

*PASTORAL THEOLOGY - AN INQUIRY* by David Deeks Epworth Press, 1987. £9.50.

There is something deep down inside us that wants to make sense of life. We want to understand what is going on around and within us. How do we tackle these questions of meaning? What are the resources to which we turn to help us make sense of ourselves and life? This book, by a Methodist Minister, addresses these questions. In a stimulating and challenging way it aims to develop 'the meaning of "love" in our understanding of God and in our practice of prayer and pastoral care' (p. 4).

A theme that runs through this book is that pastoral care is a shared activity. Care and Prayer belong to the whole people of God and not just the clergy! If we believe this to be true, then we must take practical steps to ensure that this becomes part of the outworking of our discipleship. We need seriously to examine what we expect from the clergy. Do we look for a strong, invulnerable upholder of moral truth, or a fellow traveller able to connect and share in life's mess and pain? Many clergy coming out of theological college will have been trained and encouraged to share their selfhood as part of the exercise of ministry. I wonder what reactions this honesty with others brings? The job can be isolating and congregations need to be ready to allow their clergy to share the joys and fears of ministry. Clergy need to explore models of care that will best facilitate nurture and growth. How do we bring out the best in people and enable the world to see that with God the future is always open to change? Deeks reminds us:

no pastor can exercise such a ministry unless he or she has discovered *inside* his or her own heart an experience of confusion, pain, hurt, and aggression. (p. 258)

We live in a world where the quality of life for many will depend upon the accident of geography or class. We need increasingly to look at how best the resources of the institution can be put to work to enable maximum political movement and change. Why is it that the 'Church becomes the bastion of conservatism' (p. 223)? Is this true of your Church? What has happened to prophecy and the unsettling demands of the Gospel? Perhaps movement will come when the Church takes the risk of relocating its priorities. Deeks argues for a model of pastoral education that pays close attention to the actual practice of care. 'There must be a constant interplay or oscillation, between experience and reflection, between action and learning' (p. 242). This would have profound implications for the training of clergy and could demand that we relocate theology, pastoral care and spirituality primarily in the human concerns, struggles, actions and crises of everyday life:

The process of experience and reflection has to start all over again from scratch ...care involves taking risks, that is, involvement in human discoveries and needs which may shatter all previous ways of feeling, relating, acting and believing. (p. 248)

The book itself is divided into four sections. Section 1, 'In Search for Meaning', explores the resources available to enable us to make sense of life. Meaning comes through the sharing of the stories that make up our life, though it is 'elusive ... [and] needs to be rekindled with a new openness to the world' (p. 21). The section goes on to explore the basic resources of actions and feelings. Is there any meaning behind our actions and activity? How do culture and custom affect our lives? What are we to do with the reality of alienation in the world? How do we generate and nurture imagination, feeling and art in life as resources we can draw upon? Here Deeks asks us to develop artistic creativity and style as part of our humanness through painting, music, writing and designing. What are the implications of this for politics, education, and our Church life? Deeks challenges us to engage further in a search for a truly contemporary understanding of history that will help us to broaden the horizons of our search.

Section II explores the aims and objectives of pastoral care. How do we develop a dialogue between the raw material of our lives and the Christian tradition? Surely our encounter with the Bible is part of the answer and we are given in Chapter Five an imaginative way of reading St Mark's Gospel. Scripture must be a vital part of our journey:

Here is a vast seam to be mined, a companion with which constantly to converse as we attempt to live well. (p. 79)

Pastoral care, Deeks argues, should aim to encourage people to make sense of their experience; to disclose Christian meaning in life; to stimulate people to engage in conversation with the Christian tradition and to encourage holiness. How far do these aims reflect the life and purpose of your local worshipping community?

Section III goes on to provide structures for the tasks outlined above. It explores various aspects of our personality by drawing on the human sciences. Chapter Eight attempts to provide a Christian response to the many anxieties and sin which constantly threaten us. Issues explored include bereavement and grief; human growth and development; friendship and marriage. The section ends with a look at the politics of belonging and relationships. We are reminded of the social and corporate dimensions that affect our lives. Deeks opens up a useful discussion on the nature of leadership, management and authority within groups and the ways in which various groups operate.

Section IV concentrates on the Pastor and her or his education and identity. The book ends with a powerful reflection on the pastor as a 'eucharistic companion'.

I wonder what impact such energetic theological writing as we have in this book can have on the Church life today? I suspect, unfortunately, the impact is very limited indeed. Why is it that we seem unable or unwilling to respond to the demands of love by attempting to integrate new insights and understandings into our life? 'Resistance to change is something which must be confronted imaginatively in every educational process' (p. 249). But, words alone do nothing to bring about a revolution of love. Deeks confronts us with many important questions, but the scope of the book is enlarged when we are reminded in the final pages of the central place that silence and solitude must play in our life. Only as we interrogate silence are we given the grace to touch souls.

So we travel inwards, forwards, outwards. We plumb unfathomable depths, embrace the future in hope, even its suffering and death; we transfigure every bond, system and structure with the values of the kingdom. (p. 265)

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