***Pieces of Ease and Grace*.**
Edited by ALAN H. CADWALLADER.
Pieces of Ease and Grace: Biblical Essays on Sexuality and Welcome. Edited by Alan H. Cadwallader. Pp. xlii + 219. Adelaide: ATF Press, 2013. ISBN 9781922239006 (paperback). **$15.95**.

That diversity that is an essential quality of the Anglican Communion is both a gift and a difficulty, a means of creative tension for the Church. The holding together of difference enables new light to be shone on old texts, and this collection of essays offers precisely this.

In the present climate in the Church of England, the subtitle 'Biblical Essays on Sexuality and Welcome' risks setting up the expectation that the collection will display eisegetical hermeneutics focussing largely on seeking to make a Biblical defence of practising homosexuality. Yet 'Welcome' is key: the essays rather come closer to a fresh liberation theology through the lens of texts selected because of some reference to same-sex relationships. As the title 'Pieces of Ease and Grace' suggests, this collection is *not* a feisty defence of texts which are used to condemn LGBTQIA people (such was the aim of the previous companion volume, *Five Uneasy Pieces*); in fact, these pieces engage with Biblical texts with a refreshing openness that highlights the assumptions a reader may bring to any Biblical text. As such, it is an invitation to stimulating exegesis which promises the possibility of a consistent Biblical hermeneutic.

A Prologue, Preface, Foreword, and Introduction, written by Cadwallader, Kittredge, Francis, and Smith respectively, combine to form a lengthy opening to the book. The four different voices here set the tone in line with *Five Uneasy Pieces* (2011) and in frequently rhetorical style outline the Australian-New Zealand scholarly background, the Anglican debates (which inevitably move too fast for the book to be precisely up-to-date, thus missing out on the latest steps in discussions of women's ministry in the Church of England), and the essays which will make up the body of the collection. By the time the reader reaches the Introduction, s/he may well be agreeing with Smith's opening question 'Why does this book have such an abundance of Forewords, Prefaces, and Introductions?' The 'pre-dinner drinks' to which these opening papers are likened nevertheless enliven the discourse, dealing early on with some of the disputes about sexuality so that the way is clear for the successive readings of the various texts in an easy and gracious fashion.

The essays follow the order of the occurrence of the texts in the Bible as the selection progresses from Genesis and Meg Warner's attentive reading of Genesis 2:24 to Philippians 4:2 and Gillian Townsley's focus on Euodia and Syntyche. The oft-discussed relationships of Ruth and Naomi, and David and Jonathan, are treated by Ruth Mathieson and James Harding respectively. Richard Treloar considers Esther and "Coming Out" while Gregory C. Jenks looks at Jonah and the generosity of God. The editor, Alan Cadwallader, moves the discussion to a New Testament context, examining the centurion of Matthew 8:5-13 and his care for his "servant", and the Canaanite woman who argues with Jesus that even the "dogs" can receive crumbs from their master (Matthew 15:21-28). Matthew 19:12 and Acts 8:26 then provide the centripetal texts for Ceri Wynne's discussion of eunuchs before Gillian Moses tackles the relationship between Mary and Martha in Bethany. Two undisputed Pauline

texts are treated next – Romans 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12 – by authors Marian Free and Joan Riley in subsequent papers, both reflecting on inclusivity in St. Paul's teaching, before the piece on Philippians 4:2 ends the volume.

This could not be farther from endless round of essays arguing that various Biblical relationships are homosexual. Instead, a rich breadth of relational possibilities is explored, which leads one to reassess the present dichotomy of marriage *versus* not-marriage. For instance, Harding's essay on David and Jonathan rather strives to 'free us to think of *many different kinds of opposite-sex and same-sex relationships*, not all, or even a majority, of which need be sexual' (p. 46). He encourages the reader to ask 'whether the primary human relationship… is not opposite-sex marriage but *friendship*, with marriage… as [a] manifestation of that' (p. 51).

There is yet more to these essays than an addition to the debate on sexuality. Treloar's contribution uses the story of Esther as a paradigm which offers a clear and captivating reflection on boundaries concerning aspects of 'otherness' and 'identity' (e.g. p. 66). This theme is taken up in Jenk's essay as he explores the book of Jonah in terms of God's relationship with 'outsiders' in the Bible (p. 74). Jonah, he suggests, is cited by Jesus in the New Testament as a 'biblical hero with a reputation for serving as an agent for God's grace to extend beyond traditional boundaries' (p. 77).

Beyond detailed readings, these pieces refresh interpreters' awareness of the assumptions they might bring to a text. For instance, the idea that Euodia and Syntyche were partners in leadership might in itself be challenging to traditional readings of women in the New Testament, but Townsley further acknowledges how D'Angelo's thesis - that they could be committed to one another in terms of 'sexual choice' - was an eye-opener in terms of 'how blinkered [her] vision had been' (p. 177).

Thus stressing rather the importance of noticing possibilities in texts, instead of making assertions about texts or overlooking them, this collection of essays makes a notable contribution not only to the sexuality debate but also to widening nuances of Biblical interpretation. While minor typographical errors may be an occasional distraction, this book is an enjoyable collection of close readings which surprise and inspire. Although this reader was disappointed not to have a concluding chapter summing up broader themes, nevertheless it is clear that the overarching message of this volume concerns identity and otherness and in so doing challenges traditional readings of some verses of Scripture. Readers from both academy and church will benefit from reflecting on and developing for themselves applications of the 'hospitable inclusion' that this collection graciously invites.