

CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

STUDY AND RESEARCH

In the course of its work, and in particular considering the two major issues of Church without Walls and the future shape of the central administration, the Assembly Council has looked at a variety of resources and has produced various papers for study.

Papers by the Council

Five dimensions

This looks at five key documents - Church without Walls, The fifth discipline, A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal, Sharing the pain - holding the hope, and Churches and social capital - and draws out five common themes important to the Assembly Council's work in thinking about the future of the Church.

Summaries of Books

Fifth Discipline and Fifth Discipline Fieldbook

Peter Senge (1992 and 1994). Although aimed at businesses, this inspirational book was instrumental in the thinking of the group which wrote Church without Walls. It advocates a new kind of organisation, led not by orders from the top, but by a vision nurtured and shared at every level.

Congregations as learning communities

Dennis Campbell (2000) A useful guide which takes the ideas of the Fifth Discipline and shows how they might be put to use in the local church.

God is Dead: Secularization in the West

Steve Bruce (2002) A wealthy and democratic society, argues Bruce, fosters cultural relativism which undermines faith. While this review finds Bruce's thesis interesting, it also finds that the sociologist can be criticised from the perspectives of history and theology.

A memory mutates: religion in modern Europe

Grace Davie (2000) A sociological picture showing that although religious beliefs are still widespread in Europe, the cultural 'chain of memory' which passed formal religious knowledge to the next generation has broken; and regular attendance has been replaced by 'vicarious' religion and special events.

The Voices of Morebath

Eamon Duffy (2001) A microhistory of a church in an Exmoor hamlet at the time of the Tudor Reformation. It is a time of great social, political and theological change, with all kinds of painful and unexpected consequences for the little congregation. It's a reminder that these are not the first challenging times for the church, and that it is at the local level that change takes place.

The Environment and Christian Ethics

Michael Northcott (1996) Perhaps the most pressing concern for our society - and the Church - in the future will be our relationship with the natural world. This book begins with the environmental crisis and traces back our relationship with Creation and its place in Christian theology. It goes on to develop a Christian ethic which speaks of the technological society, our relationship with the land, and other contemporary environmental issues. The question which is raised, but not fully developed, at the end of the book, is how should the church begin to be reshaped by this ethic?

Summaries of Papers

The Church and social capital

This extensive report, commissioned by the Board of Social Responsibility, explores the role played by Church of Scotland congregations in contributing to social capital at local and national level. It is important for gaining a

picture of how the Church is already reaching out into the community at the start of the Church without Walls process.

Understanding the spirituality of people who don't go to church

This fascinating sociological research by David Hay and Kate Hunt studies the views of people who describe themselves as in some sense 'spiritual', but who are not involved in organised religion. Their findings were influential in the Assembly Council's thinking about the future shape of the Church and Church without Walls.

A new commitment to neighbourhood renewal

This report by the Westminster Social Exclusion Unit in 2001 was mentioned in Churches and Social Capital (see above) as being similar in philosophy to Church without Walls. It provides a strategy for the poorest neighbourhoods in England, through a joined-up, local response rather than piecemeal intrusions from above. There is a paper drawing comparisons between this report and Church without Walls.

Sharing the pain - holding the hope and Church without Walls

Sharing the pain - holding the hope was the title of a major report in 2002 by the Committee on Urban Priority Areas, arguing that unless radical action to redistribute resources was taken quickly, the Church would disappear from the poorest areas of Scotland. This paper compares the philosophy of the report with that of Church without Walls.