

REVIEWS

PREACHING THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN YEAR (12) - John M Turner Mowbray. ISBN 0-264-67065-5, £4.95

Danger - Health Warning - reading this article is bad for your nerves if you agree with Dr Edward Norman in his Reith Lectures: "the wise aspirant to eternity will recognise no hope of a better social order in his endeavours, for he knows that the expectations of men are incapable of satisfaction". (What about women? are they still free to indulge their utopianism?)

Brought up to a strict observance of the Christian Year - not just by lectionary, hymns, prayers and sacrament, but also by pulpit fall and altar cloths for the changing seasons, - I welcome "Preaching through the Christian Year" in Mowbray's series. These 31 sermons preached to quite different congregations at Queen's College, Birmingham, or King's Cross Methodist Church, Halifax, reflect John M Turner's respect for heart and mind and will, for he does not follow the bishop's advice to "preach to the choirboys" nor does he appeal to full hearts and empty heads, (nor, for that matter, uncommitted lives with no regard for individual and social reformation).

It is an old, if eccentric, habit of mine for rapid reading to begin at the end of a book and work backwards. Hence I select from the two pages of references as a guide to one man's sources: R Garaudy, W Temple, G Gutierrez, J Moltmann, H G Wells, W Barclay, P T Forsyth, J A T Robinson, E Brunner, A Schweitzer, J Baillie, C H Dodd, T M Manson and H Williams.

Is that all? I muttered to myself, however appreciative I may have been of these writers in recent or remote years. My impatience was scarcely justified when I became absorbed by what I read. The range and quality and intensity of the proclamation comes out in many sayings, far too many to mention.

I can best show his social concern by a number of references,

for example, to anti-semitism in "the deep, dark unchristian deeds of christened men." (Rose Macaulay). And yet, in the darkness and desolation of the death camps "to be with Mother Maria (in Ravensbruck) is to be with Jesus Christ," as she went to her doom - or was it her destiny? - to comfort, by her own choice, a poor victim of the holocaust.

There is drama - with a strong whiff of recklessness - in Pastor Bodelschwingh of Bethel Hospital challenging the Gestapo with such brave words as "You do your work over my dead body:" and there is a pawky humour in the business man saying to Mother Teresa "I wouldn't do that for a thousand pounds", only to receive the pert reply, "Neither would I." But there is no news value, local, national or international, for the car-worker who asks, "Have I got the courage to stand up for what I really think (on the shop-floor)?" Any of us who have been involved in industrial action or have manned the picket-line know the dilemma of people caught up in the complexities of modern society.

Such illustrations are meant, not to obscure like smoked glass what John M Turner has to say, but to open like windows on the broad landscape of his perspectives on life, spiritual, emotional, literary or political.

His four main sections cover the periods from before Advent to Epiphany - Promise and Incarnation (12 sermons); Ash Wednesday to Good Friday - Passion and Cross (7 sermons); Easter Day to Pentecost - Resurrection Hope (8 sermons); and finally Trinity Sunday, Pentecost and All Saints (4 sermons).

John M Turner does not fail his intention of making what he preaches a dialogue with his listener who is invited to hear a proclamation, to share a vision and, in consequence, be spurred to action. With this threefold purpose the author, who admits pillaging others' material, invites us to pillage his. And who will resist such an appeal to share his burning faith, his sacramental emphasis, his summons to public action so long as the truth is spoken in love? When so many readers of newspapers and viewers

of TV are getting bored with the erotica and the exotica of our times, the Church can address the faithful and the faithless with the more authority as parsons sit at the feet of men such as John M Turner, who confronts the age, not with the commandments of God, but with the voice of God commanding - and comforting, too, in secular and sacred alike. He would have every sympathy with those who preface the benediction with the word: "The act of worship is ended. Let the service of the world now begin." His main concern is not with the half-Christ, Lord of the Church, but the whole Christ who is Lord both of Church and of world.

I hesitate to challenge one who is also the author of "Conflict and Reconciliation", but, when he cites crusades and inquisitions as poor excuses for justifying violence, warns us against one revolution as the prelude to heaven on earth, and admits that the unscrupulous tyrants who make pacific revolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable, he then goes on to say, "I would rather take my stand with Helda Camara, non-violent bishop, than with the guerrilla leader Che Guevara." Who wouldn't? But what of the jungle villager, caught up in front-line fighting between oppressive government and rebel protest, forced by both sides to decide in what is a tragic predicament? In the circumstances of Central and South America the Christian has no simple cut-and-dried choice - as even the Pope on his recent visit to Chile has been forced to concede, and the Jesuits themselves, with all their expertise in controversial situations, come up with divided Counsels. Did brother not fight brother in the English Civil War, and clan clan in the 45 Rebellion in Scotland? Such is the tragic element in many conscientious choices.

Perhaps I am too critical of the last sermon for All Saints. Of course, as is said, Paul Tillich can remind us of "Catholic substance" and "Protestant principle." Tradition recalls us to our ecumenical debt, all down the ages, from the Upper Room until the urgent now, to all branches of the one Church, and all devoted individuals. And radical protest saves the People of God from complacency and deadness as Reformation Day, dear to Lutherans, and falling at the same time, constantly informs us. But the Communion

of Saints as a living reality her and now uniting the Church Militant on earth with the Church Triumphant in heaven does not, at least as it seems to me, receive sufficient stress (though, believe me, it is most certainly mentioned). Needless to say, I would make the same complaint on many Sundays of the year were I to attend a Church of Scotland or an English Nonconformist act of worship. The sense of an Eternal Presence, where there is neither near nor far but one fellowship in heaven and earth, is too often lacking, although all strands of the Church pay lip-service to the doctrine, while too often forgetting the practice.

Lest these last two points on political involvement and *communio sanctorum* might appear to be carping criticism to some, let me hasten to add that nothing can detract from the solid contribution that John M Turner makes to the art of preaching. Were his example followed in the pulpits of our land, both in Scotland and in England, I am convinced that inevitably we would see a renovation of Kirk and Community that would bring refreshment to the human spirit, jaded by trivia and distracted by faction. He adds to whatever forces are working here and throughout the world for wholeness, health, holiness, the crying need of a despairing world. His topicality and relevance are not based on yesterday's newspaper nor on an optimism that ignores the Cross, nor an "unyielding despair" without hope of resurrection, but on a vibrant Word that is always and everywhere quick and alive.

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CHURCH FAMILY WORSHIP - Ed Michael Perry
800 pp Hodder & Stoughton £3.95 softback

From the Evangelical stable which gave us 'Hymns For Today's Church', this is a useful and ridiculously inexpensive resource for leading worship. The choice of (English) Anglican rites for the Eucharist, Baptism, and Morning/Evening Prayer to open the book is perhaps unfortunate and certainly misleading, for it contains material gleaned from a wide denominational spread and will be invaluable to all, whether of a liturgical or non-liturgical bent, in enlivening worship.

The book is more than a manual of prayers and hymns. Designed for congregational use (I will return to this a little later), it is a resource that may be used in a number of ways:

- i. A standard format for worship may be supplemented by hymns, songs and prayers from the rest of the book, easily accessible by number. Several formats are offered;
- ii. There are thematic sections (e.g. 'The People of God', 'The Holiness and Majesty of God', 'Harvest'), each containing prayers, responsive material, hymns, credal forms, selections from which could create the core of an act of worship;
- iii. The creative choice of material from throughout the book, including material from a section specifically aimed at the service-leader, can help build up a service for particular events/congregations/themes not already presented.

I have already made use of material in the book for Eucharistic worship, using one of the credal hymns (firmly trinitarian, though perhaps lacking in ecclesiology) in place of the Nicene Creed, and a paraphrase of the Gloria in Excelsis (which fits the tune of 'Land of hope and glory!'), together with a metrical version of the Lord's Prayer. This has helped make a Eucharist with singing more easily accessible to those who might otherwise have felt excluded. I know that others in these pages have written in defence of Leighton's setting of the Communion in CH3; I myself am

convinced that here we have a far more useable set of material which will help the singing at Communion, with or without a choir - Leighton is for an elite.

My experience of worship in the Kirk is limited, a mere four years, but I must confess that I often found it verbose and conservative, and seldom anything other than minister-centered. 'Church Family Worship' provides a wide choice of texts that are a model of concise and dignified language whilst remaining clearly contemporary - I could find no single occasion where God is addressed as 'thou', for example, and yet nothing seemed to jar. And in those Parishes which have ventured to have printed orders of service I am convinced that there is a wealth of material which could be used to advantage. A quick thumbing through of the copyright section also reveals a true catholicity of choice that is laudable if not more comfortable than our narrow, protestant penchants; here the St Andrew Press, the St Michael-Le-Belfrey Worship Book, and the New Catholic Hymnal all rub shoulders in a creative way.

I have two reservations. The book is aimed at congregational use, but I fear that on a regular diet of non-liturgical worship the material will become too sparse, perhaps even so with a monthly Family Service. I see its use more in terms of a ministerial resource, although its full impact will only be felt where printed orders are available - without words in front of them, despite the suspicion of 'book' worship, our congregations will remain subject to minister-centred worship; this book and printed orders might help free the congregation to exercise their own 'liturgy', and make the worship more authentically their own. My other reservation regards the hymns. I wonder whether we need always to update the language of hymnody - 'The Lord my shepherd rules my life' seems to me no more readily accessible in concept than is 'The Lord's my shepherd'. A further niggle is that no metrical index is supplied which would have helped allow unfamiliar hymns to be sung to more familiar melodies.

If nothing else, the wide lectionary provision (made thematically) should cause you to buy this book!

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