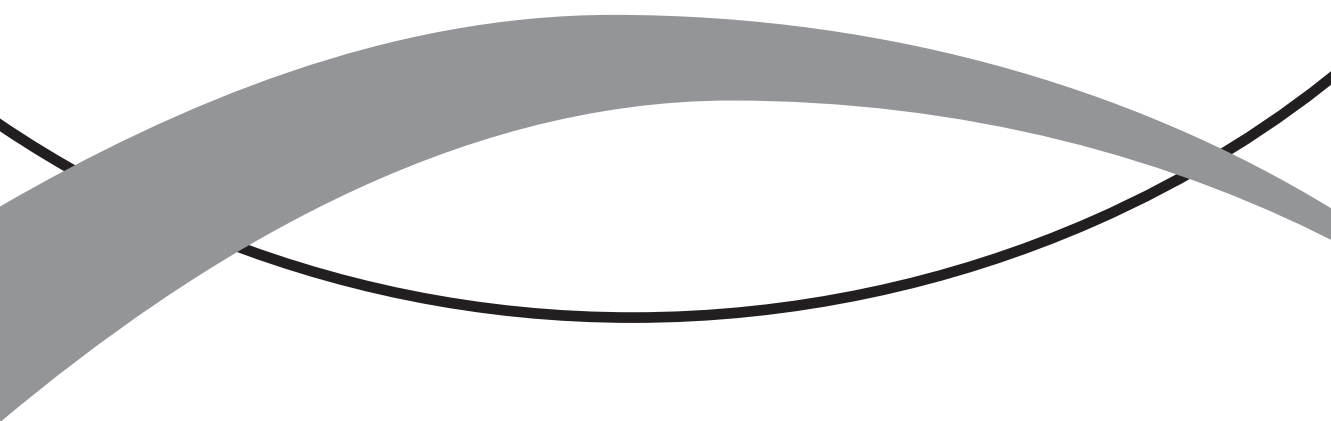


UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

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**UNITING CHURCH ENCOUNTERS
WITH THE MIDDLE EAST**

Vol. 28, No.1



Abbreviations

Documents

Hyperlinks are embedded in the full name and provide access to the full documents.

<i>AssMin</i>	Assembly Minutes
<i>BOU</i>	Basis of Union
<i>CS</i>	Covenanting Statement
<i>RP</i>	Revised Preamble
<i>UCMC</i>	The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church
<i>UCAConst</i>	Uniting Church Constitution
<i>UCAREgs2025</i>	Uniting Church Regulations 2025
<i>UIW2</i>	Uniting in Worship 2

Institutions and Organisations

<i>UCA</i>	Uniting Church in Australia
<i>UAICC</i>	Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
<i>WCC</i>	World Council of Churches
<i>ASC</i>	Assembly Standing Committee

This journal

This abbreviation can be used in bibliographical references to articles published in this Journal.

<i>UCS</i>	Uniting Church Studies
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Reviews

Theology After Gaza: A Global Anthology,

Mitri Raheb and Graham McGeoch (Editors),
Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2025 (ISBN:
9798385233649 (paperback), 9798385233656
(hardcover), 9798385233663 (ebook)).

Derek McDougall

This is an important book. With an estimated 75,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza in the Israeli response to the Hamas attacks of 7 October, 2023, out of a total population of about 2 million (May 2026), this conflict is one of the most horrific episodes in modern history, a veritable genocide. Gaza cries out for theological interpretation. *Theology After Gaza* provides such an interpretation from a primarily Christian perspective.

The major theme in the book is the call for justice for Palestinians. There are five sections and 19 chapters overall, not counting the Introduction and Afterword. The sections cover orientation issues (the position of the Christian minority in Gaza; Palestine as a decolonisation issue), theological orientation, intersectionality between the theological perspective and other issues, more specifically “Church” issues, and questions of resistance. There is a strong majority of authors from the Global South, including Palestinians; some of these authors are based in Western countries, especially the United States (US).

With justice for the Palestinians the major theme of the book, one of the most important chapters is chapter 3 on “Theology After Gaza: Political Context and Theological Challenge” by Mitri Raheb, a prominent Palestinian liberation theologian. Raheb writes of the way in which theology has been used by Zionism as a form of settler colonialism (through Christian Zionism), also drawing attention to the

theme of the Warrior God as conveyed especially in the book of Joshua. The Warrior God theology has been used by Israel but also by Hamas in the attack of 7 October 2023. Raheb’s plea is that theology be decolonised: “Theology after Gaza must expose global Israel, engage in the transnational solidarity of global Palestine, and highlight this struggle as the ethical and theological challenge of our time” (58).

Nearly all chapters develop the theme of justice for the Palestinians. In the context of developing a liberation theology of solidarity with the Palestinians, Sarojini Nadar advocates a “preferential option” for Palestinians (chapter 4). In the context of resistance struggles more generally, Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez argues for the agency of the Palestinians (and others) through “combative hope” (chapter 16).

While the emphasis in the book is on Christian theological perspectives, there is also some attention to Islamic and Jewish perspectives. Kawtar Najib argues for an “Islamic return to justice”, emphasising the need to combat anti-Palestinian racism (chapter 10). Chapter 11 (by Hatem Bazian) is primarily an attack on the Abraham Accords, and especially the role of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in cooperating with Israel. This “Muslim Zionism” was subsequently highlighted with the revelation that the UAE had secretly joined the US-Israeli attack on Iran that began on 28 February, 2026.

Atalia Omer, a Jewish American at the University of Notre Dame, offers a valuable Jewish perspective, arguing for a reparative approach in Palestine that would involve Jews making a “decolonial” move and decolonising Judaism. This is similar to the argument of the revisionist Israeli historian Ilan Pappé in *Israel on the Brink* (Oneworld, 2026) that

Jews in Palestine should simply live alongside other communities in Palestine (most notably the Palestinians of course) but without claiming special rights for themselves.

There are many other issues covered in this book, each of which deserves to be addressed but this cannot be done in a single review. While the book focuses on the Palestinians as one people, there is some discussion of the position of Palestinian Christians, beginning with chapter 1 by Raheb. Edward Said, perhaps the most famous of Palestinian intellectuals, was a Christian. Among Palestinians, Christians are a minority (down to 1-2 percent of Palestinians from more than ten percent during the British Mandate in Palestine), and in Gaza very much so, with most Gazan Christians being Greek Orthodox. Raheb writes that “The ongoing genocide in Gaza will end Christianity in the Gaza Strip” (16). In chapter 12 Yousef Kamal AlKhouri uses the term “ecclesiocide” to describe the fate of the Church in Gaza.

While *Theology After Gaza* is not intended as a work of historical analysis, the historical context is important. At times I thought there was some oversimplification. It is clearly the case that British imperialism enabled Zionism, with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 as a key development and then the brutal suppression of the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 as a culminating point. However, the British approach began to change in the context of the Revolt, with the realisation that military suppression was not sustainable on a long term basis. The book refers to the report of the Peel Commission in July 1937 as first advocating partition (24-25), but the subsequent White Paper in May 1939 argued for independence for (one) Palestine after ten years with Jews and Arabs having equal rights, with (limited) immigration allowed for the next five years and after that no extension unless consent from the Arabs was forthcoming. Israel celebrates Orde Wingate (an ardent Christian Zionist) as the most

zealous of the British officers leading operations in the 1936-1939 Revolt, but the changing political context should also be recognised. By the 1940s the more militant Zionists were engaging in terrorist acts against the British. Britain by this point wanted accommodation between the Zionists and the Arabs of Palestine, viewing the Zionists as the aggressive force. It was too late.

Global South perspectives are foremost in this book but there is not universal support among the Christians of the Global South for Palestinian liberation theology. Evangelical Christianity is strong in many parts of the Global South, and it often supports Christian Zionism. This is clear among the Pacific island countries, for example. When the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of a two state solution on 12 September 2025 (New York Declaration), five of the ten states voting against (including Israel and the US) were Pacific island countries: Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, with Fiji and Samoa abstaining. Fiji has joined Papua New Guinea in moving its Israel embassy to Jerusalem.

In arguing for a theology focused on justice for Palestinians, Raheb sees self-determination as the key; the exercise of this right should extend to the Palestinian diaspora, rather than being confined to Palestinians living in historic Palestine (24, 31). Self-determination is more important than prescribing statehood in some form.

In the Afterword Elijah R. Zehyoue advocates non-violence as the best means for advancing Palestinian goals, using the example of Martin Luther King in the US. Clearly a peaceful strategy is preferable but under international law there is a right of armed resistance to illegal occupation (not extending to attacks on civilians). How much suffering must be endured before reaching “last resort”?

In any event the Palestinians are not alone. The global Palestine movement, using peaceful means, is a demonstration of solidarity. This book, with its strong representation from the Global South, also shows the strength of that movement in the US. While no doubt a particularly articulate expression of that movement in the context of Christian theology, the book is also indicative of shifting sentiment in the US in favour of justice for Palestinians and ending support for Israel. Such a shift will not be at the expense of the Jews of Palestine but will facilitate “paths of justice and reconciliation between [the] two brotherly peoples”, the attainment of which is among the great “ethical-political challenge[s] for human civilization”.

Derek McDougall is a Professorial Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne, working in the field of International Relations. He is also a graduate (M.Div.) of the University of Divinity, Melbourne. He is active in the St Kilda South Port parish of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Standing Under the Cross: Essays on Bonhoeffer's Theology,

Michael Mawson, *New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Theology and Ethics*, London: T & T Clarke, 2023 (ISBN: 9780567709516).

Dianne Rayson

The theology and life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) continues to captivate, inspire, and instruct new generations of leaders and theologians, Christians and agnostics alike. This book is an excellent contribution to the ongoing discourse around Bonhoeffer who has never been more popular, and I would argue, never so important.

Michael Mawson has been a long-time student of Bonhoeffer's writing. This book represents his ongoing interest and dialogue with Bonhoeffer over two decades. It is a collection of essays blending systematic theology with engagement of contemporary theologians and issues, written over a long period. As such, it represents what many of us in Bonhoeffer studies refer to as ‘thinking with and beyond Bonhoeffer’. This is a methodology that encourages creative engagement with a theological giant in order to consider issues of our own contemporary contexts and has given rise to using Bonhoeffer to address issues of nationalism, climate change, cyber security and so on. As Mawson describes, he has attempted to ‘move on’ from Bonhoeffer but “continually found myself returning to [him], reading him in new ways and discovering new insights” (1). Mawson and I co-convened the 2024 International Bonhoeffer Congress in Sydney with the theme, ‘Crisis and Hope: Reading Bonhoeffer for Today’. The subsequent book gathered together cutting edge Bonhoefferian scholarship addressing contemporary issues from all parts of the world, highlighting voices oft neglected in theological scholarship (and indeed, in the church).¹ This is an important aspect of Bonhoeffer studies, that traditional scholarship is making space for emerging voices and positions.

In this collection, Mawson describes the various contexts he has lived and the very direct lessons he learnt from Bonhoeffer at different times and in different locations. It is a personal positioning that is appealing, keeping the theology real. Mawson then has a launch chapter positioning Bonhoefferian scholarship and its relevance to us today. The rest of the book is divided into three parts. The first, ‘The Form of the Word’ collects four of Mawson's earlier essays on Bonhoeffer's

¹ Michael Mawson and Dianne Rayson, eds., *Bonhoeffer and Contemporary Challenges: Crisis and Hope*, *New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Theology and Ethics* (T & T Clarke, 2025).

engagement with scripture as the Word. These chapters are loosely systematic in style but with all of Mawson's work, very accessible and readable. His work is also steered toward the practical aspects of the Christian life and for the edification of the church. This is why Mawson is an important theologian for us today: spirituality, discipleship, and Christian transformation are at the heart of his theological project.

Part 2 collects essays on 'The Vulnerabilities of Bodily Life', canvassing disability, biotechnology, and lifespan extension. Mawson does this in conversation with various scholars, notably Gerard McKenny and Karl Barth. Throughout this section, Mawson builds the case for Bonhoeffer's understanding of the human person as being relational: the "human being as a 'being in relation' with the concrete other" (74). This is at the core of Bonhoeffer's theology, that sociality, or relationality, is what defines the human. As much as trinitarian theology has helped salvage the dignity of the disabled body and as such, has assisted the church in responding to people with different needs, Mawson claims that Bonhoeffer's creaturely anthropology provides better basis for relational theology. Trinitarianism only goes so far and risks de-bodilying or at least downplaying the concrete bodies of humans in their various forms. This is what Bonhoeffer is able to amend. Whereas theologians have utilised *imago Dei* to move from a capacity-based understanding of what it means to be human toward a relational one, and notwithstanding the ethical implications that this has encouraged, Mawson critiques this move for its limitations. He writes,

My concern with this approach is that grounding relational personhood in a social conception of the Trinity can start to obfuscate or downplay the more distinctively human or creaturely nature of human personhood. To put this differently, my concern is that modelling

a relational anthropology on trinitarian relations and persons – human beings as relational through being drawn into the intra-trinitarian relations – militates against a more fundamental distinction between God as creator and human beings as creatures (81).

In contrast, Bonhoeffer provides an account of human beings as "created by God in relation to one another" (84) as articulated in *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* from 1933. Here Bonhoeffer, instead of relying on the relationality between the persons of the Trinity, "insist[s] on the limited and necessarily creaturely nature of human relationality" (84). Mawson then continues to develop Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology toward an ethic.

This is important work. Bringing Bonhoeffer to bear on theologising around disability is crucial, as is the outworking of ethical actions that rely on Bonhoeffer's notions of 'responsibility' and 'vicarious representative action', two ideas that underpin all of Bonhoeffer's ethics. Mawson argues for the concrete action of acting in the interests of the person before us. As with all Bonhoeffer's ethics, the abstract must give way to the concrete. This, I think, is part of the appeal of Bonhoeffer's theology and ethics: it remains firmly grounded in the reality that one encounters and this is why he is such a useful dialogue partner for our contemporary settings with our own concerns.

In Part 3 Mawson turns to community, and in Bonhoefferian terms this is 'community of the cross'. This section engages Moltmann of 'divine passability' discussing the suffering of God and the parallels with Bonhoeffer's own work ('only the suffering God can help' being the classic summary). The chapter on pneumatology and ecclesiology engages Robert Jenson and Reinhard Hütter on the church as both sinful and holy in

the context of church scandal. A further chapter on ‘why Bonhoeffer is not an Anabaptist’ disputes John Howard Yoder’s claim for Bonhoeffer’s Anabaptist approach. This might be the most niche essay but highlights the tendency in recent years of creating a Bonhoeffer in our own image. The use of Bonhoeffer in right wing politics in the USA is a current example. Finally, the section ends with a chapter on Bonhoeffer’s Christology in dialogue with James Cone and race.

The scope of this collection reflects both Bonhoeffer’s applicability and being able to reach into all corners of contemporary life. It also speaks to Mawson’s familiarity and deep immersion into Bonhoeffer’s entire corpus of work. It is a rare volume that is able to take a complete overview of Bonhoeffer’s theology and ethics and yet engage with such a range of authors and issues. I heartily recommend this book for those who have heard of Bonhoeffer but not read his work, as well as serious students wanting to be challenged to think ‘with and beyond Bonhoeffer’ from a very reputable author.

Dianne Rayson is Secretary of the International Bonhoeffer Society – English Language Section, a Bonhoeffer scholar and ecotheologian. Recently at Pasifika Communities University, Fiji she is about to take up the role of Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at John Coleridge Patteson University (formerly Bishop Patteson Theological College) in the Solomon Islands. Her books include *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene* and *Bonhoeffer and Contemporary Challenges: Crisis and Hope* (ed. with Mawson).

Imagination in an Age of Crisis:

Soundings from the Arts and Theology,

Jason Goroncy and Rod Pattenden (Editors),
Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2022
(ISBN: 978-1-6667-0688-8)

Stephen Pickard

This book is weighty in many respects: 350 pages; contributions from 34 authors; multiple disciplinary fields covering literature, sculpture, poems, art works, short autobiographical reflections, essays; music and song; philosophy and theology of the imagination and art. The list of areas covered by the generic term ‘the arts’ is expansive; and individual treatments of material are diverse. The contributors come from a broad spectrum of society, cultures, religious traditions, art practitioners and academics.

The brief Forward by the Cambridge theologian Ben Quash locates the primary mode of theology undertaken in the book as *celebratory* (or following Schleiermacher ‘poetic’ theology) to be differentiated from *communicative* and *critical* theology. He notes that the essays and artistic interventions have both a global reach yet draw upon many writers with “deep roots in Australian contexts” which gives a certain groundedness, an edge without sacrificing a wider relevance to the contributions.

Three themes undergird the contributions to this volume: imagination, crisis and the arts. The overarching theme of ‘the imagination’ points to a subject rich, elusive and so fundamental to human creativity and identity. To add to the mix the context of ‘crisis’ invites scrutiny and commentary. Reviewing such a volume presents a challenge. I have chosen to consider this volume under its three primary themes: imagination, crisis, and the arts. At the outset it is well to note that had it not been for COVID 19 and the cancellation in 2020 of a major conference on the arts and theology in Australia

this present book may have taken a very different shape and texture.

Trevor Hart's 'Why Imagination Matters' offers a careful analysis and appreciation of the significance of the imagination for being human. He refers to "the remarkable power of human imagination as such to form, re-form, and transform our shared reality" (50). Though he notes Terry Eagleton's warning that "imagination is not an unequivocal good" (49). Indeed, the imagination is "forever in the active service of either good or evil"; "the engine of the very best (as well as the very worst) things of which human beings are capable of" (50). Which is the reason, in part at least, for the cautious and sometimes disparaging ways in which the imagination has been treated, particularly in the Christian tradition. The Christian mystical tradition was both alive to the dangers of an unfettered imagination and also, it's great power for good. The English mystical writer William Law refused to make too sharp a distinction between reason and the imagination arguing that the latter was not a distinct faculty from our reason, "but only reason acting upon our own ideas". In truth there is a veritable industry of thought and writing on the imagination and Hart offers the reader a programmatic essay on the central theme that informs the many contributions to the book. Importantly Hart points to imagination's "own final need of conscription by God in the service of God's coming kingdom" (50); an orientation that can be traced throughout the diverse offerings in this volume.

What then are we to make of the deployment of the imagination in the arts and theology in an age of crisis? Jason Goroncy asks: "What contribution do the arts make in a world facing the impacts of, for example, globalism, colonialism, capitalism, militarism, climate change, pandemics, and the evolutions, often violent, of culture?" (18). The diverse contributions offer a road map in times

of crisis for appreciating the imagination's role and power in the arts to repair, restore and renew human community. Goroncy's "Daring Imagination" asks the pertinent question: "What kind of time is it?" (1). And following his recitation of the manifold ills, dangers and disturbances of our age he states that, "We imagine or we perish" (1). Goroncy explores the problematic status of imagining in times of disruption and disturbance. Perhaps imagining through the arts is a luxury we can ill afford; perhaps it represents an aesthetic escape. It begs the question: What are art and artists for? Notwithstanding Goroncy's inquiry into the suspicions regarding art's capabilities and limits for rebuilding community in times of fracture and confusion, he concludes that "without imagination there can be no future in which human life flourishes" (14). So, it seems the project of the volume is necessary after all! It is a must-read chapter which prepares the reader for the richness that follows in the remarkable array of contributions.

Space does not permit anywhere near an adequate overview of the variety and depth of the contributions. Just a sample: poems by Hart, Foulcher, Wieman and others; poetry in times of eco trauma; an extended reflection on the theme of the imagination and the sacred in Australian Literature; theology in conversation with the films of Rolf de Heer with David Gulpilil; the wonder of song; textless music for times of crisis; painting as a contemplative act in a time of pandemic; statues and political protest (a reflection on the objects of our loyalties and the power of inanimate objects); personal reflections on being an artist with fibromyalgia; reflections on an indigenous artwork; essays on the artist (George Gittoes) as prophet; a reflection on the healing power of black folk rituals. And so much more.

This book contains a wealth of wisdom and nourishment for the soul in testing times. It exposes the great power and potential of the arts in dialogue

with theology and philosophy to illuminate what is happening in society and human life. More often such work does not provide answers but rather asks questions, identifies persistent problems and enables us to probe some of the great mysteries of our life together. Perhaps it is this latter area wherein the gift of the arts lies. This volume is testament to the importance of such a gift in our times. This is a book to be digested slowly and thoughtfully and returned to often.

Stephen Pickard is a former Assistant Bishop in the Dioceses of Adelaide, and Canberra & Goulburn and Head of the School of Theology of Charles Sturt University. Prior to his retirement in 2022 he served as Executive Director of the *Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture* Charles Sturt University where he continues as an adjunct Professor of Theology. In an earlier life he taught theology and evangelism at United Theological College and served as Vice Principal for a time.



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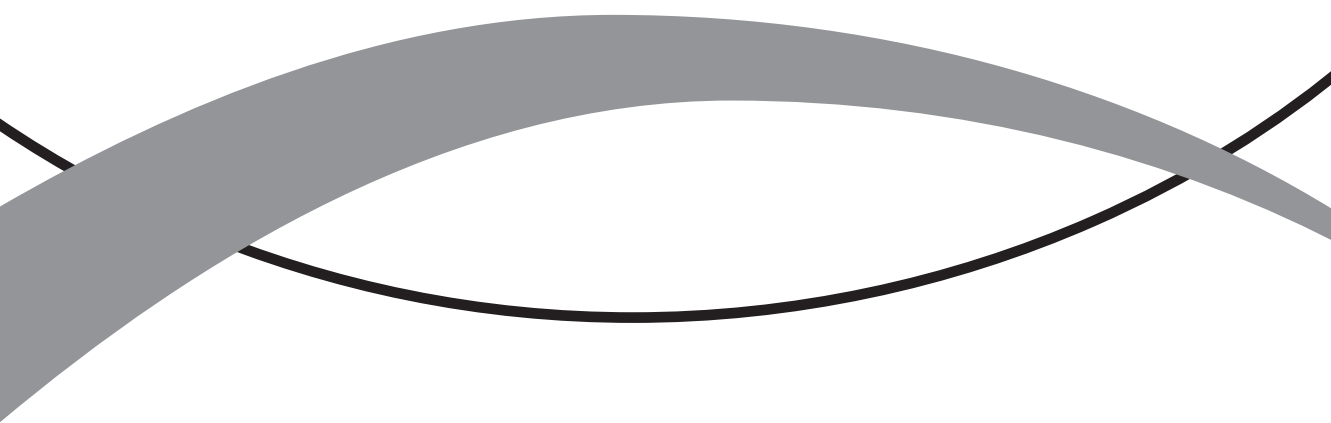
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