



The School Chaplains' Conference

Encyclical 78, Michaelmas term 2005

“Religious Experience and Good Teaching”

These were words quoted in an article written for The Times by the Very Rev'd Alan Webster last year. It is an article that leads very well into the selection of tried and tested material that might prove useful to a number of School Chaplains. This material includes an entertaining article on the value of fund-raising and a review of books on prayer.

Finally there is information about the forthcoming School Chaplains' Conference, **'Word, Weddings and Whips' - Learning and Living John's Gospel**; at Trinity College, Oxford next April, our key-note speaker will be the Most Rev'd Rowan Williams.

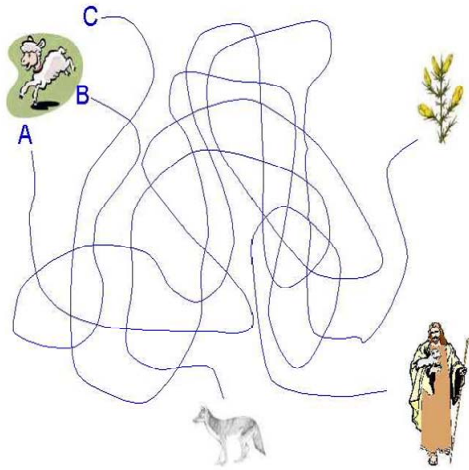
But first ... another article in our series, **'A view from the pew ...'**

I found myself, at short notice, covering a colleague's class while she dealt with a small scale emergency. *I* had nothing to do and *the class* had nothing to do, so I asked them if they could help me write this magazine article. What should I say about my

life in College over this past year? What exactly *is* it that a Chaplain does? *They* thought their answers were random, but I have never underestimated the wisdom of U4's ...

According to the U4's I 'organise religious stuff' like the Harvest, Christmas and Confirmation services. I also 'help new people' and they particularly listed Lower 3's, Sixth Formers and new teachers as in need of my assistance! According to U4 I talk about my son a lot (... do some of them fancy him? – 15 years old, 6' 4", very sporty), I wear a different pair of earrings every day (... I wish!), I give blessings in Chapel, I put up posters of cute animals and funny cartoons and I don't change the 'Thought for the Week' often enough. (I maintain that I work according to God's time and that doesn't always match up with the time of mere mortals.) I also come up with 'daft ideas' about how to support different charities. They also, quite rightly, read a lot into the 'Lost Sheep' drawing that is on the door to my room. This drawing was done by one of the U4's (thank you, Clem) when she was in U3 and it seems destined to remain in place for

the foreseeable future. It is a highly appropriate sign since my room is just



opposite the 'Lost Property' office.
(*Anything like this maze? Ed.*)

The most important thing I do, according to Francesca Starling, is to drink up the leftover wine after communion! I wonder: does anyone suspect that I deliberately put too much in the chalice just so that there will be some left for me at the end? I would *like* to be able to say that my motive in filling the chalice so generously is to symbolise the overflowing generosity of God. The truth, however, is much more prosaic: I am afraid of running out of wine before everyone has received communion.

It happened to me once. I was celebrating the Eucharist, for only the third time in my life, at a large Secondary School not too far from HLC

when one of the boys present — How shall we put this? — drank considerably more from the chalice than is usual. The chalice was empty and a long queue waited behind him. I poured some more wine into the chalice and started thumbing through the service book looking for the words of 'supple-mentary consecration' (a special form of words that must be said on just such occasions). Could I find them? No! The crowd (240 of them, all aged 13 & 14) could become restless at any moment. What was I to do? In the best Christian spirit, I cursed the boy who had emptied the chalice, muttered an apology to God (who had not skimmed on the provision of wine at that wedding in Cana) and *made up* some words that I hoped would do the trick. It was a stressful afternoon but the lightning bolt did not strike, so I assume that whatever I said must have been OK with God. Ever since, I have erred on the generous side when filling the chalice. So I guess I will just have to carry on drinking up whatever is left over, unless it is a Sunday and I have to drive straight home after the service, in which case I ask Mr Andrews or Mr Allot to help me out!

Between them, I think that the U4's *did* manage to list virtually all of the aspects of my life here. They forgot to mention that I also teach Religious

Studies: perhaps that is just taken for granted. What do *I* think is the most valuable thing I do? Now that would be telling, and as the lost sheep know, I can keep things to myself.

Rev Dr Jan Cheeseman is Chaplain at Harrogate Ladies' College and Membership Secretary of the School Chaplains' Conference.

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Today the young are drawn by choice to a changing faith.

My eleven year old grandson, leading me on a dark night to Headington Quarry church in Oxford, where he was to be confirmed, asked, "What about the Crusades?" Having no time to discuss the motives of St Bernard or the villainous sacking of Constantinople, I said, "They were bad." Satisfied he led me on into the church, which was warm, welcoming and packed with people: the fifteen candidates and five adults who were also to be baptised.

It was a special scene reflecting its Narnia window commemorating C.S.Lewis, who came to this church after he was converted by J.R.R.Tolkein, the author of *Lord of the Rings* and imaginative creator of the evil Orcs and of the Hobbits' struggle to rid Middle Earth of terror. Tolkein and Lewis were convinced

that the Christian myth is a true myth. In Lewis's words, "Sometimes fairy stories may say best what's to be said."

At the baptisms the bishop sloshed the water around, assuring us that the water stood for the love of God pouring over us all. The baptisms, confirmations, first communions and the party in the village hall afterwards were hints of a new world we have yet to realise. We prayed that God would give us power to live a new life in the dark world outside—a naïve prayer, perhaps, but has innocence no power?

In today's England, many inside and outside the Churches reconsider the question of faith. Last year Nick Doughty, a Reuters correspondent who covered the fighting in Kosovo, and father of a young family, was struck by cancer. In the months before his death he wrote an apologia to be read at his funeral, explaining his unexpected decision to affirm faith and be confirmed. Lying on a couch at home in North London he was to ill to go to church, so after many conversations with Claire Robson, his vicar, he was confirmed by a retired missionary archbishop.

In Doughty's own words, "After my diagnosis and a few weeks stumbling through tears and rage and fear and confusion, I started to take walks in the City, anything to get away from

the turmoil inside. One of these took me on a Sunday ... towards St Paul's Cathedral. I went inside, my mood of grim challenge. 'OK God, if you're real, if you mean anything, show me now if you're there, now is the time. Show me ...' No, the scales did not fall from his eyes ... something much greater happened. A profound sense of peace flooded through me in that great church. Someone was with me, someone who felt my anguish and torment very deeply ..."

Statistics suggest that in the Church of England between 30,000 and 40,000 people are confirmed each year, young and not so young. Many people are "collectors" - often of a variety of cards. For two months before his confirmation I sent a weekly picture to my grandson which he collected and called "Confirmation Cards", including the standing Stenness Stones as a reminder that there was faith and religion before Abraham; St Paul's among the flames in December 1940 saved by volunteers, as a hint we have to be brave and back what is good; and two prayers to learn by heart, "God be in my head"



and "Lighten our darkness", and a selection of others.

The vicar's sessions mattered in these months. This eleven-year-old raised the question of the Bishop of New Hampshire. "What did you decide about him?" I asked. "I said I needed time to think it out," he replied. Would that "thinking it out" could become normal for both young and old. When Tolkein and Lewis affirmed that Christianity is a true myth, they left open the question: which parts are true literal history and which are not true science and not true history?

Today is a time for considered change in religious faith. "In a higher world, it is otherwise," wrote John Henry Newman, "but here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." Moments of choice, one-to-one occasions for dialogue provided by churches and religious groups and discussions in school after ethical, philosophical and religious lessons are seminal for the vernalisation of the spirit of freedom in the mind of the young.

In the contemporary words of John Wilkins, a distinguished Roman Catholic journalist, "Young Christians in the Europe of today come to their faith through individual choice ... they have a thirst for religious experience and good teaching." Those who are searching in many denominations and religions are reconsidering those Gospel words, "Where the Spirit of

truth comes, he will to you the things to come.” (St John 16.12)

The search for meaning is at the top of the agenda for many of the next generation and for others facing crisis.

The Very Rev'd Alan Webster is Dean Emeritus of St Paul's. This article is reproduced with permission and first appeared in The Times on 7th February, 2004.

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**A Poem for Shelter
by George Mackay Brown**

*Who was so rich
He owned diamonds and snowflakes
and fire,
The leaf and the forest,
Herring and whale and horizon –
Who has the key to the chamber be-
yond the stars
And the key of the grave –
Who was sower and seed and bread
Came on the black night
To a poor hovel with a star peeking
through rafters
And slept among beasts
And put a sweet cold look on kings
and shepherds.
But the children of time, their roof-
trees should be strong.*

George Mackay Brown was born in 1921, in Stromness in the Orkney Is-

lands, near to the Stones of Stenness! He has written more than 20 volumes of poetry, published in 10 different countries. His first collection, *The Storm*, was published in 1954. His work has been awarded man prizes including the James Tait Black Memorial Book Prize. This poem appears in Selected Poems 1954 – 1983, published by John Murray at £12.95.

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Children in Need and the Value of Fund-Raising

I arrive at the gates of school this morning in the usual queue of cars to be greeted by Will, a cheerful member of our year 13 boarding house,



dressed in beach wear and waving a bucket (the temperature is -2°C) .

From the nearby long jump pit come the sounds of music and physical exertion as 6 other members of the house run a seemingly unending series of laps in the sand.

The story? Our endlessly inventive 6th form boarders have decided that they were on a flight over the Sahara desert when their jumbo jet crashed. Being a resourceful crew, they have decided not to wait for rescue, but to jog their way across the sand-dunes (320 miles, or in this case 27,000 laps of the long jump pit). And because, as a school we have always tried to teach them the importance of recycling and of not wasting our natural resources, they have also decided to carry the remains of the jumbo jet out with them, all 119,477 kilos of it, which they will lift by bench-pressing the required amount.

Little do they know however, that help is on the way – one of the other boarding houses has commandeered a school minibus in which to drive into the desert to meet them – they reckon they can do at least 10 miles, pushing the minibus up and down the school driveway...

Elsewhere, outside the school, the time is being broadcast every minute by a team from the ‘Shuker House speaking clock’, while the girls are selling their services (in the nicest and most moral way) in the dining hall – all those annoying little jobs you’ve been meaning to do and never quite got round to, cheerfully undertaken at 50p a time (personally I think they’re underselling themselves...)

It’s Children in Need Day, and once again a very large number in the school have got the bit between their teeth, and are determined to do what they can to help (there will be a series of charity sporting events later in the day).

It’s a day that brings out the best in many of them, and which puts a smile on the face of pupils, staff and visitors alike. It’s a day which, as Chaplain, I love to see, because it suggests that, for many of those in our care, an important penny has dropped.

Of course we hope that the main beneficiaries will be the some of the many children in our communities and in our world who are in need, but there is no doubt that we as a school will benefit too. On days like this the pupils have a chance to do something practical to help others, but they also have a chance to exercise their imagination, and they never fail to impress with the originality of what they come up with. On days like this talking about the school as a community makes even more sense than usual.

Rev Tim Haggis is Chaplain at Trent College and Chairman of the School Chaplains’ Conference.

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‘Over and Over’ from Celebrations and Elegies 1982 by Elizabeth Jennings

*Over and over they suffer, the gentle creatures,
The frightened deer, the mice in the corn to be gathered.
Over and over we cry, alone or together,
And we weep for a lot we scarcely understand,
Wondering why we are here and what we mean,
And why there are huge stars and volcanic eruptions,
Earthquakes, desperate disasters of many kinds.
What is the answer? Is there One?*

*There are many. Most of us forget
The times, when the going sun was a blaze of gold,
And the blue hung behind it, and we were the whole of awe.
We forget the moments of love and cast out time,
And the children who come to us trusting the answers we give
To their difficult and important questions.*

*And there are shooting stars and rainbows and broad blue seas,
Surely, when we gather the good about us*

*The dark is cancelled out.
Mysteries must
Be our way of life. Without them we might
Stop trying to learn and hoping to succeed,
In the work we half-choose and giving the love we need.*

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BOOKS ON PRAYER

These suggestions have been compiled by Rev Dr Saskia Barnden, who also submitted the poems above.

Books about Prayer:

Richard Foster Hodder 2000

**Prayer:
Finding the Heart’s True Home**

An accessible introduction to different sorts of prayer, divided into three sections: Moving inward; moving upward, moving outward.

Foster is an American, but his work is not limited to national boundaries!

**George Tooley: Pentland Books
2001**

Bringing Prayer to Life
An engaging exploration of prayer and poetry. This little book is full of

poems and Tolley has a whole chapter on What is Prayer?

**Anthony de Mello Doubleday
1978**

Sashana: A Way to God

Excellent introduction to various types of prayer. Exercises to practise – Easily accessible.

Books which include sections on Prayer:

Oliver Clément Mercury 1993

The Roots of Christian Mysticism

Relying heavily on the Desert Fathers, Clément includes a chapter on prayer in his third section — approaches to contemplation. Some difficult ideas but many quotations to ponder on.

Spiritual Classics:

Reading with the Heart
Ed. R. Foster and E. Griffith

Includes a section on prayer with short extracts from various writers, as well as a section on meditation.

Esther de Waal

Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the spiritual art of attentiveness

Each chapter ends with material for prayer and reflection and the text is full of short quotations which encourage the reader to pause and reflect.

Collections of Prayers

Tony Castle Hodder 1986

The Hodder Book of Christian Prayers

This book is comprehensive (over 1,000 prayers), if a little on the traditional side. Prayers are divided by categories – devotional, intercessory etc..

**Kathy Keay Harper Collins
1994**

**Laughter, Silence and Shouting
An anthology of Women's prayers**

Excellent, modern, varied selection

Lyn Klug Lion 1999

**The Way of Healing:
A collection of prayers and meditations from around the world for all who seek healing and wholeness.**

The 'healing' is not only physical but mental, emotional and spiritual. This attractive book has lovely simple prayers.

Others

Rowan Williams' – Ponder these things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin is a good introduction to icons for daily prayer.

Celtic Daily Light by Ray Simpson is an interesting guide with a Bible quotation, anecdote about a Celtic saint and prayer for each day.

Tony Castle's – Little Book of Daily Prayer is small enough to carry in a pocket.

I am devoted to the work of Frederick Buechner, an American writer (novelist and Presbyterian minister) especially **The Hungering Dark** which contains some lovely prayers – but sadly he is not published in the UK.

Celebrating Common Prayer has a different service for each day of the week and includes the psalms. There is morning, noon, evening and night prayer for each day.

Saskia is Chaplain of Haberdashers' Monmouth School for Girls and a member of the School Chaplains' Conference Committee.

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The School Chaplains' Annual Conference
Trinity College, Oxford
3rd-5th April 2006

'Word, Weddings and Whips' - Learning and Living John's Gospel

Speakers

Most Rev'd Rowan Williams,
Archbishop of Canterbury

Fr Nicholas King, SJ, Campion Hall, Oxford

Sister Frances Dominica, Helen House, Oxford

Rev'd Canon Professor Martyn Percy, Principal, Ripon College, Cuddesdon

Workshops on topics of interest to those involved in Christian ministry in schools.

Cost

Full Attenders to be finalised: but we in the region of £270 (£240 for paid-up members of the School Chaplains' Conference)

Other rates for part-time attenders are negotiable.

Full details are enclosed or available from the Conference Administrator, see below.

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