

Christianity and to the ‘modernization’ of China. There are a few comments about the anti-Christian student movement, provoked by the killing of protestors in Shanghai in 1925 by British police. This impacted on the work of Christian schools and colleges throughout the late Republican era, and it would have been good to know more about how the Clarks and Mannett understood those issues, as well as the question of gender both in China, and among Australian evangelical Anglicans.

This critique does not, however, detract from the intrinsic value of these inspiring stories. As well as the well-constructed narrative, there are many illuminating black-and-white photographs. The authors also supply a glossary of place names, which translate the Western orthography used at the time into modern pinyin. Very useful for anyone using a modern map!

Dr Kevin Ward
University of Leeds, UK

Steven Ogden, *Violence, Entitlement, and Politics: A Theology on Transforming the Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 150. ISBN 9781032076638 (pbk); ISBN 9780429273520 (ebk).

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Steven Ogden is an Australian priest and theologian who is interested in the theme of addressing domestic violence. The heart of the argument of the book appears to be the work of a couple of criminologists who, in a detailed series of case studies, found that ‘It is men’s orientations to and assumptions about the appropriate behaviour of women, their sense of entitlement over women, and the need to uphold their own moral universe that led to the murder of the vast majority of women partners’ (p. 111). Ogden acknowledges that understandings of the roots of violence are complex, and there is no silver bullet to deal with the problem, but he wants to follow up this lead. The question is how far it will take us. He finds entitlement to be evidenced in the way in which we use the possessive pronoun: the way in which we talk of my house, or my partner. The problem is that in everyday speech this usually says nothing about entitlement but is simply an aid to identification – ‘my house is the one with the geraniums on the window ledge’; ‘this is my partner’ (as opposed to my solicitor, vet, plumber etc.). Only occasionally does it mean ‘mine and not yours’. Other criminologists talk of sexual jealousy in relation to male violence against women. Fair enough, but does sexual jealousy derive from a sense of entitlement? The libertine Catherine Millet suggests not (*Jealousy: The Other Life of Catherine M*, 2008). Even if it did, surely the question is why a sense of entitlement should issue in violence? Does it do so necessarily? Ogden finds entitlement springs from a sense of rights. Surely, a perverted account of rights? Rights, as set out in the 1948 Declaration, are a precious marker of what is properly owing to human beings – the right to education, a safe dwelling, adequate food and so on. There is no right

to own or colonize or abuse another person. These practices do not spring from a sense of rights but from a damaged ego.

Recognizing that individual behaviour patterns are rooted in society at large, Ogden draws attention to the strong man syndrome in politics. Such figures characteristically use violence, but probably not first against women – Hitler’s ‘Night of the Long Knives’ was addressed to his previous supporters, as were Stalin’s purges. These figures do attract the support of some people – possibly mainly men – but in the case of both Hitler and Stalin (and probably of Erdogan, Putin, etc. today) their power rested on an indiscriminate use of violence against anyone suspected of disagreeing, in other words on a culture of fear. Those who dared to speak out (like the White Rose Group, or Osip Mandelstam) were at once eliminated. It is not true that ‘the masses’, as a whole, wanted a fascist dictatorship in Germany in 1933/4: the SDP, which vehemently opposed Hitler, was the largest party in German politics, but the leadership was either assassinated or sent to the camps.

Wishing to respond theologically, Ogden turns to the Nicodemus stories in John’s Gospel. He believes that Nicodemus’s interjection in Jn 7.51 marks his turn against strong man politics – but there is no evidence for this whatsoever: it is simply an appeal to legal process. Appealing to William Cavanaugh he looks for a Church ‘robust enough to counter the powers that be, but humble enough not to reproduce the exclusions and pride of these powers’ (p. 122). To establish such a Church, he looks to baptism as a political counter-practice. But as Barth and Moltmann have both insisted, infant baptism, which has been the norm in the Western Church, and still seems to be, cannot possibly produce such a Church.

The argument of the book is couched in terms drawn largely from Foucault. What Raymond Williams called a ‘structure of feeling’ is called a ‘dispositif’; what the Messianic Writings speak of as metanoia is called ‘desubjectivation’. ‘The limit-experience of divine desubjectivation entails the undoing and reforming of the self. It is a disruptive transition’ (p. 121). Does this really illuminate the experience of repentance or conversion, or throw any light on how violent offenders can be transformed? The Quaker circles of trust and accountability seem to do this far more effectively, and without a single word of jargon.

Addressing violence is certainly a key task; addressing the Church’s endorsement of state-sponsored violence would be important; addressing the roots of that evangelical Christian violence which needs to flog little boys (A. Graystone, *Bleeding for Jesus*, 2022) would also be good. I doubt whether any of this has much to do with entitlement. We are still waiting for light to shine in the darkness.

Tim Gorringe
Emeritus Professor of Theology, University of Exeter, UK