



John Robinson Where Three Ways Meet

This book had, for me, a great sense of nostalgia. Not just because it was an old book, but because it reminded me there used to be a time when senior clerics in the Church of England felt they had a duty to speak out publicly on things both political and theological. And expected to be heard.

John Robinson (d. 1983) was an academic and Bishop of Woolwich. His later life was dominated by the Thatcher/Reagan axis as well as the topic of nuclear power. He was best known for his contribution to what became known as the *Honest to God* debate in which he sought to find a deeper faith behind the shallow certainties of the age. This is a collection of last essays and sermons at the end of a lifetime of reflection.

Here he considers the value of other faiths – favourably. He considers what he describes as life *over* death rather than life *after* death. There is along piece on the book of Revelation, written, he believes, for a time when life had continued *as if* there had been no resurrection – and therefore very relevant to our own day. He cannot believe it is by the same pen as the author of John's Gospel as there seems to be a complete absence of love – John's singularly overriding theme – but it reminds us that within our concept of the divine there remains a strong sense of judgement.

Robinson looks more of his time when he argues for pacificism and unilateral disarmament, but is very contemporary in his encouragement to take the Bible seriously rather than literally. He is known as a Liberal, but he retains a strong sense of the divine (following Lau Tzu) as the hole at the centre without which there is no wheel. (In The Absence, RS Thomas has a similar sense of being in a church and there being nothing there – but that the absence had the form of a presence.)

He was, himself, dying of cancer as he reflects on God and suffering. He never asks, 'Why me?' rather he looks for the activity of God in and because of the suffering.

So, what to make of the book? Well, it's not so much a book as a collection of thoughts. Some of the conclusions look out-dated, some look remarkably pertinent. It has a confidence about it which is supported by great learning and it speaks on topics that were pressing at the time. And in our current era of policy-auditing, it was refreshing to be reminded of some ideas.

Jim Cox