

As he thinks about Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda, Whaling imagines himself present as Jesus meets the paralysed man and the experience changes him too as he, and we, realised that we also are in need of the wholeness which only Jesus can give.

The four week cycle starts by directing our thoughts to prayer itself and builds to a meditation on the words from the Cross, to the challenge of discipleship and a final resting place in the all-importance of love: 'Love is the greatest thing in the world.' 'Let us therefore treasure love, and treasure God. For where our treasure is, there our heart is also', and ends with a prayer for action drawn from John Wesley's 'The Portrait of a Christian.' All that is left is to invite his reader to contemplate the fact that 'God is love' before the cycle starts once more.

Now I turned to the introduction. I had realised that Whaling was a Methodist by reading his prayers; now I learned more of his interesting life, how he came to faith, those who influenced his life and the matters which became important to him. He shares his views as to why people today are reluctant to pray and discussed what he has learned from experience in India, from his study of the Wesleys and of C.J. Jung, leading to a challenge to his readers to engage in a daily pattern of prayer for which his book is offered as an introductory tool. It will be one which is welcomed and appreciated by many.

Dane Sherrard,
Parish of Luss & Arrochar



God in Society: Doing Social Theology in Scotland, eds. W. Storrar and Peter Donald, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2003. ISBN 0715208039. pp 232. £17.99

This is an important and welcome book that attempts to map some of the contours of what would comprise an authentic and responsible social theology in Scotland today. It originates in a series of talks and meetings of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues in New College, Edinburgh and it is published in honour of Andrew Morton, the Associate Director

of that Centre from 1994 – 2001. The book is divided into four parts and includes academic articles as well as a smattering of poetry and hymns from various sources.

The work offers a contemporary snapshot of the challenges and opportunities for an engaged and relevant public theology from a range of contemporary practitioners and thinkers in Scotland – and in one case furth of Scotland. The style is popular and accessible with little that can be accused of being over heavy with technical jargon or ponderous accounts of method. The first section, ‘Doing Social Theology in a Scottish Context’, offers two articles by Will Storrar and Graham Blount which take as their starting point for reflection the emergence of the Scottish Parliament as a challenge and opportunity to the Church (both C of S and other churches). There is nothing of Billy Connolly’s ‘wee pretendy parliament’ in either author’s account of the impact and significance of the new institution. Storrar views it as part of a post-modern development that goes beyond the outmoded conception of a ‘sovereign nation state’ which favours a form of politics that is both local and regional while at the same time related to transnational and international groupings. Heady stuff indeed. That apart, what is argued for is fairly traditional in that what is required is that the churches should engage supportively and prophetically with the new institution and the political process to bring a ‘spiritual dimension to the parliament’s choices’. The parliament is applauded for its attempts to engage directly with the voice of the poor and the estranged, and the churches should be key players in developing this type of approach given their national involvement with every parish in the land. Storrar is good at pointing out what often goes unnoticed; that the Church (here the C of S is intended) is probably the only institution which can reasonably claim to have a presence in every type of community that contemporary Scotland has to offer.

Blount in his ‘A New Voice in a New Land’ similarly considers the impact of the Scottish parliament on church life. He notes that the churches had a key role in developing a contemporary expression of the traditional Scottish view that sovereignty lies with the people – with a

‘community of the realm’ – over against the Westminster view of an absolute and sovereign power of the Crown in Parliament. This may be a trifle overstated but the churches’ role here is worthy of highlighting nevertheless. Blount also detects a ‘legacy of cultural presbyterianism’ in the form of a commitment to social justice lying at the heart of the parliament’s agenda.

Both Storrar and Blount are obviously keen supporters of the parliament and are explicitly critical of some of the media’s reporting of the parliament’s affairs. Both writers discuss something of the effect that the parliament has had on the Church of Scotland as the ‘national Church’ of Scotland, but one feels that more could have done here. It is clear that the Church of Scotland’s particular role is now more strongly rooted and acknowledged in the Westminster and UK arenas than in it is in relation to the devolved parliament in Scotland. Moreover, despite their long-standing fear of devolution, it is also clear that the Catholic church has managed to parlay itself into a position not far from that of the ‘national voice of Christianity’ in Scotland, at least as far as the media are concerned. It also has a more intimate and manipulable relationship with the ruling Labour party, particularly in the West of Scotland. The C of S’s diminished role in public life is at odds with the recent census statistics in which more than two million people identified themselves with the C of S in matters of religion. This may be nothing more than a lingering folk Christianity, but it does seem interesting that our politicians are blind to such statistics when banning MSP’s from sending out Christmas cards as some sort of token gesture to a pluralist and multicultural society when in fact – as Blount points out – Scotland is one of the least diverse communities in Europe. How the churches should respond to a secular and liberal understanding of multi-culturalism that threatens the historical place of Christianity in Scottish society is not responded to by either author, although some attention is given to the multi-faith dimension of the daily act of worship in parliament. However, if Blount is right in saying that the concern for social justice in Scottish society is a legacy of ‘cultural presbyterianism’ then what is the significance of contemporary Scotland’s wilful ignorance of its own cultural past? We have moved

from a society that celebrated Knox, education and the contribution of Scottish society to the wider world to one that barely remembers its past heritage; and when it does so it often talks in sneering terms of a moralistic and barren presbyterianism. What is the C of S to make of this development, and how has its collusion with a wholly secular political educational establishment played a part in such views taking a hold in society?

Such questions immediately spring to mind when Nick Sagovsky, in his article 'Natural Law and Social Theology', argues that 'It is by no means apparent that Christian theology has a relevant social contribution in this day and age'. Sagovsky's article opens Section Two of the book entitled 'Doing Social Theology: Working with Traditions', and this section offers two accounts of potential theoretical foundations for social theology. Sagovsky (the token Englishman?) attempts to trace a form of 'natural theology' in the Scottish theological and philosophical heritage. He concludes by outlining the implicit and coded appeals to traditional 'natural law' theory in instruments such as the European Human Rights Act and he calls for a rediscovery of confidence in a reprimed account of 'Natural law', (Alastair MacIntyre is his dialogue partner here) as a source and norm for a contemporary social theology. Duncan Forrester, however, in his 'The Political Service of Theology in Scotland' employs a Barthian critique of natural law theory to argue that too often it simply 'reflects back the conventional wisdom of the age'. Forrester calls instead for a discerning theological approach that recognises its fragmentary and partial character that can only offer 'fragments of insight', partial visions of something new and distinctive that is rooted in the reign of God, in contradistinction to the huge (and hugely failed) ideologies of the last century.

Section Three, 'Doing Social Theology: Listening to Different Voices', offers a hotch potch of differing articles that I suppose justifies the title. Marcella Althaus-Reid offers a trenchant account of the need to hear the voices from the margins of society – the genuinely other— in any adequate theology of public issues. Malcom Cuthbertson offers an insightful account of the difficulties and nuances involved in effectively engaging with the excluded in any genuine attempt to do social theology

'with rather than to' the poor and marginalised. George Newlands offers a characteristically insightful and reflective piece on the role of the arts in theological and political debate. Andrew Morton himself offers a short piece on the various meanings and significances of the concept of community in theology. There is a brief and typically profound gem of a piece by Willy Slavin entitled "'Clyde-built, Edinburgh-managed": Voice and Place in Scottish Culture' which deserves to be widely read.

Section Four, 'Doing Social Theology: Church Ways of Working' is largely a descriptive section in that it traces the history of the various church approaches to and traditions within the churches regarding social theology in Scotland. It is perhaps the least interesting section of the book, but useful to those who want to have this sort of account. David Sinclair thus largely gives an account of the approach of the Church and Nation committee over the years (with a side look at the Board of Social Responsibility). Much of it will be familiar ground but it is presented in an accessible and informative manner. Gerard Hand similarly gives an account of Catholic Social teaching (and it is teaching rather than doctrine) over the years and this is helpful to those unfamiliar with the Catholic tradition. Interestingly, Hand is implicitly critical (albeit in a muted voice) of the late Cardinal Winning's public role as the 'head of Scottish Catholicism' (p.184). Hand's clear concern here as to how far the Cardinal's views represented Catholic opinion in general or the precise teachings of Rome in particular should act as a salutary warning to those in the C of S who were calling for a three year (or more) Moderator to provide a public focus for the voice of the church. The three concluding articles by Jeremy Balfour, Norman Shanks and Alastair Hulbert provide an account of the social and political engagement of evangelical churches, the Iona community and the ecumenical bodies respectively.

There is much that is to be valued in this book, although the articles are of varying quality and importance, but that is to be expected in any collection. Perhaps a slight criticism is that as the articles emerged out of a series of meetings and discussions perhaps more could have been done to retain the flavour of such discussion by encouraging direct interaction

and engagement between the various approaches of the authors. This would have worked best with the Storrar/Blount and Forrester/Sagovsky pieces, but even elsewhere tensions and differences might usefully have been explored. Nevertheless, the work serves as a useful and thoughtful attempt to explore the basis, range and implications of a critical social theology for contemporary Scotland. As such it will find a welcome place on the bookshelves of many a minister and one hopes that the Centre for Theology and Public Affairs will continue to be a stimulus for theology of this kind in Scotland today.

Peter McEnhill,
Westminster College,
Cambridge



Travelling with Resilience: Essays for Alastair Haggart, edited by Elizabeth Templeton. Edinburgh: Scottish Episcopal Church, 2002. pp. 249. Pb. £9.99

The title of this volume testifies to a purposeful journey. Kevin Franz in his excellent foreword to these essays points to the creation of a ‘spaciousness’ within the Scottish Episcopal church as a central part of Alastair Haggart’s purpose. Elizabeth Templeton in her Memoir writes of a passion for a teaching ministry and an unswerving commitment to ecumenical action.

This collection includes remarkably powerful images – a consecration sermon by T F Torrance, another Scot who never wavered from his central ecumenical commitment, a typically unusual angle on the changing church and the unchanging God by Michael Hare Duke, a brilliant reflection on eucharist and *ecumene* by the inimitable John Fitzsimmons, the best cardinal we never had. Add to this a radical piece on inter-faith dialogue by the Bishop of New Westminster, a characteristically profound essay by Rowan Willams on Bonhoeffer and the Poets, not to mention a number of the other usual suspects from John Habgood to Richard Holloway, with a piece on Preaching from