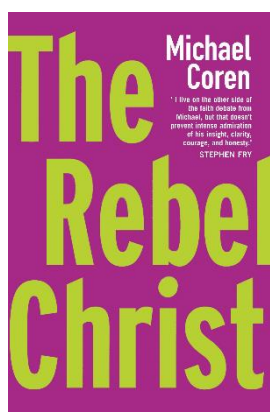


The Rebel Christ by Michael Coren (review by Reader – Peter Wright)



If you're sometimes puzzled or even dismayed by what the institutional church seems to be saying about some of the pressing issues of the day, especially those you may have sometimes heard characterised as 'hot button' issues, then this book is worth a read. The author explores very clearly and critically, what Jesus said (and didn't say) and indeed what the Bible says (and doesn't) about such issues as equal marriage, sex education, abortion, economic justice, assisted dying and more.

Coren is an Anglican priest in the Church of Canada, a journalist and former broadcaster. He writes mainly from a North American perspective, particularly the U.S.A., so some of the issues he discusses such as gun control or even abortion, for example, may have less immediate relevance for the U.K. but none are by any means irrelevant. In many ways this is a very personal book and there are several telling personal anecdotes in it.

Once a traditional Roman Catholic, he was a vocal public advocate for the religious conservatism of the Christian right, particularly in North America. However, after a dramatic change of heart, which he movingly describes, he now outspokenly opposes what he once supported. This he now considers a distortion of Christianity. He abhors the Christianity of what he terms the conservative religious right, seeing it as insular, intolerant, legalistic, triumphalist, fundamentalist, judgemental and nationalistic. Most importantly, he argues that the radical, inclusive, egalitarian, socially liberal, forgiving, inherently loving message of Jesus is by contrast revolutionary. Hence the title of the book. Fearing an emerging parallel between political and religious conservatism his topical analyses, particularly of economic justice, marriage equality and abortion, provide the main illustrations of his argument.

Other topics such as, once more, assisted dying, gun control and capital punishment, and others, are also considered.

Although much of the background and context is North American his argument and his championing of "the rebel Christ," are by no means exclusively so. A clearly practised communicator, he writes with passion, wit and well-placed bluntness to make this 146-page book a very readable and stimulating contribution to pondering the state of contemporary Christianity in the light of the message of Jesus.