

For most of the last 200 years philosophers have been predicting the collapse of religion. If 'collapse' is too dramatic, then perhaps inevitable decline would be more appropriate. And yet religion still seems to raise its head and claim to be alive and (stridently) well. Often, it seems to take us unawares be it the power of the Moral Majority in 1970's America, the power of Catholicism and Protestantism in Ireland, the growth of religious parties in Israel, the reaction to Rushdie's Satanic Verses or the role of the church in the revolutions in Eastern Europe. The strange thing seems to be that many of us who hold religious beliefs are more shocked by these so-called religious outbursts than those who have no such commitment. It is perhaps Matthew Arnold's poem Dover Beach which for me sums up the way we so often seem to view religion. Even in the middle of the 19th century he wrote of religion on the wane:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

This process whereby religion seems to be retreating from its traditional roles has even been given a name, secularisation. Such secularisation brings with it, like the retreating tide on Dover Beach, the possibility of isolated, stagnant rock pools remaining, but on the whole, the pebbles on the beach are left exposed in their millions. It is all the more strange then that in Britain survey after survey in the last twenty years has shown an overwhelming majority of people declaring a belief in God, yet rarely going to church (or synagogue, mosque or temple). Religious attachments remain, or so it seems, even when religious behaviour seems to be in decline. Why?

This strange Persistence of Faith in our world is both the subject and title of a book by Jonathan Sacks, the chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth. It is a splendid exploration into the whole area of how faith affects the way we live. Rabbi Sacks first presented this argument when he delivered the 1990 Reith Lectures on Radio 4, and so his book comes in readable 30 minute chapters. As with all good books I found myself saying both 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no' at times, but I think Rabbi Sacks is absolutely correct when he claims that religious faith gives meaningful shape and structure to our common life. In faith we discover where we have come from, and discern a vision of where we are heading, and most importantly, how to live now.

Faith allows us, indeed demands from us, that we live not only at the level of the individual, like solitary pebbles ignoring the beach, nor in solid blocks, as if seeing no pebbles but only a vast beach. Religious faith gives structure to our life for it is that web of belonging which allows us to be both ourselves and allows us to be taken out of ourselves.

Hear Rabbi Sacks:

'I believe that religions do not need to be authoritarian to possess authority, nor need they be exclusive to be authentic. Their influence lies only in the force of their example, the cogency of their teaching and the spiritual beauty of the lives they inspire In the beginning, God created the world. Thereafter he entrusted us to create a human world which will be, in the structures of our common life, a home for the Divine presence. That command still addresses us with its momentous challenge, the persisting call of faith.'

Brian Leathard

Jonathan Sacks The Persistence of Faith is published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

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Parents? Teachers? Interested in our schools?

Do come to hear

The Ven. Timothy Raphael, Archdeacon of Middlesex
and Chairman of the London Diocesan Board for Schools

preach about Education

Sunday 16 February, Education Sunday,

9.30 am Parish Communion

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Under African Skies

Dumela! - a Setswana (the principal language spoken in Botswana) 'hello'. How nice it is to have family, friends and a Christian community to come home to, after a spell spent overseas.

Since my graduation in July 1990, I have spent several months in Northern India and Southern Africa, working on certain development aid projects run by the United Nations. It really has been an enlightening experience.

Exchanging sandals and shorts for mufflers and mittens, my thoughts return to Africa, and the range of people, places and viewpoints which I have encountered over the last six months.

I travelled first to Lesotho to embark on a UN scheme; building a water irrigation and drinking system for several surrounding villages. (Lesotho is the highest and second poorest 'Kingdom' in the world, largely dependent on imports and hand-outs from R.S.A.). I was based in an isolated school hut on top of a mountain. The country and people were beautiful: tiny boys clad in blankets and wooly balaclavas, herding sheep

and donkeys, their fathers for the most part left home to work in the South African gold mines. Every day the women would leave at 6 am and return at 2 pm in their attempts to find water. Our project, which had been running for 12 years, was now nearing completion. As we dug trenches and carried pipes (3" in diameter) across miles of precarious mountain paths, we were rewarded by the response from local Basotho whose motivation and numbers increased markedly at the interest shown from outside.



I was invited to a clan chief's funeral at which a ritualistic ox was slaughtered and potent maize beer brewed, and expected to learn the local hymns and dances for a celebratory gathering in the village church. Back in Maseru (Lesotho's capital), I ran into a Basotho 'Mother Theresa' - a model Christian by the name of Mavis - mother of the destitute and dying.

From there I moved on to work at a leadership training school for adolescents in Natal, aimed at promoting racial integration and increased understanding of one's own special relationship with God. This Wilderness School, called 'L'Abri' (the shelter) took groups of city children (many from broken homes) out into the countryside (away from all material cushions), to sleep under the stars, cook over camp fires, milk cows and collect eggs - gradually aiming to develop an appreciation of the natural world and a better understanding of others' needs.

The children had to overcome physical challenges - like abseiling, raft-building and a series of woodland obstacles, by coming together, talking and drawing on each others' strengths. (It was quite something to see God working here - bringing black and white 16-year olds, in a climate of inter-racial suspicion, to trust one another with their lives, many children actually 'touching' at the camps for the very first time!

In Gaborone and Harare I helped out on daily feeding programmes run by local churches for the homeless, and worked as part of the education unit of 'Harare Shelter for the Destitute', teaching Maths, English and Geography to the city street children (many of whom were helplessly addicted to glue). Truly marginalised there was a great need to provide physical contact and reassurance, and to build a bridge to reach the emotionally crippled. (Please remember them in your prayers).

This really has been an interesting time to have been working in Southern Africa. R.S.A. is in the midst of a political transition (the effects of which can be felt in the neighbouring countries); with the complex interaction of competing cultures - the man in the street is left walking the tightrope!

Sara Butterfield

Dawnlight

This production will be presented in St. James's Church on Saturday afternoon, 7 March at 3 pm, and Sunday evening, 8 March, at 7 pm.

The scale of the project is certainly something that St. James's has undertaken before, but not in recent years. Those taking part include actors, singers, dancers, musicians, and there is much back-stage commitment: Margaret Revis is in charge of making some 40 costumes; Dick Waltham has painted a fine '6th century' representation of Christ, to be carried in procession; David Nunn is busy making various props; the Sunday School is involved.

In fact the whole congregation is involved, for those not actively engaged in the production are very much needed both as audience and as campaigners to bring in vast numbers from the whole local community! We are aiming at a packed church for both performances, and this won't happen purely by chance. Put the word round now, as energetically and as widely as you can!

The theme of Dawnlight is the spread of Christianity in this country in early times; the story will be acted, sung and danced, and should be a great experience!

Put it in your diary now, and bring all the friends and acquaintances you can think of!

Stuart Ward

Saturday 7 March at 3 pm

and

Sunday 8 March at 7 pm

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, HAMPTON HILL

D A W N L I G H T

The Early Spread of Christianity in England

in words, song, dance and music

ALL ARE WELCOME - DO COME

Admission by programme

£2 (Pensioners and children £1.50), children under 11 free

The Dark Pit of Depression

Perhaps contrary to what most of us might have expected, the turning of the year, the gradual movement away from the darkness of Winter towards the light of Spring, actually serves to increase rather than diminish the number of suicides and suicide attempts. Groups such as The Samaritans receive more calls in the Spring than at any other time of the year. For those suffering from depression the next months can often be the worst.

Perhaps it all has to do with a realisation that whereas for many people things are looking up, others only see their inner pains and anxieties heightened. Guilt and meaninglessness, feelings which haunt the lives of many people somehow feel worse when others are smiling and feeling that the future looks brighter.



For Christians who suffer from depression there may be the added burden of feeling that such feelings are wrong and sinful. The Easter Message is then received not as good news but just one more burden that increases the inner terror and the feelings of failure.

We'll just have to accept feelings for what they are: feelings. We are not responsible for what we feel, nor are we responsible for depression. They and it just are. For anyone, Christian or not, the most important thing to realise is that they will not go away simply because we want them to or because we are ashamed of them. If we are suffering from depression the most helpful thing we can do is to accept the fact. No amount of simple moralising or application of religion can do anything about it. A fact is a fact, the depression is a fact.

What can be done?

Some forms of depression are unquestionably due to chemical imbalances of various kinds and with these the doctor can offer some real help which will make a difference. In other instances it may be possible to work with a counsellor or therapist and such groups as the British Association for Counselling (37a Sheep Street, Rugby, CV21 3BX) will be more than willing to put you in touch with reputable and properly trained help. And, of course, help is always available from the Samaritans at the end of a telephone. In all instances the most needful thing of all is patience - hopefully that of others, but more especially patience with ourselves, an honest recognition that what has happened and is happening is not our fault and has to be endured. Some people welcome the chance to pour it out to God in the form of a lamentation or simply by railing against the Almighty. God can cope with our anger and maybe we need to express some of that anger to God and at God.

Out of the Depths

Canon Gonville French-Beytagh, a well-known priest who was formerly Dean of Johannesburg, writes about depression from personal experience. If you suffer, or you know those who do, send for a copy of a small booklet in which he speaks about his experience.

It is called **Out of the Depths: Encountering Depression** and is published by the SLG Press, Fairacres, Oxford, OX4 1TB, price £1. It is much to be recommended.

Rod Hacking

(Text reprinted from 'The Sign' published by Chansitor Publications Ltd., Norwich)

Heaviness may endure for a night
but joy comes in the morning.

Psalm 30

Lent 1992

As in some recent years, we are hoping to run an ecumenical series of House Groups during Lent under the auspices of the Hampton Council of Churches. The course we are going to follow is entitled 'Living the Good News' and has been put together by Christian Aid, CAFOD (the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development) and SCIAF (the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund) on behalf of the churches in Britain and Ireland.

The five week course is based on some stories in St. Luke's Gospel and is illustrated by examples of living the Good News in various parts of the world and hopefully helping us to do the same.

First of all though we need leaders to run the groups, and others to offer their homes as venues for the meetings. If you would like to do either of these, please speak to me. Later on, of course, we need people actually to come to the groups. Don't be shy - I hope there will be plenty of choice so that everyone will find a group at a suitable time and place. More on this later.

Helen Taylor

The North Aisle

The present unsatisfactory condition of the North Aisle of our church is soon to be ended. The faculty for the re-decoration and lighting improvements also included permission to remove the pews in this area.

When the pews have been removed the boarded floor will be carpetted, new chairs will be provided and also, in due course, some low-level table/desk type furniture.

The changes are designed to provide better and more flexible seating arrangements for family groups; for worship when a smaller, informal setting is more appropriate, together with the facility for providing maximum seating accommodation when the occasion demands.

It is hoped that these improvements will be carried out within the next two months.

Alan Taylor, Churchwarden

Church Re-decoration

The re-decoration of the church is almost complete. What do you think of it? Does it meet your expectations, disappoint you, thrill you or disturb you? Make your views felt, please. Speak to the Vicar, a Churchwarden or a member of the P.C.C.

Help is always needed in caring for the church - cleaning, polishing, leaf-clearance and many other things. We depend upon a few dedicated people - why not offer your help? After all, it's your church.

A Thousand Pounds by Christmas? - In fact, £1,920!

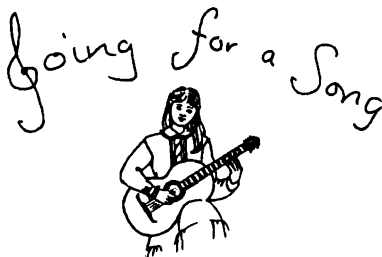
Once again, many thanks to all those who helped to raise this magnificent sum through the various coffee mornings, suppers and so on held before Christmas.

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PARISH PARTY

Saturday 15th February, 7.30pm

St. Francis de Sales' Church Hall



Dress as a

Song Title

£3

Children £1.50

Dinner

Drinks

Games

Dancing

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Carols for Christian Aid

Several members of our church took part in a Carol Service at Westminster Abbey and were sponsored so that Christian Aid benefitted significantly. The Service was shown in 'Songs of Praise' on the television.

The Vicarage Loo

Watch Bookmark on BBC 2 on 5 February, and all (almost) will be revealed!

Around the Spire

Two very new babies made their debut in church over Christmas: Flora Rose Geoghan who was born on 17 December and Emily Louise Hide who arrived on Boxing Day and came to the Christingle Service on 5 January.

Congratulations to all concerned and we wish them and their families every blessing.

Congratulations also to Michael Bunce, now Director-General of the Royal Television Society. Michael has worked for B.B.C. Television for many years so this appointment will be a new and interesting challenge for him.

Several people have had bad colds and 'flu' over the holiday period, and Violet Clark has been in hospital for a few weeks with chest problems. We send them all our love and hope they will recover quickly.

Vera Rockliffe much appreciated all the Christmas and New Year greetings received from her friends at St. James's. During the Christmas season she has herself received news from several former parishioners.

Mrs. Bougourd, widow of a former organist, lives in Kent and expects to enter a Retirement Home in the near future. Now aged 92 years, and much bothered by arthritis, she is finding it increasingly hard to cope on her own; she is still a faithful subscriber to A.C.S.

Ron and Daphne Dafforne, in Sussex, now have three grandsons: Shirley has two boys and Sally one. Julie is still single.

Rodney and Anne Bishop, in Canada, are now grandparents, as a son was born last October, in Paris, to James and his French wife Natalie. Mrs. Swindale has yet to make her great-grandson's acquaintance.

Mrs. Ivy Gilder is happily settled in Norfolk near to both her sons and is enjoying being near her four grandsons. She is very active in M.U. Diocesan work.

Joyce and John Cliff, also in Norfolk, are both very involved with church affairs and are keen bell-ringers - so often visit other parishes.

Brenda and Ray Oliver are occupied with church and community work in Clacton. Brenda still runs Brownies and Rainbows, and Ray cares for church grounds and his own garden.

The biggest surprise of all came when a 'phone call was received from John Harvey-Lloyd (husband of Norah, younger daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. Harvey, and a member of the Drama Group for some time). Their daughter, Elizabeth, lives fairly near to them, with her husband and daughter of 3½ and son 1½. John and Nora are living in Goudhurst now - he has been a J.P. for 25 years.

Scout Group News

The Scouts went away for a weekend near Cardiff in November and organised various scouting activities and some award work. Later in the month, Scouts and Ventures collected the magnificent sum of £1161 outside Sainsbury's for the Children in Need Appeal. They finished the term with a skating evening.

Cubs have gained a number of badges during the term and have taken part in the Cub Football League and the Cub Challenge Cup. They held their own Pack Carol Service and also went to the District 75th Anniversary Carol Service at St. Mary's College Chapel.

HELP would be most welcome with Beavers on Friday evenings and to coach Cub football on Saturday mornings. Offers to John Neilsen on 941 0352.

Susan Horner

Elleray Hall Christmas Lunch

80 Lonely and Elderly folk enjoyed a splendid lunch and afternoon at Elleray Hall on Christmas Day. There were musical entertainments, carols were played by the Salvation Army Band and all the guests received presents and food to take home. The Teddington Christian Council of Churches thanks the very many helpers, including members of St. James's, who made it all possible.

Stop Press

Parish Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Late October 1992

Jerusalem, Dead Sea, Bethlehem, Nazareth

Galilee and much, much more

Scheduled Air Travel, Half Board,

all excursions and entrance fees included

All welcome

More details from the Vicar

From the Registers - December

Baptisms

1	Paul Michael Lelliott	6 Graham Road
15	Gregory Hugh John Stidolph	35 St. James's Avenue

Blessing of Marriage

24 Gaynor Jane Knight and Alan Michael Arnott

Funerals

5	Frederick Horace Freeth	32 Fairlight	Aged 85
12	Kathleen Ellen Kennard	56 Laurel Road	Aged 84

Sunday Evening Services

The new pattern of Sunday Evening Services, at 6.30 pm, is as follows:

First Sunday in Month	-	Choral Evensong
Second Sunday in Month	-	Prayer and Praise
Third Sunday in Month	-	Service of Prayer for Healing
Fourth Sunday in Month	-	Open Forum - a short act of worship and time to think or speak together
Fifth Sunday in Month	-	Prayer and Praise

If there are any enquiries, please contact the Vicar. We shall review the new pattern after six months. All are welcome to all services.

Dates to Note

Feb.	2		The Presentation of Christ in the Temple
	3	14.00	Editorial Board, 19 St. James's Road
	4	20.00	Tuesday Club: Bring and Buy Auction, Wayside
	5	14.30	Women's Forum, Wayside: 40 years On, Memories of the Queen's Accession in 1952
	15	19.30	Parish Party, St. Francis de Sales Church Hall
	16	09.30	The Archdeacon to preach on Education
	18	20.00	Tuesday Club: The Greek Islands, Wayside
	19	20.00	Taizé Service, St. Francis de Sales
		20.00	Women's Forum, Wayside: Jerusalem the Golden?
	25	20.00	PCC, Vestry
Mar.	1	14.30	'Dawnlight' Dress Rehearsal
	3	20.00	Tuesday Club: The British Legion, Wayside
	4		Ash Wednesday
		20.00	Parish Communion with Imposition of Ashes
		14.30	Women's Forum, Wayside
	7	15.00	'Dawnlight', Church
	8	18.30	Compline
		19.00	'Dawnlight', Church

Advance Notices

Mar.	9	14.00	Editorial Board 19 St. James's Road
	17	20.00	Tuesday Club: Around Hampton, Wayside
	18	20.00	Women's Forum, Wayside
	23	20.00	PCC, Vestry
	25	20.00	Taizé Service, Methodist Church, Hampton



COPY DATE FOR MARCH ISSUE: 9 FEBRUARY