



Spring for ecumenism

A Faithful Presence: Working together for the common good

Hilary Russell

SCM Press

£10.99

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Hilary Russell, Emeritus Professor of Urban Policy in Liverpool John Moores University, writes out of longstanding experience, about practical and theological issues facing the ecumenical movement in Britain. Her book responds realistically to the so-called “ecumenical winter” that has affected Christian cooperation since the heyday of post-war shared working. It analyses the factors that have brought churches to this point and examines the challenges facing Christians in an increasingly secular society. It also considers the opportunities that are still open for mutual collaboration.

In her analysis of the common good, Russell shows what churches can offer and the possibilities of cooperation with many other groups. There is an encouraging focus on the great variety of social projects which faith communities support, offered through snapshots from around the country. These snapshots are supported by extensive quotations from various sources, and a lengthy bibliography.

Lists of principles, such as those from the L’Arche community – servant leadership, partnership, subsidiarity, accountability, participation, inculturation and solidarity – provide an interesting starting point for reflection on shared working in a given locality, as do the list of questions raised in the last chapter. Running through the book is a theological commentary, looking at the way in which mission flows out of the life of God. The heart of life’s meaning is described as the “delight and longing of God”; the Church is described as being “an event before it is an institution”.

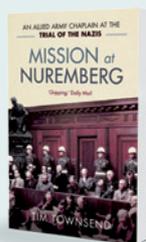
This book offers a positive analysis of the possibilities of shared working, pointing beyond the ecumenical winter to an ecumenical spring. It would be helpfully complemented by a further theological and sociological analysis of why the churches have shied away from further exploration of their common faith in the one God. Russell has provided a helpful study guide for reflection and action for Christians in local communities and those who seek to work together regionally or nationally. ●

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‘Positive analysis of possibilities’

‘A captivating journey’



The man who ministered to Nazi criminals

Mission at Nuremberg

Tim Townsend

SPCK

£12.99

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It is surprising that this story has not been told before and that the name of Henry Gerecke is not better known in Christian circles. Gerecke, an American Lutheran pastor, was the man to whom fell the task of serving as chaplain to the 21 Nazi leaders imprisoned and awaiting trial at Nuremberg in 1945 for crimes against humanity.

The story begins with Gerecke’s background working with the poor, the homeless and with prisoners during the years of the Great Depression, experience which served him well in preparation for ministry to the despised of a different kind altogether. From there, the book pursues Gerecke’s call to army chaplaincy, tending to wounded GIs in London and then to his most demanding role of all, ministering to the prisoners at Nuremberg. All the big names are there: Goering, Speer, Hess, Ribbentrop and the rest. It is a captivating journey. We follow Gerecke from his initial meetings with the prisoners, through the trial with the differing stances of the accused vis a vis their guilt and then, inevitably, ministry to those condemned to hang, with all the drama of the executions.

We also hear about Gerecke’s ministry to the families of some of those convicted. A host of vexing questions and issues arise along the way: how can one minister the Gospel to people capable of such crimes? Who has the right to forgive? Issues of discipline and the danger of “cheap grace” and, beyond these, wider and more profound issues of forgiveness, human and divine.

This is the story of a good Christian, Henry Gerecke, through whom the Gospel is pitted against the extremes of evil as they are embodied in human beings, some of whom are capable of contrition and others only of arrogant defiance. I could have done with a rather less detailed account of Gerecke’s early life and ministry, though it does help to present the profile of a man of exceptional integrity – a man with a passionate and single-minded devotion to the Gospel and its power for salvation to all. ●

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