

Faith and Reason: Their Roles in Religious and Secular Life, by D. A. Crosby. State of University New York Press, 2011. 188pp., Hb. \$70.00, ISBN-13: 9781438436135; Pb. \$25.95, ISBN-13: 9781438436142..

Faith: What It Is and What It Isn't, by T. W. Tilley. Orbis Books, 2010. 160pp., Pb. \$22.00. ISBN-13: 9781570758799.

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In attempting to review these texts of Tilley and Crosby, both of whom are exploring faith and reason, I confess that what has evolved is less a review, than a comment on their relevance to a creative and living Implicit Religion theology. Their authors' correlation of secular and religious faiths are, indeed, insightful works for academic students of theology and philosophy. If you want clearly constructed arguments for an essay, an exposition, paper, debate, or informed over-dinner conversation, these texts are clearly defined and structured in the time-honoured "points one to ten" fashion, and are stimulating, useful, and on the whole well researched, with impressive provenance. Faith is part of our humanity, and both Crosby and Tilley do explore and cite examples of our having "faith" throughout our daily lives, which have nothing at all to do with religion. Thus Crosby, in his first chapter, sets out his manifesto, as an exploration of *existential* faith: "I mean that faith with this meaning, underlies, shapes and supports the distinctive quality of a person's existence or life, its fundamental sense of purpose and direction, aim and orientation" (1).

However, I also endorse Tilley's acknowledgement that we need to bring our explorations of such issues "out of the conceptual ether" (56). He does attempt to do this, but I am still left asking myself the question, "Why are we, for example, exploring the emerging spiritualities of our culture, using counter-cultural texts, concepts and language?" Tilley writes, "The point is to recognize both what gods we actually have faith in and how that faith shapes our lives" (2). Yes indeed, but what do we then do with it? How can we then share it creatively, by entering the arenas of both secularism and institutional religion, where we can share the knowledge of such "shaping" in an accessible form—and that accessible form may not be just in language? Hildegard of Bingen writes of this potential in every human

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being in an image: “At birth one’s divine purpose is folded inside us like a tent. It is life’s purpose to unfold that tent.”

Let me try and develop this, by offering an example of a “faith story” (as encouraged by Tilley (24)). Some may recall the “Decade of Evangelism,” in the 1980s. This was an initiative of the Church of England to grow its congregations by learning to share its religious faith outside its walls more effectively. I became as the 10 years wore on, increasingly frustrated, sitting in meetings with a flip chart and points 1–10 deciding how we might do this—whilst nothing changed! I left my Church Ministry team to run, as a Reader, a retreat centre (from our home, a large farmhouse), for those of any faith or none. This decision was of course criticized by some, yet Wellsprings became something of a legend in its life-time. It opened its eyes to the pluralism of the culture, whilst remaining rooted in the Christian faith, and that combination became its acknowledged strength. Another reason people felt more comfortable in coming to Wellsprings, than to a church building, might be because institutions and hierarchies are nowadays counter-cultural. Now, however, about 16 years on, I surmise that my initiative would be not only acceptable, but welcomed by the institution itself; encouraged, affirmed, and designated a “new way of being church.”

I was informed recently by one of the elders of my current place of ministry that they were seeking, as a matter of urgency, ways in which to understand and connect with the spirituality of those beyond their buildings. Initially I was hoping I might offer him one of these two books, but I think not. He is an academic sort of person, and he would enjoy and appreciate them and their scholarly approach, but I doubt whether they would help him know better *how* to do it.

Is this the next challenge for the study of Implicit Religion? How do we share, both secularly and religiously, what we learn, and begin to liberate these rich understandings from the birdcage of a simply “conceptual ether?”

This practical question now seems, to me, to be rather urgent.