

Healing the Divides

How every Christian can advance God's vision for racial unity and justice
Jason Roach and Jessamin Birdsall

- The Good Book Company, 2022, £10.99, 144pp
- ISBN: 9781784987275
- Reviewed by **Chris Green**, a vicar in North London

Healing the Divides is such a good and important book, that I'm not going to review it, merely praise it. Here are seven reasons:

First, it is uncomfortably British. The headline rhetoric and stories surrounding race are frequently US in origin, and we know their explanations – and excuses – often don't resonate here. That's dangerous. 'We don't have *that* problem over here,' is close to, 'we don't have *any* problem over here.'

It is forensically honest that racism is an unmissable reality in 2023, in the city where I live. It's an ugly lived reality for many – violently so for some. Elements of racism are even worse in the UK than they are in the US.

Birdsall's contribution is disarming and complicating, because introducing Japan repositions the black/white polarity. Can't Japanese Christians experience racism too?

Secondly, the book is nuanced. I've read books on racism with a superficial biblical exegesis – not this one; it is faithful, thoughtful, and hard-hitting.

White people, like me, learn to evade the challenges of addressing racism, by seeming to dismantle the theological agenda of 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM), 'Intersectionality', 'Cultural Marxism', 'Critical Race Theory', and by showing how 'wrong' 'they' are. We think in so doing that we've done away with the issue. Instead,

Roach and Birdsall provide much-needed granularity. BLM is undoubtedly a political movement with an agenda, but do we hear it as a cry of pain, a political creed, or a philosophical concept? All three – but only paying academic attention to the second and third denies what is going on for my Black sisters and brothers. On a biblical timeline, BLM is a fallen lament at sinful injustice.

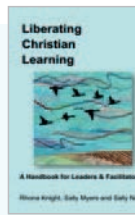
Third, it's honest. Roach's experience of being on the receiving end of racism in my city, *in, at, and from* church, silences me. Our brother is being open and telling us the truth about ourselves (me).

Fourth, it's generous in offering me the words to use without fear of being patronising, inept, offensive, or out-of-date. Permission is given and trust is extended, and I need to build on that.

Fifth, it's uncomfortable. The book tells stories I can't match. I've never been held up by the police because I'm a white man, out on my own. I've never had my colour be the first thing that people notice about me. I've never had to wonder if I'm only in the room to make up the numbers, or to make someone else look good. I've never had to teach my sons what do if their car is stopped. This gift of a book is such a gently-worded rebuke.

Sixth, it's a calm call to action, because the gospel is the deepest answer to this mess, and so local churches should be places where conversations happen, relationships deepen, and honesty and love are modelled.

Seventh, therefore, I must hear that call, and act. I can't assume that the challenge of promoting good racial relationships in the local church is someone else's responsibility. I can't leave the commenting on (yet another) injustice to a Black church leader. It is not the victim's responsibility to end the oppression. ◉



Liberating Christian Learning

A Handbook for Leaders and Facilitators
Rhona Knight, Sally Myers, and Sally Nash

- Self-published via Amazon 2023, £7.99, 136pp
- ISBN: 9798375358994
- Reviewed by **Patricia Wilkinson**, a GP in East Lancashire and a member of the *Triple Helix* Editorial Committee

As health professionals, and as Christians, we are called to lifelong learning. This short book is a helpful overview of different learning styles with practical suggestions. Although the examples are primarily based on a church context, they can apply to any 'learning event' or group. Each chapter has both theory and suggested application. Group dynamics are mentioned and how to deal with the 'awkward' person. There are hints and tips throughout, including choosing a venue, setting up, and identifying the learning objectives. Each chapter ends with a short list of 'Takeaways' to think about and consider.

A lot of the theory will be familiar to anyone who is a trainer in any setting. It also looks at Jesus' various approaches to teaching and has a brief introduction to theological reflection. The authors emphasise that one approach doesn't fit all, and that how we learn is as important as what we are learning.

This book will not tell you how to teach, or how to learn. Rather it is a short, practical overview of how Christian and medical adult learning should and could be.

I would recommend *Liberating Christian Learning* to all teachers and learners alike, whether Christian, medical, or both. ◉



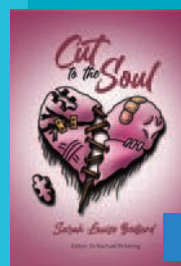
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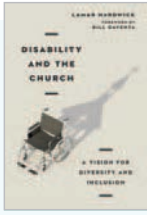




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Disability and The Church A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion Lamar Hardwick

- Inter-Varsity Press, US, 2021, £10.65, 208pp
- ISBN: 9780830841608
- Reviewed by **Grace Dalton**, CMF Intern

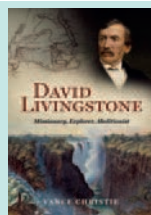
Georgia-based Pastor Lamar Hardwick was diagnosed with Asperger's in his thirties, and advocates for robust inclusion efforts within congregations.

Hardwick has coined for himself the moniker 'Autism Pastor', though I felt that there was a dearth of commentary on autism and faith (I am biased in my interest, however), despite the book including other theological reflections alongside its practical wisdom.

Several Biblical assertions struck me as presumptuous. Is it warranted to conclude that Moses had a speech-related 'disability'? Or that the palpable lacerations in Jesus' post-resurrection body imply that he would have had a 'disability' due to nail-damaged wrist and ankle tendons? But other Bible-based points are sagacious.

Powerful anecdotes from Hardwick's ministry assist us in beginning to comprehend the experiences of people with disabilities. Hardwick shares insightful thoughts on pastoring people with varied conditions, and his empathy shines through. I'd have been inclined to include some direct quotations from individuals with physical limitations, particularly given the wheelchair on the cover. He asserts that those within a minority are best placed to speak of the experiences of that minority, so I can't help but wonder if this ought to apply regarding physical disabilities also. Those of us on the autistic spectrum who are 'able-bodied' should hear from those whose limitations are of a different nature.

Astute parallels are drawn with the exclusion that has been faced by the African-American community (of which the author is also a member). He reflects on the transgression of Black folk being excluded from churches, challenging readers to address the exclusion of disabled people;



David Livingstone Missionary, Explorer, Abolitionist Vance Christie

- Christian Focus, 2023, £39.99, 768pp
- ISBN: 9781527110076
- Reviewed by **Peter Pattison**, retired medical missionary and GP

Here is a blockbuster new biography of a giant of the Victorian medical missions scene. Making extensive use of and quotations from primary sources (journals and letters), as well as reference to earlier biographies, the author gives us a rounded portrait of David Livingstone and the thirty years he spent in Central Africa (1841-1873). The subtitle, 'Missionary, Explorer, Abolitionist' sums up the three strands of his ministry, which were interwoven from start to finish.

The costliness of pioneering comes through strongly – the cost to family, health, comforts, and, sometimes, reputation. Along the way, Livingstone is credited with developing a reasonably effective quinine-based treatment for 'African fever' (malaria) long before its association with the Anopheles mosquito was established.

Mary, his wife, was the daughter of Robert and Mary Moffat, pioneering missionaries in South Africa (and later in Matabeleland, now Southern Zimbabwe).

and relays how meaningful active representation efforts, such as Black History Month, were for him as a young person within that minority.

The book challenges readers to actively accommodate those with disabilities, without whom the Church is incomplete, compelling us to ask, 'Who is missing?'. Hardwick contends that comprehensive inclusion is simultaneously costly and surprisingly possible. Recent years have seen a (sometimes flawed but needed) reckoning with racial inequality. This book reminds us that the exclusion faced by the disabled (albeit differently motivated) also needs attention. Whilst aimed at church

Supportive throughout, she died in Central Africa in 1862.

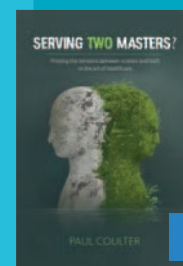
The celebrated meeting with Stanley occurred quite late in Livingstone's life. Stanley was 30 years old, Livingstone almost twice that. The pair struck up an unlikely friendship based on mutual respect.

As 'the Doctor' threaded his way between recurrent sickness, unreliable 'helpers', warring tribes, and rampaging Arab slave-traders, what comes through strongly is Livingstone's even-handed integrity, treating all men with respect and honesty. He was way ahead of his time in his courtesy to Africans and other supportive colleagues, and they loved him for it.

Devotional quotations from the journals reveal the deep faith that undergirded all his travels. His life could be summed up in Paul's words, 'However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace'. (Acts 20:24) Fittingly he was found to have gone home to his Master kneeling by his bedside close to Lake Bangweolo in what is now Northern Zambia. Most of the subsequent missions in Central Africa can trace their roots to Livingstone's pioneering labours.

There is one omission – a few maps would enrich the text for readers less familiar with the geography of Central Africa than is the author. Nevertheless, I highly recommend this book. If you can afford the cost and the time to digest its 750+ pages, you will be amply rewarded. ●

leaders, *Disability and the Church* is a worthwhile read for any Christian, prompting us to give greater thought to our engagement with people who are too often overlooked. ●



Serving Two Masters? Paul Coulter

£7.50



Against the Stream? A Memoir John Sandford-Smith

- The Ulverscroft Foundation, 2023, 281pp, £12.50
- ISBN 9781399947176
- Review by **Roger Timms**, a retired GP in East Anglia

John Sandford-Smith's warm and engaging memoir is dedicated to his beloved wife Sheila, his partner in 55 years of medical and faith adventures. She died of COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic. Beyond that deeply sad introduction, this is a highly captivating story of medical work and Christian mission across continents.

After public school and Cambridge, where John encountered and dedicated his life to Christ, there followed clinical medical training in London. After house jobs, he applied for surgical and ophthalmological training in Quetta, Pakistan. How did he get there? Well, he bought an old Land Rover, of course, and, with two companions, drove all the way, encountering the bitter East European winter and the appalling roads of the Middle East on the way. That they eventually arrived safely was little short of a miracle!

After Pakistan came work in Nigeria, by which time John had married the lovely nurse who had once sneakily squirted ethyl chloride local anaesthetic spray up his trousers while he was examining a patient.

Their children followed in due course, growing up around the world. John trained and worked in very adverse circumstances – nothing the NHS could throw at him would unsettle him after this. Despite witnessing and working amid great hardship, he always maintained his sense of humour. He recounts one friend's anecdote from Nigeria. They came upon a minibus that had driven off the road, ending up on its side in the bush, emblazoned with a Bible verse from the twenty-third Psalm, reading 'He makes me lie down in green pastures'.

After Africa and Asia, John returned to the United Kingdom, where he secured a post as a consultant ophthalmologist at an East Midlands teaching hospital. It was here



New Medicine, Old Values Discovering the Roots of Values Based Medicine Sam Leinster

- CMF, 2023, £12, 158pp
- ISBN: 9780906747865
- Reviewed by **Professor David Misselbrook**, Past Associate Professor in Family Medicine, RCSI Bahrain, Dean Emeritus Royal Society of Medicine

This is a wonderful book. The experience and the wisdom of the author are obvious on every page.

Its themes are tackled in an intelligent and well-informed manner, benefitting from the author's historical approaches to many of the chapters. This helps us to understand the underlying principles, not just a description of current orthodoxies. The brief case reports and anecdotes from the author's experience are particularly well-judged, always adding to the practical application of the principles discussed.

The book covers a wide range of medical values. This includes the usual suspects, such as moral values, through to professional principles, such as compassion. Leinster explains clearly why issues of science and evidence also relate to fundamental values.

The book is written most directly for a

that I first encountered him. He and Sheila showed great kindness and hospitality towards me and all the junior doctors.

While based in England, he continued to travel, undertaking mission, teaching, and ophthalmic surgery around the world, well into retirement. The needs are vast, and so he worked on establishing eye services where there had previously been little or no provision.

Sandford-Smith recounts in fascinating detail the events leading up to the Biafran war in Nigeria during the sixties, and the current conflict in Yemen, both of which he observed at close quarters. He writes with great warmth and insight.

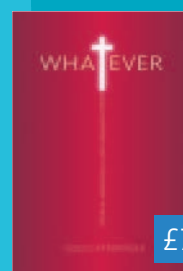
This is the story of a life well-lived, serving God and humanity, spreading the love of Christ among patients and colleagues, and having a lot of fun along the way! •

Christian audience. It would be particularly valuable for students and trainees, but even the most senior doctor would gain from reading it. For juniors, though, it will be a valuable resource that could help clarify perspectives across a wide range of professional issues, helping doctors develop the sort of practical wisdom that oozes out of every page. Although, I do wonder about the choice of putting the 'Christian perspective' at the end of each chapter. Why not the beginning? However, this is a very minor gripe about an excellent book.

I must make a particular comment about the final chapter, 'Applying the Principles'. This is a mature and well-thought-through reflection on how we should approach important dilemmas. What counts as a legitimate change in practice in changing circumstances, and what becomes a surrender of values as customs and fashions evolve around us? This chapter is such an excellent example of grounded reflection, so vital to doctors working at the grassroots and so characteristic of the whole tone of the book.

I wish I could have read this book years ago. It would have accelerated so much of my own professional development. But better late than never! The book would form an excellent basis for reflection and for self-directed PDP that could be discussed with one's appraiser. •

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