

Reviews

Johnston McKay, *Glimpses of Hope: God beyond Ground Zero* Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2002. pp. 192., £7.99
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Like November 22, 1963, the day Kennedy was shot, September 11, 2001 is now a fixed point in the calendar of modern history, and '9/11' has become one of the metaphors of political and cultural discourse.

Much – perhaps overmuch – has been said about its significance. 'The world will never be the same again', some say, and there is certainly a before-and-after feel about it. Perhaps to speak too cataclysmically of it in fact makes it harder than ever to make anything of it: cataclysms are apt to be pretty final, not easily fitted into any available mind-set. Certainly the daring dreadfulness of that morning destroyed the sense of impregnability which the US and the Western world had come to believe incontestable, not just of its air-space but of the values and the self-confidence of the corporate technocracy that were so easily penetrated.

Political commentators have competed to offer searching accounts of why it happened and what it now means. Theological accounts have been less heard, perhaps because responsible theology takes longer, is more naturally reflective, is willing to face ambiguities, and is characteristically unwilling to jump to slick conclusions. This collection of reflections is therefore specially valuable.

Johnston McKay travelled to New York in November 2001 to record programmes for an Advent series for Radio Scotland, drawing on conversations he had with ministers and layfolk who lived and worked in and around Lower Manhattan about what they saw, how they felt, and how they responded with the loving practicalities of preparing food, shelter, counselling, and quiet space, for rescue workers or distraught relatives. Later, as he prepared reflections for Holy Week, it was those same images and accounts that he turned to as he thought about the Passion and Death of Christ. These central Christian themes

of hope and judgement, of suffering and loss, of evil and forgiveness, and of dying and rising, he has now woven together in this book, threaded through with apt words of poets and theologians whom he uses to put that unforgettable event into a larger context.

Johnston McKay does not try to 'interpret' what happened on September 11 or to impose a meaning on it. Instead, he allows it, and the people he met there after it, and the stark and awful images he encountered, to speak for themselves, pointing only to what Scripture has to say about fear and hope, the human and the demonic, evil and redemption, in this or any time.

He quotes a journalist who said to him, 'The story of September 11 is a transitory one. It is there now, but it will change in time. It will mean something else to future generations'. No doubt some will tell and retell it to further their own narrow agenda. Here it is told from the standpoint of faith, the difficult faith that finds in the worst of settings glimpses of hope. In a book that will nourish and encourage long after the day that caused it to be written.

David S M Hamilton
Milngavie

Margaret Forrester, *Touch and Go*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2002. pp. 129, £7.99, ISBN 0 7152 0800 4.

It used to be fashionable to publish and collect volumes of sermons. The best of them were models of what good preaching should be, and they often reached and nourished readers far beyond the congregations to whom they were first delivered.

The Saint Andrew Press series *On Reflection*, edited by Duncan Forrester, has revived that old practice in a succession of excellent collections from Scottish ministers of this generation. The latest, from Margaret Forrester, has twenty sermons, some responding to particular events of recent years, others to seasons of the Christian Year, and each reflecting the Lectionary Readings for the occasion. Sometimes they are reassuring, sometimes uncomfortably challenging, but