"Serving the people and their parishes"

PARSON AND PARISH

is published by

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PARSON & PARISH
the magazine of the English Clergy Association
"serving the people and their parishes"
Issue Number 180 2020

PARSON AND PARISH
is produced by an Editorial Committee of the English Clergy Association
Published in Great Britain for the English Clergy Association
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Great Budworth, Northwich CW9 6HF
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Printed in Great Britain by Imprint Digital, Exeter

Cover photographs: St Peter's Church, Market Bosworth, Leicestershire and St Mary and All Saints Church, Great Budworth, Cheshire (the latter depicting the inside of the church with Covid-19 related notices, markers, hand sanitisers etc.)

From the Editor

At the end of my report for our APCM, which we held by Zoom video conferencing at the end of October, I finished with a short piece about the various Christmas Services in 2019 and concluded that 2019 had been an extremely busy and varied year – but added that at its close there had been no real indication or hint as to what was to come in 2020!

When Council members met in London in October last year I spoke about pilgrimage being the main theme for the 2020 journal – I was intending to co-lead a Diocesan Pilgrimage between Chester and Lichfield Cathedrals (The Two Saints Way) in May and to attend a national conference on pilgrimage in Oxford in September, as well as trying to complete the Camino to Santiago de Compostela along its northern route sometime in between these two events! Needless to say none of these events took place, though the Oxford Conference did have some of its speakers online. I have in fact done a lot of actual walking over the course of the year, but almost entirely within the boundaries of my two large rural parishes, as well as some virtual pilgrimages.

What can one say about 2020? Quite a lot in fact, not least in terms of online worship and meetings, and I really hope this edition of Parson & Parish captures for all of us something of this completely unexpected year and the way in which Covid-19 has affected all of us and every aspect and area of life as we know it. In different ways we have all had to get to grips with and get our heads around what has been an unprecedented time in the life of the country, and of course the Church. I'm sure I don't need to remind readers that the last time churches were closed for public worship (as far as I know) was at the beginning of the 13th Century, during the dispute between King John and the Pope!

Pieces in this edition include a moving description of an anointing by a serving priest, a more general article about the Church from the National Rural Officer who was seconded to the Church's Recovery Group, which is chaired of course by our Patron the Bishop of London, who has herself very generously found time to write an extremely interesting and thought provoking piece for us. Also included is some poetry, reflecting in different ways these strange and challenging times, as well as a very interesting piece about pilgrimage, which I decided to include given its references to virtual pilgrimages. There is also a thought provoking piece about patronage, together with postcards from recipients of ECA grants (holidays and breaks mostly from within this country this year!), Mark Binney's review of a classic work about Parsonages and some photographs of ordinary churches throughout the country coping with the ever changing guidelines and regulations. I hope there will be something for everyone in this edition – and here's looking to 2021!

The Revd Alec Brown
Editor

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Reflections on the Coronavirus

See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.

Isaiah 43:19

This year has seemed to be a wasteland of hopes and opportunities. There have been such concerns for the young people whose time at College and University has been so disrupted. Yet, when I wrote to encourage the children of the Diocese of London towards the middle of lockdown, I was overwhelmed with the response I received. On one level their whole lives were being turned upside down; but they had so much to tell me of the new things that the Lord is doing. So many of those messages from children were filled with hope and expectation, and they helped me to perceive that the Lord is doing His new thing. How true it is that it is that children and those like them enter and perceive the Kingdom of God.

Of course, we have all been grappling with what has been a fluid and changing situation with unprecedented changes to the law and ever developing guidance about what we can and cannot do.

Giving guidance to our churches has been complex. On the one hand people have rightly looked for leadership, clear explanation of what can and cannot be done and direction as to how to interpret what the government has said. On the other hand, so many have felt the pressure of external direction and intervention from those who are not as aware of their particular local circumstances as they are. We have evolved, learning that there is a partnership between those of us who must request and sometimes require consistency of approach, and those who will know best how to apply that on the ground and what works and does not work for the communities and individuals whom we serve.

This very complexity has been a strength for the Church of England is present in every community from individual streets and particular homes right the way through to the national stage.

This has been recognised and bishops and other church leaders have been significantly engaged by national, regional and local government to help to make the needs of those who are most affected known and enable official structures better to support and help.

One of the 'new things' the Lord has done is to bring us to the sombre recognition that pandemic illness is not a great leveller but to the contrary exposes and exacerbates

pre-existing inequalities. The poor, people of colour, those whose housing is less spacious or whose educational opportunities are fewer have all disproportionately suffered. The church has been called again to do the new thing of Christ and to speak up for those in need. Sometimes we have been asked why we do not do so more loudly. I can say that every time I speak to the press or in a public forum I speak of Jesus Christ and the new life and new Kingdom which he proclaims and brings in; but what is actually published or broadcast is at the mercy of the editor and so little gets through. Nevertheless the Lord works in all things for the good of those who love Him and at least in London work has been to ensure that the recovery strategy includes a very strong focus on communities in general and the role of the faith communities including the churches in particular.

Of course, we have all had to step into other new things. The Church of England's national digital team was already winning awards and offering a world class leadership; but the way that individual clergy often armed only with a smartphone and a sometimes more than wobbly internet connection have enabled our churches to step forward twenty years into the digital space, has been extraordinary. This will bear great fruit in a world which is increasingly online.

Strategic thinking about the future is of crucial importance even in the midst of the second wave. The world after Covid will have changed. Not just because there will be more meetings on Zoom and more people will work more of their week from home, but because we will have seen more profoundly what happens when society is pushed apart. There is a reason why we yearn together and why we look forward to that day which Her Majesty The Queen reminded us will come when we can meet again. In that day we will see new things that the Lord has done among us and we need to be ready to respond to what He is calling us to do.

In all of this I and my senior colleagues have felt acutely the inability to offer the levels of pastoral care that we would like. The normal ways of meeting having been inhibited; and whether it be writing letters or picking up the phone there is never enough time to do as much as we would like. I would ask your prayers to help us to prioritise correctly.

We have had to pick the path between ensuring that we do not forget those amongst us who must shield and who quite rightly could not and cannot immediately rush to open churches while staying true to the proclamation that we have made that at the heart of our life and identity lies our corporate worship, and that we should not, as the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, 'stay away from the gathering of believers'. For the churches to remain closed longer than was absolutely necessary would be to step away from what we believe to be right and true; but it is also right and true to have a care for the vulnerable, including the vulnerable among the clergy. Of course sometimes we have given the wrong emphasis in the wrong way at the wrong time but I hope that we have learned to find ways to speak clearly into the situation and to help to build up the people of God so that they can once again gather in prayer and

worship and to receive the sacraments.

The Lord's new thing has partly been to remind us of what we hold at the centre, and the things that do not change, for Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Above all I am convinced that we have seen the Spirit moving among us, doing new things. Whatever the future holds, the Lord has been opening up his way in the wilderness and calling forth streams in our wasteland. Whatever the future holds let us together walk in His way and drink deeply of the living water which in His gracious love He provides for us as we journey towards him together.

The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally
Bishop of London

November 2020

Being Church: the New Normal?

Whatever our personal experience or perspective, COVID-19 has impacted each and everyone of us. For many, the reality of COVID-19 only began to have an impact in March when lockdown was initiated and we were all told to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. For Christians,the Church, the most dramatic effect was the ban on gathering together and the closure of places of worship.

This initial 'command-and-control' phase was a rapid response to a potentially chaotic situation, designed to stop a greater emergency from happening. The challenge with this kind of approach is that while it can simplify a complex situation, the negative impacts are many and varied. On a societal level these include the shutting down of the economy; on a more personal level it includes isolation from friends and family, the jeopardising of livelihoods and a lack of access to activities that people love and have sustained them in the past.

Command-and-control can only ever be a short-term solution to a complex situation; ultimately, complex situations require complex solutions. As legal restrictions are lifted we enter into the world of guidance, where it is less about being told what to do (or what not to do) and more about empowering individuals to work out how to safely negotiate this 'new normal'.

It was as we moved out of the national lockdown that I was seconded from my normal work as National Rural Officer to also support the House of Bishops Recovery Group, chaired by the Bishop of London. The principle aim of the Recovery Group is to support churches as the guidance and restrictions issued by the Government change, working across departments which deal with places of worship to enable a safe move out of lockdown for our churches and the wider communities they serve.

Our primary role is to consider the public health implications for churches of the Government guidance. But what does this mean in practice? And how does that fit with our faith and putting our Gospel calling first?

In Luke's Gospel, we discover how Jesus understood the intention of his ministry as he reads from the scroll of Isaiah, a passage which puts the poor, the shackled, the sick and the oppressed first (Luke 4:16-19 quoting Isaiah 61 and 58). Further in the Isaiah passage ittalksmore about comforting those who morn, giving them a mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit and by doing so raising up over former devastations. In this passage Isaiah is speaking of the whole nation of Israel, pointing out that this will not be achieved by putting our individual interests first.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, choosing to act in ways which minimise the risk of passing on the virus is taking the option for the poor and vulnerable, not just in our community but nationally. If you look at the personal risk factors of those who are most impacted by the virus it is the older generation and those with underlying and often hidden health issues. Above and beyond that it is the most vulnerable in our communities who have been most impacted by the virus, including those with insecure jobs, living in poor and overcrowded accommodation, with limited access to educational support.

The reality is that some of the key practices that are so important to us in our worship have the potential to pose a genuine threat of infection to us and to those Jesus calls us to care for. One of the biggest sources of grief has been the loss of singing, even as we tentatively move back into our buildings. It is a fundamental part of much of our worship and our offering to Godbut it is also a potential vector by which we can spread the virus through aerosol and droplets. How effective a vector it is we simply do not know at the time of writing this, butby ignoring the potential risk at this time we could be impacting the vulnerable by giving the virus an avenue to spread.

In other areas, such as the use of face coverings, discerning the 'right' thing to do is more challenging. While our knowledge about the virus and the role of face coverings in preventing its spread grows, we also know that for some face coverings can be harmful to them or for those they are supporting. This is particularly true for the deaf community where the ability to see someone's lips as the speak is a vital aid to communication.

As an example of how our guidance challenges advice that potentially harms people the Church of England has chosen not to follow the Governments term social distancing, but to replace it with what is intended 'physical distancing'. A fragmented society is the last thing we want at the moment: we need to be in this together if we are going to protect one another and particularly the most vulnerable in our society.

At the start of lockdown in mid-March, we were warned that we would have to live with COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions on our way of life – and worship –for some time to come. Now the realisation is dawning for lots of people that, while lockdown has eased, the virus has not gone away, and we are going to have to plan to live with it a while longer.

As we adjust to this 'new normal', we have a choice to make. Grieving the temporary loss of those things that are important to us in our worship is necessary and important, but we must thenresolve to prioritise the needs of the vulnerable in our churches, our communities and across society. As Jesus himself reminds us, 'just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'(Matthew 25:40).

The Revd Mark Betson
National Rural Officer and member of The Recovery Group
This article first appeared in Countryway, October, 2020

REVERSE CONTAGION

Earlier this week I anointed someone with oil. It has been a *very* long time since I have done that. Naturally I took appropriate precautions but as the person concerned was already in that fragile space somewhere between life and death, the risk to her of anything transmitted from me was out of all proportion with the risks she already faced.

Naturally though, I was conscious that there was a risk that she might transmit something to me.

As I held the holding cross into the palm of her hand I prayed that the familiarity of its shape might make some deep connection with her even in her minimally conscious state. As I anointed her with the oil on her hand and on her forehead, I prayed that the aroma might trigger some sense of the presence so familiar to her from her long life of faith.

To be able to do such things is always a privilege but yesterday, after such a long absence of close physical contact, it felt like an overwhelming privilege and responsibility: to do it in a way that was meaningful and yet safe.

The following morning I came to my regular Bible reading and I began by reflecting on how that act of anointing had made me feel: undoubtedly somewhat vulnerable. So I was extraordinarily grateful and very moved that my reading set for the day came from Exodus chapter 30:22–29.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take the following fine spices: 500 shekelsof liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant calamus, 500 shekels of cassia—all according to the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil. Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. Then use it to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant law, the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, *and whatever touches them will be holy.*

In this passage God instructs Moses to first of all create the anointing oil and then tells him what to do with it: to liberally anoint every part of the 'tent of meeting', the place of God's presence. The table, the basin, and all the utensils. In other words every small and seemingly insignificant object that was related to this place of God's presence was to be touched with this oil.

Given the enormous process that we (ministers in particular) have all been through learning how to keep our church buildings cleansed from contamination and given the huge awareness we all now have about how transmission can occur from each and every single surface that we touch, this phrase from this passage stopped me in my tracks,

"**what ever touches them will become holy**" (v29)

Imagine that! Here is 'reverse contagion'. Instead of being made sick by touching a surface on which an unseen virus lies in wait for the careless or unsuspecting, imagine being made whole (hol-i-ness = wholeness) by simple contact with something that in itself is holy and transmits that holiness with a straightforward generosity and without judgement for the worthiness of the recipient.

This is a vivid and visceral picure of God's grace.

An extraordinary picture of the transaction offered to us by God. Our fear for his hope, our contaminated thinking for his truth, our poisonous and destructive attitudes towards others and towards ourselves exchanged for his unconditional love and acceptance. We come in our filthy rags, with our wounds, our weaknesses and our worries and to receive the grace of God is to be figuratively washed clean and dressed in white in a robe we do not deserve; to be made whole, to be put back on our feet again, to be given the love that we need and to feel created in us the capacity to give that love and forgiveness away to others.

The Bible has many images for this transaction: 'a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a Spirit of despair' (Isaiah 61:3)

We are made holy/whole, not by our own effort but simply because we have reached out for the presence of God.

Meditating on this passage completely reframed any lingering fears and concerns left from the act of anointing my friend the day before. It is not that I have any 'magical' belief in the power of the oil but I do have a deep belief in the power of the one who provides us, who provided Moses, with such a palpable picture of his grace and power to transform. And I do have a deep held belief in the power of prayers whether they are reinforced by physical objects such as oil or holding crosses or candles. These objects simply help us to pray in a way that we can see and absorb with our senses, they save us from an overly intellectual approach to the presence of God.

We come as frail and physical human beings in frail and physical human bodies and God, who himself took on a human body continues to meet us through every day physical objects: a wafer of bread, a sip of wine, a dribble of oil, and the pouring of water over our heads as we began our life in Christ in baptism.

In this world right now where everyone fears being "contaminated" by physical contact, let's pause to picture how God intends reverse contagion for our good: I guess we might call this a vaccine.

The Revd Sheila Bridge
Vicar of St Peter and St John, Rugby
August 2020

This article first appeared in *The Church Times* 11th September, 2020

Pilgrimage: Past and Present, Virtual and Actual

When people think of pilgrims, we think we know what we mean: Chaucer's bawdy folk 'who goon on pilgrimage' in tights to Canterbury. But pilgrimage is a multi-layered phenomenon, experiencing a modern resurgence: for example 300,000 pilgrims in 2017 arrived on foot at Santiago de Compostela in Spain, to visit the Cathedral of St James and gain their pilgrim certificate. In addition to this literal pilgrimage, today we often make use of metaphorical pilgrimage too: we talk about our own lives as a landscape we traverse through, with its obstacles, its companions and its destinations - our own road to Emmaus. Indeed, pilgrimage is perhaps something that can be experienced through virtual journeys rather than physical ones: by meditating on texts, we experience imaginatively places and people, far too remote to visit in person. Hence pilgrimage can be understood as a journey of the soul, as well as the body. This talk will explore the meaning of pilgrimage along two axes: the first, the past to the present, looking at how pilgrimage has changed from the medieval to the modern; and the second, virtual to actual, looking at how pilgrimage can be seen as a spiritual journey as well as a physical one.

You might like to know why I am speaking on the topic of pilgrimage this 2nd June at All Saints Pavement evensong: I am researching for a PhD at York's Centre for Medieval Studies, looking at the 8th century Anglo-Saxon Saint, Guthlac of Crowland. I am exploring the interaction of pilgrimage and the fenland landscape in Guthlac's cult from the medieval to the modern period, which has meant that I have been reflecting on the meaning of pilgrimage, and of spiritual journeys taken through landscapes. I am a keen walker, but have never set out on a recognised pilgrimage route - but that isn't to say I am not a pilgrim, as will become clear when we examine the history of the term.

Our modern terms 'pilgrim' and 'pilgrimage', used so famously in the opening to Chaucer's Canterbury tales, first come into use in the 13th century, as a borrowing from the Old French 'pelegrin', a term used to refer to medieval pilgrims. This is, in turn, derived from the medieval Latin 'peregrine', 'traveller' , and 'peregrinatio', 'travelling'. This is where the Peregrine Falcon gets its name: in the thirteenth-century juveniles of this species were captured on their way to their breeding location rather than from the nest: they were, a travelling bird, a *peregrine*. However the Classical roots of Latin term itself is less cosy than these connotations of hawking and Merry Englanders suggest: 'peregine' comes from 'per' and 'ager' which means 'from abroad': a foreigner, an alien, a resident having no rights of citizenship. How does such a seemingly negative term come to be applied to Christian pilgrims by Christian commentators?

Well, Medieval thinkers start describing Christians as *peregrins*, aliens, in order to describe their spiritual state. Augustine of Hippo in his fifth-century work *The City of God*, makes the most influential case for this: he imagines two cities, the earthly one

and the heavenly one - 'the City of God' of his title. He describes Christians as being 'citizens of the City of God, passing through this world as foreigners, and sighing for the peace of the heavenly homeland' (or, in Latin, ''Cives civitatis Dei / in hac terra peregrinantes / et paci supernae patriae suspirantes') . Thus Christians are only temporary residents of this world; they are pilgrims in *this* life - working towards their final destination in heaven through a process of spiritual development. Such a model of living inspired the desert fathers, such as St Anthony, to live as citizens of the city of God, removed from the world, meditating on the world to come; this in turn influenced the development of monastic orders we see dominating the cultural landscape in the middle ages - groups of people living in exile together as citizens of the City of God.

Church father or not, we might take issue with Augustine's conception: if Christians are only temporary residents in their communities, what is to become of the ethical and arguably Christian obligation to serve and support those communities through vocation: by creating support networks, encouraging environmental sustainability practices and social cohesion, teaching and caring for others, even, or especially, others of diverse faiths and none? It is precisely such ethical obligations we have been exploring in All Saints Pavement in the talks earlier this year on poverty. There is clearly a question here as to whether personal journeys support or detract from earthly community-building.

On the other hand, I see something very radical about Augustine's conception in the current global environment: through his comparison between Christians and aliens, rather than championing the citizen, those with social privileges and power, Augustine raises up the migrant: a person without papers and passports. By imagining Christians as migrants, he encourages us to consider that we are not as established as we might like to think we are: we should not get too cosy, too merry England in our spiritual privilege. Furthermore, in being encouraged to think of ourselves as spiritually stateless, we are better placed to empathise with those who are politically stateless. Sadly, in countries where Christians are not able to worship openly, such as China, Christians - as well as those of other faiths - must know all too well what it feels like to be both spiritual and political aliens.

To summarise so far: the early Christian understanding of pilgrimage is therefore of pilgrimage as a *metaphor* for the Christian life of a spiritual journey: however, moving into the later medieval period, pilgrimage comes to refer to a *literal* journey more and more. In particular, a journey to a shrine where the body of a saint lies. Thus, Chaucer's pilgrims are travelling to Canterbury (ostensibly) to visit the shrine of St Thomas Becket, who is martyred for his opposition to the King's orders (another example of Augustine's opposition of the heavenly and the earthly city, if you will). In our own Minster, the shrine of St William of York was an extremely popular pilgrimage site. The focus of the cult was on the saint's physical body, or parts of it (known as relics). Thus, pilgrimage is a very tactile and embodied form of spiritual

expression. Pilgrims would create 'contact relics' by taking pieces of material and pressing them against the shrine containing the saint's body. Particular contact relics known as pilgrims badges could be purchased on site, as could lead *ampullae* - little containers to take home holy water. These items were cheaply stamped in lead, and are found in large numbers in diverse locations, and therefore I like to think of them as examples of medieval mass production. There are clear parallels between these portable objects and the items on sale in shops in Cathedrals today; visitors can purchase a keepsake or *souvenir* (which literally, if you recall, means 'a remembrance') of the site. Photographs, perhaps controversially, can also be understood as a form of souvenir (or even contact relic) - where a piece of the experience is recorded and serves as an aid for later meditation.

Together with the clear benefits of this personal, experiential form of spiritual expression, there are clear objections, which were voiced throughout the medieval period and up to the Reformation: firstly, there are concerns about the commercialisation of pilgrimage practice, because of the exchange of money for souvenirs and the facilities that pilgrims require (lodging, feeding, ale-houses), wasn't this making our 'houses of prayer' into 'dens of thieves'? Today, we perhaps worry about visitors to churches who take photographs and pay entry fees, as being tourists rather than pilgrims, without considering that maybe they can be both simultaneously, as they were in the medieval period.

The second objection to pilgrimage, is an issue of sacred space: if one must travel to a site to reach God, does that mean that God is not in other places - is not, in other words, omnipresent? Can Christ's saving grace be so arbitrarily restricted by time and space? From such objections, we start to see why so many medieval shrines were destroyed in the Reformation, and why so few therefore exist in their original form to study and to visit now.

There are alternate conceptions of medieval pilgrimage that answer to these objections of commercialisation and sacred space: firstly, the early-medieval Celtic church had an alternate model of pilgrimage: pilgrimage was seen as a journey without a destination: it was called *peregrinatio pro amore dei* - journeying for the love of God. Celtic hermits would set out in a rudderless boat - rudderless because the hermits trusted that the choice of destination was in God's hands and not their own. They often became missionaries in the lands that the boats landed in, for example, St Columbanus, who established monasteries on the continent after setting out from Ireland. The emphasis in this model of pilgrimage is on the journey rather than the destination; this change of focus answers the objections about sacred space and commercialisation, whilst preserving the experiential and embodied aspects of physical pilgrimage.

But perhaps pilgrimage need not be physical: indeed if the focus is on spiritual transformation, rather than on the material trappings of shrines and ale-houses, surely pilgrimage can be engaged in more fully if the spiritual journey is prioritized over the

physical? Perhaps there need be no physical journey at all? This sounds radical, but is really rather medieval. For cloistered inhabitants of religious houses, especially women, vows of stability were in conflict with the urge to visit spiritual places. The medieval solution was to encourage these monks and nuns to journey *imaginatively* - to engage in virtual pilgrimage. They would do this by meditating on pilgrims' accounts of journeys to the holy land, an early form of travel writing. There is evidence that pilgrimage maps and itineraries (which list the stops on continental pilgrims' routes) were also used in this way.

Sometimes, perhaps paradoxically, virtual pilgrimage involved ritual movement: for example, a group of nuns from Villingen in the Netherlands in the fifteenth-century acted out a pilgrimage to Rome. They created seven proxy churches within their convent boundaries to represent the seven churches of Rome, and moved between them in a ritualistic pilgrimage. This virtual pilgrimage gained actual indulgences from the pope: it was clearly considered to be as spiritually efficacious as a physical journey.

However, perhaps using the term 'virtual' makes this type of pilgrimage sound more radical, more new-age, than it really is. For what else is happening when we read texts, sacred or secular, but imagined travel? When we read a historical novel, if it is any good, we travel not only into the protagonist's time, but also into their personal and emotional mindset. And in liturgy, when we listen to the gospel, or a passion story, and meditate on it, don't we, in a sense, travel to first-century Palestine? We engage in virtual pilgrimage by reading, or listening to, The Word.

So looking back, how can we engage with pilgrimage in the present, should we wish to?

Well, we can go on embodied place pilgrimage, travelling to sacred sites. This would engage all of our senses in a spiritual experience: we could be mindful of being a tourist but also mindful of being a pilgrim. But perhaps our destinations need not be official pilgrimage centres: why shouldn't places of outstanding natural beauty or places of great personal significance be *as* spiritually important as those places associated with religious history?

On the other hand, we have also seen that perhaps the emphasis of pilgrimage should be on the spiritual journey rather than the physical. So, I invite you to engage in pilgrimage virtually, using texts and liturgy as meditative aids which allow your mind to do the travelling, crossing the physical and emotional distance between you and remote times and cultures.

A third way would be to continue to make use of the 'pilgrimage as life' metaphor. Although perhaps the emphasis should not be on Christians as spiritual exiles (as with Augustine). Instead, I suggest that the emphasis should be on the journey we take *in this world:* as we walk, sometimes joyful, sometimes grieving, with that stranger on the road to Emmaus.

Emma Nuding *Doctoral Student and Wolfson Scholar*
University of York

PRIVATE PATRONAGE AND ITS FUTURE

An article about patronage entitled *Advowsons and Private Patronage*, written by Teresa Sutton, was published in the September 2019 issue of the Ecclesiastical Law Journal.[1] This article prompted discussion among our Council members, not least because of its drastic conclusion that private patronage should be abolished. My purpose here is to examine this article and discuss some difficulties I have with its arguments. I hope that in doing so I may contribute to further debate about an important institution whose origins go back a thousand years.

Ms. Sutton quotes Bourne in saying that '...power … lay ...at the heart of patronage', and goes on: 'Applying that maxim...'[2] This gives the impression that the article is based on this assumption, but a more objective analysis in an academic article might ask to what extent it remains true that power lies at the heart of patronage today.

The article also assumes that because patronage has been in existence for centuries it must be outdated: 'At first sight it seems inconceivable that medieval property rights are still being used to voice opinions and drive appointments processes'.[3] But why should this be 'inconceivable'? Simply because the rights of patronage are long established and old and the author distrusts tradition? She does not say. Later again it is said that property rights based on medieval law are 'far from ideal',[4] a judgment again apparently based on distrust of tradition or passage of time. Yet there is no shortage of long established legal principles that are still good and sound. The author also asserts that property lawyers regard advowsons as 'relics', by contrast with the fact that they are 'a matter of everyday use' within the Church.[5] I'm not clear what significance this alleged difference in perceptions has, or even whether it is true. After all, property lawyers have to deal with advowsons on a day to day basis.

The author quotes a study that suggests private patronage has often been a matter of social obligation and based on land rights rather than religious belief on the part of the patron, and says that such obligation and rights 'should have no role in the discernment of appointments',[6] without giving her reasoning. There is surely nothing wrong with a feeling of social obligation and it would be difficult to vet patrons for the depth of their religious belief.

In the next paragraph the author says discernment is vital and the process 'can appear out of step with modern expectations of transparency and due diligence...',but again she provides no evidence for that claim. All parties at interest are free to ask

[1] p. 267 and following.
[2] p. 268, second para.
[3] p. 272.
[4] p. 282.
[5] p. 269.
[6] p. 276, second para.

patrons to explain how they made their choices and the degree of rigour in the steps they have taken.

There are also some statements of dubious veracity. The author suggests there are four ways patronage works in practice, ranging from 'consultation' to 'presentation', the latter being 'its most extreme', where 'the assumption is that the patron's decision should be accepted as final without too many questions asked.'[7] If this does happen, it need not. The 1986 measure that governs patronage, the Patronage (Benefices) Measure, makes ample provision for presentations to be rejected, and the author implies that there are only limited grounds for rejecting the patron's choice,[8] which is not so.

The article expresses worries about the influence that societies holding advowsons might have, and is unhappy with societies that promote particular wings of the Church for their own theology, equating these with political parties, and imagines the press outcry if it were to be found that political parties owned the rights to make civil service appointments.[9] I suggest this is not a true parallel. Societies have their own theologies but so do parishes, individuals and clergy, and these differences of theology are all an accepted part of the body of the Church as a whole, and where these ideologies clash differences are generally ironed out. But in any case the parallel fails because a Church society and its candidate are not expected to be theologically neutral in the same sense as it is generally recognised that a civil servant should be politically neutral in carrying out his or her duties. Theological duties are not the same as administrative duties. There are many differences of theology and these cannot all be homogenised.

The author asserts that the Patronage Measure has been 'criticised by clergy, bishops, patrons and parishioners',[10] and seems to take that criticism as evidence in itself that the measure must be flawed, though there is nothing unusual about clergy and laity raising criticisms of Church law. Many patrons have difficulty with the complexity of some of the provisions of the measure, but that does not make it unsound in principle.

The article claims that the category of the individual patron has 'always been the most controversial form.' [11] This is a strong statement that needs justification. It only quotes one reference in support of this claim, and it is not clear why the institution of individual patronage should be any more controversial than that of corporate patronage.

The author suggests that relationships between parishes and educational bodies are now more like 'the sort of figurehead patron that a charity might seek,' and could exist independently of a formal right of advowson.[12] However it is difficult to see much purpose or value in patronage based on figureheads without formal rights, and in any case the author herself notes that 'patronages no longer provide any material

[7] p. 271.
[8] Next paragraph on p. 271.
[9] p. 281,Patronage societies and 'party patronage.'
[10] p. 270.
[11] p. 274,Private individual patrons.
[12] p. 277, Educational patrons.

benefit to a college,' so one would have thought that fact addresses any such problem. The same point is made about Guild Patrons, that there should be no formal rights but just links,[13] to which the same response applies.

It is argued that shared patronages due to pastoral consolidations cause increasing problems.[14] Patronage may become more administratively complex for that reason but this can be provided for, and it is not itself an argument for abolition of patronage.

As to the possible advantages of reforming patronage,[15] the article sees patronage as incompatible with falling congregations and funding of churches and trying to make them more widely used for community purposes, incompatible with the drive for new clergy, and incompatible with the possible abolition of the parish system. To take these in turn, it is difficult to see much connection between patronage and the funding and use of churches, or why patronage should hold up pastoral reorganisation. As regards the drive for new clergy, the author says patronage goes against a process of appointment being 'seen to be open and fair' and it 'lacks cohesion', but does not explain why. As to the question of the future of the parish, she says it is 'very surprising' that patronage has not been considered as part of that debate, but again does not explain why it is relevant to it, beyond hinting that patronage reform 'has the potential to facilitate broader change and renewal'. If that means that reforming patronage is a means to the end of abolishing or altering the parish system, that is not an argument about the merits of patronage but about the merits of abolishing or altering the parish system, which should be a quite different discussion.

The article acknowledges that the bishops' powers of suspension have caused friction with patrons,[16] which is certainly true, but this is no more an argument for abolition of patronage than an argument for bishops to exercise suspension with more caution.

The 'Conclusions' simply propose a drastic 'sunset' clause on private patronage and severing all formal rights in the case of other patronages. This is not reform of patronage but abolition altogether, a drastic step to take based on slender reasoning.

There is one other point here – the paper is silent about the patronages held by the diocesan bishops. It says, 'It is a common misconception that all advowsons have now passed to bishops or other Church authorities...'[17] Is that really true, or does the author just imply that this would be a good thing? If the bishops' rights of patronage were not to be abolished at the same time as the others, there would be a large residue of patronages in diocesan hands. This would result in still more centralisation of control without the checks and balances inherent in the existing system.

Successive legislation in the post-war period has already brought ever increasing centralisation of control into the hands of the dioceses and the central Church

[13] p. 279, Guild patrons.
[14] p. 283.
[15] pp. 285 to 287.
[16] p. 284.
[17] p. 275, second para.

institutions, a process which some argue has not always been beneficial, but it has in many ways shaped the modern Church. Traditions like patronage are therefore sometimes seen as inconvenient and obstructive to that culture of control. The question of patronage and what future it may have needs to be considered in this wider context.

I hope these comments may lead to a balanced discussion on the merits of the historic institution of patronage. Private patrons fulfil a very useful role that is not always appreciated by the central authorities. They know about the needs of the local community whereas the bishop does not. They also relieve the burden on churchwardens in finding a candidate for ministry. They therefore make an important contribution to the work of the Church at parish level, much of which depends on the efforts of dedicated and unpaid lay people.

Under the Renewal and Reform programme, based on the goals for the Church articulated by General Synod in 2010,a task group was set up to look at the simplification of legislation, and this included the reform of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure by simplifying its administrative complexities. The English Clergy Association strongly supports the drive for simplification of the measure, which we know from long experience many lay private patrons find very hard to understand. We have taken part in the consultation on the reform of the measure with enthusiasm. I discussed this and the plight of the private patron in my article on patronage in the 2016 issue of *Parson & Parish*.

Anthony Jennings

Anthony Jennings is Director of Save Our Parsonages and on the Council of the English Clergy Association. He is the author of The Old Rectory, the Story of the English Parsonage (second edition, 2018).

BOOK REVIEW

The Old Rectory : The story of the English Parsonage
Anthony Jennings
Sacristy Press 2018, 386pp (£40)
ISBN: 978-1-910519-51-6

This is a splendid edition of a book by Sacristy Press previously published in 2009. It has been significantly revised and expanded by 80 pages and includes a further 38 plates. The subject matter is timeless and works on many levels for different interest groups. If you are fortunate to live in an Old Rectory this book will explain its *raison d'etre*. Many people will find it an indispensable resource about old Parsonages to refer to as required. For others it will be part of the great Parsonage debate as to why the Church of England disposed of its historic housing.

Anthony Jennings is a Solicitor and architectural historian, who is the Director of Save our Parsonages and a trustee of the English Clergy Association. He has very strong views on what constitutes a quality Rectory and Vicarage and the importance of keeping it as an asset for the Church of England. This is discussed in Part One of the book (Prologue). He refers to the appeal of the old Rectory's and Vicarages built before the Second World War, most of which have the prefix 'Old' in the title. These vary in quality and the best are listed in Chapter 8 pp153-154, and various appendices at the back of the book pp 304-306.

In Chapter 2 Anthony refers to the great twentieth-century sell-off, pp 9-16. He describes it as 'the most remarkable continuous and wholesale divestiture of valuable assets ever undertaken by any national institution.' Well over 5,000 parsonages had been sold between the turn of the century and 1963. He returns to this subject later in the book.

Part Two looks at the history of the Parsonage. This links the humble origins of the Clergy to their abode, and the corresponding rise and dare one say fall in status and housing. The Clergy are vital to the Parsonage story and are discussed in Part Five pp 241-282. It was their tastes and money which largely created the varying size and scale of many Parsonages.

Part Three pp51-196 looks at the Architecture of the Parsonage with examples of all periods. The illustrations help in this regard. I think the simplest thing to say about this is the expression my children used, "that's a proper Vicarage. Why can't we live in one"? John Betjeman's Old Rectory at Farnborough is described as Éngland's finest parsonage' p120. Architects are discussed from pp 157-179. This section of the book ends with some of the curiosities pp181-196 including ghosts!

Part Four pp199-213 returns to the debate about the great sell off. Having described notable Parsonages Anthony objects to selling them off from a financial and heritage

point of view. 'The fact that larger houses can be used for PCC meetings, parish meetings, pastoral care, community fetes, garden parties, and car boot sales seems to carry no weight' p208. Many retired clergy will have experienced using the Rectory in this way. The clergy are now housed in quite ordinary houses which affords some privacy to the family. It could also be argued that the status of clergy in society has diminished, like the Rectory. 'The clergy are now rehoused in small compact boxes with no distinguishing features, usually some way from the church, or at the edge of town' p285.

There is obviously a special character to Old Rectories and Vicarages which makes them so desirable on the housing market. The large gardens pp 228-232 are much missed by many communities for the annual Church fete. Indeed, the link between the Rectory and the Parish Church is such that many Village Churches have been left bereft of any facilities at all. The scandal in my view is not that the Church of England disposed of very large heritage properties (however fine) but that they did so without any consideration for how the Parish Church would survive. The site next to the Church was of more strategic mission value than simply selling it to fund a smaller replacement. Other options should have been considered as suggested by Anthony in this book. Whenever the subject is raised in a Diocese the answer is always the same, "it was a long time ago". But if it was the legacy, it is still keenly felt today.

In Part's Four and Five Anthony talks about the legacy and future of the great sell off. He knows opinion is divided about this and ends the book with a diocesan secretary saying that 'The main reason for the sale of the vicarage is its unsuitability for modern living'p300. Clearly Estate Agents would not agree. The Old Rectory and Old Vicarage are at the top end of the housing market and with a modest amount of investment very suitable for modern living. So has the Church of England got it all terribly wrong? This book certainly informs that debate and makes for a lively conversation.

Mark Binney

Chester Poetry Break

For many, Zoom has been a lifesaver during the pandemic. It has helped us to keep in touch with one another and helped to lessen the sense of isolation. We have discovered that we can gather around all sorts of topics across boundaries that have hitherto divided us.

A small Arts and Faith Network was set up in the Diocese of Chester a few years ago – this was a meeting place for those interested in exploring the interface of arts and faith and included visual artists, poets and musicians as well those committed to promoting the work of artists in ministry and mission. Several events for continuing ministerial development were organised within the diocese including poetry workshops led by Jan Dean and John Lindley. These are the background to the Poetry Breaks which have been a monthly feature within the diocesan calendar. They were conceived as a "welcome break" and some "refreshment" during the difficulties of the lockdown. Dr Aisha Ahmad made some suggestions through Twitter about how we might manage "this marathon of living through the pandemic. She suggests, "frankly, even though we cannot physically leave this disaster zone, try to give yourself a mental or figurative "shore leave". Short mental escapes can offer respite and distance from the everyday struggle. Take more mental "leave" until you clear the wall." (20/9/20). Our poetry breaks are "shore leave".

It shouldn't surprise us that so much good poetry is being written in these days of trauma and change. In an essay called *No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear*(2015),Toni Morrison commented: "This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal." Mark Oakley, in *The Splash of Words* (2016), writes: "Poetry, like the other arts, no matter how dark their subject, is in some way an invitation to fall in love with life again but a little deeper."

So we have *Poetry Breaks*. In these "Poetry Breaks" poets and poetry lovers meet for ninety minutes once a month, starting with coffee time at 11.00. We do language and however dark the times, or the subject, we are, hopefully helping one another "to fall in love with life again but a little deeper."

Poet Naomi Shihab Nye describes poetry as organic, believing that all of us think in poems as in, for example, the story you are telling yourself as you walk down the street. She suggests that "we are living in a poem", that whenever we are thinking, when we are letting our mind leap from one thought to another we are living in a poem.

As we have got to know one another we have become braver in sharing our own work and the connections our own minds make. Some come simply to listen, and others share a poem that means a lot to them. There are many ways of engaging – and it has been good that we have not been restricted by our diocesan boundaries as we have been joined by poetry lovers from India, Kenya and North Carolina.

The Revd Canon David Herbert
Continuing Ministerial Development Officer, Diocese of Chester

Resurrection for COVID-19

Easter Day 2020

How can we sing a resurrection song
in a strange land?
Together apart;
our churches locked;
secure as the garden tomb?

Yet life burst out
of the garden tomb.

Christ is risen,
even as we weep with Mary
searching for hope
in the cold first light
of an Easter Dawn.

© S Anne Lawson
Easter 2020

Back to Church

At last we're back in Church for a service
but, if we're honest, we're all a little nervous,
of being together again after so long a time,
and to the rich language of Cranmer's Prayer Book
add masks and sanitiser and social distancing, and look,
isn't that a face shield on the Vicar's head
that he's wearing as he gives out the bread;
while later on a sheaf of corn for Lammastide
is carried in procession down the aisle
and speaks so strongly of our link to the countryside
and the work of barn and byre and field,
while telling as well of the spirit of farm and village and town
to carry on as new normally as we can, and in God's strength
to fight against this virus with all we have and not to yield.

© The Revd Alec Brown
The country parishes of Antrobus and Great Budworth
Lammastide 2020.

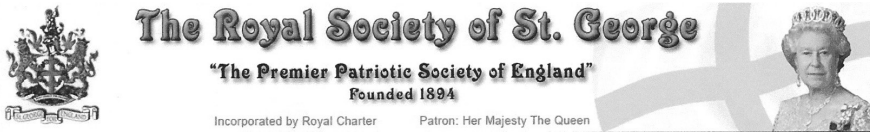
Migrations

Against an azure blue and almost cloudless autumn sky
the vapour trail of a passenger plane is seen on high,
while directly underneath skeins of migrating geese are heading
in their hundreds for their winter home;
and those of us whose feet are firmly planted on the ground and
may soon not wander very far, depending on our ranking and our tier,
can only wonder and marvel at the freedom
to come and go as once we could and would,
before the virus and the various lockdowns came;
but in spite of everything that binds us at present so tight
we know it's for our common good and that it's right
and also that in time it will surely pass and then,
like the migrating birds and the high flying passenger planes,
we'll all be able, God willing, to stretch our wings again.

Arley, Cheshire
11th October, 2020

If all we had was blossom

If all we had was blossom, that would be enough.
Those few days, when dappled sunlight
made jewels of paper white petals and pink buds,
the old apple tree suddenly transfigured
from early spring's emptiness to explosions of colour and life.
If those bursts of beauty were all that tree ever produced
it would suffice – the joy and promise sufficient to birth hope within us, even
surrounded by despair.
Yet that blossom is not the end
but only the glimmerings of the true joys to come,
when melancholy autumn showers the ground with brambly abundance,
when holding each fallen, verdant orb
feels like grasping the very earth in your hands,
aware of its precious fragility
and glorious vitality
awaiting in its first bite.



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THE ENGLISH CLERGY ASSOCIATION BENEFIT FUND

(registered charity no. 258559)

From the Almoner

The English Clergy Association can sometimes help by way of a grant towards a holiday. We know from the postcards and letters we receive how much our help has meant to the recipients. We are able to make in the order of 50 to 60 holiday grants a year. These grants are specifically for holidays, or rests from duty, for serving or retired clergy of the Church of England (as set out below).

Eligibility

The Association is able to make grants towards "a rest from duty" to those who are:

(a) clergy of the Church of England, engaged in full time ministry or part time ministry in the Church; or
(b) clergy engaged in some other employment, occupation or calling; or
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A request for an application form should be made either by letter or by e-mail:

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45 Howard Park, Greystoke, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0TU
e-mail: revrichardhall45@gmail.com

A note from the ECA Treasurer

Please consider nominating the English Clergy Association Benefit Fund (registered charity 258559) to receive all or part of any tax refund due to you.
Account The English Clergy Association Benefit Fund
Sort code 40-52-40
Account number 00026912
Nominee address 4 St John's Road, Windsor, SL4 3QN

2019/20 Postcards

2019

We have had a super holiday in the Forest of Dean and were glad to visit some of the towns along the River Wye and the River Severn. We also enjoyed a day's cycling in the Forest. We also visited Wales for the first weekend of the holiday. Many thanks to the Trustees for helping us to afford this very refreshing holiday.

A little note to wish you well and say a huge "thank you" to you and the Trustees for your very kind gift towards the cost of a holiday in South Africa as part of my extended study leave. We had a wonderful time, made possible by the terrific generosity of the ECA. We are very grateful and had a great and restful time. With thanks and best wishes.

To the ECA – with much gratitude for your generous holiday grant. We have had a very restful and much needed family time away in Gran Canaria.

Dear Richard and Trustees – thanking you for helping us (my wife, two kids and our two dogs) to spend the half-term hols on the beach in Scarborough. Little sun, but lots of fun!

Dear Trustees – my two sons and I had a wonderful holiday in St Ives, Cornwall, over half-term. The photograph does not do the view justice. The winter's light makes the sea appear turquoise and we were able to see and do so much more because it was out of holiday season. Thank you so much for your support. Much love and prayers.

Dear Richard – please find enclosed a photo from my recent holiday to Ethiopia, for which you kindly made a grant. I had a wonderful time and found it a most energising experience. Thank you so much for your generosity – it makes such a difference. With my best wishes.

2020

Just a note to thank you for our holiday grant which has enabled us to have a much needed break away in West Yorkshire. With many thanks.

Dear Friends – just a note to thank you for the generous gift given by the English Clergy Association which has facilitated this much needed holiday in Devon. Whilst

we have had poor weather we have loved exploring the area and feel well rested.
Just returned from our visit to Queensland for the wedding of our son which took place last weekend. With thanks to the Trustees of the ECA whose generous grant made this visit possible.

Thank you so much for your generous grant. I have had an amazing time so far (on the Isle of Lewis) and am feeling rested and rejuvenated. This is a stunning place!
We had to change our holiday plans due to Covid-19. We have now rented a small cottage in Northumberland – lots of lovely walks, open spaces and peace and quiet. We are grateful for your help that has made this break possible.
A postcard from Harlech in North Wales. Thanks to the English Clergy Association for your generous grant. We were able to enjoy two weeks in our caravan in this stunning part of the world, somewhere we have not been to before. We were able to take a much needed rest and break – not quite Florida and New York which was our intended holiday destination this year, but beautiful none the less. With grateful thanks.
Thank you for your generous grant. I have had a lovely break in the New Forest and go back rested. I had a lovely meal in this beautiful hotel in the Forest. Once again, thank you.
Thank you for the grant. We are having a lovely holiday in Devon.
`Please thank the Trustees very much. I am on a trip around East Anglia and the East Coast. Blessings.`
Dear Richard and ECA Trustees – the final leg of my holiday has taken me to the North Norfolk coast and a day out with my father and step mother who have themselves been camping. Again, thank 0you for your generosity.
Dear ECA Trustees – thank you so much for your generous support that allowed us to take a small family getaway this week. We were able to see parts of the West Country and it was good to get out of London for a few days. Thank you, we really appreciate your gift. God bless.

WILLS — Making a Donation in your Will

The Association and our Benefit Fund are helped greatly if there are legacies and bequests. By making a posthumous gift of money or property you may also reduce your estate's Inheritance Tax liability.

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- a legacy of a specific sum
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What to do to help us in your WILL:

If you wish to include a donation in your WILL please first consult your solicitor.

A simple form of legacy might include the following words:

"I hereby bequeath, free of tax, the sum of £ to

the English Clergy Association Benefit Fund (Registered Charity No. 258559) OR to The English Clergy Association (4 St John's Road, Windsor, Berks SL4 3QN) and the receipt of the Hon. Treasurer or other proper Officer for the time being of the English Clergy Association shall be a complete discharge of such legacy."

This wording can easily be adapted to cover the bequest of a property or of all, or part of, the residue of your estate. In any case of doubt please ask your solicitor or get in touch with the Chairman, Secretary or Treasurer. This is especially appreciated if you intend to lay down conditions as to how the bequest should be used.

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