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BOOK & DVD REVIEWS

Archbishop Justin Welby: The Road to Canterbury.

By Andrew Atherstone. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2013 145pp. £7.99pb ISBN: 978-0232529944

‘Who is Justin Welby?’ was the question many asked on the announcement of the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Having spent only a year on the episcopal bench before election, compared with an average of fifteen years for the last ten Archbishops of Canterbury, his ‘sudden rise through the ecclesiastical ranks has been meteoric’. As such, Atherstone’s biography makes for captivating reading for two chief reasons.

Firstly, the subject of the work, Justin Welby, is an interesting character with a remarkable story. From the sadness of a broken childhood home, through the privilege of an Eton and Cambridge education, to succeeding at the big end of town, Welby’s was not the typical path to Anglican ministry. Furthermore, his ministry has extended from the tranquillity of a Warwickshire village to the chaos of warlord controlled areas of Nigeria. Probably not since Thomas Becket has an Archbishop of Canterbury come as close to assassination as Welby, living with a price on his head (the grand sum of \$30!) and escaping death on numerous occasions. His ministry has demonstrated bravery, passion and sincerity as he has contended for the Gospel in a wide variety of situations. He has had an eclectic mix of formative influences; from the Conservative Evangelical Cambridge church he belonged to after conversion, to Holy Trinity Brompton, to the Benedictines, each providing shape to his thinking and theology in their own ways. Atherstone highlights how Welby has encouraged those he has led with his two favourite words, ‘Radical’ and ‘Risk’. These words are refreshingly empowering within the often lethargically conservative Church of England. Welby has used his experience in the financial sector to speak boldly, denouncing greed and promoting generosity. He has insisted that the parish churches are the centre of the diocese, not the bishop, and he is passionate for evangelism and personal salvation. In short, there is much to like in the subject of Atherstone’s biography.

The second reason that this is an enjoyable read is the book’s easily accessible nature. Atherstone achieved a remarkable feat in composing such an entertaining and engaging book in little more than two months, with a very limited prior knowledge of the subject. The information is well sourced with plenty of footnotes and Atherstone offers perceptive interpretations such as Welby’s ‘practical spirituality’ of praying for his parish while doing the family ironing, ‘demonstrating devotion both to his family and his parishioners.’ No doubt there will be much, much more written on Justin Welby, but Atherstone’s timely and readable biography is certainly an excellent introduction.

Ed Loane

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Marriage – Learn about God’s design for marriage.

DVD Produced by Lovewise, 2013. £20.00. www.lovewise.org.uk

This is a DVD resource about God’s design for marriage, aimed at young people between the ages of 14 and 18. There are four sessions, each lasting about 10 minutes. The themes covered are:- What is marriage? The benefits of marriage. The role of sex in marriage, and practical advice on relationships. Sessions I and II could be used together in one meeting, as could sessions III and IV. The DVD is accompanied by a leader’s resource booklet, which includes questions for discussion,

and mention of pertinent Bible passages.

The content is entirely sound and biblical, and it addresses vital issues such as the perils and pitfalls of sexual intimacy before marriage. In addition to the teaching, there are interviews with married couples, who speak frankly and helpfully about their relationship.

If I had a criticism, I would say that bearing in mind the tele-visual age in which we now live, the presentation could be more lively, and some young people may regard certain aspects of the material as a bit “twee.” But all in all, this would be a good course for use with a church youth group.

John Cheeseman