

smaller letters on the opposite page of each chapter. For readers who are experts, there is also a Greek original for each paraphrased portion. The possibility of comparing the paraphrase with the original is important, because most Czech readers are indeed almost biblically illiterate.

The individual stories in *Parabible* do not always follow each other; the reader understands that it is a selection of episodes. Some paraphrases contain a nice wit and have the potential to appeal to (not just young) people who would not read a normal Bible. For example, wedding bridesmaids are waiting for Justin Bieber instead of the groom, and when they run out of batteries on their mobile phones, those who have taken a power bank prove their foresight. Political analogies are fine, but probably understandable only to the Czech reader. For example, why the Prime Minister plays the role of Pilate, and is populistically afraid of the ‘voice of the people’ is quite clear, but why he is afraid of the Czech president is known only by the Czechs! The fact is that some biblical realities can be contextualised only with difficulty — the image of church leaders chasing Jesus together with police in a gardening colony below Prague Castle to arrest him is difficult to imagine. Also, the idea of having the country’s prime minister get rid of (execute) a potential presidential candidate does not fit.

Despite some weaknesses, Alexandr Flek’s *Parabible* represents a very successful and unprecedented attempt to bring the biblical message closer to the secular reader.

Reviewed by Dr Jan Hábl — Professor of Pedagogy at Hradec Králové University, Czech Republic.

Jim Purves, *Seeing it Real: Finding the Roots of Sensible Faith* (Independently published, July 2020), 83 pages. ISBN: 979-8665242040.

Jim Purves, *Finding it Real: Tracing the Roots of Faith* (Independently published, July 2020), 100 pages. ISBN: 979-8665266923.

Jim Purves, *Making it Real: Cultivating the Growth of Sensible Faith* (Independently published, July 2020), 70 pages. ISBN: 979-8669617080.

These three books (all available as paperback or Kindle editions) ‘explore a way of marrying authentic Christian experience to a theological

understanding'. The first, *Seeing it Real*, argues for a 'sensible' theology, that is, one which allows for experience. The healing, redeeming Jesus of personal experience is the bridge between humanity and God: we can understand this God 'only as we talk of Him reaching out to show Himself to us in the way spoken of in the Scripture, a way that is always *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit'.

Book two, *Finding it Real*, discusses historical theology. From the fourth century, the 'sensible' God gradually disappeared as theology became more abstract. Christ was understood in two ways. The 'Venerated (Chalcedonian) Christ' was beyond the reach of man (sic!). The 'Idealised (Calvinist) Christ' was admirable but overly rational. Nineteenth-century Scottish theology offered an alternative: the 'Paradigmatic Christ' provides a pattern to follow and draws us into full sensory communion with God. Book three, *Making it Real*, explores this. The Venerated and Idealised Christs elicit passive response. The paradigmatic Christ, however, requires self-renunciation, 'purposeful participation' and transformation, all of which necessarily entail suffering. Thus, authentic discipleship is found.

Purves, who is an experienced pastor, provides many personal anecdotes as springboards for theological discussion. The style is by turns chatty and formal. Sometimes I found the argument difficult to follow. A comprehensive introduction and a concluding summary would have been helpful. I appreciated seeing Scottish theologians brought into the spotlight, and hope that this introduction to the 'paradigmatic Christ' will stimulate discussion. More exploration of the nature of transformation would lessen the risk of reducing Christian practice to ethics, and an acknowledgement that the paradigmatic Christ is as much a product of theology's times and cultures as any other would help maintain balance. We 'see through a glass darkly'.

On the surface, this is an exercise in apologetics. But it is also a spiritual autobiography. At root, I suspect, is this question: why did profound charismatic experience prove insufficient to nourish him throughout his Christian life? Purves's answer, if I have understood it correctly, is that if theology tends to avoid discussing experience, we can easily over-emphasise it, ending up with a venerated and idealised Christ – easy to worship, but who demands little. The paradigmatic Christ may be harder to follow, but only He can 'make it real'. This insight is pastoral gold, and I shall be pondering it for some time to come.

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