

Book Reviews

Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 252 pages. ISBN: 9781725279827.

Reviewed by Helen Dare

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In *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, the publication of his doctoral research, Andy Goodliff tells the story of a decade in the institutional life of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). He does so through a careful examination and analysis of sources from a critical time in the denomination's history, as it undertook a period of listening, review, and consultation. Goodliff's account identifies and explores two streams in evidence during that time: 'denominational renewal' and 'theological renewal'. The former was concerned with the future of the church and the restructuring of the Union for mission, and the latter with an emphasis on the need for the denomination to reflect more theologically on its nature and purpose.

The book tells the story of the 1990s, which Goodliff does in the first two chapters, as he introduces the personalities, context, and streams within the denomination that are the focus of his work. These streams are presented in greater detail in the next four chapters. Chapter three explores the way the different streams engaged with tradition, while chapter four analyses in detail the two key concepts of mission and covenant. Chapters five and six are concerned with ecumenism and the operation of the Union in Superintendency and Association, both of which generated considerable difference of opinion within the denomination. Finally, Goodliff concludes in chapter seven with the identification of tensions during the period concerning the identity of the Union, the relationship between Associations and the Union, and the role of theology versus pragmatism.

The coverage of primary sources, both published and unpublished, is extensive and the bibliography alone would be useful to anyone researching British Baptist life and practice today. From a potentially bewildering amount of material and names, Goodliff presents a clear and engaging account of the time. His argument is always in focus, but the reader unfamiliar with the time and personalities is helped by the addition of biographical footnotes. Clarity is created by the early identification of a structure (the two streams) with which to assess the period, which is further distilled in the detailed examination of the work of the primary representatives of the streams, such as Paul Fiddes and Nigel Wright. Goodliff, however, resists the temptation of oversimplification and demonstrates that the concerns of the different streams were not mutually exclusive, but a matter of emphasis.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing collection of volumes reflecting critically on British Baptist theology and practice. The decade considered is within recent memory for many, and it may be that, as time passes, more themes and critical questions will emerge from this period. However, Goodliff's work raises a rich set of questions for the current leaders and theologians of the denomination to consider. As a minister in both the BUGB and the Baptist Union of Wales, I believe that this book should also be widely read by those in other Unions, as it offers a helpful prism through which we could assess our own denominational practice in context.

Erich Geldbach, ed., *Baptisten weltweit: Ursprünge, Entwicklungen, Theologische Identitäten, Die Kirchen der Gegenwart*, Vol. 7, Heft 118 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 475 pages. ISBN: 9783525565001.

Reviewed by Uwe Swarat

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Professor Emeritus Erich Geldbach (born 1939), an outstanding Baptist theologian from Germany with a prominent and long-time involvement

in ecumenical theology, serving in commissions of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) for decades, has edited an omnibus volume on *Baptisten weltweit* (Baptists around the World). The volume includes no fewer than 30 essays written by 32 authors with a total extent of 475 pages. Apart from Geldbach's own essay (on the first hundred years of the BWA), probably all contributions were not written in German but have been translated. The collection is part of the series 'Die Kirchen der Gegenwart' (The Contemporary Churches), published in German by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen. The subtitle of Geldbach's volume means in English: Origins, Developments, Theological Identities.

The 30 essays are grouped in five chapters: origin and development of the Baptist movement; Baptist missionary efforts; Baptist doctrines; Baptist women; Baptists in all continents. The last chapter is the largest: it includes two essays on the BWA; four on North America; three on Latin America; three on Africa; three on Europe; and four on Asia (including Australia and New Zealand).

Because I am mostly interested in Baptist doctrines, I would like to draw the readers' special attention to Steven R. Harmon's text on 'Das kirchliche Amt' (Ministry in the Church). He bases the ministry in the church on the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Christ's ministry as king is communicated to all believers as the ministry of oversight (*épiscopé*). This ministry is exercised communally as well as personally, locally as well as trans-locally. Nearly everything in this essay meets with my approval — including the sentence that Baptist churches are not only independent, but interdependent too. However, what Harmon depicts as Baptist practice, is in two points not true for Baptists in Germany: our local churches have the threefold ministry of pastor, elders, and deacons and not the twofold ministry of pastor and deacons that Harmon considers as a typically Baptist order. And ordination is among German Baptists the prerogative of the Union, not of the local church.

Baptists who cannot speak German may be unhappy that this broad presentation of Baptists around the world is published in this language. But I can comfort them: Geldbach told me that an English

version is in preparation (by Wipf and Stock Publishers). Baptists in German-speaking countries may be unhappy that this collection, published in the German language through a German publishing house, does not include any essay on Baptists in Germany. Unfortunately, I have no real consolation for them. They must be content that the German-speaking audience will learn a lot about the Baptists outside of Central Europe. It is to be hoped that readers with a non-Baptist background will not be given the notion that Baptists in German-speaking countries are a negligible group — even in their own eyes.

Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 256 pages. ISBN: 9781587435348.

Reviewed by Laura Dijkhuizen

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‘A biblical Woman is a submissive woman. This was my world for more than forty years. Until, one day, it wasn’t.’ (p. 2)

Professor Dr Beth Allison Barr specialises in the history of women in Europe, medieval and early modern England, and church history. Besides lecturing and supervising students in universities, she was a youth minister alongside her husband. He was a pastor in a Southern Baptist Church until he was fired over Beth’s ‘not staying silent’ (pp. 4–10) anymore regarding her view on complementarianism.

Although the occasion to write this book might be the loss of the job, the ministry, a church family, and a life she knew, it is not the motive. Barr has been teaching about women in church history for a long time and her motive is to remind her evangelical students who were mostly brought up in complementarian homes, of their historical heritage in which women have always played a significant role.

Barr challenges the claim of complementarianism as an important identity marker of ‘being a biblical church’. Through the lens of history, starting at the Roman time giving context to Paul’s writing about men and women, she unfolds the history of Christians throughout the ages. She reveals that societal changes have an important impact on church life and affect the way we interpret Scripture. This contrasts strongly with the contemporary teachings of ‘Biblical Man- and Womanhood’ in which different gender roles are brought forth as coming from biblical passages and in that matter have their origin in God’s perfect creation.

According to Barr, the way complementarianism is constructed is in contrast with the gospel and is contrary to good news for all creation. So how could this way of framing biblical womanhood become gospel truth?

While I thought I knew all the arguments for and against women in leadership, Barr opens a history I was not aware of, and I expect many European evangelicals are similar to me. The way she includes personal experiences, both in her family and in her professional environment as a university lecturer, enriches the book and connects with the challenges people (men and women) face within complementarian churches nowadays. In this way it resonates with my personal story and made me realise that the evangelical church and organisation I attended during the 1980s/90s, was very much influenced by leaders of the Southern Baptists in the United States of America. Reading this book was both a confronting as well as a healing experience for me and, as Twitter shows, for many others too. I highly recommend this book.

Darren Carlson, *Christianity and Conversion Among Migrants: Moving Faith and Faith Movement in a Transit Area* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 308 pages. ISBN: 9789004443440.

Reviewed by Will Cumbia

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As the migrant crisis continues to unfold across Europe, the make-up and faith expression of the Church in Europe changes along with it. While many studies have examined the church practices and faith expressions of migrants settled in destination countries, Darren Carlson is one of the few to undertake a study of migrants' faith practices while they are still in transit. Carlson's study examines 'the faith, beliefs, and practices of evangelical and Pentecostal migrants and refugees as well as the evangelical Christian organizations serving them between 2014-2018 in Athens, Greece' (p. 1). His work gives an enlightening view of the evangelical movement within the ever-shifting context of migrants and dives deeply into the stories of those who have encountered Christ unexpectedly on the move.

Carlson begins by describing his methodological approach and does his best to define the nuances of terminology when talking about refugees and migrants and the blurred interplay between Christian mission and humanitarian aid. He then places his research within the larger landscape of diaspora missions over the past century and gives context to the refugee crisis of 2015, including Greece's role as a transition country in migrant journeys. The bulk of his work is dedicated to profiling the migrants he interviewed, detailing their journeys and conversion stories. He then profiles the evangelical refugee centres serving refugees and migrant faith communities operating on the fringes of Orthodox-dominated Greece. Finally, he closes with pastoral and theological reflections on the positive impact of welcoming refugees.

Carlson is the founder of *Training Leaders International*, an organisation aimed at partnering with local leaders and providing theological education where it is not easily accessible. His book showcases his extensive experience with locally driven and contextual ministry and his research is successful because of the relationships he has built both with on-the-ground leaders and migrants themselves. Carlson notes how these relationships may have affected his research, recognising the power dynamics at play as a Westerner coming in to conduct research. Still, he does his best to give an objective summary of the practices of those living and working in Athens. For the majority of the work, he resists centring himself or his own interpretation of events, instead elevating the narratives of migrants themselves and how their

experience with refugee ministries and churches impacted their conversion to Christianity.

However, I found some of Carlson's critique quite thin. Perhaps this is because of his close proximity to the work in Athens and his desire to strengthen projects, rather than cause conflict within the small, already fractured evangelical community of Greece. A deeper analysis of spiritual abuse, trauma amongst refugees, and the somewhat blurry ethics of blending proselytisation, church, and humanitarian efforts would have strengthened his work. Still, his thorough research and methodology grounded in migrant narratives makes his work compelling and an important addition to the conversation on how migration and refugees are changing the religious landscape of modern Europe. It is an excellent primer for those seeking a better understanding of migrant faith, as well as an encouragement to the Western church, showing the positive impact of a theology of welcome towards those displaced.

Sergey Sannikov, *Знаки присутствия. Крещение в контексте баптистской сакраментологии*. [Signs of the Presence: Baptism in the Context of Baptist Sacramental Theology] (Kiyv: Duh i Litera, 2019), 619 pages. ISBN: 9789663786681.

Reviewed by Lina Toth

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'Baptist sacramentalism' is a contested term, particularly so among Slavic evangelicals. Published in Russian, *Signs of the Presence* argues that Baptist sacramentalism arises out of its ecclesiology rather than sacramentology *per se*. Whilst it may be negated or ignored on the theological level, it is operative in terms of the actual practice.

Sergey Sannikov is a Ukrainian church historian and theologian, as well as a Baptist minister, renowned among Slavic evangelicals in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and beyond. The focus of his book is the Slavic

evangelical context, which includes such denominations as Baptists, evangelical Christians, and Mennonites. However, Sannikov is also impressively conversant with Western sacramental theology, both in its ecumenical breadth and its specifically Baptist contributions.

Sannikov identifies and critiques seven theological paradigms of baptism: 1) symbol; 2) initiation; 3) promise or covenant; 4) unification with Christ in his death and resurrection; 5) sign of grace; 6) the candidate's confession of faith; and 7) obedience. Each of these, he argues, is present in the Eastern Slavic context as well as in Western Baptist thought, but is insufficient on its own.

Signs of the Presence is the publication of Sannikov's doctoral dissertation submitted at the National Pedagogical Dromanov University (Ukraine). As such, it possesses the typical features of a doctoral project, allocating considerable space to questions of methodology, interdisciplinarity, and ecumenical dialogue. It surveys methods and insights from a variety of disciplines ranging from philosophy and religious studies to semiotics and performance studies. In its theological approach, the book touches upon a number of theological disciplines, including biblical studies, hermeneutics, church history, systematic theology, liturgical studies, as well as comparative and practical theology. Sannikov seeks to apply what he terms a 'holistic', rather than systematic, approach, looking at baptism in conjunction with other instances of *encountering the Presence of Christ*. The author frequently (though not systematically) sticks with the transliteration of the English term *encounter* as his main criterion for defining sacrament; this feels rather odd, as there would be a few alternatives in Russian that at least should be discussed.

The author's engagement with different academic and theological disciplines has a varying degree of success: it could be argued, for instance, that in its exegesis and biblical hermeneutics the project does not quite reach its full potential. There are a number of minor mistakes and inaccuracies, such as missing words, bibliographical details, and misspelled names. Some repetition could have been avoided by a better organisation of the material.

That said, this is a monumental work and an important contribution not only to Slavic evangelical thought on baptism and sacramentalism, but also to the wider Baptist theology, particularly in the author's use of the prism of baptismal theology for reviewing and critiquing broader theological viewpoints.

Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, eds, *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations, Theology and Mission in World Christianity, Vol. 19* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 315 pages. ISBN: 9789004441668.

Reviewed by Henk Bakker

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Can the domain of 'World Christianity' still be the subject matter of investigation without raising confusion and reviving old sentiments from colonial and ethnocentric times? And if so, how should the idea of World Christianity be approached and explored, and can the multidisciplinary outline of such an inquiry be translated into basic methodological considerations and ramifications? This is the purport of the nineteenth volume of the *Theology and Mission in World Christianity* series under the auspices of Martha Frederiks, Professor for the Study of World Christianity at Utrecht University (The Netherlands), and Dorottya Nagy, Professor of Missiology at the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam (The Netherlands). Besides these authors, eleven other scholars from various cultures, countries, and academic disciplines contributed to the profundity of the volume. This compilation of articles is one of the few publications exploring the 'world-Christian turn' from a methodology point of view.

Frederiks and Nagy 'problematize trends that conceptualize World Christianity as a subject matter or a field of study', and reserve the term for 'a particular, multidisciplinary approach to study Christianity/ies' (p. 2). Hence the heterogeneous character of the

compilation of chapters and input. For example, Raimundo Barreto writes on World Christianity's theoretical underpinnings from a critical Latin American liberationist perspective and uses liberationist hermeneutics and de-colonial theory to develop a comprehensive theoretical approach. The chapters dealing with historiography (Emma Wild-Wood on Uganda, Joseph Lee and Christie Chow on China) demonstrate the complexities of overcoming established binaries of local versus global, indigenous versus missionary, and national Christianity versus popular Christianity.

Chapters six to twelve focus primarily on plurality and interfaith relations and advocate a mixed method approach that cultivates and sustains a wider ecumenism in developing public theology for the cause of the welfare of all people (Wesley Ariarajah). Five case-studies illustrate the 'mixed method' outcome of the book and reflect on the role of comparative theology (Kari Storstein Haug on Thailand), the effects of interreligious existence (Douglas Pratt on the Vatican and WCC), discourse analysis and memory studies (Lucien van Liere on the ISIS video of the beheading of migrant workers in Libya, January 2015), multiple religious belonging (Corey Williams on Nigeria), and changing conceptualisations of heresy (Paul van Geest on the church father Augustine).

On the whole, this volume is a fine and instructive introduction to the rapidly changing field of World Christianity studies.

Martin Accad and Jonathan Andrews, eds, *The Religious Other: A Biblical Understanding of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham, 2020), 552 pages. ISBN: 9781783687909.

Reviewed by Yuriy Skurydin

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This book is a serious attempt to make a healthy contribution to the relationship between Christianity and Islam. It involves more than 30

authors, specialists in the field of Islam, united by the Arab Baptist Theology Seminary (ABTS) in the framework of Middle East consultations that took place in 2018 and 2019. The chief editors of this project are Martin Accad (Chief Academic Officer of ABTS) and Jonathan Andrews (researcher and writer in the area of life of Christians in the Middle East). The main purpose of this work is to encourage Christians ‘toward a biblical understanding of Islam, The Qur’an and Muhammad’, recognising that the path to new territory requires human courage but also divine grace and mercy (xvii).

The team of authors all avoid either demonising or idealising Islam. They take a *kerygmatic* approach, involving respect and love toward Muslims. Kerygmatic means ‘proclamation [...] of the values, character and model of Jesus Christ as the heart of the gospel’ (p. 25). The centre of this approach is Christ, not Christianity, since the latter for Muslims has negative political, cultural, and civilisational connotations. Thus, the authors include not only scientific articles but also testimonies, interviews, and discussions between participants with different points of view.

The content of the book is conveyed in two main parts. Part one has three chapters and provides an in-depth study of the Bible and modern reality that encourages Christians and Muslims not only to tolerate each other but to work their way through the stereotypes, to accept and love ‘others’. I found it interesting that both the Old Testament (the stories of Jonah and Naaman) and the New Testament (the parable of the Good Samaritan and the meeting of the Apostle Paul with the Greeks in Athens) teach us that God cares not only about His people, but also about their enemies. This perspective helps us not to treat Muslims as competitors but to view them as objects of God’s work and love.

Part two consists of six chapters and the issues of the origin of Islam, the biblical view of the Qur’an, Muhammad, soteriology, and the spiritual world are discussed here. I was interested to note how different hermeneutical premises of Christians and Muslims lead to mutual misunderstanding of each other, and hence to incorrect apologetics. For example, Christian apologists often pay attention to the ‘aggressive’ texts

of the Qur'an, but in reality most Muslims are kind and hospitable people. Understanding hermeneutic differences will help Christians look at the Qur'an and its teachings in a new way. Another question is: how should Christians regard Muhammad — as a false prophet or an Antichrist? Muhammad was convinced that his message was naturally associated with Judaism and Christianity. Despite all the complexity, Muhammad became an outstanding leader (Moses) for the scattered pagan tribes inhabiting Arabia, bringing them the law and monotheism. Why do we quote and learn from the works of Plato and Shakespeare, even though they are not Christians, and ignore the Qur'an and Muhammad? The authors advise treating the Qur'an as classical literature and thus overcoming unnecessary stereotypes.

Taking on such a complex project, it was difficult to avoid drawbacks. In particular, I draw attention to the issue of soteriology. In Christianity, salvation is exclusively associated with faith in Jesus Christ. The author in section 8.4 suggests seeing Muslims from the perspective of Romans 1:18–23, concluding that ultimately only those who understand the gospel and proudly reject it will be condemned. Thus, the author has brought sincere Muslims out of condemnation. However, this reasoning is not enough and the question remains open.

This book is undoubtedly very significant and should be translated into many languages so that Christians can develop 'as positive as possible' a view of the Qur'an, Muhammad, and Muslims to have dialogue, understanding, trust, and communication about God and salvation. It is a useful source for pastors, teachers and students of theological educational institutions, and anyone interested in the dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Gregory A. Ryan, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine in a Learning Church: The Dynamics of Receptive Integrity*, Studies in Systematic Theology, Vol. 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 286 pages. ISBN: 9789004436398.

Reviewed by Henk Bakker

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This book by Gregory A. Ryan, Catholic theologian, began as a doctoral thesis at Durham University and was supervised by Paul Murray. The research explores the ‘dynamics of receptive integrity’ of Catholic theology as it is received, understood, and processed by local Catholic communities. The aim of the book is to delineate a model of receptive integrity by bringing selected hermeneutical and methodological resources into a multi-dimensional conversation. The predominant method is one of coherence in multiple dimensions, not one of deduction from fixed foundations. In doing this, Ryan is conversant with (1) Anthony C. Thiselton’s hermeneutics; (2) selected responses to Pope John XXIII’s opening address at the Second Vatican Council; (3) Francis Schüssler Fiorenza’s use of ‘broad reflective equilibrium’; (4) Ormond Rush’s appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss; and finally (5) a concrete context in contemporary church life. In addition, Ryan analyses methodological principles underpinning the recent ecumenical approach of Receptive Ecumenism, which he highly esteems.

The thesis of the book is captured in the argument that, ‘to be sure, in Catholic theology, too, the significance of the dynamics of multiple perspectives involved in ecclesial interpretation is properly recognized’. Among others, Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, warns against the mere imposition of a plethora of doctrines by disjointed transmission. Churches need to ‘receive with integrity’, in order to process their doctrinal tradition within the hermeneutical frame of *sensus fidei* [or *fideliūm*]. As such, the dialogue envisaged is characterised as a matter of the church’s active interest in its own synodality. Hereby the church enables itself to authenticate its own legacy.

Ryan’s book is a scholarly treatment of the Catholic Church’s conciliarity (synodality) as it relates to the dynamics of local theology, within the Catholic community and beyond. Withal, conciliarity is a way of doing ecumenical theology, and the main strength of this book is that

it opens a constructive discussion on receptivity and integrity of the lived tradition of the Church in its entirety, that is the church catholic.

For Baptists this feels like coming home, because this is what congregationalism is about. Baptist ecclesiology is about communal discernment of our heritage, starting with the Bible and our treasured chronicles, and about passing these on in transformed, and oftentimes readdressed and rephrased, ways, to the present and the next generations. I wholly recommend taking Gregory Ryan's book on hermeneutics and dynamics into account.

William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, 3rd edition, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies and Movements Series (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 722 pages. ISBN: 9781538122518.

Reviewed by Toivo Pilli

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When a dictionary runs to the third edition it is usually a sign that it has established itself as a helpful tool and source of information among students and scholars. This volume, the third edition of the *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists* by William Brackney, expands on the second edition (2009) and the first edition (1999). Brackney acknowledges that he has indirectly depended on both previous sources as well as a group of people for assembling details. However, it is his scholarly expertise that brings it all together.

William Brackney is a prolific writer and a well-known Baptist historian. He has held key positions in several academic institutions, including Baylor University and Acadia University. He has been actively involved in the work of the commissions of the Baptist World Alliance. To have first-hand experience of the world-wide family of Baptists is — no doubt — an advantage for a scholar preparing an overarching volume like the present one. There is no need to emphasise that bringing

a Baptist story into one volume, even if a 722-page volume, is a mammoth undertaking. The Baptist World Alliance unites about 47 million Baptist believers in 126 countries and in 241 conventions and unions. In addition, there are Baptists who are not members of the World Alliance, thus taking the total Baptist statistics up to 110 million, according to some estimations.

This recent edition has benefitted from the time factor, as the information has had time to ‘settle’ over years, and the new version of the Dictionary has been updated with a number of cross-referenced entries, and enriched by a 33-page, thematically structured bibliography. The entries and bibliography are a good introduction for students and scholars. Nevertheless, I expected to have at least some references to sources after every entry. Certainly, a massive and laudable project like this has always also its flip sides. There is limited opportunity to deal with details that from a local perspective are crucially important. For example, the Chronology mentions that the first recorded baptism by immersion in tsarist Russia took place in 1864; however, the entry ‘Russia’ correctly says it happened in 1867. Establishment of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschnikon is mentioned in the Chronology; however, the International Baptist Theological Seminary — later Study Centre — and its significant development in Prague and in Amsterdam is not in the Chronology, though a brief reference to it can be found under the entry ‘European Baptist Federation’. Baptist theological and educational institutions seem not to have separate entries, though this work is crucially important for the whole movement. Some clear indication of the criteria for including or not including entries might support a reader.

These examples are not intended to diminish the value of the volume, but rather to point out what one should expect from this reference book: it is a source of helpful initial information, broader rather than deeper, and it invites readers to continue to research and evaluate the given data against more specific evidence. It is commendable that a significant attempt has been made to bring into this volume a better awareness of Baptists beyond Western Europe and North America: there is rich Baptist life in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. For somebody who is interested in Baptist events,

institutions, unions, and historical persons in detail, the book is a solid stepping stone, a sign which shows the way but invites to pursue further on a research journey.

Dumitru Sevastian, *Dostoevsky's Convictional Theology Expressed in His Life and Literature* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Monographs, 2021), 298 pages. ISBN: 9781839732027.

Reviewed by Mary Raber

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Who could encourage deeper reflection among post-Soviet evangelicals, refreshing their vision for living 'Christ's Way' in a society beset with corruption, poverty, and social dislocation? As both a concerned pastor (Moldavian Evangelical Christian Baptist Union) and an academic dean (University Divitia Gratiae in Chisinau, Moldova), Dumitru Sevastian proposes the Russian novelist F. M. Dostoevsky (1821–1881) as someone who can inspire twenty-first century Christians.

Since the time his works were first published, many critics have tried to assess Dostoevsky depending on whether or not they agree with him, determining whether he is 'one of us' or 'foreign'. In contrast, based on the 'biography-as-theology' method of theologian James Wm McClendon, Sevastian allows Dostoevsky to speak for himself.

The structure of his study separates the writer's experience into three parts: chapter two, the formative years (1821–1849); chapter three, his arrest, near-execution, and imprisonment in Siberia (1849–1859); chapter four, Dostoevsky's 'post-Siberia' life (1859–1881). Detailed biographical material is paired with analysis of the theological themes in three novels produced during the period being examined: *The Poor Folk* (pre-Siberia), *The House of the Dead* (Siberia), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (post-Siberia), although other literary works are not neglected. Sevastian

presents an absorbing narrative of Dostoevsky's maturing as a Christian thinker, including helpful background on the social movements of his time.

Chapter five summarises the novelist's theology, which is distinctly experiential rather than abstract. Ultimately, Dostoevsky concluded that the only hope for humanity is humbly to repent and turn to Christ. The way of human beings must be transformed into 'Christ's Way', not mere assent to abstract beliefs, but an active life of forgiveness and concrete acts of love.

Chapter six discusses Dostoevsky's influence on society. Sevastian presents some of the controversy that his writing evoked, along with background information on the social/political positions of his day (Slavophiles, Westernisers, Populists). Unfortunately, Sevastian neglects to do the same concerning Dostoevsky's influence on religious groups. He reports that the Bruderhof acknowledged the gospel in Dostoevsky's work, but fails to identify the Bruderhof itself (except that it is 'baptistic') — an inconvenient omission for uninitiated readers.

Finally, chapter seven examines Dostoevsky's lessons for the benefit of believers in Moldova, although clearly his conclusions apply to Christians everywhere. The process of reflecting on Dostoevsky's vision of Christlike forgiveness and love overcoming evil, both in the lives of his characters and in his own biography, could inspire a powerful moral example to offset the pain, sorrow, and cynicism of the twenty-first century.

Sevastian's book would make an excellent text for a course on Dostoevsky. He has translated material that may be new to the English-speaking world, including excerpts from critical works by Soviet-era Dostoevsky scholars, making this study additionally valuable. This book would have benefitted from additional editing (inconsistent transliterations, incomplete bibliography, etc.), but these are details. More importantly, Dumitru Sevastian has made this reviewer want to re-read Dostoevsky's novels.

Henk de Roest, *Collaborative Practical Theology: Engaging Practitioners in Research on Christian Practices* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 371 pages. ISBN: 9789004413238.

Reviewed by Mike Pears

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In *Collaborative Practical Theology*, Henk de Roest sets out to investigate and analyse ‘research on Christian practices conducted by academic practical theologians in *collaboration* with practitioners’ (p. 1). The book is divided into two main parts: Part 1 ‘The Valorisation of Practical Theology’ (chapters 1 to 4) and Part 2 ‘Collaborative Research Approaches and Methods in Practical Theology’ (chapters 5 to 9). The current strong emphasis in university settings on the need for research to have ‘impact’ and ‘societal relevance’ is experienced in theological research as much as in other fields. Whilst De Roest acknowledges this (pp. 19–26), the heart of his argument is that by its very nature, practical theology ought to be an effective valorising approach. This is reflected in the title of the book which presents Collaborative Practical Theology as focusing on Christian ‘practices’ and in ‘engaging practitioners’ who, according to De Roest, for a more meaningful valorisation that does not come late in the research project (pp. 31–33), or even only as an afterthought (p. 18), should be included at the earliest stages of the research project — even being involved at the design phase (p. 22). This leads to the substance of the discussion in part one — a thorough investigation of the characteristics and challenges of collaboration within a practical theological context.

Having established a rationale for collaboration, part two discusses key issues in both methodology and methods that arise as a consequence. Appropriately, the discussion begins by considering the situation of practitioners and professionals before discussing the implications for academic researchers. For professionals, De Roest argues that a dominant experience is of a ‘crisis of routines’ precipitated by the speed of societal change, where ‘tacit knowledge’ embedded in such routine practices, ‘falls short’ (pp. 133–143). In light of this, De Roest’s question is, ‘How might practical theology be engaged to help

in this prevailing situation?’ (p. 134) in order for ‘explicit knowledge and skills’ to be identified so that we might apply ‘new remedies and develop new strategies’ (p. 134). Addressing this question (chapter 6), De Roest sets out six rationales ‘to encourage practitioners, everyday believers and possibly other societal actors [...] to get involved with the research *process* itself’ (p. 158). This approach situates the methodological question not in the academy (where such questions are routinely located), but in the lived experience of the practitioner. This is, in my view, a creative decentring of the usual methodological questions which helpfully sets the scene for further in-depth consideration of research strategies and methods (chapter 7), including discussion of the limitations of such approaches (chapter 8), and ultimately the value of ‘communities of practice becoming research communities’ (chapter 9).

De Roest has made an important contribution towards the understanding of practical theology as an essential discipline for practitioners and researchers alike. He ‘envisages a relational turn in theology’ (p. 2) — in my view one of the outstanding contributions of the book. By placing relationship, or collaboration, at the heart of the argument, he has helpfully navigated some of the key tensions routinely experienced by those in practical theological research, such as those between the motivation of the researcher to engage in research that is both contextually relevant and socially impactful on the one hand and regarded as properly theological and academically rigorous on the other. The complexity of these issues can seem overwhelming for students, especially for those who are less familiar with empirical and interdisciplinary research within theology. By using the frame of collaboration, De Roest has succeeded in providing us with a strong rationale for a practical theological approach which is theologically robust yet conversant with the lived experience of the practitioner. Furthermore, he has laid out a range of research strategies and methods, alongside numerous examples from the field, which will be of immense assistance to those who wish to find practical and impactful ways of carrying out theological research in their own context.

To draw on a cliché — this is a ‘must read’ for research students and those in the leadership of seminaries. However, as the title suggests, an even more fruitful reading might be experienced in an

interdisciplinary group of academics and practitioners who would be open to explore the implications for theological reflection in their own contexts; a truly collaborative reading.