

A Faithful Presence: Working together for the common good.

Hilary Russell SCM Press £10.99 ISBN: 9780334053897

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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