

**May 2017**

## **Populism and Nationalism: thoughts from Father Charles**

### ***Church and Politics***

It has been 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Whilst we have no real historical evidence that this actual event occurred it is, nevertheless, a marker of a point in time which changed the world. Across Germany and in many parts of the world activities are taking place that celebrate the anniversary of this event.

During this month (4 May) there is a festival known as 'English Saints and Martyrs of the Reformation Era'. It provides a day which is set aside for us to remember all who witnessed to their Christian faith during the conflicts in church and state. It lasted from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century (and was most intense in the sixteenth). The reform movement was mostly aimed at the papacy, but many Christian men and women of holiness, Catholic and Protestant, suffered for their allegiance to what they believed to be the truth of the Gospel.

The year the 4 May was also polling day for the Mayoral Elections. And at Mass, as we recalled the martyrs of the Reformation, I was able to look out toward the Atrium and see people as they gathered to vote at the All Saints Polling Station. As we now know a Metro Mayor is the chair of a combined authority that has agreed a 'devolution deal' with central government. This gives power that enables decisions to be made over whole city regions – with the primary focus on strategic economic growth. We shall probably need to wait to see what this means in reality.

However, it was the unusual juxtaposition of these two events that encompassed church and state, on the one site, that caused me reflection.

### ***Archbishops' Letter***

As you will see, this edition of our magazine contains the Archbishops' letter. It is a letter written in advance of the General Election in June and contains their reflections, which they provide for us to contemplate. I won't offer a summary as you can read it in detail in a moment and consider its content in your own time.

However, what I do feel is good and appropriate is that the Church, our church, is willing to speak out on matters that relate to society and the conduct of our candidates for parliament and on the nature of government.

In light of the EU Referendum, and the attitudes displayed at that time by proponents of both 'in' and 'out', by the media and the voting public, the archbishops' reminder is timely. It is also timely when we observe what appears to be a rise in populism and nationalism in Europe and the United States. The Archbishops echo the general agreed opinion of the House of Lords, who in January this year 'took note' of the challenges to the liberal international order posed by the development of populism and nationalism.

### ***Take Note and Act***

Pope Francis, more recently, has been somewhat clearer in his opinion than simply 'taking note'. He has stated that 'populism is evil and ends badly as the past century showed'. Speaking specifically about migrants who are fleeing from conflict and persecution he suggested that accessible and secure humanitarian channels are needed to address the demands of increasing numbers of refugees. Later in his speech (to the

conference on Migration and Peace) he added other causes of mass migration, including: natural disaster, climate change, extreme poverty and inhumane living conditions. Currently the Western response appears to be fear, causing a spread of populism that capitalises threat and fear, which translates into messages of hate. Whilst, Pope Francis evidences events of the last century, it would also be true to say that the evidence of history, including Catholic and Protestant Martyrs of the Reformation Era, reinforces this message.

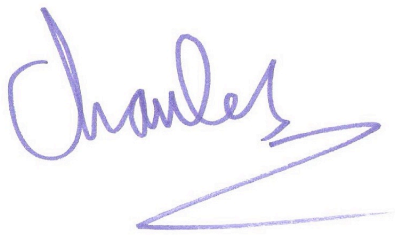
### **How do we Act?**

My inclination is to respond by staying with the words of Francis. He told the Conference that “we cannot understand our own times apart from the past, seen not as an assemblage of distant facts, but as the lymph that gives life to the present.”

If we can identify the failings of the past which have led to these continental disturbances and ‘great disorders’, we can also recognise the successes of the past. In Europe we have seen flows that move against populism and nationalism; we have experienced the great humane innovations: the Renaissance tie of faith to reason; the Reformation embrace of religious self-criticism; the Enlightenment elevation of the individual; modernity’s invention of democratic liberalism; the late-twentieth-century repudiation of interstate violence; the self-surpassing of nationalism into a larger political hope.

Perhaps now would be a good moment to read the Archbishops’ letter.

With prayers and blessings,



## Reflections from Fr James

Dear Friends,

My Lenten adventure at All Saints, culminating in the intensity of the Triduum and the glory of Easter Day, all seem, on the one hand, a long way off now: I am already fully immersed in the life and rhythms of St Mary's again.

On the other hand, however, I am still reflecting daily on all I learned and remembering the warm welcome and the many kindnesses shown to me, my wife May and the girls. Thank you!

In her recent book, *Let me go there*, the theologian Paula Gooder suggests that the season of Lent, regardless of whether we prefer to 'take up' or 'give up', should be a time for the unfamiliar. The point of the wilderness experience, she suggests, is to strip away certain comfort blankets in order that the true nature of existence and identity can be more clearly revealed in the spaciousness of the season. Unfamiliar rhythms, practices and perspectives are challenging, of course, but they also force us to sharpen our mettle, to (re)discover what's essential and perhaps to loosen our grip on that which turns out to be less significant than we first thought.

This certainly resonates with my experience among you all: a time of exploration, of recalibration and new emphasis which broadened horizons for sure but was ultimately reassuring in its essential familiarity. As I keep repeating to anyone who asks how it was: at the heart of all the newness, the same Jesus was there!

Of course, the richness of life and worship at All Saints could hardly be described as a wilderness but I can testify that crossing boundaries, encountering what at first seems other, experiencing a dose of holy challenge and disturbance, is good for the soul.

So, my sisters and brothers, be encouraged!

Be encouraged in your mission to 'take the inside out and bring the outside in'. Be encouraged in the connections that are being forged in all sorts of innovative ways for the sake of God's mission. Be encouraged that you have much to offer and stand to receive much also. Be encouraged that you have, in Father Charles, a leader who is clearly deeply committed to what you hold dear and has a vision to see those riches shared, understood and appreciated more widely. But be encouraged, most of all, that Jesus is building his Kingdom among you and through you in the corner of the world in which you find yourselves; I saw it happening!

Finally, duly encouraged, do remember that the door at St Mary's is always open if you fancy your own foray into the unfamiliar. I'll happily be your guide through the wilderness, as you all, in various ways, were mine.

Yours, in the risen Lord,

James

## **Understanding Our Values**

### **The values of the Duke of Wellington**

How difficult is it to write a biography? A recent comment, made by a well know biographer, suggested that there was no real difficulty tracing the major events in someone's life. For a person of note these tend to be very well documented. However, pushing beyond public knowledge to an understanding of the private side of a person, even a person of real significance, is a real challenge. Using the Duke of Wellington as an example, she claimed that the breakthrough which gave a real insight to the person beyond the public eye came with the discovery of a box of the Duke's financial records. This meant that she was able to discover what the Duke had done with his money! From this she believed she could uncover the Duke's deepest values and most important priorities.

### **What of our own Values?**

If someone were to come across our financial records a hundred years from now, and looked at what we did with our money – how we spent it and how we gathered it – what would this say about us? As All Saints, would we be confirmed or embarrassed by how the researcher found we had used our money? Would our financial records give any sign of how we lived-out our Christian values at this point in history? Would they show that we tried to live as faithful stewards of the treasures God had entrusted us with?

It's not only how we as a church 'use' our money. It's also how we, as the worshipping community here at All Saints, contribute to the life of our church. As good stewards we try to use our time, talents and treasure to bring God's Kingdom closer.

### **Stewardship**

It's true we don't use the word "steward" very much nowadays in our culture. However, in biblical times, stewards were amongst the most important people in society – especially that of a community existing in an agricultural based structure in semi-arid conditions. A steward had command over the resources – and all were dependent upon the good and right use of these resources.

People of wealth, power or property had no choice but to entrust their holdings to a steward to ensure the good running of the estate, community and household.

### **Our Role as Stewards**

In the parable from Matthew, Jesus teaches that all of us are stewards entrusted by God with vast wealth – God's Creation. It may be that in relative terms we see our locus of control as being quite small and limited to our own reach as individuals or a church. However, just as with Wellington what we do speaks of our values and priorities.

This is partly why exercising our stewardship can feel quite intimidating. Whenever we use our gifts we have to make decisions, decisions that say something about us. It's tempting to think that if God is really so powerful he can make these decisions; or perhaps, if we turn things around, we might say that what we receive from 'The Church' is our right and we have no decisions to make. The fact is, of course, that we do need to address these decisions.

### **Facing the Challenge of Choice**

Recently we have received the leaflet 'My Church, My Challenge, My Choice' which reminds us that it's a good time to reflect and review our approach to stewardship. What we do has a bearing on the mission of The Church as it engages with the 'missio Dei'; on our church here at All Saints as we translate this into more local (and far reaching) actions; and on how we as individuals in our worshipping community live out our own faith.

So, back to Wellington, we can apparently assess his values and priorities through an examination of his financial statements (and it's not all that grand for a Duke.....). This raises the same question for us, how might we wish to be seen in terms of our values and priorities to biographers and researchers of the future?

*James Henderson, Stewardship Director, Barnabas Trust*

### **Archbishops' Pastoral Letter to the Parishes and Chaplaincies of the Church of England, for the General Election.**

The season of Easter invites us to celebrate and to renew our love of God and our love of neighbour, our trust and hope in God and in each other. In the midst of a frantic and sometimes fraught election campaign, our first obligation as Christians is to pray for those standing for office, and to continue to pray for those who are elected. We recognise the enormous responsibilities and the vast complexity of the issues that our political leaders face. We are constantly reminded of the personal costs and burdens carried by those in political life and by their families.

Our second obligation as Christians at these times is to set aside apathy and cynicism and to participate, and encourage others to do the same. At a practical level that could mean putting on a hustings event for candidates, volunteering for a candidate, or simply making sure to vote on Thursday 8th June. The Christian virtues of love, trust and hope should guide and judge our actions, as well as the actions and policies of all those who are seeking election to the House of Commons and to lead our country.

This election is being contested against the backdrop of deep and profound questions of identity. Opportunities to renew and reimagine our shared values as a country and a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland only come around every few generations. We are in such a time.

Our Christian heritage, our current choices and our obligations to future generations and to God's world will all play a shaping role. If our shared British values are to carry the weight of where we now stand and the challenges ahead of us, they must have at their core cohesion, courage and stability.

Cohesion is what holds us together. The United Kingdom, when at its best, has been represented by a sense not only of living for ourselves, but by a deeper concern for the weak, poor and marginalised, and for the common good. At home that includes education for all, the need for urgent and serious solutions to our housing challenges, the importance of creating communities as well as buildings, and a confident and flourishing health service that gives support to all - especially the vulnerable - not least at the beginning and end of life. Abroad it is seen in many ways, including the 0.7% Aid commitment, properly applied in imaginative ways, standing up for those suffering persecution on grounds of faith, and our current leading on campaigns against slavery, trafficking, and sexual violence in conflicts.

Courage, which includes aspiration, competition and ambition, should guide us into trading agreements that, if they are effective and just, will also reduce the drivers for mass movements of peoples. We must affirm our capacity to be an outward looking and generous

country, with distinctive contributions to peacebuilding, development, the environment and welcoming the stranger in need. Our economic and financial systems at home and abroad should aim to be engines of innovation, not simply traders for their own account. The need for a just economy is clear, but there is also the relatively new and influential area of 'just finance', and there are dangers of an economy over-reliant on debt, which risks crushing those who take on too much. Courage also demands a radical approach to education, so that the historic failures of technical training and the over-emphasis on purely academic subjects are rebalanced, growing productivity and tackling with vigour the exclusion of the poorest groups from future economic life.

Stability, an ancient and Benedictine virtue, is about living well with change. Stable communities will be skilled in reconciliation, resilient in setbacks and diligent in sustainability, particularly in relation to the environment. They will be ones in which we can be collectively a nation of 'glad and generous hearts'. To our concern for housing, health and education as foundations for a good society, we add marriage, the family and the household as foundational communities, which should be nurtured and supported as such, not just for the benefit of their members, but as a blessing for the whole of society.

Contemporary politics needs to re-evaluate the importance of religious belief. The assumptions of secularism are not a reliable guide to the way the world works, nor will they enable us to understand the place of faith in other people's lives. Parishes and Chaplaincies of the Church of England serve people of all faiths and none. Their contribution and that of other denominations and faiths to the well-being of the nation is immense – schools, food banks, social support, childcare among many others - and is freely offered. But the role of faith in society is not just measured in terms of service delivery.

The new Parliament, if it is to take religious freedom seriously, must treat as an essential task the improvement of religious literacy. More immediately, if we aspire to a politics of maturity and generosity, then the religious faith of any election candidate should not be treated by opponents as a vulnerability to be exploited. We look forward to a media and political climate where all candidates can feel confident that they can be open about the impact of their faith on their vocation to public service.

Religious belief is the well-spring for the virtues and practices that make for good individuals, strong relationships and flourishing communities. In Britain, these embedded virtues are not unique to Christians, but they have their roots in the Christian history of our four nations. If treated as partners in the project of serving the country, the churches – and other faiths – have much to contribute to a deep understanding and outworking of the common good.

Political responses to the problems of religiously-motivated violence and extremism, at home and overseas, must also recognise that solutions will not be found simply in further secularisation of the public realm. Mainstream religious communities have a central role to play; whilst extremist narratives require compelling counter-narratives that have a strong theological and ideological foundation.

Cohesion, courage and stability are all needed in our response to the continuing national conversation about migration and refugees. Offering a generous and hospitable welcome to refugees and migrants is a vital expression of our common humanity, but it is not without cost and we should not be deaf to the legitimate concerns that have been expressed about the scale of population flows and the differential impact it has on different parts of society. The pressures of integration must be shared more equitably.

These deep virtues and practices – love, trust and hope, cohesion, courage and stability - are not the preserve of any one political party or worldview, but go to the heart of who we are as a country in all of its diversity. An election campaign, a Parliament and a Government that hold to these virtues give us a firm foundation on which to live well together, for the common good.

We keep in our prayers all those who are standing in this election and are deeply grateful for their commitment to public service. All of us as Christians, in holding fast to the vision of abundant life, should be open to the call to renounce cynicism, to engage prayerfully with the candidates and issues in this election and by doing so to participate together fully in the life of our communities.

In the Name of our Risen Lord,

**Archbishop Justin Welby and Archbishop Sentamu**

## **IN THIS MONTH.....MAY 1929**

Letter from Padre Gibbons to the Vicar, Canon Gillson.

*[Revd R M Gibbons was listed on the staff of All Saints' as a UMCA priest in Zanzibar. David Livingstone's return from Africa in 1857 led to the formation of Universities' Mission to Central Africa. Following a challenge issued during his lectures in Oxford and Cambridge, the universities prepared to send a mission to central Africa. Establishing the Mission's work and opposing the East African slave trade were the initial priorities. UMCA aimed to establish the church in Central Africa and both men and women were involved from its earliest days in contributing to making this a reality. Evangelistic, pastoral and educational work were all carried out by both Africans and Europeans. Medical work soon became an important addition and one of UMCA's major contributions in this sphere was its participation in the fight against leprosy. In the early 1960s UMCA merged with SPG to form USPG.]*

Minaki, Dar-es-Salaam, March 5<sup>th</sup> 1929

My Dear Father,

I fear my letter from Port Said must have seemed terribly skimpy and I feel rather mean about it. The whole of the voyage was sheer delight and I took an almost childish pleasure in each familiar tropical or African token as it appeared. Coconut palms, black skins, the Swahili tongue, the Southern Cross, flying fish, mangrove swamps and the prospect of getting back became more and more thrilling each day.

I am sure you won't think it an ungracious joy after all the kindness and delights with which I was swamped in England. I thoroughly enjoyed my furlough – every moment of it, even despite the cold and the chicken and rice, but I found that two horses can live in one stable.

There were five other UMCA-ites on board, including Father Malachi of Horfield, and we studied Swahili every morning with great fervour. On arrival in Dar-es-Salaam at dawn Father Sheppard startled me by entering the cabin while I was shaving! I didn't expect him quite so early and it was a joyous meeting. He reported "All's well". I am most thankful and grateful for the splendid way he has carried on: not a thing relaxed and many improvements!! My boys seemed quite excited and pleased to see me and I was tremendously glad at meeting them again. Their first enquiry was for my "wazee" (old folk), and then as to whether I had had a good time. In the evening they begged leave for a dance to celebrate the occasion. The generous gifts which I brought back from Clifton are installed. The ancient bit of scrap iron has again been scrapped and a bell with nice far-reaching tone has taken its place. The Church has a clock which strikes the quarters, and it was a nine days' wonder, and even yet the boys hum or whistle or sing the "Chimes". One boy wrote in an English essay, "Our father has brought us an o'clock which plays all kinds of music, at the quatter (sic), the half and the exactly". The said clock is a great improvement and help. The banner of S Andrew flies bravely over the College; the beautifully made Missal cover has given real delight and is a distinct addition to the beautiful things in our Chapel. The gramophone has attracted great gatherings, and so with them all. The ladies on the staff are immensely pleased with the view of my nice new stockings (also a gift from Clifton): it is no small relief to them as the old ones were mainly a patchwork of their kind making.

The Fridays in Lent are kept as a rigorous fast till 3 p.m. and we spend most of the time in church. On one of them I had to spend the whole day running the pump and persuading it to draw water. I took two boys down to the engine-house  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile away in a valley and when we arrived I said "I will look after the pump and you arrange a nice place where we can say our prayers". When I came out I found they had improvised a little church under a batch of orange trees: each of us was given an oil-box as a seat and desk: I had an extra one for a pulpit: coconut leaves were placed neatly in front of each box as kneelers, and the two boys were standing, prayer book in hand, all ready to begin. So in the intervals of supervising the engine we had: A conducted Meditation; The Stations of the Cross, (I had a little book of pictures); Sext and Intercessions; Evensong. We sang the Office hymns and the Stabat Mater during the Stations. In between times I noticed the boys became absorbed in their New Testaments.

The rains have begun and we have suspended all lessons for two days while our shambas were being planted by the boys. Today everything is finished and in addition we have planted many flowering bushes and shrubs. I see the Bishop has left England and we may expect him soon after Easter.

Yours ever

R M Gibbons



## **The Orthodox baptism and christmation**

Finding myself with time to spare on a Sunday recently in Thessaloniki, I set off to explore the city. The hotel bus dropped me on the Odos Tsimiski, the main street, and I headed uphill, through narrow lanes between high, white-painted houses. I first found an ancient church, now the Bey Hamam, or 'Baths of Paradise', which had been converted to this new function during the years of Ottoman control of northern Greece.

Further uphill, and past the Roman Forum, which was only discovered in the 1960s, and is a reminder of the long history of this entrepôt city, midway on trade routes from Italy to Turkey, and from the Mediterranean to the Balkans, and then Hagios Demetrios, is the Church of St Demetrios.

The building looks relatively modern, faced with neatly trimmed red brick and limestone blocks, but it dates back to the time, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Thessaloniki was the second largest city of the Byzantine Empire. St Demetrios is the patron saint of the city, famed for his military exploits, and often paired with St George, and martyred by the Romans about 306 AD by being passed through by numerous spears.

The church was open, it was about 11 a.m., so I entered, and found a great deal of activity, a mix of people of all ages, walking around the aisles, kissing the gold-trimmed icons, some sitting, some standing, and a heavily bearded priest at the front with a well-dressed party. The priest was speaking and chanting into a microphone, surrounded by a young family, a mother with a baby, and two very intrusive photographers, both with powerful lights, dancing around the party and filming every act.

I was able to walk round the side aisles to explore what was going on. In the sanctuary, a smartly-dressed older lady was seated in front of a shrine bearing a white suitcase on wheels, wrapped in gauze bows, a pair of small white leather shoes, a lace shawl, and many white flowers. I returned to the body of the church and sat, to witness the baptism – for such it was.

I sat and stood, and crossed myself, as did the other faithful, although it was hard to divine what was going on. After 20 minutes of work at the microphone, the priest and the ceremonial party moved inside the sanctuary, so I went round to the side aisle to see what was happening. Next, the water in the font was extremely thoroughly blessed. Words were recited by the priest, no doubt referring to the water of life, the parting of the waters, and other appropriate symbolic references. The priest made signs of the cross with his hands, and then lowered his head into the font, just above the level of the water, and made signs of the cross with his head and mouth. The font, I noted, was unusually deep.

Meanwhile, three cantors, one another priest, and two rather scruffy youths in oily anoraks, sang antiphons, tenor and bass. The parents took the baby over to the shrine, and the older lady, presumably a grandmother, and they, began to undress the little girl, laying her clothes aside, and delivering her back to the priest. He had meanwhile swung his long hair back, secured it with a rubber band, opened his cope and swung the leaves over his shoulder to left and right, and clipped it behind his neck with an appropriate cope-neck-clip. He rolled up his sleeves revealing muscular, hairy forearms.

The naked child was presented, and then thoroughly oiled, like a piglet being prepared for the barbecue. Holy oils were wiped over the baby's head, forehead, and signs of the cross were marked fore and aft. The priest then elbowed the water to test its temperature. Fine. The baby was then introduced to the water, dip, dip, toes-first, and deeper and deeper, Water was swiped over its head, and eventually it was dunked in full length.

The mother was waiting with a white towel over her arms, and the priest handed the child over to be dried. While in her mother's arms, the priest snipped off four little tufts of hair (what do they do if the child is hairless?). I was later told by an informative taxi driver that the hair snipping is peculiar to the Orthodox church, and the four snips describe the shape of a cross - this is said to be an expression of gratitude from the child, who having received an abundance of blessings through the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation and having nothing to give to God in return, offers part of its hair, as a first offering to God. In the Old Testament, hair is seen as a symbol of strength. The child, therefore, promises to serve God with all its strength. Chrismation, or confirmation is this act, following baptism, involving anointing with chrim, olive oil and herbs, and the hair snipping is sometimes said to be analogous to tonsure of monks.

The purpose of the white suitcase on wheels was now revealed. The naked, oiled, dunked, and shorn child, still stoically not crying, was carried across to grandmother, who opened the suitcase, and withdrew the christening robes, and encompassed the child, and tied on the shoes. The baby was brought back to the priest, who had now decently rolled down his sleeves, and unclipped his cope (but kept his hair in the pony tail). Final words were said, and the priest and congregation reverted to the regular Eucharistic service, the first for the baby in its new baptised and chrismated condition.

The baptism took 1 hour and twenty minutes, a proper act of reverence, and something that perhaps might perhaps be considered as an appropriate model for the Church of England to adopt.

*Mike Benton*

## **Easter Monday walk**

This year's Easter Monday walk took us on a six mile circuit this around the Badminton Estate. It attracted more people than ever with 26 of us from four up to ages it would be indiscrete to disclose enjoying each other's company. Our canine companions, Bella Griffiths and Hector Gordon, got to know each other. We were most impressed by young Hector's obedience when faced with so many tempting birds to put up.

Our circuit started in the very pretty Cotswold stone village, admiring the houses and the horses being exercised around us. From there we tramped across fields, crossing a private airstrip and then on to Little Badminton where we stopped for lunch in the churchyard. As ever, the C13 church was locked and the Victorian clouded glass stopped us from even getting a peep through the windows. However there was plenty of space for a picnic in the churchyard and Sebastian found some good yew trees to scale.

The return loop took us through the deer park, busy with construction of the stadium and shopping village ahead of the horse trials. Then it was back past the Beaufort Hunt kennels and through the village to the carpark and back to Janice's and Martin's for much tea and cake.