

In talking about the Covid pandemic years, Jones sees the hand of God in the historically rapid production of effective vaccines, with global entities working collaboratively and in many cases helping poorer countries to access vaccines. And he believes that thankfulness and gratitude to God by the people of God would be a fitting response to the Covid vaccines. Jones notes that historically the church has always been in the vocation of medical care and nursing of others, and while there has always been a small opposition to vaccination and mandatory treatments, the increasing rejection of scientific interventions is a worrying trend.

All through his discussions, Gareth Jones models a process of ethical decision making by considering who is harmed, who benefits, where is fairness and justice apparent or missing, and takes the reader into the shoes of each stance. And in doing so, Jones arrives at the value of occupying the in-between grey area for each situation and person, which is often a complicated and messy position. For example, he examines the ethical boundaries for embryos and the current status of research on viable embryos not being allowed in Aotearoa New Zealand. While a considerable number of unused embryos are currently discarded sometime after IVF by fertility clinics, researchers are not able to use these embryos for beneficial reasons such as improving IVF conditions and outcomes, or increasing knowledge in genetic diseases carried by some of the embryos. For Jones this is an inconsistency that needs remedying.

At the Margins bravely dissects bioethical contexts where idealism must be reconciled with the realism of a broken world. Gareth Jones believes that the power of the gospel is shown when Christians work hard to include others, especially those who are marginalised and not like ourselves. Rather than occupying the polarised viewpoints in areas such as abortion, pandemic measures and reproductive treatments, Jones encourages Christians to listen, be informed by science and then contribute in the space between so that a collective responsibility for future actions and agreed boundaries can be reached. In doing this, traditional theological thinking may need to be increasingly more nuanced for Christians to be authentically faithful, compassionate and caring of all people.

Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), *Love as Common Ground: Essays on Love in Religion*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021. (344 PP.) [ISBN 978-1793647801]

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As Baptist theologian Andy Goodliff notes on his blog, Oxford Baptist theologian Paul S. Fiddes continues his prodigious rate of academic production and shows no sign of slowing down despite being an academic theologian for over half a century and well into retirement. In the last two years, not only has he had

published three monographs of theological significance but he has also edited two collections of essays exploring love within religion, and the interrelationship between theology, love and ecology.

Love as Common Ground is the first of the two edited volumes and the culmination of Regent Park's five-year research fellowship entitled the 'Study of Love in Religion'; an interfaith dialogue between Islamic, Jewish and Christian scholars on the nature and essence of love. The catalyst for the study was an open letter from Muslim scholars to Christian leaders in 2007 entitled *A Common Word between Us and You* in which it was suggested that a common ground between Islam and Christianity consists of three great principles in the two faiths - the Unity of God, Love of God, and Love of Neighbour. The overall aim of the text mirrors that of the research fellowship, which is to produce a study into the nature and meaning of love in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as well as philosophy. Once completed, the constructive work can then be done with an articulation of 'love in religion.'

Like Fiddes' other recent publications, the subject matter of this edited volume is one that Fiddes has reflected on and written about previously, especially in his articles on ecumenism and commonality between different traditions within Christianity. Specifically, however, in 2012 Fiddes edited a response from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) to the Common Word open letter in order to mark the fifth anniversary of its production. In the response Fiddes and other signatories suggest that the 2007 letter from Muslim scholars marked a unique moment in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, and that they agree that all future dialogue should be based upon on the 'common ground' of obedience to the double love command, to love God and love our neighbour, that is found in Christianity and Islam. The rest of the response is a brief exploration of the differences and similarities in the understanding of love, both human and divine, found in the two faiths and concludes with a commitment from Fiddes and others towards further dialogue situated within a rhetorical context of love and genuine understanding. *Love as Common Ground* is the fruit of that further dialogue and the text consists of four stand-alone yet overlapping sections in which love is explored through the lenses of Islam, Judaism, Christianity and philosophy, in that order. Once done, the edited volume concludes with three essays that construct a definition of love plausible and useful to inter-faith dialogue about the nature and commonality of love in religion.

To appropriately set the scene, Fiddes introduces the subject matter of the book by articulating a theology of love; one that is based on the analogy of knowledge and enables a definition of 'love as God' if love is a form of knowledge and human love is not reduced in order to extenuate divine love. In a chapter full of classic Fiddesian themes, Fiddes sets out his defence for 'love being God' when based upon love as knowledge by arguing that an analogy of love that is in any sense meaningful should jettison the popularly-held dichotomy between agape and eros since God's love includes desire. He also disagrees with claimed disanalogies of love such as divine impassibility and immutability arguing that God, as revealed in scripture, has passions, desire, empathy, and so on. The key to defining love as a form of knowledge is, first of all, acknowledging the disanalogy between human love as knowledge and divine love as knowledge by admitting that the former is built upon the accruelement of knowledge, which is something not to be

predicated on the latter. Yet, this does not mean that divine knowledge is static but rather is perfect without being complete. So when humans participate in the perfect knowledge of the divine triune persons-as-relations then this is our way of gathering knowledge, hence defining love as God.

Following Fiddes' opening chapter, section one explores 'Love in Islam' and consists of three essays each exploring Islamic ideas of love from the Holy Qur'an, Rumi, and female Islamic mystics respectively. The essays are illuminating and insightful, and demonstrate the breadth of tradition about love within sections of Islam. Bin-Talal, for instance, outlines the 37 different kinds of love in the Quran which include humans' love for God and God's withdrawal of love to humans which is akin to divine hate. Love is highly conditional in the Quran and connected to happiness and death, especially when found in the paradisaal afterlife without, contrary to popular opinion, harems or unlimited sex. In the other two essays, authors Tajer and Dallh both draw on the Sufi tradition within Islam; first Rumi the mystical poet, and then mediaeval female Sufi mystics. Love is central to Rumi's theology and is represented by the journey from selfishness to selflessness, the ultimate expression of the tranquil self. The tradition of female Sufi mystics within Islam is very marginal due to the overbearing patriarchy of Islamic history. However, the writings of these mystics reveal these Sufi women as overwhelmed by divine love and could act as a corrective to marital and sexual violence despite the fact that the sexual nature of these poems is less explicit than found in the Song of Songs and Christian tradition.

At this point, however, it is salient to mention that naming this section as 'Love in Islam' is a bit of a misnomer. Dallh herself claims that it is erroneous to posit Sufi love mysticism as incompatible with Islamic tradition and yet the sheer omission of Shia or Sunni sources in any of the essays seems to prove the incompatibility. It would be similar to presenting a baptist understanding of salvation, and then calling it 'Salvation in Christianity' without any mention of Orthodox, Roman Catholic or other Protestant traditions' theology of salvation. For a non-Muslim reader such as this reviewer, the non-existence of any source material from the two main Islamic traditions raises the question of whether or not love as a meaningful concept has any place within traditional and mainstream Islam?

Sections two and three, 'Love in Judaism' and 'Love in Christianity,' while standing alone, share a lot of overlapping concepts and ideas, so much so that the final essay in section two by McLaughlin takes the previous two essays in section two and places them in conversation with christian scholarship on love. The three essays on love within the tradition of Judaism are examinations of chronological breadth. They range from the claim that love is derived from the bi-sexual, pre-fall human being of Genesis 1-2 to the full satisfaction of marital love in the eschaton once the messiah has come and ushered in the era of messianic universal love. Therefore, since we currently exist in the now and not yet age of tension, McLaughlin's essay answers questions that emerge such as what does divine love look like as a model of human love, what is its impact on human agency, and should we use trinitarian relationality for human relationality?

Meanwhile, the essays in section three explore some unique questions about love specific to Christianity such as the theology of love in the writings of St Maximus the Confessor and the nature of

sacrifice as a demonstration of love and self-love, rooted as it is in the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God. However, it is the middle essay by Nelstrop on the erotic love writings in the mystical tradition that introduces a theme, briefly mentioned by Fiddes in his introductory chapter, that will become a focus in the rest of the book, i.e. the place of erotic desire in our christian understanding and definition of love. Nelstrop, to bring momentum to answering the question, claims that the study of mysticism regarding the erotic in spirituality does not necessarily lead to carnal or debased outcomes. While some of these texts have been used in the past to justify rape and sexual violence, they do have a kenotic quality about them and so could be seen as potentially sacred and thereby useful in developing theological themes such as joy, hope or adoration.

As the reader arrives at the final two sections of the book - common philosophical definitions of love, and the construction of a definition of love common to religion - the place of desire, specifically erotic desire, within our understanding of divine love is the central subject of exploration. Before Dumitru's examination of friendship-love (*philia*) within Aristotle's corpus, Ellis seeks to answer whether or not desire is too this-worldly to be predicated on God, and if not, then does desire include eros and can eros be used in a religious sense without its inherent selfish and debased sensuality? She concludes that there is room for sexual desire as genuine embodied expression of love in a definition of love, and this desire can be directed towards the flourishing of others in a general sense. Moreover, following Jeanrond and Davies' essays which analyse the differences between Augustine's 'christian love' and Aquinas' 'human love', and seek to understand the human through articulating 'love as belonging' respectively, Weller concludes the volume by offering a reflection on the study of love from a perspective of relations (*pro*. Fiddes), especially the human experience of erotic love and the interface between erotic, divine and socio-political dimensions of love. Weller, following Soelle, advocates a rejection of the usual separation of the erotic and agape and garnishes support for this position from the lives and works of Tillich and King Jnr, two men who centralised eros in their definition of love and lived it out through a series of extra-marital affairs.

Love as Common Ground is a well-written and researched volume of essays that fulfils the objective to continue the dialogue between Islamic and Christian scholars since the production of *A Common Word* in 2007. It also successfully incorporates Jewish and philosophical voices into the dialogue, resulting in a fully-orbed conversation about the definition of love common to certain sections of the three worldwide monotheistic faiths. The use of the qualifier 'certain sections' is deliberate for as we have already noted a significant weakness in the book is the limitation of 'love in Islam' to that drawn from the *Sufi* tradition, a minor stream within Islam. A corollary of this reductionism is another potential weakness, i.e. the reaction of mainstream Islamic and Judaist scholarship to the strong recommendation that the dichotomy between agape and eros types of love should be eradicated, and that erotic forms of love and desire be imbibed into our definition of divine love. Given the very questionable success of the western 'sexual revolution experiment' of the last sixty years in preventing equating the erotic to human debasement and *porneia*, it seems highly unlikely that the two monotheistic faiths, with significant conservative elements within, are

going to agree with this assimilation of the erotic into divine love, let alone gather around it as a point of commonality for future inter-faith dialogue.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, this text is still a forward move in a positive direction as scholars of all three faiths continue to dialogue and interface in an attempt to better understand each other, accentuate the common positives, and make progress in the ultimate aim which is to bring together these three faiths under the rubric of love and respect in order to reverse the centuries of violence and war, and better enable the billions of followers to peacefully co-exist on this planet, one which is constantly developing into a 'global village' with each passing day.

Christiane Tietz, *Karl Barth: A Life in Conflict*, trans. Victoria J. Barnett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. (Xix + 448pp.) [ISBN: 978-0-19-885246-9]

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When I read a biography I hope for the story of a *life* portrayed all its dynamism, depth, suffering, and hope. A good biography will set its subject in their time and context, describing their relationships, work, involvements, and achievement. It identifies the defining events and circumstances that shaped the direction of the life, as well as those changes and experiences—often unsought—which nevertheless altered the trajectory of the life. Of course, it should be factual and accurate, based on careful, critical examination of primary and other relevant sources. Finally, the descriptive account of the life will also enable something of the *person* themselves to be seen and understood. I want to gain a sense of the person as they understood themselves, as they were viewed, experienced, and understood by their contemporaries; something of their character, ethos, thought, and activity. I hope that the account is three-dimensional as it were, setting forth the person in all their uniqueness, complexity, paradox, and depth. Christiane Tietz has, in my estimation, achieved this richness in her recent biography, *Karl Barth: A Life in Conflict*.

An immediate question arises concerning the need of her biography: is not Eberhard Busch's magisterial *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (ET 1976) sufficient? Tietz's biography will complement rather than supplant that of Busch. Given the nature of the case—the one and the same life—it covers much of the same ground, utilises similar materials, and is organised along comparable lines. Both are works appreciative of Barth's contribution to modern theology. Nevertheless, Tietz's biography has certain advantages, in addition to its being slightly shorter and easier to read! In the more than half century that has now elapsed since Barth's death, further important sources have become available to the biographer. The elapsed time allows critical distance in the engagement with Barth, and