SIDNEY JELLICOE (1906-1973): Scholar, Teacher, Priest and Gentleman

As a teacher, he has been revered for more than twenty years by successive generations of Bishop’s alumnae who knew him as a cautious, widely-read, incredibly learned guide, not only in his specialized fields of Hebrew, Greek and Latin texts, but also as a popular teacher of undergraduate courses in a variety of fields. As lecturer, tutor and friend, he carried his weight of learning with a light, refreshing, often whimsical, sense of humour which delighted both students and colleagues. Though always held in awe by reason of his immense learning, he was known to be one of the most approachable members of the Faculty. No question was too slight (or too stupid, for that matter) for his careful consideration and gentle correction. Not “divines” only, but undergraduates in all disciplines will long remember him with gratitude and affection.

As a Priest, Sidney Jellicoe spent a great deal of his time at Bishop’s training men for the ministry which he so gracefully adorned by the manner and mien of his own life. His love for the Bible, the Church of England and its Prayer Book, and his whole-hearted acceptance of the Christian faith which he believed to be most evidently enshrined therein, never wavered to the last. One of the old school of high Anglican devotion, he disliked change; and particularly change in those things which he believed to be bed-rock absolutes. As Dean of Divinity he was, in the words of one of his favourite O.T. prophets, “a great rock in a weary land”; a man who, in the modern jargon which he disliked, would always “stand up and be counted”. For him, priesthood involved both a public and a private ministry. He could always be found at the altar in St. Mark’s Chapel every Sunday at 8 a.m. and, during the days of Divinity House as an Anglican Theological College (“The Shed”), he was there every other day of the week as well. And he also exercised a faithful secret life of prayer and study which expressed itself in a quiet, ceaseless pastoral ministry. No one ever came to him in vain; none was sick without his knowing, and visiting them, whether they were members of Faculty, Administration, maintenance staff or students. That ministry of pastoral concern, by its very nature, is not widely-known; but Sidney was a Priest to the last, consoling the weary, passing the time of day with all who crossed his path, and exercising an unhurried ministry of friendliness from Harrold Lodge to the Boiler House and back again.

And in all things, as Scholar, Teacher, Priest and Pastor, “The Dean” was a Gentleman at all times, in all places, with all people. Knowing his own mind, and never compromising, he was always tolerant of others, utterly polite and, above all, gentle. Somebody once defined a gentleman as one who is as manly as a man and as gentle as a woman. Sidney Jellicoe was certainly that; and he proved it to us all year by year as he, his wife Winifred, and their daughters Andrea and Ruth, shared their lives with ours and made us the richer by bringing us into the family-life of a true Bishop, Doctor and Father-in-God.

To Winnie, Andrea and Ruth we extend our love and affection; and as we remember Sidney with them in deep gratitude we may well echo the words which Sir Joshua Reynolds uttered in memory of his life-long friend, Dr. Samuel Johnson — another staunch son of the Church of England whose faith in God and the Church never wavered.

“He was a man who never strutted, never tiptoed, and never stopped”. Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace.

Ronald E. Reeve.

Ordained Deacon: 1933; Priest: 1934.
Dean of Divinity, Dean of Theology, Dean Emeritus, Harrold Professor, Bishop’s University (1952-1973).
Author: THE SEPTUAGINT AND MODERN STUDY,