
Do not be deceived by the cover of Larry Culliford’s book. While it may look like something for the coffee table, it is in fact much more. Culliford writes for two main purposes: to paint a picture of spiritual (Christian) maturity and to reflect on the process of coming into such maturity. In pursing these aims, he takes an integrative approach: his book desires the “insights of neuroscience and psychology to broaden the deepest intuitions and beliefs of Christian faith” (p.3). As the title suggests, Culliford also requisitions England’s cultural heritage, drawing sundry phrases and illustrations from the Shakespearean corpus. This volume is accessible to a wider audience, yet it does at times demand focused attention. It would be a well suited to a discussion group and stands as a beneficial addition to the tool-box of both the pastor and the Christian counsellor.

Despite the short-shrift that spirituality (and spiritual development) is often given in our secular context, Culliford maintains its profound importance. He thus begins chapter one by arguing for the contemporary relevance of spirituality, which he defines as the “encounter between the "deeply personal" and the "universal"” (p.1). Spirituality is “a *something* which should elicit *much ado*”. Christianly, Culliford grounds spirituality in an “intuitive awareness of the majesty and mystery of the Holy Spirit” (p.5). However, the reality of the Spirit can also be corroborated outside the bounds of Christianity, as Culliford highlights using the legacy of Alister Hardy, sometime director of Oxford’s Religious Experience Centre.

Chapter two takes a turn into anthropology (i.e., what is a person?). After briefly citing Paul’s flesh-spirit binary, Culliford proposes an expansion based on modern accounts which centre the physical, biological, psychological, and social aspects of the person. To these four, he adds a fifth – the spiritual. And just as humans must develop biologically and socially, Culliford asserts that we need to develop spiritually. We possess a “spiritual self” which needs to develop in contrast to the “everyday ego” (p.30). On this point, Culliford cites the pioneering work of Iain McGilchrist, likening spiritual immaturity to left brain dominance.

Pondering the process of spiritual development, chapter three focuses on how humans grow through adversity. Here, the (potential) benefits that accrue from the giving up of certain types of attachments through loss, grief, pain, and adversity are delineated. Especially intriguing is Culliford’s contention that human emotions, while ever complex and unpredictable, do in fact “follow natural laws” (p.46). This point is unpacked with several riveting case studies. The chapter concludes with a psychological construal of sin and forgiveness, wherein Culliford argues that sin is better defined as “dissonance” than transgression (pp.60–62).

Chapters four, five and six further address the process of spiritual development. Chapter four uses the legacy of William James, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Carl Young to introduce the different trajectories a human life can take (“arc of life” theory). This discussion is well served by a survey of James Fowler’s six-stage schematic on the development of faith. Building on this, chapter five explores childhood spirituality and concludes with several practical admonitions for parents. Chapter six takes up adolescent religion and, among other gifts, identifies certain “big mistakes” made by the church in this domain. Culliford cautions the church against being too rigid, too exclusive, and too superior in its attitude towards others (or outsiders). Instead, churches should do more to “promote spiritual enquiry” (p.123).

Chapter seven hones in on the imperative to conquer the “everyday ego,” as a prerequisite for spiritual maturity. Thomas Merton features prominently in this discussion, which also includes a critique of secularism. Secularism’s “big mistake” is allowing “selfish, materialistic, and commercial values to dominate” without any serious mitigation (p.140). For spiritual maturity, such values must be dislodged, a process which is aided by contemplation. Chapter eight concentrates on the nature of mature faith, consummated by one’s entry into the “universal stage,” which is Fowler’s sixth stage (p.159).

In depicting this state, Culliford draws from psychologist Reza Arasteh’s delineation of ten significant factors in a person’s entry into stage six (pp.160–61). In the final sections of the chapter, Culliford engages with the ideas of heaven and hell, joy and pilgrimage.

The last two chapters are more practical in orientation. Chapter nine outlines avenues by which one may mature spiritually. Culliford’s list includes corporate worship, prayer, the reading of Scripture, charity, and Sabbath. Chapter ten offers a few summational remarks, returning to the theme of universality, which is explained as an overcoming of the “dissonance” that Culliford identifies with sin. Such overcoming entails the integration of the right and left brain. As an added bonus, an autobiographical *Afterword* is included, wherein Culliford traces his own spiritual journey. This is well worth the read.

As is evident from the foregoing survey, Culliford’s volume engages with an array of perspectives and thinkers. This enables him to envision spiritual maturity in a manner which is fresh and contemporary, moving past the sometimes stale and cliché conceptions which can linger in the church. This achievement is
complemented by Culliford’s adept use of illustrations, stories, and quotations to explain sometimes unfamiliar and dense ideas. Another virtue is the book’s relevance not merely to Christians but also to people of other (or no) faith. Though Culliford is himself an Anglican, the perspective he commends can be appreciated and applied far beyond the bounds of his confession. Finally, I was impressed by the project’s continual consultation with Scripture in advancing its sundry points. Nearly every chapter contains several biblical references, cited to reinforce major themes and lessons.

At the same time, some of Culliford’s biblical references gave me pause; on a few occasions his handling of a scriptural passage seem ill-suited. One example is the appeal to Rom. 12:6 in a paragraph which celebrates the freedom to experiment with new ideas and “to search out new experiences” (p.86). There is also the citation of 1 Cor. 2:16 (“having the mind of Christ”) in the context of a discussion of discovering (or rediscovering) “the divine Spirit that is kindling within us” (p.154). Or one could consider the comparison of Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth (Matt. 13:54–58) to misguided human attempts to return and re-educate members of one’s “parent community” (p.127). Beyond this, my only other critique pertains to the volume’s tiny page margins. In a book brimming with interesting ideas there was not much space for notation!

Culliford’s volume is to be commended. It is well theorised, well expounded and emotionally intelligent. It is written in faith to help people with their faith. It is a book which yields many satisfying epiphanies – moments where something new is learned. At least this was my experience, and it was a pleasurable one.

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This fascinating study forces Christians to think carefully about their own attitudes and practices in relation to possessions and wealth. A revision of Gregson’s PhD, *Everything in Common?* examines six New Testament paradigms in relation to the sharing of possessions in community. The first is the common purse in John’s Gospel, which Gregson argues is one of a variety of ways that Jesus and his disciples were supported. Having surveyed the evidence for the practice of the common purse in John and the Synoptic Gospels, Gregson then compares other sources for evidence of similarities and differences, finding evidence primarily of the latter, notably the porous boundaries by which the common purse was shared with those outside the circle of discipleship.

The second area of discussion is that of holding possessions in common, as recounted in Acts 2–6. Issues of historicity precede exegesis of the relevant texts before Gregson examines the practice of the early church and other parallels. The distinctive features of the early church community in Acts are argued to be the variety of backgrounds of the members, sharing by eating together, greater emphasis on God’s grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the example of sharing/giving being primarily that of an ongoing process of sale of personal possessions in response to need.

The third focus is on the response to famine recorded in Acts 11, which includes discussion of Acts 12:25 and historical questions, especially the relationship to Acts 15, Galatians 2 and Paul’s gift. Gregson also examines other responses to famine in the Greco-Roman world, noting the distinctive feature of the practice recorded in Acts being that each contributed according to ability, rather than generosity being limited to a few wealthy benefactors.

Fourth, Gregson examines the practice of eating together, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 11. There are preliminary discussions of the different situations and forms of meals in the Greco-Roman world, the common aspects of meal sharing and how patronage interacted with sharing meals. Then the context of Corinth and the Corinthian Church are outlined before a detailed discussion of 1 Cor. 11:17–34, the issues it raises and how it compares with other shared meals in the Greco-Roman world. Gregson argues that Paul uses the opportunity of confusion over practice in sharing food as one of catechesis, emphasising the social diversity of attendees, the need to ensure good order, equal relationships and formation of sound community.

Fifth the topic of giving and generosity is examined via 2 Corinthians 8–9, taking in other passages that refer to the collection (1 Cor. 16:14; Acts 11:27–30, 21:17–26; Gal. 2:10 and Rom. 15:25–32). As with other chapters, Gregson brings in relevant comparisons with contemporaneous practices, in this case the temple tax and patronage. The distinctive features of 2 Cor. 8–9 are argued that the giving is rooted in grace, in Jesus and his example; it provides for need; is voluntary, generous and practical; involves all; is in relation to what one has; is relational and has potential reciprocity. God is viewed as the ultimate benefactor. Paul subverts the practice of patronage, suggesting a different way of giving.

Sixth, Gregson tackles the limits on sharing, as set out in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The background of Thessalonica is discussed and passages in the two letters explained in more detail. The limits Paul places on sharing are to

This book is a must read for all Anglicans thinking about mission, the significance of place, and the “parish system”. Andrew Rumsey has done something truly astonishing. In 189 scholarly and stylish pages, informed by much pastoral wisdom and vision, he has clarified what is at stake in discussions of the parish and mission, including debates about its future and its relation to Fresh Expressions. The parish re-emerges as a specific kind of locality, created by complex webs of social practice both present and historical, by interaction with landscape and the built environment, and by Spirit-empowered mission, in the service of the Christ who acts to reconcile every locale to God.

Throughout the volume, Rumsey’s chapters skilfully draw together many rich seams of thought. Each chapter is prefaced by a theologically rich narrative, displaying well Rumsey’s attention to various fields, and at no point does this blend of genres and disciplines feel forced. The pace is deliberate, but the prose’s flowing character keeps things moving along. The volume bears multiple readings, but will reward quick readers as well.

Rumsey’s introduction succinctly surveys the existing literature on parishes, primarily the Church of England’s, outlining also his purpose: to explain what sort of place the parish is. His investigation proceeds through attention to theology, social and spatial theory, and the history of English attention to place and landscape, as well as parochial practice down the ages. His first chapter discusses the “place-formation cycle”, an interplay between being, revelation, vocation, and tradition. He reveals how place both forms and is formed by encounter with God, providing key context and lending shape to individuals and communities in time. The chapter presents a unique fusion of biblical theologies of “land,” modern philosophy, and T.F. Torrance and Karl Barth’s accounts of epistemology, among much else. It is an impressive opener.

His second chapter once again draws strongly on Torrance and Barth, along with Colin Gunton and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to articulate a vision of Christ’s reconciling work, which always plays out in the particular. Christ is “the one locus” of total creaturely reconciliation to God. Chapter three, “Sheer Geography: Spatial Theory and Parochial Practice,” breaks new ground in discussions of the parish, by linking them to contemporary developments in geographical thinking. His section on “the practice of everyday space” is especially insightful. Influenced by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel De Certeau, Rumsey discloses the social space of parishes, as the full range of behaviours and attitudes expressed in and shaped by public and private arenas of action within certain geographic boundaries. The chapter contains perhaps one of the most important statements of the entire book, well worth quoting in full, since it describes the “spatial ethic” that the parish is:

To conclude, if common prayer is the congregational heart of social ethics, its parochial counterpart must surely be described as “common ground” – the field of proximate social relations in which the Christian ethic of love for neighbour is realized. As such, the social space – in Bourdieu’s terms, the habitus – produced by the parish system has a vocational character, being conceived in response to the call of God in Christ. The very territoriality of the parish – its grounded, bounded nature – gives concretion (specific gravity, one might say) to this call and prevents neighbourly relations being subject to mere

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Chapter four opens the book’s section on history, and best displays how the parochial (in the best sense) might undergird a more national vision, amid the parish’s mixed historical record in gathering and preserving the properly social. The fifth chapter considers parish boundaries more properly, from 1215 to the present day. Here, Rumsey sees in medieval guilds something of an analogue for contemporary Fresh Expressions, given their more dynamic function within and across parish boundaries. The sixth chapter returns again to geography, now considering the shaping or “Christianisation of the landscape” in English history, as well as ongoing nostalgic appeals to the pastoral. The volume’s conclusion admirably sums up the volume’s argument, while addressing lingering concerns about the parish’s continuing significance in English society as a unique form of belonging. It also addresses the question of future mission and the Church of England most directly, in terms of the Church’s built heritage, new forms of local ministry, and the Church’s ongoing establishment.

There are only a few missed opportunities in this admirably lucid and enjoyable read. As a medieval historian, I thought Rumsey might have enriched chapter five’s discussion of parish boundaries by consideration of pastoral practice in England before 1215, on which there has been much research since the 1980s. Similarly, though Rumsey mentions medieval guilds and their relation to the parish, no consideration of the Church’s late medieval territoriality and its other more dynamic networks is complete without the mendicant orders and monasticism, whose practices of “territoriality” mirrored, overlapped, and sometimes challenged parochial and diocesan boundaries. Medieval ecclesial society was even more complex than Rumsey describes. As a theologian, I found Rumsey’s robust approach to Christology especially refreshing. His decision to focus solely on specific Protestant contributions to Christology seemed a pivotal choice and welcome. At the same time, the Western parish system was not developed with the insights of Torrance, Gunton, Barth, or Bonhoeffer in mind. A little more attention to, at least, key Western Church Fathers would have done much to further develop the discussion.

But this is to quibble over details in the face of Rumsey’s truly panoramic vision. Each page is packed with worthwhile insights, and more elegant writing than this review could readily quote. He has written the book one wishes one could write, and discussions of the parish and its future must use this wonderful work as their starting place.

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and Christians through the paradigm of those on the borders between the two faiths, people whom he terms “liminal persons” (p.176). Chapter fourteen argues for a move away from syncretism towards harmony between faiths. By this he means we can draw from the strengths and gifts of distinctive faiths without blurring them into one. The final main chapter reflects on fifty years of interreligious dialogue since Vatican II, noting that while some progress has been made, the situation is perhaps more bleak because of the rise in tensions between communities.

Although I am challenged by Amaladoss’s pluralist/inclusivist vision of interreligious relations, I remain unconvinced by it. He has clearly thought deeply about his beliefs and is open about the different influences he has experienced. But he appears more influenced by those outside the church than the Christian scriptures; he quotes more Hindu texts than he does Christian ones as he develops his arguments. For those who hold more exclusivist positions, Amaladoss’s writings are a warning of the danger of falling into fundamentalism and condemnation of others. The question it left me asking is how to present Jesus in a way that is both invitational and compelling.

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Mission With joins the burgeoning list of publications addressing the shape and form of mission in our increasingly post-Christian western society and I believe it offers a helpful and persuasive contribution to this conversation. Paul Keeble describes his writing as “theological back-fill”, as he expresses in theological language his years of experience immersed within the local community on an estate in inner-city Manchester. From the outset, it is clear that this is no dry-eyed abstract approach to missional engagement, but one birthed in years of building relationships with those who would not normally be found in church on a Sunday morning. His book is thoroughly theological but manages to weave anecdotes and lived-experience skilfully through its pages.

In part one, Keeble offers an engaging and helpful summary of some key definitions of mission, exploring some possible critiques of the tendency to constantly refer to Missio Dei as our default setting in thinking about mission. Keeble describes his approach as “mission-with” which he presents as a complementary approach to mission-for (social action) and mission-to (evangelism). “Mission-with” focuses on the importance of being a presence-among the local community: “Presence-among is with a missional intent, balanced by a recognition that the missioner is there as a learner and as one who finds God there already ahead of them” (p.113). While varying approaches to mission cannot perhaps so easily be categorised into either “to” or “for”, nevertheless, his emphasis upon the value of presence is a crucial contribution to any definition of incarnational mission. Keeble lays out clearly his conviction that the goal of God’s mission is the building of shalom and that when Christians grasp this vision they can see the importance of working alongside others within the local community for the common good.

Parts two and three offer theological reflection upon Keeble’s experience of moving into a housing estate in Ardwick with a young family and the challenges and opportunities that this way of living presented for living as disciples of Christ in a context that was unfamiliar and at times costly and challenging. Keeble’s stories are colourful, helping the reader imagine the intensity and richness of this way of life. He reflects both upon his own upbringing in Northern Ireland and what expectations were laid upon him as to what a “calling” might look like. He also reflects insightfully upon some shared projects within the local community during the last three decades, including Peace Week, a week long community response to gang violence. Part four considers some wider challenges for the church in mission today. At times this book reads like a thesis which has been adapted as a book. However, it is in the blending of theology and practice that this book makes its unique and valuable contribution. It is uncomfortable and challenging in all the right ways and I would highly recommend it to anyone exploring mission in an urban context. I read Keeble’s book at the time of Pentecost whilst reflecting upon Jesus’ call to his disciples to take the good news to the “ends of the earth”. Historically the church in the West has considered this challenge to be that of taking the gospel abroad to unreached nations and people groups. However, Keeble’s book causes us to reflect upon whether the inner-city estates of Britain today might be our “ends of the earth”? If they indeed are, then Mission With offers an inspiring and practical guide for how we might respond to that call in the years to come.

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3. INTERFAITH STUDIES


The core argument of the book is that dialogue is a limited activity. Three main reasons are offered. First, that religious identity is not as fixed and rigid as dialogue activities presuppose; that is, for a dialogue to take place between, say, a Hindu and a Muslim, the two individuals concerned must have clear boundaries to their own religious identity. Second, so-called religious conflicts are often not actually religious in nature and hence dialogue between religious groups will not actually address the root cause of the conflict. Third, the nature of dialogue as an elite activity that often ignores grassroots issues.

The book is developed from the author’s PhD thesis, which included fieldwork in South India for four months in 2007 and eight months in 2008. It begins by surveying the concept and practice of dialogue in India since the 1950s, with a particular emphasis on Christian approaches. Second, the practical outworking of this theory is discussed through a case study of dialogue activities in the Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, South India. Chapters three and four examine contemporary approaches to the concept of “religion” and “world religions” and religious plurality and dialogue respectively. The next three chapters critique the concept of dialogue from the perspective of religious identity, the fact that religions are not in conflict and the idea that dialogue is an elitist activity. Swamy’s argument is that dialogue focused on religious action ignores wider socio-economic and political contexts and the power relations involved in any conflict situation. He contends that religious identity is not as fixed and determinative a category as proponents of dialogue presume. He further argues that at the grassroots, people do not follow the presumptions or principles of elite dialogue but rather work out their own strategies for how to relate to and negotiate with their religious neighbours in their everyday lives. Chapter eight presents his alternative vision, based on his fieldwork in Gramam village in Kanyakumari district. He argues that people in the village construct their identity less on belief and more on praxis and group identity. While they did experience conflicts, these were normally not primarily religious but in fact personal in nature. Swamy found that all tended to participate in all religious festivals, sharing in the celebrations even if not participating in the acts of worship. In his concluding chapter, Swamy questions whether interreligious dialogue is either necessary or possible. He argues that rather than develop dialogical models, we need a better framework for understanding and interpreting how people relate and negotiate.

My impression of *The Problem with Interreligious Dialogue* is that it was demolishing a straw man, an unfortunate tendency of some PhD theses. He is correct in his observations that remote Indian villages, whose population are semi-literate and received limited formal education do not need complex models for interreligious dialogue. But that does not mean that high level discussions, as for example take place between senior staff at Lambeth Palace and Al-Azhar University are pointless. Moreover most proponents of dialogue recognise that religious identity is complex, that conflicts are multi-faceted and that dialogue must be appropriate to the context. A specialist scholar or a library wanting to expand its interfaith section may find this book a useful addition, but I would not recommend it beyond this very limited audience.

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The 45 chapters of this handbook are divided into three parts. The first part discusses Christian-Muslim relations in history, and is further subdivided into “beginnings”, “the middle ages” and “the early and modern periods”. Part two tackles theological attitudes in Christian-Muslim encounters and part three Christians and Muslims in society. The chapters are largely short essays by acknowledged experts in the field they address; for example Sidney Griffith discusses the Bible in the Qur’an and Chris Allen contributes on Islamophobia.

Designed as a reference work, the essays are both comprehensive but also severely limited; comprehensive in making the main points about the topic under discussion, but limited because they are invariably less than ten pages and so often only skim through topics on which the author has written at least one, if not several, books. I also struggled to understand the organisational logic of the handbook as a whole. The chapter on “Mutual influences and borrowings,” for example, is part of the historical section on the Middle Ages, yet that is a topic that arguably lends itself to part two or part three of the handbook. Equally, I was unclear as to why the handbook jumps from Mughal India to the end of Empire without any discussion of the intervening period. The handbook is somewhat scattergun, covering most of the main topics well, but with some omissions that leave me dissatisfied, and various essays overlapping in topic (at least three authors comment on the A Common Word initiative, for example).
Perhaps the most puzzling aspect is that there are few, if any, explicitly and overtly Muslim authors, but a number of Christian authors. The handbook laments the largely negative nature of relations between Christians and Muslims, but does not take the obvious step of modelling good relationships between Christians and Muslims by having scholars of both faiths work together on a joint project. This handbook is a volume for the library of theological and missionary training colleges, not a book for the individual student or researcher.

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4. BIBLICAL STUDIES


I was looking forward to reading this book to discover what people mean by biblical literacy and if it is really in decline in the UK. I was not disappointed. The title itself helps to position this issue in a wider framework than just people reading and appreciating, and sometimes appropriating, biblical stories. The book is divided into three parts: Located Literacies, Visual Literacies and Popular Literacies and shows the interplay between the Bible and a variety of cultural media. I identified strongly with chapter one, which discusses biblical literacy in an Irish situation, which reflected my experience in the North West as a young Roman Catholic where the Bible and culture were not linked enough, if at all. Iona Hine in chapter three focuses on two stakeholders in the quest for biblical literacy, namely; those that are keen on scriptural literacy and its resultant impact on morality and conversation, and those who see the Bible in its wider academic literacy. Crossley’s chapter on “What the Bible Really Means in English Political Discourse” highlights how the Bible has been utilised in politics. He provides a good framework to examine how politicians treat the text to affirm a liberal or cultural or radical political perspective.

Matthew A. Collins explores the use of the Bible in mainstream television, focusing on its use in 91 hours of series 1–6 of Lost, while Amanda Dillon describes, perceptively, street art as a prophetic medium with biblical allusion and calls for a wider understanding of biblical literacy in the digital age. The nature of literacy itself is brought into question. Alan W. Hooker writes in chapter six, “Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary: Eve as Redeemprtx in Madonna’s ‘Girl Gone Wild’” and looks at Madonna’s self-evident pronouncement and work particularly in the “Girl Gone Wild” music video. He explores the video’s messaging with Genesis 2–3 and in the context of the Roman Catholic Church and gender debates. At the end of the chapter he writes “We move away from panoptic classroom, to peer to peer learning. I become literate because my peer is.”

Robert J. Myles’s “Biblical Literacy and The Simpsons” in chapter seven begins with a quote from Homer Simpson: “God is my favourite fictional character”. He examines the satirising of the Bible in the “Simpson’s Bible Stories” within a wider cultural US milieu where many different stakeholders use the Bible to justify their own agendas. Caroline Blyth’s “Lisbeth and Leviticus: Biblical Literacy and The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo” demonstrates how a novel can open up conversation with biblical texts and keep the Bible in public consciousness. The final chapter by Christopher Meredith “A Big Room for Poo: Eddie Izzard’s Bible and the Literacy of Laughter” looks at Izzard’s Glorious tour in 1997 about which he writes: “Structurally, the show is a Bible transposed into comedy format: Old Testament is the first act, New Testament after intermission and apocalypse as an encore.” Izzard is quoted as saying, “I also take large subjects and talk crap about them.” The book’s final concluding comments include, “many existing discussions on biblical literacy are not about biblical literacy, they are about preserving a serious paternal metaphor in the midst of a decentralising of biblical dissemination.”

The book always remains stimulating and entertaining while rigorously engaging with the subject matter. It offers possibilities to re-imagine engagement with people and the Bible through those who almost certainly have a different approach to it. Furthermore, it challenged me think of how Christians can be more proactive, playful and imaginative in our proclamation of the Bible’s message through diverse media.

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CMS


Paul Foster’s commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians is an extensive (with just over 500 pages including bibliography and indices on the 95 verses of the letter) detailed and accessible addition to the large volume of writings on this Pauline letter. Foster’s very readable style aims not only at a scholarly readership but makes it a valuable resource for pastors and preachers.

In the introduction Foster presents to the reader the key issues in the academic debate around this “Pauline” letter. As expected he discusses in detail the provenance,
In all the massive literature on the apostle Paul, surprisingly little attention has been paid to Paul as a pastor, although this might be explained by the fact that Paul never calls himself a pastor. The noun only appears in Ephesians 4, and the verb is used only in a literal sense (1 Cor. 9:7). This volume, the fruit of an academic conference in 2014 involving theologians from various Australian colleges, admirably fills that gap and shows the value of reading Paul through this lens. Its opening article by Rosner demonstrates how family metaphors of father, mother and brother in Paul shed light on various aspects of his pastoral vision and practice, a theme which recurs in later studies. The next ten chapters are each devoted to what we can learn from specific books, beginning with a study of Acts which contains an insightful analysis of Acts 20 and challenges the popular view of Paul as a hit-and-run missionary rather than pastor. Each of the letters attributed to Paul are then studied, usually a chapter on each book although concluding with 1 and 2 Thessalonians (focussed again on familial terms including “orphan” and “infant”) and then the Pastoral letters grouped together (where Robert Yarbrough powerfully explores many of what he identifies as 68 references in the three letters showing Paul’s strong work ethic).

The emphasis throughout the book is not on particular pastoral problems and how they are handled, but rather on Paul’s pastoral vision and method more generally. Cumulatively they show how theological this vision is: God, not Paul, is the ultimate pastor of the churches and (as shown especially by Paul Barnett on 2 Corinthians) Christ is the model for Paul as pastor. His central pastoral goal is conformity of his churches to Christ. In Paul’s practice we see the importance of teaching (most fully in Orr’s detailed technical study of Eph. 4:11–12) and theological truth (for example, Bird and Dunne’s study of Galatians). In one of the most creative studies, Matthew Malcolm shows how in 1 Corinthians Paul pastors by reflecting on Scripture to interpret the Corinthians’ situation and respond to it in terms of them being like “the rulers of this age”.

In that and almost every study, we are vividly introduced to Paul as a real person facing challenges remarkably similar to those facing pastors today as he knows and cares for people and ruminates on their situation in the light of the gospel. There is painful conflict (most fully explored in 2 Corinthians) and the challenges of working as part of a team of pastors (part of Sarah Harris’ fascinating study of Philippians which looks at Euodia and Syntyche), both areas with clear parallels today. Concrete applications to contemporary pastoral practice are not drawn out but they do not need to be – the exposition of the letters and accounts of Paul’s practice, although quite academic in style, provide clear guidance for the reader. There are some areas which could be explored more, notably the pastoral character of many of Paul’s prayers and the question as to how his epistolary pastoral practice which is focused on here might relate to his approach when actually present.

The final three chapters offer a different perspective from that of New Testament exegesis, exploring how Paul as pastor has been influential in church history through studies of the Pastoral Epistles’ offices and the first Church of England ordinal, Augustine of Hippo and Trevor J. Burke, Andrew S. Malone and Brian Rosner, eds., Paul as Pastor (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018)

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5. NEW TESTAMENT

Trevor J. Burke, Andrew S. Malone and Brian Rosner, eds., Paul as Pastor (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018)

In all the massive literature on the apostle Paul, surprisingly little attention has been paid to Paul as a pastor, although this might be explained by the fact that Paul never calls himself a pastor. The noun only appears in Ephesians 4, and the verb is used only in a literal sense (1 Cor. 9:7). This volume, the fruit of an academic conference in 2014 involving theologians from various Australian colleges, admirably fills that gap and shows the value of reading Paul through this lens. Its opening article by Rosner demonstrates how family metaphors of father, mother and brother in Paul shed light on various aspects of his pastoral vision and practice, a theme which recurs in later studies. The next ten chapters are each devoted to what we can learn from specific books, beginning with a study of Acts which contains an insightful analysis of Acts 20 and challenges the popular view of Paul as a hit-and-run missionary rather than pastor. Each of the letters attributed to Paul are then studied, usually a chapter on each book although concluding with 1 and 2 Thessalonians (focussed again on familial terms including “orphan” and “infant”) and then the Pastoral letters grouped together (where Robert Yarbrough powerfully explores many of what he identifies as 68 references in the three letters showing Paul’s strong work ethic).

The emphasis throughout the book is not on particular pastoral problems and how they are handled, but rather on Paul’s pastoral vision and method more generally. Cumulatively they show how theological this vision is: God, not Paul, is the ultimate pastor of the churches and (as shown especially by Paul Barnett on 2 Corinthians) Christ is the model for Paul as pastor. His central pastoral goal is conformity of his churches to Christ. In Paul’s practice we see the importance of teaching (most fully in Orr’s detailed technical study of Eph. 4:11–12) and theological truth (for example, Bird and Dunne’s study of Galatians). In one of the most creative studies, Matthew Malcolm shows how in 1 Corinthians Paul pastors by reflecting on Scripture to interpret the Corinthians’ situation and respond to it in terms of them being like “the rulers of this age”.

In that and almost every study, we are vividly introduced to Paul as a real person facing challenges remarkably similar to those facing pastors today as he knows and cares for people and ruminates on their situation in the light of the gospel. There is painful conflict (most fully explored in 2 Corinthians) and the challenges of working as part of a team of pastors (part of Sarah Harris’ fascinating study of Philippians which looks at Euodia and Syntyche), both areas with clear parallels today. Concrete applications to contemporary pastoral practice are not drawn out but they do not need to be – the exposition of the letters and accounts of Paul’s practice, although quite academic in style, provide clear guidance for the reader. There are some areas which could be explored more, notably the pastoral character of many of Paul’s prayers and the question as to how his epistolary pastoral practice which is focused on here might relate to his approach when actually present.

The final three chapters offer a different perspective from that of New Testament exegesis, exploring how Paul as pastor has been influential in church history through studies of the Pastoral Epistles’ offices and the first Church of England ordinal, Augustine of Hippo and
George Whitefield.
The book, in short, has much to offer the working pastor and preacher but sadly at £85 few will be able to benefit from its insights.
Andrew Goddard


Michael Gorman’s *Becoming the Gospel* builds upon his two previous studies of Paul: *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (2001), and *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (2009), but readers do not have to be familiar with these earlier works to appreciate and learn from *Becoming the Gospel*.

According to Gorman, Paul’s aim is that the churches that he founded and continued to influence should not simply believe the gospel; rather they should embody the good news that they have come to believe. When Christians embody the gospel they become partners with God in mission. Paul’s letters to the churches are intended to help believers develop a missional consciousness in every aspect of their lives so that, individually and corporately, they express the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1–11 is a key text both for Paul and for Gorman). Once they are formed by the mind of Christ, Christian communities become the gospel. Church is intended not simply be a sign of God’s kingdom but an anticipatory participation in that kingdom.

To participate in and embody the gospel is to live lives that are visibly and publicly distinctive and different; as a consequence Christians will begin to attract the notice of family and neighbours. Faithful Christian living entails the rejection of the gods of family, city and empire. Those who choose to turn from these rival gods and cultic practices will not only come to the attention of others, they will inevitably begin to face criticism and come into conflict. To follow Christ exclusively means participating in the public life of the community in a visibly very different way and at times not sharing in that communal life at all.

Gorman argues that proclamation of the gospel in the early church happened more by this “embodying” of the gospel than by public announcement or preaching. On page 43 he describes the church as the “living exegesis” of the gospel. This is something for the church today to aspire to.

Gorman wants the church today to learn from the Pauline Churches’ sharing in God’s mission by becoming the gospel that we proclaim. To this end he concludes each chapter with a look at a contemporary community or ministry which he regards as embodying the gospel.

Based upon careful exegesis of a number of Paul’s letters (1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans) Gorman challenges the church today to not simply believe and preach the gospel, but to become God’s Christ-like (cruciform) agents in our world, sharing with the Cruciform God in mission to that world.

*Becoming the Gospel* is highly recommended. Gorman sent me back to read Paul’s letters with a deeper appreciation of what it means to be a church and to proclaim Christ, not just in Paul’s day but in every generation. It challenges the contemporary Church to become more Christ-like in its life and mission, to become, in Gorman’s words, once again a “living exegesis” of the gospel.

Tim Gill
Sheffield


Stanley Porter’s readable yet scholarly book on John’s gospel and what it teaches about Jesus comes highly recommended. It is divided into nine main chapters. First, Porter discusses John in comparison with other Gospels. This includes discussion of the date of composition of the Gospel. Second, Porter turns to public proclamation of Jesus in John’s Gospel. By this he means the original audience. Turning completely away from the “Johannine community” hypothesis, Porter argues that the Fourth Gospel was written primarily as a public document. He defends this view through examination of the Prologue, and treatment of particular groups such as the Galileans, Jews, Pharisees and nobility, as well as Jesus use of the “I am” sayings. Chapter three focuses on sources. Porter argues that John’s Gospel knows much material that is also evident in the synoptic, and that much of this material goes back to Jesus himself.

Chapter four engages with the Gospel’s prologue in greater detail. Porter utilises four types of critical engagement: form criticism, source criticism, musical-liturgical criticism and functional criticism. He concludes that each have valuable contributions to make to the task of understanding the text and so should be used to complement each other. The fifth chapter focuses on the “I am” sayings. Having discussed the background of the sayings, Porter goes on to argue that they shape the christological structure of the Gospel as a whole. He identifies nine categories that he discusses in turn. Chapter six tackles the vexed question of the identity of
“the Jews” in John’s Gospel. Porter dismisses those who accuse the Gospel of anti-semitism and outlines his nuanced understanding of the variety of ways in which the Greek oi Ioudaioi is used.

Chapter seven focuses on how the Fourth Gospel understands the “truth”. Porter comments that this is an under-developed theme within Johannine studies, before analysing the term in relation to God, Jesus, the Spirit, the human imperative to act in truth, and Johannine propositional truth. Chapter eight examines the Passover. The guiding verses are the quotations in John 19:36–37, but this is not a narrow focus. Rather, these verses are used as a springboard for a wide ranging discussion of the Passover theme that runs right through the Gospel. Chapter nine is, fittingly enough, about endings, specifically the language, function and purpose of John 21.

Porter’s aim in writing this monograph is to allow the distinctive Johannine voice to be heard more clearly. In this he succeeds admirably, writing a work of scholarly depth, clarity and insight. Anyone who wishes to engage in serious study of John’s Gospel would do well to read this book.

Tom Wilson
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6. PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

Nicholas Wolterstorff, Justice in Love (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015)

In this timely book, a contribution in the Emory University Studies in Law and Religion series, the Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff looks again at the perennial question of the relationship between love and justice. Leaving aside the more technical terminology used, the main thesis of the book is that there is no tension between these two terms and the realities they seek to explicate. In the case of the term “love”, a number of different phenomena are covered, but Wolterstorff has in mind the love to which Jesus was referring; this is termed agapic love. By this is meant love which seeks to promote the flourishing of the one loved beyond what justice might require.

This summary of the purpose of the book is expounded in several different directions. There are four parts to the book. Part one examines what the author calls Benevolence-Agapism. Thinkers in this group include Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and Anders Nygren. Nygren is the most radical in his insistence that God’s love is pure grace. Human worth is created by God’s agapic love. Moreover, because God chooses love over justice, we are to do likewise. Part two discusses Care-Agapism. This is a very broad topic, impossible to summarise adequately in a few sentences, but to give a flavour of the ideas covered, Wolterstorff considers Jesus’ treatment of the love commands in Leviticus. To treat the neighbour justly is an example of loving him, a way of loving him. Love is not justice-indifferent benevolence. There is also a useful discussion of natural rights.

Part three is entitled “Just and Unjust Love”. This is probably the part of the book which will be of most interest to Anvil readers since it is largely concerned with the large and practical topic of forgiveness. Jesus’ emphatic insistence that human beings are to forgive each other was new and unprecedented. Wolterstorff’s treatment is a healthy reminder that the dynamics and practice of forgiveness is a great deal more complicated than we often think. There is no consensus among ethicists. His conclusion is that “forgiveness is the enacted resolution... no longer to hold against the wrongdoer what he did to one... Mere resolution is not enough; forgiveness requires that one enact the resolution, act on it” (p.169). This sounds straightforward enough, but he goes on to discuss situations where forgiveness may be only partial. There is much more in this part which will repay careful reading including a section on whether forgiveness violates justice and all the while, there is an eye towards divine justice.

In part four, Wolterstorff moves into specifically theological territory. With the title “The Justice of God’s Love”, he offers his own exposition of Paul’s letter to the Romans. This is a bold stroke for a writer who is not a New Testament scholar. However, he demonstrates considerable skill as an exegete, interacting freely with a number of well-known figures and is not afraid to disagree with them on crucial points. His most original move is to suggest that the main topic of Romans is Justitia Dei, the justice of God, and the two final chapters are a defence of that view. This should not be seen merely as a cavalier disregard of mainstream Pauline theology, but as an attempt to apply his earlier discussion of Care-Agapism. The burden of his position is what he sees as the impartiality of grace (cf. Acts 10: 34–35). He explicitly disagrees with Tom Wright who regards God’s covenant fidelity as the proper context for the interpretation of Romans, especially justification. It is perhaps a pity that Wolterstorff does not have the space to develop his argument, since he has undoubtedly drawn attention to an important aspect of Paul’s teaching. A possible PhD topic perhaps.

Wolterstorff’s style is slightly clunky and at times his argument is difficult to follow. But this is a good book and Evangelicals could benefit from engaging with it. Another slight drawback is a rather thin index and no bibliography.

Howard C. Bigg
Cambridge
7. ANGLICAN STUDIES


I have every admiration for Paul Avis’s single-minded vocation in helping to define, interpret and shape Anglican identity over the past turbulent generation. In this latest offering, he takes “the Anglican Angst of our time” head on in an attempt to address our contemporary predicament. There is a most salutary reminder that in our fractious disputes and fights, we must never lose sight of the fact that the vocation of the title is always in the service of the gospel, not an end in itself.

The theological chapter is helpfully autobiographical, and resists the labelling epidemic that regularly infects Anglican position-taking. The two concepts which structure the argument here are those of orthodoxy (faith is not the preserve of the individual but has an ecclesiological locus) and liberalism/liberality, which calls for contextualised and grace-filled debate.

The discussion on what kind of ecclesiological “animal” the Anglican Communion is eliminates the “church” and “collection of churches” options. Rather, we are a family of churches most like the Orthodox but unique in Christendom, held together by mutual loyalty. And of course, there’s the rub. The loyalty has been stretched in many cases beyond breaking point. Avis’s dimensions of communion: recognition, commitment and participation are felt by many to have long since been abandoned. This part of Avis’s thesis calls, then, for a restoration of communion infused with charity, echoing the theology of Jean Vanier.

Subsequent chapters on missional, covenantal and peaceable vocation develop in similar vein, and there is little that I find to disagree with. Of course our communion is missional, and we are called to demonstrate that mystical unity in Christ. Of course we must be governed by covenantal virtues. And of course we must speak to one another “in the healing voice of love”. A convinced and lifelong eirenic Anglican myself, I am left at the end of Part 1 wondering whether this makes any sense at all to partisan Anglicans, for whom our vocation is to purify the Communion through radical excisions and exclusions. Martyn Percy’s “civilised disagreement” is a million miles away.

The second part of the book contains three essays on “Three-Dimensional Anglicanism”: on catholicity, on the legacy of the Reformation, and on the critical imperative. These are vintage Avis, and I particularly liked his emphatic “Anglicans...are called to indwell the wholeness of the reality of the Church” (p.129). Though these three dimensions are not the same as the clichéd three-legged stool of scripture, tradition and reason, they are a sophisticated gloss on it, and indeed on Hooker’s late Elizabethan insights.

Avis ends with a quote from an unnamed writing of his from 20 years ago: “To practise the grace of walking together without coercive constraints is the special vocation of Anglicanism” (p.187). If he is right, then those of us who have chosen to stay within the messiness and pain of the so-far-just-about-together Communion are vindicated in doing so: it is our vocation. The corollary of that would be that alternative structures, replacement Communions and associations are a distraction to our mission and a hindrance to the gospel. I know that sounds harsh, but it is implicit in Avis’s thesis.

This book is best read not as analysis but as a prophetic challenge. God has called us as his Anglican people together for a purpose. If we lose sight of that purpose, we lose our raison d’être. His prayer, and mine, is that we stop our self-destructive games for the sake of a saviour to whom alone we are called into obedience.

Adrian Chatfield
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8. DEVOTIONAL


Mere Spirituality, not to be confused with C.S. Lewis’s Mere Christianity, is an attempt at summarising and categorising the vast volume of Nouwen’s writings. Hernandez has studied Nouwen’s work for many years and is co-founder of CentreQuest – an ecumenical hub for the study and practice of Christian spirituality.

Hernandezvaluably ensures that Nouwen’s voice can be heard throughout. He succeeds at that most of the time, but occasionally the sentences are forced and not as fluent as they could be. Hernandez uses a clear referencing system by noting the initials of Nouwen’s book, which nevertheless got a bit tiresome the more I read.

The book itself has an introductory chapter to Nouwen’s life which has been helpful to put this work in context and a chronology of Nouwen’s main life events and publications at the back. It’s a helpful reference tool for those less familiar with Nouwen’s life.

This book invites the reader to reflect on their own spirituality by reflecting on Nouwen’s. It clearly invites...
us to look at our heart, a term broadly used by Nouwen for “self” and “soul” as the place that draws our spiritual life together (p.xv). Hernandez segments the book into three parts: Communion – A Life apart; Community – A Life shared; Commission – A Life Given. This is based on Nouwen’s understanding of spiritual disciplines which are necessary to create room for God. These are: spending time with God – in solitude; engaging in meaningful fellowship with others from which; thirdly, flows the going out together and serving others (p.xxi). This, I feel, we all need to be reminded of regularly and evaluate where our attention lingers, which is the strength of this book. The book then goes through each of these in turn. Every chapter concludes with further focused reading referencing Nouwen’s books, a few questions to help “living it out”, some of which are helpful, and a prayer – most were phrased in a way that didn’t help me to connect with God, but may well help others.

My favourite chapter was chapter nine on hospitality. It’s a brilliant gem where the aims of the book and the various methods work really well together, making for an easy yet challenging read. Hospitality is understood as a spiritual practice which is more than just welcoming people, it’s about creating relational space (p.93) that allows the other to become more fully their God-designed self. Hernandez draws together aspects of being at home in our own house/self, intentional hospitality to others and hospitality through absence, and thereby essentially creating space for the Holy Spirit, as concepts that define hospitality. Especially for readers involved in any form of contextual mission and ministry both in the UK and overseas, this chapter is a must read and helps to review our practice.

Mere Spirituality is a book that may be useful as part of a focused journey into one’s own spirituality, as a Lent project or a book to meditate on during a sabbatical, as part of one’s own inner spring clean. For the reader familiar with Nouwen’s work there may not be huge benefit in reading this work. None of the concepts are new in and of themselves.

Having said that, Nouwen’s work still has profound significance for our ever busy lifestyles and ministries. Therefore, any book capturing the essence of Nouwen is challenging and prophetically agitating; capturing themes around our spirituality we need to come back to on a regular basis.

Susann Haehnel
CMS

9. OTHER


This is an honest and compelling account of Mark’s personal ongoing struggle with depression that every Christian minister ought to read. It is accessible and clear, forthright without being overly direct or blunt, rooted both in faith in Jesus Christ and also in daily life. The book begins with a short chapter on the mask that Mark wears. We all wear some kind of mask, disguising some of what we are thinking or feeling, and Mark explains something of how he masked his depression over the years.

Part one then ventures deeper into the darkness, exploring different metaphors that describe the experience of depression. As someone who has never personally experienced depression as Mark has, but has family members who do and has pastored others suffering in this way, I found these chapters really helpful. There is a lot of refreshing common sense in his explanations, a clear honesty about what did, and did not, help him and a challenge that we remain committed to pastoral care, even if people do not get “better” (whatever that might mean). Part two, “Venturing Towards the Light”, offers hope for the future, not in a neat and tidy, everything is sorted because of Jesus sort of cliché, but a realist, clear, honest portrayal of what living with depression can be, what working as a Church minister who struggles with depression could be like. The appendices offer Meynell’s personal reflections on what has helped him manage his symptoms, both practical actions and also in terms of what music he listens to and books he reads.

When Darkness Seems is worked through with biblical reflections, helping the reader root personal experience with depression in a lived Christian faith. This is one of the two great strengths of the book. The other is Mark’s astute analysis of the distinctions and inter-relationships between guilt, shame and depression. It is an easy and engaging read, useful for anyone engaged in pastoral ministry, who has depression themselves or who wants to love and care for a friend or relative who struggles with their mental health.

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