

BRITAIN'S FIRST WORKER-PRIESTS by John Mantle, *SCM Press*, London, 2000. Pp. xxiii + 340 £14.95 pbk.

For some of us who were Anglican ordinands in the 1950s, military service proved a rude awakening. Not so much the two years of '*servitude militaire*' as the unavoidable and alarming fact that the vast majority of the men were alienated from the life of the Church. After demobilisation, it made the complacency of the false prophets of revival difficult to bear. Not only did it seem that the Church had little purchase on the lives of our proletarian contemporaries, but the majority of its leaders appeared untroubled by the situation.

John Mantle's book focuses on a handful of admirable, even heroic, priests and laypeople who adopted a radical strategy to combat this alienation. They were the worker-priests, their wives and lay associates. Mantle gives ample coverage of other ministries within the Church of England which sought to bridge the divide, but his sympathy is largely with those who belonged to the Worker Priest Group. *Understanding of priesthood was both imprecise and diverse*, as might be expected among the members of this Anglican group. Yet there was a common intention to be fully priests *and* workers. They and their families would share every aspect of the lives of those with whom they worked. Like 19th-century Anglican Christian-Socialists such as Stewart Headlam of the Guild of St Matthew, this praxis was ultimately grounded in incarnational theology. As in France, it was not long before some of them were conspicuously involved in Trade Union affairs.

On the front cover is a picture of the Anglican priest, Tony Williamson, at the wheel of a fork-lift truck. A hesitant Bishop of Oxford gradually yielded to Williamson's insistence that only a man in priestly orders had sufficient authority to represent the Church at Pressed Steel, his place of work. Not that he had the slightest intention of noisily proclaiming that authority—respect had to be won by being a *capable workmate*. These priests were not there to proselytise; they hoped the gospel might be quietly proclaimed by their comradely presence. Not all bishops were as acquiescent as Carpenter of Oxford. Another priest, John Strong, had a stressful time when the Bishop of St Albans failed to support him against a self-elected group in his parish who wanted a *proper* parish priest, i.e. one committed to traditional parochial activities. It is not surprising that most bishops were wary. Nearly all of them had emerged from the traditional system and were struggling to sustain it.

The account of John Strong's and Michael Gedge's four years underground in a Kent colliery compels admiration. I have always felt similarly about Simone Weil's astonishing and incompetent stint in the Renault Works in 1934. Unlike Weil, Strong and Gedge were able to win the esteem of their mates by their practical skill. But there is, as with Weil, the same determination to share the lot, to be in

solidarity with industrial workers. Only by their 'presence' could these Christians attempt to break down 'the barriers caused by the past actions or inactions of the church and present misunderstanding' (Williamson).

These priests, their families and friends, in the 1950s and 1960s often found that Catholics, both in their workplace and further afield, understood best what they were striving to do. They drew constantly upon the example of the French *prêtres ouvriers*. I suspect that the leading part played by Dominicans among others in this movement is no longer widely remembered; a pity, since it involved an impressive and costly work of Christian solidarity. It came to grief when the Roman authorities decided to curb left-wing political involvement. But these men were at that time in France necessarily and by vocation 'fellow-travellers'.

What did these worker priests achieve by 'travelling' alongside their workmates? As one French priest put it to a somewhat sceptical Ted Wickham of the Sheffield Industrial Mission: 'C'est la présence! C'est la présence!'. And in forty-five years time the attitude of the French workers to the Church will be different because of this presence' (*Abbé Hollande*). High, unrealisable hopes! Today, with an ongoing *embourgeoisement* of the Church in Britain and with dramatic changes in the industrial landscape, is this episode in the Church's history in any way relevant? We must hope so.

While warmly commending Mantle's book, I cannot help regretting that it ends on so valedictory a note: 'Though many of them [worker priests] are still with us, we may never see their like again, and the Christian Church will be the poorer for it. Perhaps, one day, someone will grant them just a few lines in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.' If the worker priests are so insecure in the memory of the Church, then so much the worse for the Church!

TONY CROSS

SHAME : THEORY, THERAPY, AND THEOLOGY by Stephen Pattison, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000. Pp. 343, £14.95 pbk.

The starting point of this book is very interesting. The author, an Anglican priest and research fellow in 'practical theology' at Cardiff University, has, as he very frankly tells us, long suffered from shame in the form of feelings of defilement and unworthiness. This led him to fifteen years of treatment by a psychotherapist, and to write this book. In writing it, his intention was to find an adequate definition for shame, and then, while presenting something of his own experience, to see what contemporary psychology and psychotherapy have to say about the causes and cure of shame and how all this relates to the Christian understanding of shame.

This could have been the recipe for a marvellous book. But I