

moreover, raises thought-provoking questions that should generate significant future scholarship. This is more than we need to ask of a first edition.

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Rachel Starr, *Reimagining Theologies of Marriage in Contexts of Domestic Violence: When Salvation Is Survival* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. viii + 225. ISBN 9781472472533. RRP \$150 or £105.

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This fine and eminently readable work is a revision of the author's doctoral thesis completed in Argentina. Starr now teaches at the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, UK, and the book 'explores the reality of domestic violence in the different, but historically entwined, contexts of Argentina and England' (p. 1). The statistics are horrifying, and Starr identifies that among the risk factors to women are 'dominant Christian teachings and practices around marriage' (p. 2). The 'focus' of her study 'is how Christian beliefs and practices serve to legitimate domestic violence' (p. 37), and while the book will be an uncomfortable read for many Christians, she succeeds well. Not only an activist in resisting domestic violence, Starr has a knowledge of the field that is probably unrivalled (as the 45-page bibliography and 1256 footnotes testify). Here, then, is a work to be reckoned with, scholarly, accessible and bursting with quiet topicality and relentless but constructive theological criticism.

Domestic violence is 'any act or omission that causes psychological, physical, sexual or economic harm, or that restricts a person's freedom (including reproductive freedom) and development by means of control or coercion...' (p. 22). It is given 'hermeneutical priority' (p. 15). Christian traditions are mostly silent about the subject because ambiguous attitudes to the body and sex have led to a 'spiritualization of marriage, the physical realities being pushed to one side' (p. 41), and because of the widespread influence of the doctrine of headship. Carefully assessing the 'three goods of marriage' (ch. 3), *fides* or faith is 'potentially beneficial' (p. 55) but only when it is 'refashioned as friendship' (p. 50). The 'good of children' has been used to deny contraception and abortion to women, and to emphasize motherhood 'as the natural vocation of women, and the means by which they are saved' (p. 60). 'Covenantal models of marriage, popular in Protestantism and more recently in Catholicism, have a grave defect: biblical covenants are enacted by violence and take[s] the form of a binding agreement between unequal partners, through which a set of obligations are imposed onto the weaker party' (p. 73). The marriage metaphor in the Old Testament prophets is a shaming metaphor 'which still works to reinforce women's low social status' (p. 77). While the idea of covenant, qualified by

mutuality, *can* be positive for women, ‘covenantal models of marriage may need to be abandoned as intrinsically violent and inescapably hierarchical’ (p. 82).

Sacramental models of marriage are no less dangerous (ch. 5). The idea of the ‘indissoluble bond’ has ‘resulted in a lasting denial of the legitimacy of divorce within the official Roman Catholic Tradition’ (pp. 104-105). Churches have emphasized the marriage ceremony instead of seeing the daily realities of married life as the possible locus of sacramental grace (p. 117). Notions of self-giving love, and of sacrifice (both of Christ as redeemer and of the Eucharist sacrificially understood) can be deeply manipulated against the interests of women. However, marriage understood as covenant and sacrament can, and must, ‘anticipate new ways of living’ (p. 120). Both models ‘suggest that marriages are formed with a purpose, anticipating new, more just and loving ways of relating to each other and the wider world’ (p. 120).

Chapter 6, ‘Reimagining the saving power of marriage in contexts of domestic violence’ examines ‘how dominant sacrificial understandings of atonement function in situations of domestic violence’ (p. 126). Even ‘[T]he denial of violence is a form of violence in itself’ (p. 128). There is a long list of deleterious consequences for women as a result of biblical teaching about, for example, Eve’s disobedience, the silencing of women in churches, the prevention of their leadership, their definition ‘as self-for-others and therefore suited to caring for others’ (p. 143). In situations of domestic abuse ‘salvation is survival’ (ch. 7). ‘Making bodily survival a good of marriage would transform theological discourse on marriage’ (p. 177). The three traditional goods, theologically reimagined, may yet enable ‘spaces of peace, the meeting of bodily needs and loving desires, and the development of just and right relationships’ (p. 176).

The book is a fine adjunct to the work of the Shiloh Project on *Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible*, presently in progress at the Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies, UK. Some readers may query whether the causal connections between certain Christian doctrines and biblical texts, on the one hand, and domestic abuse on the other hand, have been made, but there can be little doubt, especially after the reading of this book, that the combination of a more or less literal interpretation of the Bible and doctrine, together with inattention to a properly critical yet constructive theology, is dangerous and sometimes deadly.

The book deserves to be read throughout the Anglican Communion (and of course more widely). Indeed it might have been written for it. Starr finds some acknowledgement of the damage done by ‘[I]dealized doctrines of marriage and love’ (p. 42) in the report of the Archbishops’ Council of the Church of England, *Responding to Domestic Abuse* (2006) and similar reports, but notes there is less acknowledgment of domestic violence in official statements about marriage itself. The 2017 update of that report, *Responding Well to Domestic Abuse*, illustrates the veracity of Starr’s analysis. While the later report is intended as a practical guide, there is an appendix, ‘Theology’, which provides a table of ‘helpful’ and ‘unhelpful’ ‘applications’ of problematic biblical texts, yet fails completely to acknowledge or critique the theology that invites and appears to legitimize gender inequality, male headship, and the enforcement of obedience, that is based on them. As I write, the Church of England is halfway

towards the preparation of *Living in Love and Faith*, the teaching document on relationships, marriage and sexuality. It is to be hoped that the teams of authors will consider marriage critically yet positively, as this book does. There is a danger that marriage will be treated, say, as the sole context for sexual intercourse, or as an appropriate institution to be offered to same-sex couples, or not, and so on, without regard to its intensely problematic biblical and doctrinal foundations, and gendered inequalities. Such topics, important though they undoubtedly are, can distract attention from the ambiguous legacy of theologies of marriage and the reworking they require. This book offers an alternative and positive vision of marriage, which does the serious thinking that marriage requires and deserves, and foregoes the pretence that a 'lite' biblical literalism can substitute for hard and painful thinking.

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Alison Milbank, *God and the Gothic: Religion, Romance, and Reality in English Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. x + 354. ISBN 978-0-19-882446-6. RRP US\$95 or £75.00.

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Alison Milbank's thoughtful, well-informed book suggests a longer lineage to the Gothic tradition in British literature than traditional accounts which date its inception from the Enlightenment. Rather than seeing it as originating as a counter to rational Dissent and Deism, she argues that the peculiar iconoclasm of the Reformation in Britain created a consequent sense of loss of the mediating religious practices and structures provided by the Roman Catholic Church. Just as she sees in Anglican ecclesiology an emerging critique and appropriation of a past deliberately despoiled and ruined, so she sees Gothic fiction not so much as a negative expression of the spiritual fears of subsequent eras but as seeking to remedy the loss of mediating religious practices and structures by performing its own theological work. For her the Gothic tradition is no mere aesthetic substitute for vague religiosity but a space that not only permits but historically has actively encouraged theological reflection and creation.

Envisioning Gothic fiction as a mode of religious historiography makes for an extensive canon in which the poetry and drama of Spenser, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Milton play their part and Dante's influence abounds. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, with its evocation of victims of Roman Catholic persecution, who would become Protestantism's historic and eschatological victors, is seen as providing the prototypes of Gothic heroines. While the normal suspects such as Horace Walpole, 'Monk' Lewis, Anne Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, James Hogg, Emily Brontë, Le Fanu and Bram Stoker are duly rounded up, Milbank's approach also allows space for less well-known contributors to the genre such as J. Meade Faulkner, Arthur Machen and Evelyn Underhill. An Epilogue claims