



# CR

JULY 2025

490

<b>God and Darwin</b>	<b>3</b>	<i>Nicolas CR</i>
<b>Our Picture of God</b>	<b>7</b>	<i>George CR</i>
<b>CR Festival Day 2025</b>	<b>10</b>	<i>The Revd Daniel Burton</i>
<b>Scripture and Theology</b>	<b>12</b>	<i>David Bunch</i>
<b>Thomas Merton Day, 27 September</b>	<b>15</b>	-
<b>The (other) Community of the Resurrection</b>	<b>16</b>	<i>William Barham</i>
<b>Library</b>	<b>21</b>	<i>Anisha Christison</i>
<b>Walter Frere: A Diocesan Bishop at Prayer</b>	<b>22</b>	<i>Revd Dr Ben Gordon-Taylor</i>
<b>Restored Windows</b>	<b>25</b>	<i>James Gill</i>
<b>Book Reviews</b>		
<i>Learning to Live, Learning to Love</i> by John Bowker	<b>27</b>	<i>Canon Dr Alan Race</i>
<i>Archbishop Donald Arden: Reflections on serving in Malawi</i> by Donald Arden and Jane Arden	<b>30</b>	<i>Nicolas CR</i>

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# God and Darwin



I've never been much bothered by the apparent conflict between science and religion. That may be because I never learned much science at school. However, it has always seemed to me that science explains how things work. God is necessary to get it working and keep it working. God is also necessary to give it meaning.

The same is true of Darwin's theory of evolution. It has never made me doubt the existence of God. God created the world; Darwin's evolution tells us how he did it and how he continues to do it, for the world was not created just in a once only event, and left to run. It needs God all the time to keep it going.

Having said all that, I have recently discovered that a very large body of eminent scientists have become increasingly sceptical of the truth of Darwin's evolutionary theories. Not all these scientists are believers in God. Simply as scientists they say the theory is unsatisfactory; it is full of very large gaps; it makes assumptions that cannot be proved.

A fascinating book has helped me understand this: *"The Return of the God Hypothesis"* by Stephen Meyer, an eminent physicist and philosopher of science. It is full of solid science so there was much I didn't really understand, but enough of it was clear, even for me, to be fascinated and gripped by it and to come out of the experience with clear ideas, since confirmed and supported by other writers and academics, for instance John Lennox, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at

Oxford University; David Berlinski, Philosopher and Mathematician from Princeton University and David Gelernter Professor of Computer Science at Yale University (See YouTube for interviews.)

They do not deal only with Evolutionary theory. There is also the question of how the universe came into being in the first place and how it comes to be so finely tuned, in mathematically so improbable ways. But I am only going to speak here about the developing problems with Charles Darwin's theories of evolution.

Here, very quickly sketched, are some of the points they make:

- We are often given the impression that evolution is a clear progression from the first bits of jelly life (what was called “protoplasm” by early evolutionary biologists) to humankind and animals.
- In the *Origin of Species* in 1859 Darwin argued that the origin of life was to be found in what is sometimes called the “primordial soup” theory. This remains taught in most scientific text books even today and maintains that life was caused by chemical reactions in the primordial swamp over billions of years (with a few million lightning bolts thrown in).
- Many leading chemists now reject this theory out of hand – one recently described it as “a load of nonsense”. Why? Because as a result of the discovery in 1953 of DNA, and scientific analysis of cells, it has been discovered that a single living cell contains a massive amount of “specified” intelligent information in the form of software code which regulates how cells operate and sustain life. The scale of this engineering at the nano level has stunned scientists, many of whom believe that the only credible explanation for how it comes to be there, is that someone put it there. As a result, in 2008 Richard Dawkins himself, the high priest of New Atheism, speculated that life on earth might have resulted from a higher intelligence elsewhere in the universe. He very quickly qualified his comment, as might be expected. In any event, Darwin's theory that this level of technology and specified information simply emerged from the primordial swamp, is rather like saying the entire Bodleian Library in Oxford evolved in the same way. It didn't. As we all know, each book in that library was written by an intelligent mind.
- Aside from the problem of the origin of life, there are now also serious problems with the theory of natural selection. We will all be familiar with this – the most famous exposition of it is in Richard Dawkins' book: the *Selfish*



Gene. In short, the theory suggests that humans evolved as a result of an unconscious, automatic and blind process. Dawkins uses the metaphor of a blind watchmaker to describe natural selection, which, he says works without foresight or purpose.

- But molecular biology did not exist in Darwin's day. The discovery of DNA; the developing understanding of how proteins fold and genes mutate within single cells has created a serious problem for Darwin's theory. The short point (without getting buried in complexity) is that scientists have calculated the probability of a single such stable mutation at fantastically improbable levels based upon the variables at work in this process. A complex life form requires vast amounts of such mutations. It is very difficult to reconcile natural selection at all with this mathematical problem. The case against Darwin in this area is supported by some of the world's leading mathematicians and computer scientists.
- There are further problems. Darwin's evolutionary theories are based upon the gradual evolution of life down the “tree of life”. In other words, a trunk, with branches of life and species evolving gradually down each branch. But this is not what the fossil record shows.
- Life is generally regarded as having begun about 3.5 billion years ago but the “Cambrian Explosion”, a small period of 70 million years or so about 500 million years ago, is the period within which most animal life emerged. As David Gelernter writes in “Giving up Darwin”: “in general, “most species enter the evolutionary order fully formed and then depart unchanged.” The incremental development of new species is largely not there. Those missing pre-Cambrian organisms have still not turned up”. The fossil record, accordingly, does not support the Darwin hypothesis.

Much more can be said than that. I am only offering a sketch based upon discussions with friends and my reading of Stephen Meyer's book. Even this sketch raises a number of fascinating questions:

1. If Darwin's theory of evolution is wrong, do we have to go back to a literal belief in a six-day creation story such as we find in Genesis 1? Definitely not. That story and the complementary story in Genesis 2 only assert, beautifully, poetically and theologically, that God created the world, humankind and all that is in it. It also insists that God remains deeply involved in the world because it is good, and he loves it. It does not say how he did it. A book I read recently by fundamentalist Christians trying to reconcile what we know

about the world (its age, for instance) with a literal view of scripture was so complicated and illogical it verged on the ridiculous.

2. If the alternative to random or spontaneous creation is in fact some intelligent design, are we talking about God? A problem here is that, for all our knowledge that God is almighty, eternal, infinite and all the rest, most of us find it hard to think of Him as more than an old man in the sky. When we talk to God an image of God as a person usually forms in our mind. When I was young, J.B. Phillips wrote a book entitled, "Your God is Too Small." That is true. We are finite and cannot get our minds around infinity. We cannot get our minds around an infinite being. We know some things about God. We believe he exists. We believe God acts. We know he has revealed himself as Father, Son and Spirit. There is much more to God than that.
3. One thing I have taken from this discussion is a larger idea of God. I have always believed that God created the universe. As I learn more and more about what this 'intelligent design' of the universe demands, I am more and more amazed at just how much God did. I know very little but even that blows my mind.
4. Likewise, I have always believed that God is present in the world. Recent thinking about the needs of the environment and the importance of working with God in saving the planet have made me more aware of how much God is present in every aspect of creation. Creation has become more and more amazing and wonderful, and so has God. So for me to learn now that a simple cell is too complex to have happened spontaneously, or that the fine tuning of the Big Bang or the origin of life is so complicated it needs an intelligent designer to get it right, vastly enlarges my idea of just what sort of a God we have. God becomes more wonderful, not less.

Why is all this important?

A large part of the Western world has bought into Darwin's theory of evolution. People think there is a major conflict between science and religion. Atheists like Richard Dawkins use evolution as a knock-down argument against God. "Evolution proves there is no God." It does not. Even if the evolution theory was completely substantiated with no gaps at all, it still would not dispose of God. God is still necessary to show how it started and why we exist at all. But actually the arguments for evolutionary theory and creation by chance are so full of holes they cannot be used with confidence. They require at least as much faith as belief in

God.

However, if we are going to show our unbelieving generation they need God and Christ, we need to show them science does not disprove religion. It does not dispose of God. In many ways, science is on our side. There are very good arguments for intelligent design and a God who sustains us all. We need to follow this star!

**Nicolas CR (helped by Simon Miller)**

## **Our picture of God**

**A**s our Brother Nicolas says in his article, we are usually led astray by our picture of God. Most of us don't so much have a picture, as an imagination of God, a sense of what God is like. The spiritual tradition repeatedly tells us that our picture of God is always inadequate, off the mark. Here is a photo I took of a picture of God the Father which hangs in a parish church in southern Italy. Painting pictures of God in fact is something you cannot do – we cannot see God – even Moses was not allowed to see God, but only



his hinder parts as God passed by. This Italian painting comes out of a tradition that grew up in the Middle Ages of representing God as a wise old man, particularly in representations of the Trinity. The picture was clearly painted by a person of simple faith. His/her God looks so cuddly you could give him a hug. You can hardly object to him – you could imagine him behind the counter in a shop. The photo doesn't show it very well, but God also has glasses on. Presumably for this painter in the 18th century glasses would mean a person was very clever, and important. The disciples asked to see God, and, according to St John, Jesus replied, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father”. In other words, if you want a picture of God, look at Jesus. You might say that just passes the problem on: we can have mistaken pictures of Jesus too, and probably throughout its history the church has never got its picture of Jesus quite right.

However, we have various things to give us bearings. We have the Scriptures, and our constant reading of the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, builds up a picture of Jesus. We need to expect that this picture will always keep changing as we go along, as we grow in the faith. A second place that gives us our bearings is the Church. As we play our part in the life of the church, taking our place in its regular worship, praying our prayers every day, and expecting our life in the church to keep us in the process of change and growth in self-knowledge, we will have a sense of the Person who is the life of it all – the Holy Trinity of God the Father, encountering us in Jesus Christ, in the life of the Spirit. Often there are difficulties in church life as we all know, but we ourselves know more than the media headlines know – we know that the church also has something that can be found nowhere else, and in it, out of the corner of our eye, we see God.

The third place to look is other people (according to Jesus this is in fact the first place – “how can you love God whom you cannot see, if you don't love your neighbour who you can see?”). Everyone around us is made in the divine image, and in loving and serving them, we love and serve God. Hopefully, we can gain a sense of the presence of God in them too. At the sharing of the Peace in the Eucharist we are acknowledging and reverencing God's presence in people.

I myself don't know how people can say “we can't see God, we can't hear God”. How can we say God is invisible? It's not quite true. God becomes visible to us in many ways, and we have God's voice coming to us too. In the Scriptures, in the Church and its life and worship, and in our neighbour. Always sideways, always through the corner of our eye, but always real. And then there is our prayer. God speaks with us in our prayer, and we are quick to conjure up images and particular senses of what God is like. We need to question them – God can really make himself known to us particularly when our picture is most empty – when our own imaginings aren't getting in the way. You can't paint oil-paintings of God, and neither can our minds create pictures of God. That is why people like Meister Eckhart and St John of the Cross spoke eloquently about leaving behind any presuppositions we have, any imaginings of God. This is where we have to be so careful not to see our faith (it's never just *my* faith) as purely personal. It's physical as well – just think of all the physical things we do in the church, not least love and service of neighbour, churchgoing, daily prayer, making the sign of the cross, standing, sitting, kneeling, prostrating, bodily movements, lighting candles, holy water, ash, carrying palms, rosary / prayer rope, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, hymns, funeral practices, going in the church building, confession and reconciliation, processions and special events, pilgrimage, retreats, house blessing, blessing of

people and things, icons, harvest festival ..... This hurly-burly fills out hugely our sense of what God is like. Faith can never be just a deeply personal faith completely inside my head, because we are whole human beings, and our minds are integrated with our bodies: and so we need to live our faith in all these physical ways with our bodies, to free our faith from imprisonment inside my head.

Faith is certainly personal, but also bodily, and there is a third essential dimension, which is the Church. Our imagination of God can't be left to the personal. When I pray, my personal apprehension of God is filled out by all those corporate bodily things I have mentioned, but it also needs to be filled out by the Church. One big mistake of our culture is to assume that Christian faith is basically personal. When I go apart to pray, my prayer is of course personal, and needs to be personal. But if it is just that, then it will flounder. The fact of the matter is that when I pray I am never alone – there are always people praying with me. We pray with the Church. In fact it is not us who provide the engine for prayer, it is God. God prays in us, “the Holy Spirit in our hearts, crying 'Father'”. Prayer doesn't need to be a desperate personal effort – it's more like stepping onto an escalator – the prayer of the Church never stops, but rises from creation and the company of heaven to the throne of God with an unstoppable energy. St Thérèse of Lisieux said prayer is like getting into a lift. We are carried up by everybody else. We also help carry them. This makes an irreplaceable contribution to helping us not to get bogged down in mistaken images or perceptions of God. It is better to find ourselves getting to a place, every time we pray, where we can simply be still, having quietened all our thoughts. But even that is something we can't just turn on. It's enough to say our prayers, join in the life of the church, and throw our bodies into loving our neighbour and worshipping God, and just see what God sends as a gift, in our pilgrimage over the years.

In the Church today many of us operate with a picture of God as an obliging butler. *We* decide what we think God wants us to do, and then assume God will support us in our projects. We go on retreat to “have our batteries charged”, we look to God as something like the pit in a car race, where we can pull in to be patched up. The Church of England is making all sorts of plans and projects, which no doubt will open us up to new things, but all the time the Church is spiritually dehydrated. God is no butler or unquestioning supporter. He is never simply going to dance to our tune. God is more like a cat, not always doing what we want to do, and bristling with the unexpected.

**George CR**



# CR Festival Day 2025

Sermon by Fr Daniel Burton

**O**ne of my earliest memories of CR is Fr Silvanus saying the Community Prayer every evening at Compline:

Almighty and everlasting God, who didst form thy Church to be of one heart and soul in the power of the Resurrection and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, renew her evermore in her first love; and grant such a measure thereof to the Brethren of the Resurrection, that their life may be hallowed, their way directed and their work made fruitful to the good of thy Church and the glory of thy Holy Name.....

I was captivated by the prayer – by its breadth – by its depth – and by its bold simplicity. It is a brilliant prayer that contains within its 75 or so words volumes of theology, all the marks of mission we will ever need, and a mission and a vision statement to boot. Composed by Walter Frere – and in daily use in this community since August 1895 – this prayer is my text for today.

Almighty and everlasting God who didst form thy Church to be of one heart and soul: the prayer begins by calling us to the origins and essence of the church. The church was formed by God to be one – of one heart and soul. When we say the Creed we affirm that the Church is essentially one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This reminds us that to seek the visible unity of God's church here on earth is a Godly quest – something very close to the Father's heart. Ecumenism may be unfashionable, it may be extremely hard work, but it should matter to us because it matters to God.

This unity is based on two historic events that are also doctrines and movements: Easter and Pentecost. God formed the church to be of one heart and soul in the power of the Resurrection and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit – Easter and Pentecost. We do not need to argue whether the church was founded at Easter or at Pentecost – both are essential in creating the community that only exists in the power of the Resurrection and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; without them there is no community. But the Resurrection comes first – and beyond the Resurrection comes the gift of the Holy Spirit whose presence is manifested in many different ways including fellowship – *koinonia* – communion. Perhaps this is why Charles Gore chose to call his Community the Community of the Resurrection and not of the Holy Spirit. Either title is a good descriptor of the church. We are the body of the Christ – we are the Community of the Resurrection – we are the community of the Holy Spirit. Gore has said so much in

29 words.

But next we are called to renewal: renew her evermore in her first love. What on earth does that mean? It is a quotation from the bible; specifically the Revelation of St John chapter 2 verse 4 – where the messenger addresses the church in Ephesus – the first of the seven churches to be named. It is not by any means the harshest of the prophecies and indeed the Ephesians for commended for much; but in verse 4 the messenger says: “nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love”. What or who is the first love of the church? It is God. The first commandment is: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... And the first love of the church is God. It is so simple; it is so obvious that we might miss it. The church exists to love and worship the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And sometimes we forget that. We replace God with power, or authority, or wealth, or status, or ritual – there are a million different idols – and sometimes God gets lost or forgotten. And when things go very wrong in the church it is always because we have forgotten our first love -we have stopped loving the Lord our God with all our heart.....The recovery of religious life in the church of England in the 19th century was precisely a response to the call for the church to renew her first love. But every generation needs to hear that call to renewal and I wonder where we hear that call to renewal today? I dare say that we do NOT hear it in sophisticated mission action plans and strategic development programmes. But we may hear it in the voice of those who remind us that All Christians are Monks to quote the title of a book I read recently. For the monastic vocation is a very specific form of the general Christian vocation. And just as every local version of the church is called to be a community of the resurrection, so every one of us is called to be a monk; by which I mean that every one of us is called to exhibit that single-minded devotion to God which is best exemplified by those living the religious life.

The prayer has thus far been a general prayer recalling the foundation and origins of the church militant here on earth, and calling that church to renewal – specifically renewal of the single-minded devotion to God that is the calling of all disciples. But now the prayer intercedes specially for the brethren of the resurrection that their life may be hallowed, their way directed, and their work made fruitful. Take note of the words and the progression of the prayer: these brethren are called to a holy life; this holy life has a purpose and direction that needs the leading of the Spirit; and this holy life will involve work – work that has been understood in different ways at different times in the Community's 130-year history. When we embark on a particular piece of work as a response to the call to holiness we need pray nothing more than that the work may bear fruit – the fruit of the spirit, the fruit Our Lord referred to in his parable of the sower when he assured his hearers that some of the seed will fall on good ground “and bring

forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty and some an hundred”. Friends, when we pray this prayer for the brethren of the Resurrection, I am certain that its author will forgive us if we also offer the prayer for the whole church: for what more could we ask for your parish and for my parish, for your diocese and for my diocese, for the Church of England – and indeed for all Christian folk - that OUR life may be hallowed, OUR way directed, and OUR work made fruitful. It covers the lot!

Finally - why? What is it all about? All that we have prayed, all that we have covered, all that we have offered has two specific purposes: For the good of thy Church, and the glory of thy Holy Name. For 130 years and more the Community of the Resurrection has prayed this prayer and lived this prayer and those of us who have known and loved this community can testify that the prayer has been answered “an hundredfold” for the CR has been the source of so much good for the wider church, and the Holy Name of Jesus has been proclaimed around the world and lives have been transformed. It's easy to remember what it's all about on a Festival Day with a full church, and a grand liturgy and a splendid reunion. But let's remember what it's all about on the tough days, on the bleak days, on the boiler-broken-down and the organist-didn't-turn-up days. All that we seek to do and all that we seek to be as individual disciples and as members of this Community of the Resurrection is For the good of thy Church, and the glory of thy Holy Name.

Friends, if you have heard the call to follow Jesus Christ and are continuing on the path of a disciple, rejoice that you are a member “incorporate in the mystical body” of Christ “which is the blessed company of all faithful people”; rejoice that God in his infinite mercy and wisdom brought you to know and love the CR – however you are connected; and pray fervently that this community, and the wider church of Christ, may daily be renewed in her first love – for the good of God's church and the glory of God's Holy Name. Amen.

**Daniel Burton**

## **Scripture and Theology**

The last few years have seen the publication of interesting books about the theological methodology of Anglicanism. For example, in his twice reprinted 2021 book *Lighten Our Darkness*, (sub-titled *Discovering and celebrating Choral Evensong*), (Darton, Longman & Todd: ISBN 978-0-232-53462-7), Simon Reynolds explained how, in his view, the Church of England at the Reformation rejected the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, (by Scripture alone) in favour of *Prima Scriptura*, (Scripture first): human reason, (including scientific discovery, as well

as the arts and humanities), was valid in understanding the Bible, 'alongside insights from Christianity's historical experience, such as Councils of the Church, the work of Christian saints and scholars, and the insights of preaching and teaching in the early Christian centuries'.

Such an approach, wrote Reynolds, still provides a framework for hearing and interpreting the Bible which is larger than an individual understanding of text or and specific culture or historical period: 'We hear them, and interpret them, through a dynamic tradition of worship, insight and experience that is shared by the whole Church ... Christian revelation is not conclusively confined between the covers of a book ... it is primarily seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to which the Bible bears witness ... always open to new discoveries and new truth the more we hear it and reflect on it'.

This stance derived particularly from the writings of Richard Hooker in the 16th Century. For Hooker, Scripture was the primary and sole source of Divine revelation, with Church life, ethics, and other matters, derived and shaped for applicability from it using Reason and Tradition. Such theological method was, and remains, controversial. Some Christians still give sole authority to Scripture, others to Tradition and/or Reason, many to a contested combination of the three.

None of these differences are intrinsically fatal, for a dynamic interlocking and indivisible approach is, and has been, normative in mainstream Anglicanism: Scripture interpreted and understood through Reason; Church Tradition valid when relying on both Reason and Scriptural warrant; Reason itself subject to truths revealed in Scripture and upheld by Tradition.

Moreover, as Philip Hobday noted in the 2025 edition of his 2023 scholarly treatise, *Richard Hooker: Theological Method and Anglican Identity*, (T & T Clark: ISBN 978-0-5677-0808-3), recent ecumenical scholarship has noted a previously overlooked historical convergence between Catholic and Reformed theologians, importantly, but not totally, between Aquinas, Calvin, and Hooker. This is potentially significant for today's Church of England where the discovery and development of such shared ground could mitigate against tendencies to burrow in cultic sub-cultures and tribal silos - conduct which damages and limits ministry, mission, and unity.

This year, in February 2025, saw Bishop Rowan Williams enter the ongoing debate. In his book, *Discovering Christianity: A guide for the curious*, (SPCK: ISBN-10-0281090637), he viewed the Bible ('one story in many voices'), as far from

straightforward: 'The awkward truth is that the simple language of the Bible is very seldom as some people would like it to be, and it will always push you into asking more and more big questions. That is the point of theology.'

Similarly, he dismissed a claim to privilege Church Tradition. 'Tradition is part of the ongoing process of reading Scripture. If we take tradition away from this context, what we are likely to be left with is traditionalism, which is not especially good for us'. However, short shrift was also given to those who jettison it altogether: 'The tradition we must respect is the ongoing process of paying attention to people who have read the Bible before us'.

Williams contended Scripture can be understood for our times when it is engaged in by a process of *human reasoning*, taking note of historic truths together with modern knowledge from theology as well as through creative arts, culture, and human and natural sciences: 'using our common sense and making the best of what is around us in our environment to bring the record alive today'.

He was also explicit that thinking Biblically and theologically requires guidance from the Holy Spirit – no easy task for, as the Book of Prayer Book opined, the 'devices and desires' of individual and collective hearts stand in the way. It needs an opening of hearts and minds to the Spirit's guidance, a process enhanced by prayer and worship. It also entails heeding the lifelong call to love our neighbours. As Bishop Rowan put it: 'How does God go on breathing his Spirit into you, the Spirit of Jesus? He breathes it into you through the work and witness of the person next to you, as you breathe it out into them.'

We should be grateful to all three authors for setting their stalls against today's dominant culture where individualism, personal feelings, and emotional primacy hold sway. Each in their distinctive ways remind us that reflecting on Holy Scripture is not an abstract or formulaic cerebral activity but an embodied and thoughtful process of past and present thought, enlivened and progressed in response to guidance by the Holy Spirit - that Christian life force indispensable to acting faithfully in our lives, with our communities, and for issues relating to the global world.

**David Bunch**

*(For some years David was CR's Finance Manager)*



## Forthcoming Event: Thomas Merton Day, 27 September 2025

**T**homas Merton (1915-1968), arguably the most influential American Catholic author of the twentieth century, was a writer and Trappist monk at Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. His writings include such classics as *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, and *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. Merton is the author of more than seventy books that include poetry, personal journals, collections of letters, social criticism, and writings on peace, justice, and ecumenism.

We are privileged to have the extensive collection of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland now in our library here at Mirfield on permanent loan, and accessible to all library visitors. Also, our library brother Fr Nicolas has become a patron of the society. It is therefore a great delight for us to be able to offer a special day of study and reflection on the life and work of Thomas Merton, led by **Dr Paul M Pearson**, who is Director and Archivist of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, USA.



“Whatever I may have written, I think it all can be reduced in the end to this one root truth: that God calls human persons to union with Himself and with one another in Christ, in the Church which is His Mystical Body. It is also a witness to the fact that there is and must be, in the church, a contemplative life which has no other function than to realize these mysterious things, and return to God all the thanks and praise that human hearts can give Him. It is certainly true that I have written about more than just the contemplative life. I have articulately resisted attempts to have myself classified as an “inspirational writer.” But if I have written about interracial justice, or thermonuclear weapons, it is because these issues are terribly relevant to one great truth: that man is called to live as a child of God. Man must respond to this call to live in peace with all his brothers and sisters in the One Christ.”

Draft programme:

9.30	Arrival & Registration – coffee available
10.00	Thomas Merton: Poet, Monk, Prophet – An Overview
12 noon	Midday Office & Eucharist with the Community of the Resurrection (optional)
1.00	Lunch
2.00	Redeeming the Rhinoceros – Thomas Merton: Prophet and Social Critic.
3.30	Tea break
4.00	Concluding thoughts
5.00	Depart

The cost of the day is £45, which includes lunch and refreshments

## **The (other) Community of the Resurrection, Grahamstown, and others**

**S**t. Mark's Day commemorates a significant event in the South African Church calendar as on this day in 1884, Annie Cecile Ramsbottom-Isherwood knelt before the altar at Bishopsbourne in the presence of Allan Becher Webb, Lord Bishop of Grahamstown, to take her novice vows. This moment marked the foundation of the Community of the Resurrection (from 1887 “Community of the Resurrection of Our Lord”) which was to grow to make an outstanding contribution to the care and education of women and girls across the southern province. More widely known as the Grahamstown Sisters, their work continues to this day. Although not formally linked other than through diocesan structures with the CR brethren who came to work in Pretoria during 1902, both Communities of the Resurrection shared the resolve to realise, through education, the full potential of every man, woman, boy and girl drawn into their missions and schools, rather than to prepare them for servitude.

In addition to co-working opportunities which the Brethren and Sisters developed at St. Faith's Mission, Rusape and St. Augustine's, Penhalonga in present-day Zimbabwe, and later at St. Agnes, Rosettenville, Mirfield Fathers frequently led the Sisters' retreats with reciprocal visits by the Grahamstown Superiors. One of the fruits of this close relationship was that in 1938 Sister Margaret spent four years painting the frescoes in the substantial new church of Christ the King in Sophiatown, built during Raymond Raynes's incumbency to

cope with the township's teeming congregations. However, these links and co-workings were just one aspect of the Sisters' commitments, which grew into the slums of Port Elizabeth and the rural African mission institutes at the Herschel and Keiskamma Hook from the 1890s. Then to King Williamstown, Queenstown, East London, Bulawayo, Salisbury, Grace Dieu, Mapanza and St. Jame's Mission, Nyamandhlovu and finally, the Cape Flats from the late 1950s, with many additional rural and parish works taken on. Central to the Sisters' work was the Grahamstown Training College, whose output of teachers into the Colony's schools from 1894 enormously extended their influence.

Perhaps less well known than the sisterhood's expansion and achievements, followed by their inevitable post-second World War contraction, are two aspects that helped define this community. Firstly, its distinction from almost all other Anglican sisterhoods due to Webb's concept of a missionary sisterhood secured within the structure of the Church. Secondly, the role of George Howard Wilkinson, Vicar of St. Peter's, Eaton Square, who facilitated its foundation through the culture that he encouraged promoting mission and sisterhoods, out of which not one but two sisterhoods were to emerge. This article provides an opportunity to acknowledge these aspects.

### **Webb's Heavenly Vision: A Missionary Sisterhood**

From the pulpit of Bangor Cathedral in November 1875, The Right Reverend Allan Becher Webb, in his then capacity of Lord Bishop of Bloemfontein, argued that as the 'glory of God is the reason for our existence', so it falls to man to ensure that 'through what we do, and what we are – the glory of God may be increased', or not. In his contention, followers of the Church held responsibility not only for its prosperity but for increasing "His glory through the world" by enlarging its borders and throwing open the gates to draw nations in. His words powerfully endorsed the sense of responsibility held by many first and second-generation Tractarians at the time, that it was the Church of England's duty to expand its episcopacy to ensure that the new realms and territories that had fallen under British influence as a consequence of the nation's imperial and mercantile expansion should benefit from the structured apostolic church.

Despite the strength of the Church's missionary commitment in the Cape Colony, instigated by Bishop Grey from the 1850s, Webb sought more. He sought an additional missionary workforce to attend to priorities that he would evaluate in his troubled diocese, for example the rescue of abandoned children, and work in the slums of his Port Elizabeth, as well as to educate. For these roles, he sought women due, as he recognised, to their success at instilling Christian

civilising values through maternal networks, which reached rising generations of children and their men. 'The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world'. Webb, however, was troubled by the inevitable loss of women from his proposed missionary workforce due to demographic imbalance amongst Europeans in the Cape Colony, making it statistically likely that single English women would soon marry after arriving in the Colony. Whilst not against the institution of marriage, he did not want his workforce depleted nor his essential work jeopardised.

Through experience in his prior Diocese of Bloemfontein, where his need in 1874 was for a sisterhood to provide a stable source of teachers and nurses, Webb realised that he could not rely on a Branch House arrangement with an existing English sisterhood to send the women he needed, as they would never be able to spare enough. Nor was he prepared to compromise local control by negotiating with a Superior in English. The Community of St. Michael and All Angels in Bloemfontein, therefore, provided the template for what he sought: A sisterhood for English women, domiciled in his distant diocese, that unlike almost all others founded after 1845 as a consequence of the Oxford Movement and had become renegade due to suspicions and unease, would be secured within the diocesan structure of the Church.

His proposal offered security to the nobly-minded but vulnerable, upper-middle-class Victorian women he was to recruit. At the heart of the Community, St. Peter's Home in the City of Saints, the most English of the Colony's settlements with its parish churches, schools, colleges and enormous gothic Cathedral by Sir George Gilbert Scott, was to offer home-from-home security. The success of Webb's vision, which encouraged scores of women to profess, enabling it to follow the trajectory that it did, can also be attributed to the inspirational leadership of its first superior, Mother Cecile. For that, Wilkinson's role needs to be acknowledged.

### **Wilkinson's advocacy**

George Howard Wilkinson's links with the future Grahamstown sisterhood commenced in 1870, as Isherwood, its future foundress, attended St. Peter's Church as a girl. Through Wilkinson, she 'first heard clearly the call of Jesus which straightaway began to give purpose and direction to her life'. Being there to support her over the loss of both parents and then later being able to mentor her as she considered church work, Wilkinson was to orchestrate the introduction of Isherwood to Webb in July 1883, which led to the Community's foundation the following April.



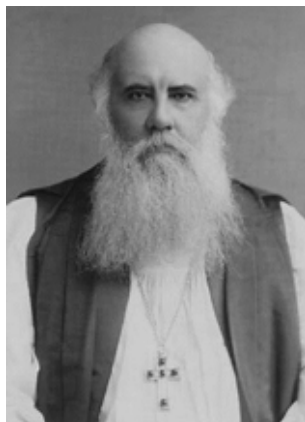
*The Reverend George  
Howard Wilkinson, 1861*

Wilkinson, however, had not always been the rock-solid Anglo-Catholic missionary-supporting churchman he had turned out to be. Instead, these values came to him by being reconstructed as a high churchman due to a bitter dispute. This saga began in County Durham, as in 1863, he was collated to the Curacy of St. Anne, Bishop Auckland, by the fiercely evangelical and anti-Tractarian Bishop Charles Thomas Baring. During the early years of his ministry, Wilkinson was presumed to be profoundly evangelical, which allowed the bishop to imagine that he had found a 'priest entirely to his mind' to trust with the town's principal Church. However, that was not to be the case. Having been educated at Oriel, Wilkinson had begun to feel his way 'towards that combination of evangelical unction with the spirit of sacramental Adoration', which lay at the heart of the Oxford Movement. This transition incensed the bishop, who not only criticised Wilkinson's weak oratory skills but suspected, probably correctly, that he was becoming a Ritualist 'as he felt his way towards a higher churchmanship'.

Through the resulting storm, Wilkinson was to abandon his evangelical leaning and get blown to the high-church shore. Among those he turned to in his quest for a 'stronger type of Christianity' was Canon T.T. Carter of Clewer, who helped guide his reconstruction. Following his inevitable resignation from Bishop Auckland, Wilkinson came to London and took the opportunity to support Richard Meux Benson's missionary initiative to attract the unchurched. Later came a commitment to overseas missionary work, which led to him joining the Standing Committee of the S.P.G. Also, as part of his reconstruction, Wilkinson honed his oratory skills, and it was with his newly gained enthusiasm for high-church practices and ritualism, for sisterhoods and support overseas missionaries that he came to St. Peter's Eaton Square. Wilkinson set about making this prominent church, which had previously had a reputation of being "high and dry", popular and thriving by deploying all his newfound strengths. George Russell, the biographer and liberal politician, likened his arrival to a 'flame of religious zeal suddenly kindled'. 'In all my experience of preaching (which has been long, wide and varied), I have never seen a congregation dominated by its minister so absolutely as the congregation of St. Peter's was dominated by Mr. Wilkinson'. He used these skills to grip and inspire the minds of his congregants, including young Isherwood.



Wilkinson's initiatives in support of the Church's responsibility for overseas mission included making his church a point of advocacy where missionaries came to preach, including such names as Henry Callaway S.S.J.E., Bishop of St. John's, in what was later known as The Transkei, and Webb, then Bishop of Bloemfontein. He also sought to provide missionary opportunities for his congregation in the east end of London and overseas. Another aspect was the creation of a fledgling sisterhood in his parish. Accordingly, a small group gathered in 1880 to prepare to form a religious community, and later, it morphed into the Community of the Epiphany, following Wilkinson to Truro. Having committed her life to the Church, Isherwood considered joining these women, but Wilkinson persuaded her to commence Deaconess training in his parish instead. In any event, she had been residing with a parishioner who had recently returned from one of Calloway's missions in St. John's and was seeking a similar opportunity.



*Allan Becher Webb, Bishop of Grahamstown*  
©The National Portrait Gallery, London

These strands came together on Sunday, 22nd July 1883, when Webb returned to St. Peter's following his translation from Bloemfontein to Grahamstown and rose into the pulpit. Using *Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the Heavenly Vision* as his text; he movingly called for volunteers to help in his distant diocese. For the reasons already discussed, he needed women to help make a difference in his troubled diocese. Isherwood was one of five who responded, and they arrived in Grahamstown in November. With five biographies already written about her life and success in attracting both money and aspirants, there seems little doubt that the early fulfilment of Webb's vision of a missionary sisterhood to serve his new diocese in the successful way it did is attributable to Isherwood. That would not have happened without the trials and resolve of George Howard Wilkinson, her life-long guide and mentor.



*Mother Cecile CR, circa 1905*

This article has provided an opportunity to link the two great Communities of the Resurrection through their

work in the southern province of the Church and to recognise their determined contributions as educators. It has also provided an opportunity to reflect on the uniqueness and purpose of Webb's vision of a missionary sisterhood as well as Wilkinson's contribution, as a consequence of his reconstruction, and his determination to mentor and support Isherwood, who became Mother Cecile. It has been my privilege to visit both communities to understand what drove those pioneers.

**William Barham**

(William Barham's book *A Powerhouse of the Spirit* will be reviewed in our next issue)

## Library



This year has already been a busy time in the Community Library. We decided to embark on decorating the New Library Room including the shelves. The project took 4.5 months to complete. It involved 4 brethren, 10 library volunteers and 6 college students who worked with the Librarian to remove the books off the shelves and get the library ready for decorating. We then unboxed the books, put them in classification order and back onto the shelves! We completed the project mid-April and it took a lot of hard work, team work and many many cups of tea and biscuits!

The New Library room looks brand new and is open for readers. To help us look after CR Library, please consider donating to the Library or Sponsor A Shelf (£5.00 per month). Please contact Barbara Clarke [bclarke@mirfield.org.uk](mailto:bclarke@mirfield.org.uk).

**Anisha Christison**

## A Diocesan Bishop at Prayer

### Bishop Frere's Own Copy of *Sursum Corda*

**M**y work in and with the Special Collection in the Library at Mirfield has revealed copious delights. I hope that what follows will be the first in a series of articles highlighting some of them, as a means of celebrating the riches of the Library and giving some account of the importance of what it holds.

In 1898 there was published *Sursum Corda: A Handbook of Intercession and Thanksgiving*, compiled by W.H. Frere and A.L. Illingworth. Agnes Illingworth was the wife of J.R. Illingworth (1845-1915), Rector of Longworth in Oxfordshire and a member of Charles Gore's *Lux Mundi* group, which typically met in his rectory. Walter Frere was CR's first Superior as such, after Charles Gore, the founder. Mrs Illingworth was also the author of *The Resurrection and the Life: Readings for the Great Forty Days and Whitsuntide* (Mowbray, 1903). She and Frere became spiritual friends, as the inscription by her in the volume presently under consideration bears witness: 'To my true friend in Christ W.H.F. St Faith's Day 1898'.

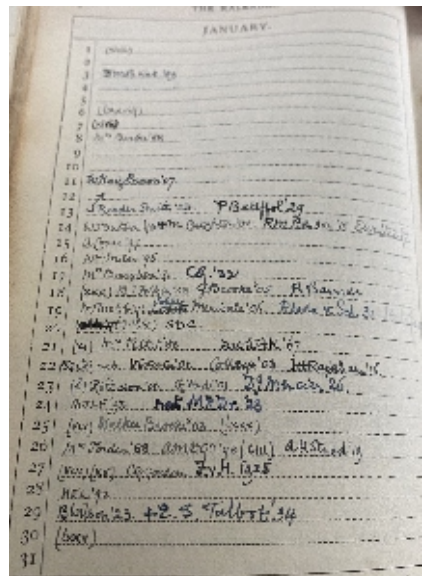
*Sursum Corda* became a popular book, appearing in a small edition in 1905, and going through many editions and impressions until at least 1926. The Mirfield Special Collection holds three copies of the small edition in addition to Frere's copy, one of which belonged to Bishop James Nash CR. The book bears all the hallmarks of the utter commitment to prayer of its authors. Edward Talbot, Bishop of Rochester (and the father of Fr Keble Talbot CR) in his Preface remarks: 'I hope that the little book may travel a way of peace. I think that there is nothing in it that should offend, and that it may be widely accepted, even if here and there some omit what others delight to use' (p. iv).

It contains a Kalendar, forms of intercession and thanksgiving for each day of the week, and additional quotations (including from Charles Gore), prayers and Collects. At the beginning are found an Explanatory Preface by Mrs Illingworth and a superb, succinct introduction by Fr Frere. It is dedicated to the memory of W.J. Butler, late Dean of Lincoln (d. 1894), himself a key figure in the revival of the religious life in the Church of England.

Frere's own copy of the book has evidently been specially bound in black leather, with a gold title against a burgundy background on the spine (copies of the 'small

edition' from 1905 onwards were bound in green cloth or green embossed leather). Much, much more than this, it contains a wealth of manuscript annotations and quotations by Frere in his characteristically minuscule hand, all making very good use of the blank space available. These include Biblical quotations in Hebrew (always in black), Greek and Latin (both in red). There are also inserted beautiful hand-drawn maps of each Deanery in the Diocese of Truro (to which I return below), additional prayers and short offices (sometimes printed and tipped in), and some loose cards. In all it is a typical example of Frere's meticulous and methodical approach to just about everything. This is revealed in his liturgical, musical and historical scholarship as well, of course, but this copy of *Sursum Corda* demonstrates that none of his phenomenal work in those areas, or any other, makes any sense without the fact that for him prayer came first, with intercessory prayer and thanksgiving for individuals, organisations and situations front and centre. It is a very personal and unique volume, which shows us something of Frere's interests and personal connections, as well as his devotion to family, friends, members of the Community of the Resurrection and the clergy and laity under his care.

I will begin with the Kalendar. Each month is allotted two facing pages. On the right are the feasts, fasts and Holy Days, and on the left blank spaces against each day for the user to insert their own material. Frere has made full use of this, recording anniversaries of birth, death and other occasions, including persons known and unknown to us in the present day. Let January serve as a typical example. In this one month alone we find the deaths of Charles Gore in 1932 (17<sup>th</sup>), Père Battifol in 1929 (13<sup>th</sup>), W.J. Butler in 1894, Fr Benson SSJE in 1915 (both 14<sup>th</sup>), Lord Halifax in 1934 (19<sup>th</sup>), Queen Victoria in 1901 (22<sup>nd</sup>), Guiseppe Verdi in 1901, Cardinal Mercier in 1926 (both 23<sup>rd</sup>), T. Walker Brooke (of Field Head, a benefactor of the Community in 1903, Friedrich von Hügel in 1925 (27<sup>th</sup>), and Bishop E.S. Talbot in 1934. The spread of years indicates the period over which the book was constantly added to. There are also births (e.g. Gore) and the Foundation of the College. It is an extraordinary snapshot of Frere's wide affections and interests. Later months include a number of fellow liturgical



scholars (Brightman, Dewick, Bannister etc.) and more musicians, for example Palestrina and C.V. Stanford (the latter may well have been a personal acquaintance). Politicians include W.E. Gladstone.

On the right hand page of each month is the liturgical Kalendar. Here again Frere has added his own commemorations. For January these include William Laud and St Francis de Sales. Saints venerated particularly in the British Isles feature prominently throughout. Thus he has added, among others, Gilbert of Sempringham, St Pancras, the Translation of St Cuthbert, St Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford, St Osmund and St Hilarion. The last named is significant because it alludes to the Diocese of Truro, referring to the dedication of the parish of St Hilary in West Cornwall, where the noted Fr Bernard Walke was Vicar in Frere's time as Bishop. Frere supported Walke in his troubles at the hands of Kensitite protesters, and gave the Blessing at a performance of the famous annual St Hilary Nativity Play, brought to wider public notice by early BBC outside broadcasts in the 1920s and 1930s

Frere's tenure of the See of Truro receives prominence in the book, not least because he has inserted hand drawn and coloured maps of each Deanery, with parish boundaries and a list of incumbents. A typical Frere detail: the incumbents' names are written in pencil so that they could easily be changed.



Walke is included, as well as the remarkable and long-serving Canon Martin Andrews CVO, MBE, MC of Stoke Climsland. In the Deanery of Bodmin we find the Prebendaries of St Endellion, a College of priests which Frere reinvigorated. It would not be an overstatement to describe the maps and names as a labour of love, for they show how devoted Frere was to the care of his clergy, whether or not they approved of him or he of them! It is an example of episcopal oversight in the best sense, rooted in prayer and forgetting nobody.

Another section may seem to modern eyes rather alarming. Opposite the prayers for those who are indifferent or hostile to the faith, there is written a list of initials headed in red capitals APOSTATE. This is the language of the time, and we do



not know who those listed were, but at least we can say that nobody was excluded from the Bishop's prayers.

In all, this little volume shines an extraordinary light on Frere's ministry from 1898 until his death in 1938, including the impact he had in the Diocese of Truro. On a personal note, I can testify to this from my own experience when serving my title in the Parish of Launceston in the wonderfully named Deanery of Trigg Major (yes, there is also a Trigg Minor!). In the mid-1990s there were still living a considerable number of parishioners who had been confirmed by Frere, and his



memory was universally treasured by them perhaps sixty years and more after the event. One elderly gentleman showed me his example of the little bronze lapel badges Frere was in the habit of giving to confirmands (the man had carried it with him ever since). I have one in my possession. It depicts a Roman soldier and the word FAITHFUL. As the contents of the little book testify, this is surely as much a description of the giver as it was an encouragement to the receiver.

**Benjamin Gordon-Taylor**

## Restored Windows



At the historic Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield, West Yorkshire, a recent window-restoration project has breathed new life into the main hall of the House, seamlessly blending centuries-old charm with modern sustainability. Our team was tasked with restoring the building's iconic windows — a delicate process that required not only the careful preservation of its historic beauty but also the integration of modern, energy-efficient upgrades.

The first step in this extensive restoration was the removal of the original single-pane glass. While this glass had served its purpose for many years, it was time for a change. We replaced the old panes with

high-performance double glazing, which significantly improves the building's insulation and energy efficiency. This upgrade has already made an impact, reducing heat loss in the hall which should help reduce energy costs.

Beyond the technical benefits, the aesthetic improvements are immediately noticeable. The new double glazing is clearer, allowing more natural light to pour into the hall. This transformation not only brightens the space but also ensures that the building's historical character remains intact. Each window was carefully stripped of its old, peeling paint, with decades of layers removed to reveal the wood's natural beauty beneath. Fresh coats of paint were applied, restoring the windows to their original glory while protecting them for the future.

The restoration didn't stop there. During the process, we also replaced rotting sections of the window frames, installed new sills, and added an opening window where there had once been none — providing much-needed airflow and ventilation to the hall. The removal of outdated secondary glazing further enhanced the windows' appearance, allowing their intricate details and craftsmanship to shine through once again.

Working on the upper windows of the hall gave us a unique perspective — literally. We found ourselves eye to eye with the ancient stone gargoyles and sculpted creatures that have stood guard over the building for over a century. These weathered, yet dignified figures served as a surreal and magical backdrop to our work, reminding us of the long history we were helping to preserve.

This project is more than just a restoration; it's a thoughtful combination of heritage preservation and forward-thinking sustainability. We're proud to have played a part in ensuring that the Monastery's hall windows will continue to grace the building for another century, all while improving the structure's energy efficiency and reducing its carbon footprint.

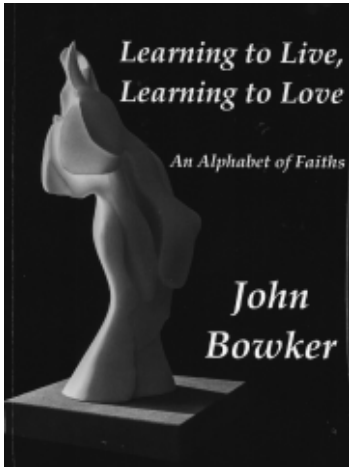
**James Gill**  
*Gills Joinery*

## Book Reviews

### **Learning to Live, Learning to Love: An Alphabet of Faiths**

John Bowker, Cambridge: LSM Publications, 2024. £10.00. iv + 168 pp.

Copies available from Little St Mary's Church, Cambridge



If we are to live or love we first need to understand better our place in the universe. This is the expansive canvas on which the well-known and celebrated religious studies interpreter, John Bowker, paints his delightful and creative A-Z 'alphabet of faiths'. To this end, our humanity is circumscribed by the dynamics of both biological and cultural evolution. We are creatures emergent initially from primeval elements and then, through the long period of evolutionary development, we have become self-consciously explorative of our environments. It is by virtue of these dynamics that we come to feel drawn into differently-shaped perceptions over life's meanings and spiritual journeys transcending our biological origins. We

might share much with our animal cousins but we are conscious of ourselves and our own histories in ways that far outstrip our East African ancestors. For Bowker, as for many scientists and philosophers: "We actually are something special" (p. 30). That distinctiveness opens out into a myriad of spiritual and religious manifestations which can be framed and explored in terms of an intriguing alphabetical format. We are bodily creatures, but that is no reason to place biological limitations on what bodiliness might entail.

The first quarter of this book reflecting on the place and scope of religious consciousness in the light of evolutionary processes could easily stand alone as a significant essay on how religions emerge and why they have mattered and continue to do so. Bowker helps us to understand our creaturely humanness as a gateway into religious visions of this-worldly and other-worldly reality. Religious consciousness is not an add-on to a vision of self-sufficient humanity but is a natural and intrinsic quality within our humanness as such.

Placing this account of religious consciousness as an 'extended preface' to a multifarious cultural view of religion that is rooted in our biological creatureliness both grounds our religious awareness and refreshingly enables us

to have confidence that religious intuitions can be imagined as being among the most natural of experiences anywhere in the world. The 'material' and 'spiritual' are woven together as threads of whole cloth.

Following the 'extended preface' the alphabet of faiths enters on a fascinating, endearing, if also slightly quirky, roller coaster ride into various aspects of religious beliefs and practices across the board. So this is not the familiar trawl through different traditions laid out as separate histories and geographies. To change the metaphor, the whole cloth takes on the feel of a coat of many colours.

Let me now illustrate the alphabetical form by citing three examples randomly. First, take the opening letter A. It stands symbolically in Zen for *Sunyata* or Emptiness, which delineates a correction to the mistaken perception that life is basically a series of substances. Or A stands for Alpha, another symbol that announces God as the source of all that is. Then draw the two into collaborative contrast within a notion of Asceticism, which is simply “choosing to abstain from some things in order to gain much more (p. 45).” Second, take the letter 'J' which stands for Juggernaut and which is derived from the Indian Jagannatha, meaning 'manifestation of God' or source of all manifestations, commanding “unswerving religious devotion” (p. 88). Jagannatha is thus a great unifier of Indian forms of tradition, including Buddhism and Jainism. As Bowker notes: “Jagannatha is a story of simple and humble origins becoming the focus of universal devotion. It is a story of encouragement, and something similar is found in all religions – as it is in the case of 'J' for Jesus” (p. 88). Humble origins leaning into devotional practices for both hints at aspirations of a shared universality bridging differences. Such is 'J'.

Third, what about 'O' which stands for 'Once upon a time ...'? 'O' therefore is a cue for story-telling, without which religions would not have developed and thrived, but which have lost much of their truth-telling power under conditions of modernity that elevates fact over fiction. Bowker again: “So once upon a time humans began to share stories that preserved important and in many cases life-saving truth” (p. 110). If we downgrade stories we lose much of the impetus for a faith that perceives as well as provokes.

This is a lively, tangential and intriguing approach to religious studies. There is nothing dry or simply descriptive about it. It seems designed to poke us into thinking outside the box religiously. Religious insight is many-sided, an imaginative endeavour refusing the many lures towards reductionism which are alive in today's academy, including the academy of religious studies. By his inventive 'alphabet' approach to religion Bowker seeks to enliven the human spirit

as well as test the human brain. The religious imagination has been with us since the beginning of homo sapiens.

This reviewer has a final query. Given the evolutionary origins and trajectory of religious awareness the universal availability of religious experience raises the issue of how to account theologically for the diversity of such experience. Jagannatha and Jesus represent two manifestations of awareness, different but potentially in some sense mutually resonant. Bowker leaves this question open, perhaps in honour of the thesis of strict separation between phenomenological-descriptive religious studies and truth-asking theology. But drawing manifestations together through an alphabetical arrangement surely and legitimately chips away at that strict separation. The universal presence of the divine versus the particularity of difference is a central question in theology of religions debates but Bowker's phenomenological approach draws that universality versus particularity axis also into the territory of explorations in the realm of religious studies. Bowker's evolutionary universal presence, however, hits a brick wall in the encounter between theistic consciousness and Buddhist non-dualism, and more than once he suggests that a choice has to be made. But need that be so? There are now religious dual-belongers, for example in the shape of Jewish-Buddhist and Christian-Buddhist adherents, and Abrahamic-Buddhist dialogue is yielding interesting results that belie the need for a definitive choice to be required. Cultural-religious evolution, it seems, is full of surprises.

There are some beautiful images of sculptures by Helaine Blumenfeld illustrating various themes empathetic to human religious awareness.

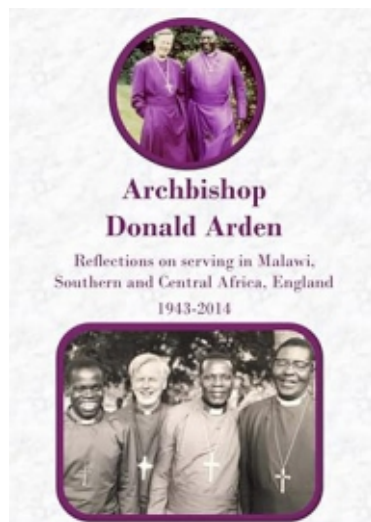
**Alan Race**

*Priest-theologian at Reading Minster*



## **Archbishop Donald Arden: Reflections on serving in Malawi, Southern and Central Africa, England.**

Donald Arden and Jane Arden, TSL Publications, 2024, £17.85



Donald Arden was my Archbishop in Central Africa for many years but I only met him once and that was in 1977, in Bulawayo, when he consecrated our brother Robert Mercer as Bishop of Matabeleland. We lived in different countries, with political differences and a civil war so it is not surprising we didn't meet up. It was fascinating, therefore, to read his memoirs just published by his wife.

Donald was trained here in the College at Mirfield and went to Pretoria diocese and Swaziland before coming to Malawi as bishop in 1961. Malawi is a small country with a wonderful Lake, beautiful hills, friendly people and poor resources. Donald and Jane describe horrendous

journeys on dirt roads, many on foot and all kinds of exciting adventures. The unpleasant excitements tended to be political when the government of Hastings Banda turned increasingly authoritarian and violent against its critics. This was news to me; we heard little of events in Malawi and Donald here describes terrible violence and injustice that is not generally known about. He played his part in bringing a kind of peace to that beautiful country.

In the midst of this political chaos Donald managed to divide the diocese into four dioceses while acting also as Archbishop of the four countries in Central Africa. It has never been a particularly united province, spread as it is over four countries of very different economic and political regimes.

There are a host of other stories of Malawian priests, one a former slave, of the kind of wonderful lay people who are the real heroes of the church in Africa, of the boats which sailed round Lake Malawi ministering to Anglicans round the lake shore. Anyone with a knowledge of, or interest in that part of Africa will find it fascinating. In 1981 he left Malawi to return to England. His retirement ministry continued then for over 30 years till his death in 2014 at the age of 98.

**Nicolas CR**



*Reconciliation Chapel*

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Please direct all materials, enquiries and comments to the editor, Fr George Guiver CR  
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