

the handbook, written by the late John Webster, offers a constructive account of “The Place of Christology in Systematic Theology”. Webster argues that ‘the formative status and specifying function of Christology in relation to the other topics of Christian teaching [...] arise from the governance of the entire body of Christian divinity by teaching about the triune God’ (p. 612). Following Aquinas, Webster identifies the object of theology as the Triune God and all things in relation to God. Christology functions as a ‘distributed doctrine’, treated both in the context of theology proper (God’s inner life) and the economy (God’s outer works).

Christology is a wide and varied field, well represented here by these contributions. One might wish now and then that a theme or period were given more extensive treatment, but these can only be minor grumbles given the overall quality and depth of the material here. This reviewer read the handbook chapter by chapter, but almost any essay would make a fine entry-point (I would recommend Webster’s essay as first to be read, in fact).

Albert L. Shepherd V,
University of Aberdeen



Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. xiii + 290, ISBN 978-1481305068. £34.99

Some works are genius because they epitomise a genre, others because they push its boundaries. Ephraim Radner’s *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life* exemplifies the latter. Its content draws upon the biblical, theological, historical, sociological, and philosophical alike. Its style is of a rigorous academic variety, yet breaks free in almost lyrical prose. ‘Academic ode’, perhaps, could serve as an apt name for this type of work, and it is an ode to the ordinary and finite mode of creaturely existence which God has ordained for his people on their journey back to him.

The project begins by aiming to track the ‘figure’ of the human lifespan as it appears throughout Scripture. What results is a contemplation of how life’s fragility, limitedness, and above all mortality are themselves constitutive of how God’s creatures are to live the lives he has given them. Such an awareness, however, has been subverted by what Radner terms the ‘Great Shift’, a range of historical and technological forces which have led to a dramatic increase in human life expectancy over the past century. As a result, Western culture – and the Church with it – has forgotten the inevitable and ubiquitous nature of death. Radner asserts that our individual deaths are stitched together in a generational fabric and that an embrace of this texture of our lives will influence how we inhabit them. In fact, ‘day numbering’, Radner insists, facilitates faithfulness.

What is especially notable is that *A Time to Keep* seeks an entry into the sexual moral debates which have riddled the Anglican tradition to which Radner belongs, and indeed the Church at large. What results is less a treatment of sexuality *per se*, but of the shape and nature of creaturely life, especially in what he coins its ‘skinful’ (fragile) and ‘filiated’ (genealogical) nature. Radner takes a firm stance in support of a traditional understanding of marriage mid-way through the book. However, sexuality is just one of a range of topics (life stages, marriage, singleness, education, work, food) in a work that considers how the acceptance of life’s boundaries as a gift impinges on how life’s ordinariness is received and performed. It is life’s concreteness and finitude, especially as detailed in Scripture and sustained by the Church, which bring both purpose and insight to how Christians should live out their days in trust and hope.

Even if a direct engagement with the controversial topic of sexuality comprises only a portion of the book, it is worth detailing Radner’s arguments as it also sheds light on the crux of his work. All of creation, Radner explains, is gratuitously created by God as distinctive from Him. Males and females together comprise humanity’s representation of this distinction, and it is for this reason that marital pairings as one female with one male are significant. The concepts of particularity and distinction continue to thread throughout the work to orient the engaged subjects and terms. To be a human ‘skin’ is to be distinguishable. Sin obliterates distinction in the direction of

‘sameness’, and death itself is the erasure of distinctiveness. Life, meanwhile, multiplies distinctiveness by bearing fruit (as the products of human labour, as literal food, and as children). Reconciliation repairs sin and renews differences. Oneness, then, has distinction as its premise (this is the driving theme of Radner’s 2012 publication *A Brutal Unity*). Love is the giving over to another to the point of death itself. In this way, death itself becomes the shape of love, so that death is in fact reconfigured as God’s gift. Thus, Radner insists that ‘Creative distinction and its suffering [...] are not “principles” but the *actual material of salvation’s form*’ (p. 107).

On one level, then, *A Time to Keep* is a celebration of created particulars, but particulars which are inherently interdependent, not autonomous. As such it could, on the surface, be confused as a simple endorsement of natural theology. However, Radner clarifies that – in true maverick form – he is out to puncture such dichotomies as that between natural and revealed theology. Our natural, creaturely existence is significant precisely because God has revealed it to be so by traversing it *with us* in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the whole book could perhaps be summarised with his assertion that ‘The traversal is transfigured by being traversed with God’ (p. 221).

Readers do well to bear with Radner’s almost overwhelming swath of theological and historical details, which reveal a breathtaking erudition. They also do well to embrace his (at times) rather unconventional way of seeking entry into subject matter. The chapter on singleness, for example (which manages to shy from functioning as a mere apologetic for singleness in a book that otherwise seems to supremely value marriage and family), begins with a lengthy treatment on diversity. Nevertheless, Radner offers connections and descriptions that shed fresh light on stale theological categories that are well worth mining and dwelling upon.

Overall, there is fruit here for scholar and pastor alike, if the latter may perhaps be alienated by Radner’s at times overly ponderous tone. The ethical insights are of a second-order variety. While Radner refrains from specifically prescribing how we should work or eat, he does indicate how we can begin to engage these activities in a theologically meaningful way. Radner observes that some may criticize him for neglecting hamartiology and eschatology. But such lacunae

are consistent with Radner's focus on receiving the concrete in the present, not on speculations on either the past or future. Nevertheless, faith is a movement through time, and Radner does a service to the Church by reminding her that Christianity is indeed a 'way' that must be journeyed in the course of our lives and deaths, and that the name of our Way is Christ.

Amy Erickson,
University of Aberdeen



Michael Mawson and Philip G. Ziegler (eds.), *Christ, Church and World: New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Theology and Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), pp. 216, ISBN 978-0567665911. £80.00

This collection of papers reflects current streams in Bonhoeffer research. The book draws from two short conferences held during the winter of 2015–16 at the University of Aberdeen under the same name. The gathered researchers represent the myriad of veins incumbent to Bonhoeffer studies. While the volume rests largely on questions of systematic theology, forays into ethics and historical theology punctuate the collection.

Mawson and Ziegler arranged the papers in thematic groupings. The first trio of Tietz, Holmes, and Plant turn to Bonhoeffer's investigations of Christology. Christiane Tietz states, 'Bonhoeffer is a theologian who conceives the task of theology fundamentally as thinking about Christ' (p. 9). From this assertion, she works through the place of Christ in Bonhoeffer's theology, a presence always concrete and in contact with the other. The historical and concrete Christ is the only grounding of reality for Christianity and the Christian life. Christopher Holmes builds upon Bonhoeffer's aversion to a metaphysical Christ and explores Bonhoeffer's treatment of Chalcedon and 'negative Christology'. Holmes suggests that danger lies in following too stringently behind Bonhoeffer. Positive Christology, which Bonhoeffer espouses, detracts from the inherent mystery of