

In so far as *Walking the Way* is concerned to energise our faith communities, making them better able to articulate what they believe and relate it to the contemporary world this is very much the kind of thing we in Free to Believe are committed to.

There is however something of a caveat to this. Our context is of a church in continual decline with structures which do not represent the reality of what we are, never mind the much smaller church we are inevitably going to become. The figures show that many synods are losing viability. Proceeds of property sales will for now keep synods afloat but this would be to the detriment of our future as a church. In fairness to everyone, including Church House staff, planning for a much more lightly staffed future centred on growth not maintenance must begin now rather than our lurching from crisis to crisis.

So far we seem unwilling to honestly face the state we are in. The danger of *Walking the Way* is that it helps us prolong the illusion that we are in a normal situation whereas in fact the crisis demands structural change, a radical different pattern of ministry and a transfer of resources to ministerial and lay theological education. We need to stop trying to rearrange the deck chairs and face up to the implications of a membership of 15-20,000.

Having said that there are three particular comments we would make about the *Walking the Way* programme.

1. If the Church is to engage more meaningfully with theology, how is this to be done?

We need theology worth engaging with. The question assumes we already have one. We don't. Theology emerges when we talk to one another, so making space in our life together to have those conversations is important. One of the key questions for me is how we make and manage that space when there is more and more pressure on fewer and fewer people just to 'keep the show on the road'. Our overall aim should definitely not be growth but depth. We need structures, events and physical plant which enable our 15,000 members to engage with one another and with ideas.

Theological education is important. Currently our ministerial training is too short to achieve real theological depth alongside all the other things which are now loaded onto it. Lay training is vital. Encouraging conferences and reading parties and youth events is important. It might be worth asking how the Quakers manage to run seven conference centres and we couldn't manage one! Young people who are genuinely engaged with a local church at age 18 might be offered, free of charge, a substantial residential course covering contemporary theological thinking. Serious preaching ought to be encouraged.

2. What liberal resources would Free to Believe suggest?

Lots and lots of books, not all of them from Christian publishers. Can we get away from patronizing pre-digested 'resources' to real meat?

Hymns are an important part of worship. Currently we have a hymnbook which came out too late to include many of the best contemporary hymns. Hymns are a perennial nightmare and we could draw attention to the many progressive hymn writers out there such as June Boyce-

Tillman, Shirley Murray, Marty Haugen, Thomas Troeger and music from the Iona community. Hymn Quest is worth considering. Currently the worship in some of our churches is like a time warp into the past.

3. What are the themes which matter to us and we believe should be covered?

These will emerge out of our search for a theology and identity. Issues around equality, inclusion, plurality and biblical studies that combine the best recent academic understanding with lived experience are likely to be part of this.

Martin Camroux, April 2018