

## Book Reviews

**Gina A. Zurlo, *From Nairobi to the World: David B. Barrett and the Re-Imagining of World Christianity* (Brill, 2023), 155 pages. ISBN: 9789004541030.**

*Reviewed by Peter Stevenson*

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Whilst teaching an undergraduate module on World Christianity, the annual *Status of Global Christianity* reports, published by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC), provided valuable resources (the latest 2025 report is currently available on their website). Those reports paint an intriguing picture of a faith which continues to grow, especially in the Global South.

The Center continues the demographic research pioneered by the Anglican missionary, David B. Barrett. In this volume Gina Zurlo, Co-Director of CSGC, drawing upon a wealth of materials, including Barrett's day diaries, offers an appreciative but honest assessment of a complex character best known as the driving force behind the creation of the *World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE)*.

In the opening five chapters Zurlo helpfully outlines Barrett's career path. Graduating from Cambridge University he worked for the Royal Aircraft Establishment from 1948 to 1952. His departure from the RAE was prompted both by a desire not to devote himself to the development of atomic weapons and by a call to missionary service. This led to an initial term of missionary service in Kenya from 1957 to 1961.

Moving to study in New York in 1962 proved a turning point in his life. Following a master's degree at Union Theological College, Barrett embarked on doctoral studies at Columbia University, which introduced him to the research tools of the social scientific study of religion. The first fruits of research employing those methods, adapted for an African context, surfaced in his 1968 publication *Schism and Renewal in Africa*. Although some voiced criticisms of his methodology, this book 'set him on the world stage as an expert in African religious movements' (p. 43). By exposing Christianity's vibrant presence across

the continent, Barrett alerted scholars to the crucial significance of Africa for World Christianity. Zurlo argues that his research helped undermine the secularisation theory which had predicted the fatal decline of religious communities in the twenty-first century (pp. 61–63).

Zurlo devotes serious attention to the lengthy process which produced the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. In Chapter 6 she explains how Barrett was invited to collaborate with Catholic scholars in Belgium, and Evangelical researchers in the USA, to create an updated version of the *World Christian Handbook*. However, under Barrett’s direction the project changed shape significantly, with the *WCE* emerging in 1982 after thirteen years’ gestation.

Zurlo rightly praises Barrett’s achievement in creating the *WCE*, which challenged prevalent assumptions about the global health of Christianity through its careful and detailed research. She argues that his research laid the foundation for the recognition of the ‘shifting center of gravity of Christianity’ popularised by other writers (p. 125).

This study evaluates Barrett’s work in its social, political, and religious contexts. Its honesty about the challenging aspects of his character enables a more rounded picture to appear. It merits attention because, as Zurlo concludes, the story of the visionary behind the *WCE* ‘is both inspiring and shocking, but David Barrett was also simply human [...] He praised God [...] for people coming to faith while acknowledging his own “unpleasant temperament”’ (pp. 130–131).

**Christine Redwood, *Hear Her Voice: Preaching the Women of the Bible* (Cascade Books, 2024), 159 pages. ISBN: 9781666780949.**

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Michael Frost’s foreword tells us that the author’s trajectory is one from a conservative evangelical perspective to an exploration of feminist scholarship. This is not just a simple theological move, but rather carries with it a shift in epistemological and homiletic practice, due to a re-

evaluation of the overt and covert use of power. In other words, such a trajectory brings with it an awareness that the ‘normal’ way of doing things (like preaching) may in fact be the male way of doing things. And it also brings with it an awareness that by deliberately reading the biblical text through the hermeneutical lens of a minor, often female, character, we may then learn to read our world and its joys and sufferings through the eyes of the marginalised. It follows, therefore, that this is not a book teaching women how to preach, but rather a book for helping both men and women to become better preachers.

In the first chapter Redwood highlights a key issue: the hard work required to faithfully embody theology in a pastoral context. She points out that ‘[h]ow a preacher reads the Bible will shape the way they preach it. This is a complex space’ (p. 2). This chapter summarises scholarly thought in an impressive number of areas — egalitarianism; patriarchy; complementarianism; christotelicism; inerrancy to name only a few — and also provides an overview of hermeneutical approaches. This is necessary in order for Redwood to state her own critical realist position and, of course, leaves the reader wanting to know more. However, it does read a little bit like a highly condensed literature review and maybe, in this book’s context, less would have helped more.

In the rest of the book, Redwood takes us through the book of Judges as a case study of the way her preaching has implemented the theological principles she has set out in chapter 1. At the end of each chapter, she provides a sample sermon illustrating the homiletical principle she has been exploring. She also provides discussion questions and exercises. So, chapter 2 provides an academic justification for first-person narratives in preaching, drawing on the work of Mieke Bal, and the concept of counter-coherence, followed by a sample sermon in the voice of Achsah in Judges 1. Other chapters cover multi-voiced sermons, postcolonial readings, the role of anger in preaching, and issues of appropriation. The book finishes with a chapter reflecting further on the homiletic process itself.

This is an excellent book. Redwood challenges traditional perspectives likely to be held by some preachers, while wanting to remain firmly and unapologetically in the evangelical tradition, making her work less likely to be overlooked or dismissed. I recommend it

wholeheartedly. However, I wonder exactly to whom I am recommending this book. Redwood is, I believe (and with all her warnings about discerning authorial intent ringing in my mind), aiming this book at practitioners. But the sort of preachers she has in mind are pastor–theologians, and to benefit from this book, the reader must be prepared to sit and engage, however fleetingly, with the scholarship. This a book which takes time and effort to read, and I wonder whether those unfamiliar with hermeneutics will be able to garner enough from Redwood’s overview to maintain their interest. I hope that it will become required reading on many a homiletics course, and that the preacher who picks it up will be inspired not only to try the exercises, but also to read further in the fascinating and crucial field of biblical hermeneutics.

**Sunday Bobai Agang, *Endangered Moral Values: Nigeria’s Search for Love, Truth, Justice and Intimacy* (HippoBooks, 2022), 128 pages. ISBN: 9781839732102.**

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This book caught my attention for the dual reason of its Nigerian context (I am originally from Nigeria) and its focus on social ethics (a core area of interest for me). In four sections of thirteen short chapters, its author boldly addresses the problem of moral deficit in the national life of Nigerian society. In a nutshell he posits that ‘Nigerians [...] are slowly but surely losing their grip on their moral and ethical bearings’ (p. 2). He argues that Nigerians cannot fulfil their God-given potential until they ‘rediscover their moral and ethical roots’ (p. 3).

Dr Agang begins the thematic appraisal of the problem of Nigeria’s troubled moral and ethical foundations by discussing, in the first section of four chapters, the failure of Nigeria to fulfil its naturally endowed leadership role in Africa, the impact of the sacred–secular divide and globalisation, the character of Nigeria’s moral crisis, and the roots of Nigeria’s morality. The second section of two chapters focuses

on two specific socio-cultural issues — tribalism and religion — that have plagued the nation and plunged it into wanton destruction of lives and properties. The third section of four chapters discusses possible solutions to the crisis of morality gripping Nigerian society. The closing section of three chapters addresses the implications of the dearth of national moral consciousness on national development in Nigeria, as well as issuing a call to action.

Overall, Agang's book is well written and makes for easy reading and comprehension. His ability to frame Nigeria's many troubles around morality and ethics is both novel and unique. His impressive use of Scripture in buttressing his arguments evinces his theological credentials and niche. He is not ashamed to point to the failure of religion in addressing Nigeria's enormous and existential challenges. His call for a more robust instrumentalisation of religion for the growth, development, and unity of Nigeria is fitting, given that Nigerians have been adjudged as highly religious.

Reading through *Endangered Moral Values*, one easily sees, strewn across its pages, the opinionated nature of the author's arguments. And of course, nothing is wrong with strongly enunciating one's views as Agang has skilfully done in his book. Yet, a couple of questions arise, whose answers could have greatly enhanced the book. For instance, the author does not make clear for the reader his definition of morality and ethics, especially in a multireligious Nigerian context. He simply assumes that what Nigerians need is a rediscovery of Christian morality and ethics (biblical ethics, as he points out in chapter ten). But Nigerians are not all Christians — they also are Muslims and African Traditionalists (among other religious affiliations apart from Christianity). Another important question that arises is whether Nigeria is a Christian nation that should be governed by Christian values, as Agang surmises. The pitfall of such argumentation is that those who are advancing the Islamic Sharia legal system in Nigeria are provided with added impetus. Constitutionally Nigeria is a secular nation, and any talk of morality should be broad and all-encompassing. Finally, Agang does not show that moral values are the only bedrock of any nation's development, since there are also developed nations that are immoral (depending on how one defines morality).

Nonetheless, I think the author has set an important agenda for academic and theological reflection in his book, and anyone interested in understanding the complexity of Nigeria's problem vis-à-vis religion and morality ought to read this book.

**Joseph V. Carmichael, *The Sung Theology of the English Particular Baptist Revival: A Theological Analysis of Anne Steele's Hymns in Rippon's Hymnal* (Wipf & Stock, 2021), 227 pages. ISBN: 9781725270848.**

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This book is a revision of a doctoral thesis examining the fifty-two hymns of Anne Steele (1717–1778) that were found in the printed editions of London Baptist minister John Rippon's hymnbooks. After a thorough chapter covering previous scholarly contributions in this field that set the scene for this study of Steele's work, the book contains a helpful outline biography of Steele. It highlights her continuing health problems (probably malaria) and states that 'she often composed her hymns from within the crucible of suffering' (p.42). Anne Steele came from a committed Particular Baptist family. Her father William Steele (1689–1769) was the pastor of the Broughton Baptist Church in Hampshire. Ancestors of both her father and her mother Anne (1684–1720) had endured years of religious persecution as dissenters in the previous century. It is clear that the tightknit Particular Baptist circles in which she grew up, together with her own health issues, contributed to the depth and theological insights expressed through her compositions.

Another chapter outlines the setting of her hymns and of Rippon's hymnbooks. Carmichael reminds us that exclusive psalmody had been the normative pattern for English Protestant worship prior to the end of the seventeenth century. The religious landscape of worship services had changed dramatically with the introduction of hymns as a means of articulating their praise. Isaac Watts was the predominant independent contributor who led the way in writing hymns that were familiar in the worship services of English Baptist congregations at that time; however, Anne Steele features among the small number of major

contributors of hymns that would be familiar in Particular Baptist circles and found in the various printed editions of Rippon's hymnbook.

A later chapter helpfully highlights the literary circles in which Steele mixed and the formative influence of Isaac Watts's approach to hymn writing, which served as a model on which she created her own hymns, although she also developed her own style of composition as she crafted a mix of 'deep theological truths and personal experience' (p. 109). In a male-dominated world, Steele was the 'only female hymn-writer from her generation whose hymns have stood the test of time (p. 113).

The last major chapter of this book covers a critical appraisal of the hymns selected for Rippon's hymnals. The author highlights the breadth of her doctrinal coverage, and states that her hymns displayed a theological cohesion with the Second London Confession (1677), together with a focus on the theological characteristics of the Evangelical Revival, namely in her approach to the Bible, the cross, and evangelism. Carmichael builds effectively on the work of earlier Steele scholarship by notable authors such as Cynthia Alders, J. R. Broome, Nancy Cho, Sharon James, and J. R. Watson. This critical examination of the significance of Anne Steele's hymns is warmly commended.

**David P. Gushee, *Introducing Christian Ethics: Core Convictions for Christians Today* (Front Edge Publishing, 2022), 330 pages. ISBN: 9781641801249.**

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This book consolidates material from Professor Gushee's introductory classes, which he taught at Mercer University. It is a detailed yet simpler version of *Kingdom Ethics*, which he co-wrote with Glenn Stassen. This book adds more topics, has a total of twenty-five chapters, and has questions after each chapter, which is helpful for students delving into

this subject for the first time. The book also comes with a QR code at the end of each chapter, providing the readers with an audio and a YouTube version.

The book has three primary sections: the first deals with the basic definition of (Christian) ethics; the second covers twelve topics, focusing on a Christian understanding of virtue and personal life; the third discusses the role of faith in politics.

The first part presents a biblical understanding of ethics. Christians generally look at Scriptures to answer ethical issues in the world; however, Gushee says it is not as simple as that (p. 32). The biblical message is not a one-size-fits-all, and our interpretation can sometimes be flawed, due to human limitations. Gushee argues that inner transformation precedes global transformation (p. 51). He mentions Thurman's vision, where the onus is on the oppressor's need to transform rather than the world to be transformed. However, Gushee also refers to movements like Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel Movement as examples of how Christians can transform the world through social and political participation (p. 63).

In the second section (chapters 8–19) the author develops twelve key issues: Truth telling, Sacredness, Justice, Love, Forgiveness, Creation, Patriarchy, Race, Economics, Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage. His stance on the ethics of economic inequality in our current consumerist culture should be given attention, as the enticement of luxury and wealth in our world is growing rapidly. He calls for a move from worshipping mammon to toppling mammon (p. 208) — a radical shift from materialism to minimalism.

In the third section, Gushee presents the political aspect of ethics, based on church and state relations, and the errors in the criminal justice system in his country. He calls himself a Baptist Separatist, perhaps wary and cautious about the strenuous relationship between church and state (p. 255). His stance on the role of church and politics appears to align with Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, and not so much with the likes of Oliver O'Donovan or Rowan Williams. Nevertheless, when the state is corrupt or distorted, Gushee advocates active participation and calling it out. He argues that Christians and the



church should not be passive bystanders when the state misuses its power and responsibilities; however, Gushee disapproves of the church using a public platform to spread its missional and religious goals.

In the last two chapters, the book tackles the moral responsibility of Christian ministers, and the challenges of being a follower of Christ.

Gushee claims that most Christian states or countries have a ‘crisis of truth’ (p. 104), and we can never claim we have ‘arrived’ (p. 38). This book serves as a stern and humble reminder that even though we worship a perfect God, human beings’ fallible nature means that we may never have all the answers, but we continue to be seekers. The book will be helpful for theology students, church workers, and lay Christians keen to understand and examine the concept of (Christian) ethics. It also provides a coherent view on understanding personal and public ethics and the role of Christians in addressing contemporary moral issues.

**Darren Cronshaw, Steve Taylor and Marguerite Kappelhoff (eds), *Transforming Work. Missiological Perspectives for the Church in the World* (Brill, 2024), 478 pages. ISBN: 9789004696228.**

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In the past few decades there has been an increasing interest in theological reflection on work. This volume, published as part of Brill’s Theology and Mission in World Christianity series, contributes to this discussion and takes it further by reflecting on the role of work in mission as well as mission in work. The twenty-two authors are predominantly from Australia and New Zealand, with some others based in the USA or Europe, but representing a slightly wider geographical spread (including Africa and parts of Asia).

In order to give a more united feel to the book, contributors were asked by the editors to address their different themes in

conversation with three specific sources. The first is the classic work of David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. Three aspects are chosen here. The first is moving beyond what the editors see as Bosch's over-emphasis on ordained ministry to look at the role of the laity as the principal actors in mission. Second, what does mission or ministry by the whole people of God look like today, over thirty years after Bosch's book? And third, to concentrate on 'the nature of God's mission as it fills marketplaces, workplaces and the whole of daily life' (p. 7).

The second dialogue text is Norman Thomas's *Readings in World Mission*. This aims to encourage a more global reach, demonstrating how the ministry of the whole people of God is lived around the world. And the third dialogue text is the entry on 'Laity' in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, written by Elisabeth Adler and Jonah Katoneene. Here especially they focus on four concepts developed in the text: 'Christ in the world', 'Church and world', 'ministry of laity', 'ordained ministry', and then add a fifth, 'maturation' (p. 11).

These five themes form the basis for the division of the book. There is not space here to outline the various chapters. All that can be said is that they offer a wide diversity of approaches. Some are from a more directly biblical perspective (focusing on Paul), some are case studies, some are more general reflections. Although most of the contributions focus on what might be called a traditional understanding of work, there are some nods in the direction of the precarity of work and reflecting on the post-work society.

There are a number of positive contributions from this book. Its very existence encourages further debate and reflection on work and mission — work as place for mission, as well as mission as and in work. It is also good to hear in more detail the richness of the Australian theological world, which is not always given its rightful place in contemporary English-speaking mission studies.

Slightly more critically, there is a sense that this book is reflecting on a world that is ceasing to exist. The nature of human labour is undergoing a profound transformation and that will have inevitable repercussions for Christian mission too, no doubt positive and negative. For many people, work is insecure, fragile, badly paid, full of danger and

anxiety, and though this is present in the book, I would have preferred this reality to be stressed more. The use of the three dialogue partners gives the book a greater structural unity but sometimes feels rather artificial. Overall, this is an important and valuable contribution to the debate about mission and work and will benefit anyone who is interested in the topic (which, given how central it is to the lives of the vast majority of us, should be everyone!).

**Pieter L. Lalleman (ed.), *Challenging to Change: Dialogues with a Radical Baptist Theologian. Essays Presented to Dr Nigel G. Wright on his Sixtieth Birthday* (Wipf & Stock, 2020, originally published by Spurgeon's College London, 2009), 206 pages. ISBN: 9781725287716.**

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I should have noticed this book back in 2009 when Dr Wright and I shared spaces at EBF, which brought him even to our home in Čakovec, Croatia. I am glad the book found me now, as a re-published issues from 2020, although that year everyone was too traumatised to think about anything properly. By now Christians know that we need to rethink church. Starting with Wright's agenda as proposed and commented on in this volume is a better place than many.

This celebratory volume in honour of Nigel G. Wright consists of thirteen essays by recognised, predominantly British, scholars and church people. There is also a foreword by the editor, an introduction by David Coffey, a global Baptist leader, and short tributes by friends and colleagues. A list of Wright's major works is added near the end.

The work exhibits facets of Wright's overarching work, centring on the church as a factor of change in the world. This interest can be traced back to his MTh and PhD days. The book includes issues important in Baptist (and baptistic) discussions which are still relevant but may also have new aspects. Wright's method includes learning from

history, but not without critical probing of theories to find ways useful for the practical life of the contemporary church.

The volume examines inescapable Baptist doctrinal subjects like ‘inter-church cooperation’ (R. Brown, D. Tidball), being ‘born-again’, ‘believer’s baptism’ (R. A. Campbell), and the difficult question about the ‘freedoms of church and society’ (J. E. Colwell). It adds questions about practical church matters like the duties of ministers, leadership, and ‘inclusive representation’ (C. J. Ellis, R. A. Ellis, P. Goodliff), church planting and evangelism (S. Murray). But it also covers aspects of wider ecclesiology (S. Holmes, S. Murray), especially relating to the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. For Wright the Holy Spirit is the power by which the church overcomes evil (P. Fiddes, T. Small).

All these issues have been handled by Wright in a new way, often called ‘radical’. In a Baptist setting ‘radical’ can mean two things: ‘radically different’ from what the Baptists expect and hence problematic, or ‘radical’ in the sense of the Baptist/Anabaptist reformation. For most contributors in the volume, both apply to Wright. When some call Wright ‘conservative’ this means that he will not easily reject the history of Baptist values to pursue wild new dreams. When he is called ‘radical’ this means that he is pointing to how Baptists could do better in practising what they believe about ministry and the church (to rephrase N. Clark’s comment noted on p. 105). Wright himself describes his position as ‘Friendly. Mainstream. Rooted’ (‘British Baptist Theologians No. 4: Nigel G. Wright’, 8 May 2026, Andy Goodliff, blog <<https://andygoodliff.typepad.com>>[Accessed 23 April, 2025]). That kind of Baptist is important for many of us who lack such Baptist examples. In a sentence: this is a valuable little book to read and especially discuss not only with Baptists.

**Aldrin M. Peñamora and Bernard K. Wong (eds), *Asian Christian Ethics: Evangelical Perspectives* (Langham Global Library, 2022), 378 pages. ISBN: 9781839730740.**

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*Asian Christian Ethics* is published as part of the series Foundations in Asian Christian Thought. The series aims to offer ‘innovative introductions to key topics that are biblically rooted, contextually engaged and theologically rich’. Contextual reflection is a priority for the series and this book offers a fine example of contextual reflection as well as important theological and ethical insights. Divided into two sections, the first eight chapters are gathered under the theme of the Ethical Way of Life, the following seven contributions are themed as Ethics in the World. The first section themes such as moral formation, divorce, business, and bribery provide the starting point for consideration of the ethical way of life. The second section addresses the themes of creation care, political and political theology, homosexuality, wealth and poverty, caste systems, and peacemaking.

In the introduction the editors address the contextualisation of ethics, highlighting the difference between a Western and Asian approach. Critiquing the tendency for Western Christian ethics to be ‘I-self’ focused, they explain that an Asian approach has a ‘we-self’ focus, a distinction that is immediately obvious from the list of contents which includes chapters on ‘Identity, Local Wisdom, and Moral Formation’ and ‘Honor Your Father and Your Mother’. The editors and contributors are not dismissive of Western Christian ethical reflection. You will meet engagement with scholars such as Cavanaugh, Volf, Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas, and MacIntyre, as well as Aristotle and Plato, but you will also encounter a huge array of Asian scholars. You will, however, also meet Confucius and Jesus in conversation on the theme of filial obligations, providing a thoroughly cultural and Christian perspective on family structures, community implications, and memorials to the deceased. Gandhi will join the conversation with Confucius and Jesus on the theme of ‘the good life’. The conversation

is respectful, engaging, and ultimately enriches the understanding of the kingdom of God and the call to a culturally engaged discipleship. A striking feature of the book is that as virtue ethics has more recently come to the fore in Western ethical discussion, Asian ethicists work from that premise as part of the outworking of their cultural heritage.

I imagine that the majority of the Asian scholars referenced will be unknown to most Western readers, but it is clear that there is a vibrant and growing Asian Christian scholarly community who, while grounding their reflection in an Asian context, have much to offer the wider Christian family. For example, in the opening chapter, 'Identity, Local Wisdom and Moral Formation', Florian M. P. Simatupang addresses the need for 'ethical redemption' of the concept of 'evangelical' and offers reflection on the Asian emphasis of local wisdom as a corrective to the competitive and divisive attitudes that exist within the evangelical community.

For a Western reader, reading this book provides the opportunity to engage with both the familiar and the unfamiliar — we meet some familiar ethicists and concepts but also a critique or corrective that emerges from the Asian cultural context. I warmly recommend this book for general reading and particularly for inclusion in Western taught courses on ethics.

**Augusto Rodríguez, *Being Missional in Times of Crisis: Leadership, Ministry, and Church Insights from the Acts of the Apostles* (Wipf & Stock, 2023), 122 pages. ISBN: 9781666763256.**

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Critics argue that the church is exceptional at performing activities like offering, singing, remaining inward-focused, and so on. However, for the church to minister to humanity effectively, it must restart. Unfortunately, it is Covid-19 that has provided the church with the opportunity. Instead of activities, the church must execute its mission

(Matthew 28:19–20). That is easier said than done. Churches face budgeting responsibilities, fostering social connections, and navigating various political leanings, making it difficult to remain consistently missional.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, Augusto Rodríguez instructs church leaders in this book about actively engaging the world. He urges local congregations to be missional during this challenging time. His effort is layered. First, resulting from the pandemic, Rodríguez endeavours to prepare church leaders for mission ministry. Second, he employs the early church as a model, thus demonstrating how present-day congregations can overcome crises. Third, Rodríguez writes to mentor church leadership with insights learned from the study of the early church in the Book of Acts. Instead of aiming his work at the academy, his ultimate goal is instructing churches to become a hybrid ministry.

Hybridisation combines online and in-person services. Traditional in-person worship will continue, unless public health issues arise. Online worship serves members who cannot physically attend. Reasons for this may include illness, social distancing, and natural disasters. Complementing streaming worship services, Rodríguez encourages churches to establish small groups. He asserts these hybrid cell groups can impact an entire city. Furthermore, he declares that cell groups are the only way the church can accomplish the Great Commission of making disciples. I disagree. Christians believe God is able. My grandmother would say, ‘He can make a way out of no way.’

While this book emphasises the shift to hybrid ministries, Rodríguez begins by exploring how the church can adopt a missional stance during a pandemic. Following the church’s example in Acts, he develops an understanding of leadership, ministry, and church organisation in times of crisis. For Rodríguez, organised leadership is aware of the challenges facing the church. He also maintains that the church must proclaim the gospel across cultural barriers.

Rodríguez has charted a pathway for churches to thrive. Nonetheless, his reference to Ronald Reagan as an example for motivating Christians is problematic. Further, one can certainly agree

about the importance of missionaries being prudent not to impose their values on the cultures they serve; however, in history there have been calamities that followed missionary presence upon native cultures. Does this suggest association with civil religion, a topic that would require more thorough discussion? In the light of the discourse developed in this book, I hope mission ministries will promote the gospel rather than civil religion.

**David P. Gushee, *The Moral Teachings of Jesus: Radical Instruction in the Will of God* (Cascade Books, 2024), 200 pages. ISBN: 9781666744767.**

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This outstanding book conveys a prophetic message to the church which demands careful attention and prayerful action.

David Gushee observes how some leave church because 'their churches no longer seem to have much to do with the Jesus whom they are supposed to be about' (p. xi). At a time when there are siren voices suggesting that Jesus's teaching is too weak, Gushee responds by inviting Christians 'to attend closely to what Jesus said about how his followers should live' (p. xi). To enable this vital process, he explores forty passages drawn from all four Gospels.

One of the book's strengths is that it exemplifies a way of handling biblical texts with scholarly integrity, which opens up their contemporary relevance. This book demonstrates a healthy approach to interpreting the Bible; and on that basis alone it merits a very warm welcome. That healthy exegesis, drawing upon a rich mix of conversation partners, serves an ambitious purpose. It seeks to confront the church with the 'radical spiritual and moral surgery' (p. 196) needed if believers are to live according to the values of the kingdom of God.



David Gushee is well known to readers of *JEBs* through his work with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and IBTS, and as the co-author of *Kingdom Ethics* with the late Glen Stassen. In exploring challenging texts, such as the command to love your enemies (Matt 5:44), Gushee adopts Stassen's *transforming initiatives* interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. This views Jesus's teachings as 'triads: traditional righteousness, followed by a sinful pattern, and concluding with a transforming initiative' (p. 57). Employing this methodology results in a fresh reading of these texts, which challenges readers to embark on a costly way of living which goes against the grain of an aggressive, materialistic culture.

Gushee restricts his comments on each of the forty chosen 'pericopes' to 1500–1600 words. Each short, readable chapter contains a feast of 'solid food [...] for the mature' (Heb 5:14) and for young believers alike. Reading this book slowly provides rich spiritual nourishment, by enabling readers to hear again the disturbing and inspiring voice of Jesus calling them to follow him. There is a depth of power in these reflections on the Gospels, which contain striking echoes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's criticism of 'cheap grace' in *The Cost of Discipleship*.

At a time when churches need to grow disciples who make disciples, this book offers a rich resource for anyone wanting to explore what genuine Christian discipleship looks like in the contemporary context.

This prophetic study calls the church to rediscover the path of costly discipleship, for 'God wants a radically reoriented humanity. But that begins with a vanguard group, the church, that will radically reorient in this Godward direction and who will fearlessly choose to play by God's rules, not by messed up human patterns' (p. 197).

To become that kind of fellowship the church needs a process of 'retraining into practices Jesus taught' (p. 197), and this book makes a stimulating contribution to that process.