

think it's p-p-popycock. How can hell be others? God is manifested in others.'

How does the story end? Does Tony regain his faith? Is Father Joe defeated by the cynical and heartless post-modern age? This is a rare thing, a 'religious' book which will be spoiled for the reader if the reviewer reveals the ending. It is sufficient to say that Hendra's achievement is a delightful celebration of Christian faith and the caring Church. One envies the reader his or her first encounter with the amazing Father Joe.

If you like your Christianity clear cut and simple with every 'i' dotted and every 't' crossed, do not read this book. But if you are the sort of person who needs to encounter the generous and warm-hearted God who welcomes home the prodigal, then take the trouble to make the acquaintance of Father Joe.

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Peace, Toleration and Decay: the Ecclesiology of Later Stuart Dissent, Martin Sutherland, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003, pp. 240, ISBN 1842271520. £19.99

Martin Sutherland's book is the fruit of his doctoral research into the life and writings of John Howe. Some of the partisanship which flows from the research still shows in the text, which continually emphasises the theme that Richard Baxter has been credited with too much influence in later Stuart dissent and that Howe has been underestimated. As a corrective this is an essential message but the danger is that Baxter comes near to being damned with faint praise. As Sutherland convincingly demonstrates, Baxter and Howe represent two schools of dissent, sometimes described as Presbyterian and Congregational, both of which flourished in the late seventeenth

century. By bringing out Howe's development of the Reformation doctrine of the 'invisible church' Sutherland also enables us to see the theological continuities which sustained dissent as the goal of comprehension receded and toleration replaced it. He also reminds us that modern secular humanism can miss what the essential issues were for the seventeenth-century mind. Because John Locke is so much better known than John Howe and his theological contemporaries, the modern historian may conclude that Locke was driving the debate when, in fact, he was a participant. The driving undoubtedly came from Dissenters and those in the Church of England who still wished the breach to be closed. Politicians and political philosophers may have had their own ideas for reconciling Christians and minimising their differences; to the Dissenters there were crucial issues at stake, which are no less crucial in the twenty-first century.

Richard Baxter and those loosely termed 'Presbyterians' in the late seventeenth century tried to cling to a Calvinist tradition, paralleled in Lutheranism, which allowed the magistrate a place in the Church. For them it was essential that Church and State worked together to ensure coherence within society. For Presbyterians then, what kept them out of the Church of England was its current understanding of liturgy and order. A negotiated compromise was the route to an acceptable ecclesiology. The significance of John Howe's thinking was that it represented an alternative view of the Church, one not coterminous with nation states or general government. Because Howe was an irenic person and because the last thing Dissenters wanted to do was to be represented as seditious, the statement of this view is cautious and hedged around with qualifications. What Sutherland does is spell out how once a foot is set on this road then comprehension is abandoned for toleration. It will also expose the essential pragmatism of the agreements made between Dissenters of different ecclesial convictions when enterprises such as the 'Happy Union' are attempted. Abandoning state religion does not mean embracing an Enlightenment freedom of individual belief. Respect for conscience cannot be used to change the common Christian orthodoxy of the Church, however invisible its constitution.

This is the territory Sutherland explores against the background of the unfolding history of dissent. The result is a book for the specialist rather than the beginner. Sutherland assumes a familiarity with much of the literature and historiography of Dissent. This particular Paternoster series, 'Studies in Evangelical History and Thought', demands such an approach. Howe provides a link between the debate on the nature of the Church begun by the Reformers and the Calvinist stream within the Evangelical Awakening.

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The Serenity Prayer: Faith and Politics in Times of Peace and War, Elisabeth Sifton, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004, pp. 363, ISBN 0393057461. £18.99

Those who have had the good fortune to spend a study year at Union Theological Seminary, New York will appreciate and relish this volume. It is an exhaustive exploration of the Serenity Prayer, as composed by Reinhold Niebuhr in the late 1940s to 1960s. This study will be of particular interest to those who take exceptional care in the composing of prayers for both private and public worship.

*God give us the grace to accept with serenity the things
that cannot be changed, courage to change the things
that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

The text of the book provides an in-depth attempt to explore the deeper meaning of the prayer. What are 'the things that should be changed?' And what are 'the things that cannot be changed?' These questions underlie the graphic reflections and memories by the author of her father. Niebuhr's vocation of over forty or so years of theological and political leadership was exercised in the restless post-World War II period, when deep social issues were erupting in the USA, South Africa, and in other colonial and post-colonial nations. European society was increasingly fragmented, and this was damaging for the