



**Alastair McIntosh and Matt Carmichael, *Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service* (Cambridge: Green Books, 2016), pp. 223, ISBN 978-0857843005. £19.99**

I remember the time when the then leader of the Iona Community wrote an article in *Coracle* which was wary if not outright critical of the idea of spirituality. And as a recent graduate in Divinity I agreed with him. But over the last thirty or forty years, alongside the steady decline of religion and church, the meaning and place of spirituality in society has gained momentum, not as a surrogate for religion, but as a different kind of force to inform and encourage mindful living in the world. Spiritual awareness has shown itself to be a way of waking up intellectually and emotionally to the depth of the problems we face today – something that is now taken for granted by activist communities like the Iona Community. Alastair McIntosh and Matt Carmichael describe the purpose of their book as ‘an introduction to spirituality for people disillusioned with, or uninterested in, religion, but open to life’ (p. 8), and explain that ‘activism is all about putting our highest values into practice in the world. Spirituality involves an awareness of where those values come from [...]: our motives, passions and drives’ (p. 20). That is the crux of the message of this life-enhancing book.

McIntosh and Carmichael write from their own involvement, practical and intellectual, in spiritual activism. Matt is a theologian and inner-city secondary school teacher in Leeds, a former student of Alastair’s Centre for Human Ecology (CHE), and a campaigner on global justice issues. He acknowledges his indebtedness to his mentor while adding his own particular experience and sensitive storytelling to the mix. Alastair is not new to the subject of spiritual activism or to a style of shared authorship: his *Rekindling Community: Connecting People, Environment and Spirituality* (2008) involved a dozen CHE fellows in research into the spirituality of rural and urban regeneration and the bond that connects people, place and nature. Here he makes a typically generous reference to how his friend Satish Kumar of Schumacher College added a third pillar to *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* (2001), his best-known book, in order to characterise the fullness of community: ‘soil, soul and society’. Mind

you, although society did not figure in the title, it figured as essential to the spiritual activism that the book was talking about. Likewise, in this book the context is society and community participation involving bottom-up and organic forms of organisation and leadership as service.

So much of the book's rich substance comes from the authors' deep immersion in the spiritual traditions of the Gospels, Buddhism, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tao Te Ching and Shamanism, as well as more recent and contemporary sources: Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Dorothee Soelle, R. D. Laing, Walter Wink, Starhawk, Quakerism and many more. That is the wisdom they share.

Several chapters lay out the foundations for what McIntosh and Carmichael have to teach, rather like a reader in the subject, including "Higher Consciousness", "The Structure of the Psyche", "Understanding Cults and Charisma", and "The Psychodynamics of Campaigning". Formally these are the most academic sections of the book and are good reasons for why practical theology lecturers might want to include it in their reading lists. But it is also clearly presented in such a way as could be used for study groups, church groups, inter-faith groups, as well as all sorts of action groups seeking direction and hope in the miasma of our world today.

A six-page index references nearly five hundred names and key ideas from the book, which is further enhanced by a glossary and reading list. These amply supplement the detailed table of contents which fully lists the various sub-titled sections in each chapter. The whole plan of the book is there in outline. The work is a textbook on spirituality and activism, but because of its personalised style and the story-telling it involves, particularly in the second half, it gathers momentum and bowls along taking the reader with it.

The narrative element, sometimes drawn from a variety of spiritual traditions or other literature, is just as often taken from the authors' own experiences: 'hitching our campaigns to stories', they tell us, 'and helping great stories to emerge out of our campaigns, is such an effective means of communicating and motivating' (p. 81). That is how the chapter entitled "Movements and Their Movers" begins, and it is full of stories.

Throughout the book each chapter ends with a short Case Study of spiritual activism, either historical (for example Gerard Winstanley and the Diggers) or contemporary (such as Gehan Macleod of the GalGael Trust in Govan). These add breadth and depth to the authors' own testimony.

The final two chapters, "Tools for Discernment" and "Into the Deeper Magic", contain moving reflections on truth, humility, dreams, curse and blessing, and the *Om mani padme hum*, 'God come to my heart', engraved on a Buddhist prayer wheel that Alastair bought from a peddler near Darjeeling in February 1980 on the Hippie Trail. The stories are wide-ranging, honest, beautiful, funny and magical. 'We are on a journey that reconnects to the life-force', McIntosh and Carmichael tell us. 'To be an activist is [...] to seek to use our lives to give life' (p. 13).

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**Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. viii + 216, ISBN 978-0300153804. £45.00**

First of all, one needs to say that this book is a delight to read. Moreover, it is economical, packing more into 140 pages than some do with many more. It is written by a philosopher-historian at the University of Edinburgh with the best of both skill-sets combined, and with an almost intuitive grasp of the religious controversies of the period. Although it is short enough to be read from cover to cover, it is also a resource for dipping into, and carefully referenced, with colourful cameos (e.g. the Rankeneans in Chapter 2). Ahnert views the Moderates as those who thought rigid doctrinal orthodoxy on the one hand and religions of feeling and enthusiasm on the other were equally to be avoided. He also argues that it was the principle of the authority of the General Assembly, not that of patronage (which had been doubted as early as Francis Hutcheson), that really mattered to