Book Reviews

Andrew Davison, and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish* (London: SCM Press, 2010), ISBN 9780334043652.
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With the publication of the Church of England Report *Mission Shaped Church* [*MSC*] in 2004, the location-bound and geographically focused parish church, along with the broad and wide network of deaneries and dioceses of which it is part, got a new title: the 'inherited church'. It takes some show of courage to accept that new – although somewhat condescending – title and argue back from within it. Clearly Davison and Milbank prefer the title 'Parish Church', arguing for all that this term positively implies and calls forth, but it is from the position of the given title as inherited – which inevitably puts them on the back foot – that they begin their counter-assault.

Davison and Milbank 'are among those who still ''fuse the meaning and forms of the gospel'' ' (p. 4). Finding philosophical support in the work of Roger Scruton and Ludwig Wittgenstein, they argue wholeheartedly that the ecclesiological heart of the Church of England is in its form: the content is in its forms. 'The message and purpose of the Church are to be found *in* the way she lives and worship[s]' (p. 5). For many this will be no surprise, even if they have found themselves drifting from this high ideal. This 'union of form and content' is the starting point for Davison and Milbank's argument and critique of the Fresh Expressions of church emerging from *MSC*. Those who advocate 'Fresh expressions' 'do not appreciate just how much the Faith is embodied *in* those forms' (p. 16). Further, they argue, '[t]o throw over the practices of the inherited church is to both weaken our grasp of the Faith, and also to weaken its grasp on us' (p. 17). Davison and Milbank show that fresh expressions' thinking and theology, with its separation of content and form, result in an *idea* of *a faith* and of *a church*. This *idea* is one that can be planted in a new and emerging culture; one that the report describes using postmodern categories and metaphors of network. Paradoxically, the construction of an ecclesiological *idea* leaves the 'meaning' 'far *more* abstract and so *culture-less* than in the inherited church'. For a movement that is born out of a culture-sensitive missiology this proves rather embarrassing. In contrast Davison and Milbank argue for a cultured gospel, one that can be found embodied in and mediated through the church. This union of content and form leads to a strong emphasis on the union of soteriology and ecclesiology; where salvation is mediated by the church and has a very church-shaped appearance. Such a union, and the following mediation argument, leads to an essential collapse of the church-kingdom distinction: 'Nor can we legitimately sideline the Church by using the language of Kingdom instead' (p. 60).

As chapters progress their root argument travels along the fresh expression branches and sees Davison and Milbank challenging, or rather accusing, Fresh Expressions of a flight towards segregation as they embrace McGavran's homogeneous unit principle of church growth and a flight from tradition. These are epitomized by the use of the word *fresh*, which implies that there is something *stale* about parish tradition. After pummelling the content of *MSC* and fresh expressions as a mission strategy, the second part of the book moves towards a construction of a theology of mission and mediation in which the church – and so the parish – becomes the goal, provides the means, and leads the way.

Sadly, Davison and Milbank's focus on the union of content and form did not extend to their book. While there is no doubt that the authors are somewhat frustrated by the idea of fresh expressions and the implicit theological positions of the *MSC* report, it is also clear that they have not engaged deeply with any real-life fresh expressions. The title would better read as 'a critique of fresh expressions literature'. Thus, despite the bibliography, the majority of the text is directly addressed to the *MSC* report and its authors. As such, it is an idealized form and content of fresh expressions that is critiqued, one that is gleaned from a book that does not claim to present a working argument for the actual practice of 'fresh expressions', nor an integrated theory or theology of such. The report was written as a progress check on *Breaking New Ground* and as a review of emerging new forms of church. The report is thus being taken to task for what it never set out to be. To supplement this, Davison and Milbank, in the ways of an experienced hunter, pick out the weak and straggling examples of fresh expressions on which to exercise the full might of their theological muscles: greeting-card makers and a sewing club (p. 77). The critique never lets up, even after the turn towards the construction, or re-construction, of a theology of mission and mediation. The book therefore has an uncompromising gladiatorial feel to it, which in the end becomes annoying or even embarrassing, depending on one's level of sympathy with the basic critique.

I am left wondering whether the gladiatorial approach is in fact a cover-up for a more fundamental mismatch between critic and critiqued. Roger Haight's framework for ecclesiology would categorize Davison and Milbank as presenting an 'ecclesiology from above'; one that is both doctrinally determined, and therefore a-historical, and so generative of its own legitimacy: 'this is the way we have always done it'. This ecclesiological approach is betrayed by the authors' Romantic portrayals of parish life, which border at times on the nostalgic: 'Whose heart does not lift when, amid the hubristic skyscrapers of the City of London, one spots a church spire or tower, dwarfed but not yet erased by the temples to Mammon' (p. 144). In contrast to the elevation of the necessity of cultural mediation, by which they mean the culture of the church, the authors are extremely dismissive of enculturation and so of Haight's 'ecclesiology from below', which considers the social and historical situation within which the church exists as crucial for understanding its full reality. While arguing that mediation through culture leads to its redemption (p. 37), Davison and Milbank struggle to acknowledge and so appreciate that the church is not apart from the culture in which it is embedded. This struggle to appreciate the cultural relationship between the church and its social and historical setting enables Davison and Milbank to

construct an ideal parish church with an ideal priest and laity, assembled from the best of the already selected cuts and with some idealized reinforcements. To return to the hunter and hunted metaphor: Davison and Milbank have constructed the ultimate warrior, one that can only exist in the perfection of idealization, who is then released to hunt down and destroy theoretical unarmed civilians who are doing their best to make a way in life within their cultures. Yet neither the hunter nor the hunted exist because their real-life examples offered by the authors are flawed. At the same time the hunters have made the mistake of not seeing that they are afflicted with the very thing they despise in the hunted: they too are time, space- and culture-bound humans.

That said, despite the gladiatorial presentation there is a subtle engaged interior, which offers the occasional gentle invitation to a conversation: 'Our purpose with this book is to call for a reflection upon the dynamics at work here, and a greater degree of awareness that there are losses when old forms are lightly discarded' (p. 9). While it seems to me that there is an urgent need for such a conversation, sadly I think Davison and Milbank have not treated their intended conversation partner fairly.

Graham Stacey
King's College London

Edward Madigan, *Faith under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). ISBN 978-0-230-23745-2.
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The First World War has a unique place in the popular culture of Great Britain and many of the combatant countries. But common perception of that conflict is often characterized by words such as 'meaningless' and 'futile'. That the Tommies were 'lions led by donkeys' remains widely accepted, as does the assertion that almost every family suffered through death or injury. All these 'facts' are, at best, half-truths. Opinion at the time almost universally endorsed the moral validity of the war; generals did not shelter from danger well behind the lines; the total cost in human life was great, but fell well short of justifying the 'loss of a generation' rhetoric. Finally, while trench warfare was inevitably a matter of attrition, by 1918 new methods of engagement led to what have been described as 'the greatest series of victories in British military history'.[1]

For two decades, historians have been offering a more nuanced narrative of the First World War. Part of that task has involved identifying the origins of public perceptions of futility – and they are easily found. School children in Britain have for at least a generation studied the First World War guided not primarily by historians, but by teachers of English literature. The poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon have become set texts, to be read alongside *All Quiet on the Western Front*. These literary sources almost invariably date from the late 1920s or early 1930s, the period of disenchantment in which it became clear that the hopes

1. Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory – The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline, 2001), p. xvii.