

self-giving and the sharing of challenges overcome the exploitative rhetorical discourses of the 'war on terror' and 'the market' (p. 246), and their resultant effects upon both the natural environment and what Pope Francis has recently called our 'social ecology'. The Christian vision is one that encompasses both the grand universal categories as well as the seemingly banal and innocuous actions of human beings as they attend to one another, and every action has an eternal and ethical value.

For readers of Levinas and Derrida and of theology, Shepherd's book is a beautiful contribution to a fascinating and renewing conversation. He is willing to follow the logic of his own argument and be unsettled by it, and invites his readers to do the same. If, however, a criticism is to be made, it might do to consider a theme not at all prominent in the book, that of sin. While there is appeal to the broad and deep tradition of Christian thought (across Western and Eastern divisions), and there is a credible reading of figures such as Moltmann and Barth along the journey, there is a tendency here to avoid the language of sin and, in its place, to refer to the mimesis of objectifying the Other, of violence and irrationality, and to the exploitation and commodification of others (including children and refugees). No doubt, all of these are devastating realities to which theologians are called to address their biblical critique, but the notion of sin is an important part of the Bible's witness, and indeed Christian witness, in that it is the name given to the conscious departure of humanity from light to darkness, through which evil of every kind is given its entry point in a world that, to begin with, is deemed 'good'. Shepherd gives a concise and orderly account of sin about half way through the book, but does not take it up with energy again. His enthusiasm for a grounded hospitality can be refined further with a more vigilant watchfulness for the reality of sin and its place in a theology that meets and is confronted by alterity. Perhaps this is merely a reflection of the nature of theology in the contemporary academy, and perhaps all of us are guilty of it, and, in fairness to Shepherd, he certainly gives it some treatment. Nevertheless, the boldness of the author's other claims can be strengthened by a more constant awareness of the insidiousness of sin, and the spiritual tradition that sin wins when we avoid naming it as such.

In any case, the above criticism does not rob this book of its value. It asserts a theology of hospitality that is well argued and enticing, and which avoids falling into sectarian or denominational ghettos along the way. For those who are wrestling with Derrida and Levinas but have eyes also for the cross and the resurrection, *The Gift of the Other* is a must read and an unavoidable contribution in a lively and important debate.

Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships*

(London: SCM, 2014). xvii + 110 pp. £16.99. ISBN 978-0-334-05188-6 (pbk)

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For at least a generation, progressive theologians have been writing books, articles and committee reports proposing that Christendom should embrace same-sex marriage, or something roughly analogous to it. A familiar premise in this pile of paper and pixels is

that in trying to interpret Moses, Jesus and Paul, the ecumenical tradition of Augustine and Chrysostom, Aquinas and Luther, Barth and Wojtyła has had a crabbed and pinched perspective on sex. This ancient magisterial tradition has counselled continence outside of sexually differentiated marriage, but the modern revisers, to varying degrees, find this discipline burdensome and unnecessary. If the revisionists are correct, then the narrow gate and hard road (Matt. 7:14) are at least a bit wider and easier than the old communion of saints realised.

I'm still not persuaded. But within the revisionist genre, Robert Song's *Covenant and Calling* shoots to the head of the class because he realises how many 'defences of same-sex relationships ... convey a sense of not having really done full justice to the thick texture of Christian thinking' (p. x), and he is wary of 'importing too readily the preferred idioms and conceptualities of contemporary secular culture' (p. xiii). Song perceives that many liberal accounts are 'incipiently docetic' (p. xv). He intends to put the new sexuality on firmer foundations by attending to orthodox accounts of creation, theological anthropology, salvation history and eschatology. Refreshingly, Song seems to think that classical Christian doctrine is a gift, an epistemological starting point for discerning the signs of the times. For these intentions, which are not always fulfilled in this book but which are so frustratingly rare in this genre, I salute this book and its author.

Song follows the tradition in so far as he explains how marriage is created by God for the sake of human flourishing and training in holiness. Marriage understood theologically has a sexually differentiated structure, in large part for the sake of having children. Yet sexuality is not a timeless and static phenomenon; its meaning shifts with the coming of Christ and the different eras of salvation history. For example, in light of the coming eschaton, celibacy is also 'an appropriate stance for those who wish to live in the new age' (p. 18). So far, so orthodox.

But trouble emerges as Song pursues the question that drives this book: '[D]oes it follow that the Church may recognise only two callings? Or might it be that there could be a third?' (p. 22). Song proposes that the hidden logic of the tradition entails a third vocation, an option other than marriage or celibacy, an option that he concedes this same tradition has managed to overlook for two thousand years, something called 'covenant partnership', by which he means sexually active and deliberately infertile hetero- or homosexual relationships. 'Throughout Christian history there has been an assumption that there are at most two callings, to marriage or to celibacy, in accordance with the New Testament pattern which never envisages any possibility of a third' (p. 23). That he nevertheless pursues this third possibility gives this book a paradoxical character—it is cautious and audacious at the same time. The rhetorical tone is modest, and Song clearly intends courteous, even-handed deliberation and moderation as a theological method, but the book's purpose is to entertain seriously the possibility that our own moment in time has uniquely privileged access to God's true intentions for human sexuality.

Song believes that because the tradition embraces contingently infertile marriages as true marriages (e.g., post-menopausal marriage), the traditional unitive and procreative goods of marriage can be validly separated in principle. But fertility as contingently lost and infertility as deliberately sought are not in principle equivalent, and it isn't clear why the former should license the latter (cf. many books and essays by Robert George and Ryan Anderson for more on this important point).

Song also surveys some traditional arguments for the significance of sexual difference in theological anthropology and marriage. (These pages include a kind footnote about *Creation and Covenant*, my own book on the topic, which has a title similar to but tellingly distinct from Song's book.) Song describes his covenant partnerships as witnessing to the eschaton, a period in salvation history when he believes sexual difference can be treated as obsolete. Song argues that 'without procreation the reasons for sexual differentiation become moot' (p. 48). But this claim is incorrect. In the tradition, the significance of sexual difference is not exhausted in procreative marriage. In the tradition, sexual difference matters because, while it is given in creation, creation itself is forward looking, and the story of the sexes does not end either in creation or in procreation. Precisely because creation always has an eschatological aspect, sexual difference also has changing but enduring significance at each stage of salvation history. For that reason, and it is a crucial point which Song overlooks, sexual difference is never obsolete, and no human vocation in any era can treat it with indifference. 'We do not know', Song writes, 'what form our bodies will take in the life to come' (p. 61), and that is true, but traditionally Christians also believe that the goods of creation and the personalising features of our embodied identity are redeemed, renewed, glorified, and even intensified in the eschaton, not made redundant and cast aside.

Why would anyone seeking a Christian way of life that anticipates the eschaton not follow the tradition and recommend celibacy? This book claims to discern a deep, undiscovered vocation that has been hidden in Christianity all along, a convenient third way for those of us lucky enough to be born in these times. Maybe, but I suspect that, for many, the appeal of such a claim stems less from pliantly following where the theo-logic leads, and more from pragmatic concern for people who ache with urgent loneliness. Consider this passage from Song: 'To touch, to hold, to feel, to need: the vulnerability of baring one's body to another, of being fully known by another and yet of being fully accepted by that other, and of rendering that love in return, can indeed make sexual intimacy a participation in divine grace' (p. 61). The potential balm of romantic partnership is powerful, and these words echo Rowan Williams's famous essay on the body's grace (Song cites the same passage from the Williams essay that Eugene Rogers deployed to similar effect in *Sexuality and the Christian Body*). Many compassionate people, perhaps extrapolating from their own longings or even happy experiences, feel intuitively that it is cruel to deny gays and lesbians this haven of erotic intimacy in a lonely world. On the terms of modernism or romanticism, this intuition is undoubtedly true.

But is this intuition true in Christian terms? Note that, as Song says elsewhere, 'the whole eschatological and ascetic thrust of the New Testament is towards a vision of the resurrection life which ... is ... beyond marriage, sex and family altogether' (p. 74). Perhaps another way to explain the paradox of this book, then, is that Song feels enough accountability to the New Testament that he can't ignore it, but his proposal for 'covenant partnerships' as the third vocation is premised on what he clearly feels is the emotional inadequacy of the New Testament's plain sense.

Orthodox theological anthropology certainly teaches that we were all created in and for loving communion, and therefore it is altogether admirable and essential for Christians to be motivated by a compassionate desire that no one should be denied consoling humane fellowship. But unmarried Christians historically find this communion not in

naked mutual caress but in worshipping celibate community. Such communities are robustly physical in an eschatologically evocative way, sublimating eros and finding their consoling grace in the sacraments, the corporal works of mercy, and cultural beauty. As Song himself says, 'celibacy is not the same as singleness', for classic celibacy enables new ways of belonging to one another (p. 54). He alludes to a 'renewal of communal celibacy' happening today, 'complemented by proposals for exploring celibate spiritual friendships' (p. 54). Indeed, in his bibliography, Song mentions the work of Wesley Hill, a recent PhD from Song's own theology department at Durham. Hill is an advocate for 'parish celibacy' and extended hospitable households. Hill is one of the leading lights of the Spiritual Friendship blogging community. I think Hill is heroic, one of several chaste gay Christians writing today. Hill lives and works within the traditional disciplines, seeking their renewal, writing with creativity about the possibilities of celibacy and with candor about its attendant suffering. But Song mentions these threads and clues only in passing, instead giving the weight of his project to exploring his novel third vocation.

Despite my frustrations with this book, I give genuine thanks and pay homage to Song when he writes like this: 'With the decline of traditional authority, people are forced on their own resources and find themselves having to negotiate lives in fluid circumstances over which they have varying degrees of control. This is not remotely the same as a dogmatic selfish individualism, but is more an effort to ensure one's emotional survival and retain a degree of personal integrity in the context of a realistic sense of what is pragmatically possible' (p. 99). The final chapter has more like that. Here Song steps back from discussing covenant partnerships to address the context that all Christians face. The sterner moralists on the orthodox side of these debates would do well to listen to Song in these moments, for he has a gift for seeing tender possibilities that fiercer polemicists will overlook. Maybe that's why I admire this book's modest rhetorical tone so much—I need this medicine myself. In these moments, he helpfully and sensitively diagnoses the urgent pastoral challenges that we face today.

But still, for most of the book, and even in certain turns of phrase in the more open-ended conclusion, there remains the underlying audacious claim. I cannot follow Song in these places. Jesus and the apostles also encountered and loved struggling people, people as susceptible to heartache and hormones as we are, and nevertheless preached conversion to counter-cultural chastity. Jesus and the apostles thought we needed liberation from the pressures and anxieties of concupiscence, a liberation that enables and requires either celibacy or marriage. No doubt it is difficult to cultivate these practices, then or now, with cruciform suffering and many missteps likely along the way. But ultimately, as Scripture and the apostolic witness insist in their plain sense, the traditional way is the way of real mercy. I cannot help but notice how the same apostolic Catholicism which preserved and bequeathed celibacy and the three goods of marriage to the Christian West also developed the expectation of pastoral accompaniment in sacramental confession. Historically, the summons to chastity, by means of either celibacy or marriage, was embedded in communities with at least semi-public penitential practices. The Real Presence is not only on the altar or in the Word, but also in the confessional. Yet the interconnected and cruciform sacramental economy is almost always missing from contemporary revisionist literature about sex. It is a real absence in this book too. I worry about that. In the fragments of western Christendom, as participation in all seven

sacraments dwindle to a remnant, maybe it is no coincidence that the need for embodied grace devolves into quasi-Christian romanticised and eroticised forms.

Our forefathers in faith believed that while continence outside of marriage sometimes feels like a cross, this kind of suffering could also be redemptive. Our predecessors understood this kind of sexual asceticism as preparation for the Kingdom of God. Today it sometimes feels like there is a queue of theologians at the narrow gate, negotiating for alternatives. I think the ancient communion of saints would want to reassure them that although the road is hard, grace and mercy abound along the way.

Rebecca Todd Peters, *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World*

(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014). xx + 141 pp. £25.99. ISBN 978-1-4514-6558-7 (pbk)

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The ethic of solidarity developed in this book 'is intended to offer first-world Christians a new strategy for navigating the morally precarious waters of neoliberal globalization' (p. xiv). In broad terms, Todd Peters's strategy for developing solidarity ethics is rooted in the principles of sustainability and social justice in ways that require first-world Christians 'to work simultaneously on transforming personal habits and lifestyles as well as global economic and political structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice' (p. 2). Something is deeply amiss in our world where basic education for everyone in the world would cost six billion US dollars annually while US citizens spend eight billion dollars on cosmetics and Europeans spend eleven billion dollars on ice cream (p. 1). From this starting point, Todd Peters invites Christian people to examine their own lives and find ways of resisting naïve complicity in unjust social systems that advantage the privileged but exploit and dehumanise others.

Chapter titles convey the structure and flow of *Solidarity Ethics*: 1 'Theories of Solidarity', 2 'Foundations for Transformation', 3 'A Theo-Ethics of Solidarity', 4 'Moving toward Solidarity', 5 'Embodying Solidarity, Living into Justice', 6 'Conclusion: Hope for Tomorrow'. Chapter 1 contrasts secularist meanings of 'solidarity' from the French Revolution's notion of *fraternité* through August Comte and Emil Durkheim's respective sociological considerations of social or mechanical solidarity and Karl Weber's idea of *Vergesellschaftung* to Karl Marx and beyond, with the idea in theological disciplines. The broad conclusion is that secularist treatments are diverse, mean different things to different people, and hence remain vague. By contrast, Christian doctrine from New Testament notions of *agapē* through to Roman Catholic social teaching in the twentieth century retain at their heart compassion and collective action for the poor. Subsequent chapters continue the theme of contrast by drawing attention to stark differences between Western values of individual rights and private property versus a Christian theology of solidarity rooted in the values of mutuality, justice and sustainability.

A distinguishing feature of the book is its targeting of people of privilege. *Solidarity Ethics* is informed by liberation theologies from around the world but written to help