

finely drawn. She frequently alludes to African views of the spirits that she regards as equally unhelpful in their overemphasis on spirits. However, we learn very little of the theologies that promote this view because she claims that there is little literature. Perhaps academic scholarship is sparse. Yet, prominent church leaders in Africa write popular theologies of spirit possession and Christian response and develop sophisticated demonologies that are eagerly consumed by a large reading public, who also purchase CDs of sermons, and follow Bible study manuals. There is some considerable variety in these theologies. Readers would have a greater sense of how Acolatse understands spirits to be operative if she had engaged with equal vigour with this range of theologies as well. She would also better demonstrate her claim that African churches, as a vibrant centres of contemporary Christianity, can make a positive influence on the entire conversation. Acolatse is too careful to keep to the traditional craft of theological writing, making her case using prominent theologians and established traditions.

Nevertheless, Acolatse's project is important for a number of reasons. She engages prominent African theologians alongside classic western theologians, thus instigating a worldwide theological conversation. She stands in the tradition of evangelical African theologians, like Byang Kato, who have been cautious about cultural readings of scripture that place a great emphasis on contemporary contexts. She wishes to modify the prominence of 'worldview' whilst taking it seriously and to read the Bible 'with the past and present believers in view and with an eye to the future', in order 'to make scriptural claims universal' (p. 200). The book seeks a universal articulation of the Christian faith, but one that is alert to the diversity of Christian expression.

Emma Wild-Wood

School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, New College, Edinburgh EH1 2LX, UK

[emma.wildwood@ed.ac.uk](mailto:emma.wildwood@ed.ac.uk)

doi:[10.1017/S0036930618000108](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930618000108)

Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), pp. xviii + 290. \$49.95

Ephraim Radner's *A Time to Keep* is an excellent theological reflection on human life as it is shaped by the concomitants of temporality. Not wrestling primarily with why human lives are limited by time, Radner focuses instead on understanding what it means that human life revolves around temporally ordered realities. Although it might seem that modern life is ruled by time

in unprecedented ways given our nearly pathological need to monitor every minute, Radner argues that the modern world actually minimises the true meaning of time by obscuring the significance of liminal events like birth and death, as well as ostensibly mundane realities like time-keeping, eating and singleness. According to Radner, each of these forms part of the 'arc of life' that comprises the God-given shape of human life and the means by which we come to know both God and ourselves properly.

*A Time to Keep* offers a series of six beautifully written essays, each of which focuses on a different aspect of human temporality. The thread tying them all together, however, is the conviction that scripture presents 'a single picture, complex though it is, of at least *one* human life ... the Son of God, Jesus the Christ' (pp. vii–viii). Radner thus seeks to orient our thoughts about human temporality and mortality around the person of Christ as revealed in the entirety of scripture.

The first two essays focus on the theological significance of both life and death. Chapter 1 reflects on mortality itself. Focusing on the 'demographic transition' (p. 22) created by declining infant mortality and increasing life expectancy, Radner contends that modern life has become increasingly shielded from the reality of death, and, consequently, unable to see its significance as a gift of God's grace. To make the latter point, Radner draws on the tradition of viewing the 'tunics of skin' provided by God after the fall as mortality itself. Chapter 2 continues this emphasis by arguing further that human finitude means that we must understand life, especially eternal life, as a constant gift of God's grace rather than an intrinsic feature of human being. From here Radner offers an extended reflection on suicide and how it reveals the both the givenness and the communal nature of human life.

The next two essays reflect further on birth and death as the boundary markers of human life. In Chapter 3 Radner presents a strong case for viewing human persons as 'essentially generational' (p. 78). Every human person is inseparably related to the generations that come before and after. Consequently, 'generative filiation' (p. 86) is fundamental to the shape of a properly ordered human life, which is designed by God to mirror the act of creation in which he opened himself to that which is not God. Radner thus locates sexuality and procreation at the centre of human existence, leading him into an extended discussion of homosexuality as an example of non-procreative sexuality, which Radner critiques as 'unfitting' to God's creative purpose (p. 103). Chapter 4 considers the 'arc' of the human life, contending that every stage offers its own insight into the nature of human existence. Consequently, we need each generation 'not simply for diversity's sake but more importantly for the sake of wisdom and responsibility, beauty, and especially that love that undergirds creaturely existence' (p. 136).

The final two essays take up particular aspects of human existence. Chapter 5 focuses on singleness. Without diminishing the centrality of marriage and procreation developed earlier, Radner contends that single people play a vital role in establishing the significance of individuality and particularity as well as community and relationality. Chapter 6 shifts attention to work and eating as central anthropological realities, both of which involve human persons in the ongoing task of creation, which in turn reflects the grace and creativity of God.

Each of these essays offers serious reflection on the nature of human mortality and addresses an impressively broad range of anthropological issues. Nonetheless, some questions remain. First, many will be unsatisfied with Radner's decision to bracket eschatology from his discussion. As he says, '[W]e should speak of human creaturehood in an integral way only by basing our self-conceptions on our present existence' (p. 40). Thus, while affirming that human persons have a *telos*, he denies that this provides any real content for theological anthropology. Yet it is not clear why such a move is necessary since allowing an eschatological perspective does not preclude seeing the anthropological significance of the present.

Second, given Radner's focus on mortality as a gracious gift, it was surprising that he did not engage the array of modern thinkers who have argued that death is a creational reality and not merely a consequence of sin, even a gracious one. How would it reshape our understanding of mortality if we followed their lead and viewed death as intrinsic to the structure of creation itself? A third concern arises in Radner's discussion of ageing as part of the arc of life. Here Radner repeats the common misconception that you really learn 'what a person is like "deep down"' by observing what they are like when they get old (p. 150). Yet this is clearly an oversimplification given that degenerative factors must also be taken into account. Throughout, Radner's discussion would have benefited from a more nuanced interaction with the literature on ageing. Finally, an issue that will certainly attract attention, and probably criticism, will be Radner's arguments regarding sexuality, marriage and procreation. Nonetheless, even those who disagree with him on these points will find his discussion worth engaging, especially regarding the creational function of sexuality and the theological importance of singleness.

In sum, *A Time to Keep* is a well-written, theologically stimulating reflection on human finitude, one that engages a fascinating array of topics, meriting a close read from anyone interested in theological anthropology today.

Marc Cortez

Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187, USA

[marc.cortez@wheaton.edu](mailto:marc.cortez@wheaton.edu)