



BOOK REVIEW - Captured by a vision by Ken Newell

A memoir that touches my life, my Church and my country... visionary, courageous and inspirational, Steve Stockman writes.

There is that provocative moment at the end of Jim Carey's film *The Truman Show*. Truman has been born on a TV set, a soap opera built around him, where everyone in his life is an actor and where they even read out cereal ads from his kitchen while he has his breakfast! He is unaware of this and accepts it all and knows no different until a few editorial errors has him rethinking the nature of his world.

The movie then climaxes as he courageously makes an attempt for freedom and an alternative world. When the producer is asked why Truman didn't question for so long, he responds with this incendiary phrase, "*We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented.*" Note the use of "we" and not "he".

Ken Newell grew up on the Shore Road in Belfast accepting the reality with which he was presented. He commits his life to Jesus, is excited to join the Orange Order and becomes a student for the Presbyterian ministry. However, Ken was too alert to the script and saw some flaws. There were moments of epiphany. Parading past St Patrick's Church on a Twelfth of July and catching, through an open door of the Church, Catholic worshippers silently praying. In his first trip into a Catholic Church in Amsterdam

he realised he had been looking down on Catholics.

Ken carefully researched and engagingly written Memoir is an insightful record of a follower of Jesus reading Scripture and listening to people and finding a different reality in the call to love neighbours, even enemies, and to realise that the ministry of reconciliation is not some deluxe Christianity for a few but just bog standard Christianity for all who claim to follow Jesus of Nazareth.

That personal story, as personal stories always do, changes the places and people Ken engages with. Fitzroy Church, where he becomes minister, is changed. Clonard Monastery, home of Fr Gerry Reynolds who became Ken's great friend and co conspirator for Christ, is changed. Even more important our country is changed as Ken and Fr. Gerry become involved with politicians and paramilitaries to negotiate the cease fires and peace agreements that we benefit from today.

As I have read the book I have been reminded of the worst days of our troubles, and the amazement of the 1994 Ceasefires. I had forgotten the slowly by slowly journey from there until in 2007 when we got a solid foundation for

power sharing at Stormont. Retreading these events with Ken gives you the feeling that you are watching it through a camera on the jacket of a participator. It is a fascinating way into our recent history.

I am personally captured by Ken's vision or, as I imagine he would say, the vision God gave him. I read it as part of my own story even though I am not actually in it. Ken's courageous leadership and friendship have deeply impacted my own discipleship and ministry. The book spoke powerfully and directly into my own attempts to follow Jesus. It also helped me to understand Fitzroy where I followed Ken as minister. We are who we are because of what Ken goes through in this book. Finally as I dabble my feet in the ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation myself this helps me to make sense of where we are as Northern Ireland in 2016.

My favourite story... In November 1997 Ken Newell was being interviewed on the radio. He was about to attend the inauguration of Mary McAleese as the President of Ireland. Unionists were doing the usual boycott. The interviewer asks Ken how he can go when his leaders are saying no self respecting Unionist should. Ken answers, ***"My party leader is Jesus Christ and he told me to go."***

May 3

Oh yes!

*Steve Stockman is Minister of Fitzroy
Presbyterian Church, Belfast. He succeeded Very
Rev Ken Newell.*

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