

BOOKS

The Church of England unfairly maligned

This hostile attack on the Church is too one-sided, says *Trevor Beeson*

THAT WAS THE CHURCH THAT WAS

by Andrew Brown and Linda Woodhead



272PP, BLOOMSBURY, £16.99, EBOOK £11.29

★★★★★

The subtitle of this excoriation of the Church of England should have been: "This is not the book that was." In February, its first incarnation was withdrawn just before it was to be published, when legal action was taken against the publishers.

The new, sanitised version leaves the identity of the litigator a puzzle – slurs against the living remain abundant and intact. Nor have the deletions (mainly from the chapters on homosexuality) done much to raise the tone. For example, we are still informed that gang rape with a broomstick was routine at a well-known boys' public school; and that "there is more to homosexuality than what men do with their willies". The relevance of all this to the plight of the Church of England is not made clear.

The joint authors are an unusual match, so it is not surprising that their union has given birth to something with more than legal problems. Prof Linda Woodhead is a highly regarded sociologist of religion – she evaluates statistics on things such as church attendance and relates them to wider trends. The results are often important but never acted upon by church leaders. Andrew Brown, on the other hand, is a knockabout journalist who, although a non-believer, has made a specialism of religious affairs for the *Guardian*. Always readable, his writing can be perceptive but is rarely objective.

Their aim is to demonstrate that the Church of England has suffered so steep a decline in attendance that it no longer enjoys the nation's allegiance. But when the majority of citizens are still happy to describe themselves as C of E, this seems misleading. The numbers may have declined, but they are still substantial: 16,000 churches whose 900,000 weekly attenders (excluding those who only go at festivals) raise £600 million annually, mainly to pay 7,000 full-time clergy who have in train another 13,000 clergy, not on the payroll. The Church Commissioners have

capital of £7 billion. However, resources are spread thinly. The Bishop of Rochester recently declared his diocese "skint".

Most of the book is taken up with an examination of what are claimed to be the two main causes of the Church's decline during the past 30 years: its mishandling of the homosexuality question and the admission of women to the ordained ministry. These questions are pursued with relentless zeal but also an unconcealed hostility, which distorts the facts.

The performance of the Archbishops of Canterbury is rightly scrutinised and two arch-villains emerge: George Carey and Rowan Williams. Carey, born in working-class Dagenham, is said to have felt quite out of place with his public school episcopal colleagues; the book castigates him for taking refuge in extensive travel to distant parts. He was an "embarrassment", they say, who contributed only simplistic sermons and enlarged the church's central bureaucracy. But surely he did much to bring about the ordination of women priests, so he wasn't all bad.

Rowan Williams, a very different character, is given rougher treatment. While acknowledging his holiness as well as his "hairiness", the book sets two "catastrophes" on his charge sheet. The first was the mishandling of a tricky issue involving a (doomed) proposal that a gifted homosexual priest, cohabiting but celibate, be made Bishop of Reading. The other concerned a lecture in which he floated the idea that Sharia law might one day be enshrined in English statute law. It was a time of racial tension, and the media hammered him. But should this really be called a catastrophe?

It is not until the final pages that the near desperate reader is given anything positive. A much smaller church, argues Woodhead, can survive, not as the church of England, but as the church for England. It will need stipendiary clergy who are well trained and paid, but the bulk of the ministries could be undertaken by self-sustaining clergy and the laity. Once a realistic church has ceased being depressed by falling numbers and the fading influence, it might recover the exuberance it had before the Roman Empire began to interfere in its life in the fourth century.

More of this is needed from Woodhead, but without the assistance of a journalist, please.

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PHOTOGRAPHY

There are few experiences more uplifting and humbling than standing in the nave of a cathedral. With the symmetry of columns soaring into arches, and the fine tracery of windows allowing an ethereal light to enter, the effect is like frozen music. These are spaces filled with centuries of human aspiration after

the divine; in them, spiritual yearning is made palpable through stone." So writes Martin Barnes, senior curator of photographs at the V&A, in his uplifting introduction to *The English Cathedral*. This beautiful book celebrates the interiors of each of England's 42 Anglican cathedrals, shot over a period of

three years by the late Magnum photographer Peter Marlow. From the cavernous immensity of Canterbury, its nave dating from the late 14th century, to Basil Spence's 20th century concrete replacement of the bombed-out Coventry, and the extraordinary blue and gold 19th-century decoration on the ceiling at Carlisle

(above), Marlow, who took all the pictures in natural light at dawn, captures the glories of some of England's most magnificent pieces of architecture. *"The English Cathedral"* is published by Merrell (£24.95). An exhibition of the photographs is at Coventry Cathedral until Sept 9

Look on high: Carlisle Cathedral, above, was founded in 1133 by Henry I

© PETER MARLOW/MAGNUM PHOTOS

What if JFK had survived?

A novel set in an alternate reality is a dark American parable, says *Duncan White*

HYSTOPIA

by David Means



352PP, FABER, £16.99, EBOOK £7.19

★★★★★

Like dismantling a lobster, David Means's debut novel, *Hystopia*, makes you work hard to get to the good stuff. The first pages of the book constitute a forbidding exoskeleton of notes by an unnamed editor prefacing what turns out to be a novel by Eugene Allen, a Vietnam veteran who killed himself after writing it. As if this were not disorienting enough, we learn that Means's story is set in an alternate reality where JFK survived Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination attempt.

Once you get to the meat, though, the book proves worth the struggle. *Hystopia*, which has been longlisted for the Booker Prize, is a piece of profoundly unsettling speculative fiction that somehow marries rich prose to the narrative intensity of a thriller.

The set-up is as follows: having survived numerous assassination attempts, Kennedy, in his third term, has presided over a ramped-up war in Vietnam. To deal with the problem of damaged veterans coming home, a process called "enfolding" has been invented, by which a government organisation called Psych Corps puts veterans through re-enactments of their experiences while giving them a drug called Tripizoid. The result is that the trauma is powerfully suppressed.

It is not just the traumatic event that needs to be forgotten but also everything in the subject's history that is connected to it. So if they watched their best friend from school die in the jungle, they will lose not only the memory of that moment but also all of their memories of "playing ball, fishing, high jinks, drag races down forlorn streets". These "enfolding" veterans live in a Michigan wracked by riots and fires and biker gangs. Some of the veterans don't respond well to enfolding and go "wayward".

There are two interlinked plot lines. The first involves the kidnapping and drugging of Meg Allen, Eugene's sister, by Rake, a veteran whose enfolding failed in such a catastrophic way that his trauma has doubled rather than been excised. Rake kills randomly, using the blood of his victims to smear "cryptic designs" as his markers. Meg he keeps alive, though, stashing her at the secluded home of his fellow veteran Hank while he goes on his rampages. Hank and Meg swiftly

form a bond and begin looking for a way to escape.

Charged with halting Rake's progress are two agents of Psych Corps, Myron Singleton and Wendy Zapf, who have just started an affair. This is risky as agents are not supposed to fraternise and, what's more, Singleton is an "enfolding" vet and one of the ways he can become "unfolded" is through having great sex (the other is plunging into cold water).

Having duly begun "unfolding", Myron has flashbacks: "That evening, as they cooked together, he stood at the sink and shook the lettuce dry in a clean dish towel, feeling the teardrop shape of the dripping vegetable weight in his fist. He put the lettuce down on the counter. (Skulls in bags, men being hoisted up in nets, bodies in bags, he thought.) In the living room he turned on the television, fiddled the antenna to bring the signal."

The questions pile up fast. What does Rake want with Meg? Why is he keeping her alive but drugged? What trauma has she enfolding? What happened to Singleton in Vietnam? Is there a connection to Rake? Why are Psych Corps not punishing Myron and Wendy for having their affair?

The "enfolding" conceit might be an elaborate one requiring some awkward exposition but once set up it is immersive. The very act of reading the novel replicates its subject matter, as you grope your way from trippy disorientation toward what is being deliberately withheld, flicking back to the editor's notes to scour for clues.

For the veterans in the novel, it is difficult to separate myth from reality. In the most stunning passage of the book, a veteran called Billy Thompson delivers a blistering 11-and-a-half-page monologue without a paragraph break, in which he both invokes and undermines the journalistic clichés of the war that the soldiers themselves began to adopt.

To write about Vietnam is to risk adding to a subject already saturated in literature, but Means is aware of the risk. What this novel is more interested in than the war itself is how violence abroad bleeds into violence at home, how trauma is transferred from the war zone to the suburb. And while the Vietnam War may already feel distant in American history, it is not as if there is a shortage of traumatised veterans of foreign wars returning to the United States. In more than one sense, then, *Hystopia* is a story of American forgetting.

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Negotiation: How to Craft Agreements That Give Everyone More

by Gavin Presman

Negotiation expert Gavin Bresman works with international business leaders like Microsoft to help them get better deals and form better relationships - but can his expertise go further than the boardroom battlefield?

Whether we're buying a house, settling a family disagreement or even exiting the EU, how can we all get more from our negotiations without losing allies?

We turned to Gavin:

Where did you learn to negotiate well?

I learnt a lot around my dining table. My father was a lawyer, my mother a head teacher, and both were politicians. Therefore debate and discussion was central to how we made decisions at home. My father was also a Talmudic Scholar, and the tradition centres on being able to argue both sides of any point. When you teach children to see all sides of an argument before deciding on an outcome, you are giving them strong foundations to be good teachers, good lawyers and good negotiators. My family taught me very well, and, as the youngest of four, I had a lot of early practice learning to get everyone's point of view included in our family agreements.

Were you always good at negotiation?

I was always an articulate kid, but I wasn't always a good listener – or particularly numerate – and both are helpful negotiation skills. I remember when my eldest brother Danny traded me my shiny silver 50p coin with four of his large copper coins, a lesson I always valued. It is always key to understand the value of what you are negotiating before you make a trade.

Are some people naturally better at it than others?

If people are naturally good listeners, or naturally people focused, they often do well as negotiators. This is because understanding your own positions and working out what you want is easy, but understanding others and crafting agreements that creatively uses variables for everyone's benefit is more of an art.

Is negotiation only helpful in the workplace?

Collaborative Negotiation is simply the process by which two people craft an agreement to best use their joint resources to achieve their common objectives. Therefore sometimes negotiation isn't helpful. Yet there are a few places where 'haggling' is still more fun,



and maybe even more appropriate. If you are seeking to trade with someone you don't like, or want to trade with them again, then taking a short-term win/lose based approach could be the best approach. The challenge is that it's less satisfying long term, less creative, and you end up with less value usually when you fail to really cooperate to craft a deal.

How can politicians negotiate better?

Anyone who is seeking to create a lasting deal with anyone needs to understand all the parties' positions, and be seeking an outcome that works for all. Post-Brexit, our politicians need to start focusing not just on our needs, but on the needs of our European partners if we are to negotiate a fair and valuable deal for all. Only if we are going to find a deal that works for all will it last and hold together the benefits of the single market for the UK. It's easy to keep stating what we want, but the important thing is to really understand what the other parties need. When we understand the other parties' position, we can use this understanding to find the terms that work genuinely work for all.

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