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# COUNTRYWAY



## Book Review

*A Christian Theology of Place*

John Inge

Ashgate, 2003

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This is one of those books that I last read fifteen years ago and have waxed lyrical about ever since. Then our editor asked me to review it for this 'Common Ground' edition of Country Way. Rereading this seminal work has been very hard indeed. I had forgotten how academic it is in style (nothing wrong with that), and my own engagement with theology of place over the last decade and a half has evolved so that I no longer have the same sense of excitement and discovery as I remember from my first few times of reading. Given it is seventeen years old, that shouldn't be a surprise.

However, this remains the book to start with in the field of place. It works its way through Western philosophy, scripture, sacrament and pilgrimage, finishing with a 'renewed appreciation of place'. In each chapter the author engages with a range of scholarly sources, including Walter Brueggemann's *Land* and WD Davies' *The Gospel and Land*. Lest this all sounds dry, he brings to life a range of spiritual, mystical experiences, highlighting the importance of place to each. Inge takes the relationship between context and event very seriously and explains clearly why we should do the same.

When Inge turns to a consideration of scripture and place, he considers the Old Testament as an account of relationship between God, people and place. He comments later that there is very little written about place and the New Testament, possibly because Paul largely ignores geographical identity, regarding it as subordinate to identity 'in Christ'. He draws on the theory that as Gentiles converted to Christianity, the interest of Christians in land became less, and their interest in Jerusalem became greater, so that by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, he felt very little need to mention land. Inge makes the point that as the body and embodiment has been reclaimed by theology, there needs to be a resurgence of interest in the space occupied by the body.

I have retained my strong interest in the Theology of Place ever since I read this book. I've read plenty around the topic since, but you won't find a better scholarly introduction.

### *Further reading*

Belden C Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 1998) ISBN 978 0 1953 1585 1

Martin Palmer, *Sacred Land: Decoding the hidden history of Britain* (Little, Brown UK, 2012) ISBN 978 0 7499 5292 1

Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, memory and identity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) ISBN 978 0 8018 6861 0)

#### *Practical information*

Maggie Durran, *Making Church Buildings Work: A Handbook for Managing and Developing Church Buildings for Mission and Ministry* (Canterbury Press, 2013) ISBN 978 1 8531 1597 4

Richard Giles, *Re-pitching the Tent: The Definitive Guide to Reordering Your Church*, 3rd Edition (Canterbury Press, 2004) ISBN 978 1 8531 1571 4

#### *More academic texts*

David Brown, *God and the Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (OUP, 2006) ISBN 978 0 1992 7198 4

Walter Brueggemann, *Land*, 2nd ed. (Fortress Press, 2002) ISBN 978 0800634629

WD Davies, *Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) ISBN 978 1850754787

Andrew Rumsey, *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place* (SCM Press, 2017) ISBN 978 0 3340 5484 9

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