

THE CLARION

The Magazine of The Parish of St Mary The Boltons

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Farewell and Thank You

Having announced in April that I would leave at the end of September I had a feeling of increasing unreality as the time drew near for my departure. 'Are you still here?' people would say. But now the time has come for me to begin a great new adventure.

In the week before my farewell weekend I was on the Kensington Area Clergy Conference at Lille in northern France. At the final Eucharist the Bishop of Kensington invited me to receive his blessing and the prayers of my colleagues. It was a powerful moment in which I realised that not only am I testing a calling but I am also being sent. I may be no campaigner but perhaps I am a pioneer and I am truly grateful for all the support that other clergy and especially Bishop Michael have given me.

On Saturday 25 September it was lovely to see so many people at Choral Evensong. The music was spectacular and shows that Graham Caldbeck is a worthy successor to Simon Gibson. I was touched that Graham wrote a descant for the hymn 'O Gladsome Light' especially for the occasion.

I began my address by quipping that at the hour of our death it is said that our lives pass before our eyes. If this was the case then I may not have long to live! Family members sat alongside friends from where I grew up in South London, fellow students from my time at Hull University and the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield, and past parishioners. There were even some people from South Africa.

In my address I spoke about an experience that I had had on retreat last May at the monastery to which I am now going. My first brush with death was when I was about eight years old. A favourite great uncle died who lived near to where I grew up. It astonished me then, as it still does, that we both exist but also cease to exist. A sense of mortality is key to religious formation.

But as the philosopher Hannah Arendt points out it is easy for such a spur to be tainted by fear. We are all afraid of death. But why is it that we so easily lose sight of the other great fact of our existence – birth? We describe ourselves as 'mortals' but never say that we are 'natals'. Yet if death is always surrounded by sorrow birth is usually surrounded by joy. It is rare to have a sad baptism. I would not describe myself as a 'born again Christian' but I did experience during my retreat an extraordinary outpouring of joy. And it is joy, not fear that enables us to move forward.

When I came back from sabbatical in America the church was embroiled in controversy over gay bishops. I believe that the church should embrace human diversity. For me the Episcopal Church of the USA made the right

choice in consecrating Gene Robinson as a bishop and the Church of England was wrong in requiring Jeffrey John to stand down. Until now I have tried to make the liberal consensus in the church work. But that presupposes equal respect for the views being expressed.

Events in the past year have shown me that we are no longer arguing things out but involved in a power struggle. In situations of conflict we have to make choices. When I was in South Africa in the early 'eighties I heard Desmond Tutu say: 'If you think that God doesn't make choices then ask Pharaoh'. I believe that if the church is going to make the changes necessary to be heard in the modern world then we all need to do some serious homework about what it means to be human. In the 'sixties we got used to being 'Honest to God'. Now is the time to become honest about humanity.

But why become a monk? As I reflected on the parish weekend last September I realised that what I am best at is silence both in terms of contemplative prayer and the pastoral art of listening to what is not said. I further realised that for this gift to be developed it needs the crucible of a religious community. I have often thought about joining a monastery but it was not until last year that I found a place that I thought might be 'home'.

Silence is easily misunderstood. I have loved being in Chelsea not least of all because I am fascinated by Thomas More whose house was on what is now Cheyne Walk. I like to think of him taking long walks around where St Mary's stands five hundred years ago after he had stepped down as Henry VIII's Chancellor because of the king's divorce. The American poet Audre Lourde says 'Our silence will not protect us'. She was right. But if silence is seen not as a cloak but as a fountain from which new and energising things flow then the monastic life is a prime place from which the church can be urged forward.

I realise that this sounds idealistic. There may be all sorts of other reasons for my move, some of which I am barely conscious, but I am encouraged by words of Basil Hume, onetime Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and Abbot of Ampleforth: 'People sometimes join communities for the wrong reasons but they stay for the right ones'. The process of discernment will sift the wheat from the tares of my tangled life.

The emotion on Saturday was restrained. I am blessed with a large family and many friends but because we are dispersed we rarely see each other. Having spent eight years at St Mary's, however, the All Age Eucharist was more intense. The parish choir sang one of my favourite modern anthems and it was very kind of Graham Caldbeck to invite Simon Gibson to play the voluntaries with the trumpeter, Steve Keogh. Those of you who remember my induction may recall that Simon played

Rossini's overture 'The Thieving Magpie' at the end of that service. It seemed the right thing to go out on.

In my address I went back to my early days in St Mary's. The church then was often locked and I realised that if it is to be a sign of something very different to the houses round about with their security systems and even armed guards the church would have to be open. And so it happened. With the Parish Office established within the church itself and more events happening increasing numbers of people have been drawn in to shed their tears and tell their stories.

The sculpture placed in the church in the year 2000, the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the building, set the seal upon the progress made in the previous four years. That a newborn baby was left at the church a few days later seemed a vindication of why the people and the church building are here. That story had a happy ending and Natasha ('Baby Mary') is probably now walking and talking in the home that was partly funded by the generosity of the people of St Mary's.

The Christian faith is articulated through worship and creeds but it is embodied in people like us. We all have our stories to tell. I spoke about one particular past parishioner that I remembered especially – Pamela Abel-Smith. She was a quiet and unassuming single woman. When I knew her she had turned to writing poetry but she had originally trained as an artist. On one occasion she showed me an extraordinary charcoal picture of a ruined house. This was her family seat which had suffered a terrible fire. In the embers she took a piece of burnt wood and drew. Pamela's experience resonates with many that I have heard as a parish priest. Sartre's comment that we lead 'lives of quiet desperation' is often proved true.

At St Mary's I have tried to raise awareness that sometimes this desperation is due to our own actions and attitudes. I recounted the time that I replaced the traditional account from Genesis of the Fall at the Christmas Service of Nine Lessons and Carols with an account of the treatment of Polish prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp. It was Christmas and the inmates were required to sing 'Silent Night' in German. Those who sang badly were beaten and some were killed. Afterwards we, the congregation, sang 'Stille Nacht'. Churches should be beautiful but they should be not pretty. Churches should be sanctuaries and places of safety but they cannot be founded upon escapism. They should be gritty, edgy and alive to the struggles of the day.

When I came to St Mary's I was well aware that my predecessor had left because of the ordination of women. I did not want to rehearse the arguments all over again but set them in a new context. The opportunity came when I met Julia Simonne, who had then recently returned from the New York ballet. On Pentecost 1998 she interpreted the coming of the Holy Spirit by dancing around the church claiming its sacred objects for women. Some were shocked at her presence around lectern, pulpit and altar. But six years later the appointment of The Revd Ginny Thomas as Associate Vicar has been widely welcomed. Ginny comes not to carry on what I have done but brings different skills and model of ministry to create a new chapter in the life of

St. Mary's. I pray that you will take her to your hearts and show her as much love as you have shown me.

It was fortuitous that the Booth-Clibborn family were in the front pew with Leonie holding three week old Giselle. I took her from her mother's arms during my address to show that the reason why we need 'to give our utmost for his highest' is not just for ourselves but for future generations as well. Countless numbers of children are born into oppression and squalor because we live in an unjust world. God calls us all however and wherever we are to light candles in the darkness - and be blowtorches if we must.

St Mary's is a beacon. It's a wonderful parish with marvellous people. At each Annual Parochial Church Meeting many people are named and thanked in the Annual Report for the myriad ways in which they contribute. There was not time in my address to go through the list again but to represent you all I singled out the Churchwardens – Linda Fleming and her predecessor Sylvia Gregory and Richard Brudenell who saw me in and now sees me out. Sylvia, Linda and Richard have given me every support not just in my ministry but personally, too. I will never forget the kindness that I was shown three years ago when my mother died suddenly.

At the time of writing I am told that money is still coming in by way of a presentation. Richard and Linda have told me the sum so far and I am staggered by people's generosity. In his account of the Franciscans in England the historian John Moorman remarks that it is easy to be poor by accident but difficult to be poor by design. So it would appear! Some of this money is funding the commission of an icon of St John the Evangelist by Suzanna Rust, a friend of mine from Ealing. In due course I will have this in my cell. I have asked Suzanna to contact Ginny once it is finished and bring it to St Mary's to be blessed. When it has been shown for a few weeks I will make arrangements for it to be sent to Cambridge.

As Joyce Grenfell remarked 'parting is hell'. Many of us shed a few tears on the last weekend of September. I hope that you will understand that as Ginny moves into her new role and I go to embrace a new life it is necessary for me to be out of touch until the New Year. The Parish Office will be able to contact me about anything urgent. Otherwise please do not interpret my silence as anything but the prelude to new beginnings for all of us. Letting go is hard and it is natural to cling on but I hope that you will understand that I cannot come back on a regular basis in the future nor be in regular individual contact.

Every Sunday is resurrection day, open door day. Every day of every week is to be characterised by what we celebrate on the first day of the week. We believe that our tears of sorrow are to be turned into tears of joy. For the stone across the tomb was not rolled back to let Jesus out but to let us and those who have gone before us and those who come after us into the mystery of Christ, God's everlasting presence of abundant life. It is this faith that binds us together whether we are in each other's company or not. So to quote Thomas More

'Thee pray for me and I'll pray for thee
That we might merrily in heaven.'

Gerald Beauchamp

PS Some people have asked what books and CDs I am taking with me. I am taking some Bible reference books, some poetry including the collected works of Philip Larkin and R.S. Thomas; Zen and the Birds of Appetite by Thomas Merton (an account of the discussions between a Christian monk and a Buddhist master), The Garden of the Beloved by Robert Way (a gentle allegory of the spiritual life), Friday Noon by Hans Ruedi-Weber (with pictures and text for Good Friday), Simon Schama's Rembrandt's Eyes and Paul Elie's The Life That You Save May Be Your Own (an essay on four 20C Roman Catholic writers - a glorious 'find' in America last year). The music includes works by Bach, Michel Camilo, Delius, Norah Jones, Frank Martin, Schumann, Sibelius, Richard Strauss and Tippett. Eclectic or what!

The Intercessions on Sunday 26 September

God beyond all names, we thank you for the many means you use to make yourself known. We thank you that in faith we know you and in worship can express our trust in you. Help us to know, love and serve you more and more, for our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

Lord, hear us...

God beyond all words, we thank you for the work and ministry of Gerald among us. We thank you for the way in which he revealed your love and glory for each of us to recognise and respond to. Fill Gerald with the gifts of your spirit for his new journey. Fill us with generosity to welcome and support Ginny, for your greater glory and that individually and together we grow in your absorbing love.

God beyond all dreams, as Gerald seeks to live the values of hospitality, poverty, celibacy and obedience, guide him and the Society of St John the Evangelist in living them boldly and authentically. Challenge each of us and your whole Church, to go beyond the obvious, meet you in every person, and make decisions for justice and for peace, and live responsibly with our means and limits.

God beyond all limits, we thank you for your gifts of life and light, and also of darkness, and the empty silence where we meet ourselves, and you. When we doubt you and our decisions, give us ears to hear you otherwise; when we stumble and fall, give us eyes to see you in other places; when we are sick and ill, give us hearts and minds to trust you despite our need to control. We pray for all for whom we are concerned, and especially... May your passion inspire our compassion and your courage be our encouragement, so that your light can shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.

God beyond all time, we thank you for meetings and partings, for beginnings and endings, for in the end is also our beginning. We thank you for the great communion of saints of every age, especially those who have been or are our guides in faith and hope and love. We remember our loved ones departed, and especially those who have worshipped here and have died. We remember ... We remember people who have died

cruelly, or in conflicts and wars. Bring peace, bring love, bring hope, bring resurrection, bring wholeness.

Verena Tschudin

The Profession in Life Vows of Geoffrey R. Tristram, SSJE

Either by accident or divine providence Br Geoffrey Tristram made his Life Profession at SSJE on Sunday 19 September. Geoffrey is British and was vicar of a parish in the St Alban's Diocese. He has just become the Novice Guardian and so will be Gerald's mentor. This is the address preached by the Superior at Geoffrey's Profession

Readings: Exodus 33:18-23; Psalm 84

All of us here should have had the experience of being protected: of being guarded by someone's act of kindness and care, of being held back or hidden or shielded or removed from something that would be too much for us to bear – too dangerous, too awful, too awesome for us to behold. Perhaps as a child, your being taken up into the safety of your father's arms, or being pulled behind your mother's apron, or having your hand held securely by someone stronger or more experienced or more confident, or your literally being pushed away from something or someone because this would have been too much to face or deal with or get out of alone... And so this act of protections was done for you out of love to save you, whether or not you could understand or appreciate it at the time.

Each night here in the monastery we pray Compline, the ancient monastic bedtime prayers to complete the day. There is a phrase on our lips that means more and more to me with each passing year, a phrase taken from the psalms:

Keep us as the apple of your eye."
(That's a yearning for God's adoring love.)
"Hide us under the shadow of your wings."
(That's a plea for God's concealing protection.)

I think there is an innate need in life both to be enlightened *and* to be kept in the dark. There is surely a need we all find from childhood onward to grow in knowledge and skills and abilities, to gain experiences in life that shape and form us, to be educated in ways that equip us for our life's work, even the need to become "streetwise" in ways where we were otherwise naïve. Enlightenment in life is a necessary, often a good thing, but knowledge comes with its own burdens. The great Welsh poet, R. S. Thomas, speaks of "the wound of knowledge."ⁱⁱ There is often a hidden and weighty cost in the gaining of knowledge. Not long ago I was invited to listen to someone speak about their life, some things that they had never before spoken aloud, so they said. And at one point this person paused and asked me whether I would like to know more about some of these matters they were sharing? And I pondered for a few moments, "whether I would like to know more" about these things? And I said, "No." I told them I was quite willing to hear more from them, if this person would find that helpful. But – to be quite precise with their choice of words – I was not liking this, not enjoying this, but quite willing and honored to be a companion as they cleared out a closet in their soul. I would call *that* my own experience of "the wound of knowledge,"

something which I suspect all of us here know about. Knowledge is a very powerful thing... and once you know, you cannot *not* know and you will always carry it.

I think Moses was being protected. In the first lesson appointed for this evening from the Book of Exodus, we hear of the LORD's saying to Moses what he will *not* know, what he will *not* see. And it's not because there is some distance between Moses and God. To the contrary, it's because there is *such* closeness that Moses is being protected. We have just heard how Moses had found favor in God's eyes, that the LORD "knows Moses by name," that the LORD'S presence will be with Moses and the people. And then Moses asks to know more of LORD: "Show me your glory," he asks. And the LORD responds, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." Moses here is being protected. Moses is being shielded from seeing the glory of God in a way that would be too much for Moses to bear.

In the Hebrew Bible, the word that signifies glory, *kabod*, implies the idea of weight, the weight of glory. The weight of something implies its importance. And there is something here of the glory of God that is too weighty or too blinding for Moses to bear. Moses is given only a glimpse of God's back, and told to follow, which is what happens when you follow; you are behind. And I think that is often the way it is. We may look to the glory of the God, but we could not bear to face it. That would be too much. Rather we see traces of God's glory left along the way, and we follow. I think it's *this* experience of the vacuum left in the wake of God's presence going before us, it's *that* vacuum that leads us on. It's the experience of God's real presence, experienced as a real absence of God, that lures us. R.S. Thomas calls this the "Via Negativa." He writes:

Why no! I never thought other than
That God is that great absence
In our lives, the empty silence
Within, the place where we go
Seeking, not in hope to
Arrive or find. He keeps the interstices
In our knowledge, the darkness
Between stars. His are the echoes
We follow, the footprints he has just
Left...ⁱⁱⁱ

The LORD tells Moses to follow, a line that is picked up on Jesus' own lips many centuries later. For you here who profess a faith in Jesus Christ, how are you experiencing his invitation to follow? How are you looking to the glory of God these days? Several things come to mind.

The founder of our own community, Richard Meux Benson, speaks of the grace of agnosticism, of what he calls "true agnosticism." Father Benson writes, more than a century ago, "we must meet the agnosticism of the present day, which rejoices in putting God aside, with that true agnosticism which rejoices in simple absorbing love."^{iv} It seems to me that God is doing a work of love in everyone – those near and those far, those whom we love and call "friend," and those whom we abhor and call "foe" – in all of these God is doing a

work of love, and our role in this is to participate in the mirroring of that love. Which is to say that even in those miserable situations where we may be prone to see someone as repugnant, or stupid, or evil, or unworthy, or wrong, there is a child of God crying for help, no matter how inarticulate they may be. Life is invitational, an invitation for us to mirror the love of God. It all, ultimately, will be judged on the basis of love: our actions, our words, our lobbying, our interventions, our alliances, our understandings, will ultimately be judged on the basis of participating in the generosity of God's love. Love should precede our understanding. You may know that wonderful line from William Blake: "We are put on earth a little space, that we may learn to bear the beams of love...."^v Everyone is ultimately a neighbor with whom God has intention of sharing eternity... and whom we, eventually, will come to understand. And in the meantime, until we understand, we love as we have been loved. Love precedes understanding.

Looking to the glory of God in this day: a second thing comes to mind. That the posture with which we greet each new morning is a posture of giving, of the giving of ourselves. It is possible to assume almost the opposite posture in life, namely, to go through life taking, and in the end this will add up to the taking of one's life, which is suicidal.^{vi} Life is not meant to be taken; life is given and it's meant to be given away. Like with water in a well, for the water to stay fresh two things must happen. There must be an inflow of water through some underground tributary. But then, fresh water must also be drawn from this well. Water not drawn from a well will become brackish, and eventually its water source will dry up. I would say that God's light and life and love is there for us in abundance. It is a very sure tributary. And it's there to be drawn on and given away with a kind of reckless generosity. Jesus has come to give us life. And we have this life to give it away. Not cling to it, nor grasp after it, nor squander it, nor squirrel it away, but to share it abundantly. There is always more provision. Draw on it and share it. Life is not meant to be taken; life is meant to be given.

A third thing comes to mind as we look to God's glory, and follow Jesus in this day and age: to let go what is unbelievable. Charles Gore, the great English theologian and bishop (a graduate of the *other* great university in England^{vii}) wrote almost 125 years ago, paraphrasing Jesus, how "the truth makes [the Church] free." Bishop Gore could as easily be writing an Op Ed article in today's *Boston Globe*. He speaks of how the Church can stand firm in her old truths and meanwhile "...assimilate all new material, to welcome and give its place to all new knowledge, to throw herself into the sanctification of each new social order, bringing forth out of her treasures things new and old, and showing again and again her power of witnessing under changed conditions to the catholic [that is, universal] capacity of [the Church's] faith and life."^{viii} For Christianity to have integrity and authority in this day and age, we need to participate with the Spirit's leading us into the truth. The Spirit of God, ahead of us. We surely need to be grounded in the past, but if we have only the past to inform our living the Christian life today, we are living out of the archives of experience, real as it was. Christianity is not a religion of resuscitation. It's a living faith, informed by death and resurrection, death and resurrection, death and resurrection. We need to let go what is unbelievable. We need to hand on more than

we were given. There is a new thing afoot, and footprints are God's, and God is up ahead of us. I would say *that* is true for us all, whether we live in a monastery or in town or in the country. There is a new thing afoot. And I can say, as someone learning to be a monk: what an adventurous and opportune time to be alive, to be a bearer of the light and life and love of a God who is lovable and believable.

And now, just a piece of history. Tristram. The name Tristram: prominent in France – Tristram, the King of Lyon, born around year 530; and then, in Arthurian legend, a Sir Tristram, a romantic who is on a quest for eternal love. There's some interesting material... That the name Tristram has both a French and Anglo heritage is intriguing. But it would be a stretch for me to try to make various parallels with these Tristrams of old and our own Brother Geoffrey. But the one piece of legend and lore around Sir Tristram that *does* seem very true for now is the matter of the quest for eternal love. You, Geoffrey, are a witness of the love of God. How it is that God broke through to you, given what you had set of to be and do with your life, all the ports-of-call where you have lived and worked, all the other things that you could have done with your life, and done well, you end up becoming a monk, and a monk in the Cambridge on *this* side of the Atlantic. We, your brothers, are *so* aware of how your vocation has been tested to bring you this point of freedom and desire. And those of us who have been around for awhile know that the tests will not end with today.

The glory of God is being revealed in our lives here in our midst, as much of God's glory as we can bear. God's glory leading us on, inviting us to love, daring us to participate in the daily initiations to die and rise, die and rise, die and rise... You, Geoffrey, come to us as a living reminder of God who is up ahead of us, and doing a new thing. Who possibly could have predicted this day? I would say that God shielded *you* from what *you* were not prepared to know and embrace about God's call on your life, shielded you until now. We join with you in giving thanks for *so* many people – your family, friends, teachers, monks and nuns – in companioning you on your way. All these people whom God has used to steer you here to this dwelling place, to abide here among us. I'm mindful of an old French proverb that reads "Gratitude is the heart's memory." For so much we give thanks to God in this day. And I'm certain that more will be revealed in time, in the fullness of time, what God has in store for you, Geoffrey, and for us in these days ahead as we seek together to give an authentic witness to Christ.

Geoffrey, welcome home.

Br Curtis Almquist SSJE

¹ From Psalm 17:8.

¹ R. S. Thomas (1913-2000) was educated in Wales at University College, Bangor (1935), and ordained in the Church of Wales (1936).

¹ "Via Negativa," by R. S. Thomas in *Later Poems 1972-1982* (Macmillan, 1984).

¹ From *Further Letters of Richard Meux Benson*, p.251.

¹ William Blake (1757-1827), English poet, painter, engraver, and visionary mystic.

¹ David Steindl-Rast, OSB, made allusion to "the taking of life" being suicidal in a public lecture, its location and date unknown.

¹ [Sic] Bp. Gore was a graduate of Oxford and our Br. Geoffrey, a graduate of Cambridge.

¹ From the preface to the first edition of *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, by Charles Gore (1889). Bishop Gore (1853-1932) served as "Senior" (the Superior) of the Community of the Resurrection from its foundation in 1892 until 1901, and was consecrated Bishop of Worcester in 1902.

Poem for Everyman

I will present you
parts
of
my
self
slowly
if you are patient and tender.
I will open drawers
that mostly stay closed
and bring out places and people and things
sounds and smells, loves and frustrations,
hopes and sadnesses,
bits and pieces of three decades of life
that have been grabbed off
in chunks
and found lying in my hands.
They have eaten
their way into my memory
carved their way into my
heart
altogether – you or I never see them -
they are me.
If you regard them lightly
deny that they are important
or worse, judge them
I will quietly, slowly
begin to wrap them up,
in small pieces of velvet,
like worn silver and gold jewellery,
in a small wooden chest of drawers
and close.

Author Unknown
sent in by Helen Singer

A free bar of chocolate if you come back to church

The Church of England is losing thousands of worshippers a year. Is this simply a sign of the times or does it smack at carelessness?

It's something newspapers have known for years: if you want people to take you seriously at a weekend, you have to bribe them. Part-works, CDs, DVDs, CD-ROMs, holiday offers – you name it, we've **wodged** it between our pages. So it was only a matter of time before the churches caught on.

Last week the Church of England released its latest attendance figures. Between 2001 and 2002, 39,000 people chose to stop attending Church of England churches. This is roughly the equivalent of the population of Farnham. Of course, there isn't really a

town in Surrey where the churches are all empty and the mosques, pubs, football grounds etc. are all full. The true story is more complicated: that several thousand churchgoers died, and not quite so many were born; that a bunch of churchgoers continued to come regularly, but missed a few more Sundays than in the previous year; and even that a lot of people started coming to church for the first time, but that these were hidden by the slightly bigger number of people leaving.

An important piece of research in this field was done a few years ago by Philip Richter and Leslie Francis, for their book *Gone But Not Forgotten*. Their team tracked down some of those who no longer went to church (the ones still alive) and asked why they had stopped. There was a smattering of flouncers, those who'd been offended by something; a handful of doubters, people who had lost what faith they had; and rather more in the distracted category, who now take their children to football training, or visit aged parents, and similar activities that have made Sunday too busy to fit churchgoing into.

Unlike in most surveys, however, the most interesting category was "Don't know". Remember, we're talking about someone's relationship with his or her Creator: the sustainer of their lives, their link with the eternal, and so forth. How odd to stop worshipping God, and not to know why. Except that it's not really that odd: it's the same drift away from righteousness as when we slip out of diets, neglect our exercise routine, and start smoking again. It's not that we decide to be unfit or faithless; it just sort of happens. "Oh well, just the one." "Oh well, we can go next Sunday."

In my earlier years as a Christian, we called this "back-sliding". We were enjoined to be on our guard against any signs of it in ourselves or our friends, to the extent of attending church only once on Sundays was a sign that something might be amiss, and a quiet word would be had with the culprit. It was an otherworldly phase, when a silly, rigid definition of what constituted a believer got in the way of contact with "normal" people. Nevertheless, despite its tinge of judgementalism, the regime did promote a great deal of pastoral care. Quite often, what lay behind a failing of belief, a disinclination to worship, was unhappiness in some shape or form, caused by depression, or bereavement, or failing relationship. Friendly contact with someone from church could make a big difference.

What Richter and Frances found was that friendly contacts are seldom forthcoming. People would drift away from church *and nobody would notice*. No phone call, no friendly e-mail, no visit. What sort of treatment could be better designed to undermine confidence in the great Christian enterprise than that sort of neglect. There's something about respecting people's integrity, and not intruding; but this sort of carelessness – from a group of people who are supposed to exercise love and charity – suggests a lack of respect for those who have been allowed to slip away unchecked.

What this means is that there is a large group of people who have tried church, who feel reasonably well disposed to it, support its general tenets in theory, but just don't happen to go anymore. This is where the bribe comes in. Next Sunday, churches in Manchester will be giving out bars of fair-trade chocolate as part of its

"Back to Church" initiative. Congregations are enjoined to invite anyone they know to come and pick one up (and stay for the service). The posters say "Missing you"; there's a questionnaire on the website (www.backtochurch.co.uk) that starts "Why did you leave your church?" and offers the options: "moved house, someone in church annoyed me, had a big life event (e.g. divorce, birth of child, etc.), and too much to do on Sundays".

Clearly, it's quite possible to be a Christian without going to church – just as it's possible to get through a weekend without reading a newspaper. But the riches of the world and the riches of heaven are on offer, and, if it takes a bar of chocolate to restore the habit of enjoying them, then so be it. And if you don't live in Manchester, don't worry: I hear that other churches are offering bread and wine.

Paul Handley

Paul Handley is Editor of the *Church Times*. The article was printed in *The Independent* on Saturday 18 September 2004. Reprinted by permission

Dance, Dervish Dance

Dance, Dervish dance -
Bring the face of God before you.

Only Love can lift the heart up so high
That its true Color is restored by the Sun!
See Him near and clapping,
That Perfect One who fathers Divine Rhythm.

O dance, dervish dance,
And know you bring your Master happiness
Whenever you smile.

Last night,
So many tears took flight because of Joy
That the sky got crowded and complained
When I discovered God hiding again in my heart
And I could not cease to celebrate.

O dance, Hafiz, dance.
Write a thousand luminous secrets
Upon the wall of Existence
So that even a blind man will know
Where we are,
And join us in this Love!

Dance, dervish dance –
Bring the Face,
O bring the Face of your Beloved
Before you!

Hafiz, Persian 14th Century Sufi
sent in by Clare Ziegler

Thanksgiving for the Work of St Jude's, Courtfield Gardens

There will be a special service at St Jude's on Sunday 3 October at 10.30am to give thanks for all that has happened in the past prior to it ceasing to be a parish church and a new project being started modelled on the San Egidio community in Rome. There will be no 10.30am Eucharist at St Mary's that day although there will be a Said Eucharist at 8.00am. Please join the people of St Jude's to show solidarity and make yourself

known to those who would like to worship at St Mary's
in the future.

The St Mary's Harvest Festival will now take place on
Sunday 10 October.

Items for the November edition of *The Clarion* to be
sent to the Parish Office by Sunday 24 October please.
