

Bob Holman, *Woodbine Willie: An Unsung Hero of World War One* (Oxford: Lion, 2013), pp. 224, £9.99, ISBN 978 0 7459 5561 2.  
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This little biography seeks to make known the life and work of Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, one of the leading British military chaplains of the First World War, better known as Woodbine Willie because of his penchant for offering cigarettes as a comfort to the men in the trenches. Its genre is the sort of hagiographic popular biography that might once have been used for the heroic exploits of missionaries working in hostile lands – the protagonist is somewhat familiarly and annoyingly, and probably inaccurately, referred to as ‘Father Geoffrey’. He even died a premature death (although this seems to have been caused by a punishing and frenetic schedule, as well as too much smoking). The book is both uplifting but also somewhat uncritical in tone, and there are several errors of fact or nomenclature which tend to indicate a lack of familiarity with some of the details of the history of the Church of England.

Nevertheless, Holman succeeds in singing the praises of his hero, who was also the author of some of the earthier poetry of the First World War, as well as the best-selling *Rough Talks by a Padre*. After the War he became a pioneer and regular speaker in the early years of the Industrial Christian Fellowship: the commitment to the poor he had learnt in industrial Leeds and then later at the front stayed with him in his national ministry from his base in Worcester. He was a figure who was keen to learn from the lower ranks and who refused to take refuge in the platitudes of establishment Anglicanism. It was on this basis that he often sought to explain the Gospel to the struggling young men in the trenches and to identify the misery of Flanders with the suffering of the young man on the cross two thousand years before, and even with the suffering of God (as Moltmann acknowledged – see p. 179). A good summary of his thinking and style comes from his book *The Hardest Part*: ‘I know nothing in real religion of the Almighty God of power. I only see God in Christ, and these men have shown me – *Him*’ (cited on p. 81).

The structure of Holman’s book follows the different publications, outlining some of their content and context as well as offering brief assessments. This is followed by a more substantial appraisal in Chapter 12, even if much is based on the summaries of others. Perhaps the most important aspect of this book is its ability to convey something of the pace of Kennedy’s career, and also the occasional and hurried nature of so much of his work and writing: he wrote some very bad books indeed (see, for instance, *The Wicket Gate*). Kennedy was a hero simply because he wanted to engage with people wherever they were, rather than expecting them to come to church or to ascend to the higher planes of theology. There is nothing systematic, or even very profound about Kennedy’s thinking, but there is a grittiness forged in the heat of personal encounter with people who simply weren’t like him. The brief and very personal epilogue by the author helps to explain why Woodbine Willie was chosen: he was, as Holman sought to be in his very different context, an ‘extraordinary voice on behalf of the poor and for peace’ (p. 190). He can consequently still

inspire, chiefly because of his humanity rather than his essentially ephemeral writing.

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Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church* (New Edition; (London: SPCK, 2013)), pp. 98. ISBN 978-0-281-06814-2, e-book: 978-0-281-06815-9.  
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There can be few scholars in the world today who have written so widely, deeply and richly on Anglicanism as Paul Avis. Avis is Canon Theologian of Exeter Cathedral, a Visiting Professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Exeter, and Editor-in-Chief of the renowned journal *Ecclesiology*. He is arguably the archetypal scholar-priest, and perhaps the pre-eminent academic and pastor who has contributed most to our understanding of Anglicanism in the world today. His writings on ecclesiology, ecumenism and Anglicanism are internationally renowned, and reflect a lengthy career at the forefront of theory and practice in ecumenical dialogue and intra-Anglican conversations and colloquia. Quite simply, if you want to understand Anglicanism – its theology and ecclesiology – you will not be able to travel far without encountering some of Avis's careful, thoughtful and perceptive writings.

The first edition of *The Anglican Understanding of the Church* was published in 2000, and has sold steadily since then. The original intention of that book was to offer a kind of primer for lay synod members, church wardens, vestry members, Parochial Church Councils and other groups. In short, it sought to introduce to the laity the layers of complexity, nuance and dense sophistication that have slowly accrued in Anglican identity over several centuries. And, moreover, it aimed to articulate an Anglican ecclesiology that is both appealing and challenging.

Few are as well-equipped as Avis to outline the shape of Anglican polity, and then fill in the key and essential details. And that he does so in this new edition bears testimony to the skill of an author who is in command of both the debates and sources that continue to determine how issues of theological identity and practice are resolved in a church that seems, at times, to both flounder and flourish with its own breadth of competing convictions. Such a church needs, I think, a skilled guide and interpreter of its history, tradition and identity to help readers and enquirers to see that where some would only see chaos, there is in fact a deeper coherence – rooted not only in diversity, but also in the generosity and capaciousness of God.

Much has changed in global Anglicanism since the first edition of Avis's book was published. It would have been easy, I think, to revise a book like this with references to faddish issues and other matters that currently preoccupy the Communion. But Avis is well able to rise above the passing soufflés of ecclesial fashion. Avis's passion for Anglicanism has always conveyed a characteristically understated tone. But the passion is there – be in no doubt. He brings a cool head and a temperate heart to a polity that can, at times, so easily (if momentarily) be overwhelmed by over-heated arguments. And it is Avis's tone, I think, that makes this book so valuable and enjoyable.