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Rachel Muers, *On the Voices, Contexts and Tasks of Theology: Experiments in Quaker and Feminist Thought* (London: T&T Clark, 2026). ISBN 9780567721266. Ebook, £76.50.

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Book review of Rachel Muers, *On the Voices, Contexts and Tasks of Theology: Experiments in Quaker and Feminist Thought* (London: T&T Clark, 2026).

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This collection of essays and occasional pieces, previously given and sometimes published elsewhere (including one, the 2023 George Richardson lecture, which appeared in this journal), is necessarily diverse in some respects but succeeds in presenting coherent themes when read from cover to cover. The core question might be framed as: how shall we theologise? Muers then explores this using especially, but not only, the resources of the Quaker and feminist traditions. Some of the talks were given specifically to students and I think the book will be of particular use to people who are considering whether and how to study theology academically, either because they are exploring setting out on that path, perhaps having previously considered it not for them or not part of their tradition, or because they have found a stumbling block and need to find new ways forward. Muers is able to show in various ways that women and others previously not considered theologian material can and should do theology, and that Quaker approaches are fully compatible with the dialogue between academy and church community which is part of good theology.

The essays are presented in four sections. Part 1, 'Raising Voices' offers an overview of the book, an encouragement to new theologians, and a chapter on 'Thinking with Julian of Norwich about doing theology' in which a central idea is that 'the theologian seeking understanding is claiming a specific blessing that has its own specific ground of hope' (p30). Part 2, 'Finding Voices in Quaker Tradition' contains four chapters, three of which explore Quaker history: Margaret Fell, John Woolman, and a discussion of voice and power which uses both Fell and John Whitehead to explore early Quaker uses of the Biblical image of 'the day of small things'. The final chapter in this section is a reflection on how nonconformist public theology might work in the contemporary British context.

Part 3 is called 'Finding Voices in Theological Streams' and it contains four chapters which explore mainly feminist issues: one on searching for foremothers in systematic theology (finding some, but not many, and why that matters and doesn't); one asking 'Where do women's voices come from?'; one on the significance of personal lives to the reading of theological work, especially where sexual immortality and actions which create and maintain gender inequality are revealed in the lives of theologians; and one on borders and boundaries, using the shibboleth/sibboleth story to explore how theology 'is both internally diverse and lacking in clearly defensible borders' (p131) and the importance of listening, challenge, and connection through difference. Finally, Part 4, 'Voices in Place' has three chapters, looking at the role of theology in the secular university, among the humanities subjects, and in ecumenical work.

I imagine many readers will go straight to the chapters most relevant to their interests. Those who are new to theology will find some chapters explicitly addressed to

them, especially chapter 2, ‘Let us hear your voice: Encouragement to new theologians’, but I would also recommend chapter 8, ‘A systematics of one’s own: Reflections of a search for foremothers in systematic theology’ as usefully opening out what it means to be a person doing theology in dialogue with previous generations while fully aware of the complexities of the tradition. Those who are not sure whether their community should be doing theology might want to pay particular attention to chapter 7, ‘Notes on nonconformist public theology’, which lays out briefly and powerfully some of the positive contributions theology can make to conversations and especially to creating spaces ‘for the meeting with God, for the meeting with their neighbour/stranger and for meeting whatever is going on in the world’ (p83).

If I were to pick out a further theme in this book, it would be the significance of forming a community of readers. This is made explicit on page 155, where Muers is talking about the relationship of theology or divinity as a subject to humanities as a whole and indeed to the world as a whole. She writes: ‘Perhaps an appropriately modest version of what we’re doing as scholars of divinity and the humanities is forming readers and communities of readers who care about good reading, as part of how humans find truth to live by, part of the healing.’ Aspects of this process are visible in many other places: reading historical sources, reading theologians appropriately in their context and with respect to their systematic visions, and as part of the projects of listening to specific (denominational and other) communities, reading the Bible, and listening to God. Something I admire about Muers as a scholar and a writer is the way that reading her work makes me want to read the work of others: she models participation in that community of readers in a way which encourages her own readers to join the wider community by careful and thoughtful reading of other theological work as well.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.