Book Reviews

Anthony E. Clark (ed.), *China's Christianity: From Missionary to Indigenous Church*. Studies in Christian Mission 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 300 pages. ISBN: 978-9004340022.

Anthony E. Clark (Edward B. Lindaman Endowed Chair and Associate Professor of Chinese history in History at Whitworth University) has gathered ten authors to consider, from a variety of disciplines and methodologies, 'What happened after the agency of manufacturing a Christian culture in China was removed from the foreign missionaries and transferred into the hands of native Chinese Christians?' (p. 2). This writing was conceived during a 2015 symposium at Whitworth University on the topic.

The chapters are written by historians, theologians, a library director and art historian, an American Studies scholar and the director of the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco, and the director of the United States Catholic China Bureau. Clark rightly considers this variety of scholars and approaches to be one of the particular strengths of the book, as it both avoids simplistic pictures of what is happening with Christianity in China and challenges assumptions in various disciplines. For example, Joseph Ho's examination of photographs and films from two Presbyterian missionaries in the early twentieth century, suggests relational realities in missionary encounters often neglected in academia.

Overall, descriptions of the various attempts at establishing Christianity in China portray varying degrees of indigenisation. Success, we read, often depended more on ecclesiastical power structures than on Chinese families turning to Christ. Ricci was shut down by Rome; Presbyterians were threatened by theological struggles in the United States. Only when all the foreign ecclesiastical powers were expelled did Christ's robe begin to fit the Chinese more comfortably.

The final two chapters, by Jean-Paul Weist, Emeritus Research Director of the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies in Beijing, and Xiaoxin Wu of the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the University of San Francisco, bring good news to those who hope for a genuine Chinese Christianity. Weist turns his research from foreign mission societies to Chinese Christians, particularly Catholics. We read stories of faithfulness and suffering, and of the fear that can still inhabit Catholic communities in light of the underground churches and of government control

of the Three-Self Church. Wu explores the impact that Christians have on mainstream Chinese culture, offering a hopeful portrayal of new openness to academic studies of religion.

My interest in the book stems from my interest in seeing the Christian faith take shape in the Muslim world and I thought I might find some hope in the story of how it has happened in China. From that viewpoint, I was disappointed. The inculturation described is only to the level of staffing western structures with Chinese Christians. To that extent, the book is well written and worth reading. But I was left wondering about deeper levels of inculturation that might be seen in the underground churches. After reading this, I still don't know.

Reviewed by Dave Keane – PhD researcher in the field of mission history at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Rodney Stark, *Reformation Myths* (London: SPCK, 2017), 194 pages. ISBN: 978-0281078271.

The back cover describes this as an 'enlightening and entertaining antidote to recent books about the rise of Protestantism and its legacy'. Amongst the abundance of books celebrating Reformation 500 this one has more than a whiff of iconoclasm but is stronger on entertainment than enlightenment.

In this work Stark deals with certain 'myths' about the impact of the Reformation, such as the Weber hypothesis on the Protestant work ethic. He acknowledges that many of these myths have long since been overturned, although he argues that they continue to persist in some (mostly unnamed) quarters. It is this persistence that he seems to find especially irksome.

The unevenness of the book is, in many ways, typified by Chapter 3. Stark begins by saying that he does not mourn the passing of Christendom, although he immediately admits a certain amount of nostalgia for it. He then states that he mourns its replacement by powerful nation states. He sees these as the product of the Reformation, which broke the consensus of Christendom. Having said this, he then acknowledges that the seeds of nationalism pre-date the Reformation. This kind of unsettled approach runs throughout the book.

Stark, it turns out, is also capable of perpetuating myths of his own. At one point he accuses Calvin of a range of salacious crimes in Geneva. The rumours about these have long been in circulation but no Calvin scholar takes them seriously today. Stark's own reference for these accusations points the reader to a popular blog. This highlights the issue of Stark's sources. While

his bibliography mentions fourteen of his own works, there are only a handful of recent scholarly works on Reformation history. Stark seems unaware of the changes that have taken place in the interpretation of the pre-Reformation and Reformation periods. For example, he makes an argument based on the irreligion of medieval society. This was once a standard interpretation; however, this view has now been overturned and, the peasants who slept in church aside, the deeply religious nature of the medieval world is now recognised.

The purpose of Stark's work becomes clear in the Conclusion where he acknowledges that this is, in part, a continuation of an earlier work exposing what he perceives as persistent anti-Catholicism amongst English-speaking intellectuals. It is a prejudice that, while he views it as akin to anti-Semitism, remains an acceptable one.

This is a provocative read in places, but unfortunately it tends to reflect rather dated scholarship on the Reformation. There are also some sweeping generalisations; for example, when he traces the roots of two world wars to the Reformation. The book will have little appeal to serious scholars of the Reformation and could prove misleading to those with limited knowledge of the historiography of the period.

Reviewed by Dr David Luke – Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Irish Baptist College.

Mark McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (eds); *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 580 pages. ISBN: 978-0199677979.

This handbook takes as its central theme globalisation, citing this as the foremost characteristic in which contemporary feminist theology takes place. With 27 contributors from around the world, and organised into three main sections, the handbook presents a diversity of feminist theological engagement. After an introductory chapter, the first section of three chapters focuses on the development and contemporary challenges of western feminist theology. Serene Jones's chapter offers a definition of feminist theology and suggests eight characteristics that are core to the work of feminist theological enquiry (including awareness of contextualised knowing, difference, de/construction, particularity, and convictions about our humanity – things that feature throughout the handbook) and which are shared by the variety of expressions that come under the term feminist theology found in the handbook. She then turns to distinctively Christian

theological imagination formed from a faith-perspective, and she draws all of this into conversation with the implications of globalisation. Melissa Raphael's chapter concerns the development of Jewish feminist theology in the post-Holocaust context and the characteristics of the Jewish feminist theological task for Judaism as a social, cultural, spiritual, and historical identity. As someone who has engaged with feminist theology as it has developed in Britain and North America over the past thirty years, I found these two chapters enormously helpful in their overview and critical analysis, and both would serve as essential reading for those seeking to understand or be introduced to western feminist theological work. At the same time, such work is further interrogated and challenged, both implicitly and explicitly, in many of the chapters that follow.

The second section turns to contexts across the globe and feminist engagement with theological imagination and praxis as it encounters globalisation. Twelve chapters cover Asian feminist theology; Indic Gynocentric theology/thealogy; a Latino Afro-Caribbean perspective; Latin American Women; the Middle East; the continent of Africa (3 chapters); Europe; Aotearoa New Zealand; First Nation (North America); and North American feminism.

The essays are hugely informative about the economics, politics, history, culture, and religion of the regions, and of women's position within each context, as well as offering critical engagement with globalisation. They show how 'gender is both *embodied* and *embedded* in capitalist globalization' (p. 181). Globalisation itself is variously examined throughout the book, with Muse Dube's chapter providing a succinct discussion of its impact on women and an analysis of how it fits in the 'family of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism' (p. 383). The feminist responses occurring in these contexts are discussed with various emphases, such as the role of Christianity, patriarchy, religious fundamentalisms, and colonial legacies and mindsets.

The third section has eleven chapters which reflect on the challenges and opportunities presented by globalisation on feminist thinking as a theological enterprise. Themes considered include: the nature of inter-religious engagement; religious subjectivity, agency and transcendence; the place of scripture as written and oral traditions; the challenges of globalisation for Muslim women; liberation theology and identity politics in the context of kyriarchal globalisation; theology, sexuality, globalisation and women's bodies in Latin America; a womanist perspective on globalisation framed by theology and narrative; women's popular Marian piety with its complexity and possibilities; feminist ritual practice; and religious de-traditioning (refiguring) bound up in women's transnational migration.

Each chapter can be read on its own and yet it is in reading them together that the enormity of globalisation's adverse effects on women is relayed. Throughout, there is an emphasis on women's material conditions, how struggles of race and class – intertwined with historical and political legacies – impact on gender, and on the importance (with examples) of feminist activism that advocates on behalf of women (and also children, men, and the planet). Indeed, with global situations showing the inadequacies of a simple identity politics around femaleness, the handbook authors 'argue for activist/praxis-defined "communities" as an alternative to identity and representative politics' (p. 17). Strenuously critical of the harms contained in globalisation, and acutely challenging, the handbook showcases feminist theological imagination engaging with concrete realities of everyday lives.

Reviewed by Dr Fran Porter - Research Fellow at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham, UK.

Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamaj (eds), *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2018), 487 pages. ISBN: 978-1783684137.

This book looks at advanced theological education from the perspective of the Majority world and asks the dual question: Why does the Minority world or Western model dominate theological education and how can we find contextually appropriate ways of doing Master's and Doctoral level research? Both editors and chapter authors take time to draw out the width and depth of the problem, which is caused by importing a Western, analytical, linear, low-culture, white male model to high-culture and a much more diverse model.

However, they complain not only about cultural insensitivity. In addition, the authors see the pattern of a written, in-depth dissertation norm as the reason why graduates of advanced theological education are not always successful in working together in teams and across disciplines, teaching well, and engaging with the real questions of theological leadership. Therefore the book is not only suitable for those from the Majority world, but for everybody, including myself as a theological education leader.

The main purpose of the book is to find more diverse, culturally and missionally relevant models of doing advanced theological education. The book consists of three sections and twenty-three chapters. The first section looks at the broader philosophical, theological, and social-contextual issues,

which are shaping advanced theological education. The second section imagines some innovative possibilities for the dissertation, and the third section asks if a dissertation is the only option. As the book is designed primarily for leaders of emerging programmes of advanced theological studies in the Majority world, the authors are drawing out possible limitations, which come with the adoption of the Western 'classical' model of dissertation. These include that the dissertation is often written alone, not together as a team; the research topic is usually chosen as a result of detailed questioning within one discipline, not crossing the borders of different disciplines and thus not offering wider solutions; and in striving for maximum objectivity, the dissertation does not bring out the richness of the author's culture.

However, the two following sections of the book offer some possible solutions to these problems. The authors are convinced that creative innovation is the only way forward: 'If the church is to benefit from the full richness of its resources – male and female, from every tribe and nation – then it is imperative that innovative forms be embraced and extended' (p. 327). Several ideas are offered – including story-telling, poetry, portfolio, problem-based learning, interdisciplinary and collaborative writing. The word *ethno-hermeneutics* runs through the book.

Personally, as a theologian and educationalist from the Western theological tradition, I missed a recognition of the strengths of 'classical' dissertation culture. Analytical and writing skills are still needed 'for reflecting theologically for the church' as well as in 'forming leadership for the church' (p. 32). The standards of academic excellence need to be acquired, whatever the form and context.

Nevertheless, the book is a very good attempt to balance the earlier unbalance towards a Western model in advanced theological education and thus I consider it to be extremely helpful. Its value lies not least in helping to challenge the Western model for Westerners themselves. At least, this happened to me while reading the book.

Reviewed by Dr Einike Pilli – Rector, Tartu Theological Seminary, Estonia.

Keith Ward, *Love is His Meaning: Understanding the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2017), 97 pages. ISBN: 978-0281077632.

This short book by philosopher and theologian Keith Ward is a gentle polemic against literalist readings of the Bible. While recognising its popularity, Ward believes that this hermeneutic is responsible for the decline

in the church. Literalism is not congruent with good contemporary scientific and moral thinking. Ward concentrates on understanding Jesus' teachings, convinced that if we take them literally, we will miss His meaning. They are, says Ward, full of figures of speech – symbol, metaphor, and much more. The gospels are not neutral historical accounts but are intended to evoke a personal encounter with Christ who 'taught in a non-literal way about God's absolute love'.

Thus, the Sermon on the Mount does not give us a new set of rules but prompts us to ask ourselves if we are treating others in a loving way. The kingdom of God is a spiritual rather than literal entity. Jesus' life fulfils Old Testament prophecy, but he preaches the restoration of all humanity, rather than the defeat of Israel's enemies, or the restoration of physical Jerusalem. The complex symbolism of Jesus' eschatological teachings looks to the end of the cosmos, when there will be a 'new heaven and new earth'. If we want to understand Jesus' teachings, we should look at his life: Christ's self-sacrifice points to God's absolute love.

Ward's agenda is pastoral as well as intellectual, and his argument is clearly and carefully articulated. A difficulty arises, however, when he presents five 'principles' to the reader: the gospels are not verbally inerrant; there is no eternal hell; Jesus left no specific moral rules, about sex or politics or anything else; there is no imminent end of the universe or physical return of Jesus on the clouds; there is no exclusive salvation for Christian believers. The problem here is not the ideas themselves (they are hardly new), but the use of the word 'principles'. This has an inflexible feel to it, which is at odds with the sensitive tone of the rest of the book, and I worry that this might alienate some readers who might otherwise have been willing to engage with its ideas. The term 'propositions' might have been more tactful. I hope the book will be used in seminaries and church groups, for it is full of rich insight and stimulating material.

Reviewed by Dr Marion Carson – member of Adjunct Faculty, IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Andrew Hardy and Dan Yarnell, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 239 pages. ISBN: 978-1532618932.

Co-written by two staff members at ForMission College, Birmingham, England, this work is an extensively referenced overview of appropriate

ways of participating in the *Missio Dei*. It forms part of the *After Christendom* Series, edited by Stuart Murray.

This work has the sense of a body of material that has been formed out of materials prepared for use in lectures. It seeks to build on biblical perspectives gleaned from the New Testament Scriptures, going on to engage with contemporary missional hermeneutics, steering the reader towards an understanding of mission that is strongly rooted in a participationalist, Christomorphic identity.

The work is particularly strong in looking at how church might better engage with Generations Y and Z, the age-groups that are most commonly missing from church. Insights as to how different generations view the meaning and purpose of life are clear and valuable.

For those familiar with the work of James McClendon, there is an interesting reading of his methodology, correlating his understanding of communities of practice to the work of the social learning theorist, Etienne Wenger. This indicates something of the strength of the work, in combining practical insights into how to engage with different age groups, while at the same time drawing the reader into considering varying hermeneutical tools that might be of use in analysing and developing good, missional practice. The work engages positively yet not uncritically with traditional models of church, and reflects on styles of discipleship and mentoring that are appropriate to missional methods, to be held constantly under review and subject to revision.

In providing extensive referencing to secondary material, much of which is of recent publication, the authors provide a full bibliography. The ensuing weakness is, perhaps inevitably, that a thorough discussion of the merits and demerits of particular methodologies and theories of learning in disciple making does lack critical depth.

This volume is a strong and practical work, providing a good addition to the *After Christendom* Series.

Reviewed by Revd Dr Jim Purves – Mission & Ministry Advisor, Baptist Union of Scotland.

Joshua T. Searle, *Theology After Christendom: Forming Prophets for a Post-Christian World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 211 pages. ISBN: 978-1498241953.

Joshua Searle, Tutor in Theology and Public Thought at Spurgeon's College, London, states that the aim of this book is to present 'the challenges and

opportunities confronting theology in a post-Christendom context and to offer proposals about how to address the current state of crisis' (p. 11). He also points out that his writing is rooted in the conviction that 'theology has reached a crucial phase in its historical development' (p. 11). The conviction behind the text is as compelling as the purpose. Much of the argument will be familiar to those who have been engaged with all things post-Christendom over the last two decades, but Searle's book reads like a manifesto. It is impatient, sees change coming and offers new, and sometimes not so new, directions of travel.

Searle associates Christendom with the Modern rationalistic tendency to formulate truth, doctrinal or otherwise, as propositions and proposes instead that in the new context theology should be concerned with character formation. The emphasis for theological education should be on the formation of prophets rather than priests, and on shaping the imagination rather than getting doctrines straight. Searle argues insightfully for a shift in attention from the church to the world, and for reconnecting theology to mission, discipleship, and the kingdom of God. Beyond these large concepts, the book's most striking arguments are in favour of reconnecting faith with life outside the church. He points towards, though does not describe in any detail, a theology that can nourish a 'Christianity as a spiritual movement for the transformation of the world' (p. 192). Chapter six, focusing on Freedom, Compassion and Creativity, offers many points of departure for fruitful reflection and practice. At times Searle presents Christendom as a straw man, equating it to Modernity and to the intellectualism of evangelicalism. A more nuanced consideration of Christendom and its passing may have added something to the exploration of the issues of formation and how the gospel is made visible in the public square.

A highlight of this book is the fascinating range of sources, showcasing not only Searle's wide reading but also his life experience, which spills over from Western evangelicalism to lived engagement with new monasticism and Eastern European Protestantism. His reflections on the Northumbria Community, rooted in personal engagement, offer insights into a movement that has had sustained and creative engagement with the context of Post-Christendom.

Reviewed by Revd Mark Ord – Director of BMS World Mission, Birmingham, UK.

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 218 pages. ISBN: 978-0691176222.

This closely argued text is a challenging one but repays careful reading. Hurd's core concern is the way in which 'religion' and 'religious freedom' have increasingly become defined according to the interests of national and international policy and law. The background to this in the past twenty years is partly the growth of violence and terrorism in the name of religion and the double response to this by Western governments in what Hurd calls *expert religion*, dominated by 'the agenda of reassurance which celebrates religion as sources of morality and cohesion, and, simultaneously, the agenda of surveillance, which fears religion as a potential danger to be contained and suppressed'. But she suggests that this has been done in an unhelpful way that has divorced religion from other important dimensions of human life with which they are set and constantly interact. Social tensions and community violence cannot be explained simply by recourse to religion.

This is contrasted by Hurd with *lived religion*, and the 'complex and unstable relation' between the 'religion that is authorised for legal and political purposes and a broader messier world of religious belonging, belief and practice'. There is pressure to fit these lived practices into categories of religion determined by policy-makers.

The third category defined by Hurd is *governing religion* in which 'government is seen as the handmaiden and governor of tolerant, democracy-friendly legally supervised religion' She correctly identifies the problems with this, that will resonate with Baptists in some settings: 'Who defines orthodoxy? Who is transformed through definitions into a "minority" or a "sect" and with what social consequences?'

Hurd concludes that there is too often a clear message that secular policy-makers will privilege those religious groups that accept the framework defined for them by the powers that be. She advocates situating religion in a series of broader interpretive fields beyond the definitions of both sectarianism and religious freedom authorised by political power.

This short review cannot do justice to a meticulously well-argued thesis, even if I would want to respond that perhaps it changes our definition of 'religious freedom' and emphasises its necessary setting in wider contexts of social and cultural factors and human rights, rather than taking us 'beyond' it.

But it is very relevant to some Baptists who do not 'fit' into the government definition of religion (often supported by 'traditional' churches)

and are left either outside the law or discriminated against within it. They are part of the 'much larger story' that Hurd urges us to engage with and recognise. At the same time there is a cautionary word to us, too, that we cannot isolate all discrimination against our churches as being purely concerned with religious freedom. There are often much more complex factors at work that we need to recognise more than we do.

Reviewed by Revd Tony Peck – General Secretary,
European Baptist Federation.

John Coffey (ed.), *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England and Ireland, 1690-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 232 pages. ISBN: 978-0198724155.

This is a superb volume of essays by leading historians, with each of the contributors offering valuable insights into evangelical spirituality. The opening essay by John Coffey on 'Sources and Trajectories of Evangelical Piety' sets the scene in a masterly way. After enjoying it I was eager to carry on reading. The rest of the essays lived up to the high standard set by Coffey.

I was particularly pleased to see the way in which a number of the authors looked in detail at experiences across Europe. This is central to Patricia Ward's 'Continental Spirituality and British Protestant Readers' and to Daniel Brunner's essay on Anthony William Boehm. It is also crucial in Tom Schwanda's exploration of the hymns of John Cennick and their connection with Moravian spirituality.

In the case of essays which cover themes that are more familiar to those interested in British evangelicalism – 'George Whitefield and Heart Religion', by David Ceri Jones, 'Inward Religion and its Dangers in the Evangelical Revival', by Isabel Rovers, and a study of conversion, revival and the Holy Spirit in Ulster, by Andrew Holmes – the authors offer important new perspectives on their topics.

The reader will also find here aspects of the evangelical scene that are not necessarily covered when the spirituality of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century is discussed: John Coffey writes on 'Dissenting Communion Hymns, 1693-1709', Phyllis Mack has a fascinating exploration of dreaming and emotion, and David Bebbington analyses 'deathbed piety' among Victorian Evangelical Nonconformists. Coffey and Bebbington include Baptist experiences.

As befits a book of essays on 'heart religion', I found spiritual nourishment woven into what is a splendid tapestry of historical scholarship.

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Reviewed by Dr Ian M. Randall – Senior Research Fellow (IBTS Centre, Amsterdam and Spurgeon's College, London) and Research Associate (Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide).

Geoffrey R. Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, McPherson and Hammond* (IVP: London, 2016), 320 pages. ISBN: 978-1783594320.

The Disruption of Evangelicalism by Geoffrey Treloar is the fourth volume in the series under the general title *A History of Evangelicalism*. The first volume, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* by Mark Noll, appeared in 2004, and now all five volumes are available for readers. The book by Treloar narrates the story of English-speaking evangelicalism, covering approximately four decades, from the turn of the twentieth century until the Second World War.

The first part of the volume serves as a good introduction for understanding evangelicalism as a phenomenon – exploring issues of revivalism, especially as shaped by Reuben A. Torrey and other leaders, analysing the role and methods of mission, discussing aspects of social engagement and devotional life. All this helps to reveal the roots and branches of present-day evangelical life. Evangelicals sustained vigorous theological discussions, some of them moving towards narrowing their positions towards fundamentalism, others broadening their horizons towards liberal convictions. Through the whole volume the author pursues the argument that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Anglo-American evangelicalism faced new situations, such as losing its former position in wider society, and going through major crises – such as experiencing the devastating effects of the First World War and its aftermath. Theological, social, and political influences, in the whirlwind of turbulent times, only deepened what Treloar describes as disruptive forces within evangelicalism. For example, while the majority of evangelicals defended the war as 'a fight for justice and righteousness' (p. 122) and were involved in 'war sevice in many forms' (p. 152), there were considerable cases of conscientious objection, which seems to have been a more significant facet of evangelical response than Treloar shows.

In many ways, by the 1940s evangelicalism had emerged as a drastically more diversified movement when compared to the nineteenth century. The hopes to regain evangelical cultural authority did not

materialise, there was no 'great reversal' in interwar evangelicalism. However, 'lack of impact is not the same as absence of interest', as the author aptly summarises. The evangelicals continued to 'think that Christian beliefs and values should shape social attitudes and behaviour in their communities' and they 'maintained the tradition of evangelical engagement with society' (p. 277).

In conclusion, this is an informative and scholarly account of English-speaking evangelicals, combining broader generalisations with specific examples. And, as always, moving closer to contextual and local phenomena the picture becomes more colourful, multifaceted, and diversified.

Reviewed by Dr Toivo Pilli – Director of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Gert-Jan Roest, *The Gospel in the Western Context: A Missiological Reading of Christology in Dialogue with Hendrikus Berkhof and Colin Gunton*. Studies in Reformed Theology 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 425 pages. ISBN: 978-9004386471.

Gert-Jan Roest, for fifteen years a church planter and evangelist in Amsterdam (and now part-time teacher of missiology at the Theological University Kampen), finished his PhD at VU University Amsterdam with this scholarly volume on the contextualisation of Christology in the post-Christendom West. The research unfolds by shaping two critical lenses for doing analysis of culture and gospel in the high tide of secularism, viz. the reading of the Western context by Hendrikus Berkhof (1914-1995) and Colin Gunton (1941-2003). Part 1 of the book offers an in-depth study of Berkhof's thinking, in particular his Christology; Part 2 looks into Gunton's Christology; and Part 3 describes the 'contours of a Western gospel at the beginning of the 21st century'.

The two are challenging dialogue-partners, because (1) both Reformed theologians take a clear ecumenical stance; (2) both incorporate in their theology insights from other Christian traditions; and (3) both demonstrate pioneering insights in contextual theology revolving around binaries such as gospel-and-culture and experience-and-revelation. As a consequence, Roest's approach is thoroughly based on theological reflection of Berkhof's and Gunton's legacies, combined with much praxis-informed analysis. The results are quite intriguing, for the gospel-centred model for reading the context – with the help of keen specialists like Lesslie Newbigin, Chris Wright, James Dunn et alia – turns out to be a promising avenue, because the

hermeneutical key to the proposed model is provided by the gospel story. The model carefully weaves together basic dimensions of Christian life which substantiate meaningful Christian presence in the secularised West (p. 315). First there is the meta-narrative of worship of Israel's God of grace, as embedded into God's story with Israel. Subsequently, Christians seek to live a gospel life of hope and expectation and make efforts to contextualise their hope by lifestyle. In interaction with their life context they (tangibly) exhibit a cruciform spirituality as is seen in Jesus, and henceforth are the clear embodiment of what gospel-centredness is all about. The story of Jesus is re-enacted as a power of hope and change by a people whose life is oriented to 'the mystery of Jesus Christ in their midst'.

The model is profoundly informed by Berkhof and Gunton as it pulls vital strings and strengths together. It develops a workable hermeneutical interpretament of 'cross' and 'new creation', by which pivotal Western notions such as 'unease with individualism' and 'social-economic-political issues' (and crises) are anticipated. The concept is quite dynamic, particularly conforming to Berkhof's thinking about nature and history, and does not look into the details of contextual processes of language, practices, and traditions. Crucial to these dynamics is the way in which the story of Jesus is being told, the way in which he is portrayed and communally embodied by the Church. A contextualised gospel-frame has at its core the Western need for the forgiving presence of Jesus, and therefore at its similar core the forgiving presence of the community of believers.

Reviewed by Revd Prof. Dr Henk Bakker – holder of the James Wm. McClendon Chair for Baptistic and Evangelical Theologies at VU University Amsterdam and lecturer at the Dutch Baptist Seminary, Amsterdam.