HOLINESS
THE JOURNAL OF WESLEY HOUSE CAMBRIDGE

Reviews

Challenging Bullying in Churches (Grove Pastoral 145), Rosemary Power (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2016), 30 pp, £3.95 pbk/digital

Imitation and Scapegoats: Pastoral Insights from the Work of René Girard (Grove Pastoral 146), Simon J. Taylor (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2016), 30 pp, £3.95 pbk/digital

It is noteworthy that two consecutive publications in the Pastoral Series of the ever popular Grove booklets should find their focus on the reality of conflict and bullying in church communities.

Simon J. Taylor's subject is the thought of René Girard. Those familiar with Girard's work will know that it has funded a vast range of human enquiry from social anthropology to economics to atonement theology. As Taylor notes, quoting the theologian William C. Placher: 'Anyone who can entitle a book *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* without a whiff of irony is not addressing small questions in a small way.'

In chapter 2, Taylor provides an admirably concise summary of three pillars of Girardian thought: mimesis, scapegoating and its application to the Bible. He then proceeds to discuss how each might inform and aid pastoral practice in chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Crudely summarised, Girard suggests that human desire is based on the imitation (mimesis) of the desire modelled by others. I want the latest smartphone because my friend has one. In non-trivial contexts, this then escalates to violence where the phenomenon of 'scapegoating' a sacrificial victim provides a safety valve through which society's violence can be focused and quenched.

www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness
HOLINESS The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge
Volume 3 (2017) Issue 1 (Holiness & Pastoral Relationships): pp. 143–145
ISSN 2058-5969

Though noting the economy of words demanded, I wondered if Taylor might have included Girard's insight that the trigger to the escalation of mimetic violence is invariably a perceived or real scarcity of resource or other threat to the community. It occurred to me that these are conditions with which many church communities could readily identify. They might also be fruitfully applied to the experience of contemporary global politics.

In Girardian thought, the effectiveness of the sacrifice is predicated on the anonymity of its victim. Chapter 5 then proceeds to discuss Girard's argument that the Bible, uniquely in the whole corpus of human literature, describes scapegoating from the perspective of the *victim*. Thus scapegoating is exposed for what it is. As I read I was reminded of the literary-feminist perspective of Phyllis Trible's *Texts of Terror* as worked examples.

In my view, the way in which Taylor harnesses Girard's survey of human cultures on every continent throughout human history in order to provide a link with the reality of bullying in the Church is compelling. It is also disarming, for it provides that indispensable tool in conflict mediation: that of releasing guilt associated with behaviours that need to be addressed by locating them in a broader sociological context. The logical outworking of the biblical witness is to call the Church to a courageous naming of contemporary scapegoats at every level of society.

Rosemary Power's *Challenging Bullying in Churches* marries real-world anecdote to concrete strategy. At times I struggled with the structure of the booklet, perhaps because the work breathlessly alerts us to the variety of forms and subtlety of bullying in the church context. The author's experience in conflict mediation and depth of theological reflection safeguards the work from a descent into polemic, and her heart as a pastor is evident in her call in chapter 4 for the pastoral support of both victim and bully. The ecumenical scope of her survey releases the reader from cynicism about the structures and practices of their own denomination. The result is arresting.

A recurrent theme of the work is the insistence that the Church needs to learn from the good practice of the public and third sector. It suggests that trade unions, mentioned some eight times, might provide a practical link to such expertise. I wondered whether, having been alerted to the issue, the Church was really so irredeemably incapable of developing competent internal structures. I do not resist engagement with external scrutiny, but if such conflict escalates in the professional context which the author offers as an exemplar to

the Church, the first question addressed by the employment tribunal is 'Did the organisation follow its own *internal* bullying and harassment procedures?'

Writing from the perspective of the Methodist Church in Britain, I note that Power references the 2015 Methodist Conference Report, *Positive Working Together*, in the opening of chapter 2 and would be interested in her assessment of how well this report satisfies the shortcomings raised.

Grove booklets excel at signposting the reader to further reading, and Power's introductions to the works of Hugh Halverstadt, Colin Patterson and Alastair McKay in chapter 3 are salutary, for they offer reasons why church communities are particularly vulnerable to unchecked bullying behaviours. We are therefore offered the opportunity not just to confront bullying when it occurs, but to address the endemic vulnerability of our communities.

I was left with the view that regardless of important distinctions between the relationship of the Church to church employees and office holders, it is essential that we all engage in the development of, and submission to, robust systems of mutual oversight and external accountability.

It is consistent with Christian vocation to develop the professionalism for which we aspire to be respected.

Andrew Emison

Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook, Jane Leach and Michael Paterson (2nd edn, London: SCM Press, 2015), 320 pp, £25.00 pbk

Given the present efforts to introduce pastoral supervision to ministers across the Methodist Connexion in Great Britain, Jane Leach and Michael Paterson have done the Church a great service by providing this revised edition of their guide to the practice of pastoral supervision. Written by experts who have helped to shape the field, *Pastoral Supervision: A Handbook* offers a comprehensive and detailed companion for all who are embarking upon a supervision journey, or who wish to reinvigorate an ongoing supervision relationship. There are substantial revisions and additions to this edition, so satisfied consumers of the first 2010 edition would be well advised to take a second look.

Although the book begins with a brief working definition of pastoral supervision – 'a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way' (p. 1) – it will take careful digestion of the subsequent ten chapters for the reader to fully grasp the richness of the practice. The chapter titles utilise Jane Leach's characteristic term for pastoral theology – 'Attending' – and survey various aspects of the supervisory process: 'Vision', 'Process', 'the Present', 'the There and Then', 'the Here and Now', 'the Body', 'the Story', 'Context', 'Group Matters' and 'Endings'. If you know what you are looking for, then the clear structure will enable you to dip into the handbook at the right place for particular assistance. However, with its lively prose, and plentiful examples from the authors' own experiences, this is also a book that can be easily read from cover to cover.

One of the gifts that this book offers to the Church is that it sets pastoral supervision clearly within a confessional framework. While being conversant with a wealth of literature from relevant other disciplines, and knowledgeable of supervisory practice in other contexts, Leach and Paterson unashamedly promote a vision of pastoral supervision that sits within the practice of local Christian ministry, whether in circuit, parish, chaplaincy or education. Each chapter begins with a passage of Scripture, which is skilfully woven into the subsequent theme. Unlike other works on supervision that, while helpful, need to be translated into the context of Christian ministry, here is an exploration of pastoral supervision that is immediately at home in the Church.

www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness ISSN 2058-5969
Holiness The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge

Volume 3 (2017) Issue 1 (Holiness & Pastoral Relationships): pp. 146–147

The text is peppered with helpful diagrams ('The three-legged stool of supervision', 'The drama triangle', 'Supervision rhombus'), and at the end of each chapter a series of exercises offers supervisors and supervisees structured opportunities to develop and enhance their practices. Many of these exercises have broader applicability (such as for staff meetings), though this perhaps merely emphasises that the skills of pastoral supervision are useful far beyond the supervisory context.

Pastoral Supervision is a challenging book to read, not because of any opacity in its language – it is almost always lucid and engaging – but because the book itself is an example of the careful attention it is trying to promote. By describing pastoral supervision as a rich and enriching practice, this book inspires a thirst for such rigorous, intentional and disciplined reflection on one's own ministry, in company with others. With the reality of pastoral supervision on the near horizon for those who work in the Methodist Church in Great Britain, this book is an essential read to increase confidence in a process that 'helps those who minister to ensure that the gifts they have received are not kept for themselves but shared as generously and effectively as possible with others' (p. 13).

Andrew Stobart

***Human Being**: Insights from Psychology and the Christian Faith*, Jocelyn Bryan (London: SCM Press, 2016), 282 pp, £25.00 pbk

Jocelyn Bryan seeks to bring insights from psychology and theology (including from biblical narratives and Christian experience) into dialogue in the task of understanding and caring for human beings. Reflecting the 'narrative turn' in many disciplines, Bryan identifies narrative as a bridge between the two disciplines and as a starting point for conversations between them (although her territory and conversations are wider and not confined to a focus on narrative alone). Bryan's work in effect surveys and discusses several points of connection between the two fields, and many resources and insights pertinent to those points of connection, thus offering an increased awareness for both fields, as well as particular insights for understanding 'human being'.

Whether familiar with the territory or gaining new insights, readers will appreciate Bryan's commitment to her task and diligence in undertaking it, in a book that is well produced and accessible in style. I would quibble that Bryan might have displayed greater awareness and acknowledgement of the available insights from other potential conversation partners (without expecting her to have written a different book). For example, although she acknowledges that historically much academic psychology is 'reductionist' and observationally based, much contemporary psychotherapy adopts a more qualitative and experiential approach that arguably offers more immediate and extensive insights for understanding human stories, personalities and relationships (yet it seems that 'psychology' and 'psychotherapy' are forever wary of each other, even before we get to theology!).

Additionally, I sensed a degree of unevenness within the book: some theological statements, or conclusions about human experience (in the periodic illustrations supplied), occasionally appeared to be unsupported 'assertions' (however potentially valid) that were lacking in a fuller reasoning or a greater underpinning in pastoral or therapeutic practice or research; this contrasted with Bryan's more substantive handling of (especially psychological) theory. Consequently, to a degree, the book also seemed to move between being more academic and intended for the academic world, yet at other times intended more widely for encouragement and awareness within the

www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness
HOLINESS The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge
Volume 3 (2017) Issue 1 (Holiness & Pastoral Relationships): pp. 148–149
ISSN 2058-5969

community of faith; maybe this was intended, and it is richer for seeking to be and do both.

Certainly the book invites attention, both from those starting out and from those with existing awareness of the insights to be gained from a dialogue between psychology and theology. Having built a platform in her initial chapters, Bryan's subsequent chapters (the major part of the book) offer a rich resource of summaries and insights, conversations and critiques. The chapters cover 'Personality' (including, for example, various personality theories and Christian perspectives), 'Goals and Motivation' (including a discussion of 'sin' and becoming 'Christlike'), 'Social Being' (premised on our fundamentally relational existence), 'Emotions', 'Self-Regulation', 'Self-Esteem' and 'Memory and Ageing'. Each chapter weaves biblical and other narratives together with psychological insights.

Inevitably some theories and ideas receive more rigorous attention than others, but the ground covered is extensive, and Bryan's subjects and discussions invite increased theological, self- and interpersonal understanding. This is a wide-ranging distillation of relevant knowledge and reflection into a stimulating contribution to theory and practice.

James Tebbutt

On Augustine, Rowan Williams (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 211 pp, £25.00 hbk

These essays are extremely good, extremely technical, very difficult and deeply rewarding. Considerable knowledge is taken for granted. They do not comprise a systematic overview of Augustinian thought; rather, a slightly uneven set of essays on selected themes.

Augustine's fourth-/fifth-century God ordered all things 'by measure, number and weight' (Wis 11:21). Augustine considered authoritarian (even violent) coercion in the Christian household and the Christian state to be the justified, shameful consequence of original sin, generating widespread opprobrium in recent decades. Williams is unapologetic. 'What is interesting about Augustine is not the attitudes he shares with his contemporaries but what is unique to him' (p. 191). 'Interesting' things are insights concerning the human self, the Church, evil, the secular state, how we may seek a God we do not know, and trinitarian relations. Most exciting and difficult is Williams' confessedly provisional teasing out from the sprawling Augustinian corpus an understanding of *sapientia* (divine wisdom) as the essential thread that renders coherent the life of the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, and our own search for the God who first reveals himself not in us but in others.

The chapter 'Insubstantial Evil' is penetrating and helpful. That Augustine's evil does not actually exist enhances, rather than diminishes, evil's diabolic reality in our lives.

The chapter on the Psalms may well astonish. 'All the Psalms can be heard as Christ speaking – the Head taking on the "voice" of the Body, the confused, needy, strident, unhappy voices of flesh and blood human beings' (p. 133). Thus worshippers become one with the finite-yet-infinite mind of the incarnate Word. No wonder missals and prayer books relegate the New Testament witness to the sidelines.

Preaching is theology's litmus test. Williams on Augustine's view of preaching: 'Scripture is beautiful and must be so if it is to move us to love, which arises from delight; likewise, preaching must be beautiful, not as a matter of impressive ornament but through its appeal to what most deeply attracts, the

www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness
HOLINESS The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge
Volume 3 (2017) Issue 1 (Holiness & Pastoral Relationships): pp. 150–151
ISSN 2058-5969

self-giving love of Christ' (p. 57). Williams on preaching: 'Without a belief in a love without self-directed interest, we may find that the gospel of a human community beyond faction and rivalry is harder to preach than we might have imagined' (p. 74). And a warning from Williams about the context in which preaching is offered: 'A society unclear about what moral wants it should nurture in its citizens will produce minds largely incapable of understanding moral crisis and moral tragedy' (p. 160).

Conventional scholarship claims that the West, following Augustine, prioritised the unity of the Godhead whereas the East, following Gregory of Nyssa, prioritised Spirit at the price of true unity. Williams thinks he has discovered a new Augustinian doctrine of *sapientia*. His own appraisal:

> So far, then, from Augustine's trinitarian theology dealing inadequately with the Holy Spirit, it succeeds, for the first time in the history of Christian doctrine, in giving some account of how and why the Spirit is intrinsic to the trinitarian life – a task which not even the most sophisticated pages of Gregory of Nyssa manage with any great clarity. (p. 184)

About that, we shall surely hear plenty more.

Michael P. Wilson