

WHY I AM STILL AN ANGLICAN, edited by Toby Churton. Collins, London, 1986. 111pp. £6.95

A few decades ago the catch-title was 'Why I am a Catholic' or 'Why I am an Anglican'. Nowadays the word *still* has to be inserted. It is necessary because of the drifting away of intellectually-inclined members of these two major churches in England. On the one hand there has been dissatisfaction with Vatican II as either being too radical or not radical enough. And on the other, a growing uneasiness about liberalism, indecisiveness and doctrinal infidelity of the Church of England. Many leave and find consolation in going private, or in joining the Orthodox Church or the Catholic Church. And against such a background there is a general feeling of irrelevance for all denominational forms in young people of every social class. Boundaries are either ignored or leapt over without the batting of an eyelid.

So an *ad hoc* group of Anglicans have attempted to defend their position and have found themselves writing on the 'Why I am still' theme. As might be expected it is a very mixed bunch of six. None is a theologian, although John V. Taylor, the much respected former bishop of Winchester, adds a few comments to round off the volume. One is a religious: one a priest. The rest are lay. Perhaps the only person who addresses himself seriously to the problem is Frank Field, M.P. for Birkenhead. He at least faces the criticisms levelled against the Church of England such as its present sectarian tendencies, its recent liturgical changes, its establishment status, its comprehensiveness and its acceptance of and ability to deal with folk religion. He sees them to be advantages and for him they constitute a good package which no other church can offer. Sister Anna's contribution is along similar lines but is more pious and indeed moving.

The book raises two issues. The problem over a similar question 'Why I am still a Christian' which is often at the back of the minds of the authors and is a question which really interests John Taylor, is sometimes confused with 'Why I am still an Anglican'. If the latter is the point at issue it must be related to church order, doctrine, policies, symbols, power, class and so on. It is these which are at stake and which will influence people to go elsewhere, lapse or stay put.

The other issue is that in offering reasons for staying where they are, or as in one case returning to Anglicanism after a period of absence, those of a cultural or a sociological kind are prominent. Quite rightly Anglicanism is seen as being deeply interwoven in English society. It has helped to establish that society and yet it is also an English product. 'You have to understand your own in order to appreciate another', said one contributor. One has to come to terms with English society in order to understand the Anglican Church. And to underline all this, no Anglican from outside England did in fact make a contribution. Perhaps no one was asked.

Of course all churches have to be related to their social setting and the Church of England of all denominations calls for such treatment on account of its unique place in the development of Christianity. But to say nothing more, to make no references to church order and to leave theology completely outside is to reduce the whole exercise to culture and expediency.

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