

*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.

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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

today the book is an excellent introduction. But as regards its title, 'Understanding Christianity' I am less sure. The early chapters left me rather wondering what it was about Jesus that was so significant that he made the impact that he did. Little or no attention is given to his ministry and teaching and why it led to the scandal of crucifixion. Some engagement with recent New Testament scholars such as Borg, Sanders and Wright, albeit at a popular level, would have been helpful and might have led into a consideration of the extraordinary adaptability of the Christian faith throughout history.

The main questions that I am left with however, concern who this book is for, and how it is located in relation to the plethora of recent books introducing the Christian faith. At times the style seems geared towards the completely uninitiated (e.g. the chapter on going to church). At other points it seems aimed at a rather more informed and sophisticated audience. For an intelligent Christian reader with a reasonable knowledge of the Gospels, but seeking a deeper understanding of the development of the faith over the centuries, this would be extremely helpful. But whether or not that is for whom it was intended is another matter.

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**Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition**, Christopher J. Ellis. London: SCM Press, 2004, pp. 300, ISBN 0334029678. £15.99

Most studies of the theology of worship tend to be biased towards those denominations and traditions which have a written liturgy and a weekly Eucharist. Often such writing on the worship of God's people is seriously flawed because insufficient attention has been paid to the free church tradition, i.e. that strand of Christianity which celebrates Holy Communion infrequently, whose worship has no fixed prayer book, and where a great emphasis is placed on preaching. To refer to these churches as 'non-liturgical' is to insult them, for to define a