

February 13, 2011 Anglican Church History Sunday

Guest at 10 am Dr. Robert Moore, preaching from his book Audacious Anglicans

The sermon on the same topic was given at 8 am by the rector.

We are looking at those who have been salt and light for the church through the lens of a wonderful book by Dr. Moore, the former High Commissioner of Guyana, church historian, and member of the Primate's theological commission. The author's goal is to correct the impression that being Anglican is not very exciting or remarkable. Here are three portraits of Anglicans fighting for social justice and changing the world.

William Wilberforce was born to comfort and wealth in 1759; his father died when he was 9 and he was sent to live with an aunt who was partial to 'methodistical piety'. This religious enthusiasm was seen to 'sap the manliness of the English character' and he was soon returned to schooling at home. He entered Cambridge at 17 and then at 21 won a seat in Parliament. His own religious conversion challenged his political vocation but friends William Pitt and John Newton thought he might be called to focus on the abolition of the slave trade. Piety, principles and politics were woven into one strand.

Evangelicals and Quakers became good allies in their opposition to the interests of West India; King George III felt that the Bible justified slavery. Inspired by John Wesley and others Wilberforce introduced a 12 point motion to Parliament. Opposition was fierce; he was castigated, lampooned and ignored. Wilberforce's even temperament and his optimism gave him an ability to spring back after each defeat. After 20 years of disappointment, in 1807 a bill to abolish the slave trade was passed into law. It would be many more years before slavery itself was outlawed. Wilberforce retired in 1825 and died in 1833. He has been considered an authorized interpreter of a national conscience.

Li Tim Oi was born in Hong Kong, then ruled by Britain, in 1907. She was the daughter of the second wife of her father; a man who embraced Western thought in many areas, he educated his daughter. There was no traditional binding of feet or mind; she trained in lay ministry at the theological college in Guangzhou. She was ordained a deacon in 1941 and served a refugee community in Macao for many years. This ordination occurred just a few months before the Japanese invasion. This struggle meant that it was nearly impossible for a priest to reach her community to celebrate the eucharist so her bishop, in pastoral response to the needs of the people, ordained her the first woman priest in 1944.

Her ordination was condemned by many – the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth conference, the Chinese House of Bishops; ultimately renunciation was required either of her or her bishop. She resigned her papers but kept the ordination in her heart and soul as an indelible mark. As the Communist revolution ensued she endured many tortures as she had under the Japanese; the red guards destroyed her home and library and her health and eyesight suffered significantly. When the churches reopened in China in 1979 she functioned again as a priest. Then she journeyed to Canada in 1981 at the age of 74. Her orders and faithfulness were eventually recognized at a service in Westminster Abbey in 1984 and in 1988 she was a special guest at Lambeth palace. Widely recognized in the United States as well, she received many honors before her death in 1992.

Many of us are well familiar with Desmond Tutu but not so much with the man who influenced him as a young boy. Trevor Huddleston was born in 1913, well educated at Oxford and Cambridge and eventually priested in 1930 becoming a member of a religious order that combined Anglo-Catholic liturgy with social gospel action. His order sent him to South Africa in 1943 to an area of Johannesburg named Sophiatown; it was a place of great joy for him. In 1948 the Nationalist party created an Apartheid state which severely limited the rights and dignity of native born South Africans. In 1949 he became superior of the Community of Resurrection bringing him into a focus of conflict and protest. He was visibly vocally political and struggled to confront injustice. He wrote Naught For Your Comfort in 1956 after watching Sophiatown bulldozed for white settlements and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 mandating church release of schooling to the government. In effect this meant only trades if anything for the blacks.

Worn out he returned to England where he was made a bishop in 1960, taking the diocese of Masai in Tanzania, the diocese of Stepney in 1968 and the diocese of Mauritius and the Indian Ocean in 1978. President of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement he spoke twice at the United Nations and at numerous rallies. In 1994 he was able to vote in the first democratic elections in South Africa where he had become its citizen and its advocate. He is buried in the church in what was Sophiatown. His memorial was held in 1998 in Westminster Abbey.

Early in his days in Africa he visited a twelve year old boy who had been hospitalized for tuberculosis. That child left the hospital converted to Anglicanism; his name was Desmond Tutu.....

Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera