

St Mary's News

March 2021

(under Coronavirus lockdown)



Includes

An Enormous Challenge – The Revd Tony Rindl

To be the person God created us to be – Cath Da Costa

PCC Reports – January & February

Two Obituaries – Molly Payne & Ian Scleater

.... and more!

An Enormous Challenge

In this month's edition of St. Mary's News you will see the usual report on the PCC meeting held in the middle of February. The headline from that report is the PCC anticipate a deficit of around £38,000 which must be a cause for concern. This figure is based on the estimated cost for doing everything that we believe God is asking of us a church and which is consistent with the vision we have developed for doing our worship, welcome and witness better following the refurbishment of the church. The thinking behind how we do our worship, welcome and witness better is something that has accompanied us throughout our journey of faith as we embarked on the reordering of the church.



It has been quite a journey and one where I very much believe God is with us, and where we are still learning and discovering more of God's plans and possibilities for us as a church. I hope the Lent Course, The Great Return, is providing us with the opportunity to reflect on our recent experiences, helping us to recognise that sense of God being with us on the journey. I hope this in turn will lead us to a greater understanding of our identity in Christ as God's children and the plans he has for each one of us, as He calls us to be part of a

brighter future and a better world. This of course may challenge us to make changes in our lifestyle in order to play a full part in making our vision of a better world a reality. No doubt our church can play an important part as we continue with Living God's Love and seek to go deeper with God, transform communities, and make new disciples.

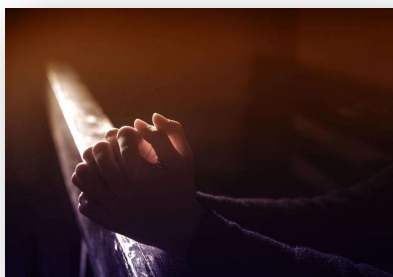
I wonder if the experience of the past twelve months has helped us develop a better understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is not simply a case of believing in Jesus. Our faith should make a significant difference to the way we live our lives. What we believe should influence the choices we make and what we do. This should inform our understanding of what it means to belong to a church and where we can be actively involved. I wonder how many people actually realise what is

involved in running a church. Perhaps a projected £38,000 deficit should reawaken in all of us a sense of personal responsibility as we must all play our part in addressing this.

In next month's edition of St. Mary's News we hope to give a detailed analysis of how much it costs for St. Mary's to operate and continue in its ministry and mission. Whilst there are other sources of income such as that generated from church centre bookings, we are largely dependent on the generosity of our church membership. Next month we will be presenting a formal challenge and asking you to consider whether you will be willing to increase your giving. It is something I want you to take very seriously, and in preparation can I ask you to do the following.

1) **To pray**

As we journey with God, take time to reflect on all that you are learning and discovering at the moment. What is God teaching you about how to live the Christian life? What is God asking of you? How do we respond to a generous God who has blessed us in so many ways? God blesses us so that we might be a blessing to others. All that God gives to us has a purpose. What can you give back to God?



2) **Consider whether your level of giving is realistic**

Every person's situation is different, and at the end of the day it is between you and God. But consider this prayer, which is an abridged version of King David's prayer as the Israelites embark on God's call to build the Temple in Jerusalem.

Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.

The bible gives a very clear mandate that we should give back to God one tenth of all the wealth we receive. It is widely recognised this is harder to implement in our modern world and the Church of England offers the following guideline: We should still consider giving 10% of our income

after tax and suggests that we give 5% to your church and 5% to other charitable causes.

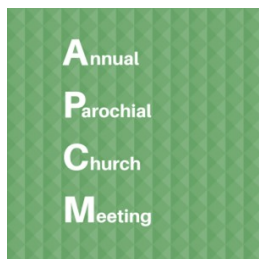
3) **Check you are giving by the most efficient method**

Please remember your generosity can go further if you are a taxpayer, as we can claim the tax back on your giving. Please make sure you have filled in a gift aid form. Also regular giving really helps so please consider giving by standing order. It will take five minutes to set up and once done regular payments will be made automatically. Please do continue to review your level of giving on a regular basis.

4) **Prayerfully consider other ways of contributing to the church**

If you desire St. Mary's to be a lively vibrant church where it is a joy to come and worship and enjoy fellowship and many social activities; if you desire St. Mary's to have a positive impact on our town and support many activities around the world; if you want St. Mary's to grow and flourish, then how will you help?

5) **Get the 25th April in your diary and attend the Annual Parochial Church Meeting**



At this time of year we are busy compiling the Annual Report for our Annual Parochial Church Meeting which will be held on 25th April. Like all businesses and charities, churches are required to submit accounts, and report on all their activities during the year and hold an Annual General Meeting. At the meeting Churchwardens are elected

and others are elected onto the PCC. It is important to review the previous year's activities and look forward to the year ahead. I think this year's meeting will be particularly important bearing in mind all that has happened over the past twelve months and what we need to consider moving forward.

I think it is also important that we recognise what has been achieved in the past twelve months. There is much that we have learned and has been reevaluated as a result of the lockdown. I think it has reinforced our view that our church is really important to us, and we have come to appreciate the importance of fellowship and coming together to worship God on a

regular basis.

I very much hope the APCM will be an opportunity to show our appreciation to everyone who has helped in anyway in keeping the church functioning. There have been numerous ways in which people have helped. A number of you have been involved in the technical support needed for us to hold services online. At times when it has been possible to open up the church for private prayer or public worship Liz Allen our facilities manager has worked hard ensuring that strict protocol is in place, so our church complies with social distancing. Together with those who have been willing to act as stewards she has ensured that St. Mary's continues to be a safe and welcoming place. Others have helped with pastoral support whereby we have been able to keep in touch with everybody who is known to be part of our church family. Peter and Alison our churchwardens have been magnificent as have the entire St. Mary's staff. Pam Rastall in particular has been a great help in ensuring that my newsletter goes out every week as well as the St. Mary's News every month. Josh has led the way in terms of online provision for services and Cath has continued to offer a great ministry to children and young families throughout the pandemic.

I think a projected deficit of £38,000 leaves us with an enormous challenge, but not an impossible one if we all pull together. So much has changed in the world over the past 4 or 5 years, and so much has changed at St. Mary's in that time. I don't believe that is a coincidence. God is very much in the mix, calling each one of us to play our part. When we do so then be assured all sorts of possibilities open up, and an exciting future lies ahead.

The Revd Tony Rindl



To be the person God created us to be



I love a good car journey! One of the many things I miss during this time of COVID are the driving holidays we used to take around Europe. There is something truly dynamic about driving through a country – you get that little bit closer to the people, the culture and scenery – you get more ‘local’ when you

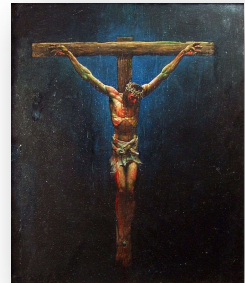
have to shop in the supermarket; on campsites you mix more with people and you can get some amazing scoops about things to see and do which lie off the tourist trail; you get more of a sense of what a country is really like - the food, the culture, the way of life as you get past what can feel like a fabricated façade for the visitor. For me, it goes a bit deeper - it appeases my need for adventure and excitement; the need to just leave life behind for a bit and go wandering. I love being able to suddenly turn off a beaten track towards an alluring sign, to stop to soak up beautiful countryside, to try the local food and meet new people. Something subtly changes between you and those you are travelling with too – you become closer as you have to rely on each other more; in the vulnerability and intimacy that is created within the space of the car, you find yourself truly sharing. The journey becomes a learning experience and what you learn about most is yourself.

We often speak about our ‘faith journeys’ – it is a good analogy: it has a beginning; you take detours and sometimes you get lost or stuck; sometimes you stop along the way and see or learn amazing things – journeys are about far more than just getting to somewhere – they teach you about yourself; they change you; they form who you are.

In January I will have been at St Mary’s for three and a half years and in all of that time I have been on a journey. In fact, if I have to be honest the true beginning of this journey extends so far back, I cannot truly say when it started, but about 4 years ago I took a step of faith – God asked me to walk away from a teaching career I enjoyed and to apply for another job – that as a Children and Family Worker. As soon as I took on the role I fell in love with it and the people I served – there have been many times when I have argued with God that surely this is it – the perfect blend of my skillset,

interests, creativity and loves – it is a great honour to serve the families at St Mary’s, to help enable them to engage with church and worship; to be there when parents need someone to talk to; to create opportunities for children and youth to learn about and experience God; to work with our amazing Sunday School and Worship for All teams; and along the way Tony and others have allowed me to do other things like preach and put together reflective services and outreach events, etc. It is a wonderful job and I hope to do it a little while longer, but as God revealed it is also the place He has chosen for my formation – in that future which God is holding out to me, I will need all of the skills and experiences I have gained throughout my past and now in the present at St Mary’s. The end of this journey may see me gain a new title of the Revd - but it is about far more than that because God is using this time - this journey - to form me into the priest He needs; helping me to grow into the person He created me to be.

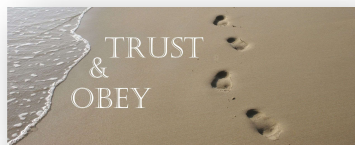
“To be the person God created us to be.” I have said that phrase often in my time at St Mary’s, but I particularly remember writing those words for a sermon back in June 2019 for a baptism. In Ephesians 2.10 it tells us that we are God’s masterpiece – now I don’t know about you, but it has taken me a very long time to accept it and I still sometimes struggle to believe it rather than the lie which the world tells me which is that I am worthless. Not only is that sense of self-doubt destructive but it keeps us from fulfilling our full potential – it prevents us from becoming the people God created us to be and which we have to become if we are to truly do what God would have us do. There are times when I look at Christ on that cross and feel an enormous amount of guilt because it was my sins that put him up there, but what Christ would have us see is God’s grace – yes it is God’s grace that forgives us of those sins but it is also God’s grace which flows from His deep love for us and the value He places on each of our lives – we are that precious to God that Jesus died for our sins – and He wouldn’t have done that if we were not worth it!



When God made you, He made you unique and special – out of all the people God has created since the dawn of time, not one of them is quite like you. God made you on purpose – for a purpose. If you did not exist, there

would be a hole in creation, a gap in history, something missing from the plan for humankind. God is calling each of us to embrace how amazing we are! If we do that - if we trust God enough to start this spiritual journey He would have us travel; if we welcome God to walk with us each step of the way opening ourselves up to the vulnerability and intimacy that such a relationship requires; if we allow the people that God places in our lives to nurture, help and partner with us; then we would be able to develop into the full potential which God placed within us at our conception - and we would be in a position to uncover and develop those talents God has given to each of us. We would be allowing God to prepare us for the role He created us for!

As I reflect back on the my journey I could tell you about the process of discernment which the Church of England has put in place - the many meetings with Vocational Officers, Diocesan Directors of Ordinands (DDO) and the Bishop as we determined whether God was indeed calling me for the priesthood, rather than as a Reader or to something else, and the testing of the Bishops Advisory Panel (BAP) which formed the gateway through which I was selected for training. I could tell you why I feel God is calling me to be a priest and the visions and assurances He has given along the way. I could tell you about what my studies are like - the lectures such as on the Old and New Testimony, Christian Doctrine, etc; about monthly residential weekends on preaching and worship; about projects and placements and essays; about building disciplines which I will continue into my new life such as doing the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. But this journey is about something far deeper than that!



In my travelling this path I have learnt a lot - but mostly I have learnt that I needed to learn what trust and obedience truly means - to not just believe there is a God or to do something because the Holy spirit prompts me to but to truly step out into

the unknown being solely reliant on God; to trust God even when things are not going the way I want them to and all I can see ahead is pain and difficulty ahead.

When speaking about how we start our journey of faith I often use the analogy of a boat sitting in a harbour. The boat is beautifully crafted and fit for purpose and the wind is waiting outside the harbour walls waiting to power the boat, but the boat has to first get itself out of the harbour before it can be manoeuvred by the wind. What if we take this analogy a little further – as new Christians we gain the faith to allow God to take over the rudder and take us in the correct direction, but maybe as we become more mature in our faith, we learn to take back the rudder and learn to work with the wind? I remember as a youth learning to sail – there is a moment when you become one with the boat and the sail and the wind – there is a sweet spot where the wind hits your sail just right and you lean your boat over so that the gunnel, the wooden upper edge of the boat’s side, cuts the water. If the Holy Spirit is the wind and you are the boat are you ready to learn to work in partnership with God so that you can ‘sail’ perfectly? Are you ready to immerse yourself in this journey that God has you on - to take your eye off the end and instead allow yourself to live the journey itself – and in the process to allow God to form you through it?

God Bless

Cath da Costa
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PCC Reports – January & February

Meeting on 18th January – by Zoom

Finance Peter Dean reported that, with the church building again out of action before Christmas, expenditure continued to be below budget. Thanks to the large donation received earlier in the year, it was likely that we would end the year in surplus, but without it there would have been a deficit. Helen Baldwin had commenced assembly of information for the annual accounts and there would soon be a request for contributions to the Annual Report. Helen had now reached the end of her three-year appointment as Treasurer. She had prepared a detailed job description and it was very important to have her successor identified and, preferably, in place during preparation of the accounts, in order to achieve a smooth hand-over. The Council endorsed the urgency of appointing a new Treasurer.

Budget Peter presented a revised draft of the 2021 budget, prepared in consultation with Par Moore. This projected a reduced, but still substantial, deficit over the year. There was extensive discussion and it was noted that with the latest lock-down likely to continue for several months, circumstances had changed since preparation of the budget in December. Also, a more detailed analysis of the Pre-School's financial prospects was also now available; these were adversely affected by the reduction in the number of children attending. As a consequence, it was agreed that a further draft needed to be prepared taking account of the latest information. The Council also requested proposals for increasing income and a comparison between our reserves and the figure that resulted from application of the Charities Commission's guidelines on reserves.

Buildings Roger Courtney informed the Council that new vinyl flooring had been laid in the Church Centre and the doorway to the Pre-School area had been moved. Works in the kitchen, in preparation for a new cooker, were proceeding. Arrangements were in hand to replace the ceilings and lighting in February. The appeal to the congregation for funding for these works had had a generous response and an additional grant had been received from the Lawton Trust. Hence their cost was covered. The Council approved quotes for redecorating parts of the Church Centre.

Pre-School Alison Saunders provided an update on the Pre-School which that day had opened for the first time since Christmas. Several staff had been furloughed. The number of children continued to be low but the Pre-School Committee had discussed how it could be better promoted to local families and action would be put in hand when lock-down ended.

Opening of the church The Vicar said that he did not expect services to resume for some time and, as required by statute, the Council passed a resolution suspending services in the church at least until the end of February.

Vicar's report Tony thanked everyone who had contributed to Christmas Services and particularly commended all the musical contributions. Other services of note included the Worship for All on 17th January which Cath had put together and led. And the prayer session focussed on coronavirus held on 16th January had provided an occasion for us all to focus on what God was doing and could do in the present situation. He expressed thanks to Valeria for stimulating and contributing so much to the morning.

Tony also noted the current use of the church by the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership as a base for the assembly and distribution of food parcels and drew attention to the photos of their activities in St Mary's News. The Council agreed that it was highly appropriate for the church to be used to support the community in this way.

Roger Courtney

Meeting on 22nd February – by Zoom

Budget The Council considered revised financial projections for 2021 which had been prepared by a small group of PCC members, and an explanatory note with recommendations for action. That projections showed that without action being taken, the prospective deficit of some £38,000 by the end of 2021 would reduce the church's reserves to the minimum prudent level. We would thus enter 2022 in a critical financial position.

Expenditure was at the minimum consistent with fulfilling the church's mission and therefore the focus had to be on increasing income. The Council agreed that the position should be put to the congregation urgently

and remitted the group to prepare an Appeal and to investigate means of increasing rental and other income. Alison Saunders reported that the Pre-School Committee were exploring how more children might be attracted to the Pre-School.

The need to link financial strategy to the overall strategy for the church was stressed. The next Mission Action plan (MAP), setting out priorities and objectives for the next 3-5 years, was due to be developed this year. This would involve a wide range of church members. The PCC agreed that while the MAP would take some time to develop, a timetable and overview of the process should be put before the Council at a forthcoming meeting.

Buildings Roger Courtney reported that ceilings and lighting in the Church Centre had been renewed and elements of the fire alarm system brought up to current standards although more work was required. Redecoration of some areas would now take place. The final payment to the contractor for the refurbishment of the church had been made. The safety design on the sliding door would be applied to the glass shortly. Discussions with the DAC on means of providing safe access to the clock gearboxes were on-going with the church wishing to use a cheaper approach than the DAC seemed prepared to accept.

Opening of the church The Vicar said that while the Prime Minister's announcements that evening had yet to be assessed, he thought that the church might open for private prayer in early March and that services in some form would re-start by Easter. The diocese would be providing guidance. There would be implications for the use of the church by Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership.

Vicar's report Tony commended Cath on the Ash Wednesday service and her events for children at around that time. He again urged everyone to participate in the Lent Course which had been carefully designed to be a transition from the present lockdown to more normal operations and to provide pointers for the church's future mission. He had recently heard Bishop Michael talk about an approach to mission which had been adopted by churches in Tanzania which he thought would be worth exploring further.

Roger Courtney

Molly Payne RIP

Tony Rindl writes:



Whenever I asked Molly how she was, the standard reply was ‘not bad for an old ’un’. In many ways Molly will be remembered as a quiet unassuming person, but this belied a steely determination that enabled her to be fiercely independent well into her nineties. Although Molly never married, she remained close to her family choosing to live next door to her brother and his family pretty much all of her adult life. Molly had been born in St. Albans and spent

her early childhood years in Hatfield before the family moved to a house on Hillfield Road in West Hampstead, London, where they spent the war years, and thankfully surviving a bomb that dropped near the house. Sadly, her father died when Molly was still a teenager and I think this strengthened the bond that she had with her mother and her two brothers Tony and Alan.

Whilst living in West Hampstead Molly became a regular worshipper at Emmanuel Church in Lyncroft Gardens and a Sunday school teacher at Emmanuel School in Mill Lane. Molly also joined the local tennis club and badminton club and was a regular player. By this time, her brother Alan was married and as his family grew, they moved to a maisonette in Herbert Gardens, Willesden, with a large garden. Molly also moved and had the upstairs maisonette whilst Alan and his family lived downstairs. Throughout this time Molly had a very close relationship with her nieces Nicky and Julie. As well as the badminton and tennis, Molly and her mother were keen gardeners and Molly was also a skilled dressmaker and keen knitter and made lots of clothes for her nieces when they were children as well as some of her own. Molly also loved the theatre and ballet, taking the girls to the Festival Hall to see ballet productions, *Swan Lake*, being particularly memorable.

Molly worked for the Legal and General Insurance Company all her working life, travelling by tube to the office in Temple Court in the City. She worked her way up to become the most senior secretary, finally working on the top floor of the company. She made many friends there, friendships that lasted lifetimes. Over the years since her retirement, she enjoyed her

catch up lunches with former colleagues known affectionately as "The Girls". She is remembered by these friends as someone who freely offered her help and advice when they joined the company and was respected by both junior office staff and the directors and management alike.

Throughout her life Molly was a keen traveller, visiting many European countries in the 1970's. She visited the fjords in Norway and the tulip fields of The Netherlands. When in November 2002 at the age of 77 she announced she'd booked another holiday the family weren't altogether surprised until she said she was off on a tour of China. They were therefore less surprised when 2 years later, aged nearly 79, she announced her next trip was Alaska.

The desire to be close as a family saw Molly and Alan & Marguerite move once more in 1999. Not wanting to be far apart they bought two newly built houses next door to each other in Brookside Road, Watford. Since moving to Watford Molly has been a member of St. Mary's.

Sue Martin recalls Molly quickly getting involved at St. Mary's and joining the bible study group which was led in those days by Vera Knibbs and then later by Mary and Ron Turvey. Sue remembers Molly was the only one who read the published minutes of the latest PCC meeting and was therefore often able to answer questions and concerns that the group might have. Sue remembers Molly as one of those quiet people who didn't say much but would help make the tea and coffee afterwards. Indeed, I think most of us will remember Molly helping out in this capacity on Sunday mornings. Molly was never afraid to volunteer and lend a hand. For many years she would help count the collection. She would often tell her family she was off to tickle the brass at church, meaning a couple of hours hard work dusting and polishing.

Molly would also quietly help others, such as the person who had been recently diagnosed as a diabetic. Molly would gently help with shopping and pointing out foods that person could continue to enjoy as part of a controlled diet.

Despite her advanced years and the need for a walking stick (or a sturdy pew end to lean against) Molly continue to make her way to church on Sundays and Wednesdays as part of a group who would have sandwich together after the service. Like so many of us Molly struggled with her hearing, but this didn't stop her enjoying Richard playing the organ and

would sit through the final voluntary and then would show her appreciation with a generous round of applause.

She will be missed by her family and by her church family and especially those of us who learned to appreciate her gentle way and her small but many acts of kindness.

Current Affairs Connect: The Trump Presidency and US Evangelicals

Last month the Current Affairs Connect Group discussed The Trump Presidency & US Evangelicals: Are there lessons British Christians can learn? The influence white US evangelicals exerted over recent Presidential elections by effectively controlling the Republican Party was an experiment in being salt and light in American society. While commending the passion of US evangelicals for a greater Christian voice in their nation, we questioned their belief that they should be the sole arbiters of God's values.

According to exit polls, in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections, respectively 81% and 75% of US white Evangelicals (hereafter “evangelicals”) voted for Trump. They did so despite the disruptive nature of Trump’s presidency, his lies and encouragement of conspiracy theories, his denial of climate change, his support for white supremacists, his attitude to women, his separating of refugee children from their parents, his flirtation with dictators and authoritarians such as Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin, his refusal to accept the election results and his speeches prior to the storming of the Capitol for which he was impeached for a historical second time. He has cultivated a culturally Christian veneer, even posing with a Bible outside a church near the White House during *Black Lives Matter*

protests. Many regarded Trump as divinely chosen to be America's president. Slogans on electioneering vans during his presidential rallies in 2020 included such disturbing claims as, "It is the Christ who speaks dust into creation that has chosen Donald Trump to prepare nations for my Second Coming" and "Donald is Mine, Chosen Divine".

Why did evangelicals support Trump?

The identity is deeply embedded in traditional American history and culture: the Pilgrim Fathers - religious freedom and family life that is patriarchal and heterosexual; Manifest Destiny with its God given right to exploit natural resources; freedom from government; and a *How the West was Won* view of history which largely ignores American Indian, Black, Asian and Hispanic perspectives. Consequently, it tends to be nationalistic, anti-immigrant, anti-Moslem, anti-feminist and anti-LGBT. It denies climate change and downplays or denies the threat of Covid 19. It is pro-life. It is pro-freedom of religious expression, providing it is Christian, especially the right for Christian charities to lobby and the right to have Christian schools. It prefers "strong", patriarchal leadership. It has a tendency to fear persecution and embrace end time Dispensationalist theology that supports Israel so as to bring about the supposed conditions for the Second Coming. Many evangelicals believe that America has a special purpose in the world and that liberals, especially the Democratic Party, pose a threat to the nation because God will not "bless" America - often interpreted as making individuals wealthy - unless socially liberal policies are rolled back. Indeed, some evangelicals are Dominionists who support a specifically Christian state under Old Testament law.

At their most extreme, some evangelicals believe QAnon conspiracies theories such as Pizzagate which maintains Hillary Clinton operated a paedophile ring out of a Washington DC pizza parlour and that the USA's many mass shootings are staged by the federal government. In Georgia they elected born again Christian congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Green of Georgia who supports these theories and has also called for the execution of prominent Democrats.

Probably the biggest single issue for evangelicals is abortion, a faultline in US politics even greater than Brexit in the UK. Like many Christians worldwide, US evangelicals consider that the rights of the unborn should be protected. In particular, they want the nationwide woman's right to abortion

granted by the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 to be overturned. Trump made this a part of his policy. He is regarded as the most pro-life President in US history, having cut federal funding for abortion, appointed three socially conservative judges to the Supreme Court, and addressed pro-life rallies.

Moreover, Trump was tough on immigration and supported small government with low taxation. He withdrew the Johnson Amendment, a provision of the US tax code which prevents charitable organisations, such as churches, from endorsing or opposing political candidates. He rolled back numerous trans-specific and LGBTQ-related policies on issues ranging from how to treat trans-students to removing LGBTQ health care protections, allowing doctors to discriminate. At the UN Trump spoke out against Christian persecution. He withdrew the US from the Paris Climate Accord, and recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by moving the U.S. Embassy there from Tel Aviv.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that Christians must be salt and light in society (Matthew 5.13-16), preventing it from decay and sliding into evil on one hand and actively promoting truth, beauty, goodness and justice on the other. Arguably, US evangelicals were attempting to be that influence through the US political system.

Reflections

We considered that Trump was an amoral individual who cynically aligned with the political conservatism of evangelical thinking, ignoring other Christians groupings, to obtain their vote. Nevertheless, he gave unqualified support to Christianity and allowed Americans the freedom to be openly Christian in their views. We commended US evangelicals for their passion in wanting to influence their country and to see more of the values of the kingdom of God, although we did not agree with their interpretation of what that looks like. As a group they had been passionate about the *right to life* in the abortion debate and refused to give in even when the liberal *right to choice* view dominated US society. It is difficult to see how British Christians could have such an influence on abortion.

This is because in the UK Christians are a minority whose voice is ignored in society. We are forced into a position where we are defensive about our faith. Several members said that because of political correctness,

especially in the workplace, they felt they could not give an opinion based on their Christian views and were not allowed to disagree with certain assumptions.

What's more, Trump had the ability to connect with a very significant proportion of the US electorate, including its underclass, echoed in the way Johnson connected with the British electorate, especially with the Red Wall northern constituencies. By unconventional straight talking, Trump and Johnson persuaded people who felt they had been marginalised that they spoke for them. This ability poses a challenge to the British Church about how we connect with the nation and communicate the gospel message.

We felt that we did not hear enough from the leadership of the British Churches. When they speak they often sound like a politician or trade unionist and rarely speak directly about Christ and the gospel. Doubtless some good work was being done by Church of England bishops in the House of Lords; and Archbishop Welby had written excellent books about how the gospel applied to British society. But this took place under the radar and went unnoticed and unreported. The Church of England has not yet found someone like former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks with the ability to resonate with the average person in the street.

Another weakness is that the British Church does not teach its members sufficiently to feel concerned about issues in society and to have a Christian voice in it. In a Biblical desire to be tolerant and inclusive in a diverse society, the Church has given space to other religions at the expense of marginalising its own. The right balance in a democracy is in fact to give space to other religions while retaining a distinctive Christian faith and voice.

But is there a single Christian voice in politics? In the US, evangelicals united around a single political view and party but in Britain there is a broader spectrum of views. We conceded it is not easy for Christians to discern God's will for the nation. Yet our civic and Christian duty is to cast our ballot every five years and we need to consider God's will before we do so. Preaching and teaching about what the Bible has to say about politics is therefore important. In weighing up the political parties we should ask ourselves whether they, their leaders and their policies are characterised by love or hatred, whether they sow peace or conflict, whether they promote mercy, justice and truth or dishonesty, deceit, self-centredness and special

interests. Jesus is always the model for leadership, whether secular and spiritual.

We observed that US evangelicals picked just one or two issues and drove them home. In the UK, Christians across the political spectrum lobbied successfully for the UK to give 0.7% of GDP to international aid, although it had taken decades and was under threat from the present government. What one or two things do we now want to change for which there would be similar agreement? Some of us suggested this could be the issue of inequality: the disparities of wealth, housing and health, which had been highlighted in the course of the pandemic.

Others questioned whether it is right for Christians to fight for any one issue. They were distrustful of a Christianised political party - or indeed a party of any religion - which is what the Republican Party has become. In the US people had lost all nuance and became aggressive, ungenerous and uncharitable as they pushed “their” issues up the agenda. Their attitude seemed to be, “This is the Christian view and if you don’t agree with us, you can’t be a Christian. And the country will go to the dogs unless you back us”. Christians have no right to believe they are the only salt in society. A better model, more in line with the concept of the various gifts God has given us, is for groups of Christians to lobby for their particular interests and for the wider church to support all their efforts. This would avoid the type of polarisation seen in the US.

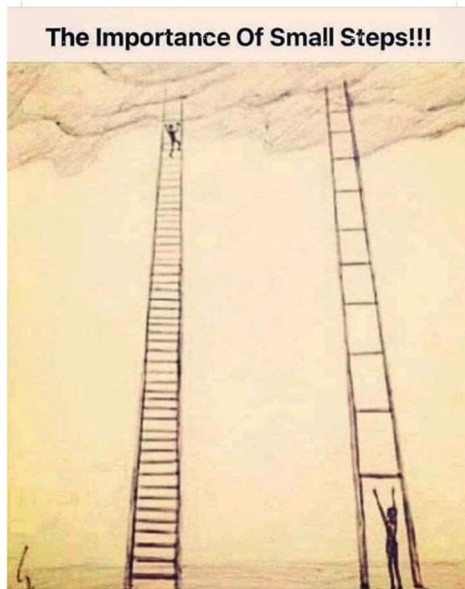
We observed we live in an angry world where a sense of wrongness is converted into rage against opponents who are cast as enemies. Indeed, part of political correctness is rage. It is important to work against injustice without feeding the world’s anger and to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable political factions in society.

We felt that a society where outrage is whipped up by the media, where an opponent is regarded as an enemy and where a person can be sacked or forced to resign for saying the “wrong” thing is frightening. Such an approach focuses on the sawdust in your eye rather than the plank in my own. We recalled that until relatively recently two people could passionately disagree with another but would defend each other’s right to speak out.

Christians should indeed be passionate about what we believe but we must not feel we have to win. We are here to model Jesus. The cross was not about winning but sacrificial service as the servant King. We should do what

we are called to do by God but recognise it is God’s fight, not ours. We should be more concerned to be righteous than to be right. We should avoid the kind of name calling we have seen in the US over abortion where one side are “authoritarian patriachs” and the others “babykillers”. Issues are rarely simple as the abortion debate itself shows with its tensions between the right of personal liberty on one hand and sanctity of life on the other. We need to defuse tension by listening carefully to others while arguing persuasively and powerfully, just as truly great reformers like William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King did.

The Current Affairs Group



IAN SCLEATER CVO - RIP

Tony Rindl writes:



We were greatly saddened to learn of the recent death of Ian Scleater. In my opinion he was a very courteous and gracious man. He came across as a very humble person despite having achieved much in life. I think he was always appreciative of the opportunities that life had afforded him. We were told at his funeral, held at St. Andrew's Church, that he considered he had lived a charmed life. I am sure this was largely due to his approach to life, hard work, diligence and in fully embracing so many interests, in particular music and the arts.

Ian was educated at Watford Grammar School for Boys where, in his own words, he “was not academically blessed, but somehow came out of it having achieved surprisingly acceptable results!” I think he was just being his typically modest self.

Ian started work at Barings in 1947 working in the Post Room – as an office junior. He tells the story of his interview with Lord Ashburton who asked him “do you really want to come here? It's terribly dull. I watch the clock from 10 in the morning until quarter to five in the afternoon”. I rather suspect Ian thoroughly enjoyed the experience of being interviewed by a Lord of the Realm and thought the idea of a job that didn't start until 10am suited him perfectly! And it clearly did. He had landed in the perfect place. A place where his combination of thoughtful judgement, skill and expertise, where his personal warmth and charm was perfect for the environment he was in, and where, in 1964, he was promoted and became responsible for the “Special Accounts” at the Bank – the role he had been born for.

He really did meet the Duke of Windsor walking along the corridor at Barings; he really did go to all those garden parties at Buckingham Palace; Ian and Carol really did go to the wedding reception of Prince and Princess Michael of Kent; he did receive Christmas cards from the Royal Family each

year; he really did have a close working relationship with Price Charles; and he was so proud when he was awarded the MVO and later the CVO for Services to the Royal Family - that's Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, an honour bestowed by Her Majesty the Queen herself - one of the proudest moments of his life.

Perhaps the most important day of Ian's life however, was the day he met his future wife of over 60 years, Carol. He married Carol on 6th June 1959 and they have enjoyed a long and happy marriage. It was obvious that Ian was devoted to Carol and to their family, two daughters and five grandchildren.

Music was an important part of Ian's life. He came from a musical family his mother was an excellent pianist and Father was a founder member of the Watford Operatic Society. Whilst at school, Ian organised his first small orchestra. Ian went on to take charge of the Watford Male Voice Choir when he was just 17, whilst studying Harmony and Composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

He was a director, honorary archivist and keen supporter of the Palace Theatre, raising money for its refurbishment through giving talks and donating proceeds from his book 'The Story of the Palace Theatre, Watford' that was written to mark its centenary.

Ian received a mayor of Watford's Audentior Award in 2010 in recognition of the book and four years later a blue plaque was unveiled in his honour at the Palace Theatre to acknowledge his considerable fundraising efforts.

Ian retired from Barings in 1989 and has enjoyed a long and active retirement, continuing to run his two allotments, being a trustee of numerous charities, being Chairman of the Admissions Panel for the two Watford Grammar Schools for 15 years, continuing to be involved in several different amateur operatic societies around London and the Home Counties - he directed musicals for ten different societies over the years, and many other roles, too numerous to mention. He was able to devote more time on another of his hobbies, photography - which saw him embrace the digital age with real enthusiasm. Perhaps most important of all he wanted to spend as much time with his daughters and grand-children as possible, and enjoyed as many overseas holidays with Carol as they could possibly fit in!

Ian was a man of faith and great integrity. He had been baptised in St. Mary's as a baby and had worshipped there for the best part of 90 years. It was a place where in his own words he felt the presence of God. Perhaps understandably he had great reservations about the reordering of the church and was concerned that any modernisation would compromise the sense of awe and wonder of such an important historical building. He informed me that he and Carol would stay away whilst the building work took place as he could not bear the thought of builders ransacking his beloved church. He did however make a promise that when the work was complete, he would come and see, and if he still felt the presence of God in the building he would stay, if not he would leave permanently. He was true to his word and did return from time to time and even kindly took photographs at the rededication service.

Ian will be sadly missed and remembered with great affection as a kind and generous person, a man of great wisdom and integrity who grasped all the opportunities that life presented him and in doing so did indeed live a charmed life. It truly was a long life well lived.



Book Review: 'History of the Bible' by John Barton

It may seem remarkable in today's secular society that a book on the history of the Bible should be BBC Radio 4's 'Book of the Week'. But that was the case just after Christmas when John Barton, formerly Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford University (and an ordained Anglican priest), presented extracts from his latest book. The BBC's choice was a sign of the continuing place of the Bible in our culture even though fewer people admit to an active faith; some 500,000 Bibles are sold each year in the UK.

In this book, Barton sums up a lifetime of study of the Bible and its origins. Acknowledging that many aspects of Biblical history are still the subject of debate, he sets out both his own views and those of other scholars. He points out that because the Bible is for us a single book between covers, we tend to overlook the fact that it is a collection of books, with very different styles of writing, produced over a long period of time and varying hugely in the ways that they have come to their present form. Seeking uniformity of outlooks and teachings across such a diverse set of writings may therefore be a challenge, as demonstrated by the range of beliefs across the Christian faith groups who claim to derive their doctrines solely from the Bible. Indeed, he makes the more general point that both Judaism and Christianity, although having Holy Scripture at the core of their beliefs, have doctrines and practices that cannot be clearly derived from Scripture. Thus while there is an overlap between Biblical texts and both faiths, it is by no means a complete overlap.

Barton first discusses the Old Testament, where archaeology has greatly illuminated textual studies. While the events recounted in the opening books go back well before 1000BC, the scholarly consensus that he presents is that the original texts themselves are unlikely to date from before 900BC or so, and then will have been amended by later writers. They may well, of course, reflect stories that are much older that have been passed down orally but the accounts that they present, of the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan for example, are not supported by archaeology. They might best be considered foundational stories for the Jewish people and nation, reflecting something in their past (perhaps that they are the product of different

migrations). Maybe we have our parallels in the stories of Arthur and Canute (my comment, not the author's).

For later OT books, there are historical reference points in the form of invasions by Assyria and Babylon and records from those empires which illuminate the Biblical accounts. But the changes introduced by subsequent editing have always to be considered and a key focus of study has been to try to identify the older elements that are still evident in the texts. And crucial to interpretation is understanding the uses to which such texts were put – whether in worship, ceremonial occasions or guidance for those in authority – and this at present is still largely obscure.

The texts of New Testament books exist in manuscripts of the second and third centuries that are much closer to the dates when they were written (but even so they are not originals, and several passages, such as the final verses of Matthew, are widely considered to be later insertions). There is little dispute about the texts themselves but they do not tell a consistent story. The differences in the accounts of Jesus' ministry in the four Gospels are well known and Barton also discusses the difficulty of reconciling the account of Paul's travels in Acts with his references to his visits in the Epistles.

Barton provides an account of the process by which the books in the New Testament came to be accepted as Holy Scripture. These, of course, did not exist at the time that the earliest Christian communities were founded and even in the second century it was unlikely that a Christian community would have access to all the writings, which were expensive to produce. But by the end of that century lists of books that correspond closely with our present New Testament appeared in writings, although in some cases others were also included. Progressively, the texts gained authority through use – this can be tracked through the quotations included in the works of early Christian writers. Thus the Councils of the church that produced the definitive list were essentially formalising a situation that had evolved and did not, as some have suggested, reject books because they were unacceptable (eg because of their views about women) to the church authorities of the time.

Barton's discussion of the difference between Jewish and Christian readings of the Old Testament is particularly illuminating. For Christians, the Old Testament provides an account of God's relationship with Israel

which foreshadows the advent of Christ. It is an account of sin and salvation with many pointers to God's final act of salvation, the coming of Christ. For Judaism, it is a guide to living – a set of instructions on how God wants his people to behave and, as a secondary aspect, an account of what happens when they do not follow these. This very different emphasis underlies the different order of the books in Jewish Bible. While in the Christian Old Testament, the order is (with some exceptions) the Law (ie the first five books) followed by the books of History and then the Prophets, the Jewish Bible has the Law and the Prophets followed by the History. Thus 2 Chronicles, with its account of the return to Jerusalem, is the last book of the Jewish Bible. Moreover, it is only the Torah (the Law) that is systematically read in synagogue services – there are some readings from the other books but nothing comparable to the systematic use of much of the Old Testament that is provided by the Lectionary.

As the previous paragraph shows, this book is about much more than the history of the texts. It is also about how interpretations have evolved and translations created. It paints a comprehensive picture of the processes by which the present texts and the understandings that come from them have come into being, and of their relationship with the doctrines of the faiths that regard them as authoritative.

For many, this book will provide hugely informative background to Bible study, raising questions and providing guidance on the ways in which we should read Scripture. Some, however, may consider that such background information is not fundamental to our understanding of Scripture; the texts that we have (in their various translations) are those that God intends us to have and their study will provide all that we need for understanding his truths. Recognising this widely held approach, Barton discusses how the concept of divine inspiration can be reconciled with the variety of teachings contained within the Bible.

Written not for the Biblical scholar but for the lay reader who wishes to deepen their understanding of Scripture, this book can be highly recommended.

Roger Courtney

'A History of the Bible' by John Barton (Penguin, £10.99)

Services

From Wednesday 10th March
the Church will be open
on Wednesdays and Fridays each week
between 12.00noon and 2.00pm
for Private Prayer

Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service in church and via Zoom;
(*in church for those not able to access online*)
4.00 pm KidsChurch via Zoom;
5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection in church
followed by Holy Communion from 17th March;
Reflection also available via Facebook

Monday to Saturday

Morning Prayer via the Church website

Please keep up to date with what is on offer
via our Facebook page
or the website www.stmaryswatford.org

Who's Who at St Mary's

(They all continue to be available via the phone or online)

Vicar

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tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Curate

The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596
jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Churchwardens

Alison Saunders | 01923 244390
Peter Dean | 07876 154387

Children & Families Worker

Cath Da Costa | 07961 564385
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currently only open on a Monday morning

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