

and failure of the crucified figure on the city dump with which Jinkins started. Christ's gracious vicarious ministry needs to burst out of the lengthy quotes from Scripture and Calvin where Jinkins expounds it, and into the trials, stresses and compromises of ministry where it covers a multitude of sins.

But with that qualification this is a timely book, and one that calls us back to a vision of ministry that is in danger of being forgotten in our often misguided attempts to respond to contemporary challenges to the church.

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Alastair Hulbert, *The Gift Half-Understood. Essays on a European Journey*, London: Melisende Press, 2002. 172 pp. £12.50. ISBN 1 901 764 117

This is a hard book to classify, but a joy to read. The 'Gift' in question is Europe, foster-mother of Christianity, begetter of 'Christendom.' 'Half-understood' is because today Europe wrestles with its own meaning and identity.

The book explores the ambiguities of Europe through the senses and intelligent attention of someone who has lived and worked 'across the Channel' for most of his adult life. It does so not by abstract theorising, but in a series of vignettes, sketched encounters, glimpses of significant place, salient friendships, treasures of landscape and culture: all shot through by the weight of Europe's history, its glories and its horrors in imperialist ideology and ecological hubris. In a theological library, it belongs in the 'Christ and Culture' section. But it would ring bells with people who have never read a technical theological book in their lives. It is for Europeans grappling with who they want to be.

Alastair and Fiona Hulbert left New College in the late 60's, fired with radical Barthianism. (not over-publicised in British theological circles that such a thing exists: but the Hulberts had met the human face of Hromadka's 'critical solidarity' with communism from first-

hand experience in Prague with the Christian Peace Conference and its East-West dialogue.) After some years with the French Protestant Industrial Mission, they moved to Geneva to the World Student Christian Federation, and then to Brussels, where Alastair was a kind of Hermes between the Scottish churches and the European Commission, particularly with regard to the 'Soul of Europe' programme of Jacques Delors. The book distills that experience, exploring Europe's emerging spiritual and ethical identity in a multi-faith, culturally turbulent world.

From Vilnius to Cordoba, Warsaw to Scrabster, Iona to St. Petersburg, we meet the colours, landscapes, smells, history and humanity of Europe, always vivid, concrete, palpable off the page. This is no mere travelogue, however. It is a passionate journey, engaging the reader with how this continent belongs both to itself and to the wider world, lives with its past, chooses its future creatively.

In particular, there is a running question about our complacency, particularly in relation to historic European values such as 'progress' and 'development', which have been, to many parts of the world outside 'fortress Europe', a poisoned chalice. The vision, sincere as it may have been, of exporting 'civilisation' has now toppled into a Euro-exported global capitalism which may destroy all that is beautiful about the grounded life of local communities, - in Europe itself, as well as in the raped cultures of former European empires. Friends and mentors such as Ivan Illich and Raimon Panikkar hover as guardians around these essays.

There is, however, nothing of ideological tract about the book. It reads like a series of love-letters to Europe, prose-poetry in style, like the work of Kenneth White (another Scot too little known in his homeland), love-letters from a Scottish home-base, written sometimes with wry humour, a sense of historical irony, even bafflement, but never with cynicism or bitterness.

For anyone who cares both about how to be both rooted in a place and open to the challenges of an interdependent world, this is a delicate exploratory tool.

It is a vivid, contemporary case-study in Gospel and Culture issues, though it deserves to be read as much more than a case-study in anything. It offers, *en passant*, a wealth of reference to tantalising reading, people worth discovering, buildings to explore, places to stand on European soil, all without the slightest trace of didacticism. It bridges, by a mixture of instinct and learned skill, the gaps which still often haunt European intellectual life: between rational analysis and feeling; between ethics and imagination; between the public and the personal.

In Scotland's current religious life, there is a resurgence of fundamentalism, of sectarianism, grafting itself onto deep-seated parochial and provincial attitudes, often not intentionally malevolent, but grotesquely ignorant of how differently other members, even of the Reformed family, do things in other parts of the world; let alone other Christians; let alone people of other living faiths. (The ongoing forced closure of the Scottish Churches' Open College, the liveliest experiment in Adult Education in the last twenty years, is a scandalous and undercontested symptom of all that).

This book has come out of breathing larger air; being aware of larger worlds; and finding that *normal*: not something to boast about, but to see as the obvious heritage of faith and Christian responsibility. It is not a manifesto in any explicit sense. But it is an enlargement of awareness to most of us who have less personal access to the rich diversity of Europe, its peoples and cultures, tensions and kinships.

It remains to be seen how Scotland emerges this century as a politically literate nation, in relation to its proud rhetoric. (The fact that a recent Education Convener from the Executive could say that the fundamental purpose of education was 'to equip children for the global market' is not encouraging!). It also remains to be seen whether the community of Christians plays a significant role in widening horizons and enlarging vision, or whether we are going to look like beached whales as the tides of secular legislation and multi-faith collaboration pass us by.

'The Gift Half-Understood' is the kind of book to provoke us to pursue such questions with energy. Its small, almost unknown publisher has no mechanisms for publicity and promotion. But it's a book worth chasing, finding, living with, telling other people about.

Students of New College have, over the decades, produced tomes of erudition, *gravitas*, cultural significance and ecclesiastical import. But not so many where a gentle ironic humour, palpable attention to the other who is met, lively appreciation of the sensory, verbal finesse and critical theological awareness cohere so suggestively.

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