



Reviews



Silent Heroes: Ordinary People in Times of War, compiled by John D. Miller, Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2004, pp. xi + 157, ISBN 071520815. £8.99

John Miller, Church of Scotland minister of Castlemilk, the large Glasgow housing estate, had a brilliant idea. Faced with having to address the uniformed organisations of his church on Remembrance Sunday, he hit upon an original way of speaking to the young ones about war. Each year he interviewed an elderly member of his congregation, getting them to speak in their own words of their wartime experiences and attitudes to war.

Some of his interviewees were old enough to have remembered World War I; most of the men were in the forces in World War II, some willingly, some unwillingly; some of the women were in wartime factories, only to lose their jobs to men when the war ended. All had their own story to tell in their own words, often sad, often humorous, often genuinely uplifting, always unsentimental and unblemished. These stories the minister relayed on Remembrance Sunday.

In this little volume, each interviewee's tale from 1985 to 2003 is reproduced. Each year is contextualised, as it were, by an initial list of seven significant events, rather judiciously chosen. Further, appended to each story is a paragraph giving the bare bones of the narrator's career.

There is something refreshingly authentic about these stories. As Miller, the compiler puts it, summing up:

Most reflections on the manner in which war affects human affairs are written by those who have held command. Here, however, are front-line experiences and insights of the rank and

file, and the wartime lives of working-class men and women on the home front. In these pages their courage and their clarity of vision speak for themselves. (p. ix)

One can only gratefully agree. This is a precious little book.

Professor D.W.D. Shaw,
St Andrews



Understanding Christianity, Gillesbuig Macmillan, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2004, pp. 150, ISBN 1903765226. £7.95

From the pen of the minister of St Giles' Cathedral comes this addition to the 'Understanding Faith' series which, it would appear from this volume, aims at providing brief and condensed introductions to world faiths. Macmillan's approach is historical, giving an overview of the development of Christianity since its beginnings, and concluding with reflections on the state of the faith world-wide today.

Early chapters introduce the reader to features of an act of Christian worship, give a very brief reflection on the Apostles' Creed, discuss the nature of the Gospels and the way they present to us the figure of Jesus, and set Christ in the context of the Old Testament. There follow chapters on the cross and resurrection, the transition from synagogue to church, the sacrament of Holy Communion, the establishment of Christendom, early christological controversies and then on through the history of the Church. The book concludes with replies to some basic questions. Throughout Macmillan is keen to emphasise the mystery of the faith and the doxological and poetic nature of religious language, and he does a very good job of condensing a huge amount of historical material. The chapters are concise and very readable, though the earlier ones are rather bitty and the running order of a couple of chapters left this reviewer rather puzzled.

These very minor criticisms however raise bigger issues. As a brief overview of the history of the faith and of its place in the world