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Elliott House

CHRISTMAS: A MUSICAL POSTSCRIPT

A friend gave me for Christmas a CD I did not know existed. It happens to be the finest recording of traditional carols and songs I have ever encountered. Forget the tinsel trash of the "three tenors" and the postured artifice of Mme. Jessye Norman and the overblown tawdriness of the Boston Pops. This record features one singer and a small baroque orchestra. The singer is baritone Max van Egmond, familiar from many recordings of Bach and other baroque music. His voice is beautiful, his diction is perfect (in the John McCormack class) and his singing simple and elegant, free of all pretense. The accompanying small orchestra is pure delight.

As an antidote to the customary bloating and blowziness of most Christmas musical presentations this will cleanse your ears and refresh your spirit.

It was given to me by Julian Friedman, who is expert in searching out such musical truffles. He is very devout in his Jewish faith, but appreciates the Christian story and is (I dare say) better informed about the New Testament than ninety-per-cent of Church-goers.

Anyhow, prepare for next Christmas by ordering Smithsonian ND040 (A22008). If you don't like it I'll buy it back from you! The subtitle is Sweet Was the Song. What a wonderful recording! You have to hunt for a copy via the Internet, or perhaps from Tower Records. It is not available from the Smithsonian. -The Rev. Dr. William H. Ralston

ELLIOTT HOUSE

This past week our house of studies held its inaugural seminar. Sixteen participants from all over North America came to take part in lectures on Plato's Republic, given by Dr. D. K. House, of Dalhousie University and the University of Kings College, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Old friends, Fr. Buechner and Fr. Bright, attended, as well as clergy from Savannah, Mr. Johnson of Independent Presbyterian Church, and Fr. Willoughby from St. Paul's. Fr. Jay James, whom I met twelve years ago at a meeting at Forth Worth, came from Raleigh, North Carolina, and four courageous clergy drove from Ontario by car through three

separate snow storms in order to be with us! We were very pleased to have the Dean of Nashotah House Seminary, the Very Rev'd Dr. Robert Munday, also in attendance.

The seminar began without pomp and circumstance, but not without the ease and charm of southern hospitality. Mrs. Neil Victor, the Administrator of Elliott House, arranged for accommodations and provided the materials, and with the help of her most talented husband, prepared an elegant dinner the evening before, as well as luncheons each of the days we met. The beautiful surroundings of the Parish House made for a most comfortable setting in which we thought through, once again, one of the formative texts of the classical world and therefore of the Christian Church.

Dr. House's exposition of the Republic was nothing less than exquisite. His thorough articulation of the argument guided us in what is a most sublime work of ancient philosophy. The Republic is, of course, only one of Plato's dialogues, which all together provide the beginnings of philosophical reason for the theology of the Christian Church in both the West and the East.

It is for this recollection of the great texts of our tradition that the Elliott House of Studies was formed. We have no intention of becoming a seminary. Rather, Elliott House is committed to the formation of clergy, especially those recently ordained, or actively pursuing ordination, and also to the continued growth of those who have spent some time in the ministry already. Our seminar this past week was structured for parish priests who have only short periods of time available to them in which they may continue their studies. The main program will be a year's internship for students to experience the Church year through the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, and to study texts that they have not had the opportunity to study at seminary.

Our concern is with the careful study of the principal texts of our tradition. These great works are neglected in most seminary education, and very often not considered at all in various courses of undergraduate degrees. Tidbits may be read, and accolades sung by secondary scholars, but the great works themselves lie dormant, even hidden, beneath the construction of professional opinion. The reason these works are truly great is because of their inherent thought and argument. They speak for themselves. No doubt they are not easy. At times they may even seem overwhelming. It takes time to work one's way out of the cave into the light of day. But the labor of thought is worth it. It means nothing less than the conversion and education of the soul. Every Christian minister should schedule his time and discipline himself to reflect upon the great works of our tradition, both for his own sake and for the sake of his flock.

Among these great texts stands the Book of Common Prayer. It is of the utmost importance for us. The Prayer Book has the distinctive position of being the special descendent of the developed thought of the Church. The Prayer Book includes the wisdom of many texts of the Christian Church written over the centuries. And therefore the Prayer Book mediates the wisdom of the Spirit through the church to us. Its wisdom is a theological and pious reflection on Holy Scripture. Thus, the form of the Prayer Book is Christian wisdom conveyed by the Church Year. The matter of the Prayer Book is the masterful prose of the very best English that has been or ever will be. Together this form

and matter are an inspired substance, a distinctive way of worship in the Christian religion.

At the center of our program at Elliott House is our intention to form young clergy according to this great liturgical and spiritual text, the Prayer Book. We believe the Prayer Book embodies a knowledge and devotion that far surpasses anything our present church or culture has to offer. To worship with this blessed offspring of centuries of wisdom is to find ourselves once again upon the shoulders of giants: the prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints whose lives were formed by and with and in the Gospel. Finally, through the Prayer Book and the texts of our tradition, all of our reflection and recollection focuses upon Christ Jesus, who is the very center of the biblical story and through whom God is fully and definitively revealed, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit are praised and adored forever. In the end, Elliott House exists for this purpose, and this alone.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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