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**Naturism & Christianity: Are they Compatible ?**

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Last year, shortly after arriving as Ethics Tutor at Wycliffe Hall, I was approached by a staff member with a strange question. A clergy colleague had been in touch with him because he'd been asked whether he would organise a service to bless the naturist camp in his parish. What should he do ? Being ethics tutor I was expected to know the answer ! For any clergy faced with similar questions there is now an easy answer – read this Grove booklet. The authors – an Anglican parish priest and a Christian philosopher and moral theologian – provide a helpful introduction to the rarely discussed subject of naturism from a Christian perspective.

They examine the history of naturism and emphasise the diverse range of meanings associated with nakedness – not simply the erotic and sexual as, encouraged by the mass media, we tend to think today. A brief study of nakedness of Scripture (which would have benefited from further reflections on Old Testament descriptions of “uncovering one’s nakedness” (eg Gen 9.22-3), the only gospel reference (Mk 14.52), and the comment of Paul in 1 Cor 12.23) is followed by a helpful historical survey of changing Christian attitudes to the body and nakedness including the reminder that early church baptisms usually involved nudity.

A number of chapters helpfully explore the phenomenon and diversity within naturism though here further reflection on such issues as the development of it as an alternative lifestyle and its relationship to an increasingly urbanised and technologised society would have been helpful. Finally, the authors conclude that although some caveats are necessary, “there is no essential conflict between Christianity and naturism, that there is nothing inherently sinful about the naked body, and that the realization of this is part of what it means to be at ease with oneself, to be healed, to be made whole”.

Overall, this represents a brave and helpful introduction to a subject many Christians would be embarrassed about, ignore, or ridicule and it raises broader issues about our attitude to the human body which merit continued thought and reflection whether or not one has a naturist camp in the neighbourhood.