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Editorial: In the midst of death...

Anthony Woollard

Our annual conference this year on 'Ritual, Worship and Culture' came close at times to being dominated by the theme of death.

That comment requires a good deal of unpacking - not least because the conference managed, at the same time, to be a thoroughly life-filled affair, characterized by the frequent and welcome participation of baby Fergus (son of Hilary Topp, national co-ordinator of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and the customary inspiration, at the other end of the age spectrum, of the indomitable Mary Roe and irrepressible Sally Barnes - from whom see more below - among others.

We began by looking at the contemporary ways in which people search for identity through culture (including ritual). There was no wish to write off today's lifestyles as a 'culture of death', in spite of the grim social, economic and political context which now forms a backdrop to all that we think and do. But, as we explored what identity means to younger people today, from the huge impact of social media to those of the gig economy and ever-growing consumerism, we could not help asking just where Life was in all this - and where the Church should be.

The last edition of this newsletter carried a brief obituary for Alex Elsmore who tragically took his own life at university; and it was striking just how many conference participants had children or grandchildren struggling with mental health issues of greater or lesser severity, as they face the increasing problem today of answering the key existential questions of life. Who am I? How should I live - given that I must one day die? These questions, to which the Church

Modern Church

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Modern Church is an international society promoting liberal theology. Founded in 1898 to defend liberalism in the Church of England, we now work ecumenically to encourage open, enquiring, non-dogmatic approaches to Christianity.

Signs of the Times

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We prefer email but will process typed or handwritten text (phone for a postal address).

once had more or less officially recognized (if not universally accepted) answers, have not gone away, and cannot be suppressed by immersion in the rituals of shopping or online interaction.

And they are being asked, and the Church is trying to answer them in many places and in many ways. One of our presentations, and all of our worship, reflected the growth of New Monasticism, which seems to provide an identity and a meaning for an extraordinary range of people. But the more everyday life of the Church also provides examples, and a highlight of the conference was Sandra Millar's presentation of her research on the responses of non-churchgoers to christenings, weddings and funerals, which still touch a remarkable proportion of the population. We hope to feature some of her findings in future editions; they not only provide new inspiration for those who have to administer such rites, but also give food for thought and hope to the rest of us - not least in the area of funerals, which can help to sum up the meaning of an individual's life. We need, however, to listen before we can speak or act, and (as Angela Tilby trenchantly argued) not assume that off-the-shelf models, whether of the currently fashionable charismatic-evangelical sort or even perhaps of some versions of liberalism, can provide genuinely profound answers which people can freely and joyfully accept. People might not be queueing at our doors on the average Sunday morning, but there is a thirst, often latent, for genuine, open-minded and open-hearted help - pastoral and ritual - with finding identity, living the good life and preparing for a good death.

What then of Modern Church and its own work? We were reminded at the AGM that the ambitious work of our General Secretary Jonathan Draper cannot be supported for more than a few years unless we have a new influx of people and finance. Like the Church of England itself, we could easily buy into a narrative of decline and react with ever more frenetic activity. I trust that we are not going down that road - but we are certainly on the move. We have a few, though still not enough, new and younger members of Council. The line-up of Trustees has so far altered less, though we have warmly welcomed David Simon as our new Treasurer, while his predecessor Rosalind Lund has stepped into the post of Secretary, and I have been elected as Vice-Chair to replace Tim Stead, while Alan Race continues as our Chair. We are energetically promoting a deeper involvement in Greenbelt. We are working on both the format and the content of future Annual Conferences, with 'Religion in the Public Square' (chaired by Elaine Graham) coming up in 2019 and - an inspired change to our earlier plans - a conference on gender and sexuality in 2020 (chaired

by Adrian Thatcher). We are seeking new ways of involving those who are not natural 'joiners' but whose ministry (clergy or lay) and whose very Christian identity depends on our work more than they realise. We are raising our profile in the media, both online and in print - including improvements in the management of *Modern Believing*, to be carried forward by the new managing editor Karen O'Donnell who took a full part in the conference.

Yes, there is death, and it is not 'nothing at all'. It comes to us all - liberals and conservatives, believers and non-believers, the 'religious' and the 'spiritual but not religious' (and those who do not think of themselves as very 'spiritual' either). It may well come to organisations, religious and other. It may well come to the whole human race, and perhaps sooner than we should like to think. But in the midst of death we are in Life - and, not least, here in Modern Church. □

A refreshed Grand Narrative for the West: Escaping from a narrow understanding of reason

Brenda Watson

The first flaw in the current argument about grand narratives and common values, discussed in my article in the July issue of *Signs of the Times*, concerned confusion over values. Lesser values such as freedom of speech, which depend upon particular situations for validity, have taken precedence over foundational values such as concern for truth. However, lack of nurture or education in values has a deeper cause. Values are regarded as subjective and therefore it is up to people to decide for themselves. Of course, the needs of society and political enthusiasm for various beliefs mean that values are still instilled, especially through the law. But values themselves are not seen as being amenable to reasoning. This constitutes the second flaw which needs addressing for a renewed Grand Narrative for the West.

Since the Enlightenment, reliance on reason has been regarded as the mainstay for policing society and promoting virtue. Yet reason alone cannot determine values; it cannot even provide reliable starting-points for the reasoning process. Its primary function is as a tool with which to analyse and check what is already assumed on other grounds.

The problem has especially been the narrow concept of reason with which the West has tended to operate. Seen predominantly in terms of logic and scientific / empirical investigation leading to factual information, this has mostly discouraged the application of reason

to what by its very nature lies outside such a remit. This has promoted a powerful divide between fact and opinion. On the one side there is demonstrable objective knowledge; on the other side, vague, subjective notions that cannot be shown to anyone else to be conclusively correct. Values clearly belong to this side of the divide.

A recent book by Julian Baggini on *The Edge of Reason* (Yale University Press 2016) argues strongly for the use of reason but insists on the importance of acknowledging its limitations. He discusses four unrealistic myths concerning reason with which people have been taken in. He writes:

‘The roots of this misguided way of thinking are found deep in assumptions about the very nature of reason and knowledge...These assumptions create a simplistic dichotomy between facts which can be firmly established, either empirically or through pure reason, and everything else, which is mere opinion or prejudice’.

Many others have noted this fact/opinion divide. Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* speaks of:

‘the division within us which disengaged reason has created, setting thinking in opposition to feeling or instinct or intuition.’

The rift between emotional and cognitive capacities is serious. It has entered theological discourse. A clear example is Perry Schmidt-Leukel's fascinating article on ‘*Religious Pluralism in Thirteen Theses*’ in *Modern Believing* (57:1). In arguing a strongly rational position, he relied heavily on what is logically possible, and the

‘need to retain the central conception of theology as a rational enquiry into the truth of faith employing the best scientific standards.’

Having just discussed Aristotle's use of the term *scientific* he failed to distinguish it clearly from its usual modern understanding.

An impossible search for certainty continues to feed the fact/opinion divide. We want to be sure; we want personal insight to be publicly demonstrated. Yet outside the arena of straightforward and obvious practicalities, and rigorous scientific enquiry on the purely physical aspect of the world, no-one can be absolutely sure they are right. One of the most signal and costly failures in all history, including religious history, is when so many people feel completely sure.

If we can accept that our tiny minds and limited experience cannot hope to get beyond the role of searching for truth, and if we can acknowledge the partial and provisional nature of certainty, we can leave behind the fact/opinion divide. As Baggini writes, it is

‘a false dichotomy... We do not have to choose between objective, indisputable fact and mere opinion. Outlooks, values and beliefs can be *more* or *less* reasonable, *more* or *less* objective... The fact that moral principles do not have the same status as scientific ones does not mean that they are no more subject to rational scrutiny than a preference for strawberries over peaches’.

Shorn of arrogant narrowness, reason can and must include what is personal and holistic. The term *discursive* could be used to describe such reasoning, whereby common sense, imagination, experience and intuition all play their part in the search for truth; reason's role is to enable stupidities and logical fallacies of all kinds to be shown up and discarded.

The result of such shared thinking in discussion and debate will not be certainty, but a moving nearer towards knowledge and understanding. The benefits at both personal and communal level could be enormous. Spectres of false thinking could be put to flight as, for example, the faulty line of reasoning, common today even on university campuses, whereby respect for others requires that reasons with which the other might disagree should not be put forward. On the contrary, as Jeremy Stout holds:

‘The respect for each other that civility requires is most fully displayed in the kind of exchange where each person's deepest commitments can be recognised for what they are and analysed accordingly.’

The role of reason is limited, yet can be of huge service. Until it helps to overcome the fact/opinion divide, the West will continue to sink under the weight of what amounts to scientism. □

A Swedish journey towards inclusion

Sally Barnes

In April a delegation from Inclusive Church (IC) was invited by Swedish Lutheran friends from the Diocese of Stockholm to take part in a conference being held on their pilot project, ‘Accessibility and Inclusion - a Church for and with everyone’. We also visited churches that are part of the project to see the work they are doing and meet members of their communities. This visit arose as a result of one made last year by the same group whom we hosted in the Dioceses of Manchester and Liverpool to see schools and churches that were similarly working on inclusion.

The first thing I need to comment on was the hospitality and friendship we were shown. Nothing was too much trouble. Our itinerary encompassed every aspect of our day. Apart from the official



Inclusive Church's delegation with members of the Swedish Lutheran Church project plan on inclusion and the Bishop of Stockholm, Eva Brunne

programme it included sight-seeing, dining out, time for discussions, and meeting the Bishop of Stockholm, Eva Brunne, who received us with much warmth. One or more of our hosts was always there to provide all the information we needed and make sure we would find our way around, especially not to get run over by cyclists! Our hosts went the extra mile for us. I want to thank them for their warmth and friendship. We will ensure the links we have made stay firmly in place.

The main aim of the Swedish project, which started in 2015, was to work on diversity to achieve the goal of developing and maintaining a church for and with everyone. No-one is to be thought of as a minority or taking part to promote the interests of a specific group. Changes in attitudes within parishes and diocesan administration would be achieved through training for all and be on-going. To support the pilot and begin their work in the parishes, one full-time and two part-time officers were appointed and paid for by the Church of Sweden. Because it is a pilot project five churches were invited to take part to start with, including all their employees, which amounted to 35 in all. (The number of employees attached to churches there is far greater than those in the UK.) Extensive preparatory work by project organisers took place including visits to get to know the parishes concerned in order to develop an awareness of their different situations, needs and viewpoints. In-depth interviews were conducted in each parish. These included asking church employees and their youth groups seven questions. These were:

- What norms do you see in your parish?
- Do your norms shut anyone out?
- What individuals are missing?

- Can you provide an example of someone breaking a norm?
- Can you provide an example of an activity or place where it is considered natural for everyone to meet?
- The goal of the project is to have a church for and with everyone; if you had complete freedom to decide what support you need now and, in the future, what would that be?

Assessing the results opened up many different issues - as one would expect in any country and institution embarking on such a wide-ranging project. As a result of the findings of this preliminary work it was agreed that the diocese needed to provide stronger support to encourage the development of parishes, including that of leadership.

A Project Report was drawn up and a conference, 'Norm Breaking', was held in 2016. A concise and clear Plan of Action was created which identified the core aims of the project. It was also of crucial importance that the full engagement of all pilot project employees was necessary in order to ensure the successful implementation of the Plan. A key document was drawn up outlining the theological reasoning outlining why it is everyone's responsibility for the inclusion of the world's diversity.

By the time we arrived, the project was three years into action. Our visits included two of the churches involved. The first, the church of Fisksätra in the suburbs, was carrying out what was described as 'unique interfaith work'. When we arrived, we went to the community centre attached to the church where supper was available for all who wished to come. Food was free and in abundance. Guests came from the wide range of nationalities and cultures that

made up the community. Their pastor Pia-Sophia, with the church workers, Pernilla and Tina, told us there were 70 different nationalities and around 200 languages, many of the community were vulnerable through poverty and unemployment, with a range of different needs. A social worker is an essential member of the staff. They all work closely together with Catholics and Muslims with the aim of creating a peaceful, friendly, integrated, positive and harmonious society for the inhabitants of the suburb. There is at present no one from the Jewish community as there are very few living in the locality, 'but if there were we would welcome their inclusion too'.

A high number of the population belong to different Islamic traditions with whom an open dialogue is kept. The Imam and a number from the Muslim community were present and joined in with the meal and activities. A plan to build a mosque behind the church with a linking glass tunnel is proposed. 'We come together for those things with which we agree and join in activities' said Pia. 'We are supported in the work we do by our diocesan bishop and archbishop. Pastors who are studying come here'. An annual festival of cultures takes place and prayers for world peace. National Swedish TV transmits programmes from Fisksätra conveying the spirit of collaborative co-existence they all work so hard to maintain. Among our discussions we talked of the issue of extremist parties that are arising in Sweden, as they are in many European countries, and the opposition they show to this kind of collaborative love. I asked who might oppose and why; the answer was, 'They hate because so much love comes from this place'. This we all saw, felt and were moved by.

The next day we were taken to the parish of Högalid to meet the staff and some young members of the parish who attend the many integrated activities taking place there. The building is huge with twin spires that dominate the surrounding area of Södermain and contains the highest pulpit I have ever seen.

Again, by UK standards the churches are well staffed with qualified colleagues who work in a highly integrated way with a wide variety of groups and individuals. Gunilla, their pastor, with other staff members, talked us through their philosophy of inclusion and the work they do. Two of the younger members talked about what they feel about the community and the activities that are available to all those who wish to join in. They showed us, for example, the cards to help members learn sign language; we joined in the art activities. Youth camps take place during the holidays which, among many things, focus on preparation for Confirmation. We attended a Eucharist conducted by Gunilla in

supportive sign language, which is the norm for the service. The Högalid staff and community recently received an award from the City of Stockholm for their work on inclusion.

In the evening, Bishop Eva Brunne welcomed us to her home and gave us time to exchange views and talk about the differences and similarities between the Swedish church and that of the Church of England over an extremely delicious meal.

On the third day we attended a conference at Vårfrukyrkan entitled, 'Who is missing at the Table?' Delegates came from many parts of Stockholm who are part of the project or had an interest in it. It was good to discuss, with a wide range of people from different disciplines, the feelings they have about inclusion and their contribution towards it, and how expertise is shared between churches and groups.

Each of us as IC delegates had been given a slot in which to talk about our own experiences and why we were part of IC. Nick Bundock, Rector of St James and Emmanuel, Didsbury, Manchester, was a key speaker on 'The Congregation - obstacle or opportunity'. The Swedish delegation, when they visited us last year, went to his parish and heard the story of how the church community changed and developed after the tragedy of a young parishioner who took her own life because she did not know how to be a Christian and gay. At the conference Nick (with her parents' permission) took everyone through the sequence of events. He talked about the stages they all went through; how it changed the way they thought of what their faith was about and how they now read the Bible differently. Through their soul-searching and discussions, they lost a few members who went elsewhere, but he talked about how his church has grown and broadened out though the inclusion of the acceptance and welcome of gay members of the community and other groups who had previously felt left on the margins or that the church was not for them. Nick's sensitive, straightforward, honest and direct way of relating this story was deeply moving and had a profound effect.

Next, Stephen Edwards, Team Rector of Wythenshawe and Area Dean in Manchester, talked of the stages his deanery went through on their way to becoming what is now the first inclusive deanery in the country. He talked of the steps they took and the work they carried out in different ways according to the needs each church had identified. They were keen to learn from each other and took many approaches; some through day workshops, others with speakers and discussions, before they all felt ready to sign up to the IC statement.

I talked about Women and the Church (WATCH), its aims and my long involvement of working with others towards the full inclusion of women, ordained and lay, at every level in the Church. Interest was shown in the journey we had taken and still are taking. While in many ways Sweden has been way ahead of us regarding women's ordination it still is not without its own issues, examples of which we were told about during our stay. I also took the opportunity to talk about the Anglican-Lutheran Society, of which I am a trustee, on what we do and what our aims are.

Jonathan Draper talked of his role as General Secretary of Modern Church. He gave an overview of the history of the organisation, now in its 120th year, formed to encourage non-dogmatic approaches to Christianity, support liberal voices in our churches and work ecumenically through regular publications and yearly conferences. Then Ruth Wilde, the newly appointed national co-ordinator of Inclusive Church, spoke similarly of her role, in the context of her background as a Quaker formerly with SCM and her involvement in many social justice activities.

This was followed by a session directed by the diocese *consulent*, Eva von Eckermann, on 'What do we do now', relating to the project, how it was progressing and hopes for the next stage, which gave people time to share their views with each other.

On our final day we visited the Diocesan office for a round-up of the week, discussing what we had experienced and felt about what we had seen. We could see that the work of the project was impressive. It was so valuable to all those who were taking part, not to mention those who were benefitting from their participation. It was clearly making a difference. The experience of the original five pilot churches will be invaluable to and supportive of those who will be joining in the future. The fact that it was instigated by colleagues from the diocese who had had the vision and laid careful ground work in preparation was a major factor; so was being funded by the Church of Sweden who saw the importance of financially supporting the difference gifts, insights and expertise of those involved.

We had the impression that in many ways Sweden was way ahead of us, and in some ways, they are. But we had also heard during our visits of the negative experiences of some women pastors for example, that women can be silently ignored and / or rejected, that there is still repression and a non-acceptance of their gifts in some parishes - all very familiar to us. It was said that in these cases, as in any case of discrimination, it is necessary to point out the norms

and behaviours that are excluding individuals and groups that diminish the Church.

'If you don't accept everyone who comes you are denying the gifts of God. What does that mean when you are made in the image of God' was a comment that we could all affirm. Both Churches in our different ways still have a long way to go but go and get there we will.

The main impressions we were left with was the sheer determination, endeavour and faith shown by those involved who are working in partnership and mutual support of each other; all carried out in the full hope that what is taking place will develop beyond the pilot so that the Church in Sweden will truly become 'A Church for and with everyone'.

A fuller version of this article is on the Inclusive Church website www.inclusive-church.org.uk □

REVIEWS

Richard Carter & Samuel Wells ed., *Who Is My Neighbour? The Global and Personal Challenge (SPCK 2018)*

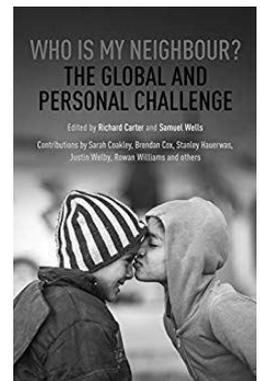
Paul Brett

These twelve essays, with prologue and epilogue, emerge from a series of lectures at St Martin-in-the-Fields in central London. Some of the essays have been previously published elsewhere.

In his preface Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin's, himself the son of migrants, uses the Old Testament story of Ruth to show how migration, far from being a threat, can be a gift to a nation. Rowan Williams follows this up with an insightful examination of the good Samaritan story. The ethics of global relationships is about defining 'ourselves as neighbours'. Quoting Bonhoeffer, it's about a readiness to 'stand in for and stand with whatever human neighbour is around'.

The American ethicist Luke Bretherton argues that politics is a form of neighbour love, and that 'building a common life with strangers and enemies is a profound act of faith'. Another American, the virtue ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, offers an extended critique of liberalism, pointing to its incompatibility with some forms of democracy. He is clearly worried by the Trump phenomenon.

Next comes the Cambridge theologian Sarah Coakley with a more spiritual meditation entitled 'beyond fear



and discrimination'. She points to the 'painful learning of the processes of prayer, moral attention and personal transformation'. On a practical level Justin Welby's chapter tells stories from around the world of reconciliation that he has encountered. It is to 'treasure the identity of the other', a 'fragile flower' that needs resourcing.

Back now to academia. Meg Warner, a post-doctoral researcher at Exeter, meticulously unpicks the Genesis story of Abraham, himself an alien in the land, entertaining strangers unawares. She notes that her native Australia, resisting immigrants, is itself 'a nation of boat people'.

In a deeply moving essay London Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu asks 'Is the rapist... the racist... the anti-Semite my neighbour? Were the Nazis my neighbours?'

Her understanding of the Hebrew text is that 'one should love *for* one's neighbour what one loves *for* oneself, not *as* oneself, i.e. 'wealth, possessions, honour, wisdom and knowledge... freedom from persecution, stability, security, citizenship and an upright way of life'.

Edinburgh ethicist Michael Northcott turns attention to the ecological crisis. He describes the environmental and social consequences of the 'neoliberal economic revolution of the 1980s' and gives numerous examples of the threats there are to the natural environment 'whose non-human inhabitants are our fellow residents'.

Sarah Teather, director of the UK Jesuit Refugee Service and former politician, talks about her experience of working with refugees. Anna Rowlands, professor of Catholic social thought and practice at Durham, follows this with a reflection on discussion in a Sunderland pub about migration and the loss of a sense of the common good. Brendan Cox, husband of the murdered MP Jo Cox, looks in practical ways for a better kind of politics to overcome what he calls a 'reduced social connectedness and civic engagement'.

In a final essay Sam Wells reprises his idea of the neighbour as 'God's gift'. We are overwhelmed by 'an ocean of need', but Jesus is the Samaritan offering mercy. And in his epilogue Richard Carter, on the staff of St Martin's, tells detailed stories of people he has met in and around Trafalgar Square. 'In discovering our neighbour,' he writes, 'we discover God'.

So, what are we to make of this rich miscellany? I would want to think very practically of that Samaritan neighbour as someone of other nationality and faith, who works with the natural world, who is a traveller, who uses resources beyond immediate need, and

whose action challenges the political establishment for their lack of care. This book is a powerful antidote to an increasingly individualistic, sentimental and inward-looking church. It ends with the words 'Go and do likewise'.

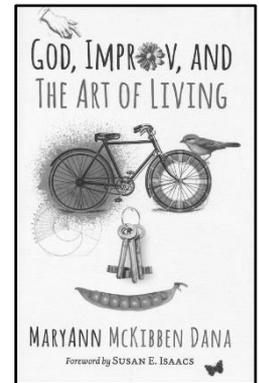
Canon Paul Brett has retired to Bath after a ministry mainly in industrial mission and social responsibility. □

Maryann McKibben Dana, *God, Improv, and the Art of Living* (Eerdmans 2018)

T Derrick Witherington

In a pluralized context wherein the variety of possible choices becomes ever more widened with each passing day, many people seek an identity which can provide them with a certain degree of certainty. Identity is, of course, necessary, but sometimes identities which are too strong and closed can possess a closed, lifeless, and, at times, lethal edge. The insights mapped out by MaryAnn McKibben Dana in *God, Improv, and the Art of Living* could be seen as providing Christians with a road-map with which to construct their identities in a faithful and openly-creative way. Drawing upon insights she learned through years of Improv classes and experiences she has experienced as a Presbyterian pastor and working wife and mother, McKibben Dana provides a creative and compelling model for Christian living.

Identifying the essence of Christian praxis as being a living in the 'yes-and' of improv, McKibben Dana maintains that it is only in letting go of our preconceived notions and living fully 'in the moment' that we can live into God's invitation to create something beautiful with our lives. This begins with first acquiring a realistic view of what is around us, serenely 'accepting the things I cannot change,' in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr. After this we then are to discern what things we *can* change, and this puts us in the moment of improv, the moment where we are bold and courageous enough to risk doing something creative in order to live authentic lives. Such authenticity is not derived from conforming our lives to God's supposedly unchanging plan, but is, rather, a question of responding to the 'prompts,' the 'interruptions,' which are set in our path, and our courageous response to them is what actually 'conforms' us to God's plan.



I did find myself nodding my head quite a bit while reading, and I certainly know from experience just how overwhelming discernment can be. How much precious time we would save if we stopped yearning to discover the 'one path that leads to happiness,' and, instead, see that happiness is something that can be created and chosen here and now? This aside, I also found myself posing a couple of questions. First, does the speed of improv really do complete justice to the first move we highlighted, namely, determining what can and cannot change? Sometimes, it seems, situations - such as that of systemic injustice - call for careful examination to properly assess the situation and determine the best way of proceeding. This leads to my second question, namely, how would someone in a situation of injustice - a refugee, a sweatshop worker... - read and respond to this book? While it seems that McKibben Dana would say that such people respond with as much creativity and freedom as possible in order to create happiness even in the darkness, don't some situations require direct action in order to open closed and deadly systems and, thereby, liberating people so that they may say, robustly, 'yes-and?'

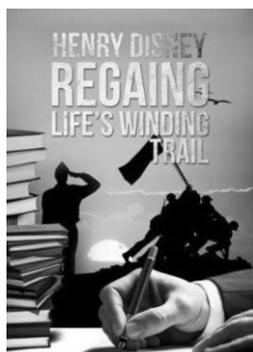
In any case, I found the book to be a creative and valuable work on contemporary Christian praxis. The author's inclusion of suggested group activities at the end of each chapter, along with each chapter's relative shortness, make this book ideal for use in church groups and on retreats. It should also be required reading for anyone involved in pastoral ministry or spiritual direction, or, indeed, for Christians who are facing big decisions. Too often have Christians hesitated to live fully in the moment, seeking to fulfil a divine 'plan' which always remains at a distance. God's call is for us to have life 'in abundance' in each moment we find ourselves in, and McKibben-Dana's book helps us to do just that.

T. Derrick Witherington is a Doctoral Researcher at the KU Leuven and a member of the research group, Theology in a Postmodern Context. □

Henry Disney, Regaining Life's Winding Trail (Austen Macauley 2017)

Rosalind Lund

In this idiosyncratic and fascinating memoir, entomologist and naturalist Henry Disney takes the reader with him on his spiritual and career journey through life.



Very much a Modern Church sort of person, his scientific knowledge and understanding meant that he could never accept a literal interpretation of the Bible and inevitably this led him through a period of difficulty with organized religion. He came through this and was led to feel that he was called to ordained ministry. However, this was not to be (half of the selectors considered him 'heretical') but his bishop thought that Henry's talents were needed in the Church and recommended him to become a selector - a role Henry fulfilled for some years.

Disney's early years were not easy - he was born in 1938 and his parents' circumstances meant that he hardly saw anything of them during the war years. He was sent to boarding school very young and no doubt this contributed to his strong sense of his own self-worth and a need to challenge authority whenever he felt misjudged and in the right. Fortunately, Aunt Sheila provided a secure base and home for him and he reports of happy memories of holidays with her in Norfolk. Not surprisingly Disney was a somewhat shy boy who developed a fascination for natural history and gained release by writing poetry. The whole book is interspersed with Henry's poetry which provides a continuing commentary on his life - sometimes the poems provide an essential insight into an experience, but if poetry is not your bag, then there is still plenty to get your teeth into. The drama of events certainly carried this reader through with a burning desire to find out what happened next!

No sooner had Disney left school than he received his call up papers and before long, it was 1957, he found himself in Cyprus where he not only discovered that he had leadership skills, but he also received an injury to his hearing that still troubles him today. He had little time for the MoD who later refused him any compensation for this injury. And, when Barbara Castle made a ministerial visit to Cyprus in 1958 she accused the Army of torturing EOKA suspects - she was denounced by the Establishment but of course events have shown that she was right. Henry engaged his comrades in debate over the value of torture and was clear that it achieved nothing - something that has been fully borne out by modern research.

Disney's life work as an entomologist has been with scuttle flies, not a field of interest that the average reader will be familiar with. His notes on the insects found in dog poo in urban areas that led to an investigation of the toxicity of parasites in dog poo resulting to today's law obliging dog owners to clear up after their dogs. Disney is still (in retirement) the go-to person for scientists the world over for scuttle flies and he has identified a huge number of new species over the years.

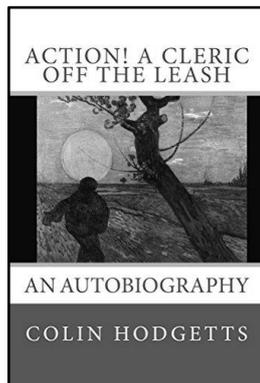
A brief review can't do justice to such a wide-ranging book. It is an insight into the working of the mind of a distinguished scientist and thoughtful lay Anglican. Henry is nothing if not provocative but his challenging approach to faith provides a much-needed counter to the sometimes bland and frankly dull offerings that are the lot of many parishioners to receive in Sunday sermons. And it is a good read.

Rosalind Lund, a longstanding member of Modern Church, has previously served as Treasurer and as Vice-Chair of Trustees. She is now the Secretary of the charity. □

Colin Hodgetts, Action!
A cleric off the leash
(Self-published 2016)

Bill Cave

Action! A Cleric Off the Leash is a self-published autobiography available on the internet. This review has one purpose: to make you buy it! Once bought, the book should be read; then its wisdom should invade your life.



Hodgetts is a prime example of the breed of clergy, like the reviewer, whose ministry has been spent outside the institutional structures of the Church of England. His full biography is on the internet. The clue to the author and his book is on the cover - not its title, but its picture: *Sower with Setting Sun*, by Van Gogh. Hodgetts writes:

I would like to lay out... my values by exploring one of Van Gogh's works of art. By the side of my computer is *The Sower with Setting Sun*. It is my ikon. It tells a story, a significant story, a sacred story, my story. Each element in the picture is a symbol: each stands for something other than itself. We are not faced with just a sun, or just a tree, or just a man sowing but with something much more profound. (Hodgetts 2016:11)

As a living parable Hodgetts not only used the Sower-image as his rule of life, but also to explain that life to others.

Hodgetts was born on Jersey in early 1940, two months before the Channel Islands were occupied by German forces. On moving to Guernsey, Church and music were added to his education and spiritual formation, leading to training at Ripon Hall, Cuddesdon; he was ordained in the mid-1960s and served in a parish in Hackney.

The young clergyman soon learned how to slip the institutional leash of church ministry, and his work as

a sower of spiritual seeds began to flourish. What follows is a series of compelling accounts of successive *fields* episodes in which Hodgetts expressed his ministry; East End curate, educationalist in South London, Christian activist and warden for the Othona community in Essex: www.othonaessex.org.uk

In 1983 Hodgetts was invited by Satish Kumar, better known for the periodical *Resurgence*, to take over an alternative secondary school at Hartland in Devon, where he was also the vicar from 2003 to 2007. Here he not only developed ideas, but saw them flourish in the developing lives of others.

Action! A cleric off the leash is not just the autobiography of an atypical clergyman; nor is it just an account of 1960s-1980s peace movement campaigns, of which the book is, undoubtedly, an important record. It is also a record of the flourishing and practical application of Hodgetts' spiritual insights.

The author's sources of inspiration were his early years in the occupied Channel Islands, developed through his readiness to accept and practice insights on the basis of inherent wisdom, not confessional where *those insights challenge us to transcend our limitations and to live according to the Gospel - and to look for God in other people's eyes.*

Hodgetts refers to Eastern Spiritualities, philosophers and theologians, literature and music to an equal extent with mainline scriptures; and a life shared with others, young people, those broken and vulnerable, and of different background and cultural tradition.

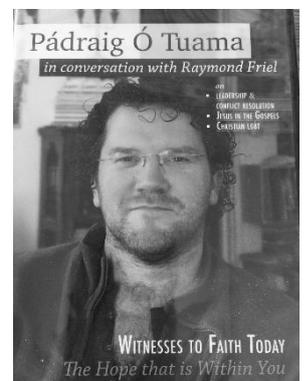
This book is invaluable - buy it, read it, live it! And give thanks for Hodgetts and his remarkable seed-sowing ministry.

Bill Cave is a former university and prison chaplain now working with Wiltshire Police. □

Padraig O Tuama in conversation with Raymond Friel - CD
(Redemptorist Publications 2018)

Keith Thomasson

This CD is part of a series of interviews with leading Christian thinkers and activists such as Jean Vanier and Timothy Radcliffe. I shall be reviewing the other interviews too. It would be fruitful to hear an increasingly diverse range of people be interviewed.



I have listened several times and read the booklet too. Both are well-produced and complementary. The booklet would be improved by having chapter markings that corresponded with the CD tracks.

The interview has an extemporaneous feel, yet I imagine the conversation was well planned. It is akin to radio at its best, yet makes up for something that rarely happens on air, namely an extended interview with a theologian. The quality has captured my interest similarly to that of Melvin Bragg's TV interview with Dennis Potter, 'Seeing the Blossom'.

Padraig O'Tuama, a self-declared ecumenist rooted in Irish Roman Catholicism, is one of two people who share leadership within the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland. On hearing this information, I wanted to hear more of how such a leadership model could be fruitful for para-church organizations.

Padraig is a poet and theologian and combines the two skills. He recently gave a presentation at the inaugural *Church Times* Festival of Poetry at Sarum College. Here he is in conversation with Raymond Friel, a published Scottish poet and experienced leader within Roman Catholic education, and a dynamic and insightful interviewer.

Padraig is invited to explore leadership in the midst of conflict, and he is deeply influenced by the Jesus of the Gospels. Padraig reflects on the challenges of being Christian and gay. He movingly recounts his experience in story and poetry. The interview is punctuated by Padraig reading several of his own beautiful and searching poems. Padraig also brings an interesting perspective on leadership as he is a leader who is lay.

Padraig's exploration of the tension between Jesus' ministry and the institutional church that has developed subsequently, is captured by the words 'creativity' and 'chaos'. This could have been enriched through a connection with 'emergence' and the writings of Tim Harle.

I shall explore three strands of the conversation that have touched me.

First, I valued Padraig's comments on *Gesture as Leadership*. He referred to the handshake between Queen Elizabeth and Martin McGuinness. He captures this in his poem, 'Shaking Hands' which begins with the pertinent question, 'Because what's the alternative?'

This has encouraged me to return to earlier reading on 'embodied leadership' by authors such as Amanda Sinclair, and to think further how gesture can help address conflict, bring healing and go beyond 'yet

more words'. Further, as part of my work with adults with learning disabilities, I am becoming increasingly open to the place of gesture within our common life. I wonder how I can incorporate gesture into my communication?

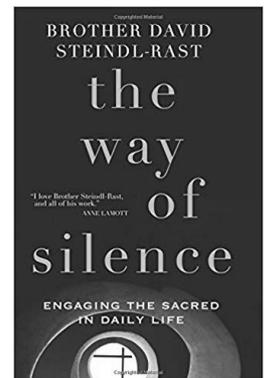
Second, I heard and read during Lent Padraig's ideas around Jesus' suffering. This enabled me to embrace with greater clarity during Holy Week a way of understanding Jesus' suffering. I quote, 'I think the death of Jesus reveals the heart of God, God's great love for people. I think the death of Jesus reveals humanity, that we are frightened of something that might be for the good, and that in the name of protecting the good, we will do the bad, which is to punish.' Padraig relates this to the contemporary incidence of torture.

Finally, Padraig's evocative story about identity offers very valuable comments for all committed to understanding the other, whoever that might be, and ultimately ourselves. Padraig's openness to faith and diversity of opinion is inspiring in the world today. It is primarily a hopeful message he proclaims.

Keith Thomasson is Senior Chaplain and Spirituality Advisor, Alabaré Christian Care and Support. □

David Steindl-Rast OSB,
The Way of Silence:
Engaging the Sacred in
Daily Life (DLT 2018)
Michael Goater

First published in hardback in 2016, this paperback edition offers a series of meditations on themes which will be familiar to readers of Br David Steindl-Rast's earlier books and, increasingly of late, to followers of his work on the internet, including a number of his conferences.



Here eleven short chapters, each prefaced by a quotation from other books by Br David (notably *Gratefulness*, *The Heart of Prayer* (1984), *A Listening Heart* (1999) and *Music of Silence* (2001)) centre, as the title of this volume implies, on 'the way of silence', a discipline of contemplative prayer, which begins, continues and ends in 'obedience'. By 'obedience', as befits a good Benedictine monk, the author intends a 'thorough listening' with the 'heart', entailing a dedication of the whole of one's being, an openness and self-giving, to whatever is. Indeed, a favourite quotation of Br David's, from Galway Kinnell's *Prayer*, runs -

Whatever happens. Whatever
What is is what
I want. Only that. But that.

This stance towards life, is one of 'gratefulness', a quality strongly associated with the author through the organization gratefulness.org, to which he is senior adviser, which is here also glossed as mindfulness, whole-heartedness, openness to meaning, vital awareness, recollectedness, or T.S. Eliot's 'concentration without elimination'. In the titles of the book's chapters and their prefatory quotations we have reflected a number of aspects of this welcome and wakefulness to the haecceity of things: 'Our Quest for Ultimate Meaning', 'The Mystical Core of Organized Religion', 'Encountering God through the Senses', 'The Mystic in All of Us', 'Cultivating Grateful Joy', 'The Homing Instinct of the Human Heart', 'Standing on Holy Ground', and in this latter vein, a meditation with which the book concludes, 'One Is the Human Spirit', delivered at the United Nations on its thirtieth anniversary in 1975.

Not everyone will be comfortable with Br David's syncretism (though he is an engaging apologist for it and deeply involved in Buddhist-Christian dialogue and Zen practices), his panentheism, the strong influence of nineteenth century Transcendentalism on his work, nor with the penchant for quietism to which such writing is so often prone (but which he would most certainly not endorse). His rootedness in Christianity, and more particularly the Benedictine tradition, cannot be doubted, however, nor his deep affinity with forms of Christian spirituality at least as old as the lilies of Christ's field in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 6.

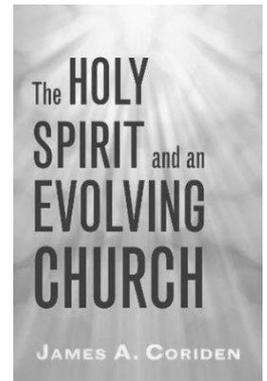
Here, as so often in his writing and discourses, David Steindl-Rast offers his insights courteously, with charm and wit, with helpful analogies (drawing on our experience of music, for example), and with a lifetime's learning (he is now 92) and wide reading lightly worn. The core of the book lies perhaps in the third chapter ('The Mystic in All of Us'), which, besides presenting much of the argument with a limpid clarity, models also a fruitful way in which *The Way of Silence* may be read. In this Br David invites us to 'a special kind of yes', that openness to what lies before us which is intimately related to obedience, to listening. We 'stand under' the text that we may understand, not instrumentally, grasping after its meaning, but attentively - as the author would say, heeding it with the heart.

Canon Michael Goater is a retired priest in the Diocese of Salisbury with an interest in Christian Spirituality □

James Coriden, *The Holy Spirit and an evolving Church* (Orbis 2017)

Karen Gorham

Fr James Coriden, canon lawyer, academic dean emeritus and professor at the Washington Theological Union, has written an interesting book on the Holy Spirit. *The Holy Spirit and an Evolving Church*, although divided by the author into six chapters, is really divided in three sections. The first acts as a brief guide to the work of the Holy Spirit in scripture and the early church. Taking us from Genesis to Augustine of Hippo, Coriden creates a story of the Holy Spirit in the life of our created world and the church, an ever-moving dynamic presence, pervading, nurturing, disturbing and evolving.



In the second section Coriden sets out his own conclusion of the Spirit's work, which is to bring in the reign of God. This is an evolutionary goal. It is a persuasive conclusion bringing light and life to the continued move of the Holy Spirit in the people of God today, with the Roman Catholic Church, like other Christian churches, being one portion or segment of the new people of God. As such the Holy Spirit, writes Coriden, continues to guide, build up and renew the church.

It is unfortunate that the author concludes his first historical section with the Council of Constantinople and the *filioque* clause and mentions only in passing subsequent saints like Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich (perhaps as an attempt to name a few women!) In fact, there is a huge jump from 1416 to the present day where in his final section Coriden picks up the Catholic Church with Pope Francis in 2015. It would have been interesting to have read, for example, how the Holy Spirit worked through the Second Vatican Council.

The first two sections of the book are used to create a final section on how Roman Catholic evolution could (or should) continue. It's here that the text, which so far has been quite systematic, gets rather arbitrary, with Coriden choosing to focus on what he considers to be some key issues: synodality, arguing that current trends may be work of the Holy Spirit whereby all baptised believers have a place and a role; the selection of bishops and the evolution of the sacraments. The conclusion is swift, and the book feels like the ending has been rushed to chime in with current developments within the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, three more considerable topics -

teaching, ecumenism and ecology - are afforded only a few paragraphs each.

There may be little doubt that the Holy Spirit is at work evolving the life of the Catholic Church; reading *The Tablet* each week highlights that fact. However, there are many other topics which could also have been helpfully seen through this lens, such as abortion, the role of women, celibacy and issues in human sexuality. In taking time to address some of these issues the author could have created a more useful handbook for the wider church.

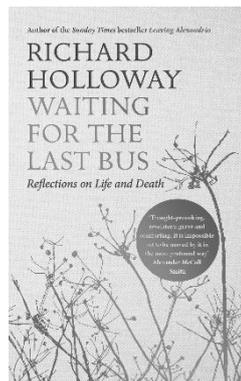
This book would appeal to those who need further convincing of the significant dynamic that is the Holy Spirit, or by those wanting to explore both the Biblical and the early church background to its movement. And, although he has missed a trick not to include a fuller analysis in the final part of the book, Coriden does successfully highlight some current issues that need further consideration by the Roman Catholic and other churches. Significant if they are to be seen in the context of a dynamic, not static, move of the Holy Spirit bringing in the reign of God.

The Rt Revd Karen Gorham is Bishop of Sherborne □

Richard Holloway, *Waiting for the Last Bus: Reflections on Life and Death* (Canongate 2018)

Vanessa Herrick

I read this profound and beautiful book at a single sitting. This is not to suggest that it is an easy read, in the sense that it is 'lightweight' or 'lacking in substance' - far from it! It is full of learning, honesty and wisdom - and above all, authenticity. For, Richard Holloway writes as if he is speaking to you from his fireside chair, simply reflecting on death - his own and others' - and pondering what he has discovered through his rich and varied life and ministry. Neither is the book limited to a description of Holloway's own experience. Rather, he weaves into the tapestry of his own and others' stories, a vibrant and relevant collection of anecdotes and literary, film and musical allusions which complement his observations in enlightening ways. In pride of place is poetry (Donne, Shakespeare, Auden, Larkin and McNiece amongst others) which, for Holloway, is what 'connects' for him in his old age. Indeed, this intertwining of personal experience and reflection with reference to both the



arts and the sciences - the refined wisdom of the polymath with just the right proportion of sincerity, humility and integrity - leaves you wanting more. It is erudite without being overwhelming, intellectually stretching without being hard work.

In its 166 pages, the book covers a wealth of topics around the subject of death. In his opening chapters, Holloway identifies our culture's reluctance to face or even speak of death and suggests that the 'last bus' has been turned into 'an agency for the postponement of death rather than the enhancement of life' (p.20). Whilst religion keeps the idea and reality of death alive, for many older people (including himself) 'church can be an alienating rather than a consoling experience.' (p.25). In later chapters, Holloway offers an expansive exploration of ideas about life after death, including the classic metaphor of casting off on the last sea journey; the testimony of those who have had near death experiences; the spirit or soul living on after the body has decayed; ghosts and occult phenomena; the Hindu understanding of reincarnation; Christianity and Islam's understanding of a Day of Judgment; purgatory; and cryo-preservation (and its potentially disastrous social and environmental consequences). In the final two chapters, the emphasis shifts to the complexity of grief, especially in relation to the death of a child.

The highlight of the book is chapter three on forgiveness. Movingly illustrated by the biblical story of Peter's failure and redemption by Jesus, Holloway stresses the importance of forgiveness of others and of self, combined with an ability to be compassionate towards self and others. Yet he is realistic about the fact that 'some can,' and 'some can't' forgive - with the inevitable consequences of each.

Throughout the book, one has the sense that it is, in part, Holloway's last reflection on his love-hate relationship with the Church and, indeed, with the Christian faith. The residue of faith remains, as does his valuing of the pastoral ministry he has been privileged to exercise; but so, does the sense of exile and, for him, the uncertainty of resurrection. He acknowledges that he neither desires nor expects life after death (p. 86) but nevertheless hopes he will face it with courage. This is a brave book and one which will both move and inspire people of all ages, but especially those of older years. It is a book, I suggest which, one day, we may all need to read.

The Ven Vanessa Herrick is Archdeacon of Harlow in the Diocese of Chelmsford. □