

Endpiece by William Odling-Smee

How can we know God if there is no language to talk about him? How can we realise his reality if we cannot describe him, if we cannot visualise him? In order to answer these questions, we need to go back to asking what is real in our lives. And to many people not just Churchgoers, it is the world which is real. The ground we work on; the daily rising and setting of the sun, the need to earn money to buy food and drink to keep you alive, families and children and all the other aspects of our daily life. That is our reality, and few would argue that these things are a mirage. The reality of God is much more difficult to understand.

The Jesuit philosopher and palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin wrote:

"If, as a result of some interior revolution, I were successively to lose my faith in Christ, my faith in a personal God, my faith in the Spirit, I think I would still continue to believe in the World. The World (the value, the infallibility, the goodness of the World): that, in the last analysis is the first and last thing in which I believe."

De Chardin is revealing a different approach to the problem of thinking about God. There is no notion of God 'up there' in heaven but a notion that the world is the reality. All statements about God are interpretations of this reality. We have to begin our thinking, even or thinking about God apart from us, from the reality that we know. This is not to say that the world equals God, or that God is dependent on the world or is a function of it. On the contrary, the world is entirely dependent on God, that in which it is grounded and of whose being and activity it is the field, like a magnetic field. It is this that we are affirming when we say of everything: "In the beginning, God" and also "in the middle, God" and "in the end, God" for "from him and through him and in him all things have their being".

This involves the assertion that freedom and consciousness and personality are not simply accidental products, emergent epiphenomena towards the end of the evolutionary process. A non-dualistic doctrine of creation involves taking creativity seriously as of ultimate significance all the way through. Whatever more we may want to say by insisting on the idea of God 'out there', at least we are asserting the idea of God 'with us', a purposeful spontaneity on the inside of things, continuously from the beginning, so that consciousness, freedom and personality are but making explicit what is already implicit.

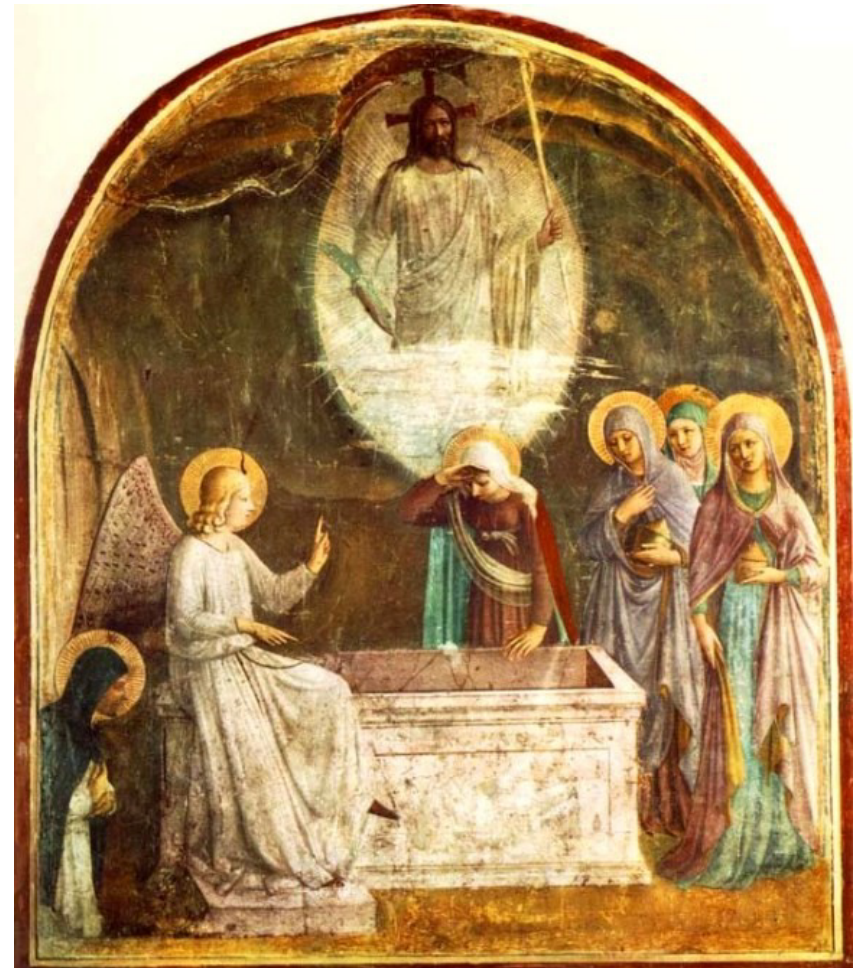
There is ultimately no proof of this; it is an act of interpretation. And when we think and talk about God, we are only interpreting natural phenomenon that we observe. And what we observe is the world, through our consciousness freedom and personality. These then are the important things in our discussion about God, for it is by these things that we may come to know a little of him/her/it.

The Parish Church of Saint George



PARISH MAGAZINE

An open door in the heart of the City



APRIL 2020

From the Rector's Desk



Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm writing this at the end of March (27th) in the midst of the biggest crisis to affect the country and the world in the last 50 years. Coronavirus – Covid-19 is a particularly virulent respiratory condition which has spread to every corner of the globe. We are in lockdown and the Churches have cancelled public worship for the next few weeks at least.

Firstly I want to say that although the buildings may be closed the Church is still functioning. Clergy and people are coming up with a huge variety of ways to keep in touch with one another, and the internet and modern media platforms have proved enormously helpful. In St George's we have so far posted 3 videos on our Facebook page (The Parish of St George, Belfast) and on our website stgeorges.connor.anglican.org. My daughter, Catherine, has managed the camera work and technical aspects for which I'm very grateful. The response judging by the number of views, has been very positive and quite a few people have said how much the videos meant to them. I plan to record more services on Sundays and Wednesdays as long as the lockdown continues. We will try to improve the picture and sound quality and include a short address or reflection.

At this stage of the coronavirus lockdown I've managed to contact all the elderly and vulnerable of the parish who are normally housebound. I've also been in touch with all the nursing homes where our parishioners are residing. I'm also gradually working through the parish membership list and have got as far as the letter 'J'. So far everyone is keeping well, thanks be to God. However if you or someone you know is unwell or very anxious then please do contact me after having first taken medical advice.

My contact details are:

Rectory landline: 028 9070 135 Rector's Mobile : 07902792080

Rector's Email : bstewart1662@gmail.com

I'm very grateful to a number of parishioners who have volunteered their services to collect prescriptions, groceries and other essential supplies for those who cannot leave the house and have no one available to buy them what they need. If you find yourself in a situation where you are confined in your home and need some urgent supplies or medication collected then please ring me on the above numbers and we can arrange to help.

At a time when we cannot physically meet together as a parish, in St George's, it is nevertheless essential that we find ways of encountering the Lord and one another spiritually. That is why we have posted the video of Morning Prayer and the Eucharist, so that you can join in with others within and beyond the parish of St George's. You may also find the following resources useful.

- The Church of Ireland Website: ireland.anglican.org/prayer-worship
 - The Church of England (Two Apps.):
 - a) Common Prayer
 - b) Daily Prayer
 - Universalis.com
- A Roman Catholic treasury of daily prayer

In your prayers remember our frail and vulnerable parishioners and pray for all those in the front lines of the fight against the coronavirus. Please ring me at any time (07902792080) if you are worried or need pastoral support. God be with you all and keep you safe.

Yours in Christ

Brian Stewart

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Harvesting lasts for just 20 days per annum, requiring 10 workers per acre and 140 blooms for 1 gram of saffron. The new hi- tech harvester at 100 pull outs per minute will change things. Go figure. Next a walk to the waterfalls, dancing down the rocks in the foothills of the Atlas mountains. On the trail back we visit a small mosque. We always make a point of calling in places of worship to admire the architecture, love and attention devoted. We prayed hoping our God was listening and not thinking us unfaithful. Further down the valley the river flows quietly down where 6 restaurants line the route with tables and chairs sitting in the shallows. We order a tagine each and let the water run over our feet ; not everyone's cup of herbal tea. But such is the nature of these waters, enriched by minerals from the high Atlas, ones powers of meditation and wonderment are vastly increased. So back to the hotel sitting on our balcony, admiring over the heights 40 far miles away, almost continuous flashes of beautiful lightening. WONDERMENT indeed.

Terence Mayne

CONGRATULATIONS



Congratulations and Best Wishes to the Rev'd Colin Young on reaching his 60th birthday at the beginning of March. Many Happy Returns Colin from everyone in St Georges.



Kyrie Eleison (Friday at St George's)

A tall arched window

The tree beyond is green and full of leaf

The tree beyond is bare, denuded

The sky is grey with cumulonimbus

The sky is blue, no trace of cirrus

Today the sky is grey

I close my eyes

Lord, have mercy

We seek you

Christ, have mercy

You are here

Lord, have mercy

A golden glow

Surpassing that of candles

Suffusing, permeating

Aetiolated

We reach for you

You grant your peace

Chris Ritchie

Chris writes to the Editor:

I am one of the regular (albeit "out of flock") attendees at the Friday Eucharist at St George's. I shared a poem with Geoffrey May about the Friday service a while ago and he suggested that I send it to you as a possible contribution to the Parish Magazine.

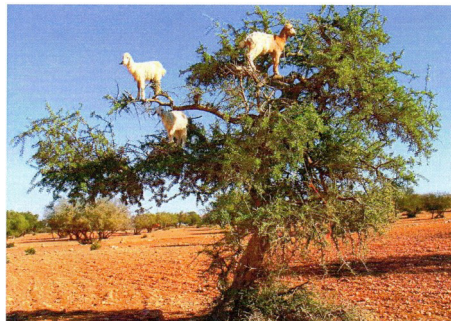
MARRAKESH

Vestless, sockless and besandled, we step on the plane destined for Marrakesh (ochre city, population 1.25 million), steeped in history and heat. The first thing we noticed in the city was the lack of upmarket motors and an abundance of small motor bikes. Our hotel is of the "auld daaysensy", much mosaiced and well staffed. We are ushered to the Ambassadors suite, large, well-appointed with balcony. It must be mentioned however, that the visiting Ambassadors must be of low rank as there is no safe for secret papers or fridge for champagne.

An excellent breakfast is served. The chefs are very good with eggs, bread and their orange juice is to die for, I suspect they add rose water. Herbal tea is another speciality, but not so alcohol, although the odd top hotel has a licence for tourists sake. So if you fancy a gin at 6.00 p.m., pour it from hip flask into your juice. This is overlooked as long as it's done in secret, so not to encourage the locals.

This is a large and fascinating city with the usual fried chicken and hamburger joints, but there is a heap more to it than tack. For instance the souk is a market city in itself, where we spend much time, with its shops, stalls and eating houses filled with desirable goods and food, absorbing the culture and character, always resisting the over persistent sales people. To avoid being robbed, not meaning pickpockets, one must bargain aggressively. However, having said that, comparing like with like, everything in Morocco is half U.K. prices at least. We enjoyed also the huge square with snake charmers, fortune tellers, henna artists and the like.

One day we went down to the Atlantic coast. On the way we visited an argon oil



co-op to see ladies preparing the product from the raw nuts. They are on to something, for would you believe it, the oil cures ageing, arthritis, gout, greying hair, hard skin and much, much more. Most interesting is the argon tree plantation. Some of the trees had up to 10 goats in them, gently walking on delicate branches like tightrope walkers, eating nuts at the same time. On we go to Essuria (windy city of Africa), the old capital, fishing port, a place of art galleries, woodworking and quaint

streets. Cat Stephens and Jimi Hendrix had holiday homes here. Orson Wells shot movies. Back to the hotel we watch the spectacular sunset from the rooftop pool and have a quick dip, before a delicious tagine. If cooking one yourself, preserved lemons are a must and if 10 different spices seem a problem just cheat with ras al hanout.

Another day and off to the Ourica valley of almond and cherry orchards in beautiful bloom and wild flowers running riot. We visit a huge crocus farm.

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Editorial

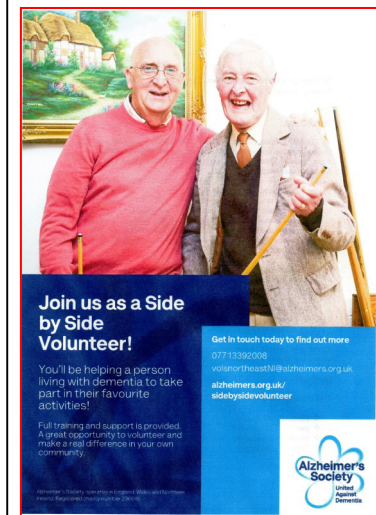
This month the Parish Magazine is smaller than usual. This is because the Church is closed until further notice. It is part of our effort to contain the coronavirus. So, there is no Calendar and no Music List, and nothing to add from the Parish Registers. There will also be a smaller print run as no one will be coming into the Church and collecting one. We plan to do the same for the May issue and will continue in this vein until the virus is controlled.

William Odling-Smee
Selby Nesbit

"Alzheimer's Society: Request for Volunteers."

"Do you enjoy good company and a bit of craic? Are you a people person? Do you enjoy helping others? As you will be aware dementia affects almost everybody in the community and Alzheimer's Society Side by Side service is in need of community minded individuals who will provide light support for people at the early stages of dementia to remain independent and engaged in the local community. This could be attending church groups, services, going shopping, out for coffees and a bun - whatever the person with dementia enjoys! It is a hugely rewarding and enjoyable service and the feedback we get from volunteers and service users is amazing - Mr B volunteer "I wish I could do this as a job - I just love giving people a lift and connecting with people on their level". Mrs B "(the volunteer) has turned my life around". We particularly

welcome male volunteers as there is an increasing demand for men in the service, women are of course always welcome as well. Please contact Alzheimer's Society on 02890 38 7787 or 07860182072 or email David.Moore@alzheimers.org.uk for more information about volunteering. Full training, supervision and out of pocket expenses are provided"



ARMAGEDDON

2020 has certainly been bad so far; one of the worst years I can remember since being born in 1952.

There were dreadful floods in parts of the UK where some areas experienced flooding of their homes and businesses twice in two weeks. I can't imagine the devastation this has caused to those affected. I think we need to finally acknowledge that something is definitely happening to the world climate. Sadly we have had at least one silly President and one silly Prime Minister who refused to accept climate change.

The catastrophic fires in Australia have been beyond imagination; those who have lost their lives, their homes and their way of life is also beyond comprehension to us who haven't been affected. What also has saddened me so very much is the loss of the amazing wildlife that only inhabits that part of the world – the beautiful Koalas, Kangaroos, Wallabies – gorgeous creatures, some lost for ever. I know I touched on this in a previous article, but the impact still upsets me very much.

Sir David Attenborough, who I think everyone will acknowledge is the most experienced wildlife expert in the world has produced a film called A Life On Our Planet in which he deals with the approaching catastrophe for our planet if we do not do something right now. He is quoted as saying *"If you have seen what I have, you cannot remain silent. What we have done to this planet during my lifetime is a crime, and future generations will view it as that. Humanity is responsible for the destruction of the world's wild places and all the biodiversity they sustain because we don't have the ability to control ourselves."* He goes on to talk about the dreadful nuclear disaster in 1986 of Chernobyl; no human being has lived there since. However, after visiting previously during another programme he made, he has seen that animals are returning - elk, foxes, wild horses and wolves. To me this is wonderful news.

He talks about the melting ice caps. He states that total habitats are becoming extinct, and of course there is the devastation of the Amazon rainforests to facilitate agriculture. He said that a world without Pandas or Tigers is just unbelievable. Certainly, for me, the extinction of some of the world's most beautiful creatures is not only heart-breaking, but unacceptable. I really do wonder more and more what God is thinking – these amazing creatures who were here before us are being wiped out by us. I know that may sound harsh, but I believe that humans are more to blame than anything else.

Then of course we have Covid-19. Not being a scientific or medical expert I really have no idea how this virus came about. I know that at the beginning of the outbreak in China there was a view that it erupted because of the selling of banned dead wildlife in a street market. We still wait to know where or how this newest virus has originated; what I know is that China has a bad reputation in how it treats animals. Again I spoke in another article how dogs are treated there – crammed into small cages where they can't even sit down, before they are taken out, hung up and skinned alive.

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treated as souls to be saved rather than as criminals to be punished' and never refused absolution to any penitent.

I had thought of suggesting to Brother Mallon that Saint Alphonsus, now the patron saint of confessors, sounded like an all-round good egg. Just the sort of really holy person who'd find it in his heart to forgive a man for not being good at both English **and** Mathematics. But fear, common sense and a healthy mixture of both held my tongue, even while I was being harangued at the blackboard by a ruddy faced Christian Brother who was struggling as much with his blood pressure as I was with logarithms.

Liguori's gentle voice, confessor and confidante, brought my story to an end with a smile I could hear. "Well I've looked through your application for funding, Paul, and, while the English is grand, the Maths could do with a make over".

THE NORTHERN IRELAND MIXED MARRIAGE ASSOCIATION (NIMMA)

The Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA) has been forced to close its Belfast office due to a lack of funding.

The charity, which has been providing support and advice to mixed marriage people for more than 40 years, 25 of those years at Bryson House, will continue its work online from 1st April.

Urgent core funding is needed to have any chance of getting new premises, according to Chairman Ken Dunn.

"Bryson House has been sold and all tenants given notice to leave, but, given the state of our finances, we cannot commit to any new office at the minute.

"Until funding is sourced, we will be 'working from home' and relying on our website and considerable e-mail contacts to keep up the good work of support and reconciliation."

NIMMA is a small charity that, despite punching well above its weight in terms of impact in the community and even international recognition and is enjoying arguably the most successful period in its history, will suffer without an urgent financial injection.

"Our third book, about mixed couples that left Northern Ireland, has just been printed, although its official launch has been postponed due to our difficulties, and a total of more than 700 NIMMA books from the trilogy have been distributed to integrated schools in recent weeks.

"It is ironic that NIMMA's success comes at this busy time, but our search for funding goes on. We have approached both the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin and the Northern Ireland Executive within the past few weeks and we will continue to lobby other trusts and charitable foundations in the UK.

"We've been through hard times before and they have made us stronger. I'm confident that we will come through this. One thing is for certain, we will continue to work tirelessly for reconciliation and to provide the very best pastoral care and support for those who need it.

If you feel you can help NIMMA in any way, please contact us on 07706285042 or e-mail info@nimma.org.uk

Paul McLaughlin

A Saintly Example



I asked the young lady her Christian name. “Liguori”, she said in a soft Connaught accent that caressed the ear. The rest of our telephone conversation competed with my head full of memories. “You’ve probably never heard of it”, she said, so I told her a story.

Brother Mallon was short, so short that the nickname ‘Tich’ was more than big enough for him, but what he lacked in height, he made up for in personality. He was a stocky man who strode around our school with an air of authority. Authority backed with a strong arm and a leather strap-slapping action that was as economic as it was pain inducing. He was a force to be reckoned with that showed two faces to me each day.

He taught English and Mathematics. I was reasonably good at the first, unreasonably terrible at the latter. It was a bad combination that brought in turn, inevitably, praise and punishment as one class ended and another began. Brother Mallon simply could not understand how this situation could be. He took it into his head that I was being deliberately bad at maths and that angered him and baffled me.

I was grateful then for the respite that once every few weeks he would concentrate on his religious duties and hand out the little leaflets from the Apostleship of Prayer. Each one was devoted to the Sacred Heart, with a colourful illustration of same on the front and a short biography of a saint on the back.

The Apostleship of Prayer is a worldwide association of Catholics and other Christians, set up in 1844, that has been described as ‘the Pope’s own prayer group’. Its magazine, the Messenger, became one of my mother’s favourites and a regular in her home right up until she was reading it in heaven. Its message of prayer and offering up of all that we are was another of her favourites, she prayed with us very night until I was a teenager, and was rigidly reinforced at school.

I’m afraid, however, that the best of intentions were lost on me with the prayers and devotions. I did not hear the voice of God in my head when Brother Mallon asked if the sound of a vocation was echoing in my ears. I thought only of the life story I was about to read and the collection of them that I kept in an empty Gallaher’s Blues cigarette box under my bed. It had been from the ‘50’ box that I had bought my father for Christmas and the silver-backed tissue paper on its inside still smelled of an ever enticing tobacco blend.

I had a ‘communion’ of saints all together in that box. Most of the well-known lads, the national patrons, all the apostles, of course, and one fellow that I had never heard of, by the name of Alphonsus. I’d played Gaelic football alongside a boy of that name at primary school, although we’d all called him ‘Fonzi’, but this Italian man used his full title, Alphonsus Maria Liguori.

I learned that St Alphonsus Liguori founded the order of the Redemptorists that I knew from Clonard Monastery and its weekly Confraternity and, according to Brother Mallon, he had heard an ‘interior’ voice saying: “Leave the world, and give yourself to me”. Now the Brother’s question to me about voices made sense.

The leaflet also said that Liguori also stressed that ‘all penitents should be

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I have witnessed the disgusting selfishness of some people in their bulk buying of all sorts of food and other items. Not only are they preventing other ordinary people obtaining everyday necessities, but even worse they are leaving nothing for those providing essential services to the rest of us. There is one example where a critical care nurse, who had finished a 12 hour shift was unable to get anything. I think too that some supermarkets have been slow to prevent this bulk buying, though I also feel sorry for the ordinary shop assistants who have been subject to abuse from customers. I was in Sainsburys in Forestside recently when I heard a customer shouting loudly at a store assistant. I said to them they should calm down, there was no need to behave in such a way. Of course I was also on the receiving end of their vitriol; I pointed out the shop assistant was only doing their job, he couldn’t provide something that wasn’t on the shelf. This is only one instance in what I’m sure are thousands taking place.

Unlike those who are able to bulk buy, not all of us have the money or resources to be able to spend hundreds of pounds on a huge shop, or have the facilities to store it all. As one comment I heard stated “*if you don’t eat 30 oranges in one week, then why buy that amount*”. Neither can I understand the mass buying of toilet rolls – certainly if this virus was gastro-intestinal it would perhaps make sense, but it is respiratory! What also worries me is what is happening to those who are most helpless: the homeless and those relying on food banks etc.

I am in the “vulnerable” category – I’m 68 and have asthma (along with other health issues) but I’m certainly not panicking. I do feel that certain aspects of the media reporting was causing panic amongst the population. I’m not saying that most of the information is not true, and certainly the advice is generally wise and sensible. However, from what I’ve heard there are also statements being posted on line and social media that is questionable to say the least – speculation doesn’t help anyone. Then, there are the conspiracy theories doing the rounds! In some ways I find that quite amusing though there are others who may be thinking there could be some truth in it. This, along with the panic taking place is not helping anyone – I know the Government has asked everyone to remain calm, but some folk may not find this so easy to do.

I really hope that sooner, rather than later, this will be over – there are encouraging signs from China that the outbreak is now settling, with no new cases being reported. I know the UK is behind China just now, but hopefully it won’t be long before we will also be in the same position.

Just now I’m finding it difficult to accept I can’t come to St George’s every Sunday as normal. I feel, in some ways, I’ve been cut off from part of my family!! However, all we can do is pray that we will all be together again as usual. I also hope that after this is all over, we may become a kinder, more caring and less selfish society. Hope springs eternal.

Jo Calder



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THE WORD OF GOD



Some people lay themselves open to disappointment: they read the Bible in search of the word of God and it seems to be more and more the word of men. People sometimes have rather a magical view of the word of God, as though it is something which falls from heaven. Whereas God reveals himself in a history, through the events of human life, and these are what have to be deciphered. Does the Christian not feel the same bewilderment when faced with Jesus? Christians see him as the Son of God, the Word made flesh, whereas his contemporaries saw him as a man like themselves. John does not write, 'We have seen the Word', but 'We have seen and heard concerning the Word' (1 John 1.1); that is, illuminated by faith and the Spirit, we have perceived the Word through what we have seen. What we have seen are human actions and wounds like our own.

God acted in exactly the same way in the Old Testament. The Jews experienced ordinary events, but believers, primarily the Prophets, read in them the Word of God. In the same way we can see words in actions: 'What he did spoke volumes' 'His smile said it all'.

However, we can fool ourselves. Are we sure that the Prophets and other believers did not fool themselves too? It is here that faith in the Holy Spirit which enlightens believers becomes important. 'The Spirit will lead you into all truth' says Jesus (John 16:13). To look for a word of God which falls from heaven can simply be to reject the Spirit and to refuse to live in faith. In such a 'word' we would have God at our disposal, whereas he reveals himself to us humbly in human form.

All this is well illustrated in Isaiah 60; 'Arise, shine, Jerusalem for your light has come and over you the glory of the Lord has dawned.' Here we have an extraordinary image of the people of God (and not the Church); like a cathedral bathed in floodlighting, shining over the city to guide those who are going through the shadows of despair. Jerusalem (and the Church) forms a luminous sign set up in the world to give a sense of direction. However, the light does not come from the people but from God who is in them.

William Odling-Smee