

CH3 568 verse 4

Father, we thank thee for thy Son's dear presence
Coming to feed us as the Bread of heaven,
Making us one with Him in sweet communion;
One with each other!

Benediction

The blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be upon
you, and remain with you always.

CH3 568 verse 5 (sung as the elements are removed)

Praised be our Father, loving inviting
Guests to this banquet, praised the Son who feeds us,
Praised too the Spirit, sent by Son and Father,
Making us Christ-like! AMEN.

John Heron
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The Scottish Church Society

Reviews



UNION WITH GOD - THE TEACHING OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS DESMOND TILLYER
MOWBRAY, 111pp £3.75 pb

This is a book which demands detailed study. It is not recommended to dilettantes, for such would find it heavy going, especially since the eight chapters have no sub-divisions, and are nevertheless structured - in the manner of old-fashioned didactic sermons - with verbally enumerated points. This reviewer found himself pencilling the point numbers in the margin prior to reading, as an aid to grappling in an orderly fashion with the subject material. The absence of sub-divisions is bound to discourage the kind of reader who has only brief spare moments to devote to the task, and contrasts most ironically with the obviously-structured manner in which St John's own writings are set out, at least in the Kavanaugh/

Rodriguez translation (ICS Publications, Washington, DC, 1979), which is not mentioned by Tillyer, but which is the one possessed by the reviewer.

The first chapter is devoted to a brief biographical sketch of Juan de Yepes. He was born in 1542 and died in 1591. It is fascinating, even after a cursory glance at his writings, to see how a 16th century Spaniard, in a land scarcely touched by the Reformation, could write spiritual treatises of universal and abiding worth, full of well-employed Scriptural quotations, and singularly lacking in the kind of late-medieval extravagances which are irritating nowadays even to popular Roman Catholic piety. John was a Carmelite, and a champion of reform in his own order. As such he endured much harassment from his superiors, yet he could write this in a letter towards the end of his life: 'Where there is no love, put love and you will find love.' John was no narcissistic recluse. He saw his calling, and that of his brother friars, as a combination of evangelistic effort and withdrawal into solitude, and had a deep practical interest in the lot of the poor and sick.

The second chapter sets out John's basic understanding of our relationship with God. It is grounded in prayer, rests upon redemption in Christ, is something which must continually grow, is sustained by the sacraments, is the means of self-understanding, and is remarkably difficult to describe in its deceptive simplicity. In the third chapter the foundation and purpose of John's writings are further examined. He is concerned to be thoroughly scriptural, and to stand within the doctrinal continuity of 'our Holy Mother the Catholic Church'. He writes, not to satisfy the idle curiosity of the general public, but for those (especially in his own Carmelite Order) who are serious in the desire to pursue union with God. (This latter concern is also that of Tillyer as author of the book under review.) John's theology is Christo-centric, but grounded in Thomism, a system whose basic features Tillyer expounds. Upon this philosophical foundation, John develops a profound mysticism which recognizes the nothingness of creation alongside God, the vanity of human wisdom which does not own God, and the enslaving nature of creaturely possessions. As Tillyer says, "Any love for other things must be held within love for God, so that any attachment which love brings is attachment to God, and not to things in themselves, outside love for God." (33) Central to John's mysticism is the concept of the 'dark night', which envelops God in his mysterious infinity, and into which all must enter who would truly know him. "We must abandon the inadequate resources of reason in favour of the darkness of faith." (Tillyer, 35)

There follows a difficult chapter in which Tillyer explores the psychological premises upon which John's thought rests. On line 15 of page 43 the words 'and our own' are surely missing, though the sense remains clear. The detailed nature of

this chapter is defended on page 56. Tillyer is concerned to combat the view that John is an unemotional 'cold fish', insensitive to human thoughts and feelings, but is also convinced that John's teachings are, on the other hand, a necessary corrective to the modern tendency to indulge in, and surrender to, the passions of the moment. Tillyer sees the danger that concern for others can become subsumed under concern for self, and that love for the neighbour divorced from the love of God can be to the ultimate detriment of humanity. The balanced nature of John's teaching here is a much-needed corrective to some modern thought.

Having, as it were, set the scene, Tillyer proceeds to expound the practical spiritual life advocated by John. The goal is union with God, and he takes us through the first steps, the subsequent progress to be expected, and the diversions and distractions likely to be encountered on the way. In the final chapter he describes the journey's end. "This exalted state is the final transfiguration of the soul with divine love, causing it to become divine itself in all its powers and faculties, totally conformed in peace and tranquility to the loving will of God." (Tillyer, 109)

There is today as always a desperate need for well-ordered public worship, but where it is not accompanied by a profound personal devotion, on the part of minister and people alike, it is not only a vain thing, but an offence in the eyes of God. A greater attention paid to this principle among the mystics can only enrich the liturgical life of the Church. And his universal appeal can only help to heal the divisions of mistrust in the Church. It was fascinating, for example, while reading Tillyer's book, to encounter in the transcription of an address given to a gathering of Conservative-Evangelical Church of Scotland Ministers in 1983, a warmly appreciative review, by one of their number, of John's writings and thought. And especially at a time when pagan mysticism, e.g. the destructive fancies of Raj Yoga, is exerting a dangerous influence, it is good to be reminded of our positive, life-affirming, but also Christ-centred heritage of Christian mysticism.

WILLIAM G NEILL

SACRAMENTS AND LITURGY, THE OUTWARD SIGNS. by Louis Weil

Published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford. £3.95 (hardback £9.50)

One of the better results of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Movement in the Anglican Church last year was the publication of a series of some nine short and readable books on 'the Faith and the Future'; although written from an unashamedly Anglican Catholic stance, they nonetheless pose, and attempt to suggest answers to, many questions that are common to Christians of all traditions, and particularly to those churches which are 'established'.

Of particular interest to readers of "the Record" should be Louis Weil's contribution on Sacraments and Liturgy. Weil is Professor of Liturgics and Music at Nashotah House Seminary in the States, and was a significant figure in the revision of the American Prayer Book, which stands as one of the finest results of the modern Liturgical Movement.

In a slim volume (simply some 100 pages of text) Weil relates the theological images of the Church to the Sacraments which are its very life, and has a very clear and concise discussion of the Evangelical and Catholic understandings of Baptism and the Supper (though, of course, the aspect of Baptism and Covenant is not really touched upon). There are some very useful comments on the restoration of the catachumenate which are timeworthy, and Weil maintains that such a restored catachumenate 'is imperative for the recovery of a truly ecclesial sacramental theology because it preserves Christian practice from too narrow an identification with cultic acts, and affirms the intimate connections between the faith of the Church and all aspects of human life ...' (p74). Equally his comments on children and worship deserve a wide hearing: 'If the worship of the Church is the prayer-action of all its baptised members, children are not a nuisance; they are a necessary part of this varied human family ...' (p80). The question of the role of children in worship and of their sharing in the Communion is a pressing one, for it either undergirds or undermines our practice of infant baptism; and Weil is not just concerned with our religious understanding of ourselves as human and social people: 'The incorporation of children ... will help us to discover the naturalness of Christian liturgical prayer and its integral relation to all that is most fully human in our lives' (p84). At least that will be the case if we take the issue of children and the church seriously.

And for Weil liturgy and worship are not the esoteric concerns of like-minded people, but are rather the bases from which action on a universally social level will proceed; from the encounter with the Living God in worship one must, in Bishop Frank Weston's words, 'go out and look for Jesus in the ragged, in the naked, in the oppressed and sweated, and in those who have lost hope, in those

who are struggling to make good.' Worship and Action go hand in hand. The 1960's saw the denigration of worship as 'churchly' and as blind to the needs of the new age; for Weil worship is the stimulus to act, a consideration to be borne in mind by those whose function it is to conduct public worship. 'Our worship is not a matter merely of mental or moral attitudes but of the involvement of all that is human in a response to God's gracious gifts' (p105).

A small book certainly, but nonetheless one that well repays careful reading and one that may be of great help to those involved in the liturgical thinking of the Churches.

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LEARNING ABOUT VESTMENTS AND ALTAR SERVICE by Raymond Wilkinson
DRAW NEAR WITH FAITH by Geoffrey Shilvock
(both published by Mowbray, Oxford; price 60p and £1.50)

If the publishers of these two little books had known more about the ethos and worship of the Church of Scotland, they might not have sent them to be reviewed in the Record. However, any member of the Church Service Society who may be curious to know what a person (now of either sex) does, who is appointed to assist an Anglican priest in the celebration of the mysteries, and where he stands or kneels at different points in the service, he will find all the answers in "Learning about Vestments", together with pictures of such tools of job as the burse and the corporal. This booklet also contains practical advice which may be applied to other activities, such as that a server, when preparing a priest's eucharistic vestments, will lay out first the garment that is put on last. What we cannot dismiss as belonging to a foreign tradition is the spiritual attitude to their duties that the book demands of altar servers. "The server's reverence may be a major factor in the dignity of the offering", so do not talk! and do not look round the congregation, but fix your eyes on the place where ceremonial is being performed. In how many churches of various denominations is worship impaired by less than reverent conduct by church officials or by chit-chat among the congregation? Canon Wilkinson's general exhortation to reverence is supplemented by specific advice regarding prayer before and after service and during communion. This is addressed to servers, but how should the ordinary church members pray while others are receiving the sacrament? Is this the moment to latch on to Christ's high-priestly intercession and to pray hard for what you most want for someone else? I do not know, and I do not think I have ever been

told. Advice about praying on entering and leaving church is especially relevant to people who are often in and out of the building to arrange flowers, to clean, to count the money or (this is me) to practice on the organ. But does the building in which we serve make it natural to cry out "Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house" or "Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of working here"?

"Draw near with faith" is a book of prayers for newly confirmed persons, young or old. It hopes "to reverse the trend of thoughtless worship and to help people in the first steps of learning to pray". It includes sections such as "some prayers to learn", psalms and topics for prayer each day of the week, preparation for communion, self-examination by the ten commandments and prayers on the way of the cross. Though the writer does not suppose that people should pray only in set forms, he commands utterances which can be memorised and repeated in the midst of daily chores, such as "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner".

These two admirable books have similar objectives and cover some of the same ground. Any congregation where all the communicant members followed the advice they give on daily prayer and bible reading, and reverent attention in church, would become distinguished for holiness. But that is a stony road, and what most of us lack is determination to tread it, not books about it.

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