of life. In many respects this is a why-to book more than a how-to book, one that is at once devotional and theological. And because Burgess refers so often (and so helpfully) to life within the family and to relations between parents and children, I think it is good reading for people in youth ministry, especially people contemplating family-based approaches.

Russell Haitch,
Bethany Theological Seminary
Richmond, IN (USA)

Hear my Story: Understanding the Cries of Troubled Youth

In this postmodern, post-9/11 world, it is often said that we live in troubled times. Indeed, the last century could well claim to have been the most troubled in history so far. Many contemporary theologians and philosophers are of the opinion that we can no longer effectively pursue these disciplines or act appropriately unless we squarely face the hurt and suffering that is all around us and in our recent past. In such a context, Dean Borgman's Hear My Story provides us with a powerful and profound tool for reflection on the group of young people he calls 'troubled youth'.

He casts his readership net extremely wide, saying in his Preface that he writes for all those 'who share in youthful struggles' (p. xi), 'those who care deeply about the masses of youth, the transience, the vulnerability, the pain, and the powerlessness of youth.' (p. ix) His subject matter, however, is much more focussed: he defines ' “troubled youth” as young people in imminent danger of inflicting serious injury on themselves or others.' (p. 23) His estimate is that this group makes up five percent of the United States youth population and that this figure is broadly applicable globally. He also speaks of a wider 'at risk' group, but rather than using this term to denote young people at risk from violence, his intention seems to be to point to a group at risk of inflicting violence on themselves or others. This broadening of the subject group occurs in many parts of the book, making its findings sound more general than they are, perhaps, intended to be.
The book takes both theory and practice seriously, making it useful both for field-work practitioners and those whose interests are more academic. Scattered throughout the text are what might be called ‘thought boxes’, which invite the reader to apply the topic being considered to an actual youth-work situation and thence to their own ministry. Helpful questions at the end of each chapter act as a further spur to reflection and, possibly, discussion with others. The resources – both in print and online – also offered at the end of each chapter are extensive and helpfully introduced, allowing the interested reader to take a particular topic further. This is, in fact, something that Borgman himself recommends, allowing a topic-centred approach to the book, dipping in and out as occasion demands. However, using the book in such a fashion would greatly reduce its narrative scope and make it more difficult to detect the underlying presuppositions and message that gently pervade the text.

Perhaps the most obvious of these is Borgman’s use of, and attitude towards, story. The stories of ‘troubled youth’ are the most compelling aspect of the book and their power does much to substantiate his claim for the importance of narrative in our postmodern world. They bring the reader into direct and uncompromising contact with these young people, issuing a challenge to hear and respond. Borgman is an excellent practitioner in this regard, who not only tells other people’s stories, but also tells stories from his own life and practice. Many of the stories linger long in the memory: in the midst of one of the book’s most disturbing chapters, on urban violence, the story of LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman shines out like a beacon. LeAlan’s final, almost litany-like, ‘I hope I survive. I hope I survive.’ (p. 224) is a stunning example of what Borgman means by youth ministry ‘empowering young people to become storytellers able to help others and serve the human community.’ (p. 12)

Another striking aspect of the book is the way that it engages in theological reflection on the issues raised. Too often, youth ministry texts miss out this vital stage, jumping straight from describing the youth situation to suggesting techniques of response. Four of the chapters at the end of the major sections of the book have explicitly theological titles – of these, Chapter 7 (Theology of Suffering) and Chapter 14 (Theology of Violence) are particularly noteworthy. These are brave and risky chapters, in which Borgman brings to bear on his topic such diverse influences as Process Philosophy, Girardian Theology and Scripture-based approaches. He stresses that there are no easy answers to these