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Inclusive Church Resource Books ? Reviews



The whole of the 6 book series has now been

reviewed in the Church Times. Poverty and Gender were reviewed on 14th August.

Poverty, reviewed by Peter Selby, former Bishop of Worcester.

Inclusive Church is familiar to most for its stance as an umbrella organisation bringing together those on the progressive side of the argument about divisive ecclesial issues such as sexuality. It has always in principle, however, embraced inclusivity as a mark of the Church in every aspect. So its resource book *Poverty* is concerned with enabling churches to be more hospitable to the economically excluded and also to engage with poverty as a social, political and theological issue.

In keeping with its message and subject-matter, the book is small in size and accessible in style, besides embodying that combination of experience, theology and resources which the Inclusive Church brand stands for.

The core of the book is Susan Durber's 'Theology of Poverty' a clear and useful exposition of what it would mean to be a Church of the poor rather than merely being a Church for the poor ? let alone a Church without the poor. Such a Church embodies giving and receiving at the heart of its life; a Church that is genuinely open to being of the poor and so to being changed in every aspect of its life.

Gender was reviewed by Robin Gill, who edits *Theology*.

This is a very welcome and accessible little book produced by Inclusive Church. The book starts with a splendid joke by the Dean of Guildford, Dianna Gwilliams. She recounts how , when she was nine, her seven-year-old brother asked their mother 'What's sex?' After her lengthy (and probably flustered) response, the small boy held up his school-trip application form with its boxes to tick and replied 'How am I going to fit that into this little box?'

With no such embarrassment but with admirable clarity, four Christians tell their stories of exclusion and inclusion. Rachel Mann is an Anglican priest who is also a transsexual. Hillary Cotton is a lay woman who has campaigned for women's ordination in the Church of England for more than 30 years, as her mother did before her. David Monteith is Dean of Leicester and is single and gay. Natalie Collins is a lay woman whose first husband abused her physically and sexually. She is now a gender-justice specialist. Each autobiographical account adds important texture to this book.

In the second part, an article by Grayson Perry which was originally published in the New Statesman is reproduced here: 'The Rise and Fall of Default Man'. Using his personal experience as an artist from a working-class background and a transvestite, he depicts the 'Great White Male' in Britain as 'Default Man'. The latter wears a suit and tie, is educated, confident, moneyed, and powerful. Perry challenges 'Default Man' to make room for others.

In the final part, Rosemary Lain Priestley, Dean of Women's Ministry in the diocese of London, offers a précis of feminist biblical interpretation over the past three decades. For those not familiar with this important literature, she offers an accessible, albeit somewhat conservative, account. As others have done, she takes the reader through the ways in which Jesus interacts with women in the Gospels, and she defends Paul against the charge of patriarchy (even in 1 Timothy, which she takes to be Pauline).

My only reservation is the inclusion of Perry's article. He does offer important insights about being a transvestite, but his central stereotype of 'Default Man' seems curiously at odds with the aims of Inclusive Church. Labelling others by their clothes (I seldom wear suits and never ties), education, colour, and money is surely what Inclusive Church is rightly against. Taken as a whole, this is an excellent book. It would be great to find it on sale at the back of every church in the country.

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