

At the same time as I endorse this book for use in the church and classroom, it's important to note its limits. The book is written at an introductory level and does not incorporate much interaction with Greek or Latin (in fact, where referenced, the Greek is transliterated). As such, an educator would have to design their own primary languages activities. Though it would add to the cost of production, the book would be strengthened by including the relevant classical texts in Greek and Latin in the endnotes instead of referring the reader to English sourcebooks. Finally, more advanced students will find the book tantalizing, but at times frustrating. Though the lack of footnotes enhances readability, it does leave students unable to trace the claims that Hylen makes. More problematically, Hylen makes no reference to other scholars and the book lacks a bibliography. Though it does not prevent me from using and recommending the book, it does mean that educators will need to spend time formulating their own bibliographies on the topic.

Once again, when evaluated as an introductory workbook, *Finding Phoebe* is excellent. I heartily recommend it for Bible studies and introductory classes with the confidence that it will help students, pastors and scholars to dismantle stereotypes of ancient women and become better readers of the biblical text.

Kristofer Dale Phan Coffman  
Luther Seminary

**PRIESTS OF HISTORY: STEWARDING THE PART IN AN AHISTORIC AGE** by Sarah Irving-Stonebraker. Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan Reflective, 2024. 225 pages. \$29.99.

In *Priests of History*, Sarah Irving-Stonebraker takes on a task of Sisyphean proportions: trying to convince people, specifically Christians, to care deeply about history. To be fair, not all individuals dislike history; in fact, there are many history buffs among us. That said, there is an undeniable antipathy towards the importance of history, especially in American culture. However, Irving-Stonebraker is Australian, and trained in England, so perhaps her optimism stems from those factors.

When I was asked to review this, I gladly accepted. Like Irving-Stonebraker, I am a professional historian, and I enjoy regaling individuals with the endless benefits of knowing about our past. Irving-Stonebraker

and I have other commonalities too: A youth spent in unbelief, an adult conversion to Christianity, and a fondness for High-Church liturgy (she is Anglican whereas I am Catholic). With these shared experiences in mind, I assumed that I would be on board with her thesis and that I would enjoy her book.

Her general thesis, which one would be hard pressed to argue against, is that we are living in an ahistoric age. She identifies five major characteristics of the ahistoric age:

1. We believe that the past is merely a source of shame and oppression from which we must free ourselves.
2. We no longer think of ourselves as part of historical communities.
3. We are increasingly ignorant of history.
4. We do not believe history has a narrative or a purpose.
5. We are unable to reason well and disagree peaceably about the ethical complexities of the past—that is, the coexistence of good and evil in the same historical figure or episode.

With these problems fresh in our mind, Irving-Stonebraker makes the argument that we as Christians should become “priests of history.” She bases this concept on a combination of Martin Luther’s theological innovation of the “priesthood of all believers,” and Sir Robert Boyle’s claim that all natural philosophers are “priest of nature.” Following Boyle, she defines “priests” by their care for a subject (not for their intercessory activities) and so she calls Christians to tend to our past.

The book is a relatively slim volume, just a little more than 200 pages, and it is structured into three major sections: 1: How we lost our connection to history; 2. Why we need history; and 3: How history can help us. Within these broad categories Irving-Stonebraker weaves her argument, includes historical vignettes, often highlighting lesser told stories featuring people of color, and tells personal anecdotes. It is a book that defies easy categorization, but if pushed (which I am since this is a book review), I would classify it as an apology for history.

I have gone back and forth on whether or not Irving-Stonebraker accomplishes the aims of her book. On the positive side, her general premise is well-put: We should be looking at our past, and we should think long and hard before tossing out traditions and practices. Sections of her book are persuasively executed: Her chapter on historiography, for example, could be used in an introductory history class.

That said, the book has two principle shortcomings. First, I am still not entirely sure who the target audience is. For historians, it is preaching

to the choir and probably unnecessary. I am not sure if non-historians will be persuaded by her thesis, and sections can come across as preachy.

More problematic for her overall argument is that for all of Irving-Stonebraker's insistence that we become priests of history, she does not engage with Christian history as a whole. Her main conversation partners are the Anglican tradition and English intellectuals. This is understandable since she is indeed Anglican (and trained in England), but this also limits her impact and relatability. To argue that Christians be priests of history but not engage extensively with Catholicism, Orthodoxy, or other popular and historic forms of Protestantism, such as Lutheranism, Methodism, or the Baptists, is difficult to understand. The book also would have benefitted from more engagement with the fields of church history and contemporary theology. Many of her claims have been explored in those spaces, and scholars who specialize in the history of Christianity have long asserted that understanding our history, and historical theology, is vital to the Christian faith.

In the final analysis Irving-Stonebraker has written an intriguing book that defies easy classification. She offers a vigorous defense of the field of history and makes the case that everyone, not just professional historians, should take on the task of tending for the past. Those are noble goals even if the execution is a little uneven.

Jennifer Wojciechowski  
Luther Seminary

**THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH**, by Hans Schwarz. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2024. 204 pages. \$27.00 (paperback).

By now it is a commonplace to observe that the future of the church in the Western world is not particularly bright. The demographic trends are unmistakable throughout Europe and the Anglosphere: churches are in decline, each year losing more members to death and desertion than they are gaining by birth and baptism. This is especially clear in mainline Protestantism in the United States, as well as in the various state churches (or former state churches) of Western European countries like the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries, and Germany. Even while the mainline and state church traditions have modernized their practice by taking progressive positions on controversial social issues—and moderated