Sermons for the Christian year

SAGE Publications

The Expository Times 2005 116: 340

DOI: 10.1177/0014524605054826

DOI: 10.1177/0014524605054826

SERMONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

THE TEXTS ARE TAKEN FROM THE *REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY*
(THE CANTERBURY PRESS, NORWICH, 1992. ISBN 1–85311–063–9)

7th August: 11th after Trinity

DEEP WATERS

By the Revd Canon Marilyn McCord Adams
Christ Church, Oxford

Matthew 14:22–33

All four Gospels focus on the question, who is Jesus? Synoptic Gospels narrate Jesus' ministry of hints and winks: of kingdom announcements, of signs and wonders, exorcisms and healings, of close encounters, of questions and parables, rabbinic debates and challenges. We watch old wine skins stretch and strain. Wherever Jesus goes, we see the little splits fountain forth with life-giving liquid. Like the chosen disciples, the reader witnesses these mighty works, from scene to scene comes to expect, this is just what Jesus does. Disciple-apprentices themselves get sent out to herald the kingdom, to exorcize, and to heal. Jesus has left carpentry behind, calls fishers and tax-collectors, invites the reader to enter Heavenly Father's family business.

Yet, in the Synoptic Gospels, these old, old stories are bracketed and punctuated with episodes that rip away the curtain, that tear the Temple veil from top to bottom, that lay bare the cosmic proportions of the struggle, the naked fundamentals, the outclassing dimensions of what is at stake. We can always tell in Matthew's Gospel; their locations are liminal, marginal – not in all the towns and villages, but in lonely deserts; not on level ground or rolling hills, but on high mountains; not on *terra firma*, but at sea, out on the deep, with storms and winds and tossing waves. The temptation story tells us plainly: the contest is not between a marvellous magician and cowering demonoids; the match-off pits the Son of God against Satan himself! The Sermon on the Mount delivers, not pedantic complications of legal minutiae, much less muscular moralizing for ordinary time, but Messiah's bold new covenant radically redefining the terms of life-together. The Sermon on the Mount raises standards way beyond reach, to a righteousness higher than the Pharisees – 'You must be perfect even as Heavenly Father is perfect!' – makes turning the other cheek, walking the second mile, loving enemies the honour code of discipleship through end-time evils and apocalyptic woes. The Mount of Transfiguration exposes Jesus as the temple in which the Shekeinah glory dwells, the mercy seat on which the great I AM rests! On the Mount of Ascension, Jesus comes out of the closet as the One to Whom all authority has been given, repeats His promise to be with us to the close of the age!

Likewise in today's awe-striking story: spirit-wind is howling, darkness is upon the face of the deep. Jesus has just repeated the manna-in-the-wilderness miracle, then sent the disciples on ahead in the boat, while He Himself went up on the mountain to pray. All night long they have wrestled Leviathan, struggled to conquer chaos. They are out in the middle, far from the shore they've left tossing and chopping, no closer to their destination. In the eerie hours just before dawn, the sea could churn up anything, could easily swamp the boat and swallow them! Theophany reasserts Jesus' true proportions, no mere small-town rabbi-healer, but the great I AM, YHWH Who tramples chaos, leaving no footprints behind (Ps 77:19)!

The Synoptic Gospels don't leave the reader floating in metaphors. They 'cash' them. Naturally incurable diseases are symptoms that scurry away at Messiah's command. Welcome easily cancels curse, wins the repentance of despairing outsiders, tax-collectors and wanton women. Jesus and His disciples will not have to go to the cross to uproot these. What is really insidious, is systemic evil, those superhuman forces that first pervert, then destroy the very structures that order creation; ghastly and covert dynamics that twist society and trash nature. The Hebrew Bible's God moves in, not just once in the beginning, but repeatedly through Israel's history,

tries to organize us in ways that will bring out the best in each of us. But then something bigger than any one of us, maybe even greater than the sum total of all of us, infiltrates, subverts, sets the interests of some against others, networks us in ways that bring out the worst in us. Yet, revolution is costly. (Witness eighteenth-century France, erstwhile Yugoslavia, and the current state of Iraq!) Some order reasonably *seems* much better than no order. Our burden has to bear down with intolerable weight for us not to be heavily invested, not to feel that our very survival depends on the *status quo*!

From the beginning, Matthew's Gospel plays out this scenario: Satan claims, all of the kingdoms of this world and their glory, are his to give; Jesus counters, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' The story unfolds the tragedy of how scribes and Pharisees, religiously the most zealous of Jesus' contemporaries, were co-opted by the system, of how the people of God betrayed themselves, sank to the nadir of cursing and killing God. Jesus' enemies are not much disturbed by His healings of socially insignificant persons. What provokes them are His challenges to the religious establishment, His implicit and direct attacks on their leadership: His seizing authority to forgive sins, His touching of lepers and bleeding women, His not requiring disciples to fast or wash, His healing on the Sabbath day. All of these drive the Pharisees first to question, then to accuse Jesus of being in league with the devil, then to take counsel how to destroy the very Messiah whose way their scrupulous Torah-observance had meant to prepare.

In the Synoptic Gospels, apprentice-disciples are kingdom heralds. Mature disciples are sent, not merely as fly-by-night messengers, not just to mess around on the surface, but to shine the searchlight on deep structure perversions: nationalism, imperialism, eurocentrism, racism, gender-phobias; all those ways Church and society act out the lies, '*you have to have less than you need, so that we can have as much as we are entitled*'; *'you have to pretend to be smaller than you really are, so we can appear as big as we really are*', *and* '*p.s. God wants it that way!*' The Synoptic Gospels have already written the text of our sermon: 'Comes the revolution!' 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'

Like the religious institutions of Jesus' day, the Church participates in the cultures it shapes and reforms. Especially where the Church is established, there are many voices that counsel gradualism: wait until the older generation dies off, until there is worldwide consensus; go slowly, the better to bring people along. Harsher still are the demands to shut up or be excommunicated, the accusations that protest is traitorous, meant not to purify but to destroy. And yet human beings do have steep learning curves and limited attention spans. Not all of the issues can be on the table all of the time with equal urgency.

Alone of all the Gospels, Matthew gives as an honest picture of discipleship in the midst of discernment: to hug the boat, praying that it won't break up before dawn? or to go out where Jesus is, trampling chaos, because the time is at hand? True to form, Peter wants to be where Jesus is. '*Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water!*' True to form, Peter does not have what it takes, there is not enough in what we are in ourselves to trample chaos. It is not with flesh and blood that we have to contend. We want to be out where Jesus is, we want to go where Jesus sends us. So we row the boat furlongs from the shore, take hesitant steps out onto the water, before fear joins self-knowledge and our initiatives sink in shame.

Matthew's Gospel is clear: mature discipleship is demanding and difficult, impossible but for one enabling condition. Jesus is not only I AM, but Emmanuel, with us all the time. We can become centres that will hold, muster the integrity to persevere for righteousness sake, shoulder our cross, love our enemies and pray for our persecutors, only if Jesus becomes our centre – '*Lord, save me!*' – the Son of God, the Risen One in Whom the kingdom comes, now and at the close of the age!

14th August: 12th after Trinity

CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES

By Canon Andrew Loat
Llandrindod Wells, Powys

Matthew 15:10–28

'Setting boundaries' is seen as high on the agenda of many people today – especially for those in the caring professions, and among them the clergy. Boundaries: knowing the limits of my responsibility and, crucially, knowing how far other people may

fairly make use of my time or my attention. It's a sad agenda in many ways, for all its apparent emphasis on personal responsibility, because in the end for some of us it's about keeping others at a distance, 'out of my hair'. Giving me space, giving me a bit of peace, because I am a limited person.

But if we are tempted to bewail a modern preoccupation to see other people as intruders rather than companions perhaps we should look more carefully at our readings today. In the Gospel, for instance, boundaries – and the transgression of them – is a prominent theme. Jesus has a draining encounter with the Pharisees when he challenges their hypocrisy. He doesn't mince his words as he criticizes their claim to love the Law of Moses while at the same time devising ways to avoid its plain obligations. Such confrontations cannot have been easy for a sensitive and compassionate man. And to top it all the disciples can't get on his wavelength, with the result he uses more energy in expressing himself still more simply so that even Peter can grasp the teaching! No wonder we discover that Jesus wanted to get away, get some peace, get some space.

The easiest way for Jesus to 'get away from it all' was to do just that – to move out of Galilee and cross over into Gentile territory – in this case considerably to the north-west, the region of Tyre and Sidon. Interestingly Jesus uses these large towns earlier in Matthew's Gospel as symbols of Gentile godlessness: if the signs he performed had been witnessed in Tyre and Sidon (shock! horror!) then their population would have responded to him, in contrast to his own Jewish people who so often watched and waited rather than saw and believed. But it is to this region, this unlikely region, that Jesus goes. Mark's account of the story adds a little more detail, a splash of colour – he has Jesus *entering a house* in Tyre, which emphasizes the desire to shut out the pressures and the draining demands he had so recently faced: close the door, take time out. If only!

Even here in Gentile cities by the sea Jesus is known – how, we are not told. The fact that he is recognized should remind us of the close interconnection between Israel and her neighbours. Indeed, Tyre and Sidon were big players in the economy of northern Palestine, bigger players indeed than rural Galilee which was dominated by its coastal neighbours.

So perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that the relative obscurity of this bolt hole is not going to last long. There comes a woman, a 'Canaanite', reminiscent of the pagan tribes which, centuries before, Israel had struggled to overcome or displace with limited success. How will our tired Israelite handle this present skirmish? Whatever she is, she is determined and intelligent. Her opening gambit shows humility, calling Jesus by the titles which show her understanding of him as Jewish Messiah, but she loses no time in declaring also her desperation: 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.'

Now this woman has shown more faith in Jesus than all those Pharisees whom he berated and yet, incredibly, Jesus does not answer her a word! He turns a deaf ear and, by implication, not once but several times. Again and again she cries out and each time he ignores her until the disciples start saying, 'For goodness sake shut her up!' (One cannot help but think it would have been easier for her had she been a Roman centurion – such men, although rare in the Gospels, got Jesus' attention far more easily.) To the disciples' plea, however, Jesus does respond, and seriously – and he uses the language of boundaries: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' This woman lives in the wrong place: the Roman centurion who appeared earlier in Matthew lived in Capernaum, Galilee. The disciples want peace and quiet, too, and the easiest way to obtain this is to give the woman what she wants. But if Israel is God's people and his means for bringing salvation to the world, is it right for Jesus to be deflected, even momentarily, from his ministry within the promised land? How far can the long-term purposes of God be anticipated in these few short years of redemptive ministry in Israel?

Such thoughts, however, don't have time to be mulled over – the woman approaches Jesus directly: 'Lord, help me!' How Jesus can so long resist this woman's heart-wrung appeals quite frankly astounds us, but the reasons we have already considered may help us understand something of his dilemma as the Jewish Messiah. But it doesn't stop there, and in fact it gets worse; he seems to try to put off the woman by saying those words about children's bread being for the children and not for the dogs under the table. Every Jew knew who the dogs were, and Gentiles were quite aware of it. Yet quick as a flash comes her answer: 'Dogs we may be, but crumbs still taste good to us!' At last Jesus yields, almost audibly groaning, touched as we are by the woman's faith

and persistence. He utters his all-powerful word, 'Let it be done for you as you wish', and joy fills a household beyond the boundaries of Israel.

The episode over, Jesus returns to Galilee; how much refreshment he had found we do not know. I would like to think that Jesus found his strength renewed not only in prayer but also by those hours spent in walking with his disciples to and from the coast, just as you and I can find deep refreshment in the companionship of friends.

So where are our 'boundaries' today, and how valid are they in God's overall plans? It was the disciples who wanted the quick solution to restore their protective boundary, whereas it was Jesus (who had worked harder by his confrontation with the Pharisees) who remained alert to his Father, seeking not to block out the intrusion but rather to see where was God in all this. Such a model for discipleship does challenge us. Many times I have gone out into the parish really not wanting to meet anyone I know, but later have returned home so glad for the encounters I had!

But it's not only personally that we erect boundaries. Countries also have interests they do not wish others to touch, so we have trade barriers and 'protectionism' and the many different ways in which economic rules work in favour of the nations that are already rich. Churches have been at the forefront of campaigning for 'Fair Trade', and seeing that not only in international terms but also what it means for local farmers and suppliers in our own country and community. So somewhat paradoxically at the same time as we are feeling our need for 'personal space' and setting those boundaries, individually, yet as a Christian community we are calling on the rich nations to enlarge their boundaries in order to embrace more of the world's poor. Yet we see no inconsistency in this.

Earlier this year I was privileged to travel with companions in the Holy Land and see not only some of the holy sites but also to meet some of the Lord's continuing people, the Christian Palestinians, on the West Bank. The conditions they live under would not be tolerated anywhere in Europe, and their situation is made much worse by the security barrier erected by Israel for defence and other reasons. We met communities who told us they had one doctor to treat 30,000 people and no guaranteed access to a hospital, and all because of where the boundaries have been placed.

We all have a right to well-being, and part of that involves the need for peace and for personal refreshment. Jesus needed it, too. But he also knew that making boundaries for ourselves, 'ring-fencing' our 'time out' is worthless unless it is also offered to God, open to him to take and shape as he will. It's not an easy path to follow, but given the spiritual and other boundaries constricting Canaanite women then and countless people and communities around the world today, it's a path of discipleship we are called to share.

21st August: 13th after Trinity

STRANGE THINGS

By the Revd Dr Stephen B. Dawes
Truro

Exodus 1:8–2:10; Romans 12:1–8; Matthew 16:13–20

Today's Gospel reading marks the turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus – the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end. Up to this point Jesus has been doing the popular and familiar things in Galilee, and has gained a reputation as a teacher and a healer. From here on he turns to face Jerusalem and steps out on an increasingly lonely journey to rejection and death. It's a turning point for the disciples too. It's the point at which they are confronted, by Jesus, with the challenge of naming him as he is. So far they have had an easy time of it: learning from his teaching, marvelling at his healing gifts and enjoying his popularity. But now, away from it all at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus puts them on the spot. 'Who do you think I am?' he demands of them. And that's when today's Gospel reading begins to get very strange.

We could have a competition in church this morning to see how many strange things we can find in it, but we'll settle for three. First, there is Jesus, a very strange sort of messiah. Second, there is Simon Peter, a very strange sort of foundation for anything. And third, there is something very strange about the future Church.

The confrontation begins when Jesus asks Peter what people have been saying about him, and Peter tells him. 'Some say you are a new John the Baptist, others that you are Elijah returned as promised,

others that you are Jeremiah or a new prophet'. Then Jesus confronts the disciples – and what about you? What do you say that I am? And Peter names him as the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Awaited One, the Son of the Living God, the True Heir of King David. And it's strange for Peter to name Jesus like that, because there was very little evidence to go on. Jesus had not done anything so far to claim that title or to look like a messiah, and certainly not the sort of messiah that many of his contemporaries were wanting. They couldn't decide among themselves what sort of a messiah they did want, but they all agreed that the Messiah would be big enough, dramatic enough, and powerful enough to be recognized when he appeared and then the sky would be the limit for what he would do. Many of them wanted a new Moses to liberate them from the Romans, not to lead them through the desert to a new land this time, but to clear the land they were in of those who had no right to be there. Or a new David, a great national hero and leader. But Jesus had not been, and would not be, anything like any of that. He was not a very messianic messiah. And that explains the strange ending of the reading, that they weren't to tell anyone that he was the Messiah at all.

And so to Simon Peter, the emerging spokesman and leader of the disciples. Simon Peter, it seems, has seen enough to name Jesus as God's Special One, and Jesus praises God for his insight. He then returns the compliment and names Simon son of Jonah as 'Peter' or 'Cephas' – 'The Rock'. He names him as the one on whom the church will be built, the foundation stone. And he entrusts him with the 'keys of the kingdom', whatever that may mean. This is a very strange naming for Simon Peter. In the Gospel stories we see his strengths and his commitment, but we also see his unpredictability and unreliability, and the same strengths and weaknesses appear in the stories about him in the rest of the New Testament. And in many ways building the Church on Peter is building it on sand, not on rock. Peter isn't solid enough, he is not a very rock-like rock. He's a volatile man, capable of huge enthusiasms, great commitments and strong action; but he is equally capable of abject failure, spineless denial, and giving way under pressure. He might be the leader of the disciples, and he might become one of the three early leaders of the Church – but rock-like he isn't. Yet Jesus names this all-too-human, impetuous, headstrong, flawed and faltering man as 'The Rock', the very strange foundation for God's Church.

And so we come to the third strange thing in our Gospel reading, the future Church and what is said about it. No other Gospel mentions the word 'church', or mentions Peter's role in it in any way. But Matthew is writing his Gospel for the Church of his day and for his own little churches, and he has something important he wants to say to them. They are small and struggling. They are finding faith, discipleship and Christian living tough in a big and hostile world. Matthew wants to remind them of their Easter Faith and Hope, and to encourage them in their mission and work, so he tells them that 'the gates of Hades will not prevail against them'. And that is a very strange promise. Think about it. This is not a picture of the Church under attack, and a promise that their attackers will not defeat them – that would have been a sensible picture for Matthew to paint and an encouraging message for Christians who felt beleaguered to hear. But that is not what his picture describes. It is the other way round. This is a picture of the Church on the attack, and a promise that it will be victorious, that 'no door will keep them out', not even the mighty gates of Hell itself. This strange community, following a strange Messiah and built on a strange foundation, taking on all the forces of evil, is and will be victorious. That is a very strange thing to say to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, to the Church and the churches in Matthew's own circumstances, and to us in the Church today. But it is what he wants his struggling churches to hear.

We have read about a strange Messiah, a strange foundation and a strange promise to the Church. But in the light of what Matthew believes, it isn't strange at all. He tells his Caesarea Philippi story this way because he knows the outcome of Jesus' lonely journey to Jerusalem. He tells it out of the Easter Faith which nerves him, faith in the victory of life over death, good over evil and light over darkness; faith that death, darkness and evil do not have the last word, and that they do not reign eternally. It is a faith proved for him in the Easter experiences of the disciples and in what God can do with the Peters of this world. It is the faith by which he challenges the Church, his churches and ours, to live; not being conformed to this world and its ordinary ways, as St Paul puts it in today's Epistle, but transformed by and into the strange ways of God.

28th August 2005: 14th after Trinity

NOT TO COUNT THE COST? THE PRAYER OF ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA[1]

By the Revd John D. Searle
Carterton, Oxfordshire

Matthew 6:21–28; Romans 12:9–21

'*Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest; To give and not to count the cost, To fight and not to heed the wounds, To toil and not to seek for rest, To labour and not to seek for any reward Save that of knowing that we do thy will.*' At first sight, this familiar prayer appears to endorse the Gospel lection in which Jesus challenged would-be disciples to 'deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' (Mt 26:24ff.). The interpretation and application of this 'hard saying' is notoriously difficult, particularly when compared with our Lord's injunction to 'love your neighbour *as yourself*'.Without detracting from the merits of a much-loved prayer, some qualifications are necessary to safeguard those who are likely to apply it too literally.

'*To serve thee as thou deservest*': In the Epistle, St Paul describes the life-style required of all Christ's followers (Rom 12:9–21); and, in a letter to his protégé, Timothy, he sets out the particular standards required of church leaders (1 Tim 3:1–13). As ministerial students we were taught that only 'the utmost for the Highest' is sufficient in the service of God. But no-one is able to serve God as he *truly* deserves. Consequently, those with a perfectionist temperament are liable to exhaust themselves striving to fulfil their calling by giving one hundred *and fifty* per cent. Even those who seek to live by 'enabling grace', may still suffer 'burn out'. It is necessary to strike a healthy balance between 'reaching for the stars' and the recognition that we are not all 'spiritual space rockets'; to stretch ourselves, but not unrealistically beyond our God-given ability.

'*To give and not to count the cost*': By contrast, Jesus bids us to count the cost of a discipleship which involves putting his service before family, the renunciation of possessions, and the willingness to suffer (Lk 14:28; cf. 26–33). Although conditions of employment have much improved for the clergy of today, any aspiring minister must recognize at the outset that the priesthood entails working long hours for a modest income, disruption of family life, and, perhaps most onerous, the pastoral obligation to help carry the cross of any 'neighbour' in need (cf. Lk 10:25; Mk 15:21). Furthermore, there will be a weight of unrealistic expectations to bear which can induce despair at failure to be 'the perfect priest', As with *all* jobs, the work of a minister involves its own particular emotional stress and physical strain. But the consequence of '*not counting the cost*' at the outset may lead later to frustration and envy of those who work less and are paid more; in short, to carry a 'chip on the shoulder' in place of a cross. The saying holds good, 'If you can't stand the heat, keep out of the kitchen'.

'*To fight and not to heed the wounds*': To carry a cross, literally or metaphorically, inevitably results in wounds. But is it sensible to disregard them? I recall a Good Friday March of Witness when the young man carrying a heavy wooden cross insisted on walking barefoot. At the end of the march his feet were bleeding, his shoulder red raw; if he had ignored his injuries and refused treatment, he would have risked septicaemia. Ministers must expect some wounds as part of the 'cost' that was accepted initially. There is now an increasing risk of actual physical harm, but the wounds we are most likely to receive are those of misunderstanding, criticism, unfair comparison, typecasting and scapegoating. Unless we are very well balanced or unusually thick-skinned we risk becoming depressed, disillusioned or cynical – all symptoms of emotional '*wounds*' which should *not* be neglected. Although refraining from 'whingeing' in public, we need to share such feelings, not only with God in prayer, but also with an understanding colleague, counsellor or friend. We may then be able to pray – as Ignatius – for strength to 'fight and not to heed the wounds'. Unheeded, the likely outcome is an impaired ministry, if not breakdown.

'*To toil and not to seek for rest*': Ordinands were once told, 'Better to burn out than rust out'. Consequently, many suffered feelings of irrational guilt when having a day-off or even an evening-in. Today, the importance of adequate rest and recreation is recognized more widely. We cannot 'love our neighbour as ourselves' unless we take sensible care of ourselves. Jesus needed to rest when tired (Jn 4:6); he took 'time out' to be alone with the Father (Mk 1:12f., 35; 6:46), sometimes taking his disciples, too (Mk 6:31, 32; 9:2ff.; 14:32ff.). Are

[1] A sermon preached before a gathering of Clergy, including Ordinands and Candidates for Ministerial training.

our needs any less? His invitation, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Mt 11:8), is as much to pastor as to people. It is a clergy occupational hazard to be so busy that there is no time for 'recharging the batteries', spiritual, mental and physical. '*Rest*' does not necessarily mean lounging in an armchair – although it could mean that. 'A change is as good as a rest' – to have a hobby, some outside interest, to spend time with family or friends, to 'let our hair down' (if we have any left), is essential if we are to '*toil*' effectively. '*Rest*' also entails conserving our emotional energy. In pastoral care, for instance, by striking a balance between personal identification and professional detachment, limiting the length of a visit or a counselling session, knowing when we should make a referral, and being able to say 'no', as sometimes Jesus did (cf. Mk 6:5f., 7:27, 9:30; Lk 4:42f.).

'*To labour and not to seek for any reward save that of knowing that we do thy will*': The principle of reward in this life and the next is prominent in Judaism; and the New Testament contains a surprising number of references to gaining and losing reward. This is noticeable in the sayings of Jesus (e.g., today's Gospel: 16:27, Mt 5, 6, 10; Mk 9:41, *et al.*), which indicate that some rewards are received in this life (Mt 6:33; Lk 18:30), but most are reserved for heaven, and are of a spiritual nature (Lk 6:23, 35; Jn 6:40, 12:26 *et al.*) As Ignatius implies, reward is not the motive, but the unsought consequence, of faithful service and the kind of life described in the Epistle (Rom 12:9–21). A minister's work has its own (earthly) rewards which include the privilege of sharing pastorally the high and low points in people's lives – literally, from 'cradle to grave', preaching Good News, and administering the Sacraments. Interestingly, clergy have scored high in recent surveys assessing comparative job-satisfaction, general well-being and life-expectancy! However, in the context of Ignatius' prayer, can we always be sure that we truly know God's will and are doing it as well as we might? Those who sometimes question the validity of their call and are conscious of their limitations as Christ's servants, will count themselves 'unprofitable servants' (Lk 17:10), and may never feel able to claim that one reward sanctioned by Ignatius until, in the Kingdom of Heaven, they receive the commendation of their Lord, 'Well done, good and faithful servant … enter into the joy of your master' (Mt 25:21).

Hopefully, those who feel uncomfortable with Ignatius' prayer may, with these caveats, be able to say it in good faith.

DECONSTRUCTING GLOBAL ECONOMICS

Ulrich Duchrow and Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Property for People, not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny of Capitalism* (London: Zed Books with CIIR, 2004. £14.95. pp. 244. ISBN 1–84277–479–4).

This is a passionately argued book which forensically examines the philosophical and cultural roots and tragic contemporary effects of the neoliberal economic orthodoxy which reigns largely unchallenged in government and corporate circles in the current era of economic globalization. The contradictions between the Lockean-influenced neoliberal private property regimen and the Christian conception of the priority of the common good are well displayed. So too are the ecological and human tragedies that are latent in the enforcement of this regimen around the world. The authors argue that the rise of the market relations, and the correlative demise of common property arrangements such as those which have for millennia governed the distribution of land in traditional cultures, and the provision of such basic resources as water even in modern ones, is resulting in a kind of totalitarian tyranny. They not only chart the sacrifices of the welfare of human communities and ecological habitats occasioned by this tyranny but also forms of resistance and a range of alternatives to global capitalism. Prominent among their account of alternatives is a well documented portrait of the churches' response to the rise of neoliberal economic orthodoxy and its effects on poor communities in the South. In sum this book offers a powerful theological reading of our times which is both historically informed and powerfully prophetic in its deconstruction of the global economy.

MICHAEL NORTHCOTT
New College, Edinburgh