

CHRISTOPHER WANSEY 1910 - 1992

The Rev. Christopher Wansey died on 17th December after a long illness - here is part of the Vicar's address at the funeral service held at St. Nicholas' on 23rd December:

Christopher was born in Japan but grew up in England and was ordained to a curacy in Walthamstow, Essex in 1934, but it was soon to Japan that he returned as a missionary with C.M.S., ministering there until the progress of war drove him home via a short time in West Africa. He came back with eyes opened by his missionary experience, to a Manchester parish where, as he later wrote, he was 'shocked at the state of the Church in so-called Christian England'. He saw that his calling was to be a missionary to English people, and he sought to be that for the rest of his life, in ministeries in Woodford and Roydon, and in two retirements of which we have shared the second in Kenilworth.

It is the lot of prophets not to be fully appreciated at the time but later to be perceived as having got things right. Chris, who wore the mantle of the prophet as well as that of the missionary, lived long enough to see some of the things that he had hoped for come to be more widely accepted.

First it was infant baptism (or more often the lack of it) which made the headlines. If you want the whole story read his book 'The Clockwork Church'. Sufficient to say that Chris was an early advocate of baptismal reform against indiscriminate baptism and for restoring the integrity with which the sacrament was offered, seeking a living and active participation in the life of the Church from parents who sought it for their children. But alongside this he showed a care for those who could not make the demanding promises by introducing a service of the Naming and Blessing of a Child, later echoed in the A.S.B.

He also affirmed that marriage in Church is only for Christians. The service presupposes that the parties concerned are ordering their lives according to the ordinances of Christ as worshipping members of the Church. How then can the law require him to offer this service to all parishioners, he asked in all innocence? Read the book for the full story.

For vintage Wansey one has to go back to a day in 1965 when, before assembled press photographers and television cameras Christopher attempted to take his seat in the House of Commons as a member of the Commons Spiritual (for he was a Proctor in Convocation of the Church Assembly) alongside the Commons Temporal, on the basis that this right, though not exercised since the 14th Century, had not been extinguished. He was unsuccessful in gaining entry, but his purpose was to draw attention to what he termed the 'humiliation' of the Church whereby it did not have control over the appointment of its spiritual leaders and guardians, the bishops, but was dependent on the state exercising this function through possibly an atheist Prime Minister. Chris lived long enough to see considerable progress being made to reverse this anomaly, and for his determined stand to be recognised by the Church at large.

All these activities stemmed from his missionary heart, from his desire that men and women might come to know for themselves the Living God through Jesus Christ, and that nothing should stand in the way of this, not the lukewarmness of the Church, the scourge of nominalism, the obscurity of the liturgy or the language. 'That they might see Jesus' was his prayer. There was nothing Chris loved more than to talk to others about God's love in Christ. Even in these last three years following his stroke he has been witnessing to the power and love of Christ from his sickbed, and handing out his little books so that the conversation between the Holy Spirit and the individual could continue elsewhere.

And all this with Olive. He dedicated one of his books 'to Olive who has uncomplainingly been dragged through church hedges backwards for 33 years'. How often she must have wondered what he was going to do next! But how often too her clear cut, perceptive comments and her loving support must have clarified and strengthened his resolve, never more so than on this final and difficult part of his journey. We give thanks today for Christopher who trusted in Christ and wanted all to know that the Christian faith is a glorious and victorious faith, because at its heart is a glorious and victorious Saviour.