

on the Church and society. The World Council Churches, the United/Uniting Churches in India and Australia and the Taizé Community in France (founded by a past Swiss SCM secretary) are, according to Boyd, obvious results of the work of the early SCM. In their life, he suggests, they reflect the spirit of the SCM: centredness on God, the central role of Bible study, openness to society, lay leadership, and willingness to challenge the status quo.

At the end of the book Boyd seeks ways to revitalise the SCM's witness in universities and as a catalyst for the wider Church. He sees closer relations between the Christian Unions and the SCM as being crucial to this. He points out that the past SCM leader, Lesslie Newbigin, who according to Boyd reflected the spirit of the SCM in his thought, is today an influential figure for many evangelical Christians. Boyd argues that this shows that past prejudices can be overcome.

This book is in many ways a result of Boyd's own soul-searching concerning his life in the SCM and "the Storm" that radically altered the SCM. Throughout he is somewhat naïve in his defence of the SCM and the ecumenical project. He is correct in calling for a student organisation open to all Christians, centred on God, and open to the world – in many ways he is describing the early SCM. However, it is not clear that the SCM could become this organisation again. This would certainly be impossible without critical engagement with its past. In this, Boyd's book is an important step.

Valteri Mujunen,
Institut Catholique de Paris



Letters to God from the Wilderness, Ronald Beasley,
Edinburgh: Shoving Leopard Productions, 2006, pp. 224,
ISBN 9781905565092. £12.95

This volume, published posthumously, is the only work of a remarkable man: an Englishman who spent the greater part of his life in Scotland, first as a Senior Youth Worker with the Church of Scotland, then as

deputy head teacher responsible for adult education in a large school in a deprived area, and finally, putting his vast experience in counselling to advantage, in a university college. Behind him he left a host of young people (and not only young people) who were the beneficiaries of his counsel – immensely patient, imaginative and, to use a favourite expression of his, ‘non-judgmental’. He played a leading role in the Fellowship of Reconciliation which gave him many overseas contacts. For all his professional patience, he did not suffer fools gladly (especially establishment fools) which got him a reputation of being a somewhat difficult customer. Yet for all the disputes he found himself in (and there were not a few) his heart always seemed to be in the right place.

Beasley was a great questioner and here the subject of his questioning is God. As his life attested, full and multi-faceted as it was, he was a convinced Christian and faithful elder and reader of the Church of Scotland, Yet he had many questions which he rehearses here with ruthless honesty. Separate letters address all the subjects which have perplexed Christians throughout the ages – evil, suffering, prayer, death, and so on – and he is not easily satisfied by the theological answers usually given. The honesty of his questioning gives his comments an appealing authenticity.

Throughout, he draws widely and frankly on his own wide experience and encounters with all sorts of people. The result is something of an autobiography as well, where we discover his likes (and dislikes!), his chief causes and main hobby-horses. Genuine humanity shines through.

For all his questioning, he refuses to give up on God, which means that the letters here constitute something of an invitation to pilgrimage, which many faithful seekers like him will find an immensely stimulating exercise.

D. W. D. Shaw,
St Andrews