

BOOK REVIEW

Tom Stuckey

Ian Cowley is the Vocations and Spirituality Coordinator for the Diocese of Salisbury. His new book **The Contemplative Minister – Learning to lead from the still centre** (The Bible Reading Fellowship 2015, £8.99) is addressed to ministers and priests who ‘like swimmers in the open sea are only just managing to keep their heads above the waves’. There was a time when being a Christian minister or priest offered an opportunity of spending a lifetime in prayer, study, delivering sermons and exercising pastoral care within a community. Not any more! Today the job requires such ‘a heroic combination of stamina, multi-tasking and change management’ that any awareness of God gets stifled.

There are seven parts to this book each with a couple of easily read short chapters. The whole book is written in a homely style. One can easily imagine Ian Cowley sitting with a small group of priests within the diocese and giving them the wisdom of his experience as a parish priest in South Africa, Cambridge and Peterborough.

Part One of the book examines vocation and the difficulty of remaining in touch with God. Parts Two and Three spell out the need for the rediscovery of our true still-centre. ‘Self management of self should occupy 50% of our time’. To his end he gives helpful tips about retreats, quiet days, time sheets, quietening the body, living with uncluttered space, the daily office and use of Scripture. From part Four the author begins to draw out Biblical insights; letting peace rule our hearts, living ‘in Christ Jesus’ and fighting ‘our adrenaline filled existence.’ From part Five onwards he focuses on letting go, establishing a ‘rule of life’, spiritual formation and servant leadership. The book ends by describing how one establishes a ‘contemplative church’.

The lack of ecumenical perspective is the main weakness of the book as is its failure to adequately address the circumstances of those of us who minister amongst aged congregations in churches of ever declining numbers. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that this book cannot be read with profit by non-Anglicans. If Desmond Tutu is prepared to write its Foreword then we can be certain that the subject of this book is significant!