

AUTUMN 2021

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

FEATURES, COMMENTARY AND REVIEWS FROM MODERN CHURCH



The
collaborative
act of
reading

*How To Eat Bread:
21 Nourishing Ways
to Read the Bible*
Miranda Threlfall-Holmes
considers the reader's
perspective

Fifty Years of Ministry:
An Anniversary Sermon
Chris Savage

Growing Old,
Growing New
Anthony Woollard

Book Reviews
Richard Truss, Michael Goater,
Guy Wilkinson and Tony Collins

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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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EDITORIAL



Anthony Woollard
Editor

GROWING OLD, GROWING NEW

Readers may be expecting this edition to contain reports from our online Annual Conference in July. Unfortunately, we have to go to press too early for those, so they must await the November issue (together with an edition of Modern Believing over the winter which will contain some of the papers given). In fact, the most valuable such reports are often produced by ordinary participants, and perhaps some of our readers might contribute reactions before the

28 September deadline?

Meanwhile, Modern Church has had its AGM in June, again online. The good news is that we are still solvent, and able to do much, thanks to the generosity of past members. The not so good news is that we are still not “growing newer” or younger to the extent that we might wish, though there are signs of growth, with a sharp increase in membership following the Church Times insert last autumn; the new category of Affiliate is also *continued* >

Signs of the Times is published in February, May, August and November. It provides news and information about Modern Church and offers members an opportunity to communicate with each other in print. We welcome articles, notices, poems, suggestions, comments and suitable accompanying images. Articles published do not necessarily reflect a Modern Church perspective – in keeping with our commitment to liberal theology we believe that other views should be heard. Send material to the editor by 28th December, 28th March, 28th June or 28th September. Articles should not exceed 1,000 words. We prefer email but will process typed or handwritten text (phone for a postal address).



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As we enter a new and unpredictable era in human affairs, it is easy to think that only the young understand the world and “the wisdom of the elders” has no place.

proving a growth area, as is the impact of our website and social media.

This edition includes an anniversary sermon by our former book reviews editor. Chris Savage is one of many members whose theological views were formed in the Sixties and Seventies – and, for some younger readers, such a contribution might look like mere nostalgia. I make no apology for this. Pope Francis, in his recently published *Let us Dream*, writes not only about the climate crisis, on which his thoughts have been so influential, but about other contemporary big issues – the post-Covid world, the role of women in church and society, and in this context particularly the need for greater dialogue between young and old.

As we enter a new and unpredictable era in human affairs, it is easy to think that only the young understand the world and “the wisdom of the elders” has no place. The young have indeed much to teach the old. We need to hear more from them. But this is a two-way

process. As Pope Francis puts it, a tree will wither without contact with its roots. The theological struggles of the recent past, and names like John Robinson and David Jenkins, can still prove highly relevant. Even before Covid and the current focus on the climate crisis, both society and our Church were undergoing a sea-change, on which *That was the Church*, that was by Andrew Brown and Linda Woodhead (Bloomsbury, 2016) remains worth a read. We still have to wrestle with all of that; and Savage’s memoir may be helpful to any who dismiss the past as “another country”. Some of us who are older have had experience of being marginalised by younger generations in the Church, who very understandably look for new blood. Society, and the Church, and Modern Church in particular, need to “grow new”. But that will not be achieved by writing off the elders as has-beens – like the young curate serving an elderly congregation who once complained to me “I was not ordained in order to be a chaplain to geriatrics”.

Professionals and laity

Another book of our time is Richard Osman’s best-seller *The Thursday Murder Club*. That has nothing overtly to do with theology, but its basic theme – leaving aside the detective mystery at its heart – is how a group of very elderly amateur detectives, once distinguished in their own fields, play a vital part in its solution, in a dialogue with the much younger professional police, who learn quickly that these are not “has-beens” by any means. Within the Church, anxiously reconsidering the role of “professional” clergy as it faces

post-pandemic financial crisis, the issue of the relationship between professionals and laity is as crucial as that between old and young.

“The Christian Story”

A more directly relevant book is *Leading by Story* (SCM Press 2017), by Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St Mary’s, Warwick. He follows those who argue that “story” is a most fundamental theological category, and “the Christian Story” (rather than a system of beliefs or spirituality) is the best definition of what we believe and what we are engaged in. The art of church leadership (clergy or lay, formal or informal) depends on sharing “stories”, in the Church as a whole or in a particular congregation, to understand and continually re-interpret where we are coming from, and to avoid the warning of the US philosopher George Santayana “Those who do not understand their own histories are doomed to re-enact them”. That means a deep listening – between old and young, professionals and laity. It may sound like a recipe for a backward-looking Church. But the true leader helps to generate new stories that build on the past – like the householder in the Gospel saying who “brings forth from her treasure things new and old”. For those who do not know Roberts’ book, it is well worth a visit, especially at this time when we may be struggling to tell or re-tell both Covid and pre-Covid stories. In some ways its message is paralleled by Miranda Threlfall-Holmes’ new book on how to read Scripture, an extract from which we publish below. And as together we engage with the telling and re-telling, the reading and re-reading,

so the greater Story continues and grows.

Stories can be told in different ways, giving different pointers to the future. Roberts particularly emphasises that the “narrative of decline”, which has so dominated the Church of England recently, is only one way to tell its recent story. In terms of worshipping numbers and demographics, it may look like the only story in town. But statistics rarely tell the whole story. The same is true of Modern Church itself. Its story from my own perspective, over the past twenty years, would certainly acknowledge a somewhat declining (until very recently) and ageing membership; but it would give far more emphasis to the work we have done, the deepening of fellowship amongst liberal Christians in an illiberal climate, and the actions taken – especially our contribution to opposing the Anglican Covenant, which is part of the story leading up to *Living in Love and Faith*. In that sense, we are still “growing new” – and a community which is well worth belonging to.

Continuing to “grow new”

That AGM in June, and the Council meeting which followed it, were well attended (around 25-30 people each), considering the challenges of struggling with Zoom on a fine summer evening. It was wonderful to see some familiar faces, and one or two who were less familiar. Not all of us were elderly white males, let alone heterosexual or cis-gender – though I must admit that most were! Yet we continue to “grow new” in such developments as the national Modern Church Forum on Zoom about which Lorraine Cavanagh wrote in our last edition. The Story goes on.

Miranda Threlfall-Holmes considers the reader's perspective in this extract from her recent book, *How To Eat Bread: 21 Nourishing Ways to Read the Bible*

Reading any text is always something of a conversation between the author and the reader. This starts with what books we choose to read in the first place, deciding for ourselves – from the cover, or from flicking through a few pages – whether this is a book that we want to allow to take up residence in our imaginations. I'm a complete wuss when it comes to violence and horror, for example, but I love classic crime fiction, so it's important for me to work out whether I am going to enjoy the ride or have nightmares for weeks.

And then the act of reading itself is not simply a question of downloading the information contained between the covers of the book into our memory banks. Different people will bring different life experiences, questions and assumptions to any text. Whenever we say, on seeing a film or TV adaptation of a favourite book, 'But that character, or place, or tone of voice, is totally different to how I imagined them!', we reveal that we have brought our own imagination to the reading of the book. The act of reading *continued* >

PHOTO BY CLEM ONOJEGHUO ON UNSPLASH

The
collaborative
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Reading is active, not passive: we co-operate with the author, or the text, to co-create a new reality out of what both parties bring to the reading.

creates something new in our brains – our construction of the characters, the scenes, the emotions involved – which is a collaboration between the words on the page and our own character, experiences and context. This is true even if what we are reading involves less imagination – a textbook, perhaps, or an instruction manual for a new appliance. We make connections and leaps in logic as we read, because of our previous experience of the subject or of similar literature. It's much easier to decipher the instructions on your second piece of flat-pack furniture than it was for your first.

Give two people the same novel,

newspaper article or textbook chapter to read, and then ask them to summarise the key points, and you will never get exactly the same response. Each of us will notice different things in whatever we read. Something in the text might jump out at us because of a connection with a subject that is particularly important to us at the time, or because we have a particularly strong emotional response to it, or already know more about a particular subject. Reading is active, not passive: we co-operate with the author, or the text, to co-create a new reality out of what both parties bring to the reading.

Is this true of the Bible as well? I think that the answer has to be yes, because this is what happens when we read anything. Just as Jesus was received very differently by the different people that he encountered in his lifetime – some became his disciples, some wanted to kill him or run him out of town – the various biblical texts are received and heard differently by different people. I don't think it's possible to read anything – or indeed meet anyone – and for this not to happen.

Two or more partners

This is not to say, of course, that the Bible can say whatever you want it to say. It's not that we just find in its pages what we want to see. A conversation always has two or more partners – not necessarily equal ones. The words on the page matter and our response is to those words, not to a random collection of letters. When we read the Bible, we read the actual text, and our reading is a collaboration with God in bringing our own experiences and contexts into

Fiction is labelled as 'women's' fiction or 'gay' fiction or 'black' fiction... or simply 'fiction.' No bookshop that I've ever seen has a shelf labelled 'straight white male fiction' – that's just the norm.

conversation with the text.

Furthermore, the act of reading is never neutral. Do you remember writing up scientific experiments in school, and having to describe everything you did in the third person and passively, as if the experiment had taken place without being touched by human hand? 'A test tube was heated...' rather than 'I heated a test tube.' In the Western academic tradition we have built up a myth of the impartial observer whose reading and experience is taken to be normative. More recently, this has begun to be critiqued. We have become more aware that the supposedly 'neutral' experience is almost always actually assumed to be a male experience – and most commonly a man who – is it also taken for granted – is white, socially privileged, educated, physically mature and healthy, neurotypical, straight, cis-gendered... the list goes on. Until very recently this wasn't even questioned, it was simply assumed. It still is, very often. Fiction is labelled as 'women's' fiction or 'gay' fiction or 'black' fiction... or simply 'fiction.' No bookshop that I've ever seen has a shelf labelled 'straight white male fiction' – that's just the norm. Similarly, it's only recently that we've become more aware of how much certain attitudes have been taken for granted in

reading the Bible. This isn't to say that those attitudes are wrong – there's nothing wrong with being an educated white straight man – but it is important for us to be aware that that set of experiences is not universal and nor should it be considered to be normative or be privileged above other perspectives.

Who you are

So it is important to be conscious of who you are, and what you bring to your reading. Indeed, who you are is what you bring to your reading – and that means that your act of reading is important and valid. You being you doesn't change God – but it does mean that the relationship you have with God will be different from the one I have. So my emphasis is on noticing how you – and I mean you, not a fictional bland objective observer – respond to the text.

Because it is in that conversation, that connection, between you and your reality and the reality of the text, that reading happens.



Miranda Threlfall-Holmes is Vicar of St Luke in the City, Liverpool, and a member of the Council of Modern Church. Her book, *How To Eat Bread: 21 Nourishing Ways to Read the Bible*, is published by Hodder & Stoughton

Fifty Years of Ministry: an Anniversary Sermon

[Bishop David Jenkins] did not wait for his consecration as Bishop of Durham to cast doubt publicly on the authenticity of the Virgin Birth stories in Matthew and Luke. He did this every Advent and incurred the wrath of evangelicals and the right-wing press, particularly the Daily Telegraph.

Fifty years ago, I awoke in the retreat house in Blackheath, South London and put on my clerical shirt and collar for the first time. I remember looking in the mirror and praying, “Lord, whatever happens please do not let me be in my new ministry like Derek Nimmo in all Gas and Gaiters”. (Some of you will remember this popular comedy TV show, which poked irreverent fun at Cathedral life, and gave a picture of clergy which was totally contrary to what I believed I needed to portray in my coming ministry.)

My memory of my ordination was principally of Una Kroll who was ordained Deaconess at the same service. Una was a former missionary nun who was active in campaigning for the ordination of women as priests. When the motion was first debated and rejected by General Synod in the 1980’s, Una famously shouted out from the Gallery at Church House Westminster, “We asked for bread and you gave us stones”. She was standing next to me in the service. I remember with fondness her whispering to me rather urgently, “For goodness sake put your stole straight before the Bishop ordains you!” Una was eventually



By Chris Savage

ordained priest after the vote for the ordination of women to that office went through in 1992; she sadly died in 2017.

My dismissive attitude towards “Gas and Gaiters” was because I felt it was rooted in the past and bore no relevance to the enormous changes happening in the Church – such as for instance the publication and controversy surrounding Bishop John Robinson’s book *Honest to God*. Having completed a gap year before ordination with the South London Industrial Mission I was passionate about relating God-with-us to an increasingly sceptical secular society.

The Taizé experience

Robinson’s book had a huge impact on me, and I was also greatly influenced by leading a week’s trip to Taizé in 1972. It was there that I experienced amidst the thousands who came to stay in that place staffed by a Protestant monastic order, and not only by the renowned and beautiful Taizé chants, but also the many groups that considered how contemplation of God can lead to action. That was achieved under the leadership of Brother Roger Schutz. At the end of the second World War, he felt that there needed to be a wide-ranging ecumenical community



PHOTO BY NATALIYA VAITKEVICH

focused on young people who could reflect on the present and have a vision of the future. The terrific experience of being in this community was undergirded by communal worship open to all. Thousands of young people arrived and stayed in tents and still do today.

Greatest influence

Perhaps the greatest influence on my faith and ministry amongst so many, from whom I have been blessed and humbled by what I have received from them, is Bishop David Jenkins.

I first came across David at a conference in Manchester when he gave a challenging paper on the theology and organization of the NHS. He will be remembered for his consistent and fiery opposition to the Thatcher Government’s economic policies particularly regarding the miners’ strike. David was always full on. He did not wait for his consecration as Bishop of Durham to cast doubt publicly on the authenticity of the Virgin Birth stories in Matthew and Luke. He did this every Advent and incurred the wrath of evangelicals and the right-wing press, particularly the Daily Telegraph. He realized the amount of opposition he would encounter but he passionately believed faith was borne out of faithful knowledge rather than *continued >*

I gave four lectures on developments about Christian doctrine like faith, the Virgin Birth narratives and the Resurrection. It was well received. At the end someone chirped up, “So what was all the fuss about?” “You tell me,” was my weary reply.

hallowed traditions of the past. He listened and always tried to seek common ground where possible!

At that time, we were living in Lichfield where I was Rector of two city centre churches. The PCC Standing Committee was appalled by David’s theological views. They felt that I had to reassure the faithful. I went along with this because it was for me a God-given opportunity to clear the slate without appeasing those who seemed very unhappy. So, we had a good balanced discussion at PCC. Subsequently I gave four lectures on developments about Christian doctrine like faith, the Virgin Birth narratives and the Resurrection. It was well received. At the end someone chirped up “So what was all the fuss about?” “You tell me” was my weary reply.

I have recently been reading *Frequencies of God: Walking through Advent with RS Thomas* by Carys Walsh. Thomas was a parish priest ministering in Wales and a poet of waiting and anticipation. He sees discovering the presence of God as “divine frequencies” even in apparent absence, which can lead us into an Advent landscape of surrender, open hearted discovery, epiphany and encounter.

I continue to be very moved, affected and challenged by Thomas’ poetry and the brilliant interpretation by Walsh. For me Thomas hits the nail on the

head. God is not just with us. He is above all in us. In our sufferings, in our depressions about COVID-19, in our doubts about ourselves and whether we can survive the present.

‘Life that lived in me’

On this journey we are in good company in the call to surrender and accept that life is ours and not ours. It is not ours to bargain with and not ours to control, but it is ours to live as grace and gift. A line from Thomas emphasizes this: “It was not I who lived, but rather life that lived in me.” Mary says to the Angel, “...here am I the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word”.

Faith is about leaving “the hopes and fears of all the years” up to God. In Matthew 6 verse 28, Jesus says “Why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

So on this day let us celebrate together by giving thanks to God for the lives that have been lived and will continue to be lived in each one of us.

Chris Savage is a retired priest in the Diocesan of Salisbury and a former member of the Council of Modern Church.

REVIEWS



Anglican Reflections On Life After Brexit

The question of life after Brexit may be at present submerged under the effects of the pandemic, but for good or ill Brexit will increasingly be seen as the game-changer it is. As one of twenty-six contributors to this timely volume says, quoting Thomas Paine, “We now have it in our power to begin the world over again”. Whether we do wisely and constructively and with a concern for the common good, and the future of our planet, or whether it is the prelude for a new narrow nationalism, inevitably however there is a replay of questions of the



Jonathan Chaplin and Andrew Bradstock (eds), *The Future of Brexit Britain: Anglican Reflections on National Identity and European Solidarity* SPCK 2020

rights and wrongs of Brexit in the first place.

The contributors have been chosen to represent a wide range of opinions, and almost inevitably, in this most divisive of issues, every reader will find their heroes and villains, though it was good for a now dyed-in-the wool Remainer like myself, to read arguments for the other side, which tended to concentrate on two themes. One is the now well-rehearsed one, that much of the Leave vote came from the disillusioned and disempowered, and the other was a deep sense of what it means to be English – the Scots, Welsh and Irish get a chapter each – but the main element *continued >*

The Church of England, or at least its hierarchy, were reluctant to make any pronouncements before the referendum, and some of the contributors see this as a failure of nerve...

here is Englishness (rather than Britishness) and an often-nostalgic national pride.

The Church of England, or at least its hierarchy, were reluctant to make any pronouncements before the referendum, and some of the contributors see this as a failure of nerve, but others as a necessary silence given that churchgoers were as divided as the nation itself. The burden of this book is that the time has now come to be far more proactive. In particular, whilst recognising the weakness and increasing marginalisation of the church, it is still the one body which is present in every local community, and one which can aid a desperately needed healing and reconciling process – one contributor makes a direct comparison to the situation following the Civil War.

However, perhaps because it is written by Christians with a pastoral and mediatorial concern, it barely mentions some of the more hard-edged prophetic things that need to be said. For instance, the whole question of truth came up in the campaign – some politicians and some of the media were deliberately untruthful – and in the aftermath we are left with a society where truth is a

contested concept. Here the church has something to engage with. Or again, as is pointed out by one of the commentators at the end of the book, most of the contributors are white, and therefore perhaps have made little of the undercurrent of racism which marked some of the Leave campaign, and continues now in the way that attitudes are still informed by a colonialist and imperial mindset, evident in the controversy over statues and the flying of the national flag.

The church is left with a heavy agenda, and it is inspiring to see this acknowledged. The danger is that this agenda will be seen in over-generalised terms, rather than providing those vital middle axioms from which real engagement and change can come. There is an urgency about all this, to ensure, as all the contributors desire, that we – the church and its fellow-travellers – help propel a new and effective moral vision for the nation. If we as Christians are looking for a role and a relevance, here it is.

— *Richard Truss*

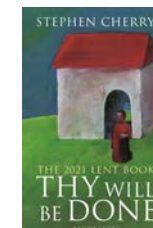
The Revd Richard Truss
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Cherry's Lent Meditation Calls Us to Make The Lord's Prayer Our Own

Thy Will Be Done, Mowbray's Lent book, is a contribution, by the Dean of King's College, Cambridge, to a spiritual practice at least as old as St Benedict, who required his monks, as the season began, to read 'straight through and entire' a codex from the library. Cherry's contribution to this venerable tradition is 36 short chapters centred on The Lord's Prayer.

Lent is for many Christians a 'foster-child of silence and slow time', a period of quietness of spirit, when we are given licence and opportunity to reconsider our priorities and whatever impedes us on the Way. We ask of our Lenten reading an honest and realistic acknowledgement of the rocky ground we daily traverse, the birds and thorns that frustrate our best endeavours; we seek a reminder of the goal to help us reorientate ourselves; and we look for refreshment and encouragement



Stephen Cherry
Thy Will Be Done
Bloomsbury/
Continuum, 2021

to pursue the journey. What better than these 57 words of Greek to fulfil such purposes? In them we recognize without evasion the reality of our waywardness; we ask that our material and spiritual needs might be met; and we celebrate first and last in the text the beginning and end of all things.

Inherited words

The challenge, says Cherry, is to make the prayer our own. To this end, each chapter deals with a clause, phrase or word of the prayer, chiefly in St Matthew's version. We are reminded that we inherit these words, originally Aramaic, rendered into Greek, into Latin, thence into the languages of people the world over, as shaped and interpreted across the centuries by diverse communities of faith. This we do in confidence that at the "capacious heart" of the prayer, whatever its accretions and mistranslations, is the spirit of Jesus himself *continued* >

It is a graceful call to enrich our own response to a scripture which – God forbid – should become ‘stale, flat and unprofitable’, but which nonetheless we may take for granted for its very ubiquity.

infused into his continuing body, the Church. Though we call it ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, it is in truth the prayer of every disciple, uniting us, on the warrant of Scripture, with the Lord’s own words in Gethsemane – his struggle and ours that God’s will be done. Hence the title of the book from the pivotal clause of the prayer as Cherry understands it.

Nuanced treatment

Cherry is at his best, most nuanced, as we might expect, in his treatment of forgiveness, sin, temptation and evil. His reflections on the gendered issues of ‘Our Father and ‘Kingdom’ are less enlightening, while his own rendering of the prayer in the penultimate chapter is perhaps an uncharacteristic editorial misjudgement. Granted, however, the criteria for a Lent book with which I began, with a lightness of touch – though he

is not averse to pointing a hard pastoral truth when necessary – quoting sources as diverse as Origen and Marilynne Robinson but wearing his learning lightly, Cherry admirably addresses these requirements. He offers us the fruits of wide reading, certainly, but as a meditation rather than a conventional scholarly commentary. This is the journal of one reflecting on his own prayerful engagement with the text. He describes his aim as an invitation to immerse ourselves in these words with him, allowing them to form us, reform and transform us. It is *lectio divina*, almost – though I suspect that Cherry would modestly disclaim the description. It is a graceful call to enrich our own response to a scripture which – God forbid – should become ‘stale, flat and unprofitable’, but which nonetheless we may take for granted for its very ubiquity. *Thy Will Be Done* is to be recommended not merely for Lent but as a ‘codex’ fit for what Benedict describes as the ‘continuous Lent’ of the Christian life.

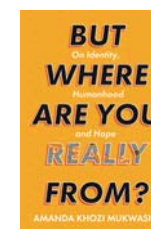
– Michael Goater

Michael Goater is a retired priest in the Diocese of Salisbury



Mukwashi Writes a Powerful Story of Identity and Integrity

The title’s question reminds me of the time when my mother in law said to a stallholder selling mangoes: “these will be much better where you come from”. An innocent comment from an older generation? Or an offensive and racist comment to a British citizen which speaks of our propensity to classify others according to our own presuppositions and prejudices.



Amanda Khosi Mukwashi
Where are you really from?, SPCK, 2020

Remarkable story

Amanda Mukwashi is CEO of Christian Aid. She traces her remarkable story from her maternal grandparents’ migration from southern to northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, under Roy Welensky as Prime Minister. She describes him as: ‘just another greedy capitalist who believed that Black people were less human than White’, which leads her to set the key questions she explores: “who were the primitive ones? Who

lacked wisdom? Who did not, and continue not, to understand the meaning of life and dignity?”

She traces the stories of the Shona and Ngoni heritage of her grandparents and the subtle gender impacts of their differing cultural worlds, and gives two chapters to the impact of colonial rule and the struggle for Zambian independence, the growing hostility towards ‘foreigners’ under the economic pressures and support for Zimbabwean independence, and the divisions arising from the post-independence political struggle for power between Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. She writes movingly of the subsequent dislocation and the dissolution of former values and social structures; but she also voices a vision, relevant to diverse western societies, that migrants are enriched by the host communities into which they come, and host *continued* >

Arriving in the UK with two university degrees, she was told: “even cleaning experience would be better than the experience you currently have.”

communities are enriched by them.

In a pivotal chapter, Amanda speaks of her own faith journey: “faith found me and changed me”. Raised by her mother and grandmother as Catholic, she was confirmed in Rome where her stepfather, a diplomat, had been posted. She encountered warmth there from Baptist families and on returning to university in Zambia, finally found a personal faith and was baptised in the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Years of elation and disappointment followed: elation at the visit of the newly released Nelson Mandela and immersion in issues of social and gender justice; and disappointment at the growing economic and political changes caused by the ‘structural adjustment’ imposed on Zambia. These led to her leaving Zambia for the UK, but also parting from her parents, siblings, friends and community.

She brought her skills, experience and passion, her values and her heritage with her.

Women of integrity

Arriving in the UK with two university degrees, she was told that: ‘even cleaning experience would be better than the experience you currently have’. Training as a care worker, there were times when, as she says: “I thought I would be beaten by the system”, but there were other times when “it took me into the heart of how people in my new home lived and thought”. She is passionate about the strength and resilience of her mother and grandmother as foundational to her own growth with the many African women in her life: “the entire story of my heritage and identity is filled with Black African women of integrity”, and she condemns in the strongest terms the ‘false narrative that says African women are suffering, illiterate, cannot lead, poor and victims’. This is a powerful book, and includes an introduction by Rowan Williams, who works alongside her at Christian Aid.

Guy Wilkinson is a retired priest in the Diocese of Hereford.



An Affirming Wake Up Call for Ministry in Secular Employment

This is an important and timely book. Francis’ exploration of ordained ministry in a very up to date secular employment arena is an important, encouraging and affirming wake up call for all MSEs. It should also provide an important, if not familiar, nudge to the Church to look afresh (again) at the recruitment, training and strategic deployment of MSEs across the canvas of mission.



James M. M. Francis
Busking the Gospel: Ordained Ministry in Secular Employment
Sacristy Press, 2021

Creative scope and potential

The author describes the aim of his book as twofold: to undertake an in-depth theological reflection on ministry in the secular environment, and to offer some practical help to enable such clergy (and the Church generally) to grow in the awareness of the creative scope and potential of this ministry in the contemporary world.

The in-depth theological reflection is achieved at a level

you would expect from a previous Teacher in New Testament Studies at Sunderland University who was also principal of the Durham Diocese Ordained Local Ministry Course.

The powerful argument put forward for the mobilisation of the creative scope and potential of this ministry is skilfully and accessibly crafted through tradition, reason, challenge,

and a strong and persistent reference to the scriptures culminating in a powerful excursus looking at Jesus, Paul and Self-Supporting Ministry. It is both refreshing and encouraging to read of a theological focus on self-supporting ministry in its own right. As Francis points out, there is much from the Gospels that makes such a focus deserved. There is more than a passing reference to the model and theology of the Worker Priest movement of Roland Walls and the Community of the Transfiguration at *continued* >

...Canon James Francis writes with great experience, insight and skill providing the reader with the opportunity to reframe and reflect on both the opportunity and purpose of ministry in secular environments.

Continued from page 19

Roslin. This has had a clear and positive influence on the author's thinking and is viewed through the lenses of similarities and differences.

Practical help

The aim of providing the practical help for both clergy and Church is also present throughout the thread of the thesis in the book. The metaphor of busking, contained within the title, is almost as evocative as it is provocative. It is explained as possessing four distinct characteristics: of context, spontaneity, provisionality and perseverance. Francis uses each of these characteristics to give both energy and validity to how MSE can and should be effectively deployed in a way that is free from the constraint of fitting in to the Parish setting of stipendiary ministry as an add-on. Contained throughout the book is input from several MSEs in various secular settings, all telling different stories, all with the common themes of a different space, creativity and mission. Each is pointing to

the four characteristics of busking identified by Francis.

Opportunity to reframe

Having spent eighteen years as Durham Diocese Advisor for self-supporting ministry, Canon James Francis writes with great experience, insight and skill providing the reader with the opportunity to reframe and reflect on both the opportunity and purpose of ministry in secular environments. This is presented in the frame of a challenge to reimagine MSE in the context of mission rather than management. Indeed, Francis suggests that the failure of the Church to support and nurture MSE is a failure of corporate imagination.

Having read the book twice, I am aware that a few more visits are still required to draw all that is packed into this excellent volume.

— *Tony Collins*

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