Prof's Picks

March 2014

The Rev. Justin Lewis-Anthony, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Students at Virginia Theological Seminary, recommends the following books as part of the Bishop Payne Library's monthly series highlighting a faculty member's "picks":


Writing about silence is not quite as counter-intuitive as painting blindness or demonstrating for apathy, but, even so, it seems a slight subject for a man whose last project was a history of Christianity (what? All of it?). It is the skill of MacCulloch as a writer and historian that his history of silence becomes something more than an esoteric study of a marginal subject. Beginning with Sherlock Holmes (!), MacCulloch shows that absence can be as important as presence. He identifies three types of silence: as a theological virtue, refusing to define too closely and narrowly the central experiences of the Christian faith; as a devotional practice, contrasting with the clamour of the world; and as an action of power, imposed upon minorities and subordinates as a means of hegemonic rule — silences, if you like, of omission, commission and oppression. The book had its origins in the Gifford Lectures of 2012, and its romp-like nature betrays those origins. His moral conclusions would bear more explanation or unpicking. Even so, it is a stimulating survey of an important area, which should, properly and ironically, lead to more discussion.


For some reason, it appears to be common currency that I have an animus against George Herbert, the poet of Bemerton and the ideal priest of Anglicanism. Far from it, and John Drury's exemplary biography of an exemplary life shows why. Drury recognizes that work takes place in context, and unlike some biographies, which treat Herbert's life and times as mere prologue to the timeless poems, places his writing in the context of the tumultuous seventeenth century. Herbert had the great good fortune to die before the chaos of the English Civil Wars, but that doesn't mean that his life was quiet or provincial. Drury skilfully weaves Herbert's life and times and work together into a seamless whole, using the highest and most lapidary English to do so (those of you who have read his earlier *Painting The Word* know how good Drury's exploration of art through language can be). An essential book for understanding the English language and the English church.

Tim Ling (ed.) *Moving on in Ministry: Discernment for Times of Transition and Change* (Church House Publishing, 2013)

If your ministry lasts longer than Herbert's bare three years in Wiltshire, then at some point you will be moving on. Very little reflection on the theological and ecclesiological implications of mobile ministry has been undertaken and Tim Ling's collection of essays is an attempt to begin a remedy. Setting aside my own chapter (on the theological resources we might find in the movies), may I commend Mark Pryce's chapter on R. S. Thomas 'A Pilgrimage to My Own Self?' Thomas, a priest of the Church in Wales, and defiantly unEnglish, was one of great poets in English of the latter part of the twentieth century. His wrestling with the silences of God and the obdurate nature of pastoral ministry can provide ample resources for a reflective ministry in his successors today. Thomas, like Herbert, deserves to be read, and Pryce's chapter is a good introduction to the pastoral reading of this poetry.