

Robin Gill, *Society Shaped by Theology: Sociological Theology Volume 3* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 252. ISBN 9781409426011.

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Robin Gill has once again tackled a central issue in the sociology of religion and a matter of concern to theologians: Does theology shape society? The first two volumes in this series addressed the issue of the impact of social forces on theology, a topic more readily accepted today even if uncomfortable to many theologians. However, both the sociology of religion and theology have claimed or hoped that theology would also be shown to be influential. While decades of secularization theory, research and ideology have favoured the first approach, the lingering effect of Weber, Durkheim and Parsons cannot be easily swept aside. Although Gill does not raise the issue in this way, I would say the question of the impact of theologies on society has become more salient as societies become increasingly religiously diverse and multiple religious voices are heard in social policy debates. Fortunately, Gill's analysis encompasses religious plurality and policy issues.

Gill is very careful, as usual, to ensure that we explore critically what we mean by theology when we ask if it is influential. Do we mean academic theology, theology as preached in sermons, the theology of those in the pew subject to sermons and writings aimed at them, or theologies of those who do not attend, or the person in the street? Since these theologies are likely to differ appreciably it is essential to clarify what is taken to be influential.

Similarly, Gill is very careful to avoid uni-directional causality. He is more allergic to using the term 'causal' than I am, but is clear that what may be theology shaped by society at one moment can become theology shaping society at another. An example I would give is that theologies promoting fertility - anti-abortion, anti-homosexuality - may be shaped by the experiences of societies with vulnerable numbers, but in another time come to shape social policy on these matters when the original 'cause' no longer applies.

While historically informed this study does not seek to explore relationships between society and theology in the past but in the present. And as we have come to expect from Gill, not only are the concepts used rigorously clarified but empirical evidence is used to test the relationships examined. This critical and disciplined clarity of thinking and testing is very rare in either theology or sociology. Each discipline tends to leave too many ideas in the taken-for-granted basket.

The late twentieth century saw sociologists driven from seminaries to the detriment of both disciplines. Churches and those up the hierarchy have long been afraid of sociology's ability to unmask pretence and hypocrisy. Some theologians and church leaders would be fearful of the accountability that sociological analysis can bring. On the other hand, sociology has too long expected too little of theology, ignoring ample evidence of its influence. Gill, like me, had the luxury of a university position which permitted both theology and sociology and their interactions to be explored. The wisdom of encouraging this interdisciplinary conversation is made obvious and urgent by the analyses presented in this book.

Gill carefully examines the role of theology in motivating altruism. The relationship between church attendance and volunteering is well established, but

can the effect be attributed to theology? The evidence is unclear. Church attending volunteers do not cite theology as a motivation, but the context of church promotes the telling of stories of self that include volunteering, compassion and helping. The question of the impact of declining church attendance, as opposed to belief, on altruism is raised but not answered. The complexity of context and causal direction are all explored with open clarity.

Gill also explores the transposition into general use of the values implicit in the healing stories recounted in the synoptic gospels – compassion, care, faith and humility. In order to derive these implicit values he uses the skills of social science to discern the meaning of language and healing, as opposed to curative actions in the first-century context and their potential meaning now. He discovers the use of these Gospel values in medical practice and research. They are even more evident in careful discussion of medical ethics where he argues that by using his frameworks the theologian brings far more than ‘nay-saying’ to the consideration of the knottiest of ethical issues.

The examples used more than justify the value of the framework Gill develops. An additional example I can think of includes the example of the persistence of patriarchy in Western societies where non-inclusive language originating in translations of sacred texts and continued in liturgy serve to reinforce a social pattern.

I highly recommend this book to both sociologists and theologians (of both the academic and more everyday variety). It forms the basis for a richer understanding of relationships between religion and society and could serve as the foundation for many highly valuable research programmes.

Gary Bouma
Monash University

Peter Boyce, *God and the City: A History of St David's Cathedral, Hobart* (Hobart: St David's Cathedral Foundation, 2012), pp. xiii + 253, ISBN 978-0-646-58194-1 (hbk).
Robert Withycombe, *Montgomery of Tasmania: Henry and Maud Montgomery in Australasia* (Brunswick East, VIC: Acorn Press, 2009), pp. xii + 299, ISBN 978-0-9082-84788 (hbk).
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The island of Tasmania, located off the south-east of the Australian mainland, is Australia's smallest state in both area and population and has its highest proportion of self-described Anglicans: some 30 per cent in the last census. Tasmania's European history began in 1803 when a British settlement was planted on the Derwent River in the south of the island. This evolved into Hobart Town which in 1813 became the administrative centre of the colony of Van Diemen's Land. Its labour force and the majority of its settlers were transported convicts or ex-convicts.

Following the foundation of the diocese of Tasmania in 1842, the Anglican Church expanded its ministry to embrace almost every township and settlement, and by the end of the nineteenth century the island had more Anglican churches in relation to population than anywhere else in Australia. The Church had a