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# Stories from the Street: A Theology of Homelessness by David Nixon

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Nixon, David. *Stories from the Street: A Theology of Homelessness*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013.

David Nixon in his book *Stories from the Street: A Theology of Homelessness* places stories of people who are homeless in dialogue with Christian scriptures, Church tradition, and particular theologies to construct a “theology of homelessness” (7). Drawing on liberation theology, Nixon argues that stories told by poor people can offer a deeper sense of the meaning of God and relationship, can reinvigorate the Christian story, and can in fact, change the world. Nixon shares a number of life histories of homeless people and teases out biographical and emotional themes from their stories in relation to spirituality. He also recounts results of reading Scripture in community with people who are homeless.

Placing these stories and scripture readings in dialogue with the theology found in Nancy Eisland’s book *The Disabled God* (Abingdon Press, 1994) and Albert Nolan’s book *God in South Africa* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), Nixon argues for a movement of homeless people “from the passivity of being recipients of charity to the activity of being agents in the growth of a Church to and with the most marginal” (179). He proposes a reworking of the Trinity to “God the Compassionate Father of Those Who are Homeless,” God the Son and Radical Storyteller,” and “God the Holy Spirit with the Power to Tell the Story Anew,” arguing that this new theological understanding will be more inclusive to those whose stories have often been overlooked (175-179).

While I appreciate Nixon’s goal of making the stories of the most marginalized central to our theology, Biblical interpretations, and the Church, this book was difficult to read because Nixon inadequately reconstructs the theoretical work of others and does not consistently link his ideas in a coherent manner. For example, Nixon shares stories from homeless people but then does not really use these stories as foundation for his theology of homelessness, but instead draws on so many different theologies and thinkers that the reader gets lost.

Relating the biographical and emotional themes from the stories to liberation theology and readings of the Bible could have produced some novel insights, but due to broad generalizations Nixon ends up reinforcing stereotypes of the homeless. While his stated aim is to focus on the agency of homeless people, he primarily interviewed chronically homeless people rather than the working homeless or homeless families, for example, and concluded that they became homeless due to a crisis, either health or relationship-related (81-86). Then he talks about the homeless “returning home” (108) through spirituality and an increased ability to solve their crises. Little is said of structural factors for homelessness, such as low wages or the high cost of housing and other necessities. Nor does Nixon make clear why these themes are particular to homeless people. Focusing primarily on individual hardship and failure does little to critique the stereotype of the homeless as having personal deficiencies, and limits Nixon’s claim that story has the “potential for transformation and empowerment” (147). He would have had to incorporate a critical analysis of power and structural oppression in relation to homelessness for the true revolutionary power of story to emerge.