

Protestant influences are a source of pride

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY

Are Protestants spoiling a party? Stuffed shirts? Are they people you might be happy to see run your bank, but with whom you wouldn't spend an evening? These old enough to remember prohibition, bans on card playing and Sunday blue laws will likely agree.

In July, Alain de Botton wrote an op-ed piece for the New York Times about the Modern Library's controversial list of the 100 greatest English language novels of the century. Reflecting on the Modern Library's choice, de Botton wrote that, "A perverse belief dictates that a great work of art must be difficult, an apparent relief of a Protestant association between virtue and a renunciation of earthly pleasures." The italics are mine.

I'm not interested here in whether it makes any sense at all to attempt to identify the 100 greatest English novels of the century.

That battle is being fought elsewhere. What struck me was de Botton's description of Protestantism. Is it true that Protestants link a renunciation of earthly pleasures to virtue? I'll admit that when I read those words, my first reaction was to become defensive. After all, when I think of renouncing earthly pleasures, I think first of monks and nuns — hardly any of whom are Protestants!

And yet, upon reflection, there is a link to be made here. One of the great hopes of the Protestant Reformation was that the serious Christianity of the monasteries and

convents would be taken up by Christians generally.

The reformers harbored the expectation that ordinary Christian people would become as disciplined and committed to their faith as the monks and nuns had been.

Of course, this dream was not to be realized — at least not on the scale the reformers had once hoped. But it is true that where Protestantism flourished, there flourished also a certain asceticism.

Protestants drastically reduced the number of holy days, which, in medieval times, had provided an enormous number of festival days when no one was expected to work. The Protestant reformers introduced the idea that one's labor was an arena for exhibiting the glory of God.

Where Protestants flourished, the rising urban middle-class, in particular, learned to approach daily work with the same systematic intensity as the monk had approached his prayers.

At first, when the merchant, the blacksmith, the printer and the mason began to treat their work as a holy calling, they brought to it no great expectation of material rewards.

The reward of this scrupulous honesty, this careful attention to detail was spiritual. One's work was offered to God. It was not just a way to earn a living, but was also a spiritual exercise.

Long hours, work disciplines — excessive drinking, gambling, idleness — had become undesirable. But to and behold, those who adopted the systematic pursuit of work as a holy calling began to get rich.

Long hours, careful accounting, concern for quality, personal austerity — all

Please see BYARS, B7

St. David's loses pastor after 22 years

By RARE PERT TEMPLETON
SPECIAL WRITER

When Father Gary Callahan answered the call to serve as head pastor of St. David's Episcopal Church in Southfield back in 1976 he never thought his assignment would last more than two decades.

"I've always felt that you shouldn't be any one place too long. It's not always good for the congregation and I was surprised to have remained at this parish for 22 years," Callahan said.

Currently learning to talk about his work at St. David's in the past tense, Callahan has accepted a new post at St. Martin of Tours in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

A former parishioner at St. David's recommended Callahan for the opening which will have him serving as head pastor at St. Martin's in early September.

"I'm very fond of all the people here but the congregation is in good shape to take on a life of its own now," Callahan said. "If I felt they needed me I'd stay but it's a calling process and so I'm looking forward to new challenges."

Jacob Jones, who has served as the senior warden at St. David's for the last two years and in that post worked very closely with Father Callahan, has mixed emotions about Callahan's departure.

"It had to happen it couldn't have happened at a better time as we are strong in membership, spirit and finances at this time," Jacob said. "We are very well positioned right now and that is to his credit. But this is truly a tremendous loss for our parish."

Looking back

Callahan, a native of New York, has fulfilled all three of his ministry assignments in Michigan. The first was as an Assistant Pastor at St. Luke's in Kalamazoo and his second was as Pastor at a mission church just north of Grand Rapids



The Rev. Gary Callahan shortly after he arrived at St. David

Steady growth

Today St. David's has more than 400 members and about 26 percent of them have been in attendance since Callahan arrived.

"I've hopefully provided some stability during this kind of change," Callahan said. "This is a place where people need to be incorporated into the church because people seem to come and go unless you find a way of involving them in church."

Getting others to get involved was Callahan's specialty according to Jones. He could get most anyone to take part without "pontificating" or "dictating" things.

"He has very strong people skills and always talked to you as a peer versus a superior," Jones said. "He's direct but he doesn't tell you what to do he says what he feels and that comes from the heart."

Those personal skills served many of the elderly residents at St. Anne's Mend Retirement Community where Callahan served as chaplain. The facility is right next door to St. David's Church making Callahan ready and available to serve any of the facilities 120 residents. He offered weekly church services, a bible study program and upon request, personal pastoral services.

"Our whole congregation will be sorry to see him go. He has been an integral part of our lives both spiritually and socially," Jacob said. "Yet we are very happy for him as well. This will be a new challenge for him."

"I think it's a good time for us to leave and good for the congregation," Callahan said, referring to himself and his wife, Barbara. "A church needs new blood and new ideas and it's not that we've grown stagnant but they are doing well here now."

Callahan will preside over his last service at St. David's on Sunday, Aug. 23. There will be a reception in his honor on Saturday, Aug. 22 from 4 to 7 p.m. at the church.

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