

ATR/86:2

BOOK REVIEWS

387

may be easy, but expediency makes a poor God" (p. 89). And again, in thinking about major gifts, he states: "If promotion of Christian generosity were taken seriously, the Church would receive many more 'major gifts' than it does" (pp. 98-99). Throughout this book O'Hurley-Pitts is relentless in his focus on the difference between a secular approach to fund-raising which focuses on the gift rather than the giver, and a concept of Christian stewardship which focuses on the giver (God) and the difference this can, has, and could make for both individual Christian lives and the church as a whole. The concepts of steward and stewardship focus on the mission of the church, on its particularity and difference, and the ways in which they can be far more effective than contemporary fund-raising in achieving financial stability and spiritual health for the church.

For those of us who have responsibilities in other church-related institutions, O'Hurley-Pitts provides much food for thought. In what ways should seminaries, for example, be using the concept of stewardship as a way to understand fund-raising needs, versus the models so common in the university? And, no matter the answer to that question, seminaries and other faith-based organizations related to the church are challenged to be involved in the teaching of stewardship as a theological concept central to Christian faith and vocation, something the author sees little evidence of at the present time.

O'Hurley-Pitts has written a provocative book which provides much food for thought as well as some concrete strategies for the understanding and the doing of Christian stewardship, wherever we find ourselves.

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Selling the Church: The English Parish in Law, Commerce, and Religion, 1350-1550. By Robert C. Palmer. Studies in Legal History. Chapel Hill, N.C. and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. xi + 330 pp. \$49.95 (cloth).

The implications of the English Reformation have long preoccupied historians. Robert Palmer's contribution to current historiography, however, both promises and delivers a novel and engaging examination of the ways in which the reforms effected between 1529 and 1540 dramatically altered the structure and character of the English church and its place in society. This excellent book offers far more than merely another new perspective on a

much studied series of events: its conclusions demand nothing less than a thorough reassessment of the actions of King Henry VIII and his servant, Thomas Cromwell.

Palmer lays out a series of provocative arguments in clear, concise fashion, much as he did in his earlier work, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death, 1348-1381* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Indeed, this book is intended as a long addendum to that study, and should be read as such. In the century and a half or so after the Black Death carried away more than a third of the population, he argues, the English church became thoroughly commercialized. By means of a complex network of regulations that governed the collection of tithes and mortuary dues, control over glebe lands and, above all, the leasing of parishes, clerics grew increasingly involved in securing for themselves economic benefit from church lands, rather than in providing spiritual ministrations to their flocks. They did so with the tacit support of the secular prince, and more particularly with vigorous resort to common law procedures that protected their economic interests. So effective, in fact, was the support of the common law that "selling the church" became part and parcel of the very fabric of English parish life. Moreover, in the decades after 1348 the changes effected to the laws governing church property, like those that regulated property in other contexts, were designed chiefly to compel lessees of church land to live up to their primary obligations as generators of income for their lessors. The Henrician statutes of 1529, then the dissolution of the monasteries that began in 1536, had dramatic—and, according to Palmer, revolutionary—consequences for the English parish and its commercialization. Spiritual and material conditions were never the same thereafter and, given the central importance of the church, neither was the fabric of English life.

Palmer begins his challenging interpretation of the significance of the English Reformation by devoting several chapters to a study of parish life before the enactment of the legislation of 1529. There are useful reviews here of the extent to which clerics, great and small, secular and monastic, interacted with the lay population, and a careful examination of the ways in which the practice of leasing parishes affected the spiritual lives of parishioners. New to this narrative is the author's reliance on the voluminous litigation of the court of Common Pleas concerning tithes, mortuary fees, and especially parish leases for evidence in support of his arguments. His exhaustive survey of these sources leaves the reader in little doubt that the church of the late medieval and early Tudor periods was much more actively concerned with "this-worldly" matters than even its most vociferous critics have alleged.

In the second part of his work, and using the same body of record materials, Palmer sets out in meticulous detail the ways in which the Henrician legislation effected reform among the clergy by disbarring its members from

using the law to further their commercial interests and enrich themselves. He offers a comprehensive review not merely of the contents of the statutes of 1529 that attacked abuses in the matter of probate fees, mortuary dues, pluralism, absenteeism, leasing, and clerical participation in commercial activity generally, but takes issue in particular with the dominant historiography of this period, which almost unanimously holds that the legislation was ineffective in reforming clerical morals. Declaring this school of thought as "completely defective," Palmer shows that first the statutes and their rigorous reinforcement, then the whole process that accompanied the dissolution of the monasteries, brought about nothing less than a revolutionary alteration of English society, "because they changed the whole character of the parish and the life of the clerical establishment" (pp. 206-207). Henceforth, the great majority of churchmen were excluded firmly from participation in the commercial sector and confined largely to the provision of the spiritual nourishment of millions of parishioners. Ironically, he concludes, it was Henry VIII, that most disobedient of papal sons, who finally gave real and meaningful effect to the spiritual ideals of the medieval church.

Palmer's book is a tour de force, bold in its claims, thought-provoking in its analysis, painstakingly researched, and compellingly argued. Not all will accept the clarity of purpose that he attributes to the figure of Henry VIII. Nor is this a book for the uninitiated, and readers unfamiliar with the intricacies of, and the records generated by, the common law courts will find it challenging. Difficult it may well prove for some, but no one who reads it will come away with their opinions of the English Reformation unchanged.

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Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian-American Theology in the Making. By Peter C. Phan. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003. xvii + 253 pp. \$30.00 (paper).

In this thoughtful book, Phan collects three instructive essays on theological methods under "Part 1: Liberation and Theology," and eight on Asian proposals for Christology and ecclesiology under "Part 2: Inculturation." These essays reflect his views on the making and promises of Asian-American theology.