

The book is an apologetic essay that consistently argues for the theistic metanarrative as the proper context in which humans could make sense of themselves and their experience. Dealing with different authors and their contribution on the subject, Kirk demonstrates that materialistic or secular humanism lacks explanatory power to answer satisfactorily the most acute aspects of being human — their origin, humanness, morality and the problem of evil. He concludes that Neo-Darwinists cannot resolve convincingly the issue of human origin, while secular humanists fail to explain the origin of consciousness and morality.

A vast project like this is by necessity a complex one. However, Kirk deals skilfully with its complexity, explaining some knotty ideas and demonstrating flaws and consequences of the secular humanist metanarrative. Although the book is straightforwardly theistic, Kirk demonstrates a commendable openness to honest and sincere dialogue with opponents. Whether such dialogue is ever possible at all is hard to tell.

Andrew Kirk has written an important book, which not only fills a gap but also points to the field in which theologians should invest their efforts in the near future.

**Reviewed by Dr Oleksandr Geychenko — Rector of Odessa Theological Seminary,  
Ukraine.**

Paul Cloke and Mike Pears (eds), *Mission in Marginal Places: The Theory* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2016), 250 pages. ISBN: 978-1842279090.

Paul Cloke and Mike Pears (eds), *Mission in Marginal Places: The Praxis* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2016), 234 pages. ISBN: 978-1842279106.

Paul Cloke and Mike Pears (eds), *Mission in Marginal Places: The Stories* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2019), 274 pages. ISBN: 978-1780781853.

In this review I discuss the trilogy of books in the *Mission in Marginal Places* series co-edited by sociological scholar Paul Cloke (Professor of Human Geography at the University of Exeter) and theological scholar Mike Pears. Pears was part of an Urban Expression community and carried out his PhD research (at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam) on a theology of place. He is currently Director of IBTS Centre in Amsterdam.

The aim of the series is to make available current thinking and material relating to mission in marginal places. This 'harvest' of material consists of theological convictions, expressed in stories, reflection and theory. These convictions can be summarised in three points: first, Christian mission must give priority to those on the margins. Second, a theology of mission must be a reflection on lived experiences. Third, mission studies must be in dialogue with social studies, for example on issues such as 'globalization, shifting experiences of 'place' and 'space', self-other relationships, urban studies and changing patterns of marginalization'.

Although the three volumes of the series are titled *The Theory*, *The Praxis* and *The Stories*, this distinction is not very clear throughout the series. Every volume consists of theory, praxis and stories, which is actually the very aim of Cloke and Pears's approach. They use ethnographical research as a source of theological reasoning, which requires an openness to question the theological tendency to bring fixed categories to the data.

Volume 1, *The Theory*, consists of three parts: Mission and Marginality, Mission and Others, and Mission and God. This volume intends to lay down a theoretical framework for the rest of the series. In volume 2, *The Praxis*, five realms are engaged for mission: the economic, political, social, environmental and creative realms. Volume 3, *The Stories*, explores the processes and practices of storying mission. Our way of witnessing is often framed by the convictions of the (middle-class Christian) culture from which we come, the authors argue. This might frustrate a perspective on what is actually going on. Storying thus requires an openness for 'new forms of social and spatial in commonness with other kinds of people' and 'a willingness to free up our imaginations of others'. This leads to new ways of engaging Scripture and how its narrativity is connected with community identity.

This reflexive interaction between social studies and (biblical) theology is the major strength of the series. The articles are written by authors who were part of mission in marginal places for years. There are no easy theories here. What this series offers is a profound contribution to a theology of mission, by using theological and sociological ways of research, by engaging concrete communities, asking the difficult questions, and by continuous and meticulous reflection on this engagement.

In doing so, the series contributes to three areas in particular. First, it offers a contribution to the development of a theology of place in missional context. Second, it offers a post-Christendom interpretation of several realms of society. Third, it offers a post-Christendom, marginal hermeneutic. In other words, it demonstrates the influence of time (post-Christendom) and place (marginal communities) on the reading and interpretation of Scripture.

This series' approach does also raise some questions. First of all, strangely enough, it suggests a Christendom setting: Christians are pictured primarily as part of a middle-class majority. Therefore the greatest risk for mission is ignoring power balances. Christians should not be too eager to communicate their news, but instead be open for learning possibilities. Also, one of the major dangers of being involved in mission are dominant 'orthodox' theological frames. I simply do not recognise this in the Dutch context, and I can hardly imagine this is the case in a British setting.

Second, the series works from a liberation theological preference of the poor. This, however, results regularly in a moral distrust of any power whatsoever. I do not find this approach constructive or theologically appropriate. This leads to my third question: why should mission in the West be primarily focused on marginal places? This is stated but not explained, sociologically or theologically.

Finally, there is some tension on the mission part of mission. The series emphasises dialogue and 'Third Space' kind of approaches, but somehow mission is about witnessing to Jesus by the church, which is a community committed to following Jesus as Lord. This tension between the particularity of the church and a *missio Dei* openness to society, where God is already at work, between sending and learning, is always there. The series' approach is not able to overcome this twentieth-century dilemma, which I think is a missed opportunity.

These critical notes aside, the three volumes are an essential read for everybody who is interested or engaged in mission in Western society — students, pastors and academics. It will question the way you read your Bible, the way you read society and your perspective on church and mission — in a good way.

**Reviewed by Dr Daniël Drost — pastor at Baptist Church, Deventer,  
lecturer and researcher at the Dutch Baptist Seminary, Vrije Universiteit,  
Amsterdam.**

Ivana Noble, *Essays in Ecumenical Theology I: Aims, Methods, Themes, and Contexts* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 286 pages. ISBN: 978-9004381087.

Despite the title that will make few hearts beat faster, this is a rich book, offering a plenitude of insights regarding the broad field of ecumenical