

words and the final section on hope consoling and uplifting. Catholic *dubia* aside, I would think that the book succeeds as an example of its *genre*, and if I were a parish minister, could safely recommend it to parish study groups as a solid and helpful introduction to Reformed Theology. Its great merit is that it takes doctrine seriously.

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Trevor Beeson, *Window on Westminster*, London: SCM Press, 2001, pp. 324, £10.95, ISBN 0334 02854X

If theology and ministry are both, inevitably, contextual, the Westminster of which Trevor Beeson writes is certainly a peculiar context for either. These diary entries reflect the eleven years during which Beeson was a Canon of Westminster Abbey – a ‘royal peculiar’ whose *raison d’être*, he says, is to ‘serve the Royal Family’s spiritual needs’ (p133). For the last five of these years, he was also Rector of St Margaret’s – a church whose demolition he had advocated in an earlier book (God clearly has a sense of humour, he reckons) – and Speaker’s Chaplain in the House of Commons, although those encouraged to buy the book by the political caricature on the cover may be disappointed to find more ecclesiastical than political intrigue inside.

The peculiarities of ministry in either the Abbey or Palace of Westminster keep coming through, from the dilemma of how one shares the peace in a service when standing next to the Queen (one bows), to that of whether to lead out the Duchess of Richmond’s parrot (stuffed, and one doesn’t). ‘A long way from Galilee’ indeed, yet there is a familiarity in the frustrations – of energies diverted into trivia, of jealousies and shortcomings among church office-bearers (though exchanging writs for defamation is beyond this reviewer’s experience thus far), and of trying to work with people whose vision is very different from one’s own. I was forcefully, and guiltily, struck by the



ingenuity which churches bring to finding the soundest of reasons not to do new things which would be very worthwhile, but ... not now, not here, not us.

Theology, in such a collection of diary reflections, comes in wry comments (often disarmingly self-critical), in occasional struggling with events personal or political, and, unspoken, in the perspective on church and world. This is theology very much *in fragments*, but no less stimulating for that. What does it mean to minister in 'the most secular church I know ... at the intersection of church and state, of the sacred and the secular' (p.122), with all the constraints and possibilities of being at the heart of the establishment and of power?

Quoting from his own 'farewell' sermon before moving to Winchester, he says 'Rarely are we in a position to tell politicians what they ought to be doing. Our task is to stand alongside them and to share in the struggle to discern what the gospel of love requires of us' (p.316). Yet standing together under God (which is where Parliamentary prayers or even the Scottish inter-faith 'Time for Reflection' should put us) may, in personal terms, inhibit but does not exclude prophetic ministry. Limited by the diary format as well as by the confidentiality of pastoral ministry and, no doubt, shortage of time in a pressured life, Trevor Beeson offers here not carefully worked-out answers but glimpses into the ups and downs of trying to make that kind of ministry work.

In so doing, he makes that narrative amusing, provocative, frustrating and well worth reading.

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