



Looking in the Distance: The Human Search for Meaning, Richard Holloway, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2004, pp. 227, ISBN 1841956031. £7.99

Those of us who are fans of Richard Holloway (and there are a number) have sometimes found ourselves nevertheless wincing at some of his more ‘off the cuff’ and hasty comments that would inevitably find their way to the front pages of one or other of the organs of the national press. Holloway himself on more than one occasion regretted being overly available to journalists seeking a scare quote from the ‘rad Bishop’. However, when he is in the mood and when he offers us his more considered and reflective judgements, he is often an insightful and wise commentator on faith in the modern world. This is very much the case in this short but beautifully written and wise volume.

Written in four movements of looking, speaking, listening and leaving, Holloway attempts to examine the phenomenon of spirituality in the modern world. The book is intensely personal and suffused with a wistful longing for the intimated but often absent ‘Other’, which is nevertheless felt even in its absence. Holloway, however, is not interested in any form of terminal nostalgia for the religious certainties of a former age. As we might expect, ‘religious certainties’ in all their forms come in for a searching examination and are generally regarded as largely defensive attempts to shore up some psychological need for certainty through appeal to an external supernatural authority. For Holloway, contemporary spirituality is prompted by the mysteries of human life in this vast universe as we find that there is a ‘certain gracious latency in creation’ (a beautiful phrase from p.54) that hints at ‘something not yet disclosed’.

Having established a basis for speaking about contemporary spirituality, Holloway then proceeds to work out the implications of this line of thought as we begin to exchange the traditional Christian metanarrative for one based on science and then on to the competing arena of contemporary moral discourse. The book concludes with a powerful final section entitled ‘leaving’, wherein Holloway beautifully, tenderly and insightfully examines the big areas of decline, loss and

death. The conclusion is ‘that we should live the fleeting day with passion and, when the night comes, depart from it with grace.’

Obviously, this is not a book in which Holloway attempts to offer an apologetic for traditional Christian faith and many will reject it simply on that score, and I wouldn’t want to agree with every word contained therein (he concedes perhaps too much to an all pervasive scientific narrative too swiftly). Nevertheless there is much here that is the product of a mature pondering on the ambiguities of faithful living in the modern world, such that virtually everyone, if they are honest, will find something that rings true with their own experience. Preachers too will benefit from the particularly rich use that Holloway makes of poetry, literature and artistic allusion to elaborate his points.

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Christ and Human Rights: The Transformative Engagement,
George Newlands, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 218,
ISBN 0754652106. pbk £15.99, hbk £55.00

George Newlands continues his prolific output of the past few years with this important and timely book on the relevance of Christian belief in Jesus Christ to the subject of human rights. Newlands’ approach to the subject is classically liberal in that he wants to engage in a reasoned dialogue with secular thought from the distinctive perspective that faith in Jesus Christ affords. He thus neither wants to dominate the discussion through final appeal to dominating norms of theological discourse, nor to simply dissolve the distinctive insights that faith might bring into the more general categories that ethical discourse might proffer. As such the book runs the risk of appealing neither to the resurgently orthodox, nor to the resolutely secular. A problem of which, I feel sure, Newlands is all too well aware.

As one might expect from Professor Newlands, the perspective taken is generous, liberal and humane. The scholarship displayed is vast and