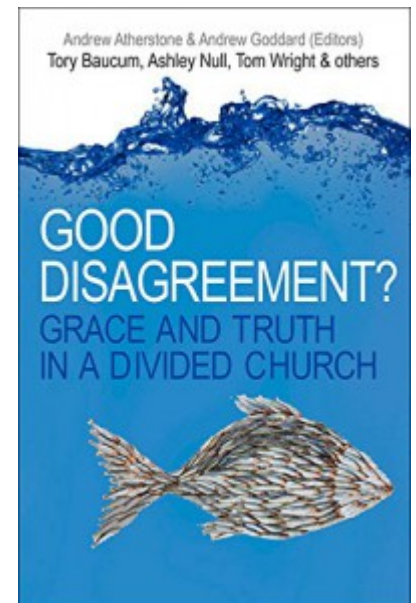


Review: Good Disagreement?

Pt. 1, Foreword

I have recently obtained a copy of *Good Disagreement? Grace and Truth in a Divided Church*. It is of current significance here in the Church of England as it informs and colours the contemporary debate about sexual ethics and gender identity in the Church. The ongoing *Shared Conversations* process is the current internal step for resolution, and the forthcoming meeting of the Primates in January 2016 is the last-gasp step in the wider Anglican Communion, as it currently formally exists.



I have come to this book as someone with a deal of familiarity with the issues, but somewhat from afar. I have been following the debate since the touchstone issues of 2003 in The Episcopal Church (US). I have been involved in briefing senior figures in my former diocese with respect to the Windsor Report, Lambeth 2008, the development of the now effectively defunct Anglican Covenant, as well as the foment and formation of GAFCON and the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans.

But I am new to the Church of England and there appears to be a deal of difference here. By my (limited and recent) observation, the rhetoric is more precise, the politics are understated, and the balance between parochial and episcopal influence is more even. The different parties exist along the spectrum here (although the edges are fuzzier) and the ability to not encroach and to live and let live runs deep... until some of the things that are held in common are touched. And then it matters. Because those common things tend to be *core*

things.

For better or for worse, sexual ethics and gender identity is core. And so the current conflict in my mind has three different outcomes; we discern what is “really core” and resolve to move differences to the periphery and walk together; we resolve differences and either reaffirm or adjust what is core, which remains common ground; we cannot resolve our differences, which remain core, and so we agree to walk apart on different ground. In my current mind I cannot conceive how the first of these is tenable, the second would take a miracle, and the third would be regretful. To that end I admire Archbishop Welby’s resolve to sail through these waters nevertheless. I am hoping that *Good Disagreement?* might help plot a chart. ++Justin writes in the Foreword:

Whether each side has much or little in common with one another, whether the outcome is unanimity or separation, it seems the only way to imitate Christ in our conflicts is to invest trust, love, and time in the people from whom we are currently divided.

Could we call that grace-filled realism? Perhaps it’s just a long way of saying “speaking the truth in love”, which cannot be *ad nauseum*, and does foresee an “outcome.”

Unlike other book reviews that I provide here, I am not going to reflect after the fact. I am going to consider this book chapter by chapter; it is after all a series of essays. This book will be a journey for me, and I will reflect on the journey as we go. Bon voyage.

- Part 1: Foreword by Justin Welby
- Part 2: Disagreeing with Grace by Andrew Atherstone and Andrew Goddard
- Part 3: Reconciliation in the New Testament by Ian Paul
- Part 4: Division and Discipline in the New Testament

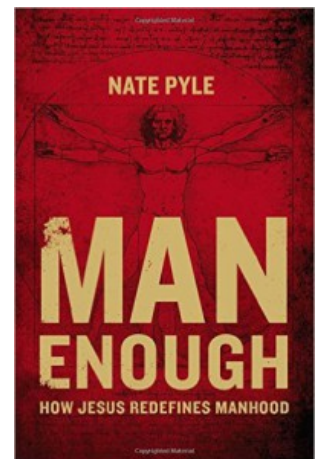
Church by Michael B. Thompson

- Part 5: Pastoral Theology for Perplexing Topics: Paul and Adiaphora by Tom Wright
 - Part 6: Good Disagreement and the Reformation by Ashley Null
 - Part 7: Ecumenical (Dis)agreements by Andrew Atherstone and Martin Davie
 - Part 8: Good Disagreement between Religions by Toby Howarth
 - Part 9: From Castles to Conversations by Lis Stoddard and Clare Hendy & Ministry in Samaria by Tory Baucum
 - Part 10, Mediation and the Church's Mission by Stephen Ruttle
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Review: Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood

I've read many books that seek to present a biblical view of manhood. We are not the first era to have waning numbers of men at church. Recent solutions for ecclesial emasculation have tended to range from exegetical insipidity to testicular ferocity.

All fall short. Nevertheless, I was looking forward to reading this very recent contribution from Christian blogger, Nate Pyle. Pyle also falls short, but he comes the closest I've seen.



This is because Pyle takes a firm Christocentric approach. The goal of the human life is not to be more “manly” (or more “ladylike”) but to be more like Jesus. **“Jesus is calling men**

and women to become more wholly human” (p156).

Pyle’s approach is therefore not only well grounded but also very useful. He can talk about the weakness, pain, vulnerability, and integrity of Jesus. All men must encounter such things, and embrace them healthily, in order to mature as a person, and therefore as a man. This is great stuff. When I think of the “strong” men that I want to emulate, I think of those who find strength in weakness, embrace the pain of life and persist, who are open and vulnerable, and who have the integrity of being the same person in all circumstances. When I counsel myself, or others, it is areas like these that need to be confronted: don’t do the bravado thing, don’t turn pain into anger, don’t run away in fear, don’t divide your life with false comfort and sin.

The book is therefore rich and applicable. It balances the “American Christian Man” caricature which is (as I have discovered about most American caricatures) not caricature but disconcerting reality. The MMA-loving, Promise-Keeping™, Courageous™, Man of God urging his brothers to “man up” while backdropped by ammo boxes and warplanes may work for some, but is unhelpful, at best, for many others. At worst this caricature turns being a husband into not much more than “looking after the little lady” and links male human value with some narrow form of productivity. Gladly, Pyle, is much more in tune with the real world.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that he couldn’t have been slightly more coherent in his pursuit. He runs into, and doesn’t overcome, an age-old problem. I encountered it for myself when training as a preacher. We were encouraged to present sermons that were accessible to both men and women.

But what does that mean? Should I use illustrations that cross the full-range of stereotypes; should I make an equal number of references to knitting compared to football? Or should I simply presume that both men and women would have the wits to understand and dissect whatever point I was trying to

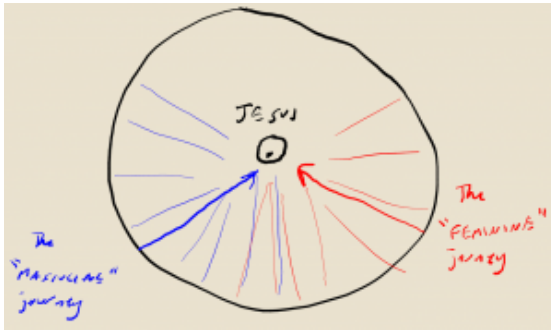
make in the way I was trying to make it? 99% of the time I choose the second option which doesn't play the gender game, but ignores it, which is the point. But Nathan Pyle has written a book *about* masculinity and also doesn't want to play the game. And this is the problem: he wants to engage the issue of manhood, but spends the whole time hovering around without landing on the heart of the issue.

On the one hand "masculinity" is for Pyle the caricature that he wants to avoid. Therefore he is at pains to show that **"nowhere does the Bible say that Jesus came to model masculinity"** (p92). On the other hand, Jesus is the model human, whom men are called to imitate, who exhibits "both feminine and masculine characteristics" (p93). So does Jesus encapsulate masculinity or not? Is he redefining masculinity, or is he transcending it? Does the goal of becoming more wholly human mean denying my masculinity, or embracing my femininity, or does it mean redefining masculinity in terms of the balance? Pyle never gets his semantics locked down.

Masculine characteristics ("Men love to be agents of change in the world" (p160)) are sometimes presumed, sometimes belittled, other times embraced by Pyle. Sometimes they are simply dismissed as being not something that a woman couldn't also exhibit. Nothing he says is wrong, it's just that he mixes and matches his observation, articulation, rejection and aspiration of the masculine without bringing it together.

It's great that Jesus is our goal, but why are men like men, and what particular issues might they face in seeking their goal? It's not enough for him to throw his hands in the air, as he does, and say "it's complex." That's not why I bought the book! I can do that myself!

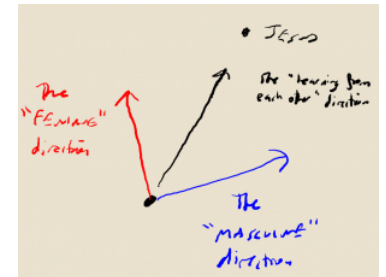
Having said that, Pyle has made me think my own thoughts. In particular he clears the ground for what might be called **vector complementarianism** which goes like this: Let us not define gender in terms of characteristics (that can happen,



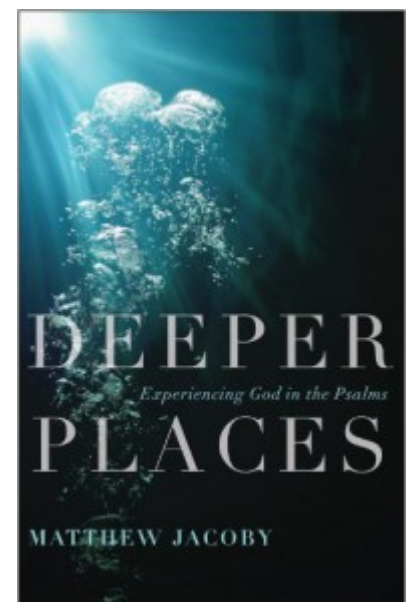
but it's secondary and therefore very blurry).

Rather, if being wholly human is our goal, and if that goal is centred on Jesus Christ, then **let us consider gender differences in terms of *direction***. In general, men and women

will grow towards Christ in *different directions*, like radials of a circle approaching the centre. Men and women do not absolutely *need* each other in order to do this, but the propensities of one, added to (not eliminating) the propensities of the other can result in a Christward direction. That's something to work on.



Review: Deeper Places



Gill and I are long time fans of the Australian Christian musical phenomenon that is *Sons of Korah*. Headed by Matthew Jacoby, the *Sons of Korah* project is to set the Old Testament

psalms to music. Their philosophy is one of interpretation rather than *re*-interpretation; they provide a literal musical “translation” more than a paraphrase. The lyrics are often word-for-word of an English text. The composition makes heavy use of strings and multi-layered folk melodies to communicate not just the meaning, but the *feeling*, of the psalms. They are both affective and effective.

It was a great delight, therefore, to have Matthew Jacoby’s book *Deeper Places* thrust into my hands by Gill after she had eagerly devoured it herself.

Here Jacoby lays out not just his philosophy for approaching the psalms, but the philosophical imprints of the spirituality that he has learned from them. It is the essence of his doctoral studies and so this is no touchy-feely pop-psych pseudo-tract; it is a deeply applicable theological treatise.

It has fed my soul, expanded my mind, deepened my homiletics, because it has drawn me to the Word of God and the words of God’s people.

For Jacoby the psalms express an holistic spiritual journey. The ultimate end is to instil “rightly oriented desire” (p68) in the hearers/readers/singers. It is no accident that the “chief end of man” is quoted towards the end of the book as he explores themes of *enjoyment* and praise.

At the highest point of the spiritual journey portrayed by the Psalter, we find people enjoying God. In their enjoyment of God, they become vessels of praise to God. This deeper sense of praise is precisely what is meant to “glorify.” We can praise God in a shallower sense with words alone, but we can only glorify God by enjoying him. (p161)

But, as they say, it’s the journey that counts. The psalms are *not* just about praise and glory, they are also full of query, doubt, tension, and raw lament. It is in the consideration of these aspects that Jacoby’s commentary is of

the greatest value.

Jacoby locates the beginning of the praise-bound journey not in victory but in the raw brokenness of this world.

From our perspectives, they [the psalms] express the desire to feel loved, to be affirmed and validated, to feel secure, and so forth. This earthly spirituality, as I have called it, is also seen in the psalms in the ample expression they give to the complications of our human dysfunction. Human dysfunction does not guide these expressions, but our dysfunction does cause a constant tension in our relationship with God that must be brought to the surface with honest communication, as it must be in any relationship. This is what we see in the psalms. (p26)

In his definitive metaphor God is imaged as an ocean in which we are suspended. The human dysfunction is a shell that not only insulates us from the divine, but propels us upwards to the shallows like a bobbing submarine. In contrast, the journey of the psalms is ever deeper, and necessarily a journey of tension; the lament of human hurt mixes with the life-filled promises of God until the shell bursts and we are consumed inwardly and outwardly by God's presence, which we therefore glorify.

"...the psalmists deliberately bring two things into tension. They deliberately highlight the reality of their situation as it stands in tension with the reality of God and his promises. As both realities are amplified, this very tension then becomes the seedbed for faith and hope. Faith is conceived by the injection of the divine promise into the open wound of a heart that has allowed itself to be wounded by reality." (p86)

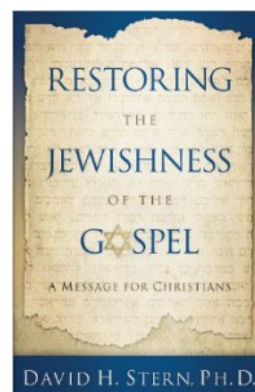
I have long rejected the association of "spiritual" with "ethereal." To be spiritual is to go deep, into gut-level

issues. And spiritual work is work that (often painfully) adjusts our foundations, or is so rooted upon our foundations that the depths of our soul is welled up and out. Jacoby threads this notion through the Psalter, revealing it's nature not just as a song-book but as an exercise-book for life.

Like his songs, Jacoby has taken what already exists and has brought it to life in lively language that I for one will be referencing again and again. He has done the preacher's task in an extraordinary way. In the very best sense he has opened the Word of God.

Review: Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel

Given my appreciation of David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible* translation I was looking forward to a brisk read through his diminutive *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*. I was a little disappointed.



I was hoping for an exposition of the Gospel which tapped into the depths of it's Jewish roots. I wanted to be excited with soteriology and eschatology filled with the earthy historicity of God's ancient people. There was a little of that, but only parenthetically.

I was also hoping for insight into the common roots of

Christian and Jewish spirituality. There's a little more of this. Here's an insight that's quite helpful:

What is it that God through his Messiah, Yeshua, does for human beings? The answer: (1) He makes them conscious of what sin is, and through Yeshua the Messiah he offers forgiveness of sin... Then, if they are Gentiles and therefore do not already belong to his own special people, the People of God, (2) he makes them part of the People of God, (3) he makes them participate in the covenants, (4) he fulfills his promises, (5) he gives them hope in this difficult world, and finally, (6) he makes his very self known to them. If they are Jews and therefore do belong to the People of God, they already have items (2) through (6) and do not need to be given them again.

But mostly this short treatise is an attempt to convince Christians that engagement with Judaism is necessary, not merely as an evangelistic strategy, but as a fundamental aspect of God's overall plans for salvation history. But perhaps some people need convincing of that; I don't think I do.

So the question raised and answered by the title is merely "Yes, we should restore the Jewishness of the Gospel", not "The Gospel is actually Jewish, here's what that means for you." Not bad, but not as useful as I hoped.