

*How God Acts* was published collaboratively by Fortress Press (in its Theology and the Sciences series) and ATF Theology for an Australasian audience. It is a fair no less than challenging book, both in substance and in style. Typographical errors are few and even the decision to place references as endnotes mars the book but a little. *How God Acts* deserves a wide readership.

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## Witnessing the violence of late capitalism: Foucault as a guide for Christian faithfulness

Jonathan Tran, *Foucault and Theology*, T&T Clark International, London, 2011, hardcover, 224 pages, ISBN 9780567033420, £50.00.

Over the past decade a number of influential philosophers from the Continental tradition have turned to the letters of Paul, the Early Church Fathers, and Christian theology more broadly to examine the modern political subject, democratic governance and liberal economy. Recent works by Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou and Slavjo Žižek have contributed to a growing theopolitical literature and re-engagement of philosophy and theology. It is in this context that T & T Clark's Philosophy and Theology series is situated. While including titles on Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and their respective relations to theology, the series also addresses more recent contributions from Vattimo, Derrida, Agamben and Žižek.

An important, yet perhaps uncomfortable, inclusion to this series is Michel Foucault. Foucault is an important inclusion due to his profound and sustained influence on contemporary political philosophy, sociology, critical theory and gradually, theology. However, Foucault is also an awkward inclusion. Unlike the philosophers already mentioned, Foucault did not directly engage theology or the Christian tradition for theological purposes. This is

not to suggest Foucault has nothing to contribute to theology. As Jonathan Tran's *Foucault and Theology* demonstrates, there are number of lines of thought, tensions and disputes worthy of careful inquiry.

A major strength of Tran's work is the respect shown towards Foucault, his work and the wider scholarship, as well as for Christian theology. Importantly, Tran did not attempt to baptise Foucault or to construct a 'Foucauldian theology'. Sensitive to the ontological and normative differences between Foucault and Christian theology, Tran's aim is to explore ways 'Foucault helps Christians think about Christian faithfulness' (p. 3). With this aim, the emphasis is not on philosophy or theology per se, but the way these disciplines can be used in creating faithful subjects that witness to different communities than those offered by global capitalism.

Tran covers a diverse range of topics: witnessing *contra* resistance; the open church and Christendom in the context of Empire; a reconfiguring of the early Christian self as an alternative to the selves offered in late capitalism; and human and animal interactions in the context of self-care. The heterogeneity of the topics addressed by Tran provides a *pastiche* of different points of entry to Foucault's work in relation to theological reflection. However, in the absence of a systematic overview, which the book does not intend to provide, the reader could feel disoriented and searching for a unifying thread. To this end, *Foucault and Theology* would benefit by tying the diverse themes more closely throughout the text to Tran's initial aim.

In addition to diverse topics, Tran covers primary and secondary texts not commonly discussed, such as Foucault's 1954 essay 'Dream, Imagination and Existence' and the special issue of the literary journal *Salmagundi*, critically discussing James Miller's biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. Tran's analysis of Miller's biographical representation and uses of Foucault's life to interpret his thought serves as an important counterbalance to *ad hominem* reductions. In this vein Tran creates space for examining Foucault's (and our own) biography and politics of the self.

Overall *Foucault and Theology* provides important challenges for the theologian as well as the philosopher. However, most importantly, this work introduces avenues of thought and practice for the individual trying to witness alternative relations to the self, the other and animals to those produced in late capitalism. Tran does not present nor attempt, a *pure* exegesis of Foucault; the language of alternatives is particularly jarring. However Tran does deliver a *faithful* reading of the political and ethical significance

of Foucault for individuals living in Empire. In this respect Tran's *Foucault and Theology* is an important contribution to contemporary theological and philosophical conversation.

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## Learning from history

Vincent P Branick, *Understanding the Historical Books of the Old Testament*, Paulist Press, New York/Mahwah, NJ, 2011, softcover, 275 pages, ISBN 9780809147281, US\$24.95.

Branick's *Understanding the Historical Books of the Old Testament* offers an introduction to four collections of books from the Hebrew Bible and Greek Apocrypha with predominantly 'historical' interests: the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings); the Chronicler's History (1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah); the Maccabean History (1 and 2 Maccabees) and Historical-sounding Midrash (Ruth, Esther, Judith, Tobit).

The book could as easily have been entitled *An Introduction to the Historical Books of the Old Testament* as it covers much of the material found in conventional introduction volumes: historical-critical questions, outlines of the individual books, relevant themes and a discussion of the theology arising from each. Most chapters follow a formula that covers individual books in the relevant collection under the following headings: Overview, Purpose, Literary form, Author and Date, Outline of book, Significant passages, Message/theology of the book.

A strength of the volume is the author's discussion prior to each section of the literary genres that cover 'history', reminding us that, while these books recount historical events, they are always filtered through intense religious faith. Of particular interest is the introduction to the midrashic books as essentially a literature about a sacred literature. Branick states, 'As centuries passed and the true understanding of haggadic midrash was lost, devout believers clung to these stories with blind conviction that what the stories narrated must have actually happened. Today a better knowledge of ancient history plus a more accurate understanding of biblical literary forms have restored these works to their legitimate literary family' (p. 207).