

**FEBRUARY 2016**



**'The tide is turning': Justin Welby interviewed by Michael Gove**

**The Archbishop of Canterbury talks about faith, politics, and whether he'd attend if one of his children had a gay marriage ceremony**

There was, of course, something very special about the House of Commons debate on Syria earlier this month. The moral challenge of how to face those who embrace evil without limits, the long shadows and sombre memories generated by military actions past, the divisions within parties and between friends, the wrestling with conscience that brought good men and women close to tears. The importance of what the House of Commons was being asked to authorise inspired outstanding speeches, most notably of all, Hilary Benn's.

While I was listening to the shadow foreign secretary, I noticed a hunched figure in the gallery also held spellbound by the speech, his head occasionally nodding in silent and respectful appreciation.

The attentive listener had, himself, spoken earlier in the day. On the same question. Not in the Commons but in the Lords. Where he had explained, with great lucidity and authority, that Islamic State would not be defeated by military action alone. The temptations of religious and political extremism also needed to be countered with a more robust ideological response, and supporters of Islamist extremism, in particular in states such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, had to be confronted.

That speech, just four minutes long, was remarkable for its intellectual depth and courage. What might seem more remarkable, to some, is that it was given from the bench of bishops. The Church of England — for so long caricatured as morally relativist, ethically vague, painfully politically correct and timorously unassertive — has found a new, clear, strong and resonant voice. And to the church's great benefit, that voice belongs to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

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Justin Welby may not appear, at first acquaintance, to be your archetypal Christian soldier. Slightly built, bespectacled and balding, he looks far more like a gentle clerk in holy orders than a turbulent priest. But he has shown, repeatedly, that he is willing to stand his ground and fight for Christian beliefs, taking on those who want to push faith to the margins of our society.

Most recently, he directed a blast of controlled derision towards the country's cinema owners, who had banned a 30-second advert in favour of the Lord's Prayer on the basis that a call to forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us was dangerously inflammatory and might cause unacceptable distress.

When I met the archbishop earlier this month to discuss life and faith, he was still bewildered by the film industry's decision, but inclined to see the positive side — the ad had generated millions of hits on YouTube.

But wasn't the decision to ban the ad evidence that the church could be marginalised in a way that would have been unthinkable a generation ago? Wasn't it proof, I asked, that in the contemporary clash of ideas Christianity was at a disadvantage?

The archbishop answered with a gentle but unflinching commitment to orthodox Christian belief: 'No, because in the clash of ideas, Christians believe in the sovereignty of God. We are confident in the Victory of God which is seen — surpassing evil — in the events of the Cross, of the Resurrection and the Ascension.'

After decades of front-rank Anglican clerics trying to meet secular critics halfway by diluting traditional beliefs, there is something refreshing about the archbishop's orthodoxy. But while that confident statement of Christian belief might have been a mainstream position for most of the past 2,000 years, aren't we now in an age of retreating faith?

'I think the tide is turning in this country. We are seeing many churches growing and particularly I would say that in the last seven or eight years one of the most exciting things has been that, in the aftermath of the Great Recession, we have seen the churches more active in social structures again, in the social events of this country, than at any time since 1945.'

That social involvement — from support for food banks to providing a welcome for refugees — has been interpreted by some critics of the church as evidence of a leftward political drift. But the archbishop adamantly rejects the idea that by following Jesus's example Christians are endorsing any party political agenda.

'As a Christian I don't think you fall within the political spectrum. There was a very remarkable Roman Catholic bishop who once said, "When I work with the poor they call me a saint; when I ask why they're poor they call me a communist."'



**HRH The Prince of Wales delivered an impassioned appeal on behalf of persecuted Christians in the Middle East, saying that the growing crisis of extremism “threatens the very existence of Christianity in the land of its birth”.**

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) attended a special Advent reception yesterday (17th December) at Archbishop’s House, Westminster, where the Prince called for more **“practical” help for persecuted Christians and went on to praise ACN as “a remarkable organisation”.**

Quoting from ACN’s *‘Persecuted and Forgotten?’* report, **Prince Charles said: “Christianity is on course to disappear from Iraq within five years, unless emergency help is provided on a greatly increased scale.”**

You can listen to [Prince Charles' full speech](#). In his speech, Cardinal Nichols also underlined that Christians were among many oppressed faith groups in the Middle East.

The Cardinal also said: **“To remain silent about this specific persecution is to neglect and weaken the awareness and role of this faith here.”**

ACN is responding further to the plight and suffering of Christians by supporting 19 new relief programmes in Syria and 11 new programmes in Iraq. The relief programmes provide vital aid including food, medicine, shelter and pastoral support for Christians across the region – including for families fleeing Daesh (IS), escaping persecution. With your continued support and prayers ACN supports over 140 projects in Iraq and Syria – Thank you!

**Faith rises from the rubble of battered Syrian city**



*“We insist despite the hurt and pain and ruin that we return to our Archbishopric and rebuild it. We insist on sending out [a message](#) that from under the rubble we are coming out to be born again with Jesus Christ. We want to relive the birth of Jesus Christ especially in this area that has seen too many dead.”*

These are the words of Fr Abdallah Kamaz of Homs in Syria, a city devastated by the civil war where the community is starting to get back on its feet after a two-year siege. A [special programme](#) shown over Christmas on SAT-7 ARABIC revealed how small shoots of faith among weary but hopeful clergy and local and returning Christians are pushing up through the ruins. As a semblance of normality returns to the war-ravaged city, services and weddings are taking place in bomb-struck churches, as the slow and costly process of rebuilding gets underway.



Dear Colleagues,

In my message to you of 22 December, I shared with you the encouraging news about the Mission and Ministry Fund contributions we had received up to that point which reflected that we had received 14% more funds from the parishes than we did for the same period in 2014.

As we work towards our year-end, we have now closed the books and I am incredibly humbled by the responses from the parishes. At the end of the financial year we have received 20.40% more funds than we received in full for 2014. In plain figures this means that the contributions received from the parishes totalled £4,096m against a call of £4,678m which represents 87.55% of the total MMF call. This still means that we face a shortfall but given the 28% increase that was asked of the parishes, this is nevertheless very encouraging and I wanted to thank each and every one of you in our parishes that work so hard to maintain the mission and ministry in this diocese.

God is generous. He gives us good things in great abundance. Generosity and giving is therefore an outworking of our faith, we are all called to be generous in our lives. I am very thankful for all that you do. There is still much hard work for all of us but I do see this response to the MMF Call as a first step in moving forward and responding appropriately in our *discipleship*.

Generosity is part of our discipleship, our response to the call of Jesus. It is not just about giving of our money, it is about how we spend our time, our talents and our possessions. As we enter this New Year, we will be focusing on *‘Journeying Out’*. Journeying out is all about sharing the love of God with others in both deeds and words. It is also about discovering God’s Kingdom and about seeking to change the lives of those less fortunate than ourselves. God is involved in all our lives, and so we are called to be involved in our community, our society and all life around us. Just as God reaches out to us, so we are called to reach out to others and to share God’s love with them.

Please do pass on my thanks to all involved and continue to pray for all of us as we seek to discover God’s kingdom and grow the church and find ways to share our story with others.

Yours

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Acting to help the poor, the outcast, the forgotten and the vulnerable, the dispossessed and the despised is a Christian duty, the archbishop believes. But the Christian analysis of how to rescue those in need certainly doesn't sit neatly on the left-right axis.

'Catholic social teaching describes the family as the base community in society. If you say that, oddly enough, everyone thinks you're on the right. But if you say we have to ask why, in a modern society, food banks are necessary on the scale that they are at the moment, then you are immediately on the left. Then you say, "I believe in an educational system that teaches eternal values" and they say, "Oh! He's really on the right." You don't fit — so I'm not going to fit.'

One place where the archbishop did fit in was Holy Trinity Brompton, the capital's — indeed the country's — leading evangelical church. Sandy Millar, the charismatic vicar of HTB, who has been one of the most influential evangelical Christians of the past 30 years, helped prepare the archbishop for ordination. Evangelicals in the HTB would tend to have traditional views, not just on theological issues, but also on sexual morality.

Few questions have so preoccupied the Anglican communion recently as the morality of sexuality — homosexuality in particular. Traditional Anglicans — whether in Nigeria or Nottingham — have been wary, at best, of the acceptance and welcome given to gay men and women and their sexual choices by secular society. It would be a challenge for any Archbishop of Canterbury to accommodate both the concerns of the traditionalists and the evolving views of the rest of British society. But when I ask this, Archbishop of Canterbury he doesn't prevaricate.

If one of his own children were to be gay and fell in love with another person of the same sex, and asked his blessing, how would he react? 'Would I pray for them together? You bet I would, absolutely. Would I pray with them together? If they wanted me to. If they had a civil service of marriage, would I attend? Of course I would.'

But, I challenged him, conscious of what many evangelicals believe, wouldn't you say to them that while you love them, their relationship was sinful or inappropriate?

'I would say, "I will always love you, full stop. End of sentence, end of paragraph." Whatever they say, I will say I always love them.'

Listening to the archbishop, you get the sense that he is never calculating who might be offended, or attracted, by his words. He is following what he believes to be the path that Jesus has called him to take.

But if that makes the archbishop seem austere and otherworldly, then I do him a disservice. He has an attractive, almost mischievous, giggle in his voice when talking about the peculiarities of living in Lambeth Palace, his love of *CSI: Miami* and the way in which the ban on his Lord's Prayer advertisement made it an underground hit in the same way as Radio 1's censoring of Frankie Goes to Hollywood made 'Relax' a surefire No. 1. And discussing popular culture with the archbishop he lets slip that his favourite ever TV series — his 'addiction', as he puts it — is *The West Wing*.

Connoisseurs of the US political drama will recall that the pivotal episode in the series comes when advisers to President Bartlet, conscious that caution and timorousness in the face of the opinions of others has diminished his authority, urge him to be true to himself. 'Let Bartlet be Bartlet' is the demand.

For Justin Welby, the lesson appears to be clear. Don't worry about what others might think, don't tailor your views to the demands of the moment, don't allow your conscience to be qualified or your heart to be misled. Constancy in faith is the great virtue.

I ask, on that basis, who are the archbishop's heroes? From whom in history does he draw his inspiration? One name stands out. Revealingly, it is not an obvious name that sends a popular signal, but a figure obscure to most, not an Anglican celebrity but a Catholic martyr, not a European mover and shaker but a voice from the developing world, not a power in any land but a suffering servant.

'Cardinal Van Thuan spent 13 years in a communist prison after the fall of South Vietnam. He was in solitary confinement. But he led his torturers to Christ. He converted, taught, and ordained priests in prison. He breathed in the presence of Christ.'

There aren't many contemporary Christian leaders who are both energetic in their condemnation of the crimes of communism and robust in their analysis of the evil of Islamism, but Justin Welby stands out. There is something special about him. And his candour, commitment and kindness are gifts in which all can share this Christmas.

"I listened to contributions which of course vary enormously. Some were very much in favour of the suggested changes and the direction of travel. Some were keen to keep to what they regard as the traditional teaching.

"It was quite fascinating to observe how the meetings worked and what, if anything, happened in public and what happened behind the scenes. I was looking forward to being there and was fascinated to compare what I know and experience of the Church of England decision making process with what happened in Rome."

He added: "I was intrigued to hear whether we can all understand ourselves as we related one to another and to each one of us, as members of the human family."

Michael Gove



## John Bradley, remembered.

Revd John Bradley, a man much admired, was the Churches Together in England Southern Field Officer who covered Devon and Cornwall and gave national support to the work of the DEOs (Denominational Ecumenical Officers)

On Monday 14 December 2015, Marian Bradley, wife of John who was a member of staff at Churches Together in England and a County Ecumenical Officer before that, sent a text to say that John had 'passed from time to eternity' in the early hours of the morning. Friends and colleagues of John will have known about his Multiple Sclerosis and how he managed work as Field Officer South for many years from a motorised wheelchair. Latterly, after retirement, John was also diagnosed with cancer. Typical of John's outlook he recently said, 'For all these years I have been waking up to the sound of the alarm clock. One day soon it will be the sound of trumpets.'

Our prayers are with Marian and daughter Mairyn who have cared for John at home. The funeral was held at the church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes on Wednesday 6 January at which past and present colleagues were present.

**John had planned the funeral service and asked for his 'Last Word' to be read - which is now available on the final page of this newsletter entitled**

**Dying, and yet we live (2 Corinthians 6:9)**



## News from Primates 2016 of the Anglican Communion

On Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016 the Primates agreed how they would walk together in the grace and love of Christ. This agreement acknowledges the significant distance that remains but confirms their unanimous commitment to walk together.

The Primates regret that it appears that the text of this agreement has been leaked in advance of their communiqué. In order to avoid speculation the document is being released in full. This agreement demonstrates the commitment of all the Primates to continue the life of the Communion with neither victor nor vanquished.

### ***The full text of this particular agreement follows:***

1. We gathered as Anglican Primates to pray and consider how we may preserve our unity in Christ given the ongoing deep differences that exist among us concerning our understanding of marriage.

2. Recent developments in The Episcopal Church with respect to a change in their Canon on marriage represent a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our Provinces on the doctrine of marriage. Possible developments in other Provinces could further exacerbate this situation.

3. All of us acknowledge that these developments have caused further deep pain throughout our Communion.

4. The traditional doctrine of the church in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds marriage as between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union. The majority of those gathered reaffirm this teaching.

5. In keeping with the consistent position of previous Primates' meetings such unilateral actions on a matter of doctrine without Catholic unity is considered by many of us as a departure from the mutual accountability and interdependence implied through being in relationship with each other in the Anglican Communion.

6. Such actions further impair our communion and create a deeper mistrust between us. This results in significant distance between us and places huge strains on the functioning of the Instruments of Communion and the ways in which we express our historic and ongoing relationships.

7. It is our unanimous desire to walk together. However given the seriousness of these matters we formally acknowledge this distance by requiring that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity.

8. We have asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a Task Group to maintain conversation among ourselves with the intention of restoration of relationship, the rebuilding of mutual trust, healing the legacy of hurt, recognising the extent of our commonality and exploring our deep differences, ensuring they are held between us in the love and grace of Christ.



## Dying, and yet we live (2 Corinthians 6:9)

I've been at death's door several times but so far found it not wheelchair accessible, but it looks as if this time I might manage it. Frank Sinatra sang that as he faced 'life's final curtain', at least he could say, 'I did it my way' and that has become an alarmingly popular hymn at secular funerals. Since I asked Jesus Christ nearly fifty years ago to be my Lord and master, I hope that, at least at my best moments, 'I did it his way.' I would be horrified to think I did it my way. I know that my passing will be excruciating for those who are closest to me but we know that the pain of grieving is part of the loving.

So what now? My little bit of Greek tells me that euthanasia, usually taken to mean either assisted or unassisted suicide, really means 'a good death' from the word thanasia (death) and the prefix eu-meaning good, as in eulogy – a good word. So a good death is to slip away peacefully in my sleep at some point in time and then the next thing you know is the alarm clock or some other sound waking you to a new day. Hours have passed but it seems like no time at all.

Resurrection is like that except that the time lapse may be a few days or thousands of years and the waking sound will not be an alarm clock but a trumpet. The Apostle Paul calls it a mystery: 'We will not all sleep, but we will be all changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.' (1 Corinthians 15:51–2) Until then I hope to rest in peace as my mortal body decays, completing my personal entropy and 'dying away in time and tone', which is what I have been doing for the past twenty years.

What next? To speculate in this life about what resurrection life will be like is likely to be as far from the mark as twins in their mother's womb discussing life after birth! 'You mean there's another way of living without the Cord which brings us everything from Mother? How can anything live outside?' But I hope to meet up with many dear friends and family who have preceded me and meet many others of whom I have only read or heard. Most of all, I shall see my Master. 'Dear friends we are now God's children; what we shall be like has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.' (1 John 3:2)

There are many secular sceptics who will insist that when you are dead, you are dead and there is nothing more. I believe in life after death and that belief is fundamental to the person I am. There are different levels of importance in the truth of what a person believes. Some say we only believe what we want to believe and that belief on God is nothing but expressing our desire for a cosmic father figure. I have never been to the USA and so have no personal experience that it really exists. I suppose Boston, New York, Washington and the Atlantic seaboard might exist, but California seems most unlikely. Perhaps something strange happens to people who sail too far west and fall off the edge and think they have been to a real place. Maybe it's all created on a Hollywood film set, not in California but in Birmingham or near Belfast. But if I had crossed the pond and found it really does exist, it wouldn't make any difference to who I am.

My belief in the reality of God and that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, opening life in all its fullness to those who trust him, is as integral to who I am as my belief that my wife loves me. To analyse these beliefs objectively would itself be an act of distrust. In that sense they are not beliefs which can be proved or disproved by peer review, but relationships which can only be lived. The only way to show the truth of a relationship is my relating and acting in consistency with the relationship. Analysis merely splits the components from each other and leaves the relationship lying in bits on the bench. God is not open to such analysis because if we could analyse God then we would be greater than God and such an entity would not be God but an idol. But God does invite the exploration of a relationship, saying, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.' (Psalm 34:8) Some have begun very tentatively with a prayer starting, 'God, if you are real...' but that can be the start of the greatest life change of all.

*John R Bradley*