# BOOK REVIEWS

**H. C. R. Vilaça, E. Pace, I. Furseth and P. Pettersson, eds., *The Changing Soul of Europe: Religions and Migrations in Northern and Southern Europe.*** Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. Pp. xiv, 265. Hb. £65. ISBN 978-1-4724-3469-2.

This timely volume, edited by four sociologists of religion, explores transformations in the European religious landscape brought about by immigration. The central question that it seeks to answer is: 'what are the implications of newcomers for the religious life of Europe and for the redesign of its soul?' (p. 5).

The book has two parts. The first focuses on theories and methodologies relating to religion and migration. Enzo Pace's chapter draws on social system theory and a metaphor of the 'four Knights of the Apocalyse' (p. 11) to explore how religion and migration – considered together – are bringing about change in European societies and societal structures. While pointing to the heterogeneity of the relationships between religion and migration, Madureira Pinto argues that religion mostly acts to produce conformity to the status quo. Tuomas Martikainen assesses the role played by the welfare state in the settlement process of immigrant religions, pointing out that the varied assumptions of different European welfare systems affect whether religious organisations concerned with immigration are focused more on social service provision, worship and community or connections with public authorities.

The second section – which was more engaging to read – presents a range of fascinating qualitative and quantitative studies of particular national contexts, immigrant groups and religious traditions. Two chapters explore the role played by major Churches in southern Europe – the Greek Orthodox Church in Greece and the Roman Catholic Church in Portugal – in the management of migration processes and response to migrants. In both cases, these Churches' complex relationships to their states and the religious-ethnic identities of migrants affect their

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approach. The next three chapters turn to explore the beliefs, practices and experiences of Christian immigrants. Authors discuss the religious affiliation of second-generation Catholics from Peru, the Philippines and Romania in an increasingly 'secularised' Italy; the 'reverse mission' and proselytising work of the Brazilian neo-Pentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Portugal; and the complex relationships that evolve between African congregations and host churches in Sweden – characterised as 'an uneasy relationship of "inclusion in exclusion"' (p. 171). The next three chapters explore the religious practices and identities of Muslim immigrants, and responses by established society to their experiences. Case studies investigate how Muslim women in Italy and Norway – as 'actors of social and cultural change' (p. 175) and creative negotiators and self-representers of religious and gender identity – are writing, using image, acting and varying their use of the hijab according to street fashion and style. They do this to draw and cross boundaries, and to legitimise their public presence. Another contribution explores how tensions between the values of established and Muslim immigrant residents in Sweden are handled in a public school context. The final chapter of the book compares the religious practice and identity of Buddhist and Christian Vietnamese immigrants in Denmark, identifying a strong correlation between levels of religious engagement and ethnic identification.

While some of the more theoretical chapters are challenging to wade through and would have benefited from being written in a more accessible and less opaque manner, *The Changing Soul of Europe* adds new and important insights to the growing body of literature on religion and migration. The detailed and well-researched case studies from Nordic and southern European countries provide a valuable corrective to discussions that have largely focused to date on the North American context and to some extent the UK, France and Germany. What is more, while the comparative analysis is largely left to the reader – and it would have been good to see more of this undertaken in the conclusion – the volume invites consideration of the similarities and dissimilarities between Nordic Protestant and southern European Catholic and Orthodox contexts. How do their different Church–state

relationships, theologies and ecclesiologies and secularisation trends affect immigrant religious experiences and responses by established society to religious immigrants? The book manages to articulate theoretical trends at the same time as it grapples with the complexities inherent in individual migrant and religious organisational experiences and practices. Perhaps its greatest strength is its engagement with migrants' own voices and the emphasis that some authors place on migrants' agency, initiative and resilience. At a time of political turmoil in Europe when immigrants (and in particular, Muslim immigrants) are increasingly portrayed as a dangerous 'them' pitted against 'us', the importance of this volume in painting richer and less simplistic portraits of religious individuals and communities – both migrant and 'host' – should not be underestimated; because, as the editors point out in the conclusion, the Europe to which migrants are contributing is one 'with a soul of hues and contrasts' (p. 256).

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**N. J. Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation.*** Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2014. Pp. xii, 109. Pb. £17.50. ISBN 978-0-227-17472-2.

In this short book, Professor Nigel Biggar has collected disparate material that together forms his 'ethic of the nation'. Biggar, a Scot, has some wider projects in mind: his positive articulation of empire and limited loyalty play into his support of the United Kingdom against separatism, and his defence of nations and national borders are key parts of the wider argument in his *In Defence of War* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

The first chapter critiques Christian cosmopolitanism for its abstract, anaemic nature and incapacity to value human beings in their specific context. Instead, Biggar argues that limited loyalty to a border-controlled, distinct nation-state is the best home for loving one's neighbour. Biggar is well aware that this stance puts him at odds with the prevailing tradition of liberal theory, and so in chapter 2, he addresses the liberal vision of society. He agrees with liberals that the establishment of humanism is essential for the health and survival of society; however, liberal

affirmation of individual freedom alone is incapable of sustaining such a polity, amounting in practice to not much more than 'an unconstrained libertarian, multiculturalist free-for-all' (p. 52). Here, Biggar recommends establishment to the national life, arguing that the Anglican Church is still the best preserver of the nation's humanist soul. Chapter 3 argues that 'national sovereignty should be seen as the freedom to incarnate and develop human goods in creative ways appropriate to particular circumstances' (p. 72). From natural law, Biggar finds moral obligations attached to national sovereigns: namely, the responsibility to create populations free from domestic oppression. Where this does not happen, other responsible nations may need violently to intervene. Whereas currently, international law tends to obstruct such intervention, Biggar argues that 'moral obligation might trump legal requirement: it might be morally right to break the law' (p. 72). The final chapter attacks the presumption that the Bible is anti-empire. Biggar creates daylight between the ideology of *imperialism* and the reality of *empire*, arguing that while imperialism is 'racist, oppressive and exploitative' (p. 89), the historical-political fact of empire is 'a complex and morally ambiguous phenomenon' (p. 92). For all that empires have promoted injustice, they also 'display some noteworthy virtues' (p. 96).

Biggar is at his best when slaying sacred cows. He questions the worth of such things as cosmopolitanism, liberal tolerance and the moral rightness of the American revolution, and defends established Churches, empires and Tony Blair's decision to invade Iraq. These negative critiques are bracing. Less successful are Biggar's positive contributions. Biggar extols nations and national identity, and yet nowhere does he grapple with what these phenomena actually are. Biggar occasionally acknowledges the historically mutable nature of 'the nation'; however, he then inconsistently promotes 'the nation' as something concrete, natural and particular. As a phenomenon of collective imagination, nationalism is hardly a solution to abstract cosmopolitanism. Readers will search in vain for any engagement with the biblical scholarship of Hays, Yoder, Schüssler Fiorenza, Wright, Campbell, Bauckham, Wink, Berkhof or Meyers. Crucial political theologians such as Cavanaugh, Hauerwas and Milbank are ignored, as are political philosophers such as

Anderson. Biggar happily equates cultural religiosity with 'Christianity', with no thought of Kierkegaard, Barth or Bonhoeffer. Tellingly, Biggar is at his best when he is not specifically addressing the *Christian* contribution to debates. The chapter justifying violent national intervention is well argued on pragmatic and legal grounds. However, for a professor in Christian ethics, Biggar is strangely silent on Jesus's example never to use lethal violence to solve violence. Similarly, Biggar makes much of the New Testament material that seems indirectly to endorse 'empire', yet he misses that this same material directly undermines the moral worth of tribal and national allegiance. For example, Jesus's teaching to pay Caesar's racially insulting temple tax was not a defence of (Roman) empire but an attack on (Jewish) patriotism. Biggar is not wrong to find benign ambivalence towards Rome in the New Testament. But seeing as this is a book on nations and their affiliations, he bypasses the much more pertinent material that suggests that Christian communities are powered by non-violent, un-tribal and anti-nationalist impulses, rendering inconsequential precisely the feelings of allegiance and identity needed to form any ethic of the nation.

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**A. Francis, *What in God's Name Are You Eating? How Can Christians Live and Eat Responsibly in Today's Global Village?*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015. Pp. viii, 157. Pb. £17.50. ISBN 978-0-7188-9381-1.

Food has almost become a modern obsession. We are regularly asked to consider our diets: whether we are eating enough fruit and vegetables, and 'superfoods' – with warnings about salt and sugar, good fats and bad fats, and so on. It can be hard to keep up. Alongside news stories about obesity, diabetes and overeating, there is the shocking fact that every year, nearly half of the food produced in the world is thrown away uneaten. Meanwhile, in parts of the world, people still die of hunger.

What and how we eat is a Christian issue, as Andrew Francis clearly indicates in this book, which explores the implications of our western eating habits in terms of both justice and stewardship. He is best where he highlights the clear connections between the choices and practices

of people living in the developed world and hunger and poverty in the developing world. His discussion of the impact of food miles on the environment is also well argued.

Francis suggests a reduction in meat consumption. He doesn't advocate vegetarianism, although he addresses issues of animal welfare inherent in our current system of meat production. He makes a plea for improved animal welfare in both the raising and the slaughter of food animals, and suggests that hunting wild game is more humane than farming animals for meat. This might be true insofar as wild game animals live without confinement, able to express their natural behaviours and follow their natural diet, but such a suggestion rests on the assumption that every kill will be clean and quick. This is not always the case: a shot animal can die slowly and painfully from its injury. Because he assumes that hunting is a source of high-welfare meat, Francis claims that 'It is only vegetarians that reject meat on the grounds of taste and/or texture who can ethically choose to say that wild-killed game should not be a supplement to their own diets' (p. 76). However, those vegetarians and vegans who reject meat on the grounds that taking an animal's life is the greatest harm that one can inflict, and that humanity does not automatically have that right, are perfectly justified in rejecting the consumption of wild-killed meat on ethical, and faith, grounds.

Francis is a passionate advocate of 'grow your own' fruit and vegetables, and community or co-operative gardening groups, as a means of sharing food and reducing both food miles and waste. He draws extensively on his own experiences, and his joy in growing, cooking and sharing fresh food is evident.

Where Francis is less convincing is in his discussion of genetically modified (GM) foods, in which he gets his facts wrong. For example, he claims that GM is 'forbidden' in the USA (p. 81). However, GM food crops were first approved for commercial use in the USA in 1996 and are widely grown and sold to consumers (although this may go unnoticed as there are no laws requiring GM ingredients to be identified on food labelling). He also states that the majority of blood oranges sold in the UK are GM (p. 81), but the UK government does not list oranges as a GM crop that can be imported into the UK. Nor are oranges listed on the EU

register of GM crops. It is a shame that these errors were not spotted and corrected during the book's production, as Francis's overall message is an important one; yet mistakes such as these potentially undermine the credibility of his argument.

At one level, this book is clearly aimed at Christians, imploring them to apply Christian principles and the obligations of discipleship to their food choices. But the book also uses language that suggests that its target audience is non-Christian (or perhaps Christians who have little understanding of their own faith). There are frequent explanations of basic Christian concepts, such as what the gospels are. The book includes a very good discussion of 'good dominion': care for the earth and the plants that it produces; for animals, their wellbeing and needs; and for those who grow the food that we eat, especially those who live in poverty. Francis acknowledges that feeding ourselves more sustainably and ethically costs more financially, but he also makes clear that there are other, high, non-monetary costs to be paid for having cheap food.

This book is ultimately a call to action: Francis makes clear that what we eat is a discipleship issue, and invites us to begin a journey of change to a more sustainable lifestyle. The final section, 'Changing the World', gives suggested steps that readers can take to amend their own food habits. The question is, will readers be willing to take the first step?

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**A. V. Primavesi, *Exploring Earthiness: The Reality and Perception of Being Human Today.*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014. Pp. xxii, 154. Pb. £17.50. ISBN 978-0-7188-9339-2.

Anne Primavesi is regarded by many as the doyenne of ecological theology, and she has been reflecting upon the contributions that are made by this branch of theology since at least her famous book *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Burns and Oates, 1991). Her subsequent writing has been much influenced by her attendance at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development convened in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (the 'Earth Summit'), and by the Gaia hypothesis

formulated by the chemist James Lovelock. Put simply, Gaia proposes that the earth's organisms interact with each other and the planet to create a single self-regulating and complex system that helps to regulate the conditions on the planet that maintain life.

Primavesi's argument in *Exploring Earthiness* is that it is only when we see ourselves as part of planet Earth, rather than Earth existing to serve us, that we will begin to see the web of perspectives that make up our worldview in a radically different way. This is the only way, she argues, that will lead to a sustainable future in which humanity has a greater chance of flourishing. Such a revised perspective has an impact on our whole outlook and behaviour, including our religious understanding and respect for one another, the political dimensions of finance and living in a militarised economy, and the ecological impact of pursuing an unpeaceable future. Across twelve chapters, she explores how our resourceful Earth has been distained, appropriated, colonised, monetised, devalued and marketised. This leads on to her desire for a peaceable Earth and, reminding us of the transforming influence of the first photographs of Earth taken from space just a few decades ago, a treasuring of our vibrant, living Earth of immense beauty.

The book's critique of pervasive anthropocentrism is direct and rightly challenging. Primavesi's greatest ire is held for John Locke's doctrine of the earth as human property and it is there that she places the blame for much of humanity's depletion of natural resources and our human-centred policies and lifestyles. She supports her arguments with quotes from scripture, texts from the gnostic gospels, and authors as diverse as Homer, Wordsworth, Milton and Bunyan. I was disappointed that there wasn't more material drawn from scientific literature beyond popular writers such as George Monbiot.

Primavesi calls for a different way of living and for an urgent change of deep habits if we are to wake up to the dangers of climate change. Climate change knows no national borders and the effects of more extreme weather – droughts, flooding and storms – land disproportionately on the world's poorest people who are in the least position to find adaptations or the resilience that is needed. While her call is of the utmost importance, I fear that in her desire to have an Earth-focused

vision of what it is to be human, she overlooks some important biblical material, such as the first chapter of Colossians, which would have added a rich vein for exploring the place of God earthed among us in the incarnation. Added to this, Primavesi appears to reduce God to the sacred seen 'as the internal transcendence of all living beings' (p. 132).

This is a timely and rigorous book that contains many challenges. As Pope Francis addressed his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) to the whole human family, so Primavesi has challenged not only Christians but all people to tread gently on the earth and view it in terms of their connection with everything else with which they share it. From dust all of us came, and to dust we go, earthed as we are on our single island home.

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**W. A. Dembski, *Being as Communion: A Metaphysics of Information.*** Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. Pp. xviii, 218. Pb. £17.99. ISBN 978-0-7546-3858-2.

William Dembski is one of the leading lights of the Intelligent Design (ID) movement. Faced with the problem that very few mainstream scientists, philosophers and theologians are sympathetic towards ID, Dembski has dug deep in his latest book, *Being as Communion*, below the day-to-day work of the natural sciences (where ID has tended to focus its efforts), and into the realm of metaphysics: '*Being as Communion* attempts to paint a metaphysical picture of what the world must be like for intelligent design to be credible (intelligent design being, frankly, incredible within the materialistic metaphysics that dominates so much of contemporary intellectual life)' (p. xiii). In other words, Dembski's purpose is to establish the kind of world in which ID would make sense, extending the arguments around ID to their deepest possible level, the nature of reality itself.

Dembski sees the deep-level arguments around ID in terms of two conflicting worldviews. The first is the worldview in which ID is at home: signs of teleology are seen in nature, and interpreted as evidence of a designing (teleological) intelligence integrated into the fabric of nature (or at least naturally active within it). The second is 'materialism', which interprets such signs as the product of physical forces and phenomena,

that is to say, the properties of matter, not of a teleological intelligence. Indeed, if a teleological intelligence were to be active in this second worldview, it could only be from the outside (as it were), as supernatural intervention breaking into the natural world.

In Dembski's eyes, the first worldview quite literally overturns the second. 'Materialism' sees information as a product of material reality. But Dembski's worldview takes the exact opposite stance, since it places information at the ultimate level of reality, and insists that matter is an 'expression of information' (p. 1).

Such is the radical nature of Dembski's reversal of priority, placing information (mind) before matter, that he feels able to make some astonishing claims: 'Materialists see the natural world as matter all the way down. Informational realists, like me, see the natural world as information all the way down' (p. 92). '[M]atter is a myth' (p. 96), but information is 'indestructible and even eternal' (p. 100). Indeed, according to Dembski's own principle of the 'conservation of information', information has always been present since the Big Bang (p. 170): information is neither created nor destroyed, it just is. Unlike 'materialism', in which information is built up slowly by evolutionary processes such as natural selection, for Dembski evolution draws upon pre-existing information to realise its goals. For instance, while for 'materialism' the human genome represents information that has accumulated gradually by un-directed evolution over billions of years, in Dembski's worldview this information long pre-existed the DNA on which it's encoded.

It's arguable whether there's much that's new in Dembski's strategy. He coins a name for his preferred worldview, 'informational realism' (p. 197), but in prioritising information (the stuff of intelligence, or mind) over physical matter, Dembski's position effectively treads the well-worn philosophical path marked out by previous thinkers in anti-realist and idealist schools of thought, such as Kant, Hegel and Berkeley. And Dembski's worldview bears striking similarities to much older gnostic and Platonist cosmologies. As a self-confessed Christian theist, Dembski sees God as the supreme source of information, since God is the 'ultimate intelligence' (p. 98). There's a difficult problem here, from which all idealist theologies struggle to escape. While Dembski could call upon the

support of the Christian doctrine of creation to insist that the creator is the source of all there is, Dembski's insistence upon intelligence and information as the root of all divine and created realities alike means that he can't affirm that same doctrine's infinite distinction between creator and creation. Needless to say, a 'materialist' theology manages this distinction easily. It doesn't help that Dembski's account of 'materialism' is confused, more a straw man for him continually to knock down than a recognisable representation of the methodological naturalism that drives mainstream science.

As with other versions of ID, Dembski wants to give us a muted natural science that has lost its purpose, since many of its most pressing questions are moved out of reach into the domain of metaphysics. It's telling that Dembski shows little interest in the open questions of the natural sciences, or in mainstream theology. A muted science can't challenge or inspire theology, and in Dembski's account, I find none of the rich theism which is currently active in mainstream science-and-theology dialogue. If you're interested in learning more about what science and theology can say about the roots of all that there is, turn to the mainstream, not to ID.

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**L. Biernacki and P. D. Clayton, eds., *Panentheism across the World's Traditions.*** New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xii, 218. Pb. £27.99. ISBN 978-0-19-998989-8.

**H. S. Gustafson, *Finding All Things in God: Pansacramentalism and Doing Theology Interreligiously.*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2017. Pp. xvi, 339. Pb. £30. ISBN 978-0-7188-9490-0.

The observation, often made, that features of panentheism can be detected in several world religions, effectively calls for a full-length study of panentheism in various global faiths. Philip Clayton of Claremont Lincoln University, who of contemporary theologians has done most to propound and defend panentheism as a religious and theological resource for the modern world, has undertaken the challenge with Loriliai Biernacki of the University of Colorado, assembling a collection of essays

on the panentheistic leanings of eight world religions from a conference held in California in November 2009. They are not so naïve as to suppose that panentheism unites and syncretises religious faith across the world and down the ages (p. 201); they rather offer the particularities of these panentheistic expressions and the parallels between them as evidence that panentheism is not a nineteenth-century Western invention (a 'flat and partial' – and indeed imperialist – reading of history, p. 4), but a multivocality. And precisely because panentheism is discernible in a pluralist context, it has potential, through its connections with mysticism, to speak to the growing constituency of people who regard themselves as 'spiritual but not religious', and, in its perception of the sacredness of all things, to provide the theological underpinning and impetus for cross-cultural work to save the planet.

Bradley Shavit Artson is the guide for Judaism (chapter 1), suggesting that it is too diverse to be described as panentheistic, and proposing instead that panentheism can be a helpful lens through which to view Judaism, because it elicits resources within that faith which enable its adherents to be more truly themselves – more compassionate towards others and towards the cosmos as a whole (p. 22). Hyo-Dong Lee highlights, within neo-Confucianism (chapter 2), the non-dualistic and non-reductionist relationship between metaphysical 'pattern' and 'psycho-physical energy', which 'provides an opening' within that tradition for 'panentheistic imagination' (p. 38; cf. 57).

Catherine Keller is the astute commentator on Christianity (chapter 3), uncovering intimations of panentheism in Irenaeus (and alluding to them in Athanasius), before describing a subversive current within Christian history that takes in Pseudo-Dionysius, Nicholas of Cusa and John Wesley, the womanist theologian Karen Baker-Fletcher and ecofeminist Ivone Gebara. This is followed by Geoffrey Samuel's examination of panentheism in Tibetan Buddhism (chapter 4); an analysis by Christopher Key Chapple of perhaps too easy similarities between Whitehead's process philosophy and Jainism (chapter 5); a treatment by Francis Clooney of the panentheistic undertones of ninth-century south Indian Hindu poetry (chapter 6); a clear essay by Meena Sharify-Funk and William Rory Dickson on panentheism in the work of Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240) as

representative of Sufi Islam (chapter 7); and a contribution by Biernacki herself on the panentheism of the tenth/eleventh-century north Indian Abhinavagupta, as an example of Tantric Hinduism (chapter 8). If the defining characteristic of panentheism is 'differentiation without separation' (cf. p. 79), that is to say, if it is the nature of panentheism to affirm 'complementarities rather than forcing final decisions between them' (to quote the concluding chapter by Clayton, p. 201; cf. 203), then the term inherently lends itself to aspects of religious systems which seek to maintain a 'both/and' approach to polarities.

If all this seems rather dry, then an astonishing ninth chapter on evolutionary panentheism since 1800 enlivens the latter end of the book. I thought that belief in the 'progress' of humanity had been killed by the First World War, but for Michael Murphy it is very much alive, and it is significant that his essay nowhere talks of 'sin' and the destructive possibilities that accompany any new 'advance'. I agree that panentheism is a 'stealth worldview' (p. 187) in an intellectual culture currently dominated by reductive materialism, postmodern relativity and religious fundamentalism, and my own description of the rise of panentheism as a 'quiet revolution' accords well with Biernacki's image of panentheism, having historically been denied the 'front door', 'sneaking in' the back door (p. 16), but this is not the same as claiming, as Murphy does, that it is a 'coiled spring waiting for release from its compression' (p. 193) and that 'humankind now approaches another rebirth' (p. 196) – there must be many places round the world where it doesn't quite feel like that – and his essay ultimately descends into an apologia for 'supernatural' phenomena.

What needs to follow these presentations – apart from a consistent reference system (some of the essays have full bibliographical details in the footnotes; others use footnotes with the Harvard system and then a list of references, leading to a real mix-up at the end of Artson's essay, which the publisher should have spotted) – is dialogue: we want to herd these (and other) contributors into a room and eavesdrop on their conversation. That would enable the panentheistic resonances which they valuably identify here, to shed light on each other and mutually deepen understanding.

If the title of Hans Gustafson's volume implies that it performs such a task, then the reader should not be misled. At the end of his book, there is a very brief episode of comparative panentheism (pp. 303–7), preceded by a rationale for the same (pp. 293–302) and a chapter on Black Elk (pp. 153–82), who self-identified as both a Roman Catholic and a native American Indian; but otherwise the work is a wordy case for the 'sacramental principle', that is, the capacity of anyone and anything to mediate the divine.

Part of the difficulty with this text (beside its evidence of not having been proofread) is its compilation from previously published essays and unpublished papers so diverse in content that one feels that any theologian in the course of history could have been compelled to carry the theme: the case for the panentheism of Aquinas, for example (pp. 106–11 and 250–1), may take some Thomists by surprise. It may be compounded by Gustafson's own ambivalence towards panentheism, or preference for 'soft' panentheism (p. 292). The result is that the real sticking-points of the argument, such as simple analogies for the God-world relationship (pp. 290–3), and the doctrine of evil, remain undeveloped. For instance, Gustafson seems to agree with Augustine and Aquinas that evil is privative (pp. 271–2), yet claims without further expansion that suffering can be sacramental because it can mediate God (pp. 284–6). Would Gustafson regard Auschwitz as a sacrament? Excising some of the more loosely-related material would have made room for detailed study at such critical points.

Those who are taking up the baton of exploring God's close relation to the cosmos in different world religions, will thus find, of these two books, that Clayton and Biernacki relay it further.

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**T. D. Knepper, *Negating Negation: Against the Apophatic Abandonment of the Dionysian Corpus.*** Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2014. Pp. xviii, 151. Pb. £16.50. ISBN 978-0-227-17455-5.

Knepper's book is the latest in a line of publications by systematic theologians and scholars of patristics who have responded somewhat

bad-temperedly to the recent popularity of the work of Dionysius the Areopagite among philosophers of religion. Such theologians seek both to benefit from the revival of interest in Dionysius that the philosophers have generated and also to explain why, actually, Dionysius was not a radical thinker of revolution and the disruption of Christian orthodoxy but, in fact, a fairly conservative theological thinker who valued the hierarchies and institutions of the Church and did not wish to see them destroyed. Knepper bemoans the agenda which others have brought to Dionysius's text, setting himself against those who want to find resources in Dionysius for advocating religious pluralism or opposing onto-theology. Instead, he wants to establish the ideas about God and language that emerge when we allow the Dionysian corpus to 'speak for itself' without being 'overwhelmed by strong interpretive rubrics, be they personal or historical in nature' (p. xvi). Some of the philosophers at whom Knepper implicitly takes aim would question the possibility of the kind of agenda-free reading that he claims to be offering; but it is not only their reading of Dionysius that Knepper is happy to dismiss without serious engagement.

The heart of Knepper's argument is the claim that, where contemporary philosophers of religion tend towards linguistic nominalism – the idea that the relationship between names and the things that they name is ultimately arbitrary – no such assumptions can be made of Dionysius. For Dionysius, there are two types of name for God: names taken from perceptual things, which function metaphorically or symbolically (so, for example, we say that God is a rock because God is steadfast); and the 'divine names' which are not simply names but which God *is* insofar as God is the cause of certain properties in the world (God isn't steadfast in the same way as a rock, but *is* the divine name 'rest-itself', the *cause* of steadfastness insofar as it exists in the world). We can remove divine names from God insofar as they apply to God's effects in the world: God causes steadfastness in the world but *is not* that steadfastness in the world. We cannot remove them from God insofar as they apply to God as the *cause* of things in the world; God *really is* rest itself, the cause of steadfastness. However limited our ability, as created beings, to grasp God fully as the cause of our being, the connection between

our existence, our naming of God as the cause of our existence, and what God really is in Godself is not arbitrary. This means that God is not so radically different from the world that all our language is equally inadequate; it does not mean, say, that all doctrinal dispute is ultimately pointless, or that all religions are ultimately the same. Dionysius holds that our knowledge of God is limited, but he does not think that we can or should abandon classical Christian doctrine, the hierarchies of Church government, or the sacraments.

Knepper's book offers a careful, close reading of Dionysius, which is often illuminating. What emerges from his reading is, I think quite rightly, a Dionysius who is not straightforwardly a resource for radical projects of overthrowing Christian doctrine and hierarchies. What is frustrating about the book is its framing. Knepper positions himself as a critic of contemporary philosophers of religion, but his detailed critical engagement barely touches on many major discussions about Dionysius in contemporary philosophy of religion. Many philosophical readers of Dionysius are, in fact, far from the simplistic advocates of apophatic abandonment that Knepper takes them to be. Jean-Luc Marion finds in Dionysius a deeply conservative and hierarchical reading of Christian theology which bears many similarities to Knepper's vision; Jacques Derrida denies that Dionysian negation is the same as his project of deconstruction precisely because he sees Dionysian negation as ultimately in service to a project of affirmation, of re-inscribing Christian ideas about God, much as Knepper himself argues. Theological responses to discussions of Dionysius within contemporary philosophy often fail to recognise the seriousness with which many contemporary philosophers read Dionysius; it is a shame that Knepper is no exception.

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**J. C. Latta, *When the Eternal Can Be Met: The Bergsonian Theology of Time in the Works of C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden.*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014. Pp. vi, 226. Pb. £22.50. ISBN 978-0-7188-9360-6.

Corey Latta's book provides a welcome study of the hitherto overlooked literary commonalities between C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden

– three twentieth-century writers who converted to Christianity in just over a decade of each other, and who each wrote Christian literature focusing on a theological understanding of time. Latta sets out to establish that each author was influenced by the secular philosophy of Henri Bergson, resulting in all three employing a number of 'Bergsonian' hallmarks to express their Christian theologies of time. To achieve this goal, the book is roughly divided into two sections: the first provides a brief background to the 'theologised literature' of the authors and a summary of the key principles of Bergson's temporal thought; the second engages in case studies of each author's theology of time, focusing on C. S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and W. H. Auden's 'Kairos and Logos'.

The book is primarily directed towards literary scholars rather than theologians, explicating the Bergsonian influence standing behind the composition of the texts rather than undertaking sustained engagement with their arguments in the context of other theological metaphysics. As such, Latta's examination of Lewis, Eliot and Auden does not purport to provide key insights into their theologies but rather to contribute to a literary understanding of the authors and their works. The book succeeds in this purpose, convincingly demonstrating that each author's understanding of time is expressed in a framework that bears the marks of Bergson.

The key limitation of the book is its predominantly isolated focus on the influence of Bergson's philosophy, largely eschewing analysis of any other philosophical or theological influences on the authors. As a result, Latta fails to articulate adequately the fact that each similarity between the authors and Bergson is predicated on even greater dissimilarity, and thus tends towards a study of parallels between Bergson and the authors rather than a thorough examination of their *use* of Bergson's philosophy of time. That is, the study largely ignores how each author modifies Bergson's ideas to conform them to the axioms of their Christian faith, and how this Bergsonian influence interacts with their key theological interlocutors.

Consequently, the book has a tendency to overstate the influence of Bergson on the authors, either by underplaying the differences between Bergson's views and those expressed in the texts studied, or

at times by actually conflating the two views. This is seen, first, vis-à-vis the Bergsonian notion of time as a transformative force, which Latta repeatedly claims is paralleled in the arguments of the authors. In each case, however, the authors may be more readily understood to describe soteriological transformation as *mediated in* time rather than *caused by* time itself. As Oscar Cullmann made clear (*Christ and Time*, SCM Press, 1965), this is conversely a basic tenet of the Christian faith and thus, contrary to Latta's implications, cannot be attributed *per se* to Bergson.

Second, vis-à-vis the use of 'eternity' throughout the book, Latta does not take sufficient account of the debates surrounding this term especially during the period in which the authors wrote, which saw its re-articulation from its Boethian sense in the influential works of Barth (*Der Römerbrief*, 1922) and Heidegger (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927). Rather than undertaking an explicit analysis of precisely what the authors mean by 'eternity' in their texts, Latta simply conflates their usage with that of Bergson, namely the understanding of time as duration uniting past, present and future in each moment. This conflation is particularly evident in the study of Lewis, who, as Latta himself notes (p. 88), made clear in his *Letters* (2.847) that God is a timeless being without 'was' or 'beginning' (putting him in line with the Boethian doctrine of eternity).

Nonetheless, Latta's book demonstrates a mastery of diverse material and drives a clear argument throughout. It provides a significant first step in developing understanding of the literature of C. S. Lewis, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden both alongside one another and in the context of their contemporaries, and is thus a worthwhile read for scholars of any of these three authors.

*University of Cambridge* Alexander D. Garton

**D. O. Eugenio, *Communion with the Triune God: The Trinitarian Soteriology of T. F. Torrance.*** Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2014. Pp. xxii, 242. Pb. £23.50. ISBN 978-0-227-17453-1.

Dick Eugenio is assistant professor of theology at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in the Philippines. This book is an adaptation of his PhD dissertation, completed under Thomas Noble at the University

of Manchester. The book engages with the thought of Thomas Torrance (1913–2007), the Scottish theologian well known for his work on trinitarian theology, particularly in *The Christian Doctrine of God* and *The Trinitarian Faith* (both Bloomsbury, 2016).

Eugenio focuses on the relation in Torrance's theology between the Trinity and soteriology. In Eugenio's reading of Torrance, we cannot have one without the other; they are mutually implicating realities.

> For Torrance, the doctrine of the Trinity is always soteriological and soteriology is always trinitarian. To isolate one from the other means to separate the being of God from his act, and *vice versa* […] In this book, *soteriological Trinity* refers to the fact that Torrance's doctrine of the Triune God is always a God *with* and *for* us. The being of God is inseparable from his acts […] Reciprocally, *trinitarian soteriology* here means that (1) salvation is the work of the Persons of the Triune God, and that (2) because, in addition to (1), salvation is grounded in the being of the Triune God, (3) the ultimate *telos* of salvation is relationship with the Triune God. (p. xx, Eugenio's emphasis)

Eugenio wants to substantiate the primacy of the Trinity for salvation in Torrance's theology in such a way that salvation itself is grounded in the being and persons of the triune God.

Chapter 1 seeks to establish the definitional schema by which Eugenio then attempts to establish his thesis. In chapter 2, Eugenio looks at the person and work of Christ in salvation, and the following two chapters develop this by looking at the Father and the Holy Spirit respectively, the three persons all working together in perichoretic relation as the ground of eternal salvation. Eugenio concludes in chapter 5 with a discussion of the 'being' of God, defined trinitarianly: 'just as the origin of salvation is a communion of love, so the *telos* of salvation is participation in the life and love of the Triune God' (p. xxii).

Eugenio demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the thought and work of Torrance, presenting evidence from the whole gamut of Torrance's works. The reader will find a well-researched book with a wealth of bibliographical resource. Eugenio admirably establishes himself as a Torrance scholar.

One area of weakness is Eugenio's engagement with some other Torrance scholars, particularly Myk Habets. While appreciative of

many of Habets's insights, Eugenio critiques Habets's work for not fully developing the Father's role in relation to the work of salvation. Habets's work, however, was not intended to meet the same aims as Eugenio's.

This reviewer happily commends Eugenio's work to the seminary professor, pastor, seminary student, or thoughtful lay Christian who wants to understand how the persons and work of the Trinity are inextricably related to a Christian understanding of salvation. It also offers a valuable development to ongoing research into the theology of Thomas Torrance.

*Vancouver, WA* Bobby Grow

**M. D. Hocknull, *Pannenberg on Evil, Love and God: The Realisation of Divine Love.*** Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. Pp. viii, 201. Hb. £60. ISBN 978-1-4094-6338-2.

This book is a very welcome addition to literature on the German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014). It is also an unusual book, in that the author's focus is on Pannenberg's eschatology as such, as distinct from his eschatological approach to Christian doctrine in general. Hocknull has clearly read Pannenberg very carefully and submits him to close scrutiny. While some may think that the formidable German tradition of theology is coming to an end, Hocknull finds that the answers that Pannenberg proposes to a range of pertinent questions are full of insight. He discusses the perplexing question of the nature of evil in the world and the possibility of its being overcome.

The book is 'about evil and love' (p. 1) but it is not a theodicy; it does not set out to justify God's ways with the world. It *does* ask the question whether we can love God in the face of evil. The chapters look at various aspects of this overriding question. The question, intrinsically challenging, is used as a test of Pannenberg's ongoing importance (pp. 33–5) at a time when many would say that theology has moved on. Yet the reality of evil, particularly in a post-Auschwitz world, has been prominent in recent theology. Unsurprisingly, Pannenberg's discussion, as Hocknull shows, is thorough and distinctive.

Chapter 1 prepares the ground. One of the key ideas, contrary to the

usual approach, is that God is not to be absolved of the responsibility for evil in the creation. Chapter 2 deals with the question: what exactly is evil? In which terms is it best discussed? Why are human beings apparently irredeemably prone to doing and being evil? Pannenberg's discussion of why this might be does not follow the usual (Augustinian) 'moral' approach – that evil is the result of our misuse of freedom – but offers a sophisticated 'ontological' and anthropological explanation, grounded in our nature as human beings, with a clear trinitarian counterpoint. Hocknull, a scientist as well as a theologian, also provides a discussion of evil and entropy, and Pannenberg's well-known commitment to the priority of the future.

Chapter 3 discusses such questions as: what is the relation between evil and sin? What should we think about 'original' sin? What kind of freedom comes into play here? Chapter 4 focuses on God, in particular God's power (omnipotence), the power of the future, and God's love (here, this reviewer found his own ideas about divine passibility profoundly challenged). Ultimately, love is to be understood as power, and God's power as the power of love.

Chapter 5 is about God's action to overcome evil in the world, the realisation of divine love. Again, a wide range of themes is discussed in connection with this: salvation as reconciliation, christology and the possibility of liberation from the conditions of sin. Of particular interest, given Pannenberg's alleged Hegelianism, is his rejection of Hegel's influential idea of the 'death of God'. The final chapter is about eschatological fulfilment, the full realisation of God's love and God's rule. Only the transformation of what is opposed to God can constitute victory over evil. Hocknull weighs up various challenges to such a hope but makes a good case for its plausibility. He finds it reinforced by the proleptic manifestation of the rule of God in the person of Jesus; also in the Church as the eucharistic community, which 'enacts its future wholeness in the present' and finds a certain fulfilment of eschatological promises in the liturgy, in anamnesis and epiclesis (p. 165).

The breadth and depth of themes that are covered far exceeds what the length of the book might suggest. Hocknull admirably succeeds in his aims in writing it. As a study of the theology of Pannenberg, it is among

the best, and noteworthy for its sharp focus on evil and its eschatological end. It is a masterly treatment of the topic of evil and the victory of divine love, an area where few venture to tread but one that is integral to Christian faith.

*University of Divinity, Melbourne* Christiaan Mostert

**C. M. Gschwandtner, *Marion and Theology.*** London and New York: Bloomsbury T. and T. Clark, 2016. Pp. x, 159. Pb. £21.99. ISBN 978-0-567-66021-3.

When, in the issue of this journal for January 2016, I reviewed an earlier book by this same author on Marion's concept of saturated phenomena, I concluded that I would not want to examine Marion's work any further, and that Gschwandtner had produced so many qualifications to the theory that she would have been better to write her own book on the subject. This current text is more of an introduction to Marion's work and so has a different objective. In those terms, I would confirm the endorsement which claims that this is the best available introduction to his work and essential reading for anyone requiring that type of text. This is not the same as saying that I would personally spend any more time reading Marion, but, for those who do, this is an excellent starting point and explains a lot of the background to the earlier book.

The author says at the outset that she is not going to enter the vexed territory of the relationship between theology and philosophy (which feels like a key question nevertheless), but will present Marion's work as a theology or even as a kind of spirituality (p. 1). While it is only right to make this approach clear, there are times when it feels as though the strictly theological predominates at the cost of the philosophical, particularly in the latter stages of the book which read like an exposition of Catholic religious thought. So the chapters all include God in the title, and range from addressing God, and approaching God, to worshipping God and manifesting God. The introduction is itself useful and offers some of the background detail to Marion's life and key influences such as Cardinal Lustiger and de Lubac, and although one might be tempted to categorise Marion as a Catholic philosopher, he eschews this in favour

of being a philosopher who is trying to become Catholic (p. 4). That being the case, one wonders whether Gschwandtner's approach is to some extent working against the grain of Marion's own self-understanding.

The first chapter examines in some detail Marion's engagement with Descartes and Pascal, and focuses on four central themes: onto-theology and the *causa sui*; the creation of eternal truths and the question of analogy; apophasis and the language of praise; and the three ways and proofs of God's existence. There is much interesting material here, including reference to Pascal's orders of knowing: that of the world, that of the mind and that of the heart (p. 18). Love, as a different kind of knowing, features heavily in Marion's work, which leads me to wonder whether this is a form of theological romanticism. There is also a discussion around Derrida and his interpretation of negative theology which leads Marion to a rather different (and again, I would argue, idealised or romanticised) concept of the gift. This sets the tone for the rest of the book. Chapter 2 on approaching God looks at ideas of the idol and the icon: again, interesting material, as Marion refuses to categorise either of these negatively, so I wonder whether there are possible links with Latour's positive approach to idols; but there is no mention of this.

One of the key issues is whether approaching and experiencing God (chapter 3) is a purely passive process. This is clearly denied, as the act of receiving God (chapter 4) is interpreted as making distinct demands upon the individual believer: 'the process of reception, although it does not involve foreseeing, controlling or dominating, is nevertheless not at all passive. It requires discipline, effort of the will, single-minded devotion, maybe even great expense of time, money and energy' (p. 88). While I would agree that there needs to be an alternative to the traditional concept of human autonomy, I am less convinced that what is being suggested here is now the appropriate approach, as what is required should involve re-defined relationships between the human and the non-human. Again, Latour is a more promising source for this. Chapters 5 and 6 on worshipping and manifesting God take us into more explicitly Catholic theological territory, with suggestions about prayer, the role of the baptised Christian, and especially the eucharist as a sacrament of the gift.

The author concludes that it is possible that Marion's thought may challenge us to overcome some of the divisions that we tend to draw in theology, between the systematic and the practical, the biblical and the liturgical (p. 144). I remain unconvinced that his philosophical approach, so indebted to phenomenology, and his own devotional commitment to a fairly traditional understanding of Catholic theology can actually achieve that. However, if one finds this route helpful, then this introductory text is certainly of value as a point of entry into Marion's work.

*Ironstone Benefice, William Temple Foundation*
*and University of Worcester* John Reader

**K. J. Wardley, *Praying to a French God: The Theology of Jean-Yves Lacoste.*** Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. Pp. xii, 246. Hb. £60. ISBN 978-1-4724-2865-3.

Jean-Yves Lacoste is one of the key figures in the theological turn taken by French phenomenology over the last three decades. Jason Wardley's book contributes valuably to the Anglophone dissemination and reception of Lacoste's work in particular and, as it does so, sheds light on that of key allies, notably Jean-Louis Chrétien and the late Michel Henry.

The phrase 'theological turn', like *la nouvelle théologie* which has been a key influence on it, began as a mark of disapproval: just as *nouvelle* implied wanton novelty, so the term 'theological turn' was intended by Dominique Janicaud to draw attention to an abandonment of the immanent constraints held to be proper to phenomenology: as he wrote, 'phenomenology and theology make two' ('The Theological Turn of French Theology', in Janicaud et al, eds., *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn* [Fordham University Press, 2000], p. 103). Lacoste, by contrast, insists that an accurate assessment of humanity, even and especially when it is phenomenological, must take account of the human being's relationship with God. Characteristically, Lacoste argues, the individual human being fails to be fully human: his or her humanity cannot begin to be properly understood except in relationship both with others and with God: 'I am born man to become man. And I have become

it by consenting to having the site of my highest humanity and personalization in the ethical relationship, intersubjective and religious' (cited in this book on p. 164).

The focus of Lacoste's writing over the past three decades has been on a range of phenomena that he groups under the designation of liturgy. Easily misunderstood as a phenomenology of worship, his project has instead rigorously explored what it means for the human being to exist *coram Deo* (before God), to use one of his favoured terms. His interest is not in religious or liturgical experience, narrowly defined, but in the phenomena that characterise human behaviour in the poorly-mapped territory where anthropology, theology and philosophy meet. Liturgy, then, is Lacoste's term for 'the logic that presides over the encounter between God and man writ large' (*Experience and the Absolute* [Fordham University Press, 2004], p. 2), and its phenomenological investigation involves repeated assays into areas often overlooked by theology and anthropology alike: prayer, play, boredom, fatigue, silence and fantasy.

Liturgy, thus understood, is not a set of practices contained within the church building. Instead, liturgy is an act of transgression, a violation of the transcendental conditions of our existence. We can, Lacoste freely admits, do without liturgy. It is not necessary to our being in the world. Yet by participating in liturgy's anticipation of the kingdom inaugurated by Christ, we let the 'God who became a face give [us] a face' (p. 60), and touch upon an existence that is both more richly individual and more deeply social.

Wardley is a sure-footed and articulate companion through this fascinating territory. Generally, he chooses to cite Lacoste's words, sometimes to such an extent that his book reads as an assemblage of citations from the master. Nonetheless, he offers a fresh and compelling tour, expressed with a clarity and articulacy that has often eluded earlier commentators. He also provides numerous hints for further exploration, showing a command not only of Lacoste's own writings, but of their intellectual hinterland.

Sadly, this is the author's last contribution to the field. Wardley died of a brain tumour shortly before the book was published and his death deprives us of a gifted translator and interpreter of this particularly fertile

tendency in contemporary French Christianity. Since the publication of *Praying to a French God*, Lacoste has published two further books, *From Theology to Theological Thinking* (University of Virginia Press, 2014) and *L'Intuition Sacramentelle* (Ad Solem, 2015). These volumes lend further breadth and depth to his engaging intellectual project and it is a matter of great regret that Wardley is not able to help in their reception.

*Christ Church, Oxford* Edmund Newey

**M. F. Perham, *The Way of Christ-likeness: Being Transformed by the Liturgies of Lent, Holy Week and Easter.*** London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2016. Pp. x, 155. Pb. £16.99. ISBN 978-1-84825-901-0.

What is pastoral liturgy? Bishop Michael Perham's profound, elegantly written, imaginative and practical book is a model answer to the question. Through an exploration of the liturgical riches associated with the time from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost, always earthed in what is possible for the least as well as the best resourced worshipping communities, he teaches his readers that there is much more to liturgy than executing it well. The community which enters this time in the Christian year with minds, hearts and imaginations ready to be engaged by the compelling narrative of Jesus, tempted, crucified, risen and ascended, and its re-interpretation through an inheritance of prayer, music and ritual, cannot avoid emerging changed.

Deepening understanding is only part of that change, and possibly not the most important one. Perham begins personally, describing the startling joy of Easter celebrations which had a determinative effect on the future course of his life and priestly vocation. The list ends with the description of a year under the shadow of an allegation that excluded him from ministry and made him a target for the media. The agony is not masked by understated prose, but at the end, there was a sense of resurrection. It is with the authority of that experience that he is able to extend the promise of transformation to others.

There is a strong temptation to describe in detail Perham's scene-setting and masterly suggestions for staging the acts of worship associated with the great days of the season: Ash Wednesday, Palm

Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Day, Ascension Day and Pentecost. To do that, however, would be at the cost of the bigger picture, which is the way of Christ-likeness along which these events are outstanding markers. He usefully reminds us of the Holy Week experience of the fourth-century nun, Egeria, whose contribution to liturgical posterity was to keep a diary of her experience as a pilgrim in Jerusalem. The purpose is not nostalgic, but instructive. What Egeria unselfconsciously learned about lively Christian devotion by entering into services at the holy sites as if participating in the actual unfolding of Jesus's last week, left an impression powerful enough to influence liturgical development and scholarship up to the present. The 'as if' is significant. Re-enactment offers little that is durable after it is over, but 'rememorative piety' brings vividness and depth to the practice of worship.

Always in focus in Perham's exploration of Christ-likeness is the humanity which Christ was prepared to inhabit. This gives a redemptive impetus to his discussion of everything in Lent and Holy Week that speaks of suffering and death. He sees the ashes used to mark the foreheads of churchgoers on Ash Wednesday as the counterpart of the eucharistic bread and wine that are blessed and distributed in the same liturgical act, our mortality side-by-side with the anticipation of an eternal banquet. Palm Sunday invites us to consider kingship and the location of true kingly authority in Jesus. Maundy Thursday, though concentrating on the last supper and the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, nevertheless includes the demonstration of love in the washing of feet. We are urged to overcome reticence about the disorganisation and embarrassment that often attends this ceremony. They are almost proper to the extraordinary circumstances of God kneeling at the feet of creation.

There may be some surprise that Perham does not wholeheartedly endorse the practice of celebrating the first eucharist of Easter directly following a vigil, at about midnight. There are sound recommendations about choreography and atmosphere for those who find this to be best suited to the local settings, but there is also a most evocative picture offered, of a quiet, tensely expectant vigil, without new fire or paschal candle, on Easter Eve, with the first eucharist celebrated at the main

gathering on Easter morning. Nor does this book end with Easter, as the title might have led readers to expect. The celebrations continue to Pentecost, but with a change of mood on Ascension Day, when attention turns to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

This is a book with the potential, when properly used, to renew the practice of communities, and more than that, to help them re-discover a quality of joy through imaginative participation in suffering, which is talked about but not always experienced at Easter. There is an unwritten epilogue. Shortly after publication, the author was discovered to have an inoperable brain tumour, and he sadly died six months later, in April of this year. His own testimony to the Easter hope is surely the companion that any sensible pastoral liturgist would have recommended to him on such a journey.

*Church of Ireland Theological Institute, Dublin* Bridget Nichols

**K. S. Bruce and J. H. Harrison, eds., *Wrestling with the Word: Preaching Tricky Texts.*** London: SPCK, 2016. Pp. xxii, 159. Pb. £12.99. ISBN 978-0-281-07648-2.

**L. M. Cavanagh, *Waiting on the Word: Preaching Sermons that Connect People to God.*** London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2017. Pp. xii, 147. Pb. £12.99. ISBN 978-0-232-53262-3.

Here are two very different books on preaching, each with much to commend it, though perhaps for different kinds of readers. Kate Bruce and Jamie Harrison bring their diverse backgrounds and experience to a book for those who might be anxious about preaching on the most demanding kinds of texts, in times when there is some scepticism abroad about sermons. The book has an introductory section offering some theological foundations, then some sections of examples of sermons (from a wide variety of preachers, many well known) with some reflection and analysis of what they've done, and a final section with some particularly compelling texts reflecting on how it is always both demanding and fulfilling to preach on any text.

The book is also a tribute to David Day, a preacher and teacher

who has, without doubt, influenced countless preachers (including this reviewer) who may never have met him, but whose wise, down-to-earth advice has shaped their practice. The first sermon in the book comes from him and it distils much of his life's force and work, with injunctions to preachers such as, 'Task one: put into words what people know in their hearts' (p. xix) and 'Task two: put into words what God feels in his heart' (p. xx). The chapter at the end, also by Day, on the debate about application, is in some ways a brilliant subversion of the premise of the book (that there are texts that are trickier than others) and a warning that preaching is never only about explaining the text – not a lecture or information transfer, not about satisfying curiosity – but about changing lives. Day shows that preaching is about imagination, and sums this up with: 'Seeing the world differently creates a desire to live in it differently' (p. 148). What is important for preachers is that they 'offer their hearers a vision of Christ that will touch the emotions and the will as well as instructing the mind' (p. 149). These pieces by Day are a powerful reminder of how well he knew, and could teach, his art.

This meant, I suspect, that some of the other sections of the book suffered by comparison. Kate Bruce writes with the authority of someone skilled in stand-up, who knows what combination of passion, authority and craft is needed to reach an audience with a message. Some of the included sermons are powerful pieces of reflection that a reader can readily take and transfer to their own development as a preacher. John Bell enables us, with imagination and compassion, to enter into the problematic Psalm 137. Jolyon Mitchell takes us to Belshazzar's feast with the help of a Rembrandt painting and a James Bond theme-song. Miriam Swaffield uses the humour of the eye to help us into a text that we might have dismissed as too ancient and quirky to be worth attention. There are certainly themes and craft here that I shall take for my own. But there were some sermons that, perhaps by virtue of being transferred to a book, seemed perhaps too 'clever', too much about technique and style, taking too long to get from text to listener. This is a particular temptation, perhaps, for a 'tricky text', that the preacher spends too long on explanation or gets too carried away by the demands of the text before reaching out to the hearer with something that will draw them in.

It can be too tempting for our work with a difficult text to remain at the second-order level of interpretation or wrestling, with more objective kind of reflection that engages the mind, but not so much the heart. The stand-up comedian must know, I should think, that we have not long to make the connection between speaker and 'audience', and that good and powerful speech must come from testimony and not from quotation.

Perhaps inevitably with a multi-authored book, there are some sections that will appeal to some readers more than others, but there is much here to inspire and encourage preachers of all kinds, and this is an effective contribution from the British context of what is often neglected as a discipline, though a vital part of the Church's practice.

Lorraine Cavanagh's book is more reflective, spending time on the theological meaning of preaching, and offering encouragement to develop and rely not so much on rhetorical skills, as on empathy and the slow waiting of faithful listening to the text and ourselves. She testifies to the way in which people are drawn to someone who preaches with empathy, someone who has clearly known pain and who can 'connect' with people as they are. She argues for a Church, and for preachers, not driven by anxiety about numbers, but by faithfulness to God. Like Day, she turns to the power of language as that which can change the way in which we see the world. She writes, for example, that 'a good sermon will open up a new theological landscape. It will "transfigure" the way [we] see things' (p. 35). She sees preaching, in this sense, as sacramental. There is much wisdom in this book (and indeed in the quite beautiful foreword by Martyn Percy). The only puzzle lies in the apparent contrast between the rather 'declaratory' style of the book and the encouragement to use metaphor and empathy in speaking. I would have liked to see, or even better hear, how this priest preaches. If Cavanagh's preaching matches her book, then it is surely very fine.

*Taunton* Susan Durber

**P. K. Stevenson, *SCM Studyguide to Preaching.*** London: SCM Press, 2017. Pp. xii, 268. Pb. £19.99. ISBN 978-0-334-04374-4.

This is a comprehensive introductory book about preaching and I can imagine it being used to good effect by those who are training for ordination or a lay ministry of preaching. The author, the principal of South Wales Baptist College, who writes from experience of preaching and of teaching others to preach, is well placed to answer the familiar question, 'How do you do it, finding something to say each week?'

Preaching is oral communication and so books about preaching, being written communication, inevitably cannot demonstrate the spoken word. That is where the video-link on the SCM website is helpful: by providing introductions to many chapters, seeing and hearing the author gives a voice to the written words.

The sections in the book – 'Preaching Matters', 'Preparing to Preach', 'Designing Sermons', 'Preaching and Performance', 'The Preaching Life' – indicate that this book covers all the basics that a beginning preacher needs. The book is ecumenical in concept, and so reminds us that our familiar and particular context and approach to preaching should not be taken for granted. For example, the section on choosing a text is followed immediately by one on the lectionary, thus speaking to and challenging all readers, who will either find themselves faced with an early decision about which text or theme to preach from on a particular occasion to a particular congregation, or will not give that any thought but will go straight to set texts.

Time pressure when faced with an ever-expanding syllabus for ordination training means that hard choices must be made about what to include in the time available. Were I still training people, I would use this as a textbook not only to add breadth to my own material but to fill some inevitable gaps in what can be covered face-to-face. The content needs to be spread out over a few weeks, as there is too much to be taken in in one reading; so it would be better to treat this as a workbook, allowing time to comply with the injunction scattered through the book to 'pause for thought'. Taking one chapter as an example, in 'Looking for Trouble', Stevenson encourages and models listening to the text of Psalm 139,

including the difficult verses 19–22, before asking awkward questions of the familiar story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13; questions which, if pursued, might lead to a very different sermon than many people expect on Maundy Thursday. He concludes this chapter by using a verse from Jeremiah to introduce prayerful reading of scripture through *lectio divina*. A chapter like that cannot be read quickly, and models the way in which sermons emerge not just from a desk exercise with a deadline but from a prayerful life.

Stevenson harvests the fruit of recent thinking: the majority of the bibliography is post-2000, and is weighted towards American texts, most of which should be readily available in Britain. That said, the chapter on 'performing' the sermon draws primarily from British preachers and authors, which is wise, given that to have integrity, the preacher must preach from within his or her cultural context, even while drawing from wider wisdom. It is also up-to-date in its consideration of modern resources: thus Stevenson adapts 'Ten Commandments for Power-Point' to 'Reflections on those Ten Commandments for Preachers', concluding with a gem of a quote on the subject from David Day (p. 202).

There is wisdom, rather than just knowledge, embedded in the book, and food for thought here for the more experienced preacher who is willing to review his or her practice and try out new approaches. However, I suspect that the main use of this book will be with people who are beginning to preach.

*Durham Cathedral* Rosalind Brown

**G. D'Costa, E. M. Nesbitt, R. M. Pryce, R. Shelton and N. M. Slee, *Making Nothing Happen: Five Poets Explore Faith and Spirituality.*** Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. Pp. xiv, 215. Pb. £19.99. ISBN 978-1-4094-5515-8.

If poetry, as W. H. Auden proclaimed, 'makes nothing happen', then poets D'Costa, Nesbitt, Pryce, Shelton and Slee celebrate and weigh nothingness by using poetic language to re-think the apophatic and mysterious. The intimacy of poetry with prayer, incantation, ritual and liturgy, not least in moments of rhythmic silence as much as patterns

and sound, invoke what the poets collectively call a 'profoundly contemplative, morally serious regard for the world' (p. 1). In asking whether religious poetry is 'possible' in the twenty-first century, they also model an example of how to answer, as their collection emerged from close conversation and group meetings with each other through which their critical and poetic thinking was incarnated. The book is written from various Christian perspectives (D'Costa and Shelton are Roman Catholic, Slee and Pryce are Anglicans, and Nesbitt is a Quaker), and engages with the Abrahamic as well as the dharmic in its desire to bring the visionary into dialogue with quietude and stillness.

Across five chapters, the group's reflections resonate with each other through autobiographical confession, feminist theology, political spirituality, interior contemplation and creative writing. Slee's '(W)riting like a Woman: In Search of a Feminist Theological Poetics' opens the volume with a searching essay on the potential of language to overcome dualisms such as poetry and prayer, as well as masculine and feminine, commenting on both poetry (John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Elizabeth Jennings, for example), and modern feminist philosophers (Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva). For Slee, writing helps to integrate theology, poetry, spirituality and feminism through a habitual discipline manifest in the rhythmic precision of poems, apparent in her 'How to Pray', in which she petitions the reader to 'hold an object in your hands / a stone / a cup / a length of beads' (p. 32). Shelton's 'Steady until Sundown: Searching for the Holy' follows Slee's deft poetry with a commentary on her own religious journey through the divine cries of Allen Ginsberg, Walter Benjamin, Adam Zagajewski and Emily Dickinson. Recalling personal experiences of prayer, the writing process and teaching writing in prisons, she combines a sharp theoretical assessment of the potential of poetry to subvert as well as praise, with meditations on her own poetry of urban spaces (such as 'When Pigeons Fall') and how to find the mystical in the ordinary (captured in her 'Swedenborg's Drains').

In 'Taking Form: On Becoming a Christian Poet', Pryce addresses the very question of what it means to be a Christian poet, and roots his creativity in the same divine grace that Caedmon conjured in his Old English *Hymn*. Drawing on scripture's wealth of poetry, from the Psalms

to Revelation, Pryce envisions God's word as 'the life of God among us, at work in us and through us' (p. 88), a generative, *bricolage*-like language at once prophetic and pastoral, symbolic and particular. Thus his elegy 'Lazarus Blossom' is at once a transformative insight into the hope of resurrection and also a personal tribute to Bishop Peter Walker; while 'Bring Rest Sweet Dreaming Child' observes the joy of the incarnation in a musical setting that Pryce used at midnight mass when serving as a parish priest. Nesbitt's 'Where Poems Come From: Spirituality, Emotion and *Poiesis*' re-thinks the same questions as Pryce, by turning the spotlight on *poiesis* (doing and making), *spiritus* (breath and life) and *emovere* (the moving out of emotion from within). Sensitively bringing together European classicism, Anglican biblicism and her familial and professional connections with Hinduism and Sikhism, she considers the reception of different forms of poetry through form, music and image. Elegantly moving from William Blake to Emily Brontë, Ted Hughes to Edward Thomas, Nesbitt relates poetic creation to an attentive mindfulness of the world that connects her both to the particulars of the external (the musical scores of birds) and the community of the internal (through her membership of her Quaker community).

As with the preceding essays, Nesbitt concludes her essay with poems (notably 'Shraddh' and 'But What Is Poetry?') that reverberate back into her and Pryce's sense of language as a call to the creator, and forward to D'Costa's joyous belief in the revelatory force of poetry to move readers emotionally and ontologically. In 'The Miracle of Poetry: Divine and Human Creativity', he echoes the writing of his fellow contributors by observing that words 'change the feel of reality' and enact 'a kind of miracle in perception, engendering a new conception' (p. 176). Absolving the reader of the at times burdensome task of finding the miraculous in poetry, D'Costa encourages the reader to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, the religious in the secular, the sacramental in the natural. As he writes in 'Zen Buddhist Temple Visit', the 'space of grace' opened up by zen offers love to every meditative onlooker (his example is a Catholic priest), regardless of religious affiliation. The gentle faith in each of these chapters will be welcomed by readers who are drawn to the spiritual through poetry, facilitating a scholarly fascination with ideas alongside an

everyday mysticism that keeps the personal and the subjective in relation to the communal and the sacred.

*University of Warwick* Emma Mason

**N. T. Wright, *Finding God in the Psalms: Sing, Pray, Live.*** London: SPCK, 2014. Pp. viii, 200. Pb. £9.99. ISBN 978-0-281-06989-7.

In this short, popular and highly readable book, Tom Wright invites us to pray and live the Psalms. He addresses the urgent task of helping Christians to re-connect to, and re-inhabit, the 'spiritual root system' (p. 5) that underpins the Bible's hymnbook. In doing so, he adds his plea to a number of other scholars, priests and writers (most notably Walter Brueggemann, Bill Bellinger and William Brown) who have been calling for a renewed interest in the Psalms in recent decades, in response to the gradual decline of both individual and corporate use of the Psalms in Christian worship. He writes enthusiastically about his own deep relationship with the Psalms since childhood, describing at the end of the book the personal significance of a number of psalms, as an illustration and encouragement to others to make space for the Psalms in their personal prayer life.

He begins by proclaiming the *transformative* nature of the Psalms: 'This book, then, is an unashamed encouragement for all Christians to weave the Psalms into the very heart of their devotional life and to expect to find as they do this that the way they look out at the world will change bit by bit' (p. 26). The task, he suggests, is that we need to learn how to inhabit the Psalms, how to see the world through the lens of these poetic masterpieces. As creatures of time, space and matter, our worldview can be transformed by breathing with the Psalms, and Wright uses these three categories to structure his reflections: the intersection between our time and God's time; our space and God's space; and the material world and creation as it will become.

Approaching the Psalter with these three lenses results in quite a different reading from those currently on offer. There are some that find a 'way in' to the Psalter through a focus on genre (for example, Bellinger); or through understanding the canonical shape of the Psalter as

a whole (for example, Brueggemann); or through paying close attention to the Psalter's metaphorical landscape (for example, Brown). As one might expect, Wright provides an explicitly christological focus on the Psalms, firmly embedded in his understanding of the whole canonical biblical narrative: his endeavour to help the reader inhabit the world of the Psalms is therefore strongly coloured by a Christian perspective. This is, again, rather different to the approach taken by most contemporary commentators on the Psalms, who tend to read the Psalms on their own terms. This latter approach avoids Christian language of 'fulfilment' (often in danger of being understood as supersessionism) or indeed explicitly christological interpretations of psalms. Wright does well in the space available to navigate between the ancient use of poems, hymns and prayers in scripture and how they speak today in the light of Christ.

Some may find Wright's categories of time, space and matter somewhat alien to the Psalter's dominant concerns and imagery, and at times it seems that certain psalms are squeezed into Wright's theological schema rather than being allowed to present their own 'worldview'. However, once one adjusts to Wright's perspective, there is much to be gained from standing at the intersections that he describes. A number of psalms bear witness to the powerful and saving actions of God in the past, the joy and pain of life in the present, and fears and hopes for the future. Such is human experience in the 'now-but-not-yet'. Considering holy 'space' or 'place', Wright takes the reader through a range of psalms that celebrate the temple in Jerusalem, before transitioning through to the place of Torah, and then Christ and the Holy Spirit. He concludes with a turn towards psalms that celebrate creation and God as creator, and those that anticipate the new creation.

I would not want to recommend this book to the exclusion of others on the Psalms, but it certainly offers a fresh and complementary companion to a biblical book that, despite its beauty and transformative power, is in danger of being squeezed out of worship by its apparent inaccessibility or irrelevance.

*Westminster College, Cambridge* Alison Gray

**J. Barr, *Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr*,** ed. J. Barton, 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013-14. Pp. xxxiv, 568; xii, 619; xii, 798. Hb. £355. ISBN 978-0-19-826192-6.

James Barr (1924–2006), former Regius professor of Hebrew at Oxford, and holder of several other distinguished positions, was without doubt one of the twentieth century's leading Old Testament scholars. Despite a range of well-known and much discussed book-length publications during his prolific life, it may be that he was quintessentially an essayist, in true British (or indeed Oxford) tradition. Typically, he would isolate a specific issue, cut through the web of competing interpretations that surrounded it, lay waste the bedevilling ill-founded assertion and counter-assertion, and withdraw, job done, with the scholarly landscape cleared of one more blot. Occasionally, he would suggest a different view or propose a particular solution, but this was not generally Barr's style. As an essayist, he was the dismantler of presumption, the accuser of the ill-informed, the highlighter of deviation from the path of tried and trusted critical exegesis.

Essayists are always well served by collections of essays, and none more handsomely than Barr, whose *oeuvre* is here amassed in nigh-on definitive fashion by one of his successors as the Oriel (and Laing) professor of the interpretation of holy scripture, also at Oxford: John Barton. For the price of a month's mortgage in some parts of the country, one can now obtain in one set Barr's 'collected essays': three volumes; over two thousand pages; 135 pieces; fourteen thematic sub-sections of hugely varying lengths (one section consists of a single twelve-page essay; while another has twenty-nine pieces in over five hundred pages). The whole is preceded by a tremendously helpful overview, 'James Barr Remembered', by Barton and Ernest Nicholson, developed from their British Academy memoir, and offering a 22-page analysis of his major books, interwoven with academic biography. Each of the three volumes is also served by a brief introduction from Barton, of four, three and two pages respectively, warmly appreciative and pointing out selected highlights in the pages that follow. Each volume is furnished with a single index, combining name and subject references. It seems churlish to

suggest that all of this is lacking in any way, but it is perhaps surprising that a full bibliography of Barr's own work is not included.

At the beginning of the first book, Barton tells us that Barr himself was in the process of amassing something like these three volumes when he died. The resulting architecture of the set is thus largely Barr's, and works as follows. Volume 1 attends to the broadest range of interpretative issues, and is more than half given over to part 1, 'Biblical Interpretation and Biblical Theology', the topic of a good deal of his book-length work too, in one way or another. As Barton notes, theology was always an interest of Barr's, his widespread reputation as an exegetical critic notwithstanding. Of the twenty-two essays located here, five were originally anthologised in Barr's *Explorations in Theology* (SCM Press, 1980; US title *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* [Westminster Press, 1980]). All seven of the essays of that book are here across the first and second volumes, though a little oddly the full publication details of all the pieces note this fact in only five cases. Volume 1 continues with six pieces on the 'authority of scripture', and then more of a miscellany of broader theological-religious concerns: on Judaism (one piece); natural theology (five pieces); and 'environing religions' (three pieces, as disparate as that rather odd non-title suggests).

Volume 2 turns to biblical studies. Here, we find twenty-one pieces on the Old Testament (a couple of which are book reviews), four on the New Testament, reflecting the fact that Barr was once a New Testament professor in Montreal, six on 'methods and implications' (ranging over allegory, typology, Childs's canonical approach, even structuralism – arguably one of the most interesting sub-collections of all), and then three further sections that each witness to a particular and less common area of interest. One is 'biblical chronology', five papers that evince Barr's extraordinary ability to track complex mixtures of insight and generalisation back to their sources, and weed out the useful from the idiosyncratic. The piece on Ussher's dating of 4004 BC is a particularly lucid analysis. A second concerns fundamentalism, of which Barr was a persistent critic. This is an argument that he tended to fight as if the future of Western civilisation depended upon it, although it is a different matter whether what has now arisen as mainstream religious fundamentalism really has much to do with the interpretation of religious texts

other than in a few soundbite cases. A final section consists of nine analyses of critical scholars, often in obituary mode.

The weightiest volume is the third, on linguistics and translation, or most often, on Hebrew. Here, we find fourteen papers on 'ancient translations' (including further book reviews), three on modern translations (launching broadsides at the New English Bible in particular), and finally no fewer than twenty-seven on Hebrew and Semitic languages. There is perhaps a sense here that Barr really got to flex his intellectual muscles most when cutting through claim and counter-claim about Hebrew and its workings. At any rate, for those with Hebrew interests, the papers here are especially illuminating.

I close with two brief reflections on this mighty feast. One criticism often levelled at Barr was that he preferred to argue and dismantle, rather than offer constructive proposals. Editor Barton thinks that this is unfair (in passing, I suspect that Barr's frequent unfortunately acerbic tone does not help his case here). Nevertheless, the collected essay format tends to add to the strange sense that Barr was often better at articulating disagreement than substantive accord, and in particular – as it often seemed to follow from this – we are left with Barr's protestation that he '*assumed* normal exegetical procedure' (vol. 1, p. xvi, Barr's emphasis), which he said of his first book, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford University Press, 1961), but which might be said of much of this work. The downside of this approach is that it proves harder than one might have wished to discern just what constitutes 'normal exegetical procedure'. My guess is that this assumption made more sense fifty years ago than it does now. Barr seemed able to critique misplaced theological construction (as he saw it) as deduced from scripture, and was often happy to say that this need not be a critique of the theological claim itself. The Bible is not theology, *tout court*, and cannot bear the weight of being so, as per his critique of fundamentalism. All this is true. But it is not really very clear how Barr thought that any theological proposal might find warrant in scripture, if indeed it did at all, and so the project of having a genuine discussion about the appropriate appeal to the Bible for theological purposes never really gets off the ground. All in all, that feels like a long-term missed opportunity.

Secondly, we have here three volumes entitled 'Bible and Interpretation', attending to this compendium of written texts that makes up 'the Bible'. But in my judgment, there is a rather odd lacuna throughout: what difference does it make that the language that we encounter in the Bible is language encountered as written text? Barr was strong on questions of what it means to talk of being 'literal' (and to disentangle this category from being equated to 'factual'), but not so much on what it means to be textual in the first place. As a result, questions of textual interpretation are persistently pushed towards models and insights drawn from the use of language in straightforward communicative/oral contexts. 'This is how language works', he effectively said, illustrating with respect to Ethiopic or some other tongue, and he was right about spoken language. The missing category is how words are caught up in webs of re-signifying re-contextualisation through their appearance in bounded sets of written texts (books, Bible, etc.). This is a fact about reading – call it intertextuality, or just observe how authors drop echoes of other texts – that makes a difference. In the end, Barr's semantics of biblical language is a semantics of language that happens to occur in texts that happen to be in the Bible, and this point (as far as I can see) makes no difference to the linguistic analysis. One need not be entirely persuaded by postmodernism to see that it does at least recognise that the rhetorical warp and woof of textual cross-referring and allusion holds some of the cards. Sadly, as a result of this lacuna, we do not end up being taught how to play a better hand.

Two thousand pages after beginning, this reviewer is two years older, vastly more informed than before, a little dispirited by the pervasive sense of critique, very much wishing that a few of the 135 papers here had set out the constructive paths that an interpreter of the Bible might take, or at a minimum pointed to some others who had taken them, and thinking overall that there can be fewer finer educations about the past 50–60 years of biblical (Old Testament) scholarship to be had than apprenticing oneself to Barr's own wide and wondrous reading – as long as what you want is a mechanic rather than an engine.

*Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham* Richard Briggs

**A. R. Angel, *Playing with Dragons: Living with Suffering and God.*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014. Pp. xviii, 120. Pb. £16.50. ISBN 978-0-7188-9348-4.

In *Playing with Dragons*, Andrew Angel examines the connection between suffering and language of mythical monsters. He points out that most books that consider suffering do so by trying to give a theological explanation to the problem of theodicy. This is not what Angel attempts to do. Instead, he uses texts about dragons in the Bible to find out how to suffer 'well'. He argues that the use of metaphors about dragons can help to express faith in God in the midst of suffering. Angel's assumption is that a person who is going through tough times is uninterested in the underlying theology. Instead, his phrase 'playing with dragons' refers to using metaphors of non-existing monsters as a way of describing the tension of having faith in an almighty God while going through pain and suffering.

Angel gives an overview of the important 'dragons' (meaning mythical monsters) in the Hebrew Bible as well as contemporary non-Jewish literature. He starts with the non-biblical stories. Thereafter, he discusses several texts in the Hebrew Bible that were influenced by these pre-existing myths. Angel argues that the ancient Israelites, as well as their neighbours, were well aware that dragons did not exist, but used the term to describe their experience of suffering. This is similar to how Angel thinks that we should use the metaphor today.

A large part of Angel's investigation into biblical 'dragons' is through the book of Job. Job paints a somewhat angry picture of God, where God is more interested in crushing the dragons than rescuing God's people. Angel's exploration then continues into the New Testament as he looks at a few stories in the gospels. These stories provide a framework for Jesus's attitude towards suffering. When the disciples are in danger or face suffering, Jesus encourages them to see beyond their circumstances and to trust in Jesus's power to subdue the dangers. Angel argues that God takes people through suffering in order to teach them to trust God.

The Hebrew Bible seems to depict monsters as playthings for God. God created them and is powerful enough to defeat them. Angel claims that

this type of language can help to articulate hope. It can allow Christians who experience suffering to live faithfully in the belief that God is good and omnipotent. This is why, Angel argues, the Bible invites its readers to 'play with dragons'.

Angel's case is interesting. He stays true to his aim of articulating a language for people who are in the midst of suffering. However, even though the book fulfils what Angel set out to do, I find it unsatisfactory. First of all, Angel creates a dichotomy between finding theoretical answers and being spiritual. I do not agree with his assumption that a person who is experiencing suffering is uninterested in the deeper problem of theodicy. Angel himself admits that the kind of language and storytelling that he discusses is insufficient for people who seek theological answers (pp. 31–2). I would challenge him not to dismiss the theological questions as unimportant, but to allow people to wrestle with them. Second, in using the language of 'dragons', he fails to remove responsibility from God. Either the 'dragon' is a metaphor for God or God created the dragon and is a passive observer of the destruction of the said 'dragon'. Angel, then, portrays a God who is the cause of suffering while also asking readers to put their trust in, and be excited about, God. His approach might cause an even bigger faith crisis for sufferers who experience no divine intervention. After all, the stories from the Bible that Angel references have 'happy endings', but that does not always happen. Therefore I would encourage readers to continue to seek answers to their questions after finishing this book. This book may be helpful, but perhaps only in combination with other literature.

*University of Exeter* Marina Hannus

**J. I. Holdsworth, *Conversations with the New Testament.*** London: SCM Press, 2014. Pp. viii, 135. Pb. £14.99. ISBN 978-0-334-04413-0.

John Holdsworth attempts something very brave in this book. He aims to write an introduction to the New Testament which foregoes the perceived dryness of the format and tone of standard critical introductions, in order to make the New Testament accessible for interested Christians. In ten chapters, he introduces various topics in the New Testament through

the conversation of a local church learning group. The basic format of the book is that in each chapter, the conversation of Ken, Abi, Tim and Alice leads them to discuss matters which touch on aspects of New Testament criticism. Holdsworth then gives the briefest of overviews of the critical appreciation of the subjects on which the conversation partners touch. When the conversation and overview are over, Holdsworth recommends some books to follow up the subject discussed, and most chapters then end with a bibliography.

As an example, Holdsworth has his imaginary learning group talk about gospel healing miracles. Through this, he introduces synoptic study and the reliability of the gospels, and source, redaction, form and narrative criticism. He offers simple overviews of each subject with text boxes on many pages, and exercises for readers to think through. He recommends further reading. Holdsworth deliberately uses a style which tries to engage the reader by appealing to questions that she or he might ask. He avoids giving the history of the critical questions or the development of the discipline.

This project is worthy and bold, but its execution does not achieve its aim in the judgment of this reviewer. The pedagogical model underpinning the book is unhelpful. In each chapter, Holdsworth offers a very brief overview of many subjects often from only one perspective. Where more than one perspective is offered, the discussion is too brief to enable the reader to understand the debate. Important cultural and historical data for understanding the New Testament are largely missing. Therefore, the reader never gains the skills or knowledge to answer intelligently the questions raised in the book. Enquiring students will probably find this frustrating. Others will simply fail to learn.

The book is also inaccurate at points about basic New Testament data. Discussing gospel materials, for example, Holdsworth offers a 'complete list of *ego eimi* [I am] sayings' (p. 43): John 6.35, 8.12, 9.5, 10.7, 10.14, 11.25, 14.6 and 15.1. To complete even the 'I am' sayings with a predicate ('I am' + the bread of life/vine, etc.), he ought to have included John 6.41, 6.48, 6.51, 8.18, 10.9, 10.11 and 15.5. This does not include the 'I am' sayings which take no predicate, such as John 8.28, 8.58 and 13.19. Inaccuracies like this only mislead students and set them up for having to

unlearn these mistakes later on. Given that this book seeks to introduce theology in a way that will not put people off, this is unfortunate.

The reading lists are also unlikely to achieve the aim of the book. The tone and content of the book are basic to the point of being suitable for year eight or nine students in schools. There is nothing wrong with this in itself. However, it creates a mismatch with the follow-up reading which is at least level four (first year of university study). The readers for whom the chapters are suitably pitched will find the suggested reading extremely difficult.

This book highlights a very important challenge facing those who teach the New Testament to ministerial students. They want an intelligent introduction which addresses their ministerial concerns. However, I am not convinced that providing a dumbed-down version of the results of critical study of the New Testament meets this need. Questions arising from their own religious experience lead students into study. This book might have been better conceived as an approach or introduction to the New Testament from the perspective of religious experience (possibly taking as its starting point Luke Timothy Johnson's work in this area).

I have every sympathy for the author in his desire behind this book. However, I find myself unable to recommend it.

*Burgess Hill* Andrew Angel

**R. Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality.*** London: SPCK, 2016. Pp. x, 238. Pb. £12.99. ISBN 978-0-281-07516-4.

The American Franciscan Richard Rohr is a widely-known and widely-loved teacher and writer on the spiritual life; and this book will be warmly welcomed by those who know his work, and by others too. He seeks to unite the study of scripture with the experience and practice of Christian spirituality. He writes accessibly, and what he says reflects the depth of both his pastoral and spiritual wisdom. The book is a revision of taped talks first given in 1973; and just occasionally, the transfer from tapes to word processor comes adrift, as in the delightful 'pious dribble' for 'pious drivel' (p. 94), and the mysterious 'abd suerly' (*sic*) on page 197. There are many wise and prophetic reflections, such as the warning that

all religion possesses a 'natural tendency toward arrogant self-assurance' (p. 19). He argues that 'what we […] see in the prophetic books is the clear emergence of critical consciousness and interior struggle in Israel' (p. 74). He says that 'we really are socially contagious human beings, but we settle for "human doings". It is at the *being* level that life is most vitally transformed' (p. 64, Rohr's emphasis) – hence the importance for Catholics of the real presence at the eucharist. And that transformation is accomplished as we become more Christlike: 'God wants *useable instruments* who will carry the mystery, the weight of glory and the burden of sin simultaneously, who can bear the darkness and the light, who can hold the paradox of incarnation […] just as Jesus did' (pp. 35–6, Rohr's emphasis).

Some, however, may feel that Rohr's fondness for broad (if often visionary) statements reflects a problem with the continuing popularity of 'spirituality': a lack of grounding or rootedness, both in the harsh realities of the human condition and in the sheer *otherness* of so many biblical texts. Thus he tells us that 'God's chosenness [of Israel] is for the sake of communicating chosenness to everybody else' (p. 43); but this doesn't do justice to the awkward challenge presented by some of the more exclusivist texts in the Bible. Thus (p. 44) he commends for reflection the beautiful words of Deuteronomy 7.7–10 ('it was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you', etc.), but doesn't mention the far harder 7.2 ('and when the Lord your God gives [the existing occupants of the Promised Land] over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them'). Too often, he gives sweeping assertions that don't bear close examination: thus he says that in the Bible, 'whenever an angel or God breaks into human life, the first words are invariably, "Do not be afraid"' (p. 9). But Moses is 'afraid' at the burning bush, and is simply told to take off his shoes (Exodus 3.5–6) – his fear is an integral part of human response to theophany. Rohr has some profound insights into the human condition; but these, too, are weakened by unverifiable generalisations. Thus at one point, he says, 'I would define suffering very simply as "whenever you are not in control"' (p. 25). But this won't do: when you surrender yourself in loving self-giving to another, or to a piece of music,

you are not in control, but you are not suffering. Elsewhere, he says that 'our English word *person* comes from the word selected to describe the "persons" of the Trinity, who were seen as an endless capacity for relationship' (p. 54). But the English word derives from the Latin *persona*, which literally means an actor's mask; and it was a very long theological journey before the persons of the Trinity came to be seen as 'an endless capacity for relationship'.

It is easy to be pedantic, and hence to miss the undoubted richness and breadth of Rohr's writing. But there is a real danger of reading back into ancient texts, or even contemporary experience, what we would like to find there: thus Rohr tells us that 'El Shaddai' means 'warm-breasted One' (p. 69). The Hebrew *shaddai*, a word used for God, could come from *shad* (a breast), but is more likely to come from the verb *shadad*, to overpower or destroy. Augustine (*Exposition 2 of Psalm 68*) catches perfectly both the spirit of Rohr's book and the challenge that it offers us:

> we need to consider the reality, and not only the words [of scripture]; we must seek the mystery concealed here, knock at the door of the secret meaning, enter through the torn veil of the temple, and see the holy sign [*sacramentum*] hidden under both the spoken word and the event.

*Kirkcudbright* Gordon Mursell

**D. F. Ford, *The Drama of Living: Becoming Wise in the Spirit.*** London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2014. Pp. xviii, 216. Pb. £12.99. ISBN 978-1-84825-538-8.

Almost twenty years after the publication of David Ford's *The Shape of Living* (Fount, 1997), we are now offered a sequel, with the hint that a third (and possibly others) may follow. As in the first work, *The Drama of Living* draws extensively on the poetry of his lifelong friend and conversation partner, Micheal O'Siadhail, biblical writings – in particular, the gospel of John (Ford is currently working on a commentary on the gospel) – and the experience of life, spoken about here more personally and autobiographically than in the earlier volume, as Ford offers testimony to key relationships and critical incidents within his life (friendship,

marriage, parenthood, colleagueship, the adventure of faith, prayer and scholarship, loss and bereavement). All of these are woven together in pursuit of wisdom: a practical, earthed and embodied phronesis that takes root and finds expression in daily life. Whereas the primary metaphor in the first book was the tactile one of shaping, in this work the dominant metaphor is that of the drama of living, utilising notions of faith as performance, the significance of characterisation and plot within human life, rehearsal as well as improvisation within the givenness of particular scripts, and so on.

This is a highly ambitious project, for all the accessibility of Ford's writing, both in what it attempts to do and how it attempts to do it. The scope of the book is vast: core themes cover the public and ordinary dramas of living (chapter 1); learning wisdom in our pluralistic world (chapter 2); the centrality of face-to-face relationships (chapter 3); practices of re-reading and rehearsing, and the habits that shape our lives (chapter 4); friendship, sex, God, and other aspects of love (chapter 5); how we cope with time, illness, aging and dying (chapter 6); and, finally, a reflection on one of O'Siadhail's enduring poetic metaphors, 'Madam Jazz' (chapter 7). Each of these themes could, of course, provide material for many tomes; and each chapter encompasses huge terrain, moving swiftly from the personal to the public, the political to the ecclesiological, the cultural to the mystical – and back again – sometimes in rather abrupt transition. Part of Ford's purpose is precisely to mirror the ways in which our daily lives mesh and clash with just such extremes of drama and ordinariness, art and mud, trauma and tenderness, and to suggest that any viable wisdom for living will have to find ways of holding them together.

If the scope of the book is vast, so is its theological methodology. This is a work of complex interplay of many strands and voices, of both inter-textuality and intra-textuality, as Ford reads between as well as within diverse religious traditions. Core images resonate and repeat in a variety of guises, and Ford's relish of words echoes his savouring of experience. He carries his learning and wide experience lightly, moving easily between continents, religious traditions, thought systems and works of art and literature. He has a penchant for alliterative lists, which do some of the work of condensation that his breadth of approach

requires. He is also a consummate teacher who can select the *mot juste* and the apt illustration, drawing readers into his pursuit of a 'richer, deeper, and more intense engagement in life' (p. 85) through his infectious enthusiasm and playful seriousness. Above all, this is a work of expansive, rather than defensive or reductive, theology, evoking a spirituality of what Ford calls '*everything ands*' rather than '*nothing buts*', that seeks to speak truthfully about tragedy *and* joy, 'chance and contingency *and* also novelty, improvisation, and good surprises' (pp. 178–9, Ford's emphases).

If I have a query about the book, it is that the very facility of Ford's writing and the apparent ease with which he moves from theme to theme, and from one source to the next, could lead to the kind of 'consumerist' reading which he critiques in chapter 4: a cursory and superficial approach to the text that seeks to extract what is useful or entertaining before moving quickly on. For this text to do the work that it sets out to do, an altogether slower, more ruminative reading is required, marked by patience, puzzlement, prayer and repetition: what Paul Griffiths describes as 'reading religiously' (p. 85). If readers are prepared for this kind of dense, close reading, they may be rewarded with an increased capacity for wiser living of the kind that Ford so well describes.

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**W. Vander Lugt and T. A. Hart, eds., *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith.*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015. Pp. xviii, 278. Pb. £21. ISBN 978-0-7188-9384-2.

If you are a library, you should buy this book. If you are a person, you should not. *Theatrical Theology* is the product of an international conference hosted by the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at the University of St Andrews in August 2012. According to the introduction, 'the purpose of this conference was to demonstrate the fruitfulness for constructive conversation between Christian theology and theatre' (p. xv). To borrow the theatrical conceit, the book is not like a coherent play but rather like a series of linked sketches, some of which

work and some of which don't. The subtitle gives a clue to an inherent falsity: *perform* is simply not the right verb to describe expressions of faith.

*Theatrical Theology* never really overcomes this faulty premise. If you suppose that the 'constructive conversation' of this book includes such considerations as the drama of the liturgy, you will be disappointed. It is rather a demonstration of contemporary academia attempting to make bricks from straw. Repeatedly we are offered the over-exaggeration of one small point into an entire chapter, far out of proportion to its actual worth and thus very like the traditional definition of a heresy, that is to say, a narrowing of vision.

In Charles Williams's novel *The Place of the Lion*, Damaris Tighe nearly destroys herself by ignoring the essence of her academic research, the understanding of ultimate realities through concepts, in favour of a satisfying intellectual framework for the material. The worst quarter of *Theatrical Theology* adopts precisely this postmodern attitude, which is to ignore 'the Thing Itself' in favour of 'approaches to the Thing', a retreat into self-defined bunkers.

This is reinforced by a tendency to define a word as suitable for a particular purpose and to build an argument from there, a linguistic legerdemain that is clever but rarely wise. A vacuous utterance is no less vacuous simply for being called prophetic. Theological liberalism is one thing; this sort of Emperor's New Clothes should be another.

The most successful chapters are those in which the author successfully restrains these impulses and elucidates a theological concern through a facet of theatre. In a highly intelligent and challenging essay (assuming you overlook the kindergarten economics), the late Marilyn McCord Adams addresses our participation in the liturgy, the extent to which we are *passive* recipients or active performers, and how closely this resembles the role of a theatre audience. Tim Gorringe draws on Peter Brook's seminal work on the role of the director; it is no original idea to equate the director with God, but the manner in which Gorringe analogises the process of rehearsal with that of creation is sufficiently thought-provoking to justify the return to familiar ground.

Ivan Khovacs and David Brown both explore the concepts of comedy

and tragedy, which are particularly illuminating in the context of Greek, that is to say, pre-Christian, theatre. Among the contributors, Brown is to be commended for his blessedly clear and intelligent chapter, reminding the reader that God, being ultimate reality, 'works much more widely than simply through his followers' (p. 275). Khovacs's re-negotiation of tragedy through the work of Balthasar and Barth represents, and indeed re-presents, Gethsemane as the fulcrum of a tragedy in which the audience is invited to participate, and thus to re-define the genre.

There are also worthy attempts to yoke the transformative power of the gospel – at least potentially – with that of theatre. One can leave the theatre 'changed' in the same way as one could be changed by an encounter with Christ, either within or without the Church. However, it doesn't take very long before the two can no longer plausibly be considered in parallel. Insofar as theatre and scripture both pose moral challenges, this line of argument remains persuasive; but theatre is not religion, however much we stretch the metaphor, and eventually each must be treated discretely. There is nothing wrong with either line of enquiry, but one becomes increasingly suspicious that the horses are being ridden in tandem simply because the book commission said so, as a 'visionary' director might saddle her actor with a tic that distorts the performance.

There is sufficient good within this book to make it a worthy addition to an institutional library, where it may come into its own for students and researchers. But a real person could save the money and go to *King Lear* instead.

*Lancing College* Nick Baldock

**R. A. Ellis, *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion, and Sport.*** Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014. Pp. x, 323. Pb. £24. ISBN 978-0-7188-9371-2.

**L. Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport.*** London: SCM Press, 2014. Pp. xxii, 130. Pb. £19.99. ISBN 978-0-334-04418-5.

For years, numerous scholars have engaged the question: how does sport embody the attributes of religion? Theologians Robert Ellis and Lincoln Harvey address this topic with books that see sport as a critical theological resource. While the books differ in nuance, they concur on the broader suggestion that a robust theological engagement with sport, whether as a participant or spectator, is essential for developing a holistic theological understanding of Christianity in the twenty-first century.

The two books share similar formats. In the first half of each book, the authors provide an overview of the history of sport, beginning with its role in ancient Greece and Rome. Sport in antiquity was frequently associated with religious rituals (such as the Olympics in ancient Greece), and the authors discuss the early Church's largely negative view of sport because of its idolatry and violence. Summarising changing historical attitudes towards sport in the medieval and early modern periods, the authors cite the rise of nineteenth-century 'muscular Christianity' as a critical shift in the way in which sport was viewed by church leaders. This era signalled an embrace of athletic competition as essential to Victorian ideals of 'Christian manhood'; it was also an era in which modern conceptions of sport (especially team sports such as cricket, football and baseball) took on their current significance. The establishment of clearly defined rules for playing certain sports (such as rugby in the United Kingdom and baseball in the United States) accompanied the emergence of a relatively modern phenomenon: the sports fan. Ellis postulates that the decline in church attendance in the UK by the mid-nineteenth century correlates with the rise of sports fandom – a reality that would further explode in the twentieth century when media such as television made it possible for millions of fans to view sporting events live. Placing their analysis of sport in a transatlantic context, both authors note similarities in how sport functioned historically in both the UK and the US, while Ellis

observes how sport in the US took on the qualities of a civil religion. An example used by Ellis is baseball, a sport long viewed by Americans as an example of their nation's political exceptionalism, despite the fact that it largely derived from British games such as rounders.

In the second parts of their books, the authors analyse how sport embodies theological significance for Christians. Drawing on the work of cultural historian Johan Huizinga, they note the importance of play, seeing this as a fundamental category for understanding human freedom and as a means for the individual to connect with God. Although both books note the difference between play and sport, Ellis makes the stronger case for seeing sport as a 'bureaucratised' form of play. This reality not only distinguishes participants from the broader population on the basis of athletic skill, but reflects the economic commodification of modern sport – embodied by fan devotion and capitalist marketing.

It would be fairer to say that Ellis and Harvey are more interested in showing how sport embodies theological characteristics, than in developing fully formed theologies of sport. Harvey is mostly concerned with equipping churches to grapple with the ramifications of sport for modern life. While warning about the dangers of substituting sport for religion, he notes that sport is in some ways analogous to liturgy. As in worship, 'when we play sport, we are celebrating our freely determined form as these particular creatures through a freely determined rule-governed unnecessary-but-meaningful activity. Through this radically contingent activity, we reverberate with ourselves in the integrity of our freedom' (Harvey, p. 93). At its best, sport points to the fullness of our God-given humanity both to play and to participate in God's created order. 'Worship is the liturgical celebration of who God is. Sport is the liturgical celebration of who we are' (Harvey, p. 108).

While Ellis embraces many aspects of Harvey's analysis, especially the important role of play as a symbol of human freedom, his theological synthesis centres upon a broader range of theological questions than that of Harvey. Drawing on theologians of culture, such as Paul Tillich, Ellis connects the drama of sport, including winning and losing, to larger eschatological themes of God's triumph over sin and life after death. Arguing that sport acts as a means of assessing God's activity in the

world, Ellis notes in his conclusion that sport is a vehicle by which 'grace may be known even when it cannot be named' (Ellis, p. 290). For both Ellis and Harvey, the ways in which sport embodies forms, rituals and human emotions of elation and heartbreak, reflect the larger struggles that Christians face in their daily lives. Sport reflects our finitude, but also points beyond our finitude, serving as a means for understanding faith.

Sometimes, talk about the relationship between sport and religion can become overly sentimental. While Ellis and Harvey write out of a deeply grounded Christian faith, their books recognise the dangers of co-opting sport as a substitute for Christianity. Yet the commonality that makes the two books compelling reading is that the authors not only are excellent scholars whose works are grounded in the study of theology and sport; they are unapologetically sport fans who know through personal experience the cycles that come to those whose devotion to a team often embodies the very human feelings of disappointment, loss and, in rarefied circumstances, joy that comes from winning. Readers might disagree on how Ellis and Harvey tie sport to Christian theology. However, no one can deny that both theologians write from a grounding in knowledge and a passionate love for their subject.

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**J. Miller, ed., *Speaking of Faith: The Winchester Dialogues.*** London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2016. Pp. x, 229. Pb. £20. ISBN 978-1-84825-920-1.

Winchester Cathedral had the commendable idea of hosting a series of interviews with leading public figures known to have some connection to the Christian faith. These included politicians such as Douglas Hurd, Frank Field, John Wakeham and Maria Miller; reporters Mark Tulley, John Simpson and Jon Snow; and the dean of Winchester, the bishop of Winchester, Rowan Williams and P. D. James. John Miller, the interviewer, allowed each of them to answer questions at some length about their job and in particular the countries with which they were most familiar, and has edited the contributions into this book.

The problem is that, for a book entitled *Speaking of Faith*, very little

is revealed of the faith of the contributors. There are some interesting passages in the book as people describe their work and encounters but, without becoming like John Humphrys, the questioner really needed to be more pressing and probing, with shorter answers. Even given the reticence of the British to speak about their personal faith in public, more could have been brought out. John Wakeham, for example, a highly experienced, wise and witty fixer in both the Commons and the Lords, is of course interesting on his time there, but he lost his first wife Roberta in the Brighton bombing and he himself fell four floors and was dug out seven hours later. 'It was not a happy time', as he says with characteristic British understatement (p. 89). Without being intrusive, I would have liked a little more on how he coped with that terrible time and if his faith helped him at all. Similarly, P. D. James, before she found fame, had quite a tough life, and clearly had great depths of wisdom beneath her love of the *Prayer Book*.

The one person in the book who is very open is Frank Field. Although a Labour MP, he was a great admirer of Mrs Thatcher and was called in by Tory grandees to tell her the truth that she had no option but to resign as prime minister. He is outspoken about the rudeness and deteriorating standards of his constituents and the need to have two-parent families. He is quite honest in saying that he has not had the experience that others claim, of saying that Jesus walks with them. He is a Christian, he says, because he thinks that it is the most reasonable thing to be, and in the light of this, he tries to respond in his life to 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matthew 5.8). There will be plenty of people who find this reassuring.

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