

# Anglican and ecumenical

*Petà Dunstan* recalls a priest devoted to Christian unity and the religious orders

**Boundless Grandeur: The Christian vision of A. M. Donald Allchin**  
**David G. R. Keller, editor**  
Pickwick Publications £18  
(978-1-4982-0319-7)

DONALD ALLCHIN (1930-2010) was a priest, historian, and theologian, who avoided preferment in the Church of England to follow his varied historical and theological

research and writing. He came to influence many, and this book of essays is a tribute to his wide interests and contacts throughout the Christian Churches. The book includes sections on each of his main interests: his dialogue with the Orthodox; his ecumenical vision; his commitment to the Welsh spiritual tradition; as well as recollections from people who journeyed with him at different times. Some essays incorporate extracts from his writings and poetry.

The book ends with the text of conversations that the editor conducted with Allchin in July 2007. So we hear Allchin’s own words and thoughts in a direct way.

This alone would make the volume significant, as it connects the writing with the person. So often, we read theology without the author’s context and, thereby, the historical dimension for understanding it.

Here we have glimpses of the places and people who influenced Allchin, as well as how his thoughts and ideas developed through his contacts with important thinkers such as Thomas Merton, Vladimir Lossky, and Dumitru Stăniloae. The self-revealing in the interviews is an insight into all that has been described in the book’s preceding essays.

The ecumenical path that Allchin trod through his life was one of his greatest contributions. He was able to combine friendship and respect with a deep and honest exchange on doctrine and practice. He became a model of the ecumenical Anglican spirit. He believed reconciliation of any conflict or divide could come only through a transformation effected by understanding and knowledge of the other side. This learning about the other is the key to the changing of attitudes which, in turn, allows people to grow together.

Allchin’s belief that the religious life led by monastic communities, in whatever form, “is absolutely invaluable”, contact with which was something that he could “never have survived without”, is also significant. It demonstrated that a spiritual life of prayer in community, led both for oneself and for others, was for him a focus of Christian life from which much else flowed. He was the warden of more than one community, and had links with many others, advising and encouraging, and yet claiming that they served him far more than he served them.

For him, the monastic tradition was an essential component in the Church’s life and witness, because, as he tells us, the religious live what he wrote about. If he were still alive, Allchin would surely have commended the Archbishop of Canterbury’s naming of the revival of all types of religious community as one of the aims of his archiepiscopate.

Unifying life, thought, and belief was central to Allchin’s understanding of the transforming power of the Christian faith. This book introduces us to all that flowed from that premise for him. It is a helpful encouragement to explore Allchin’s many writings further.

*Dr Petà Dunstan is a Fellow of St Edmund’s College, Cambridge.*

# Baptists in an Orthodox style

*Stephen Platten* reads a Georgian’s account of his denomination

**Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia**  
**Malkhaz Songulashvili**  
Baylor University Press £66.99  
(978-1-4813-0110-7)

MALKHAZ SONGULASHVILI is a phenomenon, both in terms of his intellectual fecundity and the charisma of his personality. This becomes clear in the pages of this book, which explores the unique nature of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Georgia, which Malkhaz has helped fashion as a 21st-century flowering of Christianity in the Caucasus.

The book first traces the roots of the Baptist tradition as part of the radical reform movement within the English Reformation. This is then placed in the wider context of the Continental Reformation. Alongside this is offered a concise but rich history of the growth of Christianity in Georgia; Georgia claims itself to be, along with neighbouring Armenia, the oldest Christian nation in the world.

The key missionary was Nino, a young woman from Asia Minor,

who arrived in Georgia in AD 318, and so just before the Council of Nicaea.

Both the growth of the Orthodox tradition in Georgia and the migration of European Protestants into the country from Western Europe in the 19th century are traced. Earlier meetings with European Protestant leaders are noted, as, indeed, is the movement of exiled Slavic Christian groups from Russia into Georgia. Among these, the Molokans and the Dukhabors are characterised as “essentialists”, limiting their piety to the essentials of Christian belief.

Songulashvili then traces the historical roots of Georgian Baptists in five main chapters, followed by a conclusion. After the early history noted above, three chapters trace the periods from 1919 to 1941, and from 1941 to 1989, and then post-Soviet Georgia. The final chapter outlines reforms in the Church in the early 21st century.

It is impossible to understand the history of Christianity in Georgia apart from the secular background of Tsarist Russia, within whose hegemony Georgia fell, and then, in the 20th century, the continued Russian hegemony after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. The contrasting response of the Baptists to the Orthodox culture of Georgia and the Soviet revolution magnifies and broadens the relevance of the book well beyond the borders of this

small trans-Caucasian nation. Songulashvili achieves his aims with clarity, elegance, and attractive readability.

For the Baptist Church, the martyrdom of Ilia Kandelaki in 1927 was a defining moment. Kandelaki argued for the translation of the Bible and the liturgy into modern Georgian. He pioneered the contextualisation of Baptist Christianity in Georgia within the prevailing Orthodox culture. This deliberate missiological strategy was captured again by Theodore Kocharadze in the mid-20th century and then recovered classically, in the late 1990s and early 21st century, by Songulashvili himself, when he became Archbishop of the Georgian Baptists in his early forties.

The Church retains the threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons. Its firm focus upon both word and sacrament stands within a liturgical tradition that is not a thousand miles from Anglicanism. Its cultural contextualisation retains the strength to be prophetic.

This book is essential reading for Western Christians. I hope that it will be made available in paperback with a more adequate index. It describes a Church rooted in a practical, living, and lived apologetic.

*The Rt Revd Stephen Platten is a former Bishop of Wakefield.*

# Across the Curtain in the ’60s

*John Arnold* enjoys a personal account of an East German stay

**Stepping off the Map. . . : Memories of a Cold War adventure**  
**Merrilyn Thomas, editor**  
Medlar Tree Publishing £7.99  
(978-0-9576491-1-8)

TEN years ago, Merrilyn Thomas published *Communing with the Enemy*, based on her doctoral thesis about the Coventry-Dresden project of reconciliation in 1965. She modestly omitted to mention the reckless idealism of the young volunteers (of whom she was one), their adventurousness and curiosity, their discipleship, and the sheer exoticism then of crossing the Iron Curtain, as we used to say, to experience the “real, existing socialism” of the German Democratic Republic.

Now she fills that gap and supplements her academic work with a more personal introduction and epilogue, together with seven short memoirs, and a foreword by the Dean of Coventry, testifying to the lasting value of that adventure.

As in any symposium, there is much overlapping. All speak of the pervading “greyness” of the GDR (thrown into relief by the colour and gaiety of Prague in its short-lived spring), of the contrast between the docile, rule-abiding Germans and the irresponsible, exuberant young Brits, and, above all, of the sheer goodness, even sanctity, of the Lutheran deaconesses, whose unruly but welcome guests they were. The trauma of the

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“Our answer!”: an East German propaganda poster illustrating the German Democratic Republic’s reaction to the perceived threat from Western capitalists backed by military power. From the book under review

destruction of Dresden had been such that they had not spoken of it for 20 years; then one of them said: “It is not only the rubble out there you removed, but the rubble in our hearts.”

All agree that the most lasting effects were upon the participants themselves. Character and personality are self-selecting in escapades such as this, but it is still gratifying to learn what some went on to achieve later, as Co-President of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, for example, or Director General of the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The Chaplain, Martin Turner, emerges as an exemplary leader of an expedition into un-

known territory, shrewd, brave, and with enviable people skills.

Richard Leachman goes to the heart of “the paradox . . . that there we were, embedded in a society that was . . . repressive, abusive and in every sense unfree, and yet my experience of living there was wholly illuminated by the deep-felt humanity, integrity, trust and mutual respect that we encountered in its people. . . our own group glowed with a spirit, holy or not, . . . that was wholly positive, inspiring, loving and life-giving.”

Who could ask for anything more?

*The Very Revd Dr John Arnold is a former Dean of Durham.*

## new titles just published

**Before the Door of God: An anthology of devotional poetry**, edited by Jay Hopler and Kimberley Johnson (Yale, £14.99 (£13.50); 978-0-300-21675-2). *New in paperback.*

**The Paul Debate: Critical questions for understanding the apostle** by N. T. Wright (SPCK, £16.99 (*Church Times SPECIAL OFFER PRICE* £14.99); 978-0-281-07411-2).

**The Bible in the Contemporary World** by Richard Bauckham (SPCK, £15.99 (£14.40); 978-0-281-07484-6).

**On Being Human: Distinctiveness, dignity, disability and disposal** by Michael N. Marsh (Iff Books, £15.99 (£14.40); 978-1-78279-451-6).

**God is Watching You: How the fear of God makes us human** by Dominic Johnson (OUP, £18.99 (£17.10); 978-0-19-989563-2).

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