



Reviews



Jock Stein, *From Cosmos to Canaan: The Bible in Verse* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2018), pp. 212, ISBN 978-1910519967. £9.99

Jock Stein is one of the great figures of the late twentieth-century Scottish Kirk, a renaissance man of theology, music, art, and literature, and a much-loved pastor to many. His new book, *From Cosmos to Canaan*, is a remarkable volume which deserves to be in the hands of ministers and parishioners everywhere.

The beauty of this book is that it does so many things at once, so beautifully. Primarily it is a commentary on the first six books of the Bible, from the Creation narrative of Genesis to the crossing of the Jordan into Canaan in Joshua. This is no typical commentary though, as Stein weaves in his own poetry and reflections which respond to the original material of Scripture in ways that reflect today's contemporary issues and allow us to consider how they intersect with the stories and meta-narrative of the Hebrew Bible.

An important literary device is the way that Stein uses the character of Jean Sharpin. We are told that she is a real person, a friend who met with the author over coffees and lunches over an extended period. Sharpin acts as an interlocutor who is not hostile, is well informed about many aspects of religion, somewhat sceptical, but open to being convinced, and a helpfully challenging reviewer of Stein's poems. It is also revealed that she has a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, and it emerges that she has recently been reconnected to a brother, who is terminally ill, and with whom she had a complex relationship. These factors in her life are an important part of the conversations that take place with the author, and her voice is as significant as the biblical material with which Stein interacts. As the volume reaches its ending, we hear that Jean's brother has died, and that there has been a reconciliation between them, giving huge resonance with the imagery of crossing into the Promised Land that is dealt with in the Book of Joshua.

The reader can expect to find a wide variety of Stein's poetry in this volume. It has a distinctive flavour, deeply rooted in Scripture

but helpfully laced with pastoral insight and sensitivity as well as contemporary political, cultural and social issues. In our atomised times, Stein’s commentary on the Hexateuch is a helpful catechetical work that draws out the bigger themes tackled in these books and places them before us in an accessible but nuanced way. In a time when acres of print attempts to tackle the subject of training for ministry, this relatively slim volume gets to the heart of the matter in ways that are wise, deeply focused on God, yet open to revelation in our own times. Highly recommended.

Martin Ritchie,
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Andrew Root, *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), pp. xv + 292, ISBN 978-1506446745. £14.99

With a title like *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies* I might have expected the book bearing the title to be a bit too frivolous ‘for a theology book’. I was wrong. Within the covers I found a multi-course meal of dense theology presented accessibly, a historical sketch of science and religion in modernity, and biographical synopses of the ‘movers and shakers’ of the two former items. For those readers who prefer systematic theology, this book works to ground you in the lived realities of youth and their families. For those readers who prefer practical (sad as I am to draw that parallelism!) advice for ministry to young and old, this book works to push your horizons further out, seeing how the great ideas of the past centuries cannot be separated from the lives of the great thinkers who had them. And, of course, there is Jared.

‘Jared’ is an ‘everyman’ youth minister, and it is his story which forms the through-line of the book. What is surprising about Jared, even with the considerable handicap of being fictitious, is that his story and relationships are grounded and feel true. The book is divided into three parts, each of which involves Jared meeting with Aly, Sasha, and