

both these realms is a difficult one, and it does occasionally move from what could be viewed by academics as over-simplified views of history to areas that may seem far too theoretical for church workers, but overall Higgins shows a true gift in her ability to offer a resource that will interest a wide variety of audiences. Above all, Higgins is obviously passionate about the church succeeding in the Irish context and the way that both history and cultural understanding can aid in this process. This passion is reflected throughout *Churches in Exile*, and by the conclusion you are aware that Higgins has offered alternative ways of living Christianity that could not only bring it out of exile, but also allow the church to be a serious means of social change in Ireland.

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Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 219. £16.99

In the introduction to this very valuable book, Peter Goodwin Heltzel references the fairly common knowledge that Martin Luther King Jr. carried a worn copy of Howard Thurman's influential *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949) 'in his briefcase throughout his civil rights journey' (xiii). It could easily be supposed that, in like manner, Heltzel must have a recording of John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* with him at all times. It is not incidental, therefore, that *Resurrection City* concludes with a rehearsal of Coltrane's signature work as a premier example of a mystical-prophetic theology that is unafraid to explore the full domain of the politics of love.

Jazz, and particularly its commitment to improvisatory experimentation, is, after all, the mode in which Heltzel is working. Part four ("Psalm") of Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* is indicative of Heltzel's broader intent in that it is nothing less than 'a jazz riff on jazz itself', anticipating the end of the entire piece by reserving improvisatory artistry, on a new theme, for the conclusion. 'In a similar way', says

Heltzel, ‘the mystic-prophet plays a melody directed toward the end of all things – an eschaton’ (150). The imaginative freedom at the heart of jazz, we should heartily agree, has an inherently eschatological character.

To get there, Heltzel deftly takes us through the intricacies, both theological and musical, of the twin themes of prophetic and shalom justice (Chapters 1 and 2), grounded in the person of Jesus who is clearly depicted in the gospels as part of a marginalised minority under the shadow of Empire (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 are largely historical examinations, dissecting the American experiment in terms of notions of freedom as contrasted by Thomas Jefferson and Sojourner Truth and moving toward a vision of *the beloved city* as demonstrated in the aspirations of Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr. Artistic performance returns, once more, as an essential mode of expression in Chapters 6 and 7, wherein the Brazilian stage director Augusto Boal’s ‘poetic of the oppressed’ dramatises social conditions that demand ‘the emergence of a new theater of revolution’ (127) and culminating with John Coltrane, who embodies ‘the prophetic call for justice’ bringing ‘God’s call to love into political form’ (163).

At the heart of the book is the theological umbrella of *shalom*. It is a biblical dream that Heltzel rightly allows (insists) to recur, like a necessary musical theme, constantly drawing the listener back to the most important storyline (*motif*) in a narrative that has little to do with entertainment and everything to do with real, meaningful change. Like jazz, says Heltzel, it is a vision that affirms both ‘spiritual transcendence and cultural transformation’ that is, in fact, about opening up ‘a new future’ (20–21). To its credit, *Resurrection City* is not afraid to give the broad vision of shalom the Christocentric basis and tangible expression that it narratively requires. It centres what could otherwise easily deteriorate into utopian communal yearnings in Jesus himself as one who was ‘courageously proclaiming a new reality of grace’, sharply contrasted by the more hideous sides of the often illusive *Pax Romana*, enforced by ‘crucifixion as a form of large-scale social control’ (69). Resurrection is not only about a city, after all, but is earthed in the person of Jesus. As such, the resurrection of Jesus (Heltzel reminds us by way of quoting N. T. Wright, *The*

Resurrection of the Son of Man, 587) is the ‘proleptic fulfillment of Israel’s great hope’ (72).

The book ought, however, to offer quite a bit more substance when it comes precisely to *the city* inferred in *Resurrection City* (emphasis mine). The city as ‘an important biblical metaphor for the place of God’s presence’ (3) is affirmed, but then the critical need for such a statement to be seriously nuanced in theological terms is left precariously under-developed. Heltzel jumps quickly to a future eschatological picture that suggests an urban beneficiary reality in the language of the New Jerusalem which is completely at odds with Babylon (4, 5, 7). In between, there are serious problems with urban idolatries that must be acknowledged and countered with communal designs on shalom. Heltzel does attempt to differentiate between city and garden images of shalom, particularly as portrayed in the closing chapters of Revelation. However, it is too vague. Shalom enthusiasts must be able to envision it with some modicum of clarity: the New Jerusalem is not a garden that encapsulates community (Adam and Eve), but a community (city) and encapsulates a garden (beauty).

The only other deficiency is that the improvisatory uniqueness of jazz is invoked so often that it ends up becoming theologically constraining, rather than freeing as is obviously intended. Not everything can be described well analogous to the astounding artistry of jazz musicians, even at the height of their improvisational prowess. For example, it does not serve Heltzel well (69), if the narrative of the gospels’ rendition of the Cross is fully in mind, to speak of Jesus’ forgiving posture toward his murderers as ‘an act of improvisation in the Spirit. In a word, this was jazz’. Similarly, likening Jesus’ exorcisms and healings, with all their *re-creational* suggestiveness, to Christ resorting to his nearby saxophone while silencing the symphony orchestra (60), takes the analogy across boundaries of what is *helpful* into that which ends up sounding simply *trite*; as trite as badly played jazz. There is such a thing as taking a good thing too far.

However, with the exception of those two noticeable deficiencies, this is really a fine book. It is well worth the money to buy it and the time to read it. It is creative and imaginative, ever so like the best of jazz that it emulates, and it points serious theological endeavours

in much-needed directions if we seriously hope for shalom-like transformation in our world.

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