

## Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Spring 2013 No. 128

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### BOOK REVIEWS

#### **The Accidental Anglican: The surprising appeal of the liturgical church.**

By Todd D. Hunter. Nottingham: IVP, 2011 138pp £8.99 pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-508-1

Todd Hunter is an Anglican bishop who leads Churches for the Sake of Others, a church-planting movement launched by the Anglican Mission in the Americas. Having been converted in the Jesus Movement in the 1970s, Hunter has journeyed through leadership in Vineyard Churches USA and Alpha USA to Anglicanism, increasingly attracted by “the surprising appeal of the liturgical church.” In this short autobiographical book, he sets out to recount this journey and attraction. His goal for the reader is stated upfront: “that you have some ‘Aha! I get it’ moments for your own life as you explore the meaning and power of liturgical worship”. He wants to gently persuade people of the rich resources of Anglicanism for life and mission.

The book is split into two parts. Part one chronicles how Hunter came to be an Anglican bishop. With a light and informal touch, he describes various key moments and conversations: his first encounter with the *Book of Common Prayer*; the influence of J. I. Packer, John Stott, and Sandy Millar; his ordination, first public celebration of Eucharist, and subsequent consecration as a bishop. In part two, Hunter briefly shares what he likes about Anglicanism: the narrative theology of N. T. Wright; a kingdom-focus and strong evangelistic tradition; the servant-heartedness exemplified by certain African bishops; a “sweet reasonableness” among the British Anglican evangelicals he has met. Finally, he mentions the liturgical tools which he can see “saving contemporary Western faith”: the liturgical calendar, the lectionary and daily prayers; the creed; the prayer of confession and absolution, the peace; Eucharist; ordained ministry.

In part, this is an encouraging read. Todd Hunter’s deep commitment to evangelism and church-planting shines through. More than that, his positive view of the missional potential of Anglicanism’s historical connectedness, apostolic-era theology, and participatory worship will provoke reflection. However, one major weakness stands out: his apologetic for Anglicanism and the importance of liturgy is simply too insubstantial. For sure, this is autobiography, and Hunter doesn’t intend to build a detailed case. Nevertheless, his story provides very little coherent argumentation. His reflections on what he likes about Anglicanism are short and piecemeal, and centre around admirable individuals within the Anglican communion, rather than Anglicanism itself. Disappointingly, only one short chapter deals with liturgy *per se*, and this is extremely basic.

For those who know of Todd Hunter, or have some connection with the Anglican Mission in the Americas, his personal journey might prove an interesting read. For others, there is little here to grapple with.

#### **Christopher Lowe**

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#### **Crossover City: Resources for urban mission and transformation**

Edited by Andrew Davey. London: Continuum, 2010 158pp £14.99 978-1441138644

This book is the fruit of an amendment to a synodical discussion from 2006, which requested a group be convened to provide input on urban mission. Synods, committees and amendments do not often birth interesting books, but this one beats the odds.

The opening pages are a challenge from Bishop Laurie Green to those who tend to overlook urban ministry. He puts a much needed challenge to the many ordinands who dismiss urban ministry thinking, 'I cannot in all conscience visit deprivation on my family.' Subtle reasons to do with backgrounds and expectations of success are thoughtfully laid bare. This chapter should be read prayerfully by all considering ministry.

The subsequent sections of this book consist of essays by different authors covering the 'Enterprise of Urban Mission', the nature of 'being Saved in the City', 'Presences' in the city, and a concluding set of four case studies. The sections of the book prior to the case studies are theological reflections on the doctrine undergirding urban ministry, and its outworking. Hence the 'Presences' section consists of essays on the presence of Jesus, the Spirit, and the Lord's Supper.

I believe there is a lack of doctrinal coherence and methodological justification within this book. That does not mean it is not a valuable text; it is perhaps understandable given it is a collection of essays by different authors. It means that this book cannot straightforwardly serve as a guide to doing urban mission. That said, it contains many interesting and thought provoking reflections which may help those seeking fresh perspectives on urban ministry.

Several of the essays exhibit the tendency to collapse concepts into each other — a habit much loved by academics. So, for example, the chapter on preaching attempts to commend learning about the urban context by arguing that proclamation could be 'understood as learning.' I commend strongly the idea that preachers should seek to understand and learn from their listeners — but I doubt that much is gained by eliding proclamation with listening. It is wonderful to see the patristic vision of a 'learning church' promoted. But it originally meant a church learning the scriptures — not the preacher learning to listen to a congregation. This sort of doctrinal confusion runs through many of the chapters. Nevertheless, the case studies in particular raise all kinds of challenges about urban ministry.

### **Peter Sanlon**

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### **Is Religion Irrational?**

By Keith Ward. Oxford: Lion, 2011 176pp £8.99pb ISBN: 9780745955407

The rise of the 'New Atheism' has occasioned a steady stream of Christian responses, from clergymen, scientists and theologians alike. Keith Ward, former Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, is certainly one of the most distinguished and prolific of these recent defenders of the faith, having penned a good half-dozen tomes championing Christian theism over the last decade. However, Professor Ward will also be known to many readers of this Journal as a fervent critic of evangelicalism, the author of works such as *'The Word of God? The Bible After Modern Scholarship'*, and *'What the Bible Really Teaches: A Challenge to Fundamentalists'*. Alas, even in the book under review, Ward cannot help but indulge in frequent side-swipes against Christians who believe in things like biblical inerrancy and hell – so much so that one is occasionally left wondering whether it is evangelicals, rather than atheists, who are his chief adversary.

All this makes reading *'Is Religion Irrational?'* a distinctly mixed pleasure. The opening couple of chapters sparkle with an admirably clear and persuasive series of arguments for the existence of an eternal and necessary Mind, and as such reveal the bankruptcy of the philosophical materialism upon which much scientific atheism is based. By chapter three, however, the cracks begin to show, since Professor Ward seems intent on constructing a sort of theological Frankenstein's Monster, a hybrid of bits and pieces gathered in from classical theism, process theology, and Eastern mysticism. The resulting specimen is as unsustainable as it is unappealing – for in a bid to provide a

convincing account of the God-world relation (especially in the context of theodicy) Ward has to sacrifice basic orthodox truths such as the contingency of the created universe, God's sovereignty over his creation, and the divine attributes of immutability and omniscience.

Matters do not improve much in the second half of the book. For an author so quick to denounce the atheist caricature of religion as an exercise in wish-fulfilment, it is remarkable how readily Ward himself appears to succumb to this temptation. For instance, his case against the divine authorship of parts of Scripture is based purely on personal distaste: 'I cannot think that God would ever command the killing of men, women and children, and so I cannot believe that this law [Deut. 20.16] was actually issued by God, or that people should ever have obeyed it.' Indeed, it is when dealing with specifically *Christian* doctrines that Ward is at his most untrustworthy. So Jesus crops up largely amidst lists of other notable 'prophets', and his ministry is characterised as one of revelation rather than salvation – he was merely 'a human person who became...the exemplary expression of God's nature and purpose.' Moreover, the enquiring reader will seek in vain for any extended consideration of themes such as human sinfulness or the necessity of atonement. Instead we are served up a catalogue of pious-sounding liberal fantasies, about the 'deep similarity' of the different world spiritual traditions, the fact that 'no informed Muslim believes that Islam is the only viable path to God', and the importance of encouraging any forms of religion that are 'uplifting, peace-making and health-promoting.'

In short, then, for all the wisdom that Keith Ward brings to the 'New Atheism' debate, his book is ultimately of value less as a resource for the budding Christian apologist, than as a timely reminder of the dangers of commending a form of Christianity that is beguiling, nice-sounding, but patently untrue.

**Mark Smith**

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