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EXTRACT

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Reviews

Pacific Well-being: (Is)Lands, Theologies, Worldviews

Jione Havea (Ed.), Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2024 (ISBN: 978-1-6667-6218-1)

Review by Te Aroha Rountree

Pacific Well-being, (Is)Lands, Theologies, Worldviews edited by Jione Havea is an ambitious work that attempts to explore the intersection of Pacific Islander well-being, spirituality, theology, and the concept of land. The book's title suggests a multifaceted investigation into how indigenous Pacific peoples relate to their lands, how their theological frameworks shape their worldviews, and how these in turn contribute to the overall sense of well-being within their communities. From a Māori perspective, this work presents an intriguing opportunity to explore the shared and distinct connections between Pacific peoples relationships with land and spirituality, while also reflecting on the broader implications for indigenous identity and autonomy in a post-colonial world.

The book is structured around three central themes: well-being, land, and theologies, with a focus on the Pacific context. Each chapter deals with how these elements are intertwined in the lives of Pacific peoples, particularly within their spiritual practices, cultural values, and community health. Through the lens of theology and native (indigenous) worldviews, the book discusses how native peoples across the Pacific maintain an interconnectedness with the environment and the cosmos, asserting that well-being is not just an individual pursuit but a collective one that involves the land, community, and spiritual realms.

As the title implies, the book focuses on the concept of “lands” in both literal and metaphorical senses,

exploring how the very concept of land underpins identity, relationships, and health. Theologically, the book explores the role of spirituality in promoting well-being, with attention to how these spiritual practices can shape ethical frameworks that govern the relationship between individuals, community, and the environment.

For Māori readers, the various authors treatment of Pacific theologies is of particular interest. The theological frameworks discussed in the book often resonate with Māori concepts of spirituality, especially in relation to *te tapu o te whenua* (the sacredness of land) and *whakawhanaungatanga* (the interconnectedness) of people, nature, and the divine. In Māori thought, *whenua* (land) is not simply a physical resource but is imbued with *mauri* (life force) and *wairua* (spirit). It is through these concepts that Māori understand their reciprocal relationship with the land: the health of the land is intrinsically tied to the health of the people. Māori spirituality recognises that *tangata whenua* (the people of the land) are not merely inhabitants of a place but guardians of it, responsible for its care and maintenance.

In conclusion, *Pacific Well-being, (Is)Lands, Theologies, Worldviews* offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate connections between land, theology, and well-being within the Pacific Islands. The book provides valuable insights into how indigenous Pacific communities understand their relationship to land and spirituality, emphasising the communal nature of well-being that transcends individualistic frameworks. From a Māori perspective, this work offers both resonances and limitations. While the authors successfully highlight the shared importance of land and spiritual connections in the Pacific context, the

work does not always fully address the unique theological nuances that characterise native Māori or Aboriginal Torres-Strait Islanders thought and culture. These are valuable perspectives that are not always considered in depth when framing a Pacific view or context. Māori perspectives on land and well-being, emphasise the deep interconnectedness between humans and their environment. The Māori worldview teaches that the health of the land directly influences the health of the people, with the well-being of both being inextricably linked. This concept of *hauora* (health) is holistic, encompassing the physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of life, which aligns closely with the book's discussions on the interconnectedness of well-being and spirituality in the Pacific.

Māori readers may appreciate the book's overall respect for indigenous ways of knowing but may also critique any oversimplification or homogenisation of Pacific worldviews. It is essential that works like this continue to respect the specificities of each indigenous culture, recognizing the diversity of practices and the need for self-representation.

Despite these critiques, *Pacific Well-being, (Is)Lands, Theologies, Worldviews* is an important contribution to the field of Pacific and indigenous studies. It presents a valuable platform for discussing the intersections between land, theology, and well-being from a broader Pacific perspective. For Māori readers, the book provides both a source of connection and a call for more specific engagement with Māori theological traditions. It offers an opportunity to deepen the conversation on indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and the importance of land, while also highlighting areas for future scholarly exploration. Ultimately, the book serves as a stepping stone for further dialogue on how indigenous Pacific worldviews can shape contemporary conversations on environmental

guardianship, community health, and spiritual well-being.

Te Aroha Rountree Ngai Tūteāuru, Ngā Puhi (tribal affiliations) Perehitini/President | Te Hāhi Weteriana o Aotearoa Methodist Church of New Zealand

He Kaiako ki te Whare Wānanga o Trinity. I ngā wā o mua, he Kaiako, he Kairangahau hoki ia mo te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau, i te reo Māori, me ngā kōrero o neherā. He mātanga hāpai hoki ia mo ngā rōpu o te kawanatanga, i te reo Māori me ngā tikanga, me te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Te Aroha is President of the Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and a Senior Lecturer in Moana Studies at Trinity Theological College. She was previously a lecturer and researcher for the University of Auckland, focussed on Māori language and manuscripts. Te Aroha has also been a consultant for local government agencies, providing sessions on Māori language, customs and protocols, as well as Treaty workshops.)

After Method: Queer Grace, Conceptual Design, and the Possibility of Theology

Hanna Reichel, Louisville, KY: WJKP, 2023 (ISBN: 978066426890)

Review by Geoff Thompson

I wish this book had been available at the start of my own academic career. After absorbing what I now understand to be an intellectually naïve approach to method during my own doctoral studies, on entering the academy as a faculty member a decade later, I was unsettled, not by the academy's more ideologically-aware attention to method, but by the confidence placed in ideologically-aware methodologies to produce

good theology. Hannah Reichel's impressive book forcefully interrogates that confidence.

"Method will not save us" is a refrain which regularly punctuates this book. Reichel, Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, argues that attention to method does not guarantee "good" or "better" theology. Their argument is not, however, a reactionary response to the academic focus on method. It is, rather, a constructive, probing and even teasing exploration of the significance of the strangeness, norm-deviating nature of the locations of grace for the task of Christian theology: a grace that constantly risks disrupting the boundaries that even "radical" methods set up. In short, grace is queer. Or, as Reichel says at one point: "[G]race is messy, and it messes with those it touches" (128). Including the theologian.

With this deconstructive theme in place, it is unsurprising that one of Reichel's main conversation partners is Marcella Althaus-Reid whose *Indecent Theology* is a prominent source. More surprising, at least to some, will be their other main conversation partner: Karl Barth. Barth's insistence on the impossible possibility of theology, on the demonstrated propensity of theology towards idolatry, and on revelation's capacity to disrupt theological systems do indeed place him and Althaus-Reid in an overlapping conceptual space. Reichel profitably develops this overlap as they draw on both authors throughout the book. (The surprise of Barth's inclusion in this conversation may be heightened in the Uniting Church where the dominant modes of both resistance to and promotion of Barth have focused on him as a positive theologian of the Word, with little attention to the politically- and ideologically-charged apophatic dimension of his thought.) Reichel draws on many other conversation partners from a range of disciplines, many eras, and

diverse contexts. The result is a strikingly interdisciplinary and impressively sourced argument.

Much of the force of the book's argument, and the power of Reichel's use of Althaus-Reid and Barth, is derived from the early observation that Systematic Theology and Constructive Theology (which mostly stands for what would be recognised more broadly as Contextual Theology) are equally prone to ideological captivity and the "hubris of dogmatism" (80): "Methodologically-secured orthodoxy and methodologically-secured orthopraxy equally embody a general confidence in the human ability to discern right from wrong, better from worse, and to make progress along these ideals" (81).

Yet such assumptions about progress can, as so much queer theory demonstrates, obscure the complexities, ambiguities and sheer diversity of reality. Reality is after all, "by definition and experience, that which cannot be integrated into the symbolic order of our lived experience or meaning-making, even as it pushes them to frantic and diffuse activity" (113). This is equally true of the reality of grace.

So, with all this emphasis on deconstruction and boundary-breaking, and the capacity of method to be held ideologically captive, why should any attention be given to it? Her answer to this question lies in the structure of the book. Its three parts (consisting of 2, 3 and 4 chapters respectively) follow the three uses of the Law as articulated in classical Reformed theology: Part I, "How (not) to get along (*primus usus legis*)"; Part II, "How (not) to lose hope (*secundus usus legis*)"; Part III, "How (not) to do better (*tertius usus legis*)". Or more fully:

Method cannot save us, but this does not mean that it cannot do anything for us. For starters it can allow us to glean a more precise outline of our need for redemption without ever achieving

it....Subsequently, it can continue to accompany our endeavors to strive for relative peace under conditions of finitude and fallenness (*primus usus*), it can help us understand our own need for redemption (*secundus usus*), and it can (!) guide the pursuit of relatively better forms of theology after grace (*tertius usus*). (127)

What, then, might characterise such chastened but “relatively better” theology? It is a theology which displays a realism that is hamartiological, material and incarnational.

In hamartiological realism, it takes seriously the reality of sin in which the theologian, too, remains complicit, and which prompts her to anti-idealistically engage in apophatic or critical epistemic practices. In material realism, it takes into account how both grace and sin express themselves in the trajectories of real people. In incarnational realism, it does not content itself with the conceptualization of reality in language or thought but embodies the anti-docetic commitment that conceptual work, too, must like God, “become real” in its commitment to it in its concrete realities – realities both of grace and of pain, of holiness and suffering. (159)

Such theology also produces “affordances of doctrine”. A chapter is devoted to this theme (Chapter 7), drawing the notion of “affordances” from its use in both ecology and design theory. It is an idea that points to the way designed objects can have purposes which are a function of their design, but which were not envisaged in the design, only emerging in the course of their use. Reichel uses this as a way of allowing theologians to be validly committed to conceptual (systematic)

design, so long as the designers are open to the “epistemological importance of misfits to reveal the ways in which theological designs...work (or not)” (194). This idea of affordances serves as something of a bridge between the respective concerns of systematic and constructive theologians. Arguably, it is the most suggestive part of the book.

By any measure this is an impressive book. It is a demanding read, and it is pitched at those already immersed in the technical demands of academic theology. But it brims with stimulating insights and provocative proposals. In good Queer (and Barthian?) fashion, it cuts through convention and many of its binaries. And it does all this in the name of grace. Reichel’s disruption of the mutual suspicion between Systematic Theology and Constructive theology is illuminating for the Uniting Church, where only one of our theological colleges now has a teaching position named Systematic Theology. To the extent that that development represents an outworking of the standard criticisms of the discipline in the name of rightly attending to context, *After Method* offers reasons to think that the mutual suspicion of the last few decades could itself be profitably interrogated.

Geoff Thompson is a retired Uniting Church Minister, having served in congregational and academic placements. The author of various books on Uniting Church theology, he has also published essays and journal articles on Karl Barth and more general matters of doctrine. He is the author of *Christian Doctrine: a guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clark, 2020). Thompson is a Research Fellow of the University of Divinity, a Fellow of the Wesley Centre, and Editor of *Uniting Church Studies*.



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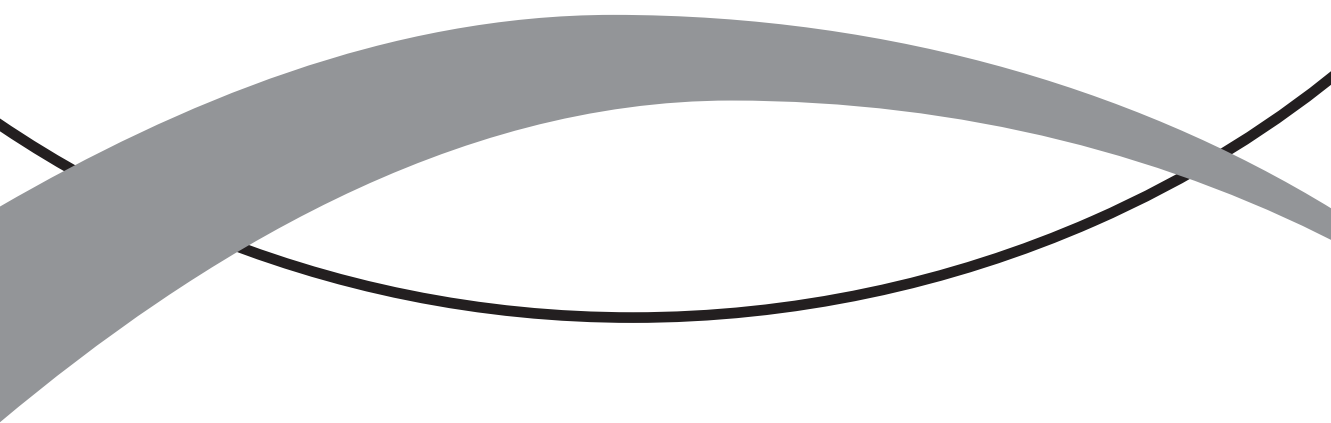
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