

John Reader and Christopher R. Baker, eds., *Entering the New Theological Space: Blurred Encounters of Faith, Politics and Community* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), pp. xiii + 241, £55.00, ISBN 978-0-7546-6339-3 (hbk).

Arising from their belief that the time has come to help missiological communities to engage in the spaces opened up between post-Christendom politics and interfaith actualities, the contributors to *Entering the New Theological Space* map inter-organisational networks, rural and urban spaces, the status of the paid and the unpaid, and the contested and evolving relationship between faith and science. They ‘offer some idea of the complexity and interdisciplinarity associated with this ‘third space’ (p. 5), which discards the oft-maintained binarism of the either/or space. Thus, they enable readers to analyse the significance of the ‘blurred encounters’ that, the editors believe, are ‘forcing the church to develop increasingly fluid and experimental forms’ (p. 10).

Each of the fifteen contributions to this volume is in its own way stimulating, and most are well-researched and eruditely penned. They cover a range of topics including John Atherton’s ethical, economical theological reflection on a ‘pilgrimage’ down Edinburgh’s Royal Mile exploring places where ‘inevitable and potentially creative’ (p. 25) “edges” have become mainstream’ (p. 19); Malcolm Brown’s piece on the ‘social atomisation’ and ‘rootlessness’ (p. 70) of London’s suburbs; Margaret Goodall’s exploration of human personhood in a thought-provoking piece on dementia; Clare McBeath’s investigation into whether a community or a city can be said to ‘suffer from mental illness’ (p. 147); and Philip Wagstaff’s study of the fluidity and stability of rural ministry.

Two essays merit special mention. First, Martyn Percy considers the nature of the cultural dynamics, implicit theology, and ‘invisible religion’ (p. 179 borrowing Thomas Luckmann’s phrase) that lead to requests for baptism (or ‘christening’) of children from non-churched families. He writes, concerning the ‘deeply coded ways in which people talk and act about God’, that ‘religious language is carried in the emotion, timbre and cadence of worship’ and that ‘deeply coded language is not [necessarily] a strategy for avoiding explicit theological language’ (p. 184). Percy’s attempt to sketch a theology of cultural conversation, and to explore some implications of such conversations for missional and risky engagement in the ‘areas of overlap and hinterlands between the life of the church and the world’ (p. 179) merits further thought.

Secondly, drawing upon the work of Bruno Latour and Slavoj Žižek, and bringing their thought into conversation with events surrounding the 2007 outbreak (in Surrey) of foot and mouth disease, John Reader contributes an intriguing, if somewhat undercooked, essay on the nature, possibility and linguistic challenges posed to truth speech by the mutual encounter of science and theology. He concludes by stating that it is ‘only by keeping the insights and theories of both faith and science in circulation’ that we can be ‘certain of remaining “in the truth”’, and that it is ‘only by loading into the process that contact with the wider world’ that we ‘avoid an unhealthy closure of questioning and debate’ (p. 208).

Despite the intriguing range of the book's reflections, I have some reservations about this book. There is a noticeable absence in this volume of any discussion of the significance and place of technology (blogging, social media and gaming, for example) in theological and ecclesial discourse and praxis. In addition, there are a significant number of typographical, grammatical and factual errors (John Knox, for example, was not the 'first Presbyterian minister of St Giles and Scotland' (p. 20)), errors which one expects would be corrected before print and to be rare in a book wearing such an inflated price tag. Finally, while one may well concur that 'all the essays in this book are a testament to the ongoing adaptability and robust mutuality of Christian thought and the church' (p. 7), if this volume represents 'the new theological space' then one might be forgiven for observing that, with one or two exceptions, such space is a little light on the theology front.

These reservations aside, much of this volume deserves wide reading, and the ongoing conversations encouraged therein are to be commended. Social planners, missiologists, pastoral practitioners and those training them will all benefit from reading this book, and from taking up the challenge to engage in the interdisciplinary and multi-layered interstices of cultural, political and theological realities.

Jason A. Goroncy
Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, New Zealand