

None Will Remain: Five Lost Churches of Manchester

Richard I. McEwan

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Manchester Cathedral was the venue in November for the launch of *None Will Remain: Five Lost Churches of Manchester*. Testimony to the interest the subject aroused was the attendance of over one hundred and fifty people. The books (the study comes in two parts) are the most substantial publication of the Anglo-Catholic History Society so far. Whatever deliberations may have taken place concerning the risk of so bold a venture, that risk has been abundantly justified.

Richard McEwan has traced in detail the histories of five churches – S. John, Miles Platting; S. Gabriel, Hulme; Our Lady and S. Thomas, Gorton; S. Alban the Martyr, Cheetwood; S. Benedict, Ardwick. Of the five, three are now demolished, one is in the hands of a non-Anglican body, and another in secular usage.

The author writes as an insider. At the age of thirteen he was taken to High Mass at S. Barnabas Church, Oxford; the experience 'shaped the sort of Christian that I am.' Insiders with long memories will not find it easy not to feel a twinge of nostalgia as they read these books, and as they linger over the many evocative illustrations. But our author is no nostalgist: he warns against the seductive perils of A. E. Houseman's 'land of lost content'. The past glories of Anglo-Catholicism can inspire us; equally, 'we waste our time and energy if we try to ignore the passing of the ages.'

So context matters: our context now and the contexts of these churches then.

In fact, Richard McEwan places them in a range of contexts. He sets their origins firmly in the grime, the squalor, the poverty, of the slums of the industrial revolution. He emphasises the impulses which brought these churches into existence. Not least among these – a second context – were the benefactions of the industrialists - Birleys, Heywoods, Bennetts, Angelina Frances Clarke - whose lives were touched both by the catholic revival and by the sordid conditions in which their work-forces lived. Richard McEwan draws out important differences: whereas the Birleys and the Heywoods were motivated by a sense of responsibility towards those on whose labours their riches depended, the Bennetts founded St Benedict's Ardwick in order to enjoy the worship they loved, both spiritually and aesthetically, in a setting as safe as they could make it from protestant hostility to 'ritualism'; about the well-being of their work force they appeared less concerned.

Protestantism was an inescapable context. It came in two forms. Some of these churches had to face the mob-hostility of the 'manly', John Bull, Protestantism of Victorian England. And four of these churches faced the Erastian hostility of Protestant bishops. The first three bishops of Manchester all saw 'discipline', 'the ban' – the denial to a church of episcopal ministrations, of licensed curates, of diocesan financial support – as the way to deal with them. Only by William Temple – one of the heroes of these books – was the mould

broken. Not only did he lift the ban, but, in his desire to place a new church in Gorton, he accepted the firmly catholic prescriptions of Mrs Clarke's will. The church of Our Lady and St Thomas, Gorton, was the result.

The final context was that of slow decline and closure. The decline of heavy industry, and the theories of post-war town-planners, effectively de-populated these parishes. And secularism, overt from the 1960s, weakened traditional church-going habits. In some cities, one Anglo-Catholic church survived as the centre of an eclectically based congregation. None of these proved able to do so. And, unlike some dioceses, Manchester, our author remarks, did not take care that, close, for instance, to student clusters, one such church should remain.

Even so, dedicated priests continued to serve these churches, sometimes with numerical success. Such priests, holding on to their inheritance, adapting to liturgical change, adopting new methods – the Company of Mission Priests is important here – ministered faithfully when the times must often have been disheartening. In this period, as in earlier times, it is clear that, more perhaps than in Roman Catholic parishes; in Anglo-Catholic parishes the impact of the individual priest was great. In this respect, however uncharacteristically Anglican was the décor, however divergent from the prescribed forms was the liturgy, they were typically Anglican.

The story of the priests who served these parishes is a noble one; a story of men, many of them celibates living in some isolation, whose days were disciplined: the daily Mass, the Office, private prayer, the confessional, long hours of pastoral care. In early days, this life might be encircled by hostility, and one of them went to prison. Some are described as socialists; many actively promoted the material welfare of their parishioners. In this noble story, even in lives of the most austere, there are moments when the absurd breaks in: readers must discover for themselves the adventures of Cracker, Fr Glenday's canine visiting companion.

If today, as the author observes, Anglo-Catholicism is bewildered, weakened, divided, it has an inheritance spiritual, liturgical, social, which has enriched the Church of England. It is not mere nostalgia to seek inspiration from that inheritance. I warmly commend these absorbingly interesting books to readers.

Garth Turner

Garth Turner was Precentor of Manchester Cathedral from 1978-86



CHURCH OF ST. BENEDICT, ARDWICK, MANCHESTER.
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