



Encyclical

*School Chaplains'
Conference*

Lent, 2009

A Word to the Wise!

A couple of years ago Bishop Stephen Cottrell came out with a slim book called “Do Nothing to Change Your Life” whose major premise was that we all need to slow down, “do” less and enjoy what is around us more. Even seemingly mundane acts such as going down to Tesco’s on the bus, he suggests, can become adventures; and what is more, if we give ourselves time to stop and stare, we may just catch a glimpse of God. He has a point, I’m sure, but I suspect I am not alone in feeling mildly threatened by a little book that sees my busy chaplain life as being in need of reassessment ... because of its very business. Tell that to the head.

As chaplains, we have a bottomless list of things to do. What with hectic schedules, heavy teaching loads and agendas without margins, the concept of stopping and staring seems laudable but, frankly, rather unrealistic. We are busy people; constantly exhausted servants rushing from master to master with no opportunity to “do nothing”.

Cleopas and his friend have no idea who the stranger is that accompanies them to Emmaus – no clue that the chap who is incredulously ignorant about recent events back in Jerusalem is in fact the Risen Lord. They only encounter the Risen Christ when they are settling in for the evening and relaxing around a table with their mysterious, but utterly compelling, fellow traveller. Cleopas and his friend experience the resurrection not on the road but when they are sitting down. Their eyes are opened as the crumbs fly. Resurrection comes literally in companionship in the quiet of an evening conversation, not in the more animated discussions earlier in the day on the road.

However reluctantly school chaplains may be to acknowledge it, there is something valuable in Cottrell’s advice that we simply must give ourselves time to step off the road, to listen and consider the work of God. The idea of chaplains “doing nothing” might seem wholly alien, but perhaps we need to “ring fence” the Daily Office or something similar, employing it not only as a time of active prayer, but permission to be still, to be attentive to the mystery and to imagine the crumbs in the air. Then we may find we have the energy, as did Cleopas and his friend, to busy ourselves with the joyful if energy-sapping task of telling people they had witnessed the Risen Christ.

Robert Easton

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Editorial

Welcome to our Lent edition of *Encyclical*.

In this issue we consider, as we move through Lent towards the great festival of our Salvation at Easter, the significance of the Resurrection in our daily living.

Also, as the bicentennial anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin is celebrated, the relationship between Science and Christian Faith is considered in a special feature.

Please send in any interesting photos of chaplaincy activity for publication in future issues.

David McGladdery



What Sort of Resurrection?

What do people – what do we – really believe about resurrection? The question is a puzzling one. At a popular level, when people speak of death and what lies beyond, there are many who still seem to believe in a disembodied state beyond death, a heaven to which those who have died move on. A firefighter's widow, speaking last year on the TV news about her young husband who had lost his life in a warehouse fire, said she knew he was safe and 'looking down on her'.

Increasingly, though, the influence of the atheist lobby is breaking through, and 'secular' funerals just look back on a life well lived (these aren't occasions for critique) rather than suggesting any ongoing, eternal existence for the deceased. There are now many – and many young people - who are beginning to assume that this life is 'all there is', and that after we die, there is simply 'oblivion'; death is the end.

The problem is that neither of these views does justice to what the Church has traditionally taught. In (say) the relatively recent time of John Donne, there was a shared worldview encompassing a literal, bodily resurrection: 'At the round earth's imagined corners blow/ Your trumpets, angels and arise, arise/From death you numberless infinities/Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go...'

Later centuries and other traditions have interpreted 'resurrection' more metaphorically, or as an experience of this present life, rather than as a literal and future event. Many will know, in this context, the power of the conviction Fr Harry Williams explored in his 'True Resurrection' – that the experience of resurrection is a divinely-given renewal and restoration in the here-and-now.

But all of this may seem very tentative compared with the real, unavoidable physicality of death, when for instance we stand at a graveside and sprinkle earth on the coffin of someone whose death we have been close to. What do we really believe about resurrection at this point? The liturgy encourages us to hold to 'the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life' – but it could be a sure bet that few of those present alongside us are taking those words as anything much more than hallowed by tradition and context.

So: what sort of resurrection do we believe in? Resurrection in the here-and-now, resurrection beyond death, resurrection literal or metaphorical? What the New Testament calls 'eternal life' is a core part of Christian belief, and 'the resurrection of the body' remains a core element in the Creed; but it is hard to be certain about what exactly we might mean by these. What perhaps as chaplains we need to be clear about is that we have ourselves a 'sure and certain hope', and that this hope, this belief that 'nothing shall separate us from the love of God' is something we can share without evasion or pretence with the young – especially at times of death and bereavement.

John Caperon



Resurrection in a Time of Redundancy

Redundancy is presently very much part of the possibility of the life of most if not all schools. The Easter proclamation is always very much part of the possibility of the life of most if not all Christian schools. My Christian faith tells me that the two are linked; my Christian hope is that the link is tangible; my Christian love is that I enable those who experience redundancy to experience resurrection.

Tangible success is expected of all schools, whether independent or maintained. Lack of success is discreetly managed: it is the failure that dare not speak its name. Lest parental opinion be adversely affected redundancies are rarely advertised. It is thought to be more charitable to the colleague concerned for the reason for departure to be decently shrouded.

Resurrection happened only after the crucifixion had been fully experienced. Indeed, so overwhelming was the disciples' awareness of Jesus' betrayal arrest condemnation and execution that resurrection was recognised only retrospectively, and then with a notable degree of uncertainty. The pain of crucifixion was public; the joy of resurrection was private.

My school has been fortunate, thus far. There have been no redundancies. There has not yet been any need for me to find out how to say "Alleluia! Christ is risen!" to a colleague who has just been "let go". Death is not usually a failure, but redundancy is often perceived, on both sides, as such. It is, perhaps, akin to unexpected divorce. This is casting in the dark. "The first rule of management", one of my Headmasters was fond of saying, "is to prepare for the worst". I would like to discover some pastoral theology that would be appropriate in response to the reality of job loss before it is needed.

This may be where engagement with post-modernism begins. It was an axiom of my youth to identify a person by the position that they held. The more fluid job world engendered by radically changing economic realities and rapidly changing information technology makes such identification unwise. The emergent post-modern society seems to be emotional rather than rational. It appears individual rather than corporate. The meta-narrative of resurrection has to be felt rather than known.

It may be foolish to expect resurrection as though it were a right. Perhaps the only pastoral response to such a devastating blow as redundancy is to stand at the foot of the cross, not in faith, nor even in hope, but in love.

John Thackray

Future Editions of Encyclical

All future editions of Encyclical will appear in a suitable DeskTop Published format. It is important that they are e-mailed to dj.mcgladdery@monmouthschool.org they should be no longer than 400 words and sent as attachments. Good, exciting pictures of Chaplaincy activity are essential to give the newsletter a lift and add interest; e-mail the original photographs as attachments, too, please.



Science and Religion – A Homily for the Bicentennial Anniversary of the Birth of Charles Darwin

“Without speculation, there is no good and original observation.”

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

“I have called this principal, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection.”

“The very essence of instinct is that it is followed independent of reason.”

Two hundred years ago, Charles Darwin was born. One hundred and fifty years ago this year *On The Origin of Species* was published. Here is a reading from the **Book of Genesis**...

And God said: ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind[♂] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ (**Gen 1: 25-6**)

On this anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin – it is good to pose the question are science and the Christian religion mutually opposed to each other – or not? True when Darwin published his famous work, certain Christians raised objections. True, Darwin – who once trained for the Anglican priesthood – turned away from Christian faith, but largely because of the premature death of his beloved daughter, Anna of typhoid fever. True, he escorted his wife to the door of their local church every Sunday, but did not go in. True, he was, for 30 years, the treasurer of that church. True, one of his best friends was the parish priest of that church (Rev’d John Brodie Innes) with whom he established and financed several charitable relief schemes for the poor. Although Darwin could not himself commit to faith, he was never anti-Christian. Some of his latter-day supporters, however, try to make Darwin, the Scientist, an opponent to God and Christianity.

When I was at school, I remember two RS teachers. One, Mrs Thomas, was an ardent Welsh Baptist, she believed that everything in the Bible was true, everything was fact. It was her encyclopaedia to understanding the world. The other teacher was called Mr. King. He said he was an atheist and so could remain an impartial judge of the Bible. He encouraged us to question the evidence, which he claimed was purely cultural. For Mr King, the Bible was a collection of stories, sayings and poems that told us about the inhabitants of Palestine two thousand years ago and was merely of anthropological interest to us today.

Well these are two extremes – the Bible is more than bad science or good poetry – and religion and science are not mutually exclusive alternatives to understanding the world in which we live.

I hope you have all read Richard Dawkin’s **The God Delusion** – and if you have, I urge you to read John Cornwell’s reply: **Darwin’s Angel**. The problem with Dawkins is that he does not understand what the Christian religion is. He repeatedly insists that all Christians are like Mrs Thomas and believe that the Bible is a literal instruction book – that the account of the Creation that you have just heard from the **Book of Genesis** is what literally happened. There are some people who hold this view – they are known as Creationists – or Fundamentalists. I want to make it crystal clear to you that neither myself or Fr. Gavin are Creationists. Genesis is not a literal account of how the world came into being – it is a poetic, allegorical picture of a world which arose out of some creative energy that we call God – who is neither male nor female, but is, as St. John said: “love”. It is a poetic meditation on the sacredness of ecological balance – everything in the living world has a respected place and a purpose.



And Christianity is not meant to be an alternative, therefore, to a scientific system explaining the factual composition of the tangible world in which we live. Christianity is a way of becoming aware of the context in which the world exists. It does not set out to explain things, so that Science comes in and says: there is a better explanation – Christianity sets out to give us a vision, an imagination a commitment. The world works through the laws of physics, chemistry and biology – Darwin and his Theory of Evolution are ways of making physical sense of who we are where we came from and where we live – but no matter what scientific truths I learn - whether from books, from discussions with scientific friends or learning from the great David Attenborough on TV – I always sense beauty, mystery and awe in the created world:

Einstein said: “ The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.”

Throughout Dawkins’ book, he does not mention Jesus, the Christ (the chosen one) of God. Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you.” He also said repeatedly, “Do not be afraid – have you no faith?” The point is that it makes all the difference if you believe in a power outside of yourself – a power you can draw on, a power you can trust. The power to forgive; the power to love? Such power gives a sense of inner strength – it gives you freedom to take risks; it means that despair and suffering does not have the last word. By contrast, if you believe that all there is to life is what you see in front of your nose, and that there is no meaning and purpose to any of it, then you really are on your own and as such an easy prisoner to fear – fear of inadequacy, fear of failure, fear of what others think, fear of death...

Human beings are not animals – responding merely according to instinct. We are blessed with imaginations and an awareness of how the present relates to the past and the future – we have the gift of faith and hope and the capacity to love. God is not a person – no one can say what God is. But for Christians, Jesus Christ is God made human. The spiritual and ethical riches of the Christian faith flourishing down the ages are not based on a Boss-Man God of bearded pie-in-the-sky caricature: but on Jesus the Christ, who reprimanded the religious nutters and fundamentalists of his day and taught instead the care of the poor, non-reliance on possessions and status and identity with the frail, the rejected the despised. His triumph was not the inheritance of earthly power by military might, but through self-sacrifice on the Cross.

A friend said to me the other day, “Look, life is shit and then you die!” Well, it may be – and who knows what happens when you die? The shit, is that struggle in human nature to overcome our fallen and imperfect nature and to strive to perform the difficult task of non-judgemental love: to forgive each other. It is this acknowledgment of fallenness that enables Christians to pick themselves, and each other, up and start again when they fail.

Science and Christianity are not mutually exclusive they are partners on an ever-evolving journey of discovery – Darwin wrote:

“My opinion is not worth more than that of any other man who has thought on such subjects ... theology & science should each run its own course ... I am not responsible if their meeting point should still be far off...

“...In my most extreme fluctuations I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God. - I think that generally (and more and more so as I grow older), but not always, -- that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.”

Science and Christianity - Mrs Thomas and Mr King – fact and faith. If you are so certain of your position to the exclusion of all else it is as though the ground under your feet is trampled down hard so nothing will grow – the seeds of faith will be blown away and be wasted; but if the ground upon which you walk is ploughed up with questioning and doubts, then the seeds of faith may take hold and germinate and bear fruit. To quote Darwin’s favourite poet, Tennyson: “There lives more faith in honest doubt.” *Rev. David McGladdery—Monmouth School*