

# Mix of courage and innocence

Graham James on the latest assessment of Ramsey's primacy

**Archbishop Ramsey: The shape of the Church**  
Peter Webster  
Ashgate £25  
(978-0-7546-6596-0)  
Church Times Bookshop £22.50

THE memoirs or biographies of 20th-century prime ministers and senior politicians often contain few references to the Archbishop of Canterbury, other bishops, or the Church of England more generally. By contrast, the memoirs and biographies of archbishops and senior churchmen recall close and frequent contact.

Were the church leaders of the last century deluding themselves? Or were our politicians careful to avoid any hint that the Church possessed influence over their decisions? Peter Webster's book on Michael Ramsey prompts such questions, since political issues are so prominent.

Ramsey has long been regarded as a deeply spiritual theologian and about as unmanagerial an archbishop as you could find. This book contains many of Ramsey's most significant speeches and sermons, introduced by a lengthy assessment of his ministry as Archbishop.

Webster does not seek to contradict the conventional characterisation, though he emphasises just how involved Ramsey was in the political controversies of his day. Ulster, Rhodesia, South Africa, and Commonwealth immigration were chief among them. Ramsey urged the intervention of British armed forces in Rhodesia as the prospect of a unilateral declaration of in-

dependence drew near. He also called for the cessation of British arm sales to South Africa while apartheid continued. He did not lack political courage.

Harold Wilson asked the Archbishop to chair the newly established National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants in 1965. It was a shrewd, perhaps even cynical, move by a master tactician. The committee had limited powers, and yet it drew Ramsey into the Government's tent. Webster casts Ramsey as a "political parson" in the mould of George Bell, pursuing a vision of justice at home and resolution of conflict abroad.

The greater autonomy for the Church of England from the State which Ramsey sought was intended, so Webster argues, to enable the Church to be capable of more prophetic utterance. It has never emerged, except, perhaps, in the Runcie years under an archbishop rather at home with the Establishment.

As greater autonomy from the State was secured (Ramsey introduced the Worship and Doctrine Measure in the House of Lords on his final day of office in 1974), the Church of England became increasingly captive to its own internal political factions. Ramsey seems to have been innocent to this possibility. His engagement with national and international politics was strong. His grasp of ecclesiastical politics was immeasurably weaker, and his interest even less. We suffer from the consequences still.

Webster illustrates Ramsey's limitations in this area in his treatment of the failure of the Anglican Methodist Unity Scheme. I am sure that Webster is right in his judgement that, even in the late 1960s, and certainly by the 1970s, the Scheme was already past its sell-by date, stranded in the ecumenism of a previous age. Ramsey could misjudge theological moods too, perhaps most significantly in his initial reaction to John Robinson's *Honest to God*. The Archbishop's irritation with Robinson's arrogance and his limited respect for Robinson as a theologian probably did not help.

There is much of value in this book, though sometimes one's confidence is dented by errors that should have been corrected. To read that in 1927 Ramsey went to Ripon College, Cuddesdon, comes as a surprise. Perhaps most disturbing in a book about Ramsey is the author's assertion that "the Church of England was born of a rejection of the authority of the Church of Rome." The writer of *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* would have had none of that.

*The Rt Revd Graham James is the Bishop of Norwich.*

DOUGLAS DALES tells the story of a tenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury who, in his 28 years as prelate, organised reform of monasteries, advised the king, and led the Church. **Dunstan: Saint and statesman** was also known for his musicianship, miracles, calligraphy, and artistic and creative ability. His coronation service was the basis of the rite used in 1953 (James Clarke & Co., £20; 978-0-227-17392-3).



Lively times: Ramsey (right) escorts Cardinal Heenan out of a side exit at St Paul's after a service for Christian unity in 1969 was left in uproar by Ian Paisley and his supporters. Behind: Robert Stopford, Bishop of London

## The transfiguration and Mary

A helpful book about Jesus and his mother, says William Scott

**Mary: A gospel witness to transfiguration and liberation**  
Andrew Jones  
BRF £8.99  
(978-1-84101-651-1)  
Church Times Bookshop £8.10

THIS book by a Welsh archdeacon about our Lady is commended by a former leader of the Iona Community. I still reel from some of the views about the Blessed Virgin from Church of Scotland ministers which I heard when an Anglican curate in Glasgow; but that was more than 40 years ago, and her foreword has helped my reconciliation processes.

Jones begins by focusing on the

transfiguration of Jesus, who in the event revealed his true nature. In being born of Mary, God has entered into our human situation and transfigured it. He continues with ideas of Mary growing out of the Old Testament. This is reminiscent of part of the Roman Catholic Catechism describing Mary as the apex of Hebrew women. The paucity of mention of Mary in the New Testament is well discussed,

bringing the first part of the book to a conclusion.

Mary in terms of liberation theology is examined in the context of the Kingdom. "Mary is an active member of the poor, just as her son was." The virginity of Mary and the incarnation are explained in clear but unoriginal ways.

The incarnation and resurrection can change us. Jones uses biblical and apocryphal material. I appreciated the references to the annunciation as "not so much Mary's love of God, but God's love of Mary". Because a parish I once served contains an altar of Our Lady of Sorrows, I was attracted to his thoughts on the cross and grace. "So often," he says, "grace comes to us through weakness and that's the paradox of grace."

It is difficult to do justice to the last part of the book, but it centres on God's relationship with Mary as being a covenant relationship. There is also a discussion of Magnificat and visits to many of the shrines of our Lady. Topics for group discussion end the volume.

I would heartily commend this book, especially to those who find devotion to the Mother of God in some way alien. *Prebendary Scott was until recently Sub Dean of the Chapels Royal.*

## TV's sky pilots

Ted Harrison finds an opportunity missed

**More TV Vicar? Christians on the telly: The good, the bad and the quirky**  
Bryony Taylor  
DLT £9.99  
(978-0-232-53170-1)  
Church Times Bookshop £9

MORE TV VICAR is a book that never quite lives up to its witty title. It is a book about the way in which certain Christian characters have been portrayed on television over the years, especially the small-screen clergy of drama and comedy. It triggers dozens of fond memories of the Vicar of Dibley, Father Ted, and, of course, Rowan Atkinson in his several guises. It quotes many of their funniest lines.

The trouble is that it is not clear whether the book sets out to be an anthology or an analysis of its subject. If the former, it leaves out too much key material — where was the section on Dave "May your God go with you" Allen? — and, if the latter,

it is too subjective and opinionated.

In the preface, the author owns up to being a telly addict. Then Bryony Taylor also admits to being a Christian, adding "Hey, that's not so easy in this day and age. It's like saying you're a trainspotter but worse." That line sets the tone for the book, which ends with a chapter "What would Jesus watch?"

The TV characters are categorised as good, bad, or quirky, and then given a scored assessment. Adam Smallbone of *Rev* is given 98% for realism. Dot Cotton of *EastEnders* gets 54% for endearment. Rowan Atkinson's Archbishop of Canterbury impression scores 81% for offence.

The book is an entertaining read, but could hardly have failed, given the material available to select from. The arrival of Dibley's new vicar is a classic. "You were expecting a bloke, beard, Bible, bad breath. . . And instead you got a babe with a bob cut and a magnificent bosom." Yet it is also an opportunity missed, and one that could have resonated with a far wider churchgoing and non-churchgoing readership.

*Ted Harrison is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent.*

### new titles just published

**Creating a Culture of Invitation in Your Church** by Michael Harvey (Monarch, £8.99 (£8.10); 978-0-85721-632-8).

**Who Are We to Judge? Empathy and discernment in a critical age** by Fraser Dyer (SPCK, £9.99 (£9); 978-0-281-07248-4).

**Do We Need the New Testament? Letting the Old Testament speak for itself** by John Goldingay (IVP, £15.99 (£14.40); 978-0-8308-2469-4).

**How to Read the Bible** by Harvey Cox (HarperOne, £16.99 (£15.30); 978-0-06-234315-4).

**The Proper of the Mass: Entrance, offertory and communion antiphons for Sundays and solemnities: Chants for the Roman Missal in English** by Samuel Weber OSB (Ignatius Press, £25 (£22.50); 978-1-62164-011-0).

Selected by Frank Nugent, of the Church House Bookshop, which operates the Church Times Bookshop.

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