

Robin Greenwood and Hugh Burgess. *Power*. London: SPCK. 2005, pp.182, £14.99

Power to the People?

Robin Greenwood, newly installed at St Mary's Monkseaton, is an example of a theologian who places his theological abilities at the service of the local church. In all his writings the reader is aware of a deep concern with the earthed practicalities of mission and ministry. Two of Robin's earlier books – *Transforming Priesthood* (1994) and *The Ministry Team Handbook* (2000) - have had an influence on the models of ministry we are developing in Byker. I am certain that *Power*, Robin's new book co-authored with industrial consultant Hugh Burgess, will also have a similar impact.

Power is an essay on the nature of power within the world and the church. Its purpose is to facilitate a dialogue between those who have responsibility for making meaning in the world and those who are shaped by the Eucharistic worship of the Christian community. Throughout the book it's possible to hear each of the authors contribute from their own disciplines and experiences.

This is a book that I found compelling for several reasons. First of all, co-author Hugh Burgess has brought into the dialogue many of the tools that we as a diocese are using to help re-structure our corporate life. These are appropriated by no means uncritically and some of the clearest passages in the book are the exposition of management theorists. A good example is the way learning organisation theory is brought into dialogue with a number of aspirations we currently have for the church community. The insights gained cover the fields of personal discipleship, church development and Eucharistic celebration and applied sensitively, could enable the church to build up the sort of 'power relations that show people their true worth.'

Secondly, Robin and Hugh offer a framework for conversations about power from a positive starting point. Rather than beginning with the problems of power, such as its abuse, five aspects of power are offered for reflection: authority, energy, capability, capacity and adaptivity. They argue that power is to be discerned most properly in the being of God who is active throughout creation. Power is 'the relational energy generated and maintained by the triune God'.

Then, there are a good number of practical proposals for renewed practice within the life of the church. These are invariably worth considering. For example, a key theme throughout is the church's need to re-organise its power dynamics to make visible its ultimate meaning, something facilitated by those who are entrusted with responsibility for education, ministry and mission development and research. There is a justified plea for the occupants of such roles, who often make themselves vulnerable as they explore the boundaries of church life, to be deeply valued in their strategic roles.

Finally, I appreciated the serious dialogue between strong ideas about how the church should be and a realistic assessment of how the church actually is. This is something that is not always well done and here the book really does succeed. It's an important issue because both within the church and in industry and commerce the price of failure is high and a blame culture persists. Instead, the authors look for a releasing of humanity through honesty and public openness, putting into practice 'God's

alternative ordering of power relations'. The Christian life responds to the command of Jesus and the pattern of his life by accepting failure in others and ourselves, thereby embodying the biblical principle that genuine progress only comes about through loss.

Power is not always an easy read. The first three chapters contain some nuanced theology and required perseverance, and yet by the end I was more than rewarded. The final two chapters are intensely practical as they explore the church's 'capacity' to work with this new understanding of power and its 'adaptivity' through leadership styles that are able to evoke the outworking of God's power within ourselves and those who have been entrusted to us.

This is a book for all concerned with leadership within a renewed church. It is for those who are in dialogue between the contemporary workplace and the life of the church. It would be also be high on my recommended reading list for all who are leading Diocesan Task Groups or who wish to probe further the new ways of working that the diocese adopted nearly three years ago.

One more thought. How about a Lent course to make this important contribution even more widely accessible? There are five keys to understanding power – one for each week of Lent. However, maybe that's already being written!

Peter Robinson