

Reviews Books



‘These texts say things no others do’

Sing a new song – to an old tune

Songs to Shake Us Up

John Campbell
Kevin Mayhew
£29.99 (ringbound)
ISBN: 9781848678231

Throughout 22 years ministering in urban multicultural settings, John Campbell has written hymns “to help the Bible come alive for today’s urban believers”. Two hundred of his texts are published in *Songs to Shake Us Up*; accompanying CDs enable helpful previews and easy copying of both words and music onto service sheets. Each text offers Campbell’s reflection on a biblical passage, having been written for a particular fellowship and setting. He describes them as “intentionally specific, contextual, immediate and ephemeral”. Campbell cautions against assuming that everything written for so explicit a context is easily relevant to another.

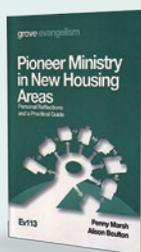
Musically, the collection has two distinguishing features. First, although every text is new, almost all of

the tunes are familiar. Secondly, he has ensured that the tunes are transposed down – as much as a fourth – for ease of singing.

To aid reviewing the hymns, we sang them in Sunday worship. After four Sundays, I invited emails with people’s reactions. One person found the hymns “insightful without being garishly modern”. Another was concerned that if the hymns are sung to well known tunes, it would spoil both the words and music of the original hymns. Another comment said that “new lyrics and reassuringly familiar tunes made it possible to focus on the words”. Helped by the pastoral perception of some of John’s texts, one person said: “Sunday’s hymn really struck a chord with the darkest days of my mum’s dementia and I can imagine that may be true for others where the person they love is not really that person anymore.”

As a worship leader, I will value this resource. It offers texts that say things no others do, and in ways I would not be able to create myself. Some I would not select because the language is too every day for my taste, but many will significantly enhance both what we derive from a biblical text and what we are able to offer in our praise and pondering.●

Nigel Uden is Minister of St Columba’s and Fulbourn United Reformed churches in Cambridge



‘The first resource on a significant challenge’

Practical guide to urban mission

Pioneer Ministry in New Housing Areas: Personal reflections and a practical guide

Penny Marsh and Alison Boulton
Grove Books Limited
£3.95 (booklet)
ISBN: 9781851749652

It is a delight to recommend this booklet – the first readily available resource on a significant current challenge for churches up and down the country. In 28 pages, this booklet provides a succinct overview of the unique mix of church planting and fresh expressions of church that can be found in new housing areas.

The United Reformed Church has a long (if largely hidden) involvement in successful ecumenical partnerships in new housing areas all over the country, but churches without that kind of ecumenical experience may not have ready access to the history and practice of

those partnerships. This booklet offers a straightforward starting point with sections on: New housing in England, underlying mission principles and a practical guide for ministers. I know that URC Synod Moderators are overwhelmed with documents to read but these 28 pages are well worth adding to that pile.

The booklet is written from a very practical, hands-on perspective and reflects the different experiences of both writers. The section on “practical steps for pioneer ministers” assumes a dedicated role, however, these practical suggestions are equally applicable to a local project that does not have the luxury of a dedicated full-time pioneer, but instead works with local DIY resources. In summary, if the town where you live has more than 1,000 new homes scheduled, buy a copy of this booklet. If you are playing catch up with existing developments being built, it will still be a great place to start thinking about how you might engage with that challenge.●

Simon Ellis is Mission Enabler for the United Reformed Church East Midlands Synod and a member of the Churches Together in England Group for New Housing



Religious violence decoded

Holy War, Martyrdom and Terror: Christianity, violence and the west

Philippe Buc

University of Pennsylvania Press

£32.50 (hardback)

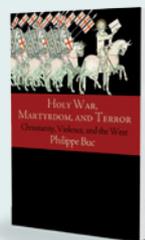
ISBN: 9780812246858

This is a timely and important book which aims to help us understand the taxonomy of those grim political realities: terrorism and “holy war”. In this ambitious, far-reaching essay, the medievalist Philippe Buc abandons specialism for the long view. His analysis ranges from the Jewish Wars of the first century through the Crusades, the Reformations of the 16th century, the American Civil War and the French Revolution to America’s war against terror.

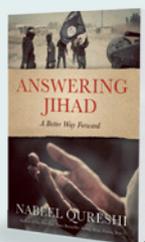
Violence, Buc admits, has many causes, yet we misunderstand it if we ignore or deny its roots in the tension within the Bible and in early exegesis between what Phyllis Trible called the “texts of terror” (ie those which call for violence) and the Gospel of peace. As Buc probes that relationship, he shows how Christianity and Islam share patterns of material and spiritual warfare and how elect groups continually become the violent vanguard of the promised universal peace of the end time. He traces the psychology of martyrdom from patristic times to the Red Army Faction and beyond and finds close connections between Christian liberty and Christian coercion (for if true freedom is the service of God, pagans need to be liberated for that freedom from all other oppressions). He shows how men and women become agents of God’s providence and therefore righteously violent; and, how a sickeningly violent event (eg the First Crusade or the St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre) can seem numinous and revelatory, moving history forwards because it brings closer the apocalypse and God’s reign of peace.

There is, Buc concludes, no dividing line between pre-modern and modern violence and terror, rather there are deep and compelling continuities. The modern states and political ideologies have an uncanny knack of translating yesterday’s Christianity into today’s secularism. This is a book of many examples and compelling digressions, for example into the motivation of Joan of Arc, and of the American abolitionist John Brown. It is rich, difficult and rewarding in equal measure. ●

David Cornick is General Secretary for Churches Together in England



‘Rich, difficult and rewarding’



‘A book I would normally steer clear of’

Examining the nature of Islam

Answering Jihad: A better way forward

Nabeel Qureshi

Zondervan

£9.99

ISBN: 9780310531388

Answering Jihad is the kind of book I would normally steer clear of, having seen decades of polemic writing attempting to prove the illegitimacy of Islam as a religion and to position Islamic doctrine as a source of violence. This book does just that, but it also offers much more.

Unfortunately, polemic against Islam often sweeps away all the subtle differences between Muslims and fails to show the good ways in which everyday believers as well as Muslim scholars live out their lives and expend time, energy and prayer – jihad if you like – within their chosen faith or religious tradition. The incongruous juxtaposition of the worst picked out from one tradition against the suggested best of another is yet another problem with this approach. But I wanted to engage with this book, because it also contains a treasure trove.

As someone who has also crossed the boundaries of religious tradition, I recognise much in Qureshi’s struggles to explain why he chose to move from Islam to Christianity. In his writing, there is no malice towards the religious tradition he has chosen to leave, rather a grappling with questions which were clearly a source of disquiet and contributed to the move. He does not denounce Muslims but wants us to recognise that the greater majority seek to live peaceful lives alongside others – an aspiration common to humanity; hence, it is a sadness to me that Qureshi views any drive toward a liberal position within Islam as returning to a source he believes to be inherently violent. That these endeavours are dismissed without further consideration is a disappointment.

This book offers little comfort to those seeking greater dialogue between faith communities – something many believe to be an essential if there is ever going to be progress towards peace and reconciliation in the wake of current events. Qureshi’s stance may appeal to those parts of the Church that focus on conversion rather than conversation. To his credit, he has a deep affection for the faith of his birth and wants it to be treated with gentleness. ●

Bonnie Evans-Hills is Interfaith Adviser to the Diocese of St Albans