Book Reviews

Thompson, J.B., *Living Holiness: Stanley Hauerwas and the Church* (Epworth Press 2010 £19.99 pb) pp. x, 166 ISBN 9780716206590

I begin with a bias: I've always enjoyed the work of Stanley Hauerwas. His reflection on the community of Christ has been, for me, inspirational. But I read Hauerwas with at least two reservations. Firstly, the sense that this seems good but I'm sure something is wrong, but what is it? Secondly, why won't he just systematize his thought, rather than always turning to vaguely connected collections of essays and sermons? What John Thompson offers here is a satisfactory response to those questions.

While Thompson is very indebted to Hauerwas, he recognizes the critiques that are rightly made of Hauerwas' work. In being honest about the critiques of Hauerwas, Thompson goes on to offer an apology for him, before moving beyond that to a renewed presentation of his work. Also Thompson helpfully allows the reader to see Hauerwas' thought organized, rather than systematized, to enable others to reflect on church life in the light of Hauerwas' reflections.

As a Methodist I see Hauerwas' contribution as a right, and productive, reflection on holiness. Hauerwas once again posits holiness in the context of collective and communal identity, rather than a bastardized individual social ethic. The book places holiness in numerous contexts of communal reflection and hopefully, for the reader, incarnates this reflection in local contexts by the helpful questions raised at the end of each chapter. In fact, one of the attractive strengths of this book is that while it succinctly presents Hauerwas' thinking, it then enables the reader, through its summary questions, to reflect on their own engagement with the ideas that have been offered.

We should not underestimate the value of Hauerwas to the Church; whether one loves Hauerwas or not, this book is an excellent and succinct summary of his key thoughts on holiness in the modern church. Ministers and lay leaders would be well guided to read and engage, with this succinct, accessible and helpful text.

Kerry Tankard
Peterborough

Jupp, Peter C. (ed.), *Death Our Future: Christian theology and funeral practice* (Epworth Press 2008 £25.00 pb) pp. xxiii, 272 ISBN 978-0-7162-0638-5

Death our Future. Wow, what a title! But how do we face the inevitable? Peter Jupp brings together eminent scholars to share their expertise concerning the future of every human being. As its title suggests, the book is an invitation to grapple with practicalities and reflect on the experience of attending funerals, as much as to engage theologically with the topic of death.

The undergirding theological relevance of the book is 'the certainty of Christ's death and resurrection' which is crucial for the retention of hope. It is this which ensures that in spite of its subject matter, the book is an uplifting rather than depressing read. The nuanced relationship between death and belief is revealed in so many different ways in chapter by chapter of this fascinating book. High-profile displays of national grief such as at the death of Princess Diana, for example, reveal a latent (albeit rapidly changing) spirituality underpinning a supposedly secularized society. Requests for 'a celebration of the deceased's life' are beginning to replace the belief that a funeral should focus upon the Christian hope of salvation and resurrection. Nonetheless it is evident that the part played by faith representatives in major disasters is greatly appreciated where the 'simple yet fundamental role of being alongside those caught up in tragedy' is still of supreme significance.

The book is helpfully reassuring at times, as well as challenging and instructive. The association of grief with trauma, especially in the event of a child's death, for example, is used to highlight the need for carers and others 'to recognise their limitations . . . and to seek help when they have moved out of their depth'. Similarly, the chapter dealing with death in hospital not only raises ethical issues but also points out the vital contribution which can be made by 'faith communities' as a reassuring presence for those with a fear of being ill.

The chapters dealing with the consequences for belief of historical views of death and the afterlife are, on the whole, more academic in nature. Whilst the section on 'Resurrection and Immortality of the Soul', does proffer some advice to clergy, namely to discuss mortality more often, a more comprehensive or illustrative exploration of how rituals and funeral practices impact on the reality of faith would have been helpful.

The book challenges us to think harder about every aspect of funerals

– burials, cremations, disposal of ashes etc. and to consider how what we do reflects the beliefs we have about what is taking place. For example, 'Music at Funerals', explores the problem of what to do when so many 'funeral' hymns are neither known nor appreciated. How should a minister deal with requests for unchristian songs? One family's request for 'See you later, alligator' at least enabled me to focus on the resurrection! Regrettably, the chapter offers very little in the way of practical advice to address such dilemmas. This is perhaps the main weakness of the book for practising ministers. Several chapters raise serious theological, liturgical and practical issues without also offering a way forward. This can leave the reader feeling all too aware of the problems, but totally ill equipped to deal with them.

Nonetheless this is a highly thought-provoking book which should be compulsory reading for anyone engaged in pastoral practice or ministry.

Tony Walton
Superintendent Methodist minister and bereavement counsellor

Atkins, Martyn, *Resourcing Renewal – shaping churches for the emerging future* (Epworth Press 2007 & 2010 £14.99 pb) pp. 268 ISBN 978-0-7162-0668-2

This is not just a book for Church leaders, but a timely reminder to all Christians that the God of mission comes first, and the Church as a mission partner comes second. Atkins shows that in understanding the nature of church thus, a shape to witness, worship and the general life of the Church is offered. Inherited churches transitioning to mission-shapedness will find this work particularly helpful.

Atkins offers good theological journeying (for he freely admits that his own ecclesiology is a work in progress) peppered with earthy illustrations that are easy to identify with. He reminds us that, paradoxically, when dealing with ecclesiology you can't start with church because the church is not of ultimate importance. Mission-shaped thinking comes from the realization that the meta-story of Scripture makes plain that God is a God of mission, that the people of God are the *product* of God's mission and then *participants* and *partners* in God's mission.

In reminding the reader of the error of church not being synonymous with mission, Atkins states that if the missio Dei cannot be pursued with the church as it is, then God raises up a new church. His comments regarding fresh expressions of church demonstrate his belief that they are God-

given signs of hope and essential in our postmodern, post-Christendom cultural context.

This book has added credence because the author works within the establishment of the inherited church and so understands the complexities of church structures and the subtle seductiveness of 'churchcentredness'. He freely states, sometimes with a bold honesty, his concerns for inherited churches that stray from the mission imperative. Yet throughout, Atkins maintains a passion and deep appreciation for the missio Dei and therefore this remains one of the most helpful books I have ever read.

Elaine Lindridge
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Race A. and Hedges P., (eds.), *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths* (SCM Reader 2009 £25.50 pb) pp. 350 ISBN: 0334041155

Produced as a companion volume to the SCM Core Text of the same name, this reader is clearly intended primarily as a source book for courses covering the theology of inter-faith relations. Nevertheless the book works well as a standalone and would be a useful addition to the shelves of those who need to reflect theologically on inter-faith issues. The selection of texts is a little wider in scope than its title indicates, as the book wisely also contains *responses to* Christianity from other faiths. As we might expect with a book intended as a teaching resource the editors assume a reader with some prior theological knowledge.

The arrangement of material is systematic and clear with three parts covering: 'Theoretical and Methodological Approaches', 'Christian Responses to Individual Faiths' and 'Other Faith Traditions Respond to Christianity'. Each subsection has its own useful and succinct editorial introduction and contains a balance of views offering at least two contrasting approaches. There are well-known writers and familiar passages – Karl Rahner, John Hick, Gavin D'Costa, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Hans Kung, Jonathan Sacks and the Dali Lama all feature – along with many names and sources which would, perhaps, only be familiar to the specialist. A great strength of the collection is its willingness to give equal weight to issues raised by such traditions as neo-paganism and Taoism along with the more familiar 'world religions'. For me, the weaker areas are in the material arising out of the practice of contemporary inter-faith encounter; Scriptural Reasoning, for example, has no mention. Given the breadth of the book and the

significance of secular pluralism for inter-faith relations today, it might also have been useful to include some texts on the theology of the secular and plurally religious society in which we live.

Stan Brown
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Astley, Jeff, *SCM Study Guide to Christian Doctrine* (SCM Press 2010 £16.99 pb) pp. 224 ISBN 978-0334043249

In this Study Guide Jeff Astley has tried a novel approach to what, for some, is a rather dry subject, 'Christian Doctrine'. Rather than work through a systematic theology from theory to practice, he has shaped it to give the practical, ecclesial outworking in a central set of three chapters on Christian Activity, Belonging and Healing.

The opening chapters start in the usual way of defining terms, reminding us that doctrine means teachings, and also the nature and use of theological language. Then there are chapters on Christian experience, before the book concludes with a more theoretical treatment of Christ, God and the World, the nature of God and finally, of course, Christian Hope.

The invitation to consider theology as a conversation is most welcome. This is a good resource for those engaging in a study of theology as an enterprise of open discourse. The idea of there being a spectrum rather than polarization of ideas guards against the destructive nature of 'party line' theology: be it conservative or liberal, catholic or evangelical, that blights much theological debate. There is a good selection of questions for the reader or study group to ponder.

Did this structure of theory, practice, theory work? I am not convinced especially as the chapter on the Church's Healing gave a very theoretical, though helpful, survey of the atonement. Nevertheless with a good index and helpful definition boxes spread throughout the text, the structure is less important for this study guide. The writing is clear, with technical terms immediately defined, good use of simple diagrams, even the occasional amusing aside. Doctrine doesn't have to be boring. As both a reference and study resource aimed at undergraduate level 1 this has much to recommend it.

John Emmett
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Cupitt, Don, *Theology's Strange Return* (SCM Press 2010 £16.99 pb) pp. xvii, 133 ISBN 978 0 334 04372 0

Don Cupitt's conviction is that, acknowledged or not, the radical-humanist reading of the human condition is unavoidable, and that religion cannot be exempt. Since at least David Hume in the early 1730s, life simply has no outside. We are on our own and the supernatural has been edged out.

Yet this is a warm, frequently doxological, book that points to ways in which life-affirming theological themes are making a comeback. The philosophers are here (their terminology and Cupitt's own preferred expressions are explained) but also the voice of common experience. Language is everything for Cupitt, yet all the senses are drawn on for the experiencing of wonder. The sun and landscape, music, film and art, poets and writers are called on to testify to theology's return in new guises.

The Introduction sets out the stall with examples that ease us into the concept behind the book, though to distil each of them into a sentence is to engage in a terseness that Cupitt helpfully avoids. Firstly, whereas in the traditional theology of Genesis 1 it is *God's word* that has the power of creation, in postmodernity, while it remains *language* that creates and shapes the world, it is now *our language*. Secondly, it is precisely through the human theological idea of a God who created us in his own image that we have gradually been able to become all that we now are in a world without the supernatural. Thirdly, Jesus is freed to become again the radical, ethical liberator when the theologically created Christ of faith is recognized as a development for maintaining religious control.

In 12 enjoyable bite-sized chapters we are introduced to theological themes that have returned different yet recognizable. 'The Return of Divine Grace as Universal Contingency', for example, describes the abandonment of pre-destination and 'Why me?' thinking in favour of the readiness to accept that a lot of things just happen. Word studies show how thought has developed and Cupitt, writing (he reminds us more than once) as an older man, declares 'Just to welcome each morning, just to see once more the annual cycle of plant and animal life, and just to feel the sun and to know that one is still able to enjoy life – all this remains a blessing, an unlooked-for gift, a happy happening. Just life itself makes *me* feel as happy as his personal Assurance of Salvation used to make the old Calvinist feel.' For most of the time there is more grace here than in the old Moral Providence.

Cupitt goes on to consider ways the world is experienced and understood in western secularized societies and is repeatedly able to trace the roots of

today's thought deeply embedded in religious and philosophical tradition. With such antecedents the late modern radical-humanist world-view is anything but meagre and barren. Cupitt would not share the interest Harvey Cox, having earlier disavowed the possibility of desecularizing, later found in new Pentecostal forms of religion. For Cupitt there is no going back. Rather, he seeks to persuade that traditional divine attributes and operations can only 'return' precisely in a new and more worldly guise. On this reading the Church may have ceased to be a sign of hope, but its story remains an essential part of how we as humankind have come to be who we are – and there could be space emerging for a new kind of Grand Narrative.

Ken Walker
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Vickers, Jason E., *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T and T Clark 2009 £14.99 pb) pp. viii, 133 ISBN 0567 O3353 8

Vickers avoids the pitfalls of those who make John Wesley, who preached a 'plain truth for a plain people', a simplistic practical theologian by ironing out the inconsistencies and seeming paradoxes and creating a monochrome Wesley in their own image. For such, it is comforting to emphasize the apparent contradictions between Wesley's theology (an Arminian gospel for all) and his praxis (a High Church Tory of the establishment Church). So for some he is a reactionary conservative and for others a progressive democrat. Vickers argues, very persuasively, from his treatment of Wesley texts and the social context of his writing and ministry, that there were no such contradictions between Wesley's Arminian covenant theology and his economic trinitarian theology. Sometimes the text betrays the American context and fails to nuance the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* of the Methodist movement within a Church of England which it sought to reform, not separate from. An opening chapter on the development of eighteenth-century Methodism offers a useful summary before three main chapters devoted to the key questions: was Wesley loyal to the Church or a reluctant rebel? Was his movement a challenge to the establishment of his day? Was his Arminian theology a loyalist theology of joyful obedience or of the egalitarian freedom as a 'proto-liberal democrat'? Perhaps the best chapter is the one devoted to a discussion of his 'Honouring the King',

including a critique of treatments of the theme by David Hempton and Ted Jennings, stressing the underlying principles he argued from rather than the commitments and actions which flowed from his ministry. Vickers makes the case for Wesley as a constitutionalist deeply committed to order and hierarchy rather than an individualistic liberal, closer to Burke than to Paine. The proto-Marxist liberation theologians who have made John Wesley their patron saint will find Vickers uncomfortable reading. Wesley is firmly embedded in the doctrine and liturgy of the Church of England, with a covenant theology of grace set in the context of constitutional rights guaranteed by the King in Parliament, to whom Wesley owes his obedience as an enthusiastic supporter of the confessional state. To create conflicts between Church and State, Religion and Politics, God and the King, is to misrepresent Wesley. The implications of Vickers' reading of Wesley for the contemporary conversations with the Church of England and Methodist responses to secularizing tendencies in government reform are a challenge to the enduring nonconformity of Methodism which owes more to Victorian liberalism than to the eighteenth century.

Tim Macquiban
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Ward, Graham, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (SCM Press 2009 £25.00 pb) pp. 317 ISBN 978 0 334-04350-8

There's lots of talk around these days about living in a post-Christendom world where the norms of western society no longer take their bearings from Christian practice. Terms such as secularization, materialism, postmodernity and so on, suggest that Christian disciples inhabit a strange and increasingly alien environment. Graham Ward's book tries to help them reimagine their vocation in this changing landscape. To do this he undertakes a depth redescription of the present context and the impact of this upon both the world and the Church. This involves unmasking the theological assumptions of late modernity, rereading the Christian tradition back into contemporary culture, suggesting what it means for Christians to act in this environment, and developing an understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in both world and Church. In so doing he not only reimagines the vocation of the Church, but exposes contemporary western thought and practice as parasitic upon Christian culture and its universalisms. In addition, by locating western secularism within a global perspective, he

contextualizes it and relativizes it. The western secular tradition emerges as something particular and increasingly transcended as other societies and their diaspora communities are assertively religious and reject any equation between modernity and the decline of faith. In addition signs of a hunger for the transcendent are also re-emerging within so called secular contexts seen in the popularity of the Harry Potter series, *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the rise in pilgrimage statistics and the rise of the spirituality industry. These combined reveal the new visibility of 'religion'. Yet this post-secular world is not a return to the past but represents a new hybrid landscape within which existing religious communities have a legitimate stake. Ward therefore promotes impolite Christian discipleship which he calls 'eschatological humanism', a mediated theocracy whereby Christians live unashamedly under the final judgement of God. Such living signifies and reperforms the Christian hope through ecclesial micro-practices whose full meaning may not be immediately transparent. They represent communal ethics discerned through corporate and prayerful discipleship. This way of life is material and embodied, though not materialistic. It is theologically rooted and thereby able to contest the commodified, branded vacuity which presents itself as the contemporary capitalist consumerist utopia. In short Ward advocates communal faith in flesh expressed in the practices of hope, love and faith to counter faith in fantasy marketed across the globe in the name of a spurious, hyper-individualistic freedom. This feels like a robust vocation for the contemporary Church.

John B. Thomson
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Althaus-Reid, M., (ed.), *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* 2nd ed., (SCM Press 2009 £19.99 pb) pp. 192 ISBN 978-0-334-04185-6

Marcella Althaus-Reid died in 2009, and this second edition was published with a preface marking both her death, her particular contribution to the revisioning of liberation theology, and her own work on indecent theology.

This book, part of the Reclaiming Liberation Theology series, attempts to participate in the recovery of liberation theology which has come to be seen as increasingly marginalized and, more worryingly, as a failed

project in Latin America. Within the collection of essays several reasons are posited for this by the range of authors, each writing from Latin American perspectives. As they engage with liberation theology they challenge its assumptions and its processes with reflections from human sexuality, poverty, gender, post-colonialism and identity. The collection flows naturally from essays that attempt to deconstruct the methodology of liberation theology to those that wish critically to engage with feminist theology and to construct an *indecent* liberation theology. The styles vary significantly from reasonably 'academic' theological text, with detailed referencing, to one very poetic essay which at times feels confused, and to the concluding, testimonial, theological reflection of a minister in the Metropolitan Community Church in Buenos Aires.

The book will undoubtedly satisfy those already convinced by the project of indecent theology and probably leave those who are sceptical unmoved. It may, because of that, be ultimately disappointing. More fundamental, however, is whether it succeeds in revitalizing liberation theology. Theologically some of the writers succumb to a process of over compensating for what they see as deficiencies in both traditional and liberation theologies by risking the reduction of the person to the material and the body alone; the rightful rejection of the dualism of body and soul results simply in a distorted corporeality. Similarly, the adding of new layers of gender, post-colonialism and sexuality may add to the project of liberation theology, as a critique of excluding communities and social realities, but probably doesn't further the macro-project. The answer and resolution may lie, in fact, in the final essay: the personal journey of one person in their faith, and within that their sexuality, who then enables the welcome, reception, liberation and celebration of others in a community of prayer, worship and faithful action. Where the macro fails, the micro may offer the gospel a way forward.

Kerry Tankard
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Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation* (T&T Clark 2010 £25.00 pb) pp. xx, 234 ISBN 978 0567033570

The paperback publication of this book makes more widely available to ecumenical discussion Avis' valuable contribution to the nature of authority in the Church. The assumed coherence of the spiritual and the temporal

in medieval thought led to the emergence of frequent conflict between them. Gregory VII, Innocent III and Boniface VIII, for example, claimed superiority: all power was of God wholly delegated to the Pope who, in respect of temporal power, further delegated it to the Emperor. Not unnaturally, the Emperor objected – hence, for example, the Investiture Contest.

The Great Schism (1378) stimulated reflection on the relationship between papal, monarchical authority and the authority of a General Council: it was after all the Council of Pisa, summoned by the cardinals in 1409, which removed two popes from office in order to end the scandal of three popes. Jean Gerson and Nicholas of Cusa are significant discussants of conciliarity. Subsequent argument at the Council of Basel (1431–49) re-established monarchical power in the hands of the papacy and brought about the eclipse of conciliarist influence.

Avis points out that discussion of conciliarity has never died. The Reformation in both Protestant and Anglican forms has, in distinctive ways, made room for modified versions. Drawing on the Natural Law and the Common Good they ground authority in the Synod, or Conference, rather in a person. Vatican II testified to episcopal collegiality, though not at the expense of papal primacy. Hence conflict remains between Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism regarding the nature of authority. However, there are some Catholics, (e.g. Archbishop Quinn, Cardinal Kaspar, and *Receptive Ecumenism*), who are becoming more sympathetic to the opportunities presented by renewed attention to the issues raised by conciliarism. On the other hand, dissensions in Anglicanism and within Protestantism have lead to concern about where authority lies in these traditions.

This book is a valuable enquiry into issues central to an understanding of the nature of authority in the Church. Could we continue conversation where Avis leaves it, and find a *modus vivendi* which would allow us to move beyond the Reformation and bear witness to Christ in the world?

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Leach, J. and Paterson, M., *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* (SCM Press 2010£18.99 pb) pp xiv, 226 ISBN 0334 04325 6

Pastoral Supervision is precisely what its subtitle suggests: a handbook, and a very practical one at that. At a time when church ministers and employees are being urged to take the need for supervision seriously, as an appropriate form of Christian oversight and accountability, David Lyall points out in the first words of his foreword, 'This is a book that was waiting to be written' (p. ix). The foreword draws attention to the recent formation of the (British) Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators and the leading role of the two authors in it.

The book is admirably clear throughout. It is aimed at those who are already engaged in the practice of supervision, as supervisors or as supervisees, and also at those who are considering whether to engage in supervision. Pastoral supervision is defined here as work/ministry-focused, distinguishing it from counselling and spiritual direction, and undertaken from a spiritual/theological world-view (which makes it *pastoral*). Space is not given to distinguishing supervision from, say, consultancy and the book's suggested techniques would be shared by many mentors and spiritual directors. Each chapter has a summary at the beginning (not really necessary?), starts its main theme through attention to Scripture and ends with exercises for the reader. All chapter titles begin with 'Attending to . . .', which is an image that could have borne more explication as it is theologically so rich. The chapters cover vision (both what supervision is and also the supervisee's vision of ministry), models for understanding the supervisor's role, dealing with what's brought to supervision from the ministry context, the context of the supervisory relationship itself, and wider contexts that impinge. There is a chapter on group supervision and one on ending supervision. In the examples and exercises, there is a good range of creative techniques, not all word-focused.

There is some tension between the definition of pastoral supervision through its (vague) spiritual/theological context and the actual use in the book of a definitely Christian context, though that is unlikely to be a problem to many readers of this journal. Rather ironically for a book concerned with enabling supervisees and supervisors to learn for themselves, the reader has to trust the authors for the theoretical underpinning; for instance, the appropriate use of secular models, since this is not discussed. However, such discussion would be beyond the scope of a short book that is focused on practical

techniques. There are footnotes and a bibliography through which these concerns could be pursued.

Pastoral Supervision does what it sets out to do. Reading it for review, I did not give myself time to do more than read through the exercises, but I shall certainly return to them.

Jane Craske
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Rogerson, J.W. and Vincent, John, *The City in Biblical Perspective* (Equinox 2009 £15.99 pb) pp. 122 ISBN 978-1-84553-290-1

As its title suggests this modest book explores biblical perspectives on the city. The first part, by J.W. Rogerson, begins with a brief consideration of the meaning of the word 'city' in English and its Hebrew synonyms. Old Testament cities were small, a base for services in an economy which was still largely land based. Yet city houses were exempt from the Jubilee laws, perhaps because shared walls made for more complex ownership rules. Frequently cities have a negative connotation as in Babel, a symbol of human rebellion against God, and Sodom, epitomizing human greed and wickedness generally rather than the specific sexual sins so often attributed to it. Intriguingly the Song of Songs 'portrays the countryside as liberating and the city as enslaving' from a young woman's viewpoint.

To those who know John Vincent, it is hardly surprising that his contribution on New Testament perspectives focuses on the role of the city as a source of power and influence and on the implications of the New Testament material for contemporary Christians. In New Testament times those in power were neither Israelites nor Christians. Mark features Jesus as a peasant from a small town (though even Nazareth is a 'city' (*polis*) in Luke 1.26). By contrast Matthew addresses mainly urban Christians whilst Luke focuses on Jerusalem and 'Acts is almost totally an urban story.' In a discussion of Corinth Vincent sees evidence of social strata in the tiny early Christian community notwithstanding the challenge to social structures, such as the role of women and the institution of slavery, which underlies the gospel. Romans 13.1–7 'clearly cannot be taken over as a policy good for all time'. Above all 'in the New Testament, God's Project becomes focused in the person and work of Jesus centred upon acting out the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven/God here on earth'.

I found this an intriguing read. It opened windows on a number of issues

to which, as both preacher and citizen, I have given inadequate attention. But really I want more than this book offers, for it is more like a collection of tasters around a theme than full treatment of any of them. And in the end I am not entirely convinced that a Bible written in an essentially agrarian society whose 'cities' are more like today's market towns has much to offer to the complex modern city so far removed from the land that many urban children hardly know or care where their eggs, milk or bread are sourced.

Dudley Coates
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Isherwood, Lisa and Bell Chambers, Elaine, *Through Us, With Us, In Us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century (*SCM Press 2010 £25.00 pb) pp. vii, 263 ISBN 978 0 334 04366 9

In many respects this book is an invitation to new ways of thinking about how we understand ourselves in relationship with each other, the cosmos and God. Relational theology draws on the rich resources of process, liberation and feminist theologies as well as ecotheology. The book is divided into three helpful sections, each addressing a different area in which relational theology challenges our understanding of God between and within us.

Embodying Relational Theologies includes five provocative chapters which range from Susannah Cornwall's theological reflection on intersex conditions to Mary Grey's demonstration of non-relationality and its consequences in a case study of Palestine. The chapters under the heading of 'Relationality and the Cosmos' are just as diverse. They wrestle with our relationship with creation and the cosmic story, weaving together the themes of role, place and fluidity to develop an agenda for fresh ways of relating based on the integration of old and new theological insights.

The final section 'Divine Relationality' draws on human experience to stimulate debate on the nature of God. Again, the richness of the perspectives which reflect on such issues of abuse, pain and power make it a theologically challenging read.

This book is a valuable resource for those studying theology at first degree or MA level. It is a demanding read and one which those who have limited prior knowledge of systematic theology, and feminist theology in

particular, might struggle with. Some chapters provoke and challenge in uncomfortable ways and others provide inspirational insight into spirituality and the nature of the essence of our relationality as human beings. The authors are well known and each of them seeks to stimulate fresh theological thinking. To gain most from this book requires approaching it with a mind open to new ways of engaging with theology, ourselves, the cosmos and God. Quite a challenge, but a rewarding one!

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Bradshaw, T., *Pannenberg, A Guide for the Perplexed* (T and T Clark 2009 £14.99 pb)pp. viii, 190, ISBN 9780567032560

There are two competing texts that are currently providing theological readers with introductions to some key theological thinkers. At one end we have the armchair theologians series and at the other, a series of 'guides for the perplexed'. The former play heavily on well-informed scholars, a light touch, some comic twists and the odd cartoon to keep the reader engaged. On the other we have a drier, more serious approach which basically and fairly says it all. Here I sit with a 'guide to the perplexed', so let me try to do it justice.

I've never read Pannenberg as a primary text. What a confession! I have, however, read Barth so I feel I've justified myself a little, but I approached this text in an appreciative way. I therefore must ask the questions: who is this book for, and what can it teach me of Pannenberg and his thinking; and can I, as the ill informed, engage with him and be moved to read his work more deeply?

To deal with the first question – it is well written for the student, be they recognized by their affiliation to the academy or by their personal passion to discover what they do not yet know. The nature of these texts is to present the work of a valuable theologian in an accessible way. That said, one should not consider this to be a simple read. While the original sources may be even more testing, these introductions will stretch the reader while attempting to offer an important overview of the primary work. This leads conveniently to my answer of the latter questions.

Students will be enriched by this 'guide'. It serves as a good introduction to the key themes of Pannenberg's work, a summary of the primary

theological texts and an enticement to look further. As I set myself the question, based on this book, would I read deeper into Pannenberg – the answer has to be yes.

If you want jokes, with good academic content, go for the Armchair Theologian series anytime, but sadly Pannenberg hasn't made it there yet. That said, you could do much worse than the *Guide for the Perplexed*.

Kerry Tankard
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