

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,
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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

theology in general, and the Orthodox and Hussite traditions in particular. Ivana Noble, Professor of Ecumenical Theology at Charles University in Prague, and a former president of *Societas Oecumenica*, wants to present ‘a consistent attempt to see Christian tradition even after the separations and schisms as a common heritage that includes even the painful divisions that need to be overcome’ and to illustrate how such an understanding ‘opens up reconciled relationships’ (pp. 1, 3). The book is a collection of articles and lectures written and presented between 1995 and 2017, but all significantly reworked and updated.

Regarding method, she does not exclusively choose one method that should be followed. In fact, the whole book is an illustration of the different methods that can be used and can be fruitful. For example, in chapter two she makes a convincing case for using three complementary methods: hermeneutical, phenomenological and epistemological. All three methods are mutually related. Every method is a servant; it has its beginning and its end (p. 35).

A beautiful chapter is chapter three on the apophatic aspects of theological conversation. The apophatic way is an important counterpart of the kataphatic way, the narratives and symbols of revelation: ‘The kataphatic way, necessary for being able to share any content of our faith, still needs the ongoing company and corrective of the apophatic way, so that the content does not become idolatrous.’ (p. 42) Other topics that come along are religious belonging in a changing Europe, two chapters on the experience under a totalitarian communist regime and intriguing thoughts on secularisation and liturgy (Schmemmann!).

The final twelfth chapter describes Noble’s personal journey, from the first ecclesial naivety, through a hermeneutics of suspicion, inter-religious and inter-cultural encounters (discovering that ‘within Christianity the cultural differences often play a more significant role than the confessional ones’), to a post-critical view of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. During an Easter service in which the abbot washed the feet ‘also of “strangers” like me’, she experienced something as ‘incommunication, as opposed to and a healing against excommunication’ (p. 211). From this experience she tries to build an ecumenical theology that creates space for a free investigation of Christian traditions. When she adds that she also wants to take on board ‘the religious, the non-religious, and even the anti-religious other’ I wonder why she mentions them at this stage, especially in light of the fact that the free churches are almost absent from this book. Should not this substantial part of Christ’s body be included when we talk about the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? So, before broadening ecumenical theology to other religions, it would be better first to take seriously that there is still a (growing) delta of (free) churches, whose gifts are also part of the

common Christian heritage. I see this as a missed opportunity in this otherwise excellent book. What is hopeful is that it is titled ‘Essays in Ecumenical Theology I’. I am hopeful that Ivana Noble will bless us with Part II, and that it will also give attention to the contribution of the baptistic and pentecostal churches.

**Reviewed by Teun van der Leer — tutor at the Dutch Baptist Seminary,
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Alexandr Flek, *Parabible* (Prague: Biblion, 2018), 192 pages. ISBN: 978-8087282403.

The author (who completed his MTh at IBTS Prague) is a Czech evangelical pastor and translator. In 2009 he published *Bible 21*, a modern translation for twenty-first-century people. According to the author, the motivation for his latest book was a desire to address today’s ‘uninitiated outsiders’. Most Czechs today no longer understand biblical texts without first becoming ‘some kind of insiders, experts on the Bible’. Flek originally wrote the individual paraphrases as illustrations for his own sermons and published them on social networks. A positive response subsequently encouraged him to bring them together and publish it as a book.

Parabible is not a paraphrase of the whole Bible, but only of the sixty stories and parables from the life of Jesus described in the Gospels. The stories are abbreviated and mostly transferred to contemporary Czech scenery. Jesus grows up here in the small village of Nošovice in the east of the republic. He causes upheaval at the wedding, not in Cana of Galilee, but in Karvina, a small town on the Polish border. He chooses his disciples not from the fishermen, but from the ‘IT specialists’, who are enthusiastic about his ‘start-up’. Together they go ‘to build a network that has not been here before’. Another example comes from John 9, where Jesus heals a man who was born blind. In *Parabible*, the man has AIDS and is in a regional hospital.

The book is divided into five parts, which more or less cover gospel events. The individual parts are called Incarnations, Missions, Confrontations, Passions and Finals. From the graphic point of view the book looks very modern and the individual chapters are separated by almost meditative illustrations. The reader also has the opportunity to compare Flek’s paraphrase with the original (Czech) biblical text, which is printed in