accounts of justice. Thus, it should be required reading for ethicists across the ideological spectrum. In a time of conflict, Porter attractively stresses the *contingency* of our ability to develop the virtue of justice. Justice emerges in agents when they learn (a) stable desires for comprehensive goods greater than the self and (b) stable desires to treat others in accord with the particular norms of respect and equality that are rooted in the types of creatures we are. In recognising the contingency of such formation, she illuminates why it is so challenging to move beyond a 'morality of obligation' approaches to justice, whether of the left or right. Such approaches neglect the need to develop a stable desire to follow norms. This insight depends on 'getting justice right' as a specific virtue perfecting the will. Porter's book does not end up resolving all the divisive issues of the demands of justice, but it explains the framework within which fruitful exchange about these demands should take place.

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Ephraim Radner, *Time and the World: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. vii + 326, $50.00/£32.99.

Ephraim Radner, professor of historical theology at Wycliffe College in the University of Toronto, is well known for his sustained and probing accounts of the church's disunity (e.g. *The End of the Church* (1998); *A Brutal Unity* (2012)). These make use of biblical figures – in particular, the figure of a divided Israel – to give theologically thick descriptions of the current ecclesial situation. His commentary on Leviticus (2008) also explored biblical figures, especially sacrifice, and argued that we have a 'thinner' understanding of Jesus without them. A constant theme throughout these works is that the church's engagement with scripture is a mode of God's engaging the church, a means of conforming readers to the reality of the world as it is coming to be in Christ through the Spirit. It is this process, a figural reading of Christian scripture, that is the topic of the present work.

Time and the World is a demanding book: ambitious in scope, theological in substance, counter-cultural in spirit, at turns breath-taking and head-scratching in style, yet always urgent and important in its moral and spiritual summons to acknowledge our status as creatures of God's word. The first part treats the history and theology and the second the practice of figural reading. There is also an appendix with four exemplary figural sermons from Aelfric, John Donne, John Jasper (a former slave) and Radner himself.

'Time' and 'world' are hardly standard fare in hermeneutical textbooks, so why include, much less lead with, them? First, because figural reading 'is not really a "method"' (p. 7) but an account of reference, a way of identifying what the Bible is talking about, which turns out to be 'everything', everywhere, at all times – the world as God's creation: 'The figures of Scripture are not "themes" ... they actually *are* what we are created as both being and becoming in time' (p. 11).

The book opens with a case study: to what does 'exile' refer? The modern historical-critical reflex is to ask 'did it happen?' and then to specify what, when, why and where. Figural reading complicates, challenges and eventually overturns this way of thinking by expanding the reference: from Adam's exile from Eden and Israel's ongoing exile in the period of second Temple Judaism (cf. N. T. Wright) to Calvin's idea that earthly existence is a kind of exile from the saint's heavenly home and the lived experience of African-American slaves. The referent of 'exile' is not a punctiliar event but a paradigmatic narrative that binds one time to another.

To read scripture Christianly is to read individual and ecclesial experience in light of the figures used to tell the true story of the world, namely, the story of Christ: 'We do not look to history to find Christ; but at Christ to find history, in its divinely constructed form' (p. 41). Figural reading is the practice that corresponds to the conviction that what happens in time is not 'one damned thing after another' but, on the contrary, one blessed thing: the realisation of God's creative purpose and divine sovereignty, to wit: the creation and restoration of all things in and through Jesus Christ. Scripture 'represents the pattern of recognizability by which all things exist' (p. 102). In Radner's lexicon, it is as proper to speak of figures of metaphysics as it is figures of speech. Indeed, God's speech as we have it in scripture *is* the reality of the world. Radner devotes considerable space to showing that figural speech does not depend on a particular metaphysics of participation but rather on what we could call the 'canon sense' of scripture: the awareness that God's words in the Bible describe the whole of reality as it is in relation to Christ.

Part 2 opens with a helpful reflection on the significance for figural reading of the lectionary. From this modest starting point, Radner makes a compelling case that the temporalities not only of the two Testaments but of all other times are figured, and thus given Christian meaning, as a result of canonical juxtaposition. The point of biblical interpretation is not to reconstruct a past time but to experience the present, and thus ourselves, as also part of what the Bible is about: *this* (twenty-first-century context) is *that* (some aspect of the history of Christ). Faith seeks understanding by allowing 'the various pieces of Scripture to inform one another by comparison, contrast, and

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mutual illumination' (p. 232). For example, the Trinity is not taught but caught, as it were, by attending to the logic of God's figural imagination or historical intention (they amount to the same thing, for 'to really happen' is 'to be biblically figured', p. 261).

Figural interpretation is not a matter of applying biblical truths to contemporary situations but of fitting contemporary situations into the Bible. Crucial to understanding Radner's argument is the claim that this is not the reader's invention but God's work – the work of God's words: 'Scripture, in God's hands, shapes us, orders us, *uses* us to know him as he speaks; it does not, in the first instance, simply tell us who God is' (p. 237). Consequently, preaching figurally – locating ourselves where we belong, in the biblical text, in Christ – is the way the church acknowledges its status as a creature of the word (p. 263). Hearing the preached word opens a 'clearing' (cf. Heidegger) in which the truth of Jesus Christ, his body and the world is unconcealed.

This meagre summary only begins to do justice to the richness of Radner's bracing defence of figural reading. I am left admiring the strange new world (strange to modern ears, at least) he has opened as to what it means to be biblical – and with three questions. First, how can we recover the reading practices necessary to relate the parts of scripture to one another in an age where 'memory' refers to the amount of data stored in one's computer? Second, what can we do to commend figural reading to biblical scholars who see their vocation as defending the historical particularity of texts (I recommend reading Radner's book in conjunction with Iain Provan's robust defence of literal interpretation, *The Reformation and Right Reading of Scripture*)? Third, whose say-so counts in the conflict of biblical figurations? Are there wrong ways to figure things out? What is the locus of interpretive authority? This concern relates to Radner's earlier work on ecclesial disunity. Here I would have liked to have seen interaction with John Webster's view of scripture as an ingredient in the economy of divine self-communication and his proposal for biblical reasoning. Is figural reading a form of, or alternative to, biblical reasoning?

Radner has written a profound, prophetic and demanding book. The demand is not the Lord's command to Abraham, 'Go from' or the children's 'Take up and read' overheard by Augustine. It is rather the demand, taken up by generations of Christians, to read and 'go figure'. Whether scholars and other Christians will heed it, and return from their exile in the desert of biblical criticism where they have wandered for some 400 years remains an open and urgent question.

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