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March 2014
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Forward in Mission

**Damian Feeney and Philip North
reflect on the mission of the Church**

Also in this issue:

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- Bishop Peter Ramsden does mission PNG style
- Digby Anderson considers going to church

parish directory

BEXHILL on SEA St Augustine's, Cooden Drive, TN39 3AZ
Sunday: Mass at 8am, Parish Mass with Junior Church at 10am. Further details: Father Robert Coates ssc on 01424 210 785

BIRMINGHAM St Agatha, Stratford Road, Sparkbrook (B11 1QT) "If it is worth believing in, it is worth travelling for" Sunday Mass 11am. Secure Parking. Canon John Herve ssc - 0121 449 2790

BISHOP AUCKLAND St Helen Auckland, Manor Road, West Auckland Medieval church, *Forward in Faith*, ABC. Sunday: Sung Mass 10am, Evensong and Benediction 6pm. Weekday Mass: Mon 7pm, Tues, Thur, Fri, Sat 9.30am, Wed 10am, Rosary Mon 6.30pm. Parish Priest: Canon Robert McTeer ssc 01388 604152 www.sthelenschurch.co.uk

BLACKPOOL St Stephen on the Cliffs, Holmfield Road, North Shore ABC, Forward in Faith, SSWSH Parish. Vicar: Canon Andrew Sage ssc. Sundays: Said Mass 9am, Solemn Mass (Traditional Language) 10.30am, Evening Service 6pm; easy access and loop. Tel: 01253 351484 www.ststephenblackpool.co.uk

BOSTON LINCOLNSHIRE St Nicholas, Skirbeck Boston's oldest Parish Church. *Forward in Faith* Parish under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Richmond. Sunday: Low Mass 8am (1st and 3rd), Sung Mass 9.30am. Daily Mass, offices, benediction and confessions as displayed on notice boards. Rector: Fr Paul Noble SSC 01205 362734 www.forwardinfaithlincs.org.uk/stnicholasboston.html

BOURNEMOUTH St Ambrose, West Cliff Road, BH4 8BE. *A Forward in Faith Parish, Resolutions ABC in place.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass BCP, 10am Sung Mass Traditional Ceremonial, 6pm Evensong, 2nd Sunday of the month Choral Evensong with Benediction. Parish Priest: Fr Adrian Pearce SSC 01202 911569; Parish office 01202 766772. Email: afpear2@gmail.com

BOURNEMOUTH St Francis of Assisi, Charminster Road (corner of East Way) *A Forward in Faith Parish* under the care of the Bishop of Richmond. *Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass, Parish Mass 10am, Evening Service 6.30pm - first Sunday of each month. Parish Priest: Fr David Wastie www.stfrancis-bournemouth.org.uk

Bowburn, Durham Christ the King, Forward in Faith, ABC. Sunday: 11am Sung Mass and Sunday School; Weekday Mass: Wed 9.30am, Fri 6.30pm; Evening Prayer and Benediction 5.30pm last Saturday of month; Parish Priest: Fr John Livesley ssc 01388 814817

BRADFORD St Chad, Toller Lane (B6144, 1 mile from city centre). Sunday services: Low Mass 8.30am, Solemn Mass 10.45am, Evensong and Benediction 6.30pm. Weekday Masses 8am (except Wednesday 7.30pm and Thursday 9.15am). Parish Priest: Canon Ralph Crowe ssc 01274 543957. *Resolutions ABC.* English Missal/BCP www.stchads.dial.pipex.com

BRIDPORT St Swithun *Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: Low Mass 8am; Sung Mass 9.30am, Evening Prayer and Benediction second Sunday 6pm. Weekday Masses: Thur 10am. During interregnum please contact the Revd Duncan Wilson on 01308 420651

BRIGHTON WAGNER GROUP The Annunciation (11am) Fr Michael Wells 01273 681431. **St Bartholomew's** (11am) Fr. David Clues 01273 620491. **St Martin's** (10am) Fr Trevor Buxton 01273 604687. **St Michael's** (10.30am) Fr Robert Fayes 01273 727362. **St Patrick's** (10.30am) Fr Steven Underdown 01273 747889. **St Paul's** (11am) Fr Robert Fayes 01273 727362. (Sunday Principal Mass times in brackets.)

BRISTOL Christ Church, Broad Street, Old City Centre BS1 2EJ

Resolutions ABC. Sunday 11am Choral Eucharist, 6.30pm Choral Evensong with Anthem and Sermon. Georgian gem, Prayer Book services, robed men and boys' choir, Renatus Harris organ. Tues, Thurs and major holy days: 1.05pm Eucharist. Regular recitals and concerts (see website). During Interregnum contact Roger Metcalfe,

Churchwarden on 01275 332851 www.christchurchcitybristol.org

BROMLEY St George, Bickley Sunday: Low Mass 8am, Sung Mass 10.30am. Daily Masses: Tues 9.30am, Wed 10am, Thurs 10am, Fri 9.30am and 6.30pm, Sat 9.30am. Times of Confession and other information from Fr Owen Higgs on 020 8467 3809

CARDIFF near rail, bus, Millennium Stadium, city centre and Bay Daily Mass **St Mary, Bute Street** Sunday: Solemn Mass 11am; **St Dyfrig** and **St Samson, Pentre Gardens** Sunday: Solemn Mass 9.30am. Parish Priest: Fr Graham Francis 02920 487777. Associate Priest: Fr David Morris 029 2221 2177

CHARD The Good Shepherd, Fumham. *Resolutions ABC* Sunday: Sung Mass 9.45am, Solemn Evensong and Benediction (3rd Sunday only) 6pm. Weekday Masses: Tues 10am, Wed 6.30pm (with Healing and Reconciliation on the 4th Wed of the month). Contact: Fr Jeff Williams 01460 419527 www.churchofthegoodshepherd-chard.weebly.com



SALISBURY - St Martin

CHESTERFIELD St Paul, Hasland, Derbyshire Sunday: Sung Mass 9.45am (Family Mass 1st Sunday), Evening Prayer 3.30pm. Masses: Tues 7.15pm (Benediction last Tues of month), Frid 12 noon, Sat 8.30am. **St James, Temple Normanton, Chesterfield, Derbyshire** Sunday: Parish Mass 11.30am, Thur: Mass 7.15pm. Fr Malcolm Ainscough SSC 01246 232486

CHOPWELL Saint John the Evangelist NE17 7AN *Forward in Faith Parish ABC* Sunday - Sung Mass 10am. Daily Office & Mass as displayed. Parish Priest: Fr Paul R Murray ssc 01207 561248 p.r.murray@durham.anglican.org

COLCHESTER St Barnabas Church, Abbott's Road, Old Heath, Colchester *A Forward in Faith Parish. Resolutions ABC.* Sunday: Mass 8am (Said) and 10am (Sung). Weekday Masses: Mon 6pm, Tues 10am, Thur 7pm, Holy Days 7.30pm. Check website for other daily services www.stbarnabasoldheath.wordpress.com Vicar: Fr Richard Tillbrook ssc 01206 797481 fathercap@hotmail.com

DEVIZES St Peter's, Bath Road, Devizes, Wiltshire *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Exeter. All resolutions passed.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass (BCP), Fourth Sunday only: 10am Sung Mass, Thurs: 7pm Low Mass. Mass on major festivals and Saints Days - times vary. Contact during interregnum: Mrs J Hosie, Churchwarden 01380 813500

EASTBOURNE St Saviour's *A Forward in Faith Parish with Resolution ABC.* Sunday: Low Mass 8am, Solemn Mass 10.30am. Daily Mass and Office. Details and information from Fr Jeffery Gunn 01323 722317 www.stsaviourseastbourne.org.uk

FOLKESTONE Kent, St Peter on the East Cliff *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Richmond.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass, 10.30am Solemn Mass. Weekdays - Low Mass: Tues 7pm, Thur 12 noon. During Interregnum - tel: 01303 254472 www.stpeterschurchfolkestone.org.uk - stpetersfolk@yahoo.co.uk

GRIMSBY St Augustine, Legsby Avenue Lovely Grade II Church by Sir Charles Nicholson. *A Forward in Faith Parish under Bishop of Richmond.* Sunday: Parish Mass 9.45am, Solemn Evensong and Benediction 6pm (First Sunday). Weekday Mass: Wed 9.30am. Parish Priest: Fr Martin 07736 711360

HARTLEPOOL St Oswald's, Brougham Terrace. *A Forward in Faith Parish under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Beverley.* Sunday: Sung Mass 9.30am, Benediction 6pm. Daily Mass, Offices and Confessions as displayed. Parish Priest: Fr Graeme Buttery ssc 01429 273201

HEMPTON Holy Trinity (near Fakenham, Norfolk). *ABC, FF.* The Church on the Green. Visit us on the way to Walsingham. Mass on Sundays and Wednesdays at 10am. Linked to the Shrine of OLW. Parish Priest: Fr Lockett ssc 01328 820030

KINGSTON-upon-THAMES St Luke, Gibbon Road (short walk from Kingston railway station) Sunday: Low Mass (English Missal) 8am, Sung Mass (Western Rite) 10.30am, Evensong and Benediction 5pm. 3rd Sunday each month: Teddy Bears Service for pre-schoolers 9.30am. Wed, 7pm Exposition, 8pm Mass. First Sat of the month, 11.15am Mass of Our Lady of Walsingham. For further information phone Fr Martin Hislop: Parish Office 020 8974 8079 www.stlukeskingston.co.uk

LEAMINGTON SPA St John the Baptist *Parish under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Exeter - all resolutions passed.* Daily Mass. Sunday: Low Mass 8am, Parish Mass 9.30am, Solemn Evensong and Benediction (1st Sunday only) 3.30pm. Traditional Catholic Worship in a friendly atmosphere. Parish Priest: Fr David Lawson ssc 01926 422208 www.fifparish.com/stjohnleamington

LIVERPOOL St Agnes and St Pancras, Toxteth Park (FF & ABC) Sunday: Parish Mass 10am; Solemn Evensong and Benediction 6.30pm. Daily Mass. Sunday School. Glorious J.L. Pearson Church, with modern catholic worship, good music and friendly atmosphere. Parish Priest: Canon Christopher Cook ssc 0151 733 1742 www.stagnes.org.uk

LONDON-HEATHROW-HANWORTH TW13 St George, Hanworth Park, Feltham, TW13 7QF *Beautiful and historic Church. Traditional worship. Vibrant parish social life - ABC Fulham Jurisdiction.* Sunday: 8am Low Mass (English Missal), 10am High Mass (Traditional), 6pm Evensong and Latin Benediction (first Sunday of the Month). Low Mass 10am Tues and Thurs. Fr Paul Williamson: 0208 844 0475. Email: 1stewart1@live.co.uk

LONDON EC3 St Magnus the Martyr, Lower Thames Street (nearest Tube: Monument or Bank) *Resolutions ABC.* Mass: Sunday 11am, refreshments following, Tues, Wed, Thur and Fri 12.30. Visitors very welcome. www.stmagnusmartyr.org.uk Fr Philip Warner rector@stmagnusmartyr.org.uk

LONDON N1 Holy Trinity, Hoxton Sunday: 10am Parish Mass and Sunday School. Midweek Services: contact Fr Andrew Newcombe 020 7253 4796

LONDON N21 Holy Trinity, Winchmore Hill. *A Forward in Faith, Resolution A,B & C, modern catholic parish.* Sunday: Every Sunday: Said Mass 9.00am and Sung Mass 10.30am with Junior Church. Weekdays: Tues to Fri 12 noon Angelus and Mass. Saturday Mass 10am. For the Sacrament of Reconciliation and other enquires contact Fr Richard Bolton at rdeb2010@btinternet.com or phone 0208 364 1583

London NW9 Kingsbury St Andrew *A FIF Parish under the Episcopal care of the Bishop of Fulham* Sunday: Sung Mass 10am, Thursday Said Mass 10am. Tube to Wembley Park then 83 Bus to Church Lane. Churchwarden: 020 8205 7447

London SE11 4BB St Agnes Kennington Park, St Agnes Place - 8 minutes walk from both Kennington and the Oval tube stations (Northern line) *ABC/FIF.* Sunday: 10am Solemn Mass. Daily Mass: Mon

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Cover
Image

The Bishop of Beverley
at St Peter's Church, Barnsley



LEAD STORY

Mission and Church Growth

Damian Feeney on the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme and the true nature of mission

we will
need to
develop
our best
practice
and
thinking
in response
to social
trends
which
have
not been
dreamt
of yet

Part of the familiar rhetoric which has coloured the life of the Church since the early Nineties has involved the imagery of battlefield and mission field. It has been used in times of particular stress and tiredness; it has been used in connection with the Ordinariate; more recently, it has resurfaced in the debate to find legislation which both permits the consecration of women to the episcopate and finds a way to accommodate those who are unable in conscience to accept such a development. It is easy to see why. So much energy has been expended, so many resources allocated to the debates about our life together, to the galvanizing and focusing of arguments and the sustaining of the faithful, and the frustration is easily felt.

One point worth making is that the polarization of these aspects of mission into contrary opposites is not entirely helpful. On the one hand, the question of the type of church we are inviting people into has been a pressing issue, intimately tied up with questions of mission and evangelism; the other side of that coin is that parishes and communities of a traditional integrity have indeed continued to work, despite other concerns and pressures for the growth of the Church. That has been a good work indeed. The mission of the Church is, and always will be, our most pressing priority, however bracing the prevailing wind may be.

A helpful checklist

The recent findings from the Church Growth Research Programme has been two years in the formulating, and are presented as a document entitled *From Anecdote to Evidence*. The research behind the document cites three specific strands of research – data analysis, church profiling and a third piece of work more difficult to categorize in methodological terms, but encompassing specific areas of endeavour: Cathedrals, Fresh Expressions, Church Planting, Amalgamations, Team Ministries. Unsurprisingly, what has been collected amounts not to a single strand of revealed truth about what constitutes and ‘causes’ a growing church; rather, a number of factors can be identified which might be said to be common to churches which are experiencing growth. Unwilling to create hostages to fortune (with readers of august publications such

as this, for example) the authors stress that association does not itself establish causality, and that further evidence and research into the interrelationship of these factors is necessary to establish cogent causal relationships.

Urgent priorities

Good leadership. A clear mission and purpose. Willingness to self-reflect, to change and adapt according to context. The involvement of the whole people of God. Prioritizing growth. A clear, chosen style of worship. An emphasis on catechesis, on nurturing disciples. These last three are couched in the rhetoric of *being intentional*, suggesting a deliberate strategic prioritizing which leads to action. But none of this is rocket science, and these are concepts which have been around for a good while now, and from a variety of traditions and sources. Perhaps the difference here is that rather than simply accept the received wisdom of these sources, there is *evidence* to suggest that these characteristics are important.

By contrast, the research points to urgent priorities in arresting areas of particular decline – the evidence concerning children and young people should cause more than a little anxiety. The trend to pastoral reorganization into teams in the face of the dwindling availability of stipendiary clergy is recognized as detrimental to church growth. The statement ‘Churches are more likely to grow when there is one leader for one community’ will chime with many as lying at the heart of our common pastoral and parochial understanding, but which we have turned away from because of acute matters of finance and resource. In addition, it is still too early to tell as to whether the shift in profile of parochial clergy away from mainly stipendiary into a more ‘mixed economy’ involving SSMs will provide an effective and liberating model of being in multi-parish benefices.

Renewed confidence

One particular piece of good news is that there is no suggestion of specific ecclesial tradition as a factor for growth or decline one way or another. There is nothing about the particularity of being Catholic or Evangelical which predisposes churches to growth or decline. On the contrary, growth is experienced

where there is 'consistency and clarity and the chosen style and tradition are wholeheartedly adopted' (p. 8). In other words, and in the immortal words of *The Producers*, 'When you've got it, flaunt it.' More seriously, part of the renewal of our confidence will continue to grow as a confidence in our tradition, with good teaching and exposition, attractive, awe-inspiring and numinous liturgy, a distinctive and Christ-like sense of community and pastoral care.

Missional and attractional

One sometimes unhelpful polarity in church growth thinking comes when we consider the language of so-called *missional* churches and *attractional* churches. Such a distinction is not present in the wording of the report, but certainly illustrated in some of the research which lay behind it, not least the research on church planting. A missional church community is one which goes out boldly and proactively, bringing proclamation, teaching, and healing to people who don't have it, don't know they need it and will perish without it.

Attractional church communities are those which are the antithesis of this, and have a *come to us* mentality. We have what you need, and it is located right here. Come and see, and you will find out, whether from the beauty of our liturgy, the power and authenticity of our preaching, or the sheer quality of our relationships and pastoral care. There is more than an element of caricature about these models – but then again, there always is. And the fact that one of these models is called *missional* does imply that the other model must therefore have nothing to do with mission, in much the same way that the term *evangelical* has become associated with one tradition or strand of thinking.

A truthful theology of mission contains both elements, and we see both displayed in Scripture. There are patterns of going out and coming in. We simultaneously draw in (through our community life, through invitation, through the forming of rich and life-giving relationships) and move out (through planting congregations, through witness and service, and through the opportunities to listen and speak which are afforded to us). Each should energize the other. This dynamic is one which should preoccupy us, and indeed the whole Church, as we understand the bracing context of the Church's life and witness: in some ways that witness will look and feel quite different from what we may be used to, and we will need to develop our best practice and thinking in response to social trends which have not been dreamt of yet, as the rate of change in the society we serve accelerates.

Drawing people closer

To characterize the mission dynamic as merely one way is not enough. Jesus goes out. He visits a variety of communities, teaching, proclaiming the Kingdom, healing. He sends others to do the same. But the purpose is then to gather, to draw people closer, to attract people into a renewed understanding of covenant and community. The culmination of the drawing in process is drawing people close to the cross of Christ. It is the supreme example of attraction as we consider how we might be part of a Church which both goes out and draws in. During Advent we at St Stephen's House were privileged to be led by Fr Andrew Sloane in retreat: his profound words on the rich imagery

to be found in Eliot's *Four Quartets* found resonance and joy, cast as they were against the backdrop of the *Quarantore*, the Forty Hours' Devotion to the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The discovery was that this wonderful act encapsulated an attractional model on the surface, but in fact was truly apostolic, for through adoration and intimacy with Christ we receive the grace of conversion, and thus are sent out, to draw others to the same joy.


Being truly apostolic

We cannot see the drawing of people through the church door, sat in a pew and clutching a gift aid form, as the end of our striving, our work somehow done. Rather, we seek incorporation into the body, the formation of the Body of Christ around those who have heard the Word, who have met the Lord Jesus and seek his transforming grace. If a community is truly apostolic – receiving, sending, nurturing others in other communities beside their own – then it becomes imbued with a grace-filled quality. The acid test of any Christian community is its capacity to give and receive love, even to death. Standing within the apostolic tradition can never merely mean that we can trace our family tree. It must mean being in the company and the tradition of those who are sent out, having freely received, so that we might freely give. And that community, well formed, rooted and grounded in love, is itself attractive, drawing people together through the joy and vitality expressed there.

The core task

Two particular developments in recent times have reminded us that in the midst of all our important discussions and agonizing regarding the future of the Church, the core task remains what it has always been: the growth of the Church in mission to herald the coming of the Kingdom. The first of these has been the engagement of Catholic and Evangelical parishes in the *Leading Your Church into Growth* movement, experienced by many through national and diocesan courses now over a twenty year period. The second is the *Fan the Flame* initiative.

Not only is it possible for the Church to grow numerically, it is imperative, and a default position: and if the Church is not growing, something is getting in the way. But that sense of growth can never rest at the merely numerical, but is about conversion, also, and transformation. What matters is truthfulness, holiness, invitation, faithfulness, engagement in community life, mutual love, self-giving; because these are the hallmarks of Jesus Christ who sends us out so that we may gather in.

The existence of the Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda in the Church of England presupposes that we will be a vibrant, joyful and active constituency, witnessing boldly to the person of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. If that is so, the business of church growth – qualitatively and quantitatively – is something we must take seriously and act upon, not merely to secure our place within the Church but because it is our God-given duty and joy. 

For the Programme findings, see

<<http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk>>

and for the Fan the Flame initiative, see

<<http://fantheflameweek.weebly.com/mission-task-force.html>>

Manageable evangelism – the first thirty seconds

Philip North explains how churches can create a good first impression

I was very struck by a conversation I once had with a church organist. His own parish had given him ten weeks sabbatical leave, and finding himself for the first time in many years in the position of being able to make a choice about where to go to church, he decided to do an experiment. For ten weeks he would go to a different Anglican church each Sunday, meaning that in the course of his sabbatical he would visit every parish in the deanery.

His reflection on his experience was fascinating and well worth some study because it brings home the importance of first impressions. He told me that his mind was made up about whether a particular church would be the sort of place where he could belong in thirty seconds. If the first thirty seconds was bad, no matter what the quality of the subsequent preaching, liturgy or music, he was ill-disposed towards it. If the first thirty seconds was good, it did not matter what disasters followed, he felt he had found a church where he could belong. From the point of view of a priest, this is very alarming because the first thirty seconds are the period of time when we have no control of what is going on.

A good place to start

The industry of evangelism has a habit of making church growth sound terribly complicated and difficult. It has invented its own language (missional, modal, sodal, etc.), its own technocrats (pioneer ministers, church-planters, etc.) and its own culture (fresh expressions, new monasticism, etc.). The impact can be debilitating for an ordinary parish which feels terribly left behind by all the whizzy vocabulary and ideas. However to a great extent, church growth is manageable and do-able for even the most humble parish as long as we focus on doing a few things well. And perhaps the best place to start is the first thirty seconds. We all have new people drifting into our churches occasionally. If they can receive the right sort of welcome and feel they have found a place where they can belong, a very important start has been made. So what do we need to get the first thirty seconds right? Here is a checklist.

Exterior and journey in

If your church noticeboard is chipped and out of date, if you still have a sign on the wall saying 'The Millennium is Christ's Birthday' or an advert for a fayre which was held in 2009, then no one will want to go near. A simple, attractive noticeboard with as few words as possible, a banner or two and a working party sorting out the grounds are simple steps that can make a world of difference.

Solid wooden doors, long paths, dark porches, doors

which don't tell you whether to push or pull, poor signage and the lack of disabled access are all things that seem small to us but which can put huge barriers in the way of a visitor. We need to see our buildings through the eyes of a visitor and so make the journey into the building as simple as possible. Remember, visitors will be embarrassed, nervous and unsure of themselves. The journey in needs to be simple, clear and well signposted.

Welcome and order of service


The single most important factor in the first thirty seconds is the person who you meet first on getting through the door. What is required is a trained welcome team who will smile, who are genuinely pleased to see people, will enquire after the names of newcomers and show them to a seat. This is one of the most vital tasks on a Sunday morning and it is worth investing time in calling the right people to participate in it.

What is placed in the hand of the person walking into your church? Is it a heavy book and endless tatty bits of paper which require a degree in librarianship to negotiate? With orders of service it is the simpler the better, and increasingly parishes are using technology to produce an eight-page weekly booklet with the Mass, readings and notices all in one place. Or you could of course give up on paper altogether and go for the big screen! But the basic rule is, the simpler the better.

Atmosphere and seating

Walking into a buzz of conversation can seem friendly for those on the inside, but for a new person it can be intimidating because they feel that everyone has friends except them. The best atmosphere is one of prayer with music playing gently in the background. A brisk music practice before Mass begins can also be very helpful in building up the right sort of atmosphere. It gives an opportunity for a non-liturgical welcome, demonstrates that we are all learning and provides an opportunity to invite people into prayer and stillness before the Mass begins.

'I am afraid this is my seat.' Anyone who says this to a newcomer should be excommunicated! But there is more to the layout of a church than this. Too few chairs and people feel crowded and hassled. Too many and they feel lost and abandoned. Obviously churches with fixed pews cannot do much about this, but if you are lucky enough to have chairs, then attention given to layout is well worthwhile.

We need to resist the tendency to complicate church growth. In many ways it is simple, indeed at times almost trivial. An audit on 'The first thirty seconds' in your Church might bear surprising fruit. 

**church growth is manageable
and do-able as long as we focus
on doing a few things well**

St Paul

Nicolas Stebbing CR urges us to see past St Paul's difficult reputation to appreciate his grasp of God's glory and love

Apriest I know used to describe St Paul's writings as rather like a currant bun! If you have tried reading straight through any of the epistles you will know what he meant. Much of it is pretty hard work, quite stodgy and not very easy to follow, and then you hit one of his marvellous passages which just sing out to you of the glory of God. Something like 'I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8.38ff).

Thanking God

There are lots of those sort of passages. Paul had a grasp of the amazing glory of God and a grasp on the kindness and love of God, and Paul was absolutely amazed that this God, in the form of Jesus Christ, had taken the trouble to knock him off his horse and show him a far better way of following him than the one that had taken up his life so far. Paul never, ever got over that; he never stopped thanking God for it. Read through his Epistles and you find that every one of them begins 'I thank God...' He really did. It was one of the most attractive things about him.

Creative theologian

Yet St Paul has a bad reputation. People say his writings are unintelligible. They have a point. He can be difficult. He was struggling to write Christian theology for the first time. He was having to get his mind around totally incomprehensible ideas like the Trinity. He had to invent new ideas, drag old words into new meanings. He did an amazing job. His writings take up a mere 60 pages of the average Bible and yet thousands and thousands of books have been written about him.

People say he was bad tempered. Well, maybe, but when you look at

the reasons for his anger you see he is angry because people were destroying the Gospel, trying to steal the freedom away from these sons and daughters of God. Yes, he says, 'You stupid Galatians; Who has bewitched you?' (Gal. 3.1). They were being stupid.

They were letting men persuade them to take on all the 600 rules and regulations of the Jewish law, abandoning the wonderful freedom of being saved by Christ. That was stupid! Paul loved his Christian brothers and sisters. He cared passionately when they did stupid things. He cared most

**he saw what God has done
for us in Christ and was
utterly amazed by such
generous love**

of all when people came and corrupted their faith and took away their hope of salvation. Paul got angry and sarcastic, because he loved people. He was not going to stand back politely and let them be carried off to hell.

Following his example

So when we think of criticizing Paul, we need to ask whether we can even hold a candle to his example. Do we preach Christ as he did? Do we tell our friends about this Jesus whom we meet in church? Do we show by the quality of our lives that Jesus lives in us, in such a way that people will say to us 'Tell us about Jesus'? I can't answer 'yes' to any of those questions. I need to ask myself how I could do that better. Well, I think I know how we could all do it better. We could follow Paul's example and really think about Jesus, let Jesus come into every part of our life. We could look at him every day in the Gospel and see what he is saying. We can ask him to set us on fire with love for him, as he set Paul on fire, and then people will see Jesus in us and ask to know more about him.



A divided Church

Will they see Jesus in us? If they look at us what will they see? Two of the best letters Paul wrote were his letters to the Christians in Corinth. They were a wildly enthusiastic congregation who were badly divided. Even within our own Anglican church we are sadly divided: between sound Catholics and Aff Caths, between low church and high church, between evangelicals and others, between priests and laity.

All these different groups have gifts, insights, virtues which we all need. It is not easy to bring them together. I do not myself see how it can be done. It requires love, hope, vision and a great longing to bring the divided Christ back together again. We must not settle contentedly into our little divisions. We must weep over them, repent of the part we have played in creating them, pray to know how we can heal them.

St Paul knew what it was to have a divided Church. He saw divisions in Corinth. He saw divisions between Jews and Greeks and he found the way of unity was simply in Christ: 'Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Greeks but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (I Cor. 1.22ff). **ND**

*A Sermon preached at
the church of St Paul, Brierley
on their Patronal Festival,
25 January 2014*

Keep calm and carry on

Nicholas Turner urges us not to react to the media frenzy at the end of the month

There are times when it is important for the Church to speak out and times when it is wiser and more generous to keep quiet and say nothing. A time for quiet is shortly upon us.

On 29th March, the day before Mothering Sunday, the new form of Equal Civil Marriage will come into force and it will, barring war or earthquake, be headline news for several days.

What each radio, television and newspaper editor will be looking for is a ranting, anti-gay bishop or vicar, as the cardboard bigot to be set against the thoroughly nice gay couple, who will be celebrating their wedding with all their friends and family. The media likes to be seen supporting worthy causes, and this offers a perfect opportunity.

I was asked to go on a television programme just before civil partnerships were coming in, some eight years ago; I told them I would be fully supportive of whichever couple they chose. That was the end of the phone call.

The forthcoming event will be hailed as 'gay marriage'. It is not, of course, gay marriage but equal marriage: it is the same civil contract for any two people, irrespective of their gender. A fairly obvious point, you might think, but not one that the House of Bishops seem fully to have grasped. If Equal Civil Marriage is a deliberate attempt to exclude any sexual element from the formal relationship, it is no more about same-sex couples than it is about opposite-sex couples.

Nor is it *marriage*. 'Clause 1.3' is the helpful mantra. The new Act, on its very first page in its very first clause, makes an unequivocal statement that this new institution is quite distinct from marriage as understood by the Church of England.

The Act, as it says itself, 'preserves the integrity of the Canon law of the Church of England in relation to marriage'.

So it is not gay and it is not marriage.


What are we worrying about? There are plenty of concerns about the new institution, as I have outlined in earlier issues, but there is absolutely nothing that should stop us rejoicing with those who rejoice (Romans 12.15). The government may be undertaking a concerted assault on matrimony, for political reasons, but individuals are not. Don't let anyone take it out on them.

What is the House of Bishops Statement (issued on 15th February) all about? It reads as though it seeks to be a studied compromise between the radicals and the fundamentalists, a careful CofE *via media*. My own first impression is that it has muddled *The Pilling Report* with the *Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act*. As already noted, the latter, despite its title, is *not* about gay marriage.

There is a new institution of Equal Civil Marriage but not of 'same sex marriage'. Eleven times the Bishops use this phrase, but in no instance is it quite clear what they mean. The issue, after the 29th, will be whether and how a Civil Marriage can be blessed. This is actually a lot more complicated than it seems, but one thing it's not is picking out gay couples for special treatment, good or bad.

The same advice holds: keep quiet, keep praying, and let it pass. I like to think this is a unfortunate but temporary statement that will in time be improved upon. The fact that the official text wasn't even proof-read suggests it was hurried. There will be more to come, for unbelievable as it may seem, no one yet knows all the details of the new form of civil marriage. And we still won't know after the 29th.

Only in September will its core character become clear, when the process for changing an existing civil partnership into a civil marriage comes into force.

This may be an appalling way to introduce parliamentary legislation, but that's how it is. The debate does not end here. 

Singing hymns and arias

One item of Victorian furnishing sadly hasn't been restored to fashion by Fiona Bruce's *Antiques Roadshow*: the nineteenth-century belief that the British Isles were peculiarly blessed by God.

Yet if you think of the times of the year when we celebrate our patron saints you'll see the validity of that view. This month, David and Patrick, heralding the coming of Spring. St George when Spring is as victorious as the English archers at Agincourt (many of them Welsh actually – medieval multi-culturalism). St Andrew, an extra dram as winter's chill begins to bite. How blessed are these timings.

'To begin at the beginning', quoting Dylan Thomas and introducing St David. It's Dylan's centenary this year. Sink several pints of Welsh brewed Reverend James bitter. Words from St David's final sermon are recaptured every time we say the Credo Cymru motto. 'Be Joyful. Keep the Faith.' Quoting again, this time Wales' greatest living theologian – no, not Rowan – Max Boyce. Hope we all were 'singing hymns and arias', on March 1st.

March 17th – St Patrick. Fifty plus years ago I was in the record industry. Looking back to the early Sixties, I don't think of Beatlemania, but rejoice that, in 1962, Glen Daly topped the Irish charts with 'Hail Glorious St Patrick.' As we roar out this hymn, may 'Mary's prayers win our country back to Thee' – not just Erin's Isle but every inch of the British Isles, from Scillies to Shetland.

On St George's Day imitate St George's Hanworth Park where they wave St George's flag while singing the hymns. In waving them wish success to the lads as they seek to do an Agincourt in Brazil.

If you're reading this under St Andrew's patronage vote 'No' in the Referendum. Only Good Friends can afford to have 'Auld Enemies.'

Alan Edwards

The numbers game

Digby Anderson sets out the real reasons for the decline in church attendance

There are some among the faithful clergy and committed laity who worry about the small number of their congregations. They know the Dominical command to teach the Gospel to the whole world and to baptize all they can. Then they look at empty pews and they worry. Have they and the church failed to teach as convincingly as they might? They are all too aware that hostile voices ridicule the claims of the church in the name of science, modernity and competing creeds. Have they failed to counter such attacks? Should they have done more to make the church relevant to the modern world?

The answer to their questions is, in most cases a definite 'No.' The relevance crusade has actually done harm; no more is needed. Answering intellectual critics is a waste of breath. The worriers' thinking is based on two errors. The first is the more interesting because very widespread. It occurs in regard to many different topics outside the church, for instance in thinking about the economy, especially disadvantage, about education, about food and countless other matters.

Who is to blame?

Take food. There is some agreement that the English today do not eat very well. Given the contemporary obsession with health, this is widely understood to mean that they eat unhealthily. More careful analysis shows that many families fail to prepare and consume good quality meals economically. Who is to blame? Candidates include the wicked food companies and their advertisers for offering too much processed food, for killing off high street food shops and enticing consumers by advert and package into bad ways. Of course there are industrial farmers too. Then there are schools which fail to teach domestic economy. Most of all there are social pressures which subvert juvenile appetites and dietary habits and pressurize working mothers.

Take your pick of the villains and any others you prefer. But they all share one characteristic. They are part of the supply of food and food attitudes. These villains cause the poor victim, innocent families, children and especially mothers to shop, cook and eat badly. What, today, one is not permitted to say is that part of the problem may be on the demand side.

Never suggest that the problem is down to indulged children, non-participant and often absent fathers and lazy, fashion-obsessed, ignorant mothers. But that is the truth. Thus, for instance, the destruction of local shops is because the shopper has deserted them in favour of the out-of-town supermarket.

For more than fifty years critics have bemoaned scholastic attainment, especially the large number of children who leave the state system after 11 years (10,000 hours) of compulsory schooling unable to read, write, count and work in a disciplined way in jobs. The villains

are the system, the lack of 'resources', the curriculum, the disadvantaged background of some pupils but never the pupils themselves and their parents. Able-bodied men fail to take an active part in the economy. The fault lies with poor incentives, lack of support, devious employers, but not with the able-bodied men who eschew jobs that immigrants gratefully embrace.

Their own choice

The error then is to assume automatically that any problem will be caused by supply factors. In the case of the church, the pews are not filled because of failures on the part of the church. But people are not absent from church because of clerical inadequacy. The fact is clear and can be seen by anyone with eyes to see. The absentees don't want to be in church. They prefer to be somewhere else, doing something else.

**the absentees don't want to
be in church – they prefer
to be somewhere else, doing
something else**

Look, on your way to and from church at what the faithless are doing. They are driving off here and there to their pleasures, standing on street corners drinking from tins or still at home in bed or on the sofa. That is what they like. Once upon a time family and other social pressures led them to church. They no longer do so

and the faithless no longer come. Nor are they equivocal in their decisions. You won't see them pacing up and down outside the church agonizing about whether to hear mass or go and buy another pizza. And it is not occasional, their dismissal of church; they repeatedly do it. They do not flirt with Baal, they are full-time enthusiastic idolaters. The fact of this choice is obvious. It has nothing to do with what the parish priest has or hasn't done and everything with what the faithless prefer to do.

Not an intellectual matter

These alternative preferred pastimes, by the way, do not include reading atheistic articles by scientists. On my way to church I have never seen one of the unfaithful sitting on a park bench reading the latest Richard Dawkins. The loss of faith – no, not loss, that suggests oversight, we are dealing with rejection – is not an intellectual matter. That of course is the other error, thinking that exposing the atheists' scientific nonsense will bring the faithless surging back into church.

So we can stop worrying about the empty pews or rather worry about something else that does not rest on the two errors. My own favourite might be concentrating on those who have comparatively recently ceased to attend church. As for those deeply habituated to faithlessness, they have God's gift of free will. They have repeatedly made their choice. It may lead to Hell but we, while still praying for them, offering mass *pro populo*, for the whole parish faithful and faithless, and keeping the west door wide open, are bound to respect it. **ND**

faith of our fathers

Arthur Middleton on the need for a new Oxford Movement

Michael Ramsey saw the need for a new Oxford Movement. In North America, Anglicans have responded to the more recent challenge of Cardinal Kasper's call in England for a new Oxford Movement. It is a challenge to work for and elucidate the principles of the first Oxford Movement and Anglican patrimony that in England has not been taken seriously enough. In America some Anglicans are beginning to appreciate the importance of the classical Anglican tradition. This serious concern for the Anglican patrimony is encouraging because for many years my own work has been concerned with restoring the lost Anglican mind, my latest book being *Restoring the Anglican Mind*, which the Anglican Association in this country promoted. What do I mean by the Anglican mind?

The lost Anglican mind

The word 'mind,' or in Greek *phronema*, is used in the way in which the early Christian Fathers used it in their theology, to refer to the *mindset* or *outlook*, the orthodox mind of the Church. The attaining of this mind is a matter of practising the correct faith

(*orthodoxia*) in the correct manner (*orthopraxia*). This mind refers to the completely self-sacrificial trust and faith in religious and moral truths, an unshakeable certainty about the truth of the faith for all time and the practice of orthodox Anglican worship, piety and behaviour.

The Anglican mind is vested in the Anglican understanding of Scripture, tradition and reason, against all heresies and schisms of all times. Also, this mind is termed the 'mind of the Church' and thus 'the mind of Christ'.

Today, the loss of this mind underlies the general ignorance of and antipathy towards the true spirit and practice of Classical Anglicanism and the widespread success of the revisionist and politically correct ideologies and agendas in the Anglican Communion. The hysteria surrounding Gareth Bennett's *Crockford's Preface* in 1987 missed its most important point. In a section entitled 'A Theology in Retreat' he pinpointed the crisis within Anglicanism as being fundamentally theological and stemming from a deliberate rejection of this balanced synthesis, the Anglican mind, which is a distinctive Anglican theological

method. He pointed out that such a distancing of the modern Church from its prescriptive sources has serious consequences for Anglican ecclesiology and the rejection of 'living in a tradition' would not be readily acceptable by most modern Anglicans.

Ecclesiastical history

Yet the movement in theology which it represented has not been set aside. English faculties of theology are now part of an international scholarly enterprise which has moved steadily apart from the churches. Even where theological scholars are priests or ministers there is a tendency to bridge the gap between their work on early Christianity and their participation in the present life of the Church by a downgrading of the value of Christian tradition.

The most notable casualty has been the study of ecclesiastical history. If Anglicans once did their theology through a study of the historical experience of the Christian community, that seems no longer to be the case and the notion is in eclipse that the spirituality or the teaching of the era from the Fathers to the Reformation has anything to offer the modern Church. What is most definitely discouraged is any form of denominational history. While such a tendency is understandable in theological faculties in modern universities, its effect is most notable in Anglican theological colleges which have now trained a whole generation of priests with a minimal knowledge of classical Anglican divinity or its methods.

Living in a tradition

The development of an orthodox Anglican mind is so essential today when few propagate it, or even recognize the biblical-patristic foundation of the Anglican mind. It cannot take place apart from orthodox Anglican worship, piety and behaviour. Michael Ramsey would say that we do our theology to the sound of church bells, or in other words from inside an ecclesial context. Acquiring an Anglican mind does *not* mean collecting a head full of Anglican quotes. Rather it refers to the transformation of the whole person, resulting in one's gradual participation in the heavenly vision. **ND**



Given the number of court cases you have on the go,
we thought law would be more important than divinity.

A traditionalist approach

J. Alan Smith offers some principles for a Christian approach to the solution of political, social and economic problems

Man is the only creature known to be aware of his own existence and of the existence of the universe itself. This gives humans a very special place in creation. Each person has the power to gain some understanding of the universe and we should therefore hold each of our fellow humans in high regard throughout his life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

How we ought to behave

It follows that we have a duty to find out as much as we can about the world in the brief time we have. There may be duties laid upon us. If there are not, then we may perhaps have wasted our brief lives. On the other hand, if there *are* duties laid upon us that could have easily been discovered, then the consequences of *not* investigating the world could be dire.

Further, we have a life-span of up to, say, 100 years yet we are heirs to a civilization of some 3,000 years. Thus, in seeking to understand the world, we need to make full use of the work of others, without accepting it uncritically. As Sir Isaac Newton wrote: 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.'

One of the facts about the universe that has been discovered by societies throughout history is the objective existence of the moral law or natural law that describes how men *ought* to behave, not how they *do* behave. A child who states, 'That's not fair!' is not simply disagreeing with what has happened but is claiming, perhaps unconsciously, that there *is* a moral law. Some may disagree but, as Doctor Johnson put it: 'But if he really does think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why, Sir, when he leaves our houses let us count our spoons.'

Need for human law

If all men were virtuous, morality would be enough to govern their behaviour, but, as things are, there is

a need for human law to control both the governed and the governors. This must be rooted in morality, otherwise governments would be no more than robber bands.

We are sometimes faced with a false antithesis between a secular code and the full implementation by the state of the code of a particular religion such as Shariah law. However, there is no need for the state to implement fully the code of a particular religion. The best answer is that given below by St Thomas Aquinas, taken from *Summa Theologiae* Ia IIae, 96, 2.

**if all men were virtuous,
morality would be enough
to govern their behaviour**

Question 96 discusses the power of human law; article 2 asks 'is it the business of human law to restrain all vice?'

Aquinas' view

In his answer, Aquinas states: 'Law is laid down for a great number of people, of which the majority have no high standard of morality. Therefore it does not forbid all the vices, from which upright men can keep away, but only those grave ones which the average man can avoid, and chiefly those which do harm to others and have to be stopped if human society is to be maintained, such as murder and theft and so forth.'

What is required is for one or more authorities, independent of the state, to offer interpretations of natural law to guide in the formulation of human law.

A major divide in political philosophy is between those who believe in the existence of an ultimate solution to political problems and those who do not. In general, those who believe in the existence of an ultimate solution, do so because they believe that they possess it; moreover, they believe in

its inevitability. For those of us who do not, there are four consequences of this divide.

Four consequences

We are prejudiced against change, though not totally opposed to it. Our current systems work to a greater or lesser extent, and any changes should be tested to ensure that they lead to improvement rather than deterioration.

The second Viscount Falkland summed up this fundamental principle: 'When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.'

We prefer evolutionary change to revolutionary change. Preferably, any change should be small enough so that we may predict its likely effects and be able to reverse the change should that step prove necessary.

We believe that power should be diffused as much as possible. This is the principle of subsidiarity, best stated in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (*The Social Order*): 'Just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to a group what private enterprise and industry can accomplish, so too it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, for a larger and higher association to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower societies.'

Of its very nature, the true aim of all social activity should be to help members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them.'

We believe that there is a similar principle to Subsidiarity, which may be called Temporal Subsidiarity. It asserts that there are natural limits to the extent that we may restrict the choices available to future generations.

These points are not original but may, perhaps, comprise an original arrangement. They provide traditionalist Christians with a useful approach to the solution of political, social, and economic problems. **ND**

devotional

A prayer for all Arthur Middleton

Father forgive' is a prayer for everyone in all ages, for all time. The first to respond was not some learned sage conversant with the Scriptures waiting on God. It was a hardened criminal, hardened by brutal and selfish crime, but a man who had accepted his punishment as the justice he deserved. There can be nothing harder than the criminal heart, the hardness deaf to the pleadings of his victims and without compassion for them. Yet it is this simple thief and criminal who recognizes, where the Jewish religious authorities could not, a king according to a new measure of kingliness.

'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom' is a real prayer from a man pinned down by the harsh experience of reality. It is when the barricades are down and truth can penetrate that we realize that without God our strength is an illusion. It prompts him to make his confession, to put aside and forget all his grievances in order to accept the transformed life that God's love and forgiveness brings. His prayer is the plea of a man disillusioned with what life has been and asking God to give a meaning to it.

Disillusionment is what connects this bandit and life today. Despite the so-called 'progress' in technology, living standards, education and health, a sickness and despair pollutes the spirit of our times. It seems to be in open rebellion to God. There is hardness to the things of the Spirit that does not want to be concerned with the things of God.

The situation of life today reflects something of Calvary, with one criminal unrepentant and hardened in the values by which he has always lived; and the other being drawn to a completely different set of values. Society today has been rather like a thief in stealing the life and time God has given it and using it for its own ends. We are reaping the reward of that theft in the crime, frustration, despair and unreality of life today.

Prayer becomes real

'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom' is a prayer for all who are surrounded by good fortune, yet do not have faith; a prayer for our society, which Mother Theresa said that for all its riches was very poor because it lacked communion with God, the vision of an eternal throne.

It is when, like the thief, life pins us down and forces us to ask fundamental questions, that prayer becomes real. Such prayer knows that the past cannot be changed but there is dawning the awareness that God can change its meaning and significance. It is a cry for communion with God. It is a profound sense of our need to be open to God, of our dependence on God, our need for his grace. **ND**

For all those who cherish the fullness of the faith, the Feast of the Annunciation of Our Lord (25 March) must be an extra-red letter day. I was appalled recently to hear of a priest leading a retreat day before Christmas posing the question 'How many of you can put your hand on your heart and say you really believe in the Virgin Birth?'

For the Christian the Incarnation of the Our Lord is not an option, it is the keystone around which the doctrine and ethics of Christian life hang. Without it all that is left is a pile of rubble out of which something ramshackle can be constructed. It follows that contemplation of the Incarnation is the foundation of prayer: prayer being our relationship with Christ in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Prayer and doctrine cannot be separated.

Our understanding of our partaking in the sacramental life of the Church will also be shaped by the attitude of our mind, heart and will to Jesus Incarnate. For those readers who attend churches where the Blessed Sacrament is permanently reserved, I advise you regularly to place yourself deliberately

Ghostly Counsel

Honouring Mary

Andy Hawes is Warden of Edenham Regional Retreat House

in sight of it and keep the mind and will fixed on the Lord as being present in all the perfect simplicity of the Host. This can have the effect of 'renewing the mind after the manner of Christ Jesus' challenging the pervading dead hand of materialism and relativism which is the cause of spiritual death in so many. The wisdom of God is foolishness to man and we must embrace the radical presence of God eternal who wondrously makes himself present in our space and our time.

As the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer knew very well, the truth of the Incarnation cannot be upheld without honouring Mary Mother of God. The reformers were careful to preserve the Marian feasts and in their

collects and readings handed down the fullness of Orthodoxy. The daily praying of the Magnificat in Evening Prayer provided a living conduit to communion with her whom 'all generations will call blessed.' I know after over thirty years as a parish priest in 'middle of the road' Anglican parishes that for many Marian devotion of any kind is forbidden territory; although most haven't a clue why they hold such strong reservations.

I have no wish to trample on such tender sensitivities but I have always encouraged parishioners to see Mary as a friend and mother. Her will and the will of Jesus are always seen as one in Scripture from the first sign at Cana until his death. She is always present; holding him in birth and death, and present both at his conception in the Annunciation and the birth of the Church at Pentecost.

For those readers who struggle with an invitation to be a companion in prayer with the Mother of Our Lord it might be helpful to remember that Gabriel addresses her as 'full of grace.' The claim of the Church throughout the ages has always been that this 'fullness of grace' has never ended and that the Lord is still with her.

Where is reality?

Denis Desert on the importance of the here and now

Pope Julian II commissioned the Renaissance artist Raphael to paint a fresco in one of the magnificent apartments of the Vatican. The subject was to reflect the contribution of the classical philosophers to Western culture. The result was *The School of Athens* painted in the years between 1508 and 1511. The painting is set in a large debating chamber in the classical style with a considerable number of philosophers arguing their points of view. The centre of the painting is dominated by the two greats, Plato and his pupil Aristotle. As they step down into the chamber they are in hot debate, each taking a radically different view.

Plato and Aristotle

Plato, no doubt, quotes his famous allegory of the cave declaring that all we see in the present dimension is no more than a shadow of the reality above, while Aristotle, the father of Western science, states that reality is rooted firmly in the here and now, in what we see before our very eyes. The artist makes this clear by depicting Plato pointing firmly up and Aristotle pointing firmly down with the flat of his hand.

While both men shared a common understanding in the primacy of reason, their conclusions took a different slant. Plato held that there was a link between the application of reason and the conclusion that reality is grounded in the eternal forms. But Aristotle held, on the contrary, that reality is grounded in what is observed.

Daily life

Jean-Pierre de Caussade was born in Cahors in 1665 and died in 1751. His classic work is *Abandonment to Divine Providence* and also *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*. Reflecting the perspective of Aristotle he wrote in his second work, 'The present moment holds infinite riches beyond your wildest dreams but you will only enjoy them to the extent of your faith and love.' His works underline the importance of the everyday, the here

and now. God is experienced not by switching off from the mundane but by engaging with the routine of daily life with all its ups and downs. In the *Abandonment*, he wrote, 'God teaches the soul by pains and obstacles, not by ideas.' For de Caussade everything that happens to us is of consequence, even 'The Slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' At one point he wrote, 'God speaks through disaster.' Clearly, from de Caussade's understanding, it is futile complaining 'why did God allow this to happen to me?' Everything that happens in the course of life is, under God, an opportunity for growth.

If I might quote a Muslim friend

**everything that happens in
the course of life is, under
God, an opportunity for
growth**

who lived in Jerusalem and had been diagnosed with leukaemia. In a letter he wrote, 'God has sent me this illness as a gift to teach me the virtue of patience.'

The orbit of faith

I think that de Caussade would have agreed with this. Again in the *Present Moment* he wrote, 'There is no moment when God is not manifest in the form of some affliction, obligation or duty.' People of faith cannot separate out their experiences in terms of that is of God but this is not. Everything is experienced within the orbit of faith.

But he was conscious that his teaching could be interpreted as Quietism. He countered this in his *Present Moment*, 'I must not, like the quietists, reduce all religion to a denial of any specific action, despising all other means, since what makes perfection is God's order, and the means he ordains is best for the soul.' Quietism was triggered off by the Spanish priest de Molinos and his followers who saw passivity and the contemplative life as superior to that

of meditation and godly service. This view was condemned as heresy by the Papacy and Molinos was arrested and died in prison.

Communicating the faith

To my mind it is de Caussade's focus on the here and now that needs to be emphasized in communicating the faith to the contemporary world. As Christians we tend to give the impression that there is something intrinsically bad about the world and that we need to fix our eyes on the eternal. This, I believe, presents a false dichotomy.

If creation emerged, as some scientists suggest, from a speck of proto matter then everything comes from the heart of God and therefore is essentially good. This means, I believe, that everything, heaven and earth, spiritual and material, time and eternity is held together in a creative unity. Reality is not just up there or down here but is in a constant state in which we are privileged to exist.

Of course, this understanding raises the question of good and evil. But, as de Caussade pointed out, 'God instructs the heart ... by pains and contradictions.' That great visionary Poet, William Blake, put it this way, 'Man was made for joy and woe, / And when this we rightly know, / Thro' the world we safely go.' The negative side of experience may possibly play some part in the creative process in which we are called to take part.

Much has been said from the top about the urgency of communicating the faith. It appears to me that we have to enter first into the fundamental questions of life and faith reflected in Raphael's painting; we need to enter the *School of Athens*. The next step, as Matthew Arnold touched on in the nineteenth century and Don Cupitt in his *Sea of Faith*, is to evaluate and understand contemporary culture. The third step, with a renewed vision, to proclaim the Gospel but firmly rooted in significance of the here and now and how it may be applied to our daily lives. **ND**

Sacramental assurance

Ross Northing on the dangers of abandoning the concept of objective truth

There is a story, whether apocryphal or true, concerning a man knocking on a presbytery door who informs the priest that he wants to become a Christian. The priest replied, 'What makes you think we want you?'

Not the most conducive of welcomes to be sure, but perhaps what lies behind the priest's response is the knowledge that the Lord said, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide' (John 15.16).

As we know, much of modern secular thinking is subjective. Objectivity is virtually scorned and dismissed as the province of those with closed minds. The idea of objective truth has given way to the claim, 'Well, it's true for me.'

Personal opinion

This was brought home to me when seeing a documentary involving three young people visiting Leonardo da Vinci's fresco of the Last Supper in Milan, following the rather interesting claims made by the author Dan Brown in his novel *The Da Vinci Code*. On arrival they were read a relevant passage from Mr Brown's work and all claimed that they could see what he was talking about with regard to the *sacred feminine* in the V-shape gap between the Lord and St John. Then Brian Sewell, the art historian, was brought in and Mr Brown's work was read again and Mr Sewell declared that this was of course 'bunkum'. He then explained that Leonardo da Vinci had painted the moment when Christ said, 'One of you will betray me' and St John had turned to St Peter and, like all the other Apostles, is asking who it might be or whether they were the betrayer. Two of the young people in the group were really pleased to hear an art historian's view and stated that they could now see that Dan Brown had made the story up to suit the theme of his novel. The other young person said, 'No, I still think Dan Brown's right.'

That individual's response illustrates

all too vividly the fact that we live in an age where personal opinion is so often equated with truth, and where there is a real danger of inconsistency in our thinking when it does not fit with what we want to see. When what we actually need does not fit with what we think we want, how do we react? When Scripture and the Tradition of the Church do not suit our own way of thinking, do we vaunt our own opinion as being of greater value? Are we then following Christ who chose us, or the dictates of our own hearts?

Only when it suits?

I was recently reminded of these words of Pope Benedict XVI in his Introductory Words at Evening

changes to the nature of the sacraments are not open to individual provinces or Synods

Prayer in Westminster Abbey in 2010, 'Fidelity to the word of God, precisely because it is a true word, demands of us an obedience which leads us together to a deeper understanding of the Lord's will, an obedience which must be free of intellectual conformism or facile accommodation to the spirit of the age.'

Being called by Christ to follow him involves a call to discipleship and a call to witness to the faith he revealed. This involves having the humility to recognize the truth of those words of God, recorded by Isaiah, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' (55.8-9).

We want to be known as followers of Jesus – or is this only when it suits us? If Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, then this surely requires the humility to accept that there is an ultimate source of Truth outside the court of our own personal opinion and

that of individual Synods or Provinces?

We have experienced the damage that can be caused when individual Provinces claim to have the authority to be able to alter the sacramental order of the Church. In response to this we have always pointed to the truth that the Church of England's understanding is that it continued with the historic three-fold order of bishop, priest and deacon as the Church had received it; and that, therefore, the General Synod had no authority to make such a change without the whole Church agreeing that the Holy Spirit was guiding the Church to do so.

Risk of inconsistency

Changes to the nature of the sacraments are not open to individual provinces or Synods, nor are they open to individual bishops or priests. We have argued for consistency in our approach to the theology of the sacraments of the Church, and yet, sadly, there have been calls by some who, while wishing to uphold the Church's understanding of the nature of holy orders, for the understanding of the sacrament of marriage to be changed.

It seems to me that this is nothing other than sacramental inconsistency. Should an individual, who holds that the General Synod has no authority to change the nature of Holy Orders, campaign for a change in the understanding of the sacrament of marriage? How can it be Catholic doctrine that it is permissible to have private judgement in the matter of orders and sacraments?

Independent departure from what the Church of England has received regarding the nature of the Sacraments, by a Synod or an individual, runs the risk of failing any test of doctrinal rigour or consistency. It would simply mean that they mean whatever anyone wants them to mean. There is a vast gulf between that position and the faith and understanding of the one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of which we claim to be a part. **ND**



Fan the Flame relaunched

In February 150 priests and Deacons met for a wonderful retreat at Walsingham. At the end of the week 7-8 February, a group of clergy met in at Walsingham to plan the relaunch of the Fan the Flame initiative. Well over a hundred parishes have benefitted in the past from this week-long teaching mission, led by local lay co-ordinators and resourced by visiting missionaries. The group of sixteen missionaries who gathered at Walsingham included both those who had led such missions before, and those who were new to the task but were keen to incorporate the work of teaching missions into their priestly ministry. Bishop Lindsay Urwin, the originator and founder of Fan the Flame, framed our time together with a bible study on 1 Timothy to start us off, and with a concluding Mass in the Barn Chapel. In between, the sessions were led by Fr Mark Gilbert SSC (Vicar of St Wilfrid, Chichester) and Fr Damian Feeney SSC (Vice-Principal of St Stephen's House, Oxford), both of whom will be overseeing the running of the initiative.

We have our first mission in the pipeline, for June, and we are hopeful that this wonderful gift to the church can be restored to its former vigour. Accordingly, we ask three things. Firstly of all, please do remember us in your prayers. Prayerful support is at the heart of the Fan the Flame process, and your prayers will be vital as we move forward. Secondly, please consider having a Fan the Flame mission in your parish. It is a wonderful opportunity for the renewal and energising of God's faithful. Thirdly, we are looking to incorporate new missionaries into the Mission Task Force so that we will be able to resource the missions effectively. Please do contact us if you would like to know more.

If you are interested in give in a week of your time to help another Parish as a member of the Task force please could you send an email to fantheflameweek@msn.com. More information can be found on our new website:

<http://fantheflameweek.weebly.com>

Women in the Episcopate: Reference to the Dioceses

The diocesan synods will shortly be voting on the Women in the Episcopate legislation – a draft Measure and a draft Canon.

This legislation forms part of a package which also includes a House of Bishops' Declaration (containing provisions that will replace Resolutions A and B and the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod) and a Resolution of Disputes Procedure, both of which we warmly welcome.

Only the Measure and the Canon will be the subject of formal voting in the diocesan synods. When legislation is referred to the dioceses because it touches the sacraments of the Church, Forward in Faith believes that synod members should give their votes according to principle and conscience. For members of Forward in Faith that is likely to involve voting against the Measure and the Canon because, for reasons

of theological conviction, we cannot endorse the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate. This will be the only opportunity for members of diocesan synods to vote on the principle in accordance with their theological convictions.

We wish to underline that in making this recommendation we are not seeking to hinder progress towards a final resolution of this issue. It is important that this is made clear in diocesan synod debates. We are conscious that at this stage in the process only simple majorities are required.

We were encouraged that, when members of the General Synod voted against the relevant parts of the legislation at the February group of sessions, the fact that they felt obliged to do so as a matter of integrity was widely accepted. We trust that similar understanding will be shown in the diocesan synods.

On behalf of the Council

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The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker
Chairman

LINDSAY NEWCOMBE
Dr Lindsay Newcombe
Lay Vice-Chairman

ROSS NORTHING
The Revd Ross Northing
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