

REVIEWS

Marina Lewycka, *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian*. London: Viking, 2005. 336 pp. £12.99. Hbk. ISBN 0670915602.

Peterborough where I live is a conglomerate of a range of communities of strangers, groups from a variety of countries who have been swept here partly by the availability of work and partly by the tides of recent European history. Alongside the more visible presence of Pakistanis and Indians, there are groups of Eastern Europeans from countries such as Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* offers an insight into the life of one of the lesser known communities of immigrants living in this city.

This first novel of Marina Lewycka, shortlisted for the Orange Prize of Fiction, is at first sight not an obvious choice for a theological book review. Religion or even Christianity is hardly mentioned at all, and a superficial reading could lead one into reading this book as a black and white *Daily Mail* type tale of those who exploit others because they can. But those who allow themselves to be drawn into the author's gripping and often hilariously funny style find a complex picture of human life in twenty-first century Britain which raises questions to which Christian theology cannot give simple or simplistic answers. Rather, Christian theologians must allow themselves to be read by a text like this and to engage in constructive dialogue with it.

Nikolai, the narrator's father, a Ukrainian widower, announces that at eighty-four years of age he is getting married to a young woman from Ukraine. His two daughters decide that they must put aside their old feud and rescue their father from this gold-digger who turns out to be in pursuit of nothing but a glamorous western lifestyle which the old man is unable to sustain. Valentina "exploded into our lives like a fluffy pink grenade, churning up the murky water, bringing to the surface a sludge of sloughed-off memories, giving the family ghosts a kick up the backside." (1) Nikolai refuses to give in to their misgivings about this arranged marriage to a woman who is divorcing her husband in Ukraine to marry a man in England in order to secure an education and a future for Stanislav, her son. "If I can save just one human being..."

Nikolai diverts his attention to writing poetry and to the study of the seemingly safe and undisturbable beauty of engineering and writes for posterity "a short history of tractors" in Ukrainian. He is a tragic and at times comical character, a survivor, obsessed with saving at least one life from suffering be it from Communism or capitalism. It doesn't really matter. And he, a lifelong non-smoker, is

obsessed with cigarettes which once saved his life and because of which he once nearly lost it.

Interspersed with the story about their father's marriage with Valentina is the narrative of the relationship between the two sisters Nadeshda (the narrator) and Vera. Vera is ten years older than Nadeshda and is the keeper of the family history, now that their mother has died. Nadeshda has grown up envying her for the secret knowledge she has about the adult world and yet begins to sense that Vera "knew grown-up secrets so terrible that just the knowledge of them had scarred her heart." Thrown together once again by the need to rescue their father from his hair-brained idea to save a woman from Ukraine, she decides "to find out the whole story, and to tell it in my own way." (49)

This is a story about remembering, telling and about that which cannot be told and is best left unsaid; those things which are best not known "because they can never be unknown," "the knowledge of the darkness that lurks at the bottom of the human soul." (272) Underneath Valentina, the Ukrainian beauty who demands all the luxuries life in Peterborough has to offer and taunts Nikolai, the graveyard escapee, about his erectile dysfunction ("squishy squashy floppy") emerges a human being, a mother who wants the best for her son, who has nothing to sell but her own body.

This is not a story of heroes and heroines; it is a story of survivors, of those who forge a living because they can do nothing else, but also of those who, out of gratitude for their own survival, find within themselves the desire to make the survival of others possible. "You must understand, Nadezhda, only I can save her." (4)

Christianity is not so much concerned with survival but speaks about life, life in abundance, the glory of God, a human being fully alive, Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. But perhaps our Christian speaking of life or life in abundance is meaningless if it does not also hold within it the desire for the survival of others, those closest to us, even if they are themselves caught up in the structures of sin and death, and of strangers.

Perhaps it is here, in flawed characters like Nadezhda and Vera, their father Nikolai and even Valentina, desperate survivors amidst the chaos that is modern European history and the building of the new Europe, that we find remnants of the distorted image of God within us, the ability to close a chapter of history, unresolved though it may be, and to be enticed once again to go on a journey of hope.

Lewycka tells the story of two families caught up in the struggle to survive ("to survive is to win"). She does not use big loaded terms like "forgiveness" or "responsibility." There is no grand happy ending, only the acknowledgement that the main characters find themselves in a place where new lessons about life can be learnt, where life can somehow go on. Her moving debut novel illustrates that not only is the personal political, but the political is eminently personal, that the grand narratives of the ordering and re-ordering of the world ultimately break down into the stories of women, men and children who endeavour to survive.

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John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith*. Cardiff: Aureus, 2003. 148 pp. Pbk. £12.99. ISBN 1-899750-35-5.

A thumbnail sketch of John Reader's latest book would probably read, "The Archers meet Jacques Derrida"—an everyday tale of country folk whose ways of living, unbeknown to them, have profound philosophical and theological implications. In case this be misconstrued as implied criticism, I want to state immediately that the book is a deft foray into highly complex ideas about the nature of community, politics, civil society and social economics, all within the setting of post-modernity and globalization. In the light of these two "metanarratives," Reader asks, "What is distinctive about Christian faith, identity and pastoral practice?" And what is the basis for dialogue between Christianity and the secular rationalism?

As with his first book *Local Theology* (1994), Reader argues that "the local" is the place of epiphany, where the particular sheds light on the universal. This time round, he is feeling the pinch of living at the level of "blurred encounters." As vicar of some rural parishes in Worcestershire, he finds himself caught between the heightened consumerism and expectations of "newcomers" impacting on old values and ways of life. As a member of a local Housing Association Board, he feels himself increasingly "professionalized" within a world once shaped by the concept of volunteering. As *de facto* chaplain to the farming community in 2001 during the trauma of the foot and mouth outbreak, he is caught between the emotional attachment of farmers to their animals and land, and the cold rationalism of the Government and veterinary science as they attempt to control the disease.

These local experiences lead him to locate part of his discomfort between two hitherto opposing forces, "faith and reason," which traditionally have "stood on mountain tops facing each other and occasionally shouting across using words that the other cannot understand." (22) His thesis is that the "deconstruction" (a Derridean term) of rational modernity has allowed "the other," hitherto excluded by the labelling of modernity, to emerge. The "other" includes faith, and values associated with it including trust, emotional attachment, life as vocation, radical hospitality—values that cannot be rationally explained, but which are important if one is to allow both faith and reason to engage in beneficial exchange. Reader identifies four "locations where the relationship between faith and reason might constructively be pursued" (41) One location is Derrida's concept of the Messianic which describes a discernable structure of visionary *optimism* underpinning human thought and enterprise (for example, Habermas' ethics of communication, and discourses on human rights). This messianic dimension points to the future and holds out possibilities of what is yet to come. It is the dimension by which we can measure and evaluate human activity and explore "some common ground for future exploration." The problem comes when someone or something thinks "it has arrived."

Another idea emerging from the Messianic is that of different levels of autonomy. The *pre-autonomous* is that level of emotional response and basic trust, which we need as the basis for any rational decision (i.e. *the autonomous*). The *post-autonomous* is when we move into the Messianic, by exploring new ways of being and patterns of thinking that point to and en flesh future possibilities. The post-

autonomous clearly links to Castells' concept of the "project identity" which moves from forms of "resistance" and "legitimizing" identity to a conscious attempt to establish new and changed identities as a "positive force for change." This is ultimately John Reader's argument; that all "blurred encounters" taking place, pastorally, globally and locally, are opportunities for new and creative ways of thinking, despite the risks of being "eaten" by others in terms of losing distinctive values and motivations.

The metaphor of eating reminds me that the menu offered by this book may not be to everyone's taste. The sudden shifts from abstract discourses on human rights to the intricate politics surrounding the organization of a Children's Festival can be disorientating, and it is not always clear what category of book this is as various components "blur" into one another. Is this pastoral care, political science or philosophical discourse? The book could also have paused for more theological reflection about emerging ecclesiologies in these blurred settings. But on the whole the threads connecting these different elements remain intact.

This is a highly creative call for a multi-functioning church, one that can operate and engage with all three levels of autonomy and thus build on an "open identity" in relation to the local/global world.

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Frances Ward, *Lifelong Learning: Theological Education and Supervision*. London: SCM Press, 2005. viii + 192 pp. £14.99. Pbk. ISBN 0-334-02962-7.

This is a book which promotes knowing in action through reflection on practice. It is addressed to those training for ministry, those engaged in ministry and those who facilitate life-long learning through supervision or theological education. The book is structured to explore seven anchor ropes which support the safety net of supervision: reading the signs of the times; educational theory; the interplay of theology; learning to listen; learning to write; resistance in learning; coping with the downside of ministry. The mesh of the net is created using case study material from the verbatim accounts of six ministers and three student ministers. Questions to engage the reader in reflection on their own practice pepper the book and invite a journey of reflexive learning.

What the book does well is to encourage the reader to make themselves accountable for the work and learning they do. By offering case study material and asking the reader to analyse the patterns of ministry they see there, the reader can begin to appreciate the value of supervision. Simultaneously questions about one's own practice are raised. Ward manages to make the book itself a safe space in which to reflect on one's own practice. In this way the book itself becomes a dialogue partner, mirroring the dialogical process of supervision which she explores theologically through J. V. Taylor's understanding of the Holy Spirit as the Go-between God.

The disadvantage of this approach is that it does underplay the huge power differential between supervisor and reflective practitioner. In the ecclesial settings Ward addresses, most supervision is undertaken by those who have institutional power: that is, by those placed in oversight. Particularly when those in supervision are being trained, formation into particular habits and ways of being are critical to the task of supervision. Ward does not make a distinction between supervision which is voluntary and supervision which is part of training or which happens within a structure of oversight.

Consequently, she does not draw out any theology of oversight. Ward wants to dissociate supervision from the idea of being watched over and so, although the case study material roots the issues discussed in the, sometimes, grinding reality of ministry, the essential relationship between episcopate and ministry is lost. Although she handles well the importance of allowing the reflective practitioner to have a different voice from that of the supervisor, the relationship between both these voices and the voice of the Church or of God is a missing dimension.

Nonetheless, there are some very useful insights. For those beginning theological education or encountering supervision for the first time, the chapters on life-long learning, and particularly the section on the games of avoidance played by both supervisors and student ministers in chapter 6 are particularly helpful. For those who want to improve their supervision of the work of others, chapters 4 and 6 offer some ideas and suggest further reading. In their daily work those who minister have enormous access to and influence over others. Any book which helps ministers to take supervision seriously is to be welcomed.

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Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*. London: SCM Press, 2004. iv + 186pp. Pbk. ISBN 0-334-02983-X.

From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology traces the development of a feminist theology which critiques the patriarchal stance of culture and theology, through to liberation theology which stands with the poor for liberation from oppression using the Exodus motif, to an indecent or queer theology that reflects with those not only on the economic margins but also on the margins of sexuality; prostitutes, gays and lesbians and particularly transvestites.

This book came alive for me in the story telling and re-telling of the biblical narrative around indecent theology done from the margins of poverty, or what is regarded as indecent, from a normative heterosexual position. The story of the woman with the issue of blood is given a challenging new interpretation as we move from Jesus, the patriarchal power, cleansing the impure woman to an interpretation which sees the flow of blood as potentially creative. The book, I believe, was much weaker in its abstract theoretical conceptualizations. These I found difficult to follow due to the language used, a lack of knowledge concerning the

South American context, and a lack of ability to see the connecting or progressive steps from feminist to liberation to indecent theology.

It is an interesting observation that while several articles in the book analyse the commodification of liberation theology as a product of Western capitalist theology, this book has the hallmarks of being such itself. The book explores the “popular theologian” meeting with the poor of South America and doing biblical reflection with them as a Western product and the books, theme parks and tourist trade arising out of liberation theology as objects for marketing in order to maintain the power of Western theology’s hegemony. This both tames the impact of liberation theology and provides profit for Western theology enabling it to maintain its power base. Yet Althaus-Reid’s book is written in a style expected by Western academia and is also being sold as part of that same power base. Maybe the impact will be to tame indecent and queer theology too, as well as providing further profit for Western capitalism to continue its hold on the globe and continue to increase the gulf between the rich and marginalized poor—the indecent folk.

Althaus-Reid argues strongly against bi-polarities, decent and indecent, male and female, body and spirit, seeking a more holistic approach that accepts diversity and the rich complexities of life today. In that she adopts a post-modern approach but without any explicit acknowledgement of the impact of post-modernist thought. She speaks of the challenge of indecent theology to the hegemony of Western theology but nowhere does she articulate how it is possible to hold together the different theologies arising from the different margins, for example the communities living under the bridges or in urban slums in South America or the numerous other marginalized communities within the global capitalist world. Thus while challenging the hegemony of Western global capitalism no viable alternative is offered; only a critique from a queer God expressed from within the nomadic, transitory communities where families and communities form in different combinations alien to the government or official stated lines. However, it came across that in such situations there is definitely power for life.

Again my lack of experience in the South American context made it difficult from the book to gain a picture of how widespread ideas posited actually are. Many generalizations were used of the Conquista and its impact, of San La Muerte (the Saint of death), and the impact of Mariology. It is difficult to see how localized or widespread they might be from information given. I was left wondering whether things were being generalized from South American popular culture in a similar way to Western culture generalizing through its use of liberation theology and the notion of the popular theologian. For instance, a whole chapter was dedicated to the impact of Mariology, from a Roman Catholic perspective, and the interpretation that leads to, especially amongst women, as Mary the rich white woman who cannot walk. I wonder how much this is an external reading from an academic and how much it is actually held among Latin American women. There seemed little evidence other than an impression. As the Latin American women had such indigent powerful women, with their skirts and festivities, it is surprising that Mary has not been re-envisioned by them following these role models, regardless of the power of the Roman Catholic church in that setting.

Having critiqued Western theology for taming and co-opting South American liberation theology, Althaus-Reid seeks to move liberation theology on to indecent theology, a move I did not find totally satisfying. Liberation theology has, as its underpinning, the Marxist understanding of people's relation to the means of production. There is alienation between those who own such and those who, as workers, are "owned" as part of the means of production; between the wealthy and those who are marginalized by their alienation from the means of production. Althaus-Reid argues that this does not go far enough and we have to move on to one's relation to one's body. I was not convinced by her argument that this follows and was therefore left questioning what the basis of indecent theology actually is.

The book left me asking if it is possible to build a theology on the basis of a critique rather than on some more solid foundation. This writer suggests the body and one's relation to it as the basis but each person experiences embodiment in a different way so that this may result in total fragmentation, the hell or abundant life of a post-modern world. The book was powerful as a celebration of the diversity of life we experience as embodied people. It gives expression to our need as humans to recognize our rich bodily diversity, especially of those living on the margins, as transsexuals, gays or prostitutes, and to the sharing of stories as a key way of doing so. However, for me, the rationale and theoretical framework for doing so was not fully formulated.

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Oliver O'Donovan, *Just War Revisited*. Current Issues in Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 157 pp. Pbk. \$19.99. ISBN 0-5215-3899-8.

For those who believe that the point of Christian just war thinking is to make possible serious and politically relevant engagement with national policies and international affairs, the sad state of Christian ethical thought about such matters is a frequent cause for despair. On the one hand, we note the dominance of Hauerwasian pseudo-sectarianism in many quarters and its irrelevance to hard thinking about matters of state. On the other, one reads official ecclesiastical statements and writings of many Christian ethicists only to find the language of just war contorted into a "presumption against war" stance that uses the vocabulary of just war only to criticize and reject every possible use of military force (except, unhelpfully, peacekeeping in completely permissive environments). Needless to say, such an interpretation, in a world in which states will continue to feel the need—sometimes legitimately—to use military force condemns Christian thought to political irrelevance.

To further complicate matters, if one looks to the current state of secular international law, one finds legitimate use of force restricted almost entirely to responses to aggression unless authorized by the Security Council—a model which fits many contemporary real-world challenges poorly at best and reveals the dramatic disconnect between the Security Council's putative authority and its actual ability to function effectively as a collective security organization.

Oliver O'Donovan's *The Just War Revisited* is precisely the kind of tonic required for the whole community of Christian ethics. Although it consists of five essentially independent chapters dealing with different specific issues, there is an overarching theme: the origins of all Christian just war thinking in the specific problem of seeking justice and exercising judgment where there is no overarching authority to which contending parties may appeal for effective redress of grievances. As O'Donovan writes, "In the face of criminal war-making, judgment may take effect through armed conflict, but only as armed conflict is conformed to the law-governed and law-generating shape of judgment. . . . Formally, what is proposed [by just war thinking] is *toto caelo* different from the crime of war: it is a provisional witness to the unity of God's rule in the face of the antagonistic praxis of *duellum*. Yet it is no less true in this form than in any other that judgment has only the same material means available to it as crime" (6–7).

The first chapter is the longest and most systematic. In it, O'Donovan lays out his fundamental theological approach to Christian just war. It is, he argues, an extension and not a departure from the normal responsibilities of government—different, since in the absence of overarching authority between states, it lacks formal judicial processes—but, when properly understood, striving in that absence to find law-like restraint and regulation. It disagrees fundamentally with pacifism, he cogently argues, not in choice of *means* (non-violent vs., when necessary, violent) but rather concerning "the *nature* that interim worldly peace that may in fact obtain between communities and individuals without mediating institutions of government, i.e., peace among sovereign nations" (7, original emphasis).

He further argues that the idea, commonly held by some, that pacifism and just war are close relatives—the former rejecting all war, the latter permitting it only very grudgingly—was a mere "trick of the light" caused by the concerns with massive nuclear deterrence (8). In other words, "presumption against the use of force" is not a general moral principle of just war, but only an artifact of that particular conjunction of factors at the height of the cold war deterrence stand-off which masked much more fundamental disagreement over the nature of the international community and the means of its governance. If ethics is about provision of practical guidance amid the hard cases of the real world, "'Nonresistance' is not an ethical term" (11). Instead, serious ethics much enable us "*to engage in the praxis of judgment—to engage in it in these days and in these circumstances, where we actually find ourselves, here and now*" (13, original emphasis).

What makes *Christian* just war thinking unique, O'Donovan argues, is its insistence that the just warrior retains a sense of his or her role as a provider of justice in the admitted irregular circumstance of lacking and established juridical authority. An implication of that stance is that, contrary to Michael Walzer's secular account (to pick only the most famous example), Christian just war may not "make survival the final criterion of what may and may not be done. . . . a Christian witness to God's peace must always be acted out against the horizon of suffering and martyrdom" (9). In other words, by balancing the transcendent perspective with the realities of earthly politics, O'Donovan argues, Christian just war creates the space for responsible and effective statecraft, including use of the military instruments of

national power, without succumbing wholly to the felt exigencies of a purely secular perspective.

With similar skill and balance, O'Donovan works his way through the full range of the standard just war principles and offers judicious and practically relevant interpretations of each. Any reader seeking nuanced and specific guidance on how to think intelligently about war would be well served by working through the whole of chapter 1 very carefully, with one major caution: O'Donovan argues that the traditional distinction between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* is not fundamental to the tradition. Space will not permit a detailed critique of that claim here, but as a practical matter such a position opens his argument to exactly the kind of "just war pacifism" (i.e., a view that uses just war language to oppose every responsible use of force) he is concerned to combat.

The rest of the book applies similar acumen to more specific and topical issues: counter-insurgency war (drawn heavily on the British experience in Northern Ireland); the much vexed question whether there can be such things as inherently immoral weapons (as opposed to immoral uses due to indiscriminate targeting or lack of discrimination); "war by other means," by which O'Donovan means sanctions and other non-violent but still coercive means on diplomacy; and the promise and limits of formal war crimes prosecutions for both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* crimes. Space will not permit a detailed assessment of the details of those arguments, but perhaps it will suffice to say that O'Donovan offers subtle and sometimes surprising perspectives and considerations on each of his chosen topics.

Christian just war thinking desperately needs rethinking if it is to be relevant to the contemporary world. Whatever one thinks about specific policy choices already made, it is obvious that the West is in for a long conflict from unfamiliar angles, and that few of those conflicts will fit established ways of thinking about just war as it took shape in post-Westphalian international law. O'Donovan's is one of a small but growing number of scholars who are plumbing the depths of the best of the Christian tradition, on the one hand, but keeping a firm eye on the realities of the contemporary international scene as well. This is an important book. Church leaders, scholars and ordinary Christians very much need the sober and reflective perspective it offers.

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Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004. 252 pp. Pbk. \$21.99. ISBN 1-58743-076-2.

Stanley Hauerwas' latest offering is a series of essays loosely collected around the issue of non-violence, a focus of much of his published work. The subtitle mentions Bonhoeffer, but only two essays address the German theologian and these reflect a very "Hauerwasian" Bonhoeffer (as Hauerwas himself acknowledges). The book has far more to say about Milbank, Wittgenstein and Yoder than Bonhoeffer.

The title of book does capture the fact that all of the essays, in one way or another, deal with Christian formation in a community of faith. However, Christian formation has been the constant theme of Hauerwas' writing for some 30 years, and there is not much new material in this book on that subject. Nonetheless, the essays are provocative and worth reading. If nothing else, Hauerwas is always interesting.

I especially liked his sermon on 9/11. I used it in a Sunday School class in my church, and the group's discussion of it was quite vigorous. There are pacifists in my church, but most of the members are "just warriors" who believe that war can only be justified as a last resort to protect the innocent. For many in the latter group, Hauerwas' sermon represented a compelling case for Christian non-violence. His conviction that "the Scripture makes clear that we do not get to vindicate Christ. We do not need to avenge his death. His ascension to the Father is the only vindication needed" was, for many, a clear articulation of Christian pacifism (212). Still, most were more compelled by the need for a just response to innocent suffering.

If there is another theme besides non-violence pervading this book, it is Hauerwas' response to the persistent critique that his understanding of the church-world relation is sectarian. Hauerwas hates to be called "sectarian." The question, of course, is what Hauerwas and his critics mean by that word. Hauerwas seems to assume that when folk call him sectarian they are suggesting that he advocates Christian withdrawal from the world. To this critique Hauerwas responds: "Contrary to critics who accuse me of tempting Christians to withdraw from the world, my concern has always been to help Christians understand we cannot and should not avoid engagement with the world" (14). Yet, other than offering a witness to the world, it is hard to discern exactly what Hauerwas means by "engagement." He often betrays a maddening tendency to leave statements like this one undeveloped.

I'm reminded of a friend in college who was a running back for the football team. He once told me that the key to being a running back is "to give them a leg and then take it away." Hauerwas' answer to his critics on the issue of sectarianism is akin to my friend's description of being a running back. Hauerwas is a good broken field runner—he is hard to pin down! He speaks of engagement with the world, but it is not clear what he means. Indeed, the clearest statement he makes of the church-world relation is buried in a footnote and again undeveloped: "The church can never abandon the world to the hopelessness deriving from its rejection of God, but must be a people with a hope sufficiently fervid to sustain the world as well as itself. That is why as Christians not only do we find that people who are not Christian manifest God's peace better than we ourselves, but we must demand that they exist. It is to be hoped that such a people may provide the conditions for our ability to cooperate with others in securing justice in the world" (232 n. 33). A concrete example of what he means by this statement would be enormously helpful.

The most insightful critique of Hauerwas' sectarianism is Jeffrey Stout's contention that Hauerwas is "rigidly dualistic" (*Democracy and Tradition* [Princeton University Press, 2004], 149). Hauerwas addresses this critique in the last chapter of the book, but even here it is hard to avoid the impression that Hauerwas is anti-world. For example, Hauerwas' critique of liberalism as ahistorical in that it denies the contingent nature of existence is probably the most consistent description he offers

for what he means by “world.” As such, it is hard to imagine that Hauerwas could find anything worth redeeming in liberalism. Yet most modern folk are not nearly as ahistorical and Kantian as Hauerwas imagines. If one were to describe modernity in a more historical and “traditioned” fashion, as Stout does, one might find a more dialogical and transformational understanding of the church–world relation.

My only other comment is on Hauerwas’ essay entitled “The Narrative Turn.” He distinguishes himself from “narrative theologians” who suggest that we all need stories, so why not the Christian story? He calls this strategy a “disguised” form of liberalism. For Hauerwas, narrative is rather the “character of Christian convictions” because “good stories defy summary,” while liberal theology is forever looking for good summaries or “essences” (137). Ironically, Hauerwas too provides plenty of summaries and essences as he articulates his own understanding of Christian narrative. In the opening words of his Postscript, for example, he writes, “If, as I argue in *Performing the Faith*, all life is contingency...” (215). Sounds like a summary or essence to me!

I always find Hauerwas worth reading. This particular book, however, should be read alongside Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition*. Taken together, these two books will enrich our discussion of what it means to be American and religious.

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Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005. xii + 226 pp. Pbk. \$18.00. ISBN 0-8006-3709-7.

Christians across denominations today are seeking a deeper understanding of how religious practices can help them pattern the rhythm of their daily tasks in ways that reflect God’s activity in their lives. *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* will be a good resource in their pursuits.

Bradley Holt tells a multicultural story of Christian spirituality by pointing out key historical and contemporary figures that remain relevant for current conversations, figures such as: Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, John Calvin, George Fox, Charles Wesley, Toyohiko Kagawa, Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, Gustavo Gutierrez, Desmond Tutu, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. This list makes it evident that Holt takes an ecumenical, “intercontinental and intergenerational” approach to spirituality. An aim of his book is to broaden North Americans’ understanding of Christianity. “Just as each period and culture in the history of Christian spirituality is unique, so we as individuals are different from one another. In our thirst for God, we need not all drink from the same cup, glass, or goblet” (205).

The traditions of Christianity are presented as living and dynamic. Holt encourages readers to think beyond practices and ideas that are most familiar to them. He places special emphasis upon the need for Westerners to understand and benefit

from the spirituality of non-Westerners. “The churches planted in these continents over the past centuries have accelerated their growth since the late twentieth century as their leadership was gradually put in the hands of indigenous persons. Perhaps missionaries from these countries will re-evangelize Europe in the future” (182). Without a good look at the practices and beliefs of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans, Westerners may miss significant developments that are distant from their own experiences and fail to understand the experience of people living in places where Christianity is growing at a more rapid pace.

Holt’s discussion of Christian spirituality is not limited to history and tradition; the book, he says, is as much about information as formation. “Having studied for many years in institutions of higher education, my approach to religion has been very intellectual, academic, left brain. My interest in spirituality is due in part to the needs of the other side of my human nature, the experiential, emotional, spontaneous, right-brain side. On one level, this book is an attempt to bring these two sides together” (17). Holt provides exercises at the end of each chapter to encourage the reader to engage what he or she has learned from spiritual expressions of the past. Some of the exercises are reflective. For example, Holt invites the reader to reflect on his or her own life by making a life map and considering the life’s outline from the point of view of spiritual formation. “Who was God for you during that time? Did you have spiritual experiences then? How did you think of your life? Who were the most important people to you? Did they serve as spiritual mentors or supports? What wounds or griefs did you suffer during each period? How do you look at them now?” (19). Other exercises that Holt suggests are more active, such as inviting the reader to go on retreat, fast, participate in communal worship, take a pilgrimage, and to take action for social justice.

It will be of interest to readers of *Political Theology* that Holt takes some care to discuss the connection of spirituality to social justice. “Doing” is underscored as a spiritual practice. “Both caring for the poor and standing up for those who are being treated unjustly are central to the Christian life” (27). The connection is most clearly made in his chapter on “The West Since 1900.” Holt ties the movements led by prominent Christian leaders against economic, racial, gender, and environmental injustices to ethical requirements clearly voiced by biblical prophets. He outlines the social-prophetic concerns of leaders such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard Thurman, Dorothy Day, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, and notes their significance for the continued relevance and vitality of Christianity in the twenty-first century.

One limitation of the book is that too little is said about the increasing importance of interfaith dialogue. Christians need to increase their knowledge of and appreciation for other religious and spiritual traditions and many are doing so on their own. As Holt contemplates where the discussion should continue to progress he calls for a “*listening spirituality*.” “We must be willing to hear the voices from continents and ages other than our own. It will be important that we also listen judiciously to people of other faiths” (206). The book would be even more valuable if it began to integrate this idea even when examining spirituality from a historical perspective.

What is most helpful about *Thirsty for God* is the way Holt connects historical information to the formation of Christian practice. Holt makes history accessible and invites further exploration of significant figures and movements. The book is a “sampling of spirituality of over 100 individuals and spiritual movements... [that] is intended to be an hors d’oeuvre to increase your hunger for more exploration” (vii). Although many of the significant figures Holt mentions could be much more fully developed, *Thirsty for God* is a good resource for congregational study groups, church school classes, and church leaders and teachers preparing for such discussions.

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David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household*. London: SCM Press, 2001. New edition. 297 pp. Pbk. £18.99. ISBN 0334028442 (hbk) 0334028426 (pbk).

“A theology of marriage and family does little if it works only with the concepts... This book has been an attempt to renarrate the home and the domestication of love and sex as the venture of a rich social life” (247). It is a most attractive quality of this book that it is rooted and grounded in real lives—the lives of the author, his family, his neighbourhood, and his church. There is an engaging story which colours and enlivens this exploration of sex, love, marriage and the household. Furthermore, the author is deeply contextually rooted in the traditions of Catholic moral theology which pervade this work, revealing themselves in the thinkers he quotes and the values he espouses, exegetes and criticizes.

This rootedness in praxis, in intentional and value-laden practices, is a strength, giving the book credibility, human interest, freshness, engaging sincerity and good-humoured earthiness. The work is in no way thinly anecdotal, but is backed up consistently by a wide range of research and thinking. There is, however, a flip-side to writing passionately and well about that of which you have experience and for which you are an advocate; and that is to write in too generalizing and dismissive a way about that which you know less well and find unattractive. My own history, when brought to this text, finds it at times both too optimistic about marriage and occasionally too shallow about some experiences which appear to be outside McCarthy’s own.

The central thesis of this book is that sex and marriage must be viewed in a wide context which includes social, political and economic factors, extended family and neighbourhood, church, and the love of God. This is explored deeply and richly and is an exciting and an important contribution to understanding what marriage means in contemporary western society. Throughout, McCarthy remains in touch with real lives and events. The pivotal story he tells at the beginning of chapter 5 about his family’s move to a new home and neighbourhood through which they unintentionally became embedded as an open family in an open neighbourhood—

"I have become used to the uncomfortable practice of waving at our neighbour through the closed kitchen window. This is not the home we were looking for" (86)—became for me a vivid symbol of what the book is all about. I did, however, sometimes feel that, rather than truly working from experience to the theorizing of that experience, he works from views largely determined by his understanding of moral theology and cherry-picks the experiences to illustrate the points.

The structure of the book is clear and well developed. The first four chapters are essentially critical, dealing with "Glamour and Good Housekeeping" (a wonderful title, whose content can be summed up by a quotation from later in the book, "Great lovers do not necessarily make for good housekeeping" [64]), "Sexual Desire," "Romantic Love" and "Family Values." The key target of McCarthy's critique is the supposedly self-sufficient marriage which in his view is the end result of a personalist account of the meaning of sexual union, combined with a consumerist, contractual account of the individual in society. This kind of marriage is, he argues, isolated, untenable and closed to love of God and neighbour. Instead we need to give a much thicker and richer account of marriage, as part of an open household, understood within an ongoing exchange of practical love which extends into the wider social domain. His emphasis on the ordinariness of things, including sex, and on the need to see love worked out over time, are engaging and realistic. "Marriage is only a particular instantiation of common practices of the Christian life" (217).

Chapter 5 lays out the shift from closed to open household and the neighbourhood economy, and chapter 6 addresses Catholic social teaching on family and home. Chapters 7 to 11 are the constructive part of the book, "reinterpret[ing] marriage and family by following the logic of what I develop...as the social economy of neighbourhood and home" (246).

The first edition of this book came out in 2001. The main feature of this new edition is the inclusion of fresh material, in particular chapter 10 "Family Miscellany." McCarthy says he has written this chapter in response to the need to include material on "topics like cohabitation, non-traditional family and same-sex marriage" (xii). While this chapter contains some interesting and indeed provocative material, I feel it slightly lacks coherence as a whole, too much of a "miscellany." It concludes with a brief section on "dying at home" which seeks to explore further what it means to be a bodily hospitable home, but needs to be better integrated into the whole book.

It should by now be quite clear why this book would be of interest to readers of *Political Theology*. McCarthy steadfastly refuses to detach sex, or love, or the family, from a communal political context. He says (of the discussion about same-sex relationships), "we cannot make our way through with private relationships and a politics of indifference" (221). It is well written in a readable, clear style which avoids technical jargon but does not avoid complex ideas. It is both theologically and sociologically attentive and widens the usual horizons of thinking on the subject of sex and marriage. I bring two questions to any book on this topic: what is the theological meaning of sexual intimacy? and, how do we address the issue of the bringing up of children in the complexities of contemporary life? McCarthy addressed both of my questions, although his answers felt a little circumscribed by

what seemed to be his *a priori* commitments. I have come away from reading the book much enriched in the way I think about both issues.

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Graeme Smith, *Oxford 1937: The Universal Christian Council for Life and Work Conference*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004. 273 pp. £34. Pbk. ISBN 3-631-52232.

Graeme Smith has given us a careful and meticulous retrospective study of the Oxford Life and Work Conference of 1937. He must have spent many hours in the archives of the World Council of Churches.

The WCC, as we now know it, came together from three earlier strands, namely Faith and Order, Life and Work, and the International Missionary Council. The founding fathers like Mott, Oldham, Bell, Paton, Soderblom, and Temple were all significant people who played a part in all three of these groups, slowly bringing them together in a passionate desire to build a united Church witnessing to the whole world. They saw this as a great world-wide movement but if you read the biographies and autobiographies of these people you find it is a small like-minded group of friends, urged on by a passionate vision. But they were not only friends; they were some of the most able and visionary people of their time. The First World War gave them a great impetus to succeed. But, as we see in this book, they were equally caught up in the time in which they lived; the growth of secularism, fascism and communism conditioned their reactions.

The movement went ahead through a series of international conferences, beginning with Edinburgh in 1910 dealing with the three main areas. Oxford had been preceded by the Jerusalem Missionary Conference and was followed by the Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference. They developed a methodology for these conferences with a series of preliminary meetings producing working papers, which thus created the agenda. What Smith does is to question what they thought they were doing. The Oxford Conference was really a missionary conference and he justifies using the work of Anton Wessells to demonstrate that what they did at Oxford was a form of missionary inculturalization. Whether this thesis is fully proved does not really matter; it provides a very useful spectrum through which to look at the Conference. Three main things struck me reading this book.

1. The first is the vast influence of J. H. Oldham. It is only recently that Keith Clements produced the long-awaited biography of Oldham. This long-lived father-figure of the ecumenical movement, who was basically an educationalist, not only organized many of the conferences but he was a great talent-spotter looking out for bright and lively minds and drawing them into the background work in many ways. He had enormous energy, commissioned the papers, edited them, drew up agendas and, while appearing to be very consultative, actually had most things in his hand.

Not for nothing did the jibe appear that ecumenical conferences met to agree the report that had been written beforehand.

2. The great theological tensions which lay underneath the Conference between the Barthian neo-orthodox theologians on one side, and more critical liberal theologians on the other. Oldham seems to have had more sympathy with the former group represented by Brunner, but some of his close colleagues like Temple and Niebuhr were in the second camp. Smith shows how they came to a common mind in that they agreed that man could not save himself and that there had to be a Christo-centric theology. But this tension has existed ever since and Smith rightly points to the more recent dialogue stimulated by the later writings of Lesslie Newbigin which have been so (destructively) dominant in missiological thinking in England. He then makes the telling point about Newbigin that “*his defence of Christian identity was a result of the process of inculturation which he feared would undermine the truth of Christianity.*” Readers who care to follow this further should consider the essays in the book, *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin* (Eerdmans, 2002)—a book not in Smith’s bibliography.
3. Inculturation is a term we need to consider and be self-critical about in our own thinking and actions. Wessells, like Dennis Nineham, sees Christianity as the transformer of cultures and this as an ongoing never-ending process. But Christianity also has to challenge culture as the Confessing Church did in Nazi Germany (and this was already becoming an issue at Oxford in 1937). Thus Christianity has no static identity but is already relating positively and negatively in any given culture. Smith sees this taking place at Oxford in relation to views about society. Oldham took this up later in his book *The Responsible Society*—a phrase used in the Oxford report. What has not yet been considered is how we hold our faith in this context and what is the spirituality behind it. This needs to be developed further. The answer may be partly in Bonhoeffer’s thinking and also in an apophatic theology which affirms both the activity of God in all things and in the ultimate mystery of God. Criticism of the Enlightenment implies that God has nothing to do with it and that there was once a pure Christianity and a pure gospel. But all this is unincarnational. If we are not to some extent trapped in our culture, we are not living in the real world. Barthianism will not allow of cultural processes in the New Testament. If the Gospel is transforming then the transformation is an ongoing process, not a static one. This is a matter which requires deeper thought by liberal theologians.

For many years the volumes of the Oxford Conference sat on my bookshelves, rarely opened. In downsizing for retirement, I disposed of them. Graeme Smith makes me wish that I had not done so. There is history here and also much food for thought.

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Scott, Peter and William T. Cavanaugh, eds, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. x + 566 pp. Hbk. \$124.95. ISBN 0-631-22342-8.

The world events of recent years have forced awareness on the unaware—and upon secular politicians and academics—that religion and theology do in fact have a political dimension; in fact they are and always have been political, however pleasant or unpleasant that prospect might appear to the observer's religious outlook. Indeed one experiencing such prospects might be led to reconsider the project of modernity, and the very spheres of the "secular," the "religious" and even of the "state" itself. Much contemporary "political theology" is predicated on specific delineations of the "religious" and the "secular," typically leaving to the former the spiritual or the individual or that which does not deal with "power." Yet though this approach can be discerned in what might now be termed classical Euro-centric approaches championed by Dorothee Sölle or Jürgen Moltmann, differing approaches were subsequently developed in Latin America and Southern Africa, and then again in the early eighties in North America as unease amongst the religious over the increasingly "naked public square" deepened. So what precisely is such "political theology"? A working definition is provided at the outset as "the analysis and criticism of political arrangements (including cultural-psychological and economic aspects) from the perspective of differing interpretations of God's ways with the world." (1). As this quote suggests, the answers to this question are divergent and diverging, and admittedly suspicion has surrounded the very term "Political Theology" since its inception due to its association with the German lay theologian Carl Schmitt who had a past colored by Nazi associations. What, then we still ask, is political theology?

This Companion offers an indispensable guide and source to answering this question, for it does not seek to provide one definition or answer, but rather to provide a record of a conversation between numerous interlocutors from varying disciplines and sub-disciplines within the political, the theological and related disciplines. So instead of offering an alphabetical dictionary approach (though one of this Companion's uses is the presence of a fine index which enables it so to be used as you trace an idea's or figure's other conversations) to the subject, in which critical links or ideas or arguments might be lost under an arcane heading, it offers thirty-five essays written by specialists and arranged into five parts. The first provides an introduction to the traditional resources in political theology, including essays on canonical sources (on the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures by Walter Brueggemann and on the New Testament by Christopher Rowland), theological sources prior to modernity (Augustine by Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Aquinas by Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt) and interestingly, one on an often overlooked area, that of worship or liturgy (by Bernard Wannenwetsch).

The second part, "Political Theologies: Survey," is precisely that, a survey of differing understandings, and the task, of political theology. The individual chapters are devoted respectively to both specific movements as well as to significant persons in the area of political theologies. The critical contribution here is that by Michael Hollerich on the modern proponent of Political Theology, Carl Schmitt, and the

conversation thus initiated is expanded through contributions on Jürgen Moltmann (by Nicholas Adams), Johann Baptist Metz (by J. Matthew Ashley), Gustavo Gutiérrez (by Roberto S. Goizueta), Karl Barth (by Haddon Willmer), Reinhold Niebuhr (by W. Werpehowski) and Stanley Hauerwas (by R. R. Reno) not to exclude amongst the fourteen chapters those on Black (by M. Shawn Copeland) and Asian (by Aloysius Pieres) political theologies. Other thinkers and movements presented include Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Courtney Murray, William Temple, and the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

The third part on “Constructive Political Theology” is the most interesting and provocative for the religious reader. Here the political and its relation to the theological are explicitly drawn out through seven chapters focused on theological doctrines such as the Trinity, (by Kathryn Tanner), Creation (by Peter Scott), Christology (by Raymond Schwager), Atonement (by Timothy G. Gorringer), Spirit (by Mark Lewis Taylor), Church (by William T. Cavanaugh) and Eschatology (by Robert W. Jenson). These contributions clearly reveal how the modernity’s assumptions regarding the place and function of religion determine its political role.

The fourth part, entitled “Structures and Movements,” presents responses to various movements in the world and academia. Each of these chapters is critical as they—in and from slightly differing perspectives—engage in conversation with both the past and present of political theology. Thus core theological and political convictions are brought into conversation with considered theological evaluations and their interactions noted with differing historical political and cultural structures and movements. The vital issues surrounding the definition of the state and civil society, democracy, critical theory, postmodernism and globalization are all treated here. The richness and potential of this volume exceeds the capacity of a review to fully describe, but if an example might be offered, this would be the contribution by Daniel M. Bell with his chapter on “State and Civil Society.” Here Bell engages the differing conceptions of the state and religion that have marked modernity and considers the role of “civil society” not only in limiting the power of the state, but also in transforming it. The numerous directions that his chapter suggests stimulate conversations that must be continued by the reader.

The fifth part, entitled “Perspectives,” offers an Islamic and Jewish perspective on the task of political theology. These two final contributions offer needed voices often not heard in an increasingly pluralistic—and politicized—religious world. Bustami Mohamed Khir outlines an Islamic theology of liberation that would offer socio-political justice. In so doing he traces the similarities of his approach with forms of Christian liberation theologies. Peter Ochs then presents a Jewish perspective in his “Abrahamic Theo-politics.” Once again, a reading of these two contributions forces recognition of similarities (and differences) and prompts further conversations and hopefully further refinement of concepts and political practices.

Editors Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh have succeeded in offering a valuable guide for all interested or intrigued by this contemporary phenomenon of political theology. It succeeds because it includes solid yet critical reflections from prominent theologians and political philosophers from across the continents, from

North America (USA, Canada), the United Kingdom, Europe (Germany, Austria), Asia (Sri Lanka) and Africa (South Africa). The ability of each contribution not only to answer the reader's questions, but also to provoke further conversation and analysis, means that this book promises to become essential reading for all interested in the many and necessary connections between theology and politics (however the terms are defined), and the bases upon which their modern claims are based. No matter the level of the reader's knowledge of political theology, to start reading from this Companion is to find oneself launched into an ongoing critical conversation.

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