He begins by tracing what he calls 'a contested inheritance' with the Church of England and draws attention to how it was caught up in 'Empire and exclusion', although this is often ignored or overlooked. He thus questions whether there is an 'integrity' of Anglicanism. Higton argues that to talk about doctrine is to deal with disagreement, with life, and with exclusion. All of which could be said of Baptists to some or the same degree.

The following chapter is a survey of where doctrine is done in the Church of England. He begins with ordinary belief and the work around 'ordinary theology', which has generated studies of the place of the Bible, of the understanding of Christology, the lives of older laywomen, of running Alpha courses and use of songs/hymns. What these kinds of studies demonstrate is the good material available, undertaken by researchers, into the ordinary belief of churchgoers. Baptists take note. Doctrine is also located in 'formal theological education', meaning Colleges and Universities, and thirdly in the ecclesial institutions themselves. The perhaps obvious conclusion is that doctrine doesn't happen only in one space, but in many, and Higton suggests we think of 'this tangled network as a doctrinal economy, a doctrinal polity or a doctrinal ecology' (72), each of these words highlighting aspects of access, power and complexity.

Part Two offers a set of studies that unpack questions of doctrine and intellectualism, doctrine and belief, doctrine and scripture, doctrine and disagreement, and doctrine and change. Each of these chapters is a rich study. Intellectualism is 'one of the characteristics deformations of doctrinal theology' and what is needed is a growing knowledge of the love of God, doctrine that serves the spiritual life of the church. With regards scripture, Higton speaks of 'the church's scriptural settlements' as being 'always mobile, always changing' the context and horizons in which we are reading are not static. We are to read 'while walking' (169). Disagreement is an unavoidable part of church life because, positively, 'Christian life, in all its lively and disquieting variety, is a collective exploration of discipleship, a bazaar of experiments in following Jesus' (170). How do we face disagreement? Higton suggests four possible ways doctrinal theologians can assist: seeking resolution; persuasion; receptivity; and seeking understanding. He recognises the limits of what doctrine can provide. A mark of Higton's argument is its humility: 'In always contingent and ramshackle configurations, the product of happenstance, self-protection and the limitations of our resources ... we hold on to one another as a way of waiting upon the Spirit, holding on for a blessing (202). Higton's conclusion is that doctrinal theology must always serve the church and ordinary belief. He outlines some ways that might be done in terms of Bishops, Commissions (writing reports) and those providing theological education.

The Life of Christian Doctrine is an important and helpful piece of work, which those engaged in doctrinal theology within ecclesial institutions would benefit from reading and reflecting on. The church is always engaged with the life of the doctrine, but too often it is not done well. It is seen as too intellectual, it can feel separated from love of God, it doesn't take account of ordinary belief, scripture is sometimes used as a blunt instrument, there is a need to attend to disagreement well and

accept that doctrine does change. For Baptists, who have struggled to do doctrinal theology, because of our ecclesiology, Higton's book might be a starting point to explore why doctrine cannot be ignored and some possibilities of how it can be carried out amongst us.

Andy Goodliff

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Alister McGrath, *Through a Glass Darkly: Journeys through Science, Faith and Doubt* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2020)

In the Michaelmas term of 1971 a young 18 year old Marxist from Northern Ireland arrived in Oxford to study chemistry. He is now the Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion and Fellow of Harris Manchester College, Oxford. In this memoir Alister McGrath maps his journey from committed atheist to a notable apologist for the Christian Faith.

The book focuses on the relationship between Science and the Christian Religion through his own experience of Oxford University in the 1970s and 80s. This mostly reads as a journal of encounters, wide reading and a determination to hold on to the need for a big picture despite the assaults of such 1960s notables as Arthur Koestler. He became increasingly dissatisfied with the Marxist map of existence and went in search of another.

'Reading Einstein in depth for the first time firmly persuaded me that science needed to be supplemented if it was to deal with the deepest human questions of meaning and value.'

He readily admits that his was a conversion of the mind. It was discovering the works of C. S. Lewis, whom he mentions more than either God or Jesus, especially God, which transformed his outlook. He describes Lewis as his 'travelling companion' and it was the intriguing content of one his essays, 'Is Theology Poetry?' which enabled McGrath to locate science within a 'coherent mental map' which set him on his way into faith in Christ who now he confesses embodies the wisdom of God "holding all things together as one".

He seems driven by a vocation to explain. So his many books are regularly attempts to draw out the meaning of doctrine and belief for the non-specialist reader. Although I do not feel he can really leave the debating chambers of the Academy far behind. In particular there is Apologetics, which was much in the mind of C. S. Lewis too. This led him into many debates with the proponents of the New Atheism and more latterly the need for a re-discovery of Natural Theology. I wonder what his take on the Climate Emergency is?

He somewhat politely passes over what was clearly a demanding stand-off with the Church of England in his time as Principal of Wycliffe Hall. But he was surely on the

right track when he argues that Theology must be heard in the Public Space but more than that it must be seen to make sense in that space and not within its own confines of language, history and precedence. And therefore the training of priests (of which he is one) must take this fully into account. He writes, 'The bureaucrats of the Church of England seemed to think that teaching students about issues of Anglican polity was more significant than ensuring the survival of Christianity as a serious option for thinking people in Western culture' Ouch!

I sense that both before and since he has enjoyed and been obliged to follow a solitary path despite much recognition by the Academy and the publishing world. A year before this publication he published *Narrative Apologetics*. It would appear that this book is an attempt to illustrate the ideas of the latter. As he explains he is not attempting an autobiography but rather uses his life experience to explain his convictions. Much of the book reads more like a ship's log than story. He rarely uses anecdotes but is clear that 'our convictions arise from our personal histories – from our interactions with others, both living and dead...they helped me expand my vision of reality, rather than being limited to my own personal experience, by challenging me to consider whether I might have missed something that they have see, and reassuring me that I was not alone in facing up to problems and seeking wisdom.'

One such person whom he mentions twice is Paul Fiddes under whom he was introduced to systematic theology and the German scholars of the mid-twentieth century. It would have been respectful of Paul that he had bothered to state his current standing in the University of Oxford. He did this for nearly all others he mentions. An oversight? A pity.

But it is in the humility of the title that McGrath offers a fundamental truth. In his words from the introduction:

'Although my transition from atheism to Christianity is an important part of this book it is not the only important discovery I made over the course of my life. Alongside this change in my religious views, I learned that an early expectation of certainty in relation to the big questions of life was unsustainable. All of us whether atheists or religious believers, have to learn to live with uncertainty about those beliefs that really matter – such as the existence of God or the meaning of life. I have had to learn to live in a world in which we cannot prove our core convictions. I have written about the darkness and shadows in our life because we need to learn to live meaningfully and authentically in the midst of uncertainty. It can be done.'

John Rackley
Leicester