

The Church of England is a mystery inside an enigma. On the one hand, there is the Establishment hierarchy of prelates, at the head of a congregation still dominated by elderly, middle-class people of settled opinions. On the other, there is the thoughtful and innovative body which has provided some of the most courageous political protest of recent years. On race, disarmament and urban poverty in particular, Anglicans have repeatedly proved a thorn in the flesh of the temporal authorities, the more irksome because, when the conservatives are in office, church criticism feels like a backbench revolt.

The development out of a formerly dominant heritage of social complacency has deep roots: Christian socialism is as old as, if not older than, the secular variety. Its rapid development in the past few decades, however, owes much to the imaginative energy of practical people such as Trevor Huddleston. This perceptive collection of essays marking Huddleston's 75th birthday shows that he is the kind of religious person (Mother Theresa is another) whose holiness causes unease among the self-righteous, anger among the powerful, and whose discomfiting example leads prime ministers to deliver long, blush-making sermons about their own personal credos.

Huddleston's admirers present him as a man who combines humility, warmth, impatience of humbug and terrier-like determination. But the main theme, and the aspect which makes him so frightening to politicians, is his selflessness. One of the most moving testimonials is from Desmond Tutu, who has known Huddleston since his own childhood, and once startled the Lambeth Conference by announcing that he used to sit on Trevor's lap. "He did not laugh like many white people — only with his teeth", writes

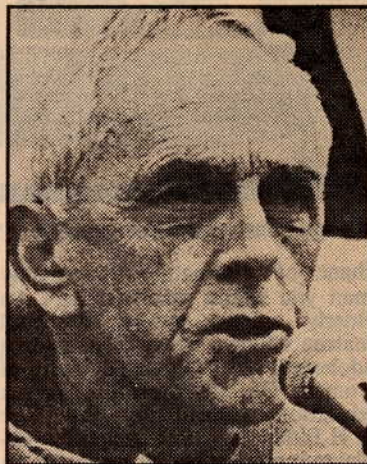
Turbulent priests still rattle their rulers

TREVOR HUDDLESTON
Essays on his Life and Work
edited by Deborah Duncan Honore
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Ben Pimlott

Tutu. "He laughed with his whole body, his whole being, and that endeared him to many black people." Tutu recalls how, as an insignificant 13-year-old in hospital for 20 months with TB, he was visited by Huddleston at least once a week.

Where did it all come from? We are told little about Huddleston's background. He spent his early adulthood at Oxford. Then, in 1943, as a novice member of the (Anglo-Catholic) Community of the Resurrection, a monastic order, he was dispatched, fatefully, to South Africa. It was a time of rapid change in the dominion, unnoticed by the world. Afrikaner nationalism was on the march. In Sophiatown, a black township near Johannesburg, Huddleston was in the front line. When Dr Verwoerd's National party won the 1948 election, the new regime set about eliminating Sophiatown and replacing it with a white suburb. Huddleston, the English representative of an unhappy church, forged his own political personality in the struggle against this outrage, becoming in the process a Gandhi-like figure to the black liberation movement.



Huddleston: terrier-like determination

In 1956 the Community of the Resurrection unexpectedly ordered Huddleston back to England, perhaps responding (as one writer alleges) to government pressure. As a move to neutralise him it failed. Huddleston's influence as a shaper of international liberal (and Christian) opinion was enhanced by exile from his adopted country. In his book, *Naught for Your Comfort*, Huddleston used his own observation of injustice to chip away at the flint of the received wisdom on South Africa. He also admitted to an obsession: "I must try to discover and relate that strange but deeply real truth which so many have experienced: the

witchery of Africa — the way it lays hold of your heart and will not let go."

The witchery retained its grip, first in Tanzania (the book includes a tribute from Julius Nyerere) and then in the diocese of Stepney, in east London, which he took over in 1968. There were many tinpot Verwoerds in the East End bishopric, home of a large Bangladeshi community. The British National party declared the area "a stinking cess-pit that is a mecca for every black pimp and dope addict who steps off an immigrant boat". Fighting racism in Britain and South African apartheid (through the Anti-Apartheid movement) went hand in hand.

Huddleston's last clerical post before his official retirement was on the island of Mauritius, where he held the engaging title of Archbishop of the Indian Ocean. Why did he not get York or Canterbury? Partly, perhaps, because he was a campaigner more than an administrator.

But there could also be other reasons why he was kept on the margins of church power, and why in his sprightly old age this morally-concerned government has declined to fete him. "Passionately he has pleaded for Christian involvement in the struggle against the deprivation of inner cities, the appalling tide of unemployment, and the loss of dignity for many thousands of young people," writes François Piachaud, Prebendary of St Paul's Cathedral. "And he has been outspoken in criticising the policies that, in the cause of individual freedom, permit aggressive self-interest and materialism to flourish and result in a divisive society."

If there are exponents of a new, as well as of an old, theology who treat such attitudes with suspicion, there are many thousands of others, non-Christians as well as Christians, who feel gratitude and for whom Huddleston's attitudes offer inspiration and hope.

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