

# bookreviews

## Signposts to Reformation ways

### A FRUITFUL EXHORTATION

A Guide to the Homilies

By Gerald Bray

Latimer Trust. 134 pages. £7.99

ISBN 978 1 906 327 248

**The 'historic formularies' of the Church of England, to which every deacon, presbyter and bishop has to declare assent and belief, are enumerated in the ordination services as the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the *Ordinal*.**

But in truth there is a fourth component: the two books of *Homilies*. Article 11 of the 39 (on justification by faith) refers to one of the Homilies (Book 1, Homily 3) for the full elucidation of this seminal Reformation statement, while Article 35 teaches that the two Books of Homilies 'contain a godly and wholesome Doctrine,' absolutely necessary for the Church's laypeople to understand. Simply put, the two Books of Homilies are

the official sermons of the Anglican Church.

And yet, in the centuries since their composition (the last Homily was written in 1571), they have suffered a progressive neglect far more pronounced than that of the Prayer Book and Articles. They are now entirely obscure to all but a few devoted Anglicans of a somewhat antiquarian bent. Their length, language and 16th-century concerns and applications put off many would-be readers.

### Providing a bridge

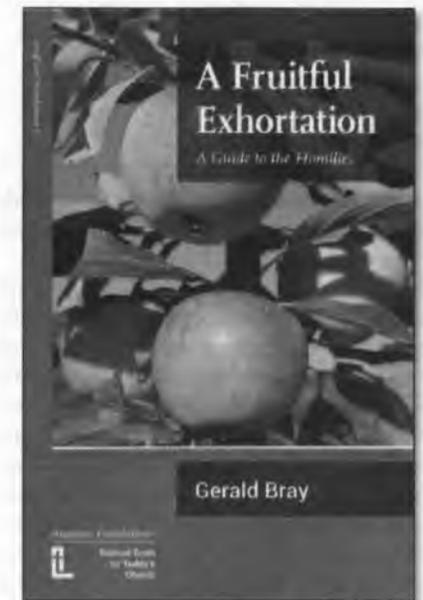
Gerald Bray's guidebook is an attempt 'to provide modern readers with a bridge that will give them access to what the Homilies teach' and in that modest aim it is an undoubted success.

There is a brief but valuable historical introduction to each of the two Books of Homilies (the first book produced under Edward VI by Thomas Cranmer; the second

under Elizabeth I by John Jewel), but the bulk of this short guide simply comprises a series of digests – with an introductory paragraph, selected quotations and occasional editorial notes – of each of the 33 Tudor sermons.

The nature of this work means that Bray's book does not really serve on its own as a doctrinal primer, pastoral manual or devotional resource: rather, it signposts to the Homilies, which do. It provides a reference guide that one might read once through and then dip back in to find where to look in the Homilies themselves.

It will reward Anglican readers with a fuller understanding of and appreciation for the Reformed evangelical heritage and denominational distinctives of their church – something that, with the current debates in the Church of England and the advent of new Anglican groups such as AMiE, is perhaps more important now than for



several generations previously.

**Tom Woolford,**  
ordinand at Oak Hill College