

Book of the month

Ian McCormack is delighted to find a new edition of a classic exposition of the faith



THE FAITH

Instructions on the Christian Faith

Raymond Raynes CR

American Church Union, 100pp, pbk

No ISBN, £5 - Available from

The Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield

One of the joys of a private retreat at the house of a religious community is the serendipitous finds in the retreat house library. In my own case on a recent trip to Mirfield, it was actually the bookshop which yielded up the greatest gift, but the principle is still the same. I had heard of this book before, but not seen it anywhere available to buy, so it was a joy to find that the Community of the Resurrection is now selling this work by one of its greatest Superiors.

First published in 1961, and edited by Raynes' biographer Nicholas Mosley, this new edition has been published by the American Church Union, with CR's permission, and edited by Christine Sunderland. Mosley has written a new foreword. A debt of gratitude is owed to all involved for making this small but valuable book available to the Church once again.

The Faith is not an attempt at systematic theology, but then Raynes was not a systematic or particularly academic theologian. What he was, as Mosley's biography (a wonderful combination of theology, churchy gossip, high church photos and inspiring accounts of a life lived in the service of Jesus Christ) makes clear, was a visionary, a man inspired not only by the aweful power and majesty of God, but also by the Gospel imperative to preach, teach and *live* the Good News. Something of the passionate love of God with which this stark, austere and strangely intriguing priest was gripped comes across in this book. As Mosley says in the preface to the first edition, 'the missions that Father Raynes took during his last years had an extraordinary effect upon his hearers. He was ill, and his appearance was gaunt and startling. He spoke with no rhetoric, but with an intensity that kept people transfixed night after night who had come at first only from convention.'

As that passage suggests, *The Faith* is a series of edited transcripts of talks given by Raynes in 1957, in Denver, Colorado, just a few months before he died. Mosley says that he tried to keep Raynes' distinctive style, and he succeeds. Even after further editing by Sunderland to make the text more easily accessible to modern readers in a secular culture,

Raynes' style does indeed shine through.

The style is generally one of short, punchy sentences, which make the book a treasury of quotations for preachers as well as a straightforward guide to the faith. So, for example: 'love can never save itself. That is the one thing love can't do. Love saves others, but it cannot save itself, because the moment love tries to save itself, it becomes selfish.' And again, 'What shall we do with Jesus Christ, who is called the Son of God? We can receive him or reject him, but there is no other alternative. We must do one or the other.'

Each of the twenty chapters is also very short, meaning that the book can be read in one sitting, or dipped into and out of over a period of time. Either way, many passages bear careful reading and meditative consideration. Among them, the explanation of why the Mass is a sacrifice, the descriptions of the other sacraments, the chapter on prayer and the brief chapter entitled 'Vocation' are particularly fine.

The two passages quoted above both come from the chapter on Repentance, which finds Fr Raynes in typically uncompromising form: 'Some say they don't like confession. Of course they don't like it. We don't like going to the dentist, but if we want to be delivered from pain, we go... The Church can't compel us to go to confession; they can't compel us to brush their teeth. But it is

a good thing to brush our teeth and it is a good thing to go to confession.'

This chapter is typical of the book: firmly based on Scripture and the teaching of the Church, direct and clear in its presentation of the Catholic faith, and yet imbued with a gentle wit and a deep knowledge of human nature. 'Theoretically we are all against sin, but usually against other people's sin.' And how about this, the conclusion to Raynes' discussion of the sacrament of reconciliation, to make any priest who might read this book sit up and think: 'Every priest on the day of his personal judgement when he stands before the judgement seat of Christ will be asked by Our Lord, 'Did you teach the people this way of forgiveness?'' That is typical Raynes; cutting through the detritus which we so often build up around ourselves, teaching the Catholic faith in its demanding but beautiful fullness, and asking the questions which we may not want to hear, but which will lead us ever closer to the Lord. In short, I wish I had heard these talks.

