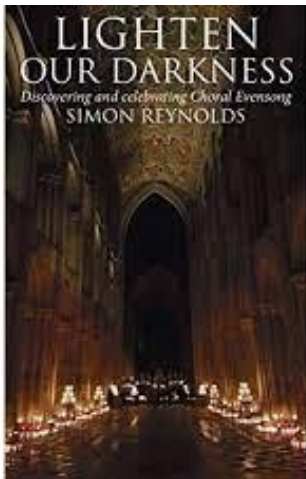


Simon Reynolds Lighten our Darkness



This is an extremely attractive book about Choral Evensong. Reynolds imparts his knowledge and affection for the service with warmth, brevity and delight. It serves as an excellent introduction and handy reminder of the history and purpose of the service.

He notes the increased popularity of cathedral worship, particularly in these pandemic times, and believes that part of the appeal is its undemanding anonymity and grandeur which provide space for the congregation to reflect and ponder.

At a time when so much in life is personalized, Choral Evensong is unashamedly not about us: the focus is the worship of God. In many contexts the congregation is not even expected to verbalize anything: the emphasis is on learning to listen. The first set of responses begins with a prayer for God to be in all we say: “O Lord open thou our lips” and the service unfolds with Psalms and Canticles which may reflect emotions which are quite alien to us and in ancient language (more “Shakespeare than Twitter”) which is not easily understood. The readings from the Bible may come from a culture and time very different to our own and the intercessions within the liturgy are deliberately brief and general – and unaltered.

But this is not a concert – still less a museum-piece. It is an experience of being taken out of ourselves and towards the Other with music and language that can disorientate and reorientate us and hopefully allow us space to set our own joys and anxieties within a broader context.

After the formal liturgy is concluded, there may be a sermon and intercessions of a more personal nature. These, he notes, should be brief and in keeping with the reflective nature of what has gone before.

For someone who has been to a Choral Evensong and thought it *was* nothing more than a concert, this short book will bring enriching insights and deeper understanding. It makes a powerful case that faith is something experienced rather than explained and reminds us that in worship we are nourished, sustained and renewed.