

***Parish Magazine of
St Giles' &
St Margaret's, Oxford***



January 2007

Free

The United Benefice of **St Giles and**
SS Philip & James with St Margaret

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The parish magazine aims to provide an opportunity for us to exchange ideas and to share our experience of the Christian life. Publication date is noted below. Please send the editor articles, drawings, book reviews, or parish news. The editor is especially grateful for material which has no particular sell-by date and for copy sent by email attachment.

Recommended length of articles: invited articles max 1,100 words (3 pages); all other contributions max 700 words (2 pages).

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Dear Friends,

January 2007

Did you watch the final episode of the Vicar of Dibley? Whether you did or not, I wonder whether the thought passed through your mind ... why is this coming to an end? Certainly this thought went through my mind as the final comic exchange happened as the credits rolled by. Maybe the series is coming to an end because Dawn French doesn't want to be only known as the "Vicar of Dibley". But I suspect that the main reason is that the advisors to the programme know that a period of history has passed. Female Vicars are no longer news... a new phase has already started when women are now more or less fully accepted as members of the clergy. The advocates of women's ministry no longer want to draw attention to the gender of the Vicar; they simply want to get on with the job!

The turning of the year was also marked by another ending of a more tragic nature. The long battle to remove Saddam Hussein from power reached its tragic climax with his hanging at the end of the year. There is something incredibly sad for me about someone's execution. However bad and inhumane that person has been, hanging someone seems to be the ultimate statement of failure. I agree with John Donne that anyone's death is a loss that is felt by all of us. All of our histories are so intertwined that it is hard for any of us to escape a sense of sadness that a better way forward could not have been found. Yes, seeing someone die should make us all pause and reflect ...silence seems the most appropriate response. How very sad that someone chose to taunt Saddam as he was executed, yet his response to recite verses from the Koran called Jesus' temptations in the wilderness to my mind.

But perhaps the saddest loss for me that occurred at the end of 2006 was the death of my Rector in Windsor, Canon Jeffery Whale. He was a man that could infuriate me by his lack of organisation and forethought but nevertheless he was a very loveable man. He was undoubtedly a man of faith who did his very best to live his faith on a day to day basis. He was honest and open and a man who gave himself fully in the service of others.

These three endings, all of a very different nature, underscore the fact that the passage of time does bring issues to closure. Nothing goes on for ever; even the Archers will come to an end one day! Although this could encourage us to take a gloomy attitude to life, I think that it can be seen in a different, more positive way. We should remember that the problems that seem to be endless, such as the Palestine/Israeli conflict will one day come to an end. In such situations we have to keep a sense of hope without knowing or seeing precisely what we are hoping for.

Secondly, we also need to recognise that in order that new things can come, something needs to go in order to make room for growth to occur. The problem which many of us suffer from is an inability to let go of something that has passed its sell by date. If you want any proof of this look at the state of your attic or other “long-term” storage area. I know I am as guilty as others on this score ...maybe the dawn of the New Year will help me see the need to create some space for growth and change.

Thirdly, what strikes me about these three endings is the need to use time wisely and not waste it on things which are irrelevant. We don't know how much longer anyone of us has either in this life or in our current situation. So if we want to move something forward, we need to seize the moment and get on with what has to be done. Yes, there is a difference between things which are urgent and things which have priority. But fussing over this difference and getting distracted by issues which are of little importance will only make problems worse.

So as the New Year starts in earnest, those three endings are making me look towards the future with a greater sense of purpose. I do think that we need to look to the future with a sense of hope and optimism but also realise that these can only take shape if we are prepared to live with a greater sense of freedom, being less encumbered by our past. I can see more clearly now that time is indeed a very precious gift and this should never be wasted ...it can easily be taken from us without our consent.

Best wishes for 2007, with love,

Andrew.

This month's edition of the Church Magazine focuses on the **New Testament**. The previous issue examined the Old Testament; and the February issue will be looking at the formation of the Bible as a whole.

Invited articles in this issue:

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| <i>What Manner of Genre?</i> | p. 6 |
| <i>By Val Cunningham</i> | |
| <i>The Apocryphal Gospels – and how they arose</i> | p. 10 |
| <i>By Anthony Aston Smith</i> | |
| <i>Recognising our Benefactors</i> | p. 14 |
| <i>By Andrew Bunch</i> | |
| <i>Paul's Legacy: Christianity in Turkey</i> | p. 16 |
| <i>By David Longrigg</i> | |

The article of *Bernard Silverman* is strictly speaking not about the New Testament, but it makes a useful addition to our themed issue:

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| <i>Why I am not a scientist-theologian</i> | p. 20 |
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What Manner of Genre?

Val Cunningham

'What manner of man is this?' startled onlookers asked of Jesus when he calmed a storm in the Gospel of Matthew. Spectators, they were, *theoroi*, theorists. What sort of theorising does this man provoke? For our part we have to ask what manner of writing is this, about this man and his life and death and teaching and meaning – the writing we call the New Testament. What manner of genre is this? For sure, the book is an uncanny mixture of genres: bits of history and document and memoir, epistles, theological essays, sermons, apologetic, hagiography, dream-visions, apocalyptic, miracle stories, parables, short stories heavy with

mythic. Here poetry, the poetic, sublime as well as wild poeticity, rub keen shoulders with prose, even the most banally prosaic. What to make of it? How to theorise this?

Taken as a whole, as a freestanding little book, the New Testament might be thought of as having a poetic beginning (well, four or five goes at beginnings - the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles), and a flamingly poetic ending, the Book of Revelation, both of them framing a longish prose middle. A middle - as the novelist Henry Green put it of his own very realistic prose - thick with authorial spittle: the spittle, the sweat even, of St Paul, tentmaker turned itinerant preacher - blessing, and cursing ('Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works'), het-up about trivia, the cloak he left behind him at Troas, noisy women who should shut up in church, young Timothy who needs to take a little wine 'for his stomach's sake'.

Certainly the New Testament's ending book is different from all that down-to-earth stuff - a wonderful and weird, excited and exciting vision of a Blake- and Tolkien-inspiring cosmic struggle to end all cosmic struggles, the downfall of the satanic Beast and his Whore and of imperial Babylon city, and the arrival of New Jerusalem city, all golden streets, river of life and healing trees, 'coming down from God out of heaven': an imagination-boggling heaven full of curious creatures passing eternity amidst massed choirs and large brass ensembles worshipping a victorious Lamb. As for the book's beginning texts, they plunge you into a magical, mythographical story of Jesus's origins, this child of the Holy Ghost born out of prophecy in a welter of angelical messengers, guiding stars and worshipping astrologers. These narratives make, of course, the aptest of prefaces to Jesus' ministry of story-telling, his doing of theology largely through narrative. 'Now a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves.' Which is to say, doing theology as metaphor - the very essence of the poetic. Jesus is the perpetual maker of metaphoric material. He knows himself, becomes known to the reader, as a set of metaphors - bread, water, way, truth, life, and so forth. Metaphor is the rhetorical device by which meaning is produced in acts of representation through transference, the

meaning of this thing carried over to some other thing to become transformed into it. Jesus is not bread, but becomes it by metaphor's powerful transporting, transferring, transforming force. And that's a model, is it not, of the incarnation, of the divine transposed into the human, becoming what it was not to start with. Which is the essence of all these stories about Jesus, and by Jesus. Jesus as metaphor indeed. Or, as perhaps the New Testament's most forceful beginning text, John's Gospel, has it: Jesus as word itself.

As the word of God, in fact. The word of God the creative speaker of the Old Testament's own beginning book, the Book of Genesis, the God whose word was genetic because it was performative. 'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.' Creation as utterance: the word as maker. Here was making, creativity, as utterance – and a making out of the rawest of poetic materials: 'the earth... without form, and void' – *tohu wa bohu*, an untranslatable Hebrew phrase for the primal raw materials of creation. *Tohu*, something like *chaos*; *bohu*, a nonce word of no known meaning, only to be guessed at, but there (it seems to me) to serve a mere rhyme for *tohu*, thus announcing that in the beginning there was not just the word of God, but rhyming words, poetic ones. So here, at this first genetic moment, in this most momentous of beginning narrations, was a proleptic adumbration of the new – and dramatically poetic – beginning to come, the coming of the story-telling, metaphor-mongering Jesus, the divine one in and as metaphor: Jesus as the very poeticity and poem of God – and so, unsurprisingly, the master of story, metaphor, the new poetic word of God.

So the new era of the new word and wordiness, the new divine poetic, was to be imagined, and propagated, as a repeating of the creative essence of the earlier version: the New Testament as a replaying extension of the Old, a *fulfilment* of the Old, as the New Testament, and Jesus, keep saying; new word and words built on the old ones; the poeticity of the New Testament fired by the poeticity of the Old. And that is, of course, a striking feature of the New Testament's middle as well as of its beginning (think Matthew's insistence that his Gospel's stories are continuations of Old Testament ones) and of its end (John the

Revelator's Book a dazzling rewrite of apocalyptic Ezekiel and Daniel). The middle is very far from not sharing in the going poeticity. Paul and the other Epistle writers are not least extraordinary metaphoricists in their own right, intense metaphor-makers in the wonderfully fluent manner of Jesus their master. Paul's theology is unimaginable stripped of its image repertoire – Christians as God's epistles, their hearts notebooks inscribed by God, and as a household economy of faith, temples of the Holy Ghost, living stones, living sacrifices, slaves of God, and so on on and on). And the new theology of these epistlers, the new theological words of this New book, turn out to be repeatedly expressed as poetry, done in obviously poetic language, poetic mode.

The New Testament theological is massively a matter of poetic words - and poetic words, what's more, which turn out to be repetitions, rewrites, updates (an affair as it were of *midrash*, as the rabbis called it) of poetic words, passages, concepts, the image repertoire, of the Old Testament. These texts draw heavily on the Old Testament in general, but particularly on its poetic texts, plundering most notably the great poetry of the Psalms and of Second Isaiah. Look, for instance, at Romans chapters 3, 4, 8 and 10, or I Corinthians 2, or Hebrews 10, or I Peter 2 in a version like the RSV, which helpfully prints poetry as poetry rather than in blocks of prose, and see just how much of the New Testament theological text (that 'prosey' middle) is actually poetry rather than prose, and is simply a quoting, reworking, a flagrant *mélange*, an intense mixing 'n matching of great Old Testament poems. So much, you might say, for the prosaic middle. New Testament theological text is, extremely commonly, the abundant outgrowth of Old Testament poetry. It *is* poetry; a new poetry made out of the old. Aptest of media, you might think, in which to imagine and project Jesus the new poetic word of the verbally creative God.

The Greek poem-word, *poiema*, occurs only once in the New Testament – in Ephesians 2.10, for the Christian (God's *poiema*, or 'workmanship', AV). There's a closely related variant in Romans 1.20, for the created natural world (AV, 'the things that have been made'). Nature and the believer: God's poems, the poetic works of the poetic deity; God's

words, His word, thought of as making things - old creation, new creation. And the most striking thing about this poeticity – which is of course Jesus’s kind, the kind of which Jesus is the sharpest exemplum – is that it’s not just verbiage, words, stories, rhetoric, metaphoricity, poeticity, for their own sake, but a poeticity with designs on the real. This is a making which makes in and for the real – the knowable, empirical, historical real. That, at any rate, is the wager of this new poetic, the allegation that all this mythicity, this story-world, is also factual and historical. That this Jesus – divine word, metaphor, poem – is also a real person in and for the real, the actual and historical. There are mythic representations galore, as CS Lewis once put it, of divine persons dying for the salvation and healing of the dead land, and for that matter lots of stories of miraculous births and saviours rising from the dead, but the New Testament’s arresting idea is that its stories are the real thing that all the rest only shadow forth. *That* is how we are to theorise all this.

‘For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you.’ Paul’s words, from that ‘prosing’ middle, about the Word, the Word in a person, as a person, speaking words, metaphorizing words no less (this bread: my body), words which are also a thingy reality, edible, digestible (bread, wine), the embodiment, the performance of the word. The original divine making. The word once again become flesh. The metaphoric *as* a real, *as if* real: the real life of metaphor. It’s exactly what the most potent metaphors do – and not least God’s kind – the divine word, and Word, turned into things, making things, in the real world of things, things such as Paul’s ‘things that are made’ and his poetic Christian believer.

The Apocryphal Gospels – and how they arose

Anthony Aston Smith

It may seem surprising to us, in an era where we are deluged with the written word, that for the first twenty or so years after Pentecost the

Christian faith probably spread without any recourse whatever to the written word. Christianity, in its earliest stage, was simply a heretical sect of Judaism, with its adherents fully accepting the authority of the Jewish scriptures, our 'Old' Testament. (Their leaders subsequently made good use of this authority to validate the authority of Jesus as Messiah, particularly in Matthew's Gospel.) But the rapid spread of Christian faith was due not to the gospels (which did not exist then) but to the fervent evangelism of Paul throughout Greece and Asia Minor. At that time there must have been many in Israel who would have had vivid personal memories of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry (amazingly, Paul does not seem to have been one of these, despite his fanatical opposition), and the spread must have been assisted also by popular and informal discussion of sayings and miracles and probably talk of the further deeds of the Apostles.

The primacy of the spoken word is not so surprising in a culture where relatively few could read or write. Memories would have been finely honed for the accurate retention and passing on of information by word of mouth; by contrast the written word had to rely on the accuracy and probity of a scribe, and there was always the possibility of misunderstandings or downright dishonesty in the transmission of the message. But fairly quickly, problems of *authority* would have arisen in the churches Paul left scattered around. The churches were founded initially by his preaching and the authority of the oral tradition, but when he continued his travels and left them to their own devices, difficulties speedily appeared. Questions arose, factions developed arguments and quarrels broke out, and all must have realised the need for a source of authority to adjudicate on these matters. As Paul (the sole authority they had) could not be in two places at once to sort out local backslidings and controversy, he *had* to write to his flocks, and so we have gained the priceless by-product of his mission: his epistles to the young churches he had founded. These circulated throughout the Christian communities and became the first authoritative writings of the Church, but they *are* by-products. They are primarily dealing with local problems and, whatever his preaching may have covered, there is virtually nothing in his epistles telling of the actual life and actions of the incarnate Christ.

So at the same time there must have been a rapidly growing and very real need for authoritative knowledge of the life and ministry of Jesus. We know nothing about the author or the exact circumstances which generated it, but this need eventually resulted in the Gospel of Mark: the earliest extant document concerned specifically with the life, teaching, ministry, passion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This need was increasingly urgent because by the time Mark was writing the number of people who had had personal contact with Jesus must have been diminishing rapidly. James, John, Peter and Paul had all suffered martyrdom and there was a danger of the Church becoming rudderless and its adherents disillusioned and losing faith. Mark saw that one way – perhaps the only way – to keep hope and faith alive (especially at times of persecution) was to write the story of Jesus as a record for his own and future generations of the Church. In this way he could bring home to people the reality of the synthesis of humanity and divinity in Christ's life, and proclaim a message of hope despite the apparent failure of Jesus' mission on the cross. Mark's account must have been successful because within the next 10 – 15 years, Matthew and Luke produced their gospels, Luke in addition covering much of the lives of Peter and Paul after the death of Jesus in a second volume.

Further Christian literature must have begun to proliferate by this time. By the end of the 1st century the Gospel of John was in existence, and by 125 a.d. numerous other works were in circulation, several claiming to apostolic authorship or as an eye-witness of Jesus. Thus a further problem now faced the leaders of the Church: which of these many writings should be considered as definitive for the teaching and preaching of the Church? The result was (eventually) the formation of the Canon of the New Testament, and those writings which were excluded from the Canon (usually because they were considered heretical or largely fictitious by the church leaders of the time) are now collectively known as the Apocryphal New Testament. In this corpus there are several self-styled 'gospels', but none of them are really Gospels in the sense of 'Good News' as we understand it. For the most part they were probably written either to strengthen the faith of the flock

or make some moral or doctrinal teaching, or (because of popular demand?) to set out further accounts of the birth and infancy of Christ. Although some of this extra material may go back to the oral tradition, generally speaking it is exceedingly verbose and not at all convincing!

At the time these accounts were written there was a popular cult of mystery religions (Gnosticism), claiming that salvation could only be attained by a secret revealed knowledge of God, known only by the apostles and secretly passed on by them to the leaders of Gnostic sects. In order to give an authority to this teaching 'gospels' were written, purporting to be by an apostle, but with a strong bias towards the Gnostic beliefs. Because these teachings were condemned by the orthodox Church and forbidden to be read by the faithful, much was destroyed and many are only known from small fragments. One of the earliest and more complete is the Gospel of Thomas, only discovered in 1946 and probably Gnostic, but which is really just a collection of sayings of Jesus with a strong ascetic bias but without any historical framework. (Not to be confused with the Acts of Thomas – a romantic account of his life in India – or the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, which is a crude assemblage of tales about miracles by the infant Jesus and portraying him in a very unflattering light.) We only possess the Gospel of St. Peter as a fragment of some 60 verses giving an account of the crucifixion with an anti-Jewish bias. The Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Truth are also Gnostic productions in which attempts are made to assimilate Gnostic thinking with orthodox Christian doctrine; but they contain very little narrative or reference to Jesus. We only have the Gospel of the Ebionites ('poor men') in fragmentary form, but it seems that this sect (from east of the Jordan) held that Jesus was the human son of Joseph and Mary and received the Holy Spirit at his Baptism. The Gospel according to the Egyptians and the Gospel according to the Hebrews are similarly shadowy, known to us only through a few fragments and quotations by Clement of Alexandria and Jerome. The Gospel of the Hebrews was said to follow Matthew very closely, but there are two sayings attributed to Jesus quoted in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (p.626) which do not appear in the canonical gospels.

These writings and their associated literature give us valuable insights into the growth and spread of Christianity in the first two centuries a.d. and the disputes and heresies with which Paul and the early bishops had to deal; but I cannot think that we have lost anything vital to our faith by their exclusion from the Bible.

Further reading.

F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone: *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*; 2nd Edn, OUP 1978.

W.H.C. Frend: *The Rise of Christianity*; DLT, 1984.

M.R. James: *The Apocryphal New Testament*; OUP, 1983.

H.C. Kee & F.W. Young: *The Living World of the New Testament*; DLT, 1983.

C.M. Laymon (Ed.): *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*; Abingdon Press, 1971.

Recognising our Benefactors

Andrew Bunch

If you put together a list of the people who have made a significant contribution to your life, how many people would you include? Yet however many people you chose to put on your list, I suspect there would be a number of people that would get forgotten. The most likely candidates to be forgotten are the people who you may have only met for a short while but nevertheless played a crucial role for you. They are the ones who maybe helped you to make a decision or discovery that you were apprehensive about and later proved to be a turning point.

In the life history of Jesus, I think that Elizabeth (Mary's cousin) is just such a person. Yes, she has an acknowledged importance because she was the mother of John the Baptist. But I think that we should also recognise that but for her perceptive response to Mary's visit to her prior to Jesus' birth, the history of the New Testament could have been very different ... indeed it may never have happened at all!

Many years ago, as chaplain to a secondary school in Windsor, I used to visit the school once a week. To make myself available to the students, I

would have lunch in the dining hall. It often happened that nobody came to talk with me and so I had plenty of opportunity to observe the behaviour of teenagers without any interference from adults. The observations made then, made me very aware of how teenagers like to solve problems in their own way without any reference to authority or their parents.... and some of the solutions they take can be highly risky.

Mary was probably a teenager at the time when she was pregnant with Jesus and after the initial euphoria; my guess is that she was a very worried girl. Being unmarried and pregnant was a very dangerous condition to be in.... nice girls didn't get into such a state and anyone who did, could face being stoned to death. So what did she do? Did she talk to her parents – personally I doubt it. Her relationship with her parents might have been a model of open communication, but the high level of anxiety about the consequences and being a teenager would both work against this. My guess is that she wanted to get out of her home environment and try and find her own solution away from home.

Elizabeth's pregnancy gave Mary a perfect excuse to get away from home – she could go and help her older cousin out and be a willing extra pair of hands. So the journey could then take place with her parent's blessing and without raising any questions. (Perfect!) What was Mary thinking about on the journey.... were there predecessors of “Vera Drake” in those hills where Elizabeth lived? Mary might find out. Or perhaps she could talk the situation through with her cousin... at least she was going through a similar experience.

Thank God for intuition! When people who have been through similar experiences meet, they don't have to explain everything in detail, there is a natural resonance and understanding. Just by looking at Mary, Elizabeth knew what was going on in Mary's life. Yes, the unborn child may well have given her the prompt she needed... but what possessed Elizabeth to react in the way that she did? Surely a good and upright person who had been waiting for so long for a baby might look on her pregnant and *unmarried* younger cousin with disapproval, but she didn't! What Elizabeth did was extra-ordinary - she gave Mary an enormous degree of affirmation.

Those few words of greeting could well be the main turning point of the history of mankind. They could be the words that saved Jesus' life at the most vulnerable stage of his development. So when reading the New Testament, I now want to give tremendous thanks for this generous hearted middle-aged lady named Elizabeth. She is so often one of the unsung heroes of the Gospel. We simply take her for granted as just doing what women do...having babies. But remember, even this wasn't easy for Elizabeth – she is a lady who encouraged hope to triumph over expectations – a true exemplar of the Gospel message.

Maybe it was Elizabeth's example which later prompted Mary to act in the way she did at that wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). Once again someone was being affirmative to another at a very critical stage of their life and thus enabling God's Kingdom to be known much more fully. My guess is that the Gospel story is full of many more examples of such affirmation unlocking the hidden potential for life. Perhaps this is one aspect of the New Testament message that needs to come out of the shadows so that we can once again start to realise the power of the Gospel to transform people's lives.

Paul's Legacy: Christianity in Turkey

David Longrigg

This article was written before 20th November 2006 because I thought, wrongly, that it was to be inserted in the December magazine. Since then there have been articles in newspapers, The Tablet and other magazines, on the Pope's visit to Constantinople; and, no doubt, there will be further comments in the press during and after. I look forward to reading about Turkish/Christian relationship at this sensitive moment in Turkish religious history.

It was certainly Paul on his three missionary journeys between 45 and 64 AD who spread Christianity outside the confines of Palestine and established churches, as we know from his Epistles and the Acts of the

Apostles, in Asia Minor, Athens, Corinth, Rome, Northern Greece and elsewhere. It was not a simple and easy process of spreading the Good News, preaching, converting and baptising. Paul himself – and no doubt some of his missionary companions as well – was beaten up, put on trial, imprisoned and shipwrecked. He incurred the wrath of the Jews, the displeasure of belligerent philosophers, and hatred from adherents of other faiths as well as pagans. He appeared before Herod Agrippa in Caesarea, appealed to Caesar, the privilege of a Roman citizen, and went to Rome for the hearing. There he was imprisoned and finally beheaded outside the city walls.

For more than two and a half centuries Christian churches were officially illegal more often than not, but persecution was a somewhat haphazard process. After about two hundred years there were so many Christians with influence that the state considered they were a menace; but in 324, Constantine became the ruler of the whole empire, Christianity became lawful and the church more or less experienced peace. Constantine was not baptised at first, but his sons were, and Christianity became the religion of his court. Christian clergy were exempted from the payments of tax, bishops heard civil cases in their courts, and so the church began to be integrated into imperial administration.

In the century after Muhammad's death in 632, Arab soldiers of the Muslim faith conquered Christian countries such as Egypt, Palestine, Syria, North Africa, and most of Spain, and later in the eighth and ninth centuries overcame Asia Minor, today's Turkey where Paul had established the Christian faith. In many Muslim states Christians and Jews were tolerated because they were 'people of the book', the Old Testament. The Muslims did, however, disapprove of the Christian tradition of putting pictures in churches, and, because of the doctrine of the Trinity, accused the Christians of believing in three Gods. On the whole, if a Christian community paid its tax it was left in peace; but this did not happen everywhere; and it must be remembered that Christians had little patience with the Muslim faith and its adherents in predominantly Christian environments. At the time of the Crusades,

though, the Crusaders and the numerous Christian communities in Lebanon, Syria and Asia Minor, frequently traded with Muslims, and there was a genuine effort by Christians to understand the Muslim faith. Some scholars, abbots and philosophers in England, France and Italy studied Arabic, and urged others to do so. The Koran was translated into Latin in 1143; even so, in 1310, a friar of Florence published a refutation of the Koran, while Dante argued that the faith of Islam was a heresy of Christianity!

Christianity in Asia Minor can be equated with the ups and downs of the city of Istanbul and its magnificent church, St Sophia. Constantine's son built the first church, burnt down in 532, then rebuilt by Emperor Justinian, the outside of the one we see today, considered the biggest and most beautiful in Christendom. The Turks captured the city in 1453, and St Sophia became a mosque. The last Christian service there was on the night of 28/29 May 1453, and the first Muslim service four days later. The mosaics were covered up in 1934 and today the building is a museum.

The Ottoman Empire grew on its ethnic diversity and religious tolerance, and many officials were Jewish or Christian converts as opposed to ethnic Turks. A widely travelled seventeenth century Huguenot said, *'There was no country on earth where the exercise of all religions is more free than in Turkey'*. In the early nineteenth century 50% of the population were reported to be Christian. But in the middle to late nineteenth century nationalism changed matters. Istanbul lost its diversity and became 99% Turkish: Jews, Greeks and Armenians emigrated. At Edessa, Christian Armenians were deported, and many murdered in the desert. Two thousand Christian families in the town defended themselves for some weeks, but Ottoman troops broke through and massacred these families. These and other incidents the Turkish authorities are reluctant to acknowledge, as you know, but they are part of their historical background. In 1955, in Istanbul, in a single night, thousands of hired thugs, in the presence of the police, ransacked every Greek shop in the city, desecrated cemeteries, and gutted seventy-three

Orthodox churches. This is certainly not tolerance for a religious minority.



Today there seems to be little Christian presence. My wife, with a party from the Oratory went this year to Turkey, Ephesus and so on. They were there for a week, but not once did they attend mass in a church: masses were said in a hotel room, a ruin or the open air. Christian priests, and religious, were not allowed to appear in the streets in any form of Christian religious garb. When I was in Cairo in Feb 2006, three million of the city's fifteen million inhabitants were considered to be Coptic Christians with their numerous churches and a cathedral, a considerable minority. But the Christians are under much pressure from a revival of Islamic insurgency in Upper Egypt. In April 1992 fourteen Copts were gunned down for refusing to pay protection money; and in 1994 an ancient Coptic monastery was attacked resulting in the deaths of two monks and two civilians. A church in Cairo was bombed, but the priest in charge, in his domed Coptic hat, according to a correspondent, refused to elaborate. *'This bomb is forgotten ...I do not want to talk about it...it would not be suitable to write about the matter'*. It is true the government's army has taken steps to control this guerrilla warfare

in order to save the tourist industry, but the relationship between the Christian Copts and the Muslims is certainly uncooperative if not openly belligerent.

I know the above is Egypt and not Turkey. But the latter, too, is very strongly Muslim, and religious minorities seem almost invisible. The Turkish response to EU criticism states that ‘... legislation and administrative measures have been put into effect regarding the Freedom of Religion.’ It then talks about Minority Issued Assessment Commission, places of worship, living conditions of non-Muslim religious minorities, the possible re-opening of a theological school for Orthodox clergymen (we wonder why it closed), religious education – Islamic, Christian or Jewish – at University levels can only be provided by public institutions, work permits for foreign clergymen are issued ... complaints that may arise are rapidly addressed, and so on. If you would like to see a fuller extract, ask John Clements, who kindly lent me two books: ‘From the Holy Mountain’ by William Dalrymple, and ‘Christian World of the Middle Ages’ by Hamilton. My own impression of the Turkish response to the EU is that they are considering re-opening, or taking part in, things to do with religious minorities that have in the past been abolished, closed down or neglected. But how sincerely a secular and Muslim country changes its past habits, I cannot say. I feel, but hope I’m wrong, that the life of a Christian and a Christian community in the Turkey of today could be just about as difficult as it was in Paul’s time.

Why I am not a scientist-theologian

Bernard Silverman

I’m often asked to preach or write on the subject of religion and science, and normally I refuse. Recently, because the invitation was to preach in my own College chapel, I couldn’t say no, and I had to confront what it was that made me uncomfortable.

In certain senses, I stand in succession to two famous ordained scientist-theologians. Arthur Peacocke, who died a few months ago, was a

biochemist who was one of the founding Fellows of my College (St Peter's) and moved in 1973 to be Dean of Clare College, Cambridge. He founded the Society of Ordained Scientists, of which I am an associate. John Polkinghorne FRS didn't quite manage to teach me quantum mechanics at Cambridge in the 1970's, but that isn't the reason I get a mention on his website polkinghorne.org. He resigned his chair at Cambridge in 1979 to be ordained and take up a second career in ministry, but was back at Cambridge within seven years and became the president of Queens' College.

Both Peacocke and Polkinghorne have written widely about the theological ramifications of their own scientific disciplines. As a physicist, Polkinghorne is especially concerned about questions like "where will the matter come from for the resurrection of the body". Peacocke, the biologist, writes on "Evolution and Creation" and "Chaos and Complexity". Many people find their work fascinating and edifying. However, in thinking about God and science, I don't find that they address the sorts of question that bother me. *What theological questions does science ask me?*

First of all, what should we think about science? Any research scientist will understand that science is a highly creative activity. The predominant driving force behind the work of most scientists is, or should be, curiosity and fascination about the created world, or the genuine desire to make some positive contribution to human needs and problems. Science is one of the most

Science is one of many ways we can delight in God's creation and the gifts we have to understand and marvel at it.

amazing achievements of the human mind and community. Darwin and Einstein, Crick and Watson, have uncovered the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between space and time, the way in which life emerged and develops and continues to do so, and the grammar of the genetic instructions contained in every known living cell. Reflecting on these achievements gives a sense of wonder in two ways: firstly, the more we learn about the created universe the more we wonder at it. And

secondly, we can wonder at the power of the human ability to find out such things about the natural universe. Among God's good gifts are human minds capable of critical enquiry and thought, and I believe it is God's will that we should use that intelligent curiosity to learn about science and to use it for good ends. Science is one of many ways we can delight in God's creation and the gifts we have to understand and marvel at it.

Scientific knowledge can give us power, and like all power it has the power to do good and the power to do bad. It's both because of its wonder and power that scientists should, if they can, try to communicate these. Understanding science is important so that we can discern good science from bad, humble science (most of it) from arrogant, and, most of all, true science from bogus. We should learn to engage in scientific debate on the level of rationality rather than emotion. Learning about creation, understanding science, is God's work, indeed an act of prayer and reverence, if it is done with humility and with care.

Above all, the real place we need the guidance of the Spirit is in discerning how to use the knowledge we obtain. The knowledge of science itself may be morally neutral, but the way it is used certainly isn't. Scientific knowledge and technological advance give us tremendous opportunities and face all of us with important choices. We all want to live in a world where infant mortality is what it is now rather than what it was 200 years ago, but should we try to keep a 22 week fetus alive? We all enjoy easy transport, and gain many benefits from it, but should we give up driving or flying to conserve resources and limit global warming?

It's sometimes suggested that science encourages a world view that is without ultimate purpose. Scientific explanations are not the same as moral or theological ones. In Luke Chapter 3, Jesus asked, "those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty

Above all, the real place we need the guidance of the Spirit is in discerning how to use the knowledge we obtain.

than all the others living in Jerusalem?”

The scientific explanation is simple: the mortar between the stones underwent chemical changes, and then gravity did the rest, but Jesus' question was about a different level of purpose and meaning. He recognised that the sun rose on the evil and the good, the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. Good science is not about purpose or ends, it describes the way things are, but that does not mean it denies purpose or meaning. The purposeless way of life summed up by “eat and drink for tomorrow you die” is a view that long predates scientific discovery.

Are scientists arrogant? Very, very few scientists believe that they have found, or that they are seeking, all knowledge and truth. Stephen Hawking wrote that if we find a “theory of everything” we will “know the mind of God”. I do not recognise the sort of God Hawking is talking about. His theory of everything would be a link between electricity, magnetism, gravity, and so on. It would, for example, tell us about things that are very big (clusters of galaxies) and things that are very small (subatomic particles). It would tell us a lot about physics, but very little about the complexities that biologists study, and to my mind nothing at all about most aspects of human life. The sort of God it would tell us the mind of isn't the sort of God I believe in. And similarly, when one reads atheist propagandists like Richard Dawkins, surely the appropriate reaction is to realise that we too don't believe in the sort of God Richard Dawkins doesn't believe in.

But I also have to take some issue with scientist-theologians like Peacocke and Polkinghorne. Science to me is enormously important, but, in contrast with Peacocke and Polkinghorne, I think it's a mistake, even dangerous, to try to use it in a theological way. Science gives opportunities and poses sometimes difficult choices. It raises key questions about humility and purpose and power. However, I don't think it has much or anything to say or ask about God that wasn't already a question long ago.

Old Testament books like Proverbs talk about a different kind of wisdom and understanding, one which rejoices in creation and in humanity but somehow stands above and beyond. Time itself is part of the physical universe, so when we say “The Lord created [Wisdom] at the beginning of his work” (Proverbs 8:22) or “In the beginning was the Word” we aren’t making a statement about time in the sense we can understand it, but a theological statement about God’s standing beyond and outside our notions of time and space. And passages like Colossians 1:15-20 say that all creation, all things visible and invisible, relativity, quantum mechanics, evolution, DNA, genomics, you, me, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, all things have been created through Christ and for Christ. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, the first place in everything. In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven. Isn’t this the right way to think of science in the scheme of things?

WYNDHAM HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Wyndham Housing Association provides sheltered housing for the elderly. We offer flats to rent or buy for people wishing to live active, independent lives while being relieved of the burden of housekeeping and maintenance.

As a small non-profit making organization, we are able to work closely with residents and their families to ensure that each resident's needs are being met.

Contact the Administrator on 01865 511239

www.wyndhamhousing.org

ST. GILES' BELLRINGERS

Firstly, advance notice of the

Bellringers' Evensong
6.30 pm Sunday 14th January 2007

Please come!



Secondly, a recent achievement:

On Sunday 3rd December 2006 in 40 minutes,
for Evensong
A QUARTER-PEAL OF 1260 GRANDSIRE TRIPLES
Tenor 13 cwt

Laura Cairns	<i>Treble</i>
John G. Pusey	2
Bernard Masterman	3
Maarit Kivilo	4
Simon L. Edwards	5
Dermot J. Roaf	6
Leon G. Thompson	7
David H. Ingrouille	<i>Tenor</i>

Conducted by Dermot J. Roaf

First Quarter Peal, at the first attempt, for the ringers of the Treble and Tenor Bells

Congratulations to Laura and David on ringing their first Quarter Peal. This is an important milestone in the life of a ringer, and particularly creditable if achieved, as this was, at the first attempt.

It was a red-letter day also for the tower, suggesting that we may soon be able to revive our tradition of marking the first Sunday of each month with a Quarter Peal before Evensong. The last time we were able to do

so was two years ago, after which our numbers fell to a level where this was impossible. But now our established learners have improved (thanks both to their own diligence, and to much patient coaching, particularly from Dermot Roaf and John Pusey), we have been joined by some experienced newcomers, and we have welcomed some more total beginners. Things can be said to be looking up.

Nevertheless, don't hold back if you are thinking of giving us a try!

We still need volunteers - with a sense of commitment, a willingness to climb ladders and handle ropes, and an ability to count, count, and keep on counting. We are friendly and sociable, and recently met after Sunday service for lunch together. Thank you, Laura, for doing all the organisation. Ringers of several years' standing will remember that it was also Laura who initiated and masterminded that memorable Ringing Tour and excellent country-pub lunch ...

We are now planning our special Evensong, on Sunday January 14th at 6.30 - a normal Evensong, but with suitably bell-related hymns and voluntary, and change-ringing on handbells in place of an anthem. We hope that as many as possible of the regular St. Giles' congregation (morning as well as evening) will be able to join us.

Rachel Hands

Ringling a Quarter Peal

When I first started learning to ring those words meant that novice ringers weren't required. This was for experienced ringers only. I think when ringling rounds, call changes and methods of various degrees of difficulty we ring for 5 or 6 minutes, although depending on how confident you are in a method it can feel like an age before the relief of the captain's call 'That's All' and then 'Stand' and we set our bells and smile small smiles of acknowledgement of a job well done or avoid eye contact if its been disastrous... A Quarter Peal lasts about 40 minutes, so the challenge was a big one not only to physically ring for that long, but to concentrate and stay right.

My co-Quarter-Peal-novice David Ingrouille and I were taking the Treble and Tenor respectively, to the method. The Treble starts at the front, leading, and moves simply through the bells one step at a time till ringing at the back and then comes ‘down’ to the front again. Writing those words it seems so simple and it should be – Bob, our octogenarian ringer reminds me often that all I have to do is count to 7... I wish it was that simple in practice. David’s job with the Tenor is to ring at the back, always the last bell to sound in the sequence and, very importantly, the rhythm for the other bells. St Giles, being an 8 bell tower, that leaves 6 others following a much more elaborate method and moving around in more complex patterns.

The challenge for the Treble is that you can’t know the bell you have to follow next except by seeing it and you see it by knowing the place you are meant to be ringing in – Leading, 2nd, 3rd etc, and seeing the bell that rings before that place.



I was nervous at the beginning, because I didn’t have the hardest job by any means, but I could cause it to fail if I lost my place and went wrong. A healthy dose of adrenalin accompanied me as I climbed the steep ladders up to the tower.

If you were outside St Giles on Sunday, 3rd December you would have heard us start at 5.45pm with ringing rounds, simple and in sequence Treble (1), 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, Tenor (8) to settle, the music being created as the bells move around each other. Then Dermot, the tower captain, called ‘Go Grandsire Triples’ and off we went. It was a false start. We rang for a minute or two before being called back to rounds, stood the bells and started again. I don’t know if it was done on purpose – David

and I have our conspiracy theory – but it helped to settle me as I had known where I was so hadn't caused the restart.

With renewed confidence off we went and 39 minutes later with Dermot's 'That's All' and 'Stand' I had successfully rung my first quarter peal – a fact that will be recognised in print in the next edition of the fortnightly ringers' magazine, 'Bellringers' World'.

It was glorious. Grins all round at the end, some tower housekeeping ringing the bells down for safety until the next practice night and then off to the Royal Oak for a well-deserved beer and 'post-match' debrief. Murmured praise – such a modest bunch; comments on technique – no opportunity for improvement lost; and experienced ringers commenting that in the middle parts even the music sounded good... praise indeed.

I can't actually remember the sound we made, I can only remember feverishly watching the other bells and counting (in my head!) which place I was meant to be in and relief when the bell I was expecting to follow was there to be followed. It didn't feel like 39 minutes. It felt like an eternity and then over in seconds. The band, the other ringers, was very supportive, they knew what they were doing and as a novice, with a good band around you anything is possible.

This will happen again on Sunday 7th January, and whilst you may not hear it all, know that as the bells are being rung the tower is a maelstrom of nervous energy, meaningful eye contact, encouraging looks, bobbing heads, shouted instructions and that when it comes round – the method completes and we return to rounds at the right point – the relief, well my relief, is palpable. It was great fun and I look forward to not only doing it successfully again, but even making the music sound good all the way through.

Laura Cairns

ST GILES ROOF APPEAL

Our Final Extravaganza!

**** Wine ****

**** Cheese tasting and talk by the Oxford Cheese Company ****

**** A myriad of extraordinary and amazing promises to be **
auctioned including:**

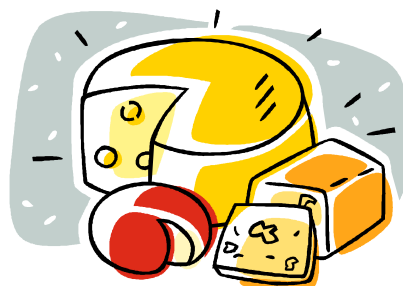
two air tickets to New York
a week in a cottage in the Dordogne
a night for two at the Old Parsonage Hotel with dinner
wine, champagne, travel, food, etc, etc

All in the beautiful surroundings of Keble College

Put Sunday afternoon, **18th March, 2007**, in your diary now.

At 7 o'clock, there will be a cheese tasting followed by a talk given by the **Oxford Cheese Company**.

At 8.30 the auction of promises will be conducted by Ben Lloyd of Mallams.



To reserve your ticket for this event at £5 each, contact the church office by phone (01865-311198), post (St Giles Church, Woodstock Road, Oxford, OX2 6HT) or email (admin@st-giles-church.org).

***** Make this a Mothering Sunday to remember *****

If you are able to contribute any promises, however small or unusual, we would be very happy to add them to the auction.

Dates for your diary ... January 2007

Saturday, 6th	The Epiphany
10.00 am	Tour of St John's in aid of St Giles' Roof Appeal Meet <i>at St John's Porters' Lodge</i>
6.00 pm	Eucharist with hymns <i>at St Margaret's</i>
Sunday, 7th	THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST
6.00 pm	Epiphany Carol Service <i>at St Margaret's</i>
Thursday, 11th	Mary Slessor, 1915
8.00 pm	PCC Meeting <i>at St Margaret's</i>
Sunday, 14th	SECOND SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY
6.30 pm	Bells Evensong <i>at St Giles'</i>
Wednesday, 17th	St Antony of Egypt
8.00 pm	PCC Meeting <i>at St Giles'</i>
Thursday, 18th	
12.30 pm	Hilary Term Talks commence <i>at St Giles'</i> <i>Six degrees: life on a hotter planet.</i> Speaker: Mark Lynas
Sunday, 21st	THIRD SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY <i>Christian Unity Week commences</i>
10.30 pm	Mattins & Holy Communion Preacher: Bishop Bernard Longley
6.00 pm	United Service <i>at St Margaret's</i>
6.30 pm	Evensong <i>at St Giles'</i>

- Thursday, 25th**
12.30 pm
The Conversion of St Paul
Lunchtime Talk *at St Giles'*
(Title and speaker to be confirmed)
- Saturday, 27th**
Holocaust Memorial Day
Variety Evening *at St Margaret's Institute*
- Sunday, 28th**
6.30 pm
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY
Homeless Evensong *at St Giles'*
- Thursday, 1st Feb**
12.30 pm
Lunchtime Talk *at St Giles'*
Managing the impacts of climate change
Speaker: Chris West
- Friday, 2nd**
8.00 pm
Candlemas
Sung Eucharist *at St Margaret's*
- Saturday, 3rd**
St Anskar, Archbishop of Hamburg
Brahms Liebeslieder concert *at St Margaret's*
- Sunday, 4th**
10.30 am
Third Sunday before Lent
Family Service with Baptism *at St Margaret's*



Weekly Services at St Giles' & St Margaret's

Sunday

8:00am	Holy Communion	St Margaret
8:00am	Holy Communion	St Giles
10:30am	Parish Eucharist <i>with Sunday School & Crèche</i>	St Margaret
10:30am	Mattins & Holy Communion	St Giles
6:00pm	Evening Prayer	St Margaret
6:30pm	Evensong	St Giles

Monday

5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
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Tuesday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles
7:15pm	Eucharist	St Margaret

Wednesday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
12:30pm	Eucharist	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles

Thursday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
8:00am	Iona Liturgy	St Giles
10:00am	Holy Communion	St Margaret
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles

Friday

7:00am	Morning Prayer	St Margaret
1:15pm	Taizé Service	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Giles

Saturday

9:00am	Morning Prayer	St Giles
5:30pm	Evening Prayer	St Margaret