

## Book Reviews

**Andy Goodliff & Paul W. Goodliff (eds.), *Rhythms of Faithfulness: Essays in Honor of John E. Colwell* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 266 pages. ISBN: 9781532633508.**

*Reviewed by Helen Dare*

Revd Dr Helen Dare is minister of Broad Haven Baptist Church in Pembrokeshire, Wales, and a tutor in Biblical Studies at Cardiff Baptist College. [helenjdare@googlemail.com](mailto:helenjdare@googlemail.com)

This *estschrift* brings together seventeen British Baptist theologians to honour their friend and colleague John Colwell, a theological educator (teaching at Spurgeon's College) and a local church minister. Colwell has enthused others in the study of theology through both his teaching and his publications — including *Promise and Presence*, *The Rhythm of Doctrine*, and his more personal book *Why have you forsaken me?*, which explores Psalm 22 in the light of his experience of bi-polar disorder. In addition to this, the volume also recognises his foundational role in the development of the Order for Baptist Ministry (OBM), a dispersed community committed to sustaining each other in ministry through a 'commitment to prayer and attentiveness' and a 'commitment to gather' ([www.orderforbaptistministry.co.uk/expressions](http://www.orderforbaptistministry.co.uk/expressions)).

It is the pattern of the OBM's daily office that gives shape to the chapters comprising the first part of the book, with essays concerning our becoming present to God, the presence of God, confession, biblical interpretation, prayers of concern, and a sending out to love and serve Christ in the world. The second part of the book follows the seasons of the Christian Year (and the days and seasons of the OBM Daily Office). There are, as is to be expected, chapters on Advent, Lent, and Pentecost — liturgical seasons familiar to most Baptists. Yet in looking beyond usual Baptist practice to the liturgical year in its fullness, there are also chapters on the less familiar Annunciation, Passiontide, Creation, and All Saints.

However, this volume contains far more than theological reflection to stimulate the thought of those who are members of the OBM, already use a daily office, or follow the seasons of the Christian Year. There are essays here not only from contributors who work in the field of Christian doctrine, but also (owing to Colwell's interests and influence) from a liturgical theologian, biblical scholars, and historians. Many of the chapters draw on emphases from Colwell's own work, entering into dialogue with it. Some (such as Richard Kidd and Paul Fiddes) continue disagreements with Colwell in an irenic fashion, in the manner of colleagues and friends who have built a practice of disagreeing with each other respectfully. Others take Colwell's work as a springboard to develop new ideas. Whichever approach they take, however, the esteem with which the authors hold him is clearly reflected in how they engage with his work carefully and with a generosity that runs throughout the book. Given the quality of all of the chapters, it is likely that each reader's favourites will be determined by their own particular interests, and while engaging with each article alone is rewarding, together they have the potential to challenge and inspire many readers in different contexts. In reflecting on his interaction with Colwell, Nigel Wright comments, 'Theological wrestling is an emotionally costly business, not least because of what is at stake' (p.173). This volume demonstrates that being willing to engage in that task is not only costly, but also enormously creative.

**Walter Brueggemann, *Virus as a Summons to Faith: Biblical Reflections in a Time of Loss, Grief, and Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 92 pages. ISBN: 9781725276734.**

*Reviewed by Elie Haddad*

Dr Elie Haddad is President of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon.

[EHaddad@ABTSLebanon.org](mailto:EHaddad@ABTSLebanon.org)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1874-8729>

Walter Brueggemann is an influential Old Testament scholar and theologian, a prolific writer who has shaped theological minds for decades as he ignited a vision for prophetic imagination for the church.

Brueggemann authored this book only six weeks after the start of the Covid-19 crisis. It is incredible to see such a thoughtful work come out in such a short time. With his deep understanding of Scripture and his vision for prophetic imagination for the church, Brueggemann helps his readers think through the implications of the pandemic critically, theologically, and biblically. Brueggemann accomplishes this difficult task by skilfully taking his readers on a journey through several Old Testament narratives to draw lessons that can relate to the crises of today. He believes that ‘any serious crisis is a summons for us to reread the Bible afresh’ (p. xi).

The book starts with a hard read, trying to answer the *why* question. Why would God cause or allow the plague to happen? Brueggemann argues that there must be an interplay of at least three interpretive possibilities for such a God-linked reality.

The first interpretive possibility is a ‘transactional mode of covenant’ (p.1). This is simply when people reap what they sow. God blesses people who obey him and curses those who disobey him. The second is ‘YHWH’s purposeful enactment of force’ (p.5). This is when God mobilises the negative forces of creation to accomplish his purposes. The third ‘concerns the sheer holiness of God that God can enact in utter freedom without reason, explanation, or accountability, seemingly beyond any purpose at all’ (p.10).

Brueggemann then moves into encouragement mode, helping us consider God’s mercy and goodness, teaching us how to pray and how to change our perspective from that of ‘a *preoccupation with self* to a *submission to and reliance upon God*’ (p.46). Brueggemann ends the book with a message of hope, that the groaning of this world precedes the birth of newness, right after he does what we expect of him. He implores our prophetic imagination to embrace the new realities, the new normal, as God’s gift to us. ‘[T]he future [...] belongs [...] to bold faithful thought that evokes bold faithful action’ (p.58). Brueggemann concludes each chapter with a powerful prayer that personalises the lessons learned.

What starts as a hard read, grappling with understanding the purposes of God, ends in an exhortation for prophetic imagination. Each crisis is a summons to a more profound and active faith.

We are now three years removed from the start of Covid-19. This was by no means the latest crisis or cataclysmic event that we have experienced. I am writing from a region that is still reeling from recent earthquakes in southern Turkey and northern Syria, devastation which requires no less of a summons to faith.

Thank you, Dr Brueggemann, for grounding our reality in biblical faith and grounding our faith in the ‘power and wonder of YHWH’ (p.5).

**Daniel G. Oprean, *Theology of Participation: A Conversation of Traditions* (Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2019), 267 pages. ISBN: 9781783686384.**

*Reviewed by Helle Liht*

Helle Liht is Assistant General Secretary of EBF and a lecturer at the Estonian Free Church Theological Seminary.  
helle@ebf.com

Daniel G. Oprean is Professor of Theology at Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania, and a pastor in the Romanian Baptist Union. This book, a revised version of his doctoral thesis, grew out of his own experience as a Baptist pastor and preacher in a predominantly Orthodox country where Baptists are a minority, and, as observed by him, encapsulated in their own tradition and living in isolation. Ministering in such a setting led Oprean to conclude that ‘if we are to think seriously about the Christian mission in Romania in contemporary times, our thoughts need to include the sincere sojourners from the Orthodox churches’ (p.4). Following this conclusion, Oprean presents the two key aims of his book. His first aim is to contribute towards contextually relevant baptistic theology by engaging with the local Orthodox tradition and thereby to counterbalance the theologies imported by the foreign fundamentalist missionaries. His second aim is to enhance the dialogue between the Romanian Baptist and Orthodox communities and ‘contribute to the mutual understanding of the two’ (p.6).

To achieve these aims, Oprean engages with the writings of two prominent theologians: Paul Fiddes, a British Baptist theologian (1947–) and Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993), a Romanian Orthodox theologian, both formative within their own traditions. The first part of the book explores the theological thought of Stăniloae, and the second, that of Fiddes. In both cases, he focuses on three key subjects which are central for both traditions — baptism, eucharist, and spirituality. By analysing these, he builds a foundation for the third part of the book, which is a dialogue between the two.

One of the strengths of the book is skilfully sketched summaries of the theological thought of Stăniloae and Fiddes. These would serve, even without the third part, as an appeal to stretch and deepen one's understanding of baptism, eucharist, and spirituality. Yet the third part opens up new horizons for both the Baptist and the Orthodox traditions in Romania. Oprean's thorough study presents the understandings that both theologians have in common as well as where they differ from each other, and this builds a solid base for ecumenical dialogue between the two traditions.

Another strength of the book is that Oprean explores the concepts of baptism, eucharist, and spirituality in relation to Stăniloae's and Fiddes' understanding of the Trinity and the concept of *perichoresis*. Furthermore, trinitarian theology is the backbone of Oprean's study, giving it a depth and potential to disclose the relational and participatory character of not only God and humanity, but that of all created order. In the scope of this study, Oprean does not go much beyond exploring baptism, eucharist, and spirituality, yet there is great potential to expand the conversation to all spheres of life created and to be redeemed by the Triune God.

Although Oprean places this study firmly and humbly within the Romanian context, I believe it has great value for many Baptist communities, especially in Eastern Europe, where the past communist regimes have pushed the churches into isolation and thereby also shaped their theologies. As a model for ecumenical dialogue, the importance of the book is even greater.

**John Weaver, *Emmaus: Journeying Toward and Onward from Emmaus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022), 140 pages. ISBN: 9781666743708.**

*Reviewed by Craig Gardiner*

Revd Dr Craig Gardiner is a tutor in Christian Doctrine and Chaplain at Cardiff Baptist College, Wales.

cg@cbc.cymru

In his latest book, John Weaver delivers that most interesting of phenomena: a deeply autobiographical volume which is not actually about the author. It is, instead, an honest and richly resourced text for Christian discipleship, and while it does draw on the author's experience of ministry, it is more consciously rooted in the biblical account of Jesus and two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. The resultant interplay of exegetical insight, theological understanding, and personal reflection allows Weaver to 'impose a shape' (p.71) upon his understanding of discipleship. That this shape is then skilfully articulated should come as no surprise. Weaver has a proven record of holding polarities in creative tension: finding Christ within the sacred *and* secular, revelation through science *and* faith, as well as exploring both academic *and* pastoral vocations. *Emmaus* is written after Weaver's retirement from formal employment, but he rejects notions that ageing heralds 'decline and loss' (p.48). Instead, he argues that maturing and holistic theologies move away from 'either-or' dichotomies and towards more 'both-and' ways of thinking. Weaver's commitment to such a methodology speaks with authority throughout the book's exploration of a 'whole life discipleship', where 'worship is life' and 'mission is being' (p.63).

Weaver finds in the Emmaus narrative, a paradigm of discipleship that listens to others with genuine curiosity, explores experience in the light of Scripture, and shares its reflections within authentic hospitality. This 'journey towards Emmaus' emerges as a core motif by which disillusioned individuals and disappointed communities might discover a gospel that honours their pain, but nonetheless leads them into authentic companionship with Christ. Such discoveries become the 'thin places' of divine epiphany explored by Weaver through personal recollections of his life as a geologist, pastor, and his travels overseas. There is always enough biography to ground the authenticity

of the testimony, but never so much that it distracts from his challenges to discipleship. How, he asks, might we experience not only a conversion to Christ and church, but be ‘converted to the world for which Christ died?’ (p.42). What does it mean, to live a ‘cross shaped life’ (p.46) that learns through ‘tragedy and failure’ (p.63) and testifies to relationships that might matter more than religious regulation?

From this fulcrum of understanding, Weaver travels ‘away from Emmaus’ by exploring a pilgrimage with disillusionment. He enquires how such a journey might lead the church towards a ‘second naivete’ of faith that embraces vulnerability, overcoming our tendencies to settle for ‘unexamined certitude’ (p.84), and a theological ‘littleness of mind’ (p.85). His pilgrimage celebrates the practicalities of journaling (even as an intermittent practice) in articulating our discipleship before God.

In effect, this book is Weaver’s own journal of personal pilgrimage. There are minor quibbles where inquisitive readers may welcome more extensive referencing and a deeper exploration of notions such as ‘cross shaped life’. Occasionally the sources cited might be more diverse. But at its heart, this book wrestles honestly with the same questions Weaver has consistently posed to students, congregations, and himself: ‘Where is God and the good news in this story?’ and ‘What might that mean for us?’ The book does not seek to offer all the answers to such questions, but it does deserve a thorough reading for the quality of Weaver’s persistent enquiry.

**Erich Geldbach (ed.), *Baptists Worldwide: Origins, Expansions, Emerging Realities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 562 pages. ISBN: 9781666795879.**

*Reviewed by David Luke*

Dr David Luke is Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Irish Baptist College, where he teaches Historical Theology and Church History. david@thebaptistcentre.org

At one point the editor notes, ‘Baptists with their emphasis on congregational polity and the “autonomy of the local church” must further face the difficulty of who may with some kind of authority speak

for them.’ It is a difficulty that confronts the person who seeks to tell the Baptist story. This account of the Baptists is one told from the perspective of the Baptist World Alliance, which connects around half of the Baptists in the world. As such it has the feel of an institutional account, with lots of lists and countless abbreviations.

In Geldbach’s introduction he laments that, due to the invasion, a proposed chapter on Baptists in Ukraine has been dropped as it is no longer current. He then engages in a denunciation of Russian aggression and those who have supported it. While many will support his sentiments, it is a rather unusual inclusion, given the nature of the book.

The strength of the book, and one that is often lacking in other book-length accounts, is that it employs multiple voices. While there are chapters from several notable Western Baptist historians, we also hear about non-Western Baptists from people who form part of their national movements. These are the most engaging sections of the book. There is a fast-paced chapter on the story of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. There is also a provocative chapter on Baptists in South Africa, as they seek to deal with the legacy of apartheid. The section on South America has two insightful chapters on issues confronting Baptists in this region. The second of these, which focuses on Argentina, considers the challenge of implementing Baptist principles against the background of that nation’s history and culture.

Overall, however, the book is North American-centric in its orientation, with around one third of the contributors from the United States. There are four chapters, a quarter of those focused on national movements, given over to Baptists in the United States. This includes a chapter devoted to the pension scheme of the American Baptist Churches, USA, while there is a single chapter on the movements in fourteen Asian countries.

There is a considerable amount of information in this collection about the Baptist movement at a macro and institutional level. As an account of Baptists few will find it an inspiring one, since not many are stirred by the machinations of conventions and their decisions. It is,



nonetheless, a very useful reference work and an interesting snapshot of the global diversity of Baptist life in the early twenty-first century.

**Sunggu Yang, *King's Speech: Preaching Reconciliation in a World of Violence and Chasm* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 101 pages. ISBN: 9781532650918.**

*Reviewed by Erica Whitaker*

Erica Whitaker is a PhD student at IBTS Amsterdam and is serving as the Associate Director for the Institute for Black Church Studies at the Baptist Seminary of Kentucky.

rev.ericawhitaker@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1372-760X>

The preaching of Martin Luther King Jr has been examined by scholars and theologians for over half a century. Sunggu Yang, Assistant Professor of Christian Ministries at the College of Christian Studies at Portland Seminary, George Fox University, gives new insight and perspectives on King's theological preaching. This book explores King's sermons and how King's writing encourages Christians in the face of injustice and fear. Yang gives both a historical review as well as the significant relevance of King's preaching ministry of God's reconciliatory work in the church and in culture.

Yang gives the reader a clear structure, parsing the book into four concise chapters. The first chapter highlights important biographical aspects of King's preaching, including institutions like Morehouse College and mentors like Tillich and Barth who influenced King's theology. The second chapter explores how King developed his theology on violence and reconciliation specifically, examining one of King's most influential writings, *The Letter from Birmingham Jail*. The third chapter analyses how King crafted his sermons using *Death of Evil upon the Seashore* as a key illustration of King's strategic approach to sermon writing and delivery. Chapter three also illustrates King's 'other-typology' in his exegesis and preaching of Exodus. The final chapter gives three practical lessons from the life and preaching of King for those desiring to live in King's belief of 'Beloved Community'.

There are many strengths of Yang's *King's Speech*, specifically in his approach to the extensive life of Martin Luther King Jr through the

lens of King's theology of preaching. This nuanced approach opens a new path for practically applying concrete aspects of King's work in our world today. However, the practical application for the church today could have been expanded more thoroughly in chapter four. Further depth in considering how preachers today could apply King's work on justice and non-violence would offer methods for clergy and churches to implant in their current ministries. There is also omission of any criticism of King's patriarchal posture in ministry and how King explicitly did not fully support women in leadership roles, both in the church and in the fight for justice.

This book is a must read for those interested in a fresh approach to reconciliation in a world of violence and conflict, offering a new perspective on King's preaching for the church today.

**Alexander Chow Alexander & Emma Wild-Wood (eds.), *Ecumenism and Independency in World Christianity: Historical Studies in Honour of Brian Stanley* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 370 pages. ISBN: 9789004437531.**

*Reviewed by Peter Stevenson*

Revd Dr Peter Stevenson is a Senior Research Fellow at Spurgeon's College. He was formerly Principal of Cardiff Baptist College.

[peter.stevenson.2011@outlook.com](mailto:peter.stevenson.2011@outlook.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9401-7238>

At first glance, reflections on disconnected events in 1899 and 1900 appear to offer little to contemporary discussions about World Christianity. Jumping to that conclusion would mean missing Mark Noll's imaginative contribution to this stimulating collection of essays. He considers some people who were not in the headlines as a new century was dawning, whose experiences nevertheless helped shape the unexpected growth of World Christianity in the twentieth century. Looking back, he argues that events involving people such as Pandita Ramabai, Vedanayakam Samuel Azariah in India, and William Wadé Harris in West Africa, 'represented signs in the wind' (p.35), hinting at the dramatic nature of Christianity's global growth in the decades ahead.

Alongside Noll's study, this book contains essays from an international team of distinguished scholars all paying tribute to Brian

Stanley's 'acclaimed historical scholarship on World Christianity' (p.1). From a Baptist perspective it merits attention, partly because Stanley's teaching career began at Spurgeon's College and his book, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992*, is acclaimed by David Bebbington as 'the best of any missionary society so far published' (p.21).

In her essay, Kirsteen Kim adopts the methodology employed by Brian Stanley in his magisterial study, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton University Press, 2018), by examining 'two contrasting examples from different parts of World Christianity in a similar period to analyse the different ways in which Christians have responded to a particular theme or issue' (p.63). Thus, in chapter 4 she explores ecumenical and evangelical discussions about the relationship between churches and missions. Kevin Ward follows on with another 'unexpected juxtaposition' as he reflects on the East African revival in the light of revivals in East Asia. A similar strategy is evident in chapter 6 where Allen Yeh reflects on creation care in Latin America by comparing Catholic and evangelical perspectives.

Those three chapters form part of the first major section of this book: *Studying World Christianity*. The next six chapters examine aspects of *Christians Working Together*, followed by five chapters exploring *Pluriform Christianity*.

'*And what more shall I say?*' There is not space to engage adequately with the rich feast offered by Andrew Walls, Ian Randall, Dana Robert, Sebastian Kim, Marina Xiaojing Wang, and others. Their contributions demonstrate how valuable insights emerge by paying close attention to the diverse ways in which Christianity is embodied in different geographical, and historical, contexts. The eight chapters focusing on mission in various Asian contexts helpfully expanded my global vision.

This volume is a valuable resource which invites and encourages further research into World Christianity. Hopefully it may also entice more readers to explore Stanley's *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (see following review).

**Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 504 pages. ISBN: 9780691196848.**

*Reviewed by Ruth Gouldbourne*

Revd Ruth Gouldbourne is minister of Grove Lane Baptist Church in Cheadle Hulme, Greater Manchester. She has been involved in teaching church history in several colleges and is a Senior Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam.  
ruth.gouldbourne@yahoo.com

Stanley's intention in this book is to provide a history of Christianity in the twentieth century, not in what has become the normal, Eurocentric way, but rather telling the story from a global perspective. As a leading historian of World Missions, he is peculiarly well able to explore the topic from such a viewpoint, and this book is evidence both of his skill in communicating, and of the importance of such an approach.

In the introduction he explains that he is aiming neither for comprehensive coverage of everything that might come under the heading of 'Christianity in the twentieth century', nor for a specifically chronological approach, but rather is selecting themes that are especially important for understanding Christianity in global terms, and then approaching them through a 'compare and contrast' approach to case studies. Each chapter presents two contrasting examples of the theme he is considering, and the whole combines to produce a mosaic picture that allows the reader to grasp an overall sense of what is — or could be — an extremely complex subject.

Through his chapter themes, he explores issues such as nationalism, ecumenism, oppression, religious plurality, mission, and migration. The use of two case studies in each chapter means that there is a binocular view of each topic, which allows both for the exploration of difference and the tracing of similarities.

Although the book is not strictly chronological in approach, the chapters follow a roughly chronological sequence, starting with the 1914–1918 World War and ending with a consideration of migrant churches. This sets up some helpful echoes, as the contrast between the positions of the beginning and the end of the century comes into focus.

As an approach, this global perspective has many strengths. In the chapter about Christians living in a religiously plural context, Stanley

refers to 'how introverted Christianity in its European form [has] become'. This has particular relevance in that chapter, but does apply to the rest of the book. Reading the history of the last century through eyes from different parts of the world is challenging, encouraging, and worrying.

There are some frustrations. Stanley is very strict on dealing with only the twentieth century. He comments several times in various summaries that 'this situation now looks different as we come into the 21<sup>st</sup> century' — it would have been interesting to know how. This is especially true in the material dealing with Orthodoxy, as things have changed so much in the last twenty years (and the current impact of religion in the Ukraine war), and in the discussion of Christian nationalism in the light of the current situation in the United States of America. However, this is a history, not a reflection on current affairs, and it offers rich material for exploration and understanding. The roots of Liberation theology, and the different ways in which it is explored in Latin America and Palestine are particularly interesting.

This is an important book, both in content and methodology, and we are grateful to Brian Stanley for its arrival on our shelves.

**Klaas Bom & Benno van den Toren, *Context and Catholicity in the Science and Religion Debate. Intercultural contributions from French-speaking Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 244 pages. ISBN: 9789004420281.**

*Reviewed by John Weaver*

Rev'd Dr John Weaver is a former tutor at Regent's Park College, Oxford and an ex-principal of South Wales Baptist College. He is a Vice President of the John Ray Initiative: Connecting the Environment, Science and Christianity.  
jdweaverswbc@yahoo.co.uk

This text is essentially an exploration of theological reflection. The study is located in the emerging field of intercultural theology: the theological study of, and dialogue between, various religious perspectives in terms of how they exist in relation to their respective social and cultural environments.

In French-speaking Africa three different cultures meet: African traditional cultures/religions; Western colonial and post-colonial

involvement; and Christian independent mission and African Christianity. The studies are based on six groups (one of academics and one of students) drawn from three university cities: Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Yaoundé (Cameroon), and Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo).

The authors are based at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen, Netherlands, where Klaas Bom is assistant professor of Systematic Theology and Benno van den Toeren is chair for Intercultural Theology. They have spent a great deal of time on location with these six groups. Their study is an exercise in ‘formal theology’ and engages academic theological reflection, while using the insights harvested from ‘espoused theology’, the lived theology of the faith community.

They consider intercultural theology as a three-way conversation between different participants discussing their understanding of God in his relation to the world. This allows for a critical realist exchange. They maintain that to gain new insights, true intercultural exchange means giving equal attention to alternative understandings of the nature of scientific knowledge, of religious knowledge, and of the knowledge transmitted by other traditions.

We are introduced to a multi-dimensional model of theological reflection through Group Model Building to counter the dominant understanding of science and religion (in the North Atlantic world), and this allows consideration of how the debate is modelled in African concepts and understanding, using the language and concepts of the local population.

Models are produced by each of the six groups; however, the authors note that a causal loop diagram or model is a simplification of a comprehensive and complex debate on science and Christian faith, as recorded by the groups.

They describe the ‘catholicity’ of the debate in the sense of encompassing the whole church and the whole of humanity. ‘Intercultural theology’ holds that theological reflection is on the one hand localised and embedded in particular social contexts but on the other hand is part of a worldwide conversation with the global ‘catholic’ community of Christian communities.

The authors ask, Can these voices from a particular cultural and geographical setting be heard in a global debate? Do we allow Christ and the salvation he brings to grow in cross-cultural translation? New language and cultures lead to new insights as was seen in the early church with the influence of Greek philosophy.

I have explored some multi-dimensional models of theological reflection in my own work (*Outside-In*, Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2006, and *Christianity and Science SCM Core Text*, London: SCM, 2010), but much of our European approach to the Science and Faith debate is two-dimensional: western science and Christianity. The models developed in this book are both refreshing and challenging and offer encouragement for a multi-dimensional approach in all areas of theological reflection.

**Lon Graham, *All Who Love Our Blessed Redeemer: The Catholicity of John Ryland Jr. Monographs in Baptist History* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 224 pages. ISBN: 9781666726633.**

*Reviewed by Ian Randall*

Dr Ian Randall is a Senior Research Associate at the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide and a Senior Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam.  
ian.m.randall@gmail.com

It is sometimes thought that the idea of Baptist catholicity is a recent interest that some individuals have taken up but which does not reflect the mainstream of Baptist tradition. It is true that important books seeking to advocate this perspective have come out in recent years. Steven Harmon's *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (2006) was one among several. But this excellent volume by Lon Graham, which began life as an IBTS Amsterdam PhD, shows that far from being a relatively recent innovation, 'catholicity' has a significant place within the Baptist story.

The book focuses on John Ryland Jr (1753–1825), a leading figure among the Particular Baptists in England. His range of gifts and interests meant that he was an effective pastor, at Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol; a College president, at Bristol Baptist College; and a dedicated supporter of the Baptist Missionary Society. Lon Graham argues convincingly, from an impressively wide range of published and unpublished sources, that someone as committed to Particular Baptist

convictions as was unquestionably the case with Ryland Jr, was at the same time determinedly catholic in his sympathies.

As well as its profound probing of Ryland Jr himself, this volume helpfully investigates earlier examples of Baptist catholicity. While Henry Jessey and John Bunyan would be expected, although there are fresh insights here regarding them, Graham shows the influence of an overlooked figure in the Broadmead church, Robert Purnell. At all stages in this study, there is an abundance of footnote references in which to revel. In some cases, the rich material found there might usefully have been included in the main text.

There is a clear portrayal in what Graham writes of the theological foundations on which Ryland Jr built his catholicity. This is a key aspect, since there could be an inclusive spirit that pays little regard to scripture. At the same time, it is heart-warming to read of the personal relationships that were important to Ryland Jr. He displayed a deep concern for and affirmation both of orthodoxy and of other believers from whom he differed in some areas. It is a combination splendidly brought out in the book's title, taken from what was central to Ryland Jr. This is an outstanding book, which informs and also inspires.

**Lina Toth, *Singleness and Marriage After Christendom: Being and Doing Family* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 143 pages. ISBN: 978-1532635588.**

*Reviewed by Susan Stevenson*

Revd Susan Stevenson was formerly Regional Minister with the South Wales Baptist Association, UK.

rev.susan.stevenson@gmail.com

This volume in the *After Christendom* series comes from Lina Toth, Assistant Principal and Lecturer in Practical Theology at the Scottish Baptist College. Drawing on her passion for theology and history she re-evaluates the familiar slogan, 'God first, family second, then church', in the light of Scripture, Christian tradition, and the history of Christendom.

Throughout the book the author invites readers to look again at what she identifies as our inherited assumptions about marriage and



singleness. This is needed in order to hear afresh the radical call of Jesus to his church to become a community growing together towards a deeper, gospel-shaped vision of a ‘happy’ life.

After an introduction which clarifies the book’s aims and provides a helpful map through the material, there follow eight chapters covering the biblical and historical material.

The opening chapter considers the prevalent perception that marriage and the life of the nuclear family are more important to the make-up and ministry of the church than singleness. The next chapter outlines Old Testament perspectives on singleness, marriage, and family life. Against this background, Toth argues that a radical shift comes in the teaching of Jesus, which prioritises the new community of the church.

Having painted a picture of families and households in the Greco-Roman world, the next chapter examines New Testament evidence, showing how the first churches both challenged and adapted to social norms. This prepares the way for an examination in the next chapter of Christian literature outside the New Testament, which reveals the hostility generated by the perception of the church as a destabilising influence on the social order.

Chapter 5 traces the development of the theology and practice of marriage as Christianity became the established religion of the empire. The next chapter follows that story through the changes brought on by the Reformation, by the Industrial Revolution, on to the emergences of Victorian family values.

In chapter 7 the focus turns onto Western society’s growing preoccupation with happiness and the perception that romantic love and a nuclear family are essential to a ‘happy’ life. Some of those issues are discussed in chapter 8, which challenges churches to be real communities in the midst of a fragmented, consumerist culture, and offers ‘some key ideas for a “happy” Christian life in an increasingly post-Christian context’.

This book is designed as a discussion starter and does this in a helpful way, along with providing suggestions for further reading.

Questions about ‘happiness’ are live issues both in the church and beyond. Post-pandemic questions about what it means to be authentically church are even more urgent.

I was stimulated and excited by this skilled theologian who opens up ‘the fascinating unsettling world of the bible’ in a way that offers new perspectives and hopeful possibilities.

**Stefan Paas, *Pilgrims and Priests: Christian Mission in a Post-Christian Society* (London: SCM Press, 2019), 384 pages. ISBN: 9780334058779.**

*Reviewed by Scott Kohler*

Revd Scott Kohler is a PhD student at IBTS Amsterdam and pastor of Bedford Baptist Church in Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada.  
scott.kohler@bedfordbaptist.ca.

At the outset of *Pilgrims and Priests*, Stefan Paas describes his work as ‘a study about missional spirituality’ (p.xvii). The book covers a lot of ground and touches many disciplines. Yet this declaration indicates that the ultimate aim of the book is to come to a Christian understanding of what it means to do mission in a society that seems to see little value in what the church has to offer. In addition to positions as a Professor of Missiology at both the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Theologische Universiteit Kampen, Paas has written about and been active in church planting, so he is well situated to reflect on the questions at the heart of this work.

After opening chapters that give an account of both the secular situation and various ideas of mission in the church’s Christendom past, the lengthy third chapter (‘From Folk Church to Conquest’) articulates a careful typology and critique of major models of the church in relation to mission. Given his deliberately post-Christendom perspective, Paas’s sympathetic but critical words about ‘Countercultural Church’ represented by neo-Anabaptists will be of special interest to readers of this journal. In chapters 4 to 7 Paas presents his own proposal, taking his cues from a rich biblical theology of exile and 1 Peter’s images of the church as a community of ‘pilgrims and priests’.

One of the motivating impulses in Paas’s theology of mission is his conviction that ‘Christians need to find a way to have “joy over one

sinner who repents” (Luke 15:7,10) rather than being obsessed by quantitative success’ (p.72). In the interest of finding this way, he proposes ‘a spirituality of signs and foretastes’ rather than instrumentality in the church’s approach to mission (p.198). This is what it means to operate as priests in a world where we come to see ourselves as an alien or pilgrim people. Worship takes a central role in this spirituality and practice of mission, and in this respect the book is worth reading alongside the mid-twentieth-century writings of Martin Thornton who, from a very different cultural situation, made this priestly element central to his pastoral theology of worship. For churches and leaders confronted with questions about which direction their gatherings should be aimed — whether toward God or toward an unbelieving world — Paas’s work suggests a helpful and integrative way of seeing and understanding the church’s task. In his words, this task is to live out this ‘spirituality of signs and foretastes’ that will ‘demonstrate the reality we believe in and hope for’ (p.229).

Much of the value in *Pilgrims and Priests* arises from its explanatory power, with the treatment of the biblical experience of exile in chapter 4 especially illuminating for the post-Christian setting in which much ministry in the West now takes place. One is left with a desire to elaborate and witness in practice the approach that is set forth in these pages.

**Rupen Das, *The God that the Poor Seek: Conversion, Context, and the World of the Vulnerable* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2022), 280 pages. ISBN: 9781839732737.**

*Reviewed by Sarah Mhamdi*

Sarah Mhamdi works for BMS World Mission as part of the People on the Move team and is based in the UK. She spent several years overseas working in development work in creative access countries.  
smhamdi@bmsworldmission.org

Rupen Das states at the beginning of his book that many of us do not ‘understand the spirituality of the poor’. Das uses conversion to following Christ as a window to see into the spiritual lives of two groups of people living in poverty — formerly Muslim, Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Hindu converts to Christ in Bangalore, India. The author

says that the book is ‘the stories of how some of the poor encountered Christ’.

Before the stories, Das takes us on a journey to understand how missiologists and theologians have approached the topics of conversion, poverty, contextualisation, and hearing the voices of the poor. In each area we see how people have understood the subject in the past, before considering current principles and practice.

When we reach the chapters on the stories of the poor, Das outlines the context of the people whose stories he collected: Syrians in Lebanon experiencing event-based poverty — their situation is due to something that happened — and Indian slum dwellers experiencing generational poverty. All those interviewed shared how and why they now follow Christ. The final two chapters are given to interpreting and assessing the stories and sharing who is the God that the poor seek.

Rupen Das is a well-known, well-respected author, researcher, and professor, based in Canada and the USA with extensive experience working in humanitarian assistance and development. He is concerned that the voice of the poor is heard, and understood, whenever people seek to work with them or on their behalf. Das wrote the book as he often wondered what ‘the poor, the victims of human trafficking and abuse, and the refugees think about God’. In his conclusion he comments that what he saw and heard impacted his personal understanding of God.

After years in development work myself, I was attracted by the title of the book: Who is it that the poor want to encounter? How do I live in a way that shows that Christ makes a difference to my life and can to others? I was eager to reach the voices of the poor themselves and, at first glance, was disappointed that these did not start to appear until page 115! But, of course, Das knows what he is doing and the outline of why we are using conversion as a key, the historical overview, and setting out principles is essential.

The book is written in an academic, but accessible style. Specialist words are explained so that it could be read by non-missiologists/theologians. I would have been interested to see Das talk to practitioners who are working among similar communities to see if

they have reached the same conclusions in their experiences of sharing Christ among people living in poverty. I think that this will be a good reference for Christians interested in working among the poor.