

## Book Reviews

Richard W. Voelz, *Preaching to Teach: Inspire People to Think and Act* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 103 pages. ISBN: 978-1501868078.

The sixth book in The Artistry of Preaching Series, this book follows the series' goal of offering practical advice related to neglected themes to inspire creativity in preaching. Voelz, assistant professor of preaching and worship at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, begins his work by asking a question of image and authority. How preachers understand their role, and thus how they understand their authority for preaching, is important to him. A re-casting of the image of preacher-as-teacher via critical pedagogy, Voelz claims, can offer a pertinent image of preaching for today's context.

The book draws upon critical pedagogy research and literature in the North American context. However, despite this, Voelz's book offers important insights for pastors, no matter where they currently live.

Following the introduction, the book offers four chapters explaining how critical pedagogy re-imagines preaching. Chapter one explores how the preacher can contribute to the formation of public life. The second chapter examines critical pedagogy's call to teach toward a vision of the public square in relation to preaching. Teaching practices in critical pedagogy and their intersection with preaching is the topic of the third chapter. The relationship between the congregation, understandings of authority, the preacher-as-teacher, and the sermon are addressed in the fourth chapter. A final fifth chapter offers a helpful overview of the core themes and terms presented in the book and three sermons with comments explaining how each sermon uses preaching-as-teaching as envisioned by Voelz.

Building upon the work of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, and Peter McLaren, Voelz re-frames the traditional understanding of preaching to teach. Preaching-as-teaching is different when done from a critical pedagogy, argues Voelz, because it can encompass many forms of preaching. This includes prophetic and pastoral preaching, as it allows the preaching to address the major issues of the day in a manner that encourages participants in the sermon to find both personal and social healing. Critical pedagogy stresses a move from giver of information to what may be passive listeners, to preaching to empower critical thought and conversation about church, community, world, and a vision of individual and communal transformation toward the *basileia tou Theou*. This term, rather than the

*kingdom of God*, is preferred – due to the many connotations that *kingdom* may have.

Overall, the book presents a needed reflection on preaching. Voelz shows that critical pedagogy can give insight and offer preaching that invokes theological reflection and participation of the church in their local community and world. This effort I commend, but I find it hard to see, in the examples offered, how Voelz builds fully upon the practices of critical pedagogy. Where are the moves in the sermon from monologue to dialogue, demonstration to brainstorming, critique or interpretation of reality to joint discovery and the faithful communal implementation of this discovered vision for an embodied future? Nevertheless, this is an important lens through which to view preaching and offers the reader imagination as to how this image of preaching might be implemented.

**Reviewed by Matthew Norman – Area Coordinator for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Field Teams in Europe (Barcelona, Spain).**

Paul Avis (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 672 pages. ISBN: 978-0199645831.

The four parts of this handbook on the Church present the sources of ecclesiology in Scripture, its contours through history, and its present-day situation, which is approached via prominent ecclesial theologians and modern movements and influences.

The biblical material in Part One is well structured and covered in engaging fashion and by a good representation of varying ecclesial traditions. The presentations of church traditions in Part Two, presented by respected representatives of various denominations, is lively and informative. These serve as a reminder that between the biblical texts and the present context there is a rich and complex lived experience, from the ancient Western and Eastern Churches right through to modern Pentecostalism, which shape and resource present-day ecclesiologies. The theologians considered in Part Three are all important and dealt with by authoritative scholars. These essays give us a sense of how the Church has dealt with key issues in recent history and how we have become what we are now. The range of white men considered tells its own story, both of the Church and of the focus of this handbook. Part Four, though, gives us the most interesting snapshot of the Church today: rooted in issues of equality and gender, engaged with the social sciences, as an observable and not only ideal social reality, and, above all, global. These interesting chapters are asked to do a lot of work in a relatively short space, especially the chapters on Asian and African ecclesiologies.

A handbook of this sort is bound to have limitations, on account of the scope of the subject matter and the need for a clear structure. What is covered is rich, worth engaging with, and speaks of the depth and wealth of the Church. That said, a more sustained appraisal of evangelicalism and the Church, and churches, of the Global South feel like a deficit in text that aims at being compressive. The content is heavily slanted towards the West and is male dominated, both in terms of historical interest and contributors. These factors tell their own story about the Church and ecclesiology, but both in the historical Church and world Church there is more to be told, and more diverse voices to hear.

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

Philip Salim Francis, *When Art Disrupts Religion: Aesthetic Experience and the Evangelical Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 203 pages. ISBN: 978-0190279760.

This book by P. S. Francis is a thought-provoking study on how aesthetic experiences have transformed the religious beliefs of young people who have been raised and formed in American evangelical communities, especially those considered ‘fundamentalist’. Although the study has a clearly defined American evangelical context, I suspect that anyone who has been raised in the twentieth-century evangelical tradition and still dares to read it, will find disturbing similarities with his or her own church culture. Evangelical suspicion of the arts is not just an American phenomenon. Therefore, I believe, the value of this book reaches much beyond the geographical borders of its origin.

This study is based on interviews and memoirs of eighty-two American Evangelical Christian students who at different times have studied in the programme called Oregon Extension, or in the Bob Jones University School of Fine Arts and Communication. These accounts, often cited at length and analysed in great depth, are the gems of this study. They convey the students’ pain and grief when, after having been exposed to aesthetic experiences, they distance themselves from the American evangelical tradition and often from Christian faith in general. The ‘absolute certainty’ defined by their religious communities did not answer the complex questions of human experience which they first encountered in different art pieces and which then became their own.

Francis describes how through aesthetic encounters – literature, music, painting, film, etc. – the students experienced a different kind of ‘knowing’ than that of certainty. They also experienced a different kind of

meeting with the ‘outsiders’ than that of ‘evangelising’ as they were exposed to listening without a possibility to preach the Gospel as required in their religious communities – novels and paintings wouldn’t hear. And in spite of pain and often accompanying depression, they have been able – or at least are on a journey – to overcome the need for ‘absolute certainty’, the divide between ‘insiders’ (members of their own religious community) and ‘outsiders’, and the demand for ‘all-or-nothing commitment’ to their religious community.

Francis’ study engages profoundly with the question of how religious communities (and not only ‘fundamentalists’) preserve their identities, how challenging it can be to move away from these inherited patterns of life, and how multidimensional and complex may be the role of arts and other humanities on this journey. And, although written in the American evangelical context, Francis’ study offers a challenge to all denominational institutions and theological schools whose role is to preserve and shape their own denominational identity.

**Reviewed by Helle Liht – Assistant General Secretary,  
European Baptist Federation.**

Emma Scrivener, *A New Day: Moving on from Hunger, Anxiety, Control, Shame, Anger and Despair* (London: IVP, 2017), 192 pages. ISBN: 978-1783594412.

Emma Scrivener’s first book, *A New Name*, described her experience of severe anorexia, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and self-harm as a teenager, and the spiritual experience which kickstarted her into recovery. This second book builds on the first, and acts as a self-help manual for people struggling with similar problems. Written for a popular market, it seeks to provide a biblical perspective on dealing with issues such as anger, control, anxiety, shame, and despair and how they shape the ways we think and behave.

The book is aimed at middle-class, Western young people, as its preppy cover design underscores. Worried by simplistic messages such as “I was a drug addict, but now I’m clean” which tend to permeate evangelical rhetoric, Scrivener wants to help people who are discovering that emotional and psychological difficulties do not disappear after conversion. We should expect ‘mess, weakness and suffering’, and rely on Jesus, our broken Saviour, to help us through.

The book’s structure is provided by Genesis 1.5 (‘And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day’). We move from the darkness of the night towards the daylight. Reflection questions, Scripture

meditations, practical advice, thoughtful prayers, and information on mental health issues help us on our way. Inward-looking emotional self-indulgence, is, thankfully, avoided. Scrivener is aware of the need, even in the darkness, to take personal responsibility and develop healthy responses to our experiences and thought patterns.

From a pastoral perspective, this is a helpful resource for youth and pastoral workers. From a practical theologian's point of view, however, its use of Scripture is rather incoherent. Genesis 1.5 and the Adam and Eve story are full of promising ideas for a discussion of behaviour and emotion, and would have been sufficient, fertile resources for the whole book. Unfortunately, she too often reverts to a kind of Christian Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, urging readers to replace 'non-Biblical' thinking with 'Gospel truth', an approach which risks the sort of simplistic thinking of which Scrivener herself is suspicious. Nevertheless, there is enough interesting material here to encourage the hope that the church can move away from literalism and proof-texting in pastoral work. It is the responsibility of pastoral theologians to enable popular authors like Scrivener to go much deeper.

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

Tom J. Obengo, *The Quest for Human Dignity in the Ethics of Pregnancy Termination* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 155 pages. ISBN: 978-1498233828.

In Kenya abortion is illegal, except when the woman's life is in danger. Nevertheless, 700+ pregnancy terminations are carried out daily on 15-17 year olds. Obengo, who is ordained in the Africa Inland Church and teaches at Moffat Bible College, is troubled by a lack of 'human dignity' in the church's response to those who have terminations. Besides experiencing physical and psychological ill-health caused by dangerous procedures, girls are excommunicated from the church.

Obengo provides a wealth of information on the legal, historical, and current context of abortion in Kenya. He gives a history of attitudes to abortion in the Christian tradition, noting that although abortion does not feature in Scripture, the moral status of the foetus does. The qualitative research consists of interviews with doctors, lawyers, and pastors and focus group discussions with church members. Doctors are willing to consider legalising abortion for healthcare reasons, while pastors and lawyers disagree. The focus group discussions reveal a need for teaching on abortion in churches, and on the morality of sex for young people. Obengo thinks that

chastity remains the best preventative of abortion, but dislikes the ‘all or nothing’ approach to termination found in the churches, which he believes contributes to stigmatisation. Giesler’s theory of graded absolutism and Martin Benjamin’s concept of moral compromise help him towards the conclusion that abortion may be justified in certain situations – threat to mother’s life, incest, and rape – and that education and counselling, rather than excommunication of ‘sinners’, is required. He provides recommendations for church and public servants.

I hope that leaders in Kenya and beyond make use of the research and recommendations provided in this meticulously researched book. There are some problems – the argument tends towards circularity and the theological reflection could be much stronger. For example, his analysis of biblical sources is scant, and a promise to build on Reformation theology is not followed through. It is good, however, that double standards in treatment of boys and girls in the Kenyan church are identified, and that the stigmatisation of those who have abortions is challenged. The cultural and religious assumptions behind these practices require further investigation.

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

Alan Thomas, *Tackling Mental Illness Together: A Biblical and Practical Approach* (London: IVP, 2017), 206 pages. ISBN: 978-1783595594.

Alan Thomas is Professor of Old Age Psychiatry at Newcastle University. His belief is that mature church leaders can help those with mental illness and so he sets out to share some of his expertise to enable them to do so. His perspective is that of the clinician, but he also wants to ‘construct a Biblical approach to mental illness’.

Thomas offers his views on the limitations of current psychiatry and defends its strengths. Troubled by the anti-psychiatry movement which, in both its secular and Christian forms, questions the existence of mental illness, he argues for a ‘Biblical’ view of people as psychosomatic wholes – mental illness, which can have biological and inter-personal causes, affects the whole person, not simply the mind. Disturbed by a tendency in modern psychiatry to medicalise everyday distress, he criticises current views which equate certain behaviour with disorder. Unsurprisingly, he dismisses all things Freudian as unscientific, asserting that the Bible gives us a ‘surer guide to dealing with the influence of the unconscious mind’. Psychoanalytic explorations of childhood trauma are, he thinks, incompatible with biblical teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation. Further, non-religious

techniques, like the currently fashionable ‘mindfulness’ should be avoided lest they lead some people into sin.

As we might expect, he is at his best when discussing his area of clinical expertise. He argues strongly for the efficacy of Electro-Convulsive Therapy, and tackles the common criticism that psychotropic medicines are ineffective. He is cautious about certain psychotherapeutic approaches but supportive of the use of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. His writing is limpid when he describes the various illnesses and their treatment, and his description of ‘stepped care’ will be of much practical use in the pastoral setting. He provides helpful vignettes from his long experience.

Unfortunately, however, his attempts to link the pastoral and clinical are less successful. He seems preoccupied with the relationship between mental illness and sin, while having little to say on the profound suffering which patients and families experience. His tendency is to use Scripture as though it were a textbook, which leads to simplistic assertions of the sort noted above, and a less than nuanced approach to pastoral care. His desire for the church to be involved in the care of the mentally ill is admirable, but the question of how the biblical texts are to help us in this task requires a much more sophisticated approach than is presented here.

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

Tim Noble, *Mission from the Perspective of the Other: Drawing Together on Holy Ground* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 218 pages. ISBN: 978-1532650482.

Whereas missiology has tended to focus on either God or the missionary as the agent(s) of mission, Tim Noble seeks to reimagine mission by recovering a third vantage point – the perspective of the other. His argument is as simple as it is profound: instead of seeing the other as a threat or problem to overcome, what if we reimagined the other as a gift? In this way, Noble invites us to discover how encounter with the other may be ‘mutually enriching for the missionary and the addressee of mission’(p. ix).

The book unfolds in two parts and according to a distinct ‘other-centred’ logic. In the first part, entitled ‘The Other’, Noble attends to the way ‘the other’ gets portrayed in Scripture, in contemporary trends in missiology, and finally, in contemporary philosophy, particularly in the work of Jean-Luc Marion.

Instead of seeing the other as the static ‘object’ of mission, Noble displays how the other is an active subject in his/her own right – someone

whose presence may bring both blessing and challenge. The upshot: it's otherness all the way down! We are always encountering and being encountered by 'those who draw near' (the Greek etymology of *proselyte*); therefore, authentic encounter lies in welcoming and receiving the other without attempting to categorise him/her in advance. In this way, mission is not something that we possess, rather it is a 'a response in love to the other who draws near' (p. 181).

The second part of the book develops the first, by offering biographical sketches of three missionaries (Saint Ignatius of Loyola, William Carey, and Bishop Innocent Veniaminov) who, in their own way and historical context, sought to embrace the possibility and challenge of authentic missionary encounters with the other.

Noble's book, which extends his previous writings in mission and liberation theology, offers a compelling approach to mission studies for a number of reasons: first, its generosity of spirit and ecumenical appeal; second, its timeliness in a world where patterns of globalisation and forced migration mean that encountering the other has become inescapable for most of the world; and third, its attempt to uphold the other's otherness and the possibility of mission.

Of course, every book bears limitations as well: many readers will question why the second part features an all-male cast of missionaries; others will want a more prescriptive approach that lays out what a non-possessive approach to mission looks like. And, to be fair, Noble does anticipate these criticisms.

The enduring appeal of this book is Noble's ability to raise the following question in such a way that the reader wants the question to become his/her own: "How can we leave our vision of mission open to the challenge of the other, so that together we travel towards a deeper understanding of who God is?"

Wherever we are placed and engaged in intercultural mission (whether that be overseas or in one's own neighbourhood), this book reads as a call to (re)discover that mission is not so much a technical blueprint waiting to be executed but a relational possibility waiting to be discovered.

**Reviewed by Dr Samuel E. Ewell – Community Animator with  
Companions for Hope, Birmingham, UK.**



Robert H. Nelson, *Lutheranism and the Nordic Spirit of Social Democracy* (Aarhus, DK: Aarhus University Press, 2017), 324 pages. ISBN: 978-8771842609.

As a Canadian Baptist residing in Norway, I read this book with great interest. The author describes himself as ‘an economist with interest in the political and economic roles of religion in society, including the diverse forms religion has taken in the modern age’ (p.11). His intended audience encompasses ‘economists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, students of Nordic history, students of the history of religion, theologians, and anyone interested in the role of religion in its diverse forms in shaping modern societies’.

Nelson demonstrates convincingly that the social democratic structures of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland are a result of the secularisation of their common Lutheran heritage. While examining these countries collectively, he has a special emphasis on Finland. He compares his analysis with that of Max Weber, who charted the influence of Calvinism in the rise of capitalism.

The longstanding formative influence of Lutheranism within the Nordic countries has evolved into what Nelson refers to as ‘secular Lutheranism’, which he sees as the underlying foundation for the rise of the social democratic political structures of these countries in the twentieth century. The superior positions that the Nordic countries have occupied in the ‘World Governance indicators’ published by the World Bank since 1996 indicate that they distinguish themselves from other countries in Europe and the rest of the world. Nelson points to their common Lutheran religious and cultural heritage as the prime collective influence that has been formative for their common values and similar social and political structures.

Nelson begins by ‘setting the stage’ with a brief historical overview of the history of the church in the Nordic countries from the Vikings to Lutheranism. He goes on to present a complex portrait of Martin Luther, whom he views not only as a religious reformer, but as a political revolutionary, who, albeit inadvertently, was responsible for

opening the way to wide new religious, political and religious freedoms and resulting experimentation, and indeed to whole new directions of thought and action in society that in the space of a few hundred years would yield the modern world (p.80).

He also makes the claim that Luther’s main contribution to the reformatory process has been his emphasis upon the freedom of individual conscience. This, despite his observation that it would be the other branches of the Reformation that would truly spearhead its cause (pp. 82-84). The complexities and paradoxes evidenced in Luther’s writings and actions are

recognised by Nelson, who points to the Peasants' War of 1525 as a watershed event in his life and his role as figurehead for the Lutheran Reformation. Luther's defence of the authority of secular authorities in their enforcing of 'uniformity of worship, confession and ecclesiastical usage' (p. 86), the violent means that Luther advocated in suppressing the Radical Reformation of his day, and the later tirade against the Jews (1943) are some of the problematic issues that Nelson addresses. He notes the irony of the development of the kingdoms of Lutheran Europe becoming small versions of the universal Roman Catholic Church, where the kings and princes wielded the same religious authority in their territories as the Pope in Rome – a 'Lutheranized' version of Roman Catholicism (p.95).

Nelson highlights the fundamental differences in the respective working ethics and theologies of calling between Calvinism and Lutheranism, and concludes that Luther's emphasis on the state's responsibility in providing for the social welfare of its citizens and his critical attitude to the pursuit of personal gain in business have provided the foundation for the current social democratic welfare states of the North.

Nelson's presentation is remarkably astute and insightful, and he skilfully demonstrates how Lutheranism is the fundamental collective force which has been defining for the social democratic Nordic countries. However, because the volume is compact, there is little possibility for a nuanced and differentiated presentation of each of the countries. This is particularly the case in his portrayal of the various Pietist movements, where he focuses primarily on German state Pietism, whereas Moravian Pietism with its Calvinistic emphasis on business enterprise and industry was profoundly influential at grass-roots level in both Denmark and Norway.

I would warmly recommend this volume as required reading for theological studies to enhance an understanding of the Nordic social democratic context.

**Reviewed by Revd Linda Aadne – Assistant Professor, Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology (HLT), Norway.**

Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah (eds.), *Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 240 pages. ISBN: 978-0878080663.

These essays illustrate the diversity of Islam as lived by Muslims throughout the world and argue for an 'adaptive missiology' that approaches Muslims 'with a studied appreciation for their specific context' (p.144). The essays

are written by sixteen practitioner-scholars with a wealth of first-hand experience in often-sensitive Muslim settings, as witnessed by the fact that five of the authors use pseudonyms. The collection is comprised of eighteen essays: two introductory chapters ‘conceptualize’ Islam and argue against an essentialist view of one ‘true’, orthodox Islam, fourteen case studies illustrate Muslim diversity, and two concluding chapters seek to ‘reframe’ missiological engagement with Muslims in light of this diversity.

The case studies that make up the heart of this volume let the reader share the experience of meeting various kinds of Muslims, none of whom seems to fit stereotypical expectations for Islam and its followers. Along with this shared experience of encounter, these essays offer practitioner reflections supported by a wealth of relevant detail: the words of Muslims and converts from Islam, theoretical perspectives, statistics, trends, historical and political context, and cultural and linguistic issues. Rather than focusing on contestations between Islamic and Christian orthodoxies, these studies take a social science approach that explores the meaning of these diverse Muslims’ experience and questions how bridges of understanding might be constructed in sharing the gospel with them.

This collection has assembled an admirable array of contributors who have experienced the diversity of Muslims around the world and are thus able to offer thought-provoking insights. Yet it must be observed that, of sixteen contributors, only one is a woman. This valuable collection of essays would surely have been greatly enriched – and better able to serve its intended purpose – had it included the voices, experiences, and insights of more female practitioner-scholars.

This volume explores a *missiological* approach to Muslims in all their diversity, so it is not surprising that most of the contributors confine themselves to discussions of how to ‘reach’ various kinds of Muslims. In today’s world access to Muslims of all kinds has greatly increased. Yet we are also witnessing the historically unprecedented increase of Christians of Muslim background (CMB) and the emergence of congregations made up of such believers. Of fourteen case studies, four (chs. 3, 11, 13 and 14) touch helpfully on issues of discipleship and Christian formation for CMBs. A similar collection that delves into issues of discipleship and Christian formation for CMBs from such diverse Muslim backgrounds would be a valuable addition to the contribution made by this excellent book.

**Reviewed by Charles E. Faroe – PhD researcher at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.**

Stephen B. Bevens, *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 215 pages. ISBN: 978-9004366718.

This collection of essays, all by the prominent missiologist Stephen Bevens, presents as a defence and a further explication of tenets central to his significant work, first published in 1992, *Models of Contextual Theology*. Bevens' thesis develops the notion that there is no such thing as 'a theology' that holds true, regardless of context; but that theology arises out of a conversation between Scripture, Tradition, and our present experience in a given time and culture.

In this collection of essays, Bevens addresses criticisms that arise out of what he regards as misunderstandings of his central thesis. His argument might well be represented by a quotation repeated throughout this work, attributed to Charles Kraft, that, 'when a theology is *perceived* as irrelevant, it is *in fact* irrelevant'. In chapter 1, Bevens helpfully condenses and explains the six different models that he offered in *Models of Contextual Theology*, in looking to work through towards an appropriate theology for a given context: countercultural, translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, and transcendent models. He posits that a preference for, or blending of, one or more of these models is characteristic of the writing of contemporary theologians.

In the chapters that follow, Bevens engages with the challenge of shaping a practical theology that maintains orthodoxy and yet is truly contextual, recognising the pervasive mission of God in and towards all that is in the World. Going further, Bevens addresses and engages with the work of a number of significant, missiological thinkers, whose works have been published in the intervening years.

Interestingly, Bevens' representation of contextual theology runs parallel to a stress found in baptistic theology, as expressed in the writing of James McClendon, insisting that a dialogue needs to take place between the context of the present and the Scriptures, that conversation being peculiar to the circumstances and location in which it takes place. What differs most significantly is that Bevens is speaking to the wider church out of a Roman Catholic base.

This work serves as an excellent introduction to the well-expressed thoughts of a leading, contemporary missiologist.

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