

HIGH TIDE

*Parish
Magazine*

*Weymouth
St Paul
with Fleet*

AUG 2025



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*Many thanks to all who have contributed to this issue of the Parish Magazine and to Liz Evans for the proofreading. The next Magazine will be published on **Sunday 31st Aug.** Please, send all articles, information, news you wish to be published by Sunday 24th Aug.*

Front cover: "The Immaculate Heart of Mary" (contemporary)
© CelestialSaintStudio

From the Vicar

Dearly Beloved,

Chris and I had to go up to London this week for a passport appointment with the Polish Embassy. Since the appointment was in the early morning, we had to stay for the night before, so we do not miss the allotted time.

As we were very close to it, we decided to visit the famous Temple Church. You know, the one which was used as a filming location in the 2006 movie adaptation of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. To paraphrase the Roman poet, Virgil's description of Alcathous in *Aeneid* (Book 7, line 511), the book was dumb, but the film proudly took that torch and ran straight off a cliff with it... Anyway. We wanted to see the church *notwithstanding* rather than *because* of Dan Brown's "masterpiece".

I went to the porch, opened the door and found myself in front of a desk equipped with every necessary thing: leaflets, announcements, various electronic devices and most importantly a till. Behind the desk an elderly lady, the kind we all know from and see in churches: charming smile, sparkling eyes, gentle voice. Her very kind "hello" was, however, immediately followed by a firm "*There is a charge of £5 per person. Thank you.*"

I must have looked very touristy (Chris was behind me, in the porch) because she didn't ask if I/we came here to pray, to seek solace, to find peace, to light a candle or simply out of curiosity. She was gently but firmly sitting behind *The Desk With The Till* like a Roman Sybil (I opened with Virgil, so it feels like I should follow with Roman mythology) gone corporate: one hand on the gate, the other on the till. No access to the mysteries unless you pay. Silver lining: unlike the ancient Cumaean doorkeeper, this one was happy to accept cards.

I quickly said: "*Oh, then no, thank you.*" She replied with a very sweet, condescending and long "*Oooooooh...*", the tone going up and down like gentle waves Scylla must have generated in the sea (you see, once you open the Pandora box of Roman mythology, it's difficult to close...). Her still sparkling look said what her voice only implied: "*Your choice. Your loss. Goodbye.*" Then she shifted all her attention back to her mobile.

I almost left but then I said: "*I am a Church of England vicar...*" But I could not finish the phrase which would have gone something like "*I am not going to pay to go into a church.*" She very kindly interrupted: "*Oooooooh... then you can come in for free, of course.*" I admit this made me rather happy and satisfied because I could say: "*No, thank you. It's the principle. I don't think you should be charging people to enter a church*" and I could leave.

Now, I am not against tourists paying an entrance fee as they would at any historic building, especially the ones for whom churches are indeed only museums and historic buildings. I am a vicar, I know that we need money to keep our churches open. I am also sure that the dedicated staff at the Temple Church would let anyone in for free if they came to pray. But.

Should we transform the entrances of our churches into ticket selling booths? Or welcome everyone as if they were indeed entering a museum? Should we put anyone into the awkward situation where they have to explain themselves: I am here for prayer (peace, meditation, solace, comfort). Imagine a person with personal grief or loss who only finds the type of churches Temple Church has apparently become?! What message are we giving about God, the Church, faith and Christians in general? Wouldn't a kind, simple request for donations (preferably a written and not a verbal one) be better? People often respond to that way more generously anyway.

Should we allow blasphemous filth, like The Da Vinci Code, be filmed in our buildings? Or *any* kind of concert and music played, activity exercised, play performed in a church?

One of the most boring books of the Bible for a superficial reader must be Leviticus with its endless liturgical rules and cultic laws. Yet, St. Peter in his first letter, written to the newly born Church, quotes from that book: "*It is written, Be holy, because I am holy*" (1,16). The original text says: "*I am the Lord your God [...] be holy, because I am holy. I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy*" (Lev 11,44-45).

I felt nothing of that holiness at the strictly guarded entrance of the Temple Church. There was nothing sacred about it. Nothing that witnessed the Supernatural. It didn't feel like an awesome place and it was not, in my experience, either the house of God or the gate of heaven (Genesis 28,17). Perhaps the only experience I shared there with Jacob was that I, too, was filled with fear. But not, as he was, with a holy fear that fills you when you are touched by the Presence of the Holy One but rather with an anxious fear about the future of the Church. If we, Christians, treat our sacred buildings (and ultimately our Holy God) this way, what can we expect of others? Who could ever find him in a place we block with desks and tills?

And perhaps that is the true fear: that while the descent into a faith hollowed out by commercialism and stripped of any power of witness is all too easy, "*to retrace your steps—as Virgil wrote—and climb again to the upper air: this is the task, this is the toil.*" Then, the day after, I returned to our financially poor and struggling parish church, looked around, and hope returned.

Assuring you of my prayers, I am,
ever yours in Christ,

Fr. Gregory

**Pastor of Gaza church hit by Israeli fire:
‘We are in God’s grace and we persevere in faith’**

by Walter Sánchez Silva for CNA:

ACI Prensa Staff, Jul 21, 2025 / 16:43 pm (CNA).



The pastor of the only Catholic church in Gaza, Argentine priest Father Gabriel Romanelli, on Sunday described the current situation after the church was hit by Israeli fire on July 17,

leaving three people dead and several injured, including a 19-year-old postulant who remains hospitalized.

In a video posted July 20 on his YouTube channel, Romanelli, a priest of the Institute of the Incarnate Word, began by sharing the bad news: “Unfortunately, the war continues,” he said. “Today there were many deaths, people who were even waiting in the north, where there is a great need for humanitarian aid. The numbers are terrible; there is no final figure yet, but they’re talking about dozens of deaths, many.”

Furthermore, he continued, “the heat is oppressive. Today the heat index was 42 degrees [Celsius; 108 degrees Fahrenheit], and they say it will remain that way for days to come. There have been more evacuations in different places throughout the Gaza Strip, and the bombardment continues unabated. We have had nearby bombardment with some shrapnel falling, and unfortunately, we have come to understand what shrapnel means, which is not just something that makes noise but something that damages, wounds, and kills.”

The priest mentioned that he, too, was injured on Thursday by shrapnel from Israeli fire, which was condemned by various Church leaders and by Pope Leo XIV himself, who spoke on Friday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and on Monday with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

The good news from Gaza

Romanelli then said there is good news: “We are in God’s grace, we are persevering in the faith. Many have expressed their closeness in every way because of what has happened here: the attack on the Catholic Church here. The patriarchs have come to visit, as I told you.”

The Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, Italian Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, “is still here, so it’s a blessing for the people to have him, to pray with him, to see him pray, to ask for his blessing, to listen to him, to console him. That he can console us is very gratifying. Everyone’s gratitude is very good news.”

“Other good news is that Nayib, one of our young men in a wheelchair with a lung injury, is doing better. He prays; he’s always been a prayerful man, and he continues to pray and ask for prayers. He’s still hospitalized,” Romanelli said, although the situation at the hospital, so necessary now, “is deplorable.”

“Most of the hospitals in the [Gaza] Strip were destroyed, but Nayib is doing better. His situation is delicate, but he’s doing better,” the priest added.

“Suheil is doing better. He had a major operation and will need to be patient during his recovery,” he continued. “He’s our postulant, whom you know, a great guy. He’s 19 years old and very well-liked here. The young people, the teenagers, the children, the adults are all very moved by what happened, so, well, today we were able to have a conversation. He spoke on the phone, so he’s doing better.”

Praying and working for peace in Gaza and the entire region

The pastor of Holy Family Church also said that “people are still in shock: You can imagine how little time has passed since all of this. The good thing is that we prayed and sang. Although there were bombardments, there has been little flying debris these days, and the children wanted to go out, sing, and yell, so they were seen more in the yard, and they started playing with a soccer ball.”

“And well, we continue to ask you, thanking you for your prayers, and asking you to work, let us all work, and convince the world that peace is possible and necessary,” he continued.

The priest prayed “to the Prince of Peace, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Blessed Virgin Mary for the gift of peace, especially for Gaza and for the entire region.”

“What is happening to Christianity in Nigeria is incomprehensible”

by Ngala Killian Chintom, Special Report 29 Print:

A prominent Nigerian Catholic researcher and criminologist has issued a stark warning: Christianity could disappear from Nigeria within the next 50 years if the persecution of Christians continues and an agenda of Islamization succeeds.

Emeka Umeagbalasi, Director of the Catholic-inspired International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (Intersociety), made these remarks following a recent attack on the Immaculate Conception Minor Seminary in Ivhianokpodi village, within the Auchi Diocese in Edo State.

Deadly attack, kidnapping at seminary

Armed assailants had stormed the seminary on July 10, shortly after 9:00 PM, killing a security guard and kidnapping three seminarians, according to a diocesan statement signed by communications director Father Peter Egielewa.

The remaining seminarians were relocated to “a safe area” while security around the seminary was enhanced, Father Egielewa stated. He added that, unfortunately, “no communication has been had with the abductors yet.”

Police investigating the kidnapping condemned the incident as a “senseless act of violence against a religious institution and innocent young students,” describing it as “not only barbaric, but also a direct attack on public peace and security.”

Bishop Gabriel Ghiakhomo Dunia, speaking from the United States, where he learned of the abduction, urged parents of the kidnapped seminarians to remain calm and not be “crushed by fear, threats, or intimidation.”

He emphasized the broader threat, noting, “These things are not happening only at the Seminary. Some seminarians have even been kidnapped from their homes while on holiday. We must remain vigilant and do all we can to protect them.”

Bishop Dunia extended his “deepest condolences to the family of the gallant officer who was killed.” He expressed surprise that the attack occurred despite enhanced security measures put in place after a previous kidnapping at the same seminary on October 27, 2023. On that occasion, the seminary rector, Father Thomas Oyode, offered himself as a hostage in place of two young seminarians and was released after 11 days.

Bishop Dunia placed the blame for the latest kidnapping squarely on the security forces, stating their failure in duty led to the incident.

The latest attack is just one of several recent deadly incidents. Residents of the largely Christian Bindi village in Plateau state woke up at 3:00 in the morning on July 15 to the deafening sound of gunfire as Jihadist Fulani herdsman struck their village. 27 villagers were killed, many of them burnt alive in their beds.

The killing of Christians has become a daily routine in a country nearly evenly divided between Christians and Muslims.

“What is happening to Christianity in Nigeria is incomprehensible. It’s very, very shocking. And there seems to be no solution,” said Umeagbalasi.

Pinpointing exact figures for Christians killed and kidnapped in Nigeria is challenging due to a lack of centralized data, the complexity of the violence, and widespread underreporting. However, reports from reputable organizations paint a grim picture: since 2009, at least 60,000 Christians are estimated to have been killed.

Open Doors’ World Watch List reports over 13,000 Christians killed for their faith in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023, alongside 12,000 kidnappings. ACLED data suggests an even higher toll, placing the number killed within the same period (2015-2023) at over 50,000.

Intersociety, in a February 2024 report, stated that Nigeria has become “the second deadliest Genocide-Country in the world,” accounting for over 150,000 religiously motivated civilian deaths since 2009. This toll is surpassed only by Syria’s civil war casualties (306,000).

Beyond fatalities, the violence has had a devastating impact: Intersociety’s report also details 18,500 church attacks, 1,100 Christian communities sacked, and over 15 million Christians displaced from their homes since 2009. Additionally, 2,200 Christian schools were destroyed, and approximately 34,000 moderate Muslims also died in Islamist attacks during this period.

A BBC investigation highlights that Nigeria is the epicentre of anti-Christian violence globally, accounting for an estimated 90% of the 9,000 Christians killed for their faith worldwide each year.

A plan to Islamize Nigeria

Umeagbalasi told CWR that, contrary to the generally held narrative that attacks on Christian communities are driven by economic factors, particularly the struggle over land, there is a sinister intent by authorities in Nigeria to Islamize the country.

It started with Boko Haram in 2009, but when Buhari came to power, he elevated the Islamization agenda to state policy, according to the Nigerian criminologist.

“It’s pure religious persecution,” Umeagbalasi said. “If it isn’t the persecution of Christians, tell me how many Emiratis have been killed, how many mosques have been destroyed, how many farmlands belonging to Muslims have been destroyed.”

He accused Nigeria’s former leader, Mohamadu Buhari (who died last week, on July 13th) of recruiting and arming foreign jihadists to unleash the violence Christians are facing today. He said Fulani herdsmen and Fulani bandits are also operating with the complicity of the government of Nigeria.

“Retired Major General Muhammadu Buhari, upon becoming President, did not govern Nigeria with a multicultural, pluralistic, or multireligious vision. Instead, his goal was to Islamize the nation “by hook or crook.” He established agents, brought in external enemies, and recruited ineffective leaders specifically tasked with Islamizing eastern Nigeria, particularly the southeast,” said Umeagbalasi.

He stated that the Buhari administration facilitated the entry of various militias, including the Nasarawa Dokubo Islamist Conquest Volunteer Force, the Mujahideen, jihadist Fulani herdsmen, and other jihadists whose presence was enabled by open Nigerian borders starting in 2017.

“Furthermore, in 2016, the administration was accused of radicalizing the Nigerian security forces, including the police and the State Security Service (SSS), along Islamic lines.”

He pointed out that the Islamization agenda hasn’t changed under Bola Tinubu and noted that the “persecution of Christians is getting worse because it has become an integral project of the federal government.”

Lozano added that in the northern part of the country, where states are governed under Islamic law (Sharia), “Christians face structural discrimination: difficulties building churches, accessing certain rights, or obtaining public positions.

“While this doesn’t always translate into direct violence, it creates a permanent atmosphere of hostility,” she told CWR.

“What is most worrying is that, in many cases, the perpetrators act with total impunity. The violence is reaching levels that border on barbarity: villages razed, entire families murdered, seminarians targeted and kidnapped,” she said.

Umeagbalasi told CWR that the continued attacks on Christians have a chilling effect on evangelism, despite the resilience of Nigeria's Christians.

"No one—be they a bishop, seminarian, priest, or pastor—wants to be killed," he said.



"Yet those perpetrating these senseless killings believe that by eliminating the messenger, they can destroy the message. This belief underpins their actions, and it is a threat that should alarm us all. We did not train priests for martyrdom in this way. We did not ordain seminarians for this fate. We did not consecrate bishops for this end. And we did not call our laypeople to be victims of such violence," he told CWR.

"Losing an innocent soul is a serious threat to the security and safety of others elsewhere. So, it is already psychologically affecting the evangelism and gospel," he added, and explained that in Northern Nigeria, particularly in the hinterlands, "you dare not profess Christianity. The intent of these murderers is to inflict fear on members of the Christian Faith."

"If care is not taken in the next 50 years, by 2075, there will be no Christianity in Nigeria," Umeagbalasi warned.

But Maria Lozano of Aid to the Church in Need notes that despite the persecution, "faith has not disappeared" from Nigeria, but "it is a faith that cries out."

"Like in the Psalms, it is a faith made of lament, of unanswered questions, of a soul that does not understand, but still clings to God. It is a wounded faith, yes, but also a living one. People hold on to the Rosary, to the Eucharist, to the community — because they know that in God lies their only hope," Lozano told CWR.

She underscored the need for Nigeria's Christians to receive needed help in their time of need.

"Even a faith that cries out needs to be supported," she said. "At Aid to the Church in Need, we believe our mission is not only material but profoundly spiritual: to remind them that they are not alone, that their cry is heard, and that the universal Church is with them — even in their darkest hour."

Transformation

Irene Leader writes:

Our personality is not fixed, and it changes with the last life experience, i.e. becoming a parent leads to becoming more conscientious, grown up, responsible, etc. It is possible to change anything about yourself: your behaviour, character, personality. However, there is a version of you in Jesus which manifests as walking in love. Therefore, you can keep your sense of humour and your behaviour but realise that in Jesus you will try not to go around using these to hurt other people.

If you have a fear of man, you will spend your life trying to be what you think everybody else wants you to be – people-pleasing is exhausting! If you have a fear of God (*not the kind that says that God is out to get you*), you will view Him with awe and reverence.

Any changes you make to yourself by effort, will revert when you stop trying. For example, I never wash up and I am constantly nagged by my spouse that this is something we could do together. I do it for a quiet life and the nagging stops. After a while nagging recommences and my frustration increases. *‘What’s the problem now? I am washing up, aren’t I!’ ‘Yes, you are, but I want you to want to wash up.’* The problem is that I have not changed on the inside. Change is temporary; transformation is permanent. Change is external; transformation is internal.

You have heard *‘no pain, no gain,’* but this is not true in God’s economy. We can have a positive, painless, permanent, and effortless transformation. Rom 12,2 says, *“do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* Are you putting on a new creation, which is Jesus, or just a better version of who I used to be?

Renewing the mind is not just what to think, but how to think. I want to process the way God thinks so I need to be adaptable, teachable, humble, flexible, ready to repent. Humility means ready to give up my opinion. Renewing the mind remains a constant throughout life. Change of self leads to a destruction of our self-worth because it is saying that you see something wrong with you that you want to fix. Change is not positive and not motivational; it is manipulation, saying I can’t accept myself as I am, so I have to become another person. Change will fail and work against you; it is saying I don’t believe who God says I am.

Faith says, if you are dedicated to God you need to try harder, pray harder. It also says that changing your behaviour is repentance. However, true repentance is embracing God and making Him your source. It is change of direction into Him, not just change of behaviour.

Faith says you need to feed your spirit, but your spirit is already perfect because you are born again. You become a new man as you die to self: your view, opinion, perception, reality, and take on God's.

Transformation says what do you want to be like? It is subtle, but it is massively different from change. It says, 'I am another person.' I just need to yield to this and then I become that other person. It says I accept who I am in Jesus, and then I become that. Establish it in your heart and it manifests externally by default. Transformation is metamorphosis. It is a process without effort. The caterpillar does not have to imagine being a butterfly, this is inherent.

Heb 4,11 Paul says labour into rest. This is not labouring as striving to bring about change. The labouring is what you are doing internally by study, meditation, transforming the mind. God said to Joshua 1,8 *"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."*

The transformation comes when I see something I want to be. All that you can become is already inside – like the butterfly. When your identity is in Jesus, this gives you your identity, self-image, self-esteem, and self-worth. Dying to self is not something we have to inflict upon ourselves, but look into the mirror and what kind of person do you see? Do you see the Glory of God revealed in you: goodness, mercy, character, and nature?

We do nothing to make the old man die other than embrace the new man. Until you surrender the old man and die to self, you cannot transform. You can do lots of study of the Word, but unless you are ready to give up your opinions you will remain stuck and be unable to hear from God.

Gal 2,20 Every time Holy Spirit takes something of the old me away, it gets replaced with the opposite because I am in Jesus. He gets transformed into my sin and I get transformed into His Righteousness. This is Reconciliation: an exchange. Everything He became that was us (sin) He overcame in the grave to resurrection. Jesus takes on resurrection power and we get transformed into that which He takes on.

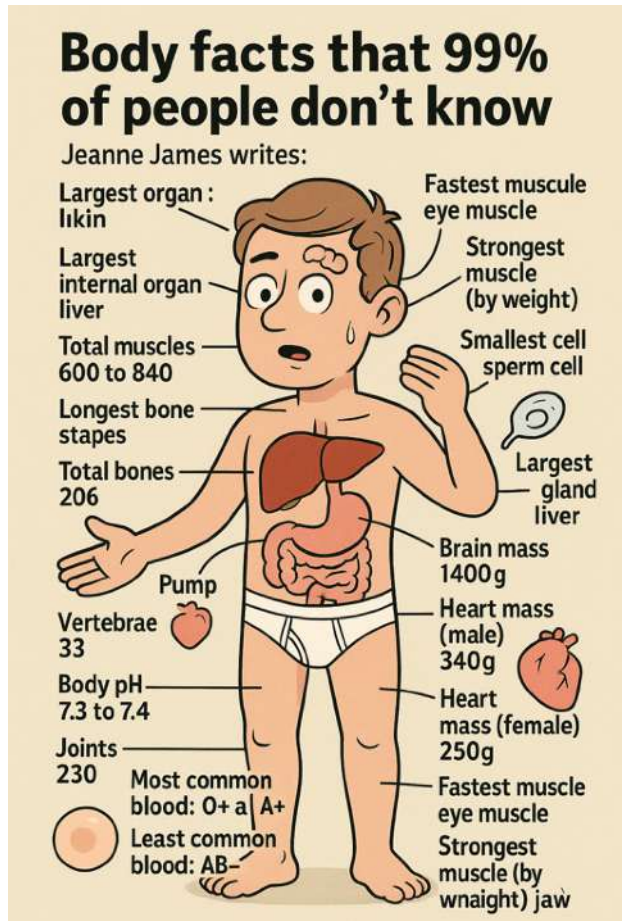
However, we are only being transformed to the degree we believe God's Word and yield to it by perceiving God as He really is. How you interpret the Scripture is the key; not how sincerely you believe it. Remember just before the parable of the Good Samaritan an expert in the Law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life? Jesus replied with this question, *"What is written in the Law and **how do you read it?**"* (Lk 10,25-26)

Positive, painless, permanent transformation happens effortlessly when you abide in God through the Lord Jesus and live His Word written in the Scripture. Be done with trying to change – it won't happen!

Body facts that 99% of people don't know

Jeanne James writes:

1. Largest organ: skin
2. Largest internal organ: liver
3. Total muscles: 600 to 840
4. Longest bone: femur
5. Smallest bone: stapes
6. Total bones: 206
7. Filter: kidneys
8. Pump: heart
9. Vertebrae: 33
10. Body temperature: 37C
11. Body pH: 7.3 to 7.4
12. Joints: 230
13. Most common blood: O+ and A+
14. Least common blood: AB-
15. Largest gland: liver
16. Brain mass: 1400g
17. Heart mass (male): 340g
18. Heart mass (female): 250g
19. Fastest muscle: eye muscle
20. Strongest muscle (by weight): jaw (masseter)
21. Hardest substance: tooth enamel
22. Smallest cell: sperm cell
23. Largest cell: egg cell
24. Skin renewal time: 28 to 30 days
25. Total blood volume: 4.5 to 6 litres



Dorset Historic Churches Trust: Ride and Stride

Gill Cox writes:

We at St. Paul's have been very fortunate in the past to receive generous grants from the Dorset Historic Churches Trust (DHCT) towards repairs to the church. Much of their money comes from the annual Ride and Stride.

It has been a few years since anyone from our congregation has taken part, although we do provide refreshments for those from other churches who visit throughout the day.

It would be wonderful if this year we could muster a group of people to represent St. Paul's to walk, run, ride a bike, a mobility scooter or even a horse if you prefer!

It could be a local route around Weymouth or you could drive further afield and walk a route round less familiar churches in the county.

Half the money you raise will go to DHCT and half to St. Paul's.

The annual report of the DHCT is available to read in church - take a look at pages 11 to 14 to see how much other churches in Dorset raised last year.

There will be more information in the September magazine.

Sponsorship forms are available together with more information from Gill Cox.

It is encouraging, and gives us all an inspiring example, that our sister church, Fleet, participates at the Ride and Stride every year.

Guild of Servants of The Sanctuary

Three Chapters (groups linked to a local church) of the Guild will meet at St. Paul's for their annual meeting on Saturday 23 August. This will also be our parish's "Marian Devotion Day".

11am: Holy Rosary

12pm: High Mass & Procession of Our Lady

Lunch (bring and share; drinks offered by the parish)

3pm: Guild Office & Litanies of Our Lady followed by Benediction

All are welcome and we count especially on the presence of our altar servers and of members of the Rosary Group!

Fleet Old Church: summer evening services



If you ever read the weekly notice sheet, if just by accident, you will know that the Old Church in Fleet has been brought back to life for three evening services during the summer months. Now that only one more is there to go (grab your diary: 24 August, 3pm!), we can say with confidence that these services have been a great success.

Geoff, Fleet's PCC secretary, commented on the success of this "brief but well-planned service at the Old Church." He was very impressed "with [the] church organ and choir playing/singing in the background", jokingly referring to the prerecorded hymns played via bluetooth speakers. With some light disappointment he added: "but try as I may I could not see them..."

His email concludes: "We had a good congregation of about twenty-five which included two couples hiking by and a dog. Please thank those members of St. Paul's who both attended and helped considerably in setting up and breaking down."

Anthea, one of Fleet's churchwardens, writes: "Following the lovely service yesterday at the old church I would like to say thank you to everyone for their support attending the service, providing refreshments afterwards and making the afternoon so enjoyable. A big thank you too also goes to St. Paul's parishioners for their continued support for our little parish in Fleet. It was fabulous to see the church so full and hear the wonderful singing, bringing this little old church back to life.

There were a total of 24 people present, 4 more than the previous service in June, and the total donations received was £93.40."

Please note, the difference in numbers of attendance (Geoff: 25, Anthea: 24) is due to the presence of a lovely dog. The Vicar is still finding ways to officially record his presence in the "Services' Register Book" for posterity...

The service was followed by cakes and refreshments in the churchyard. We hope to see you there in August!

**Calendar, Service times,
and Prayer Intentions**

Anniversaries of death

Order of Morning and Evening Prayer

Calendar for August 2025

FRI	1 st	St. Peter's Chains	12pm
SAT	2 nd	St. Alphonsus Liguori Bishop	9.30am
SUN	3 rd	7TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY	10.30am, 4pm
MON	4 th	St. Dominic	12pm
TUE	5 th	Dedication of S. Maria Maggiore	9am
WED	6 th	Transfiguration	10am
THU	7 th	St. Cajetan	6pm
FRI	8 th	St. John Mary Vianney	12pm
SAT	9 th	St. Oswald King & Martyr	9.30am
SUN	10 th	8TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY	10.30am, 4pm
MON	11 th	<i>Sts. Tiburtius & Susanna Virgin, Martyrs</i>	12pm
TUE	12 th	St. Clare of Assisi	9am
WED	13 th	<i>Sts. Hippolytus & Cassian, Martyrs</i>	10am
THU	14 th	<i>Vigil</i>	6pm
FRI	15 th	ASSUMPTION OF THE BL. V. MARY	6pm
SAT	16 th	St. Joachim, Father of Our Lady	9.30am
SUN	17 th	9TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY	10.30am, 5pm
MON	18 th	<i>St. Agapitus, Martyr</i>	12pm
TUE	19 th	St. John Eudes	9am
WED	20 th	St. Bernard Abbot	10am
THU	21 st	St. Jane Frances Fremiot de Chantal	6pm
FRI	22 nd	The Immaculate Heart of Mary	12pm
SAT	23 rd	St. Philip Benizi (<i>Anointing</i>)	12pm
SUN	24 th	10TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY	10.30am
MON	25 th	St. Louis King	12pm
TUE	26 th	Monthly Requiem	9am
WED	27 th	St. Joseph Calasancius	10am
THU	28 th	St. Augustine Bishop	6pm
FRI	29 th	Beheading of St. John the Baptist	12pm
SAT	30 th	St. Rose of Lima, Virgin	9.30am
SUN	31 st	11TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY	8am, 10.30am

We pray for...

- 1st Dying - *Handel Kardas, Dennis Farmer*
- 2nd Walsingham - *Marlene Clothier*
- 3rd Our Parish - *Claire Humphries, Sylvia Mackintosh, Terry McCarthy pr.*
- 4th Our PCC - *Phyllis Richardson*
- 5th S.P.O.T. & all our volunteers
- 6th Our Benefactors, living and departed
- 7th Priests and vocations - *Charles Bristow*
- 8th Our Churchwardens - *Pennie Fowler, Neville Wathen*
- 9th Our Cell of Walsingham
- 10th Our Parish - *Christine Tolman*
- 11th Fleet - *Betty Scriven*
- 12th All the Oswestry Parishes
- 13th Bishop Paul of Oswestry
- 14th Families - *Mike Anderson, Winifred Queben, Michael Kemp pr., George Ayling*
- 15th Forward in Faith *14th: Mervyn Bown*
- 16th Fathers - *Daisy Tabone*
- 17th Our Parish
- 18th Missions - *Marrion Hain*
- 19th Those who doubt God's love - *Marge Medway, Kathleen Lucking*
- 20th Care homes & hospitals - *Paul Gibbons, Leonard Norris*
- 21st Widows and widowers - *Dorothy Scriven, Jessie Buckingham, Renee Skilleter*
- 22nd Sick - *Frederick Bishop, Agnes Searle*
- 23rd Purity of heart - *John Lucking*
- 24th Our Parish - *Roy Tarrier, Kathy Bray*
- 25th Our Diocese - *May Riggs*
- 26th Departed
- 27th Emergency services
- 28th Our priests
- 29th Persecuted - *Andy Van Dorsten*
- 30th All afflicted by wildfires, heat, drought, floods - *Iris Croxford, John White*
- 31st Our Parish

If there are names missing from the list or you want to add names, please, talk to the Vicar.

Optional private prayer: Open, O Lord, my mouth to bless thy holy Name; cleanse also my heart from all vain, evil, and wandering thoughts; enlighten my understanding and kindle my affections; that I may worthily, attentively, and devoutly recite this Morning Prayer, and so be meet to be heard before the presence of thy divine Majesty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER

V. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

V. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of his Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

V. O Lord, open my lips. R. And my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

V. O God, make speed to save me. R. O Lord, make haste to help me.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Alleluia!

V. Let us rejoice in the Lord; let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him!

R. The Most High King of glory, even Christ: Him let us worship.

V. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth; and the heights of the mountains are his.

R. O come, let us worship him.

V. The sea is his, for who but he made it; and his hands fashioned the dry land. O come, let us worship and fall down, and weep before the Lord who made us! For he is the Lord our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

R. The Most High King of glory, even Christ: Him let us worship.

V. Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts: As in the provocation, on the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tempted me, and put me to the test, and they saw my works.

R. O come, let us worship him.

V. For forty years I loathed that generation, and I said: They always err in heart, they have not known my ways, so I swore in my wrath: they shall not enter my rest.

R. The Most High King of glory, even Christ: Him let us worship.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

R. The Most High King of glory, even Christ: Him let us worship.

HYMN

Light of the anxious heart,
Jesus, thou dost appear,
To bid the gloom of guilt depart,
And shed thy sweetness here.

Brightness of God above!
Unfathomable grace!
thy presence be a fount of love
Within thy chosen place.

Joyous is he, with whom,
God's Word, thou dost abide;
Sweet light of our eternal home,
To fleshly sense denied.

To thee, whom children see,
The Father ever blest,
The Holy Spirit, One and Three,
Be endless praise address. Amen.

The appointed Psalm(s) and Reading(s) follow (please see next page).

1	Psalms 141	Ezekiel 13,1-16 2 Corinthians 9,6-end	5	144	Ezekiel 18,1-20 2 Corinthians 11,16-end
2	142	Ezekiel 14,1-11 2 Corinthians 10	6	27	Ecclesiasticus 48,1-10 1 John 3,1-3
3	106 v. 1-10	1 Maccabees 3,1-12 2 Peter 1,1-15	7	149	Ezekiel 20,1-20 2 Corinthians 13
4	143	Ezekiel 14,12-end 2 Corinthians 11,1-15	8	150	Ezekiel 20,21-38 James 1,1-11

9	1	Ezekiel 24,15-end James 1,12-end	21	17	Ezekiel 43,1-12 Mark 1,29-end
10	115	1 Maccabees 14,4-15 2 Peter 3,8-13	22	19	Ezekiel 44,4-16 Mark 2,1-12
11	2	Ezekiel 28,1-19 James 2,1-13	23	20	Ezekiel 47,1-12 Mark 2,13-end
12	3	Ezekiel 33,1-20 James 2,14-end	24	119 v. 73-88	Ecclesiasticus 3,17-29 Revelation 1
13	5	Ezekiel 33,21-end James 3	25	21	Proverbs 1,1-19 Mark 3,1-6
14	6	Ezekiel 34,1-16 James 4	26	23	Proverbs 1,20-end Mark 8,7-19
15	98, 138	Isaiah 7,10-15 Luke 11,27-28	27	28	Proverbs 2 Mark 3,19-end
16	8	Ezekiel 36,16-36 James 5	28	30	Proverbs 3,1-26 Mark 4,1-20
17	119 v. 33-48	Ecclesiasticus 3,1-15 2 Peter 3,14-end	29	31	Proverbs 4,1-19 Mark 4,21-34
18	14	Ezekiel 37,1-14 Mark 1,1-13	30	32	Proverbs 6,1-19 Mark 4,35-end
19	15	Ezekiel 37,15-end Mark 1,14-20	31	119 v. 161-end	Ecclesiasticus 11,18-28 Revelation 3,14-22
20	16	Ezekiel 39,21-end Mark 1,21-28			

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTUS

Ant: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, alleluia.

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, *
who has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, *
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets God promised of old *
to save us from our enemies, from the hands of all that hate us,
To show mercy to our ancestors, *
and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham: *
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear, *
holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.
And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, *
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
To give his people knowledge of salvation *
by the forgiveness of all their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God *
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, *
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, *
world without end. Amen.

Ant: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, alleluia.

*V. Let us pray. – **Intercessions** are offered for the Church, for the Sovereign (the world), for those in need, and for the dead. Then follows the Collect:*

O God, you declare your almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of your grace, that we, running the way of your commandments, may obtain your gracious promises, and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **R.** Amen.

V. Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

V. The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil, and keep us in eternal life. **R.** Amen. **V.** Let us bless the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God. **V.** And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. **R.** Amen.

Morning Prayer ends with the final Antiphon of Our Lady:

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy; our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

V. Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, who by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, didst prepare the body and soul of Mary, glorious Virgin and Mother, to become a worthy dwelling for Thy Son; grant that we who rejoice in her commemoration may, by her gracious intercession, be delivered from present evils and from everlasting death. Through the same Christ our Lord.

R. Amen

EVENING PRAYER

V. The Angel of the Lord brought tidings to Mary.

R. And she conceived by the Holy Ghost.

V. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

R. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it unto me according to thy word.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt amongst us.

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

V. Let us pray. We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts, that as we have known the Incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of

an angel, so by his Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of his Resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. **R.** Amen.

V. O God, make speed to save me. **R.** O Lord, make haste to help me.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

R. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Alleluia!

HYMN

All ye who would the Christ descry,
Lift up your eyes to him on high:
There mortal gaze hath strength to see
The token of his majesty.

Here is the King the gentiles fear,
The Jews' most mighty King is here
Promised to Abraham of yore,
And to his seed forevermore.

A wondrous sign we there behold,
That knows not death nor groweth old,
Sublime, most high, that cannot fade,
That was ere earth and heaven were made.

'Tis he the prophet' words foretold,
And by their signs shown forth of old;
The Father's witness hath ordained
That we should hear with faith unfeigned.

Jesu, to thee our praise we pay,
To little ones revealed today,
With Father and blest Spirit One
Until the ages' course is done. Amen.

The appointed Psalm(s) and Reading(s) follow:

1	Psalms 4	1 Samuel 9,1-14 Luke 22,1-13	7	11	1 Samuel 12 Luke 22,47-62
2	7	1 Samuel 9,15-end Luke 22,14-23	8	12	1 Samuel 13,5-18 Luke 22,63-end
3	107 v. 1-12	Genesis 50,4-end 1 Corinthians 14,1-19	9	13	1 Samuel 14,1-15 Luke 23,1-12
4	9	1 Samuel 10,1-16 Luke 22,24-30	10	108 or 116	Isaiah 12 2 Corinthians 1,1-22
5	10	1 Samuel 10,17-end Luke 22,31-38	11	18	1 Samuel 14,24-46 Luke 23,13-25
6	72	Exodus 34,29-end 2 Corinthians 3	12	22	1 Samuel 15,1-23 Luke 23,26-43

13	24	1 Samuel 16 Luke 23,44-56	23	38	1 Samuel 23 Acts 3,1-10
14	72	Proverbs 8,22-23 John 19,23-27	24	119 v. 49-56	Isaiah 30,8-21 2 Corinthians 9
15	132	Song of Solomon 2,1-7 Acts 1,6-14	25	39	1 Samuel 24 Acts 3,11-end
16	25	1 Samuel 18,1-6 Luke 24,36-end	26	40	1 Samuel 26 Acts 4,1-12
17	119 v. 17-24	Isaiah 28,9-22 2 Corinthians 8,1-9	27	45	1 Samuel 28,3-end Acts 4,13-end
18	26	1 Samuel 19,1-18 Acts 1,1-14	28	46	1 Samuel 31 Acts 5,1-11
19	29	1 Samuel 20,1-17 Acts 1,15-end	29	47	2 Samuel 1 Acts 5,12-26
20	33	1 Samuel 20,18-end Acts 2,1-21	30	49	2 Samuel 2,1-11 Acts 5,27-end
21	35	1 Samuel 21 Acts 2,22-36	31	119 v. 81-88	Isaiah 33,13-22 John 3,22-36
22	37	1 Samuel 22 Acts 2,37-end			

Each reading ends with these words:

V. This is the word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

MAGNIFICAT

Ant: Jesus said to his disciples: Arise, and be not afraid, alleluia.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,+
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;*

he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed;+
the Almighty has done great things for me*

and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him,*
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm*
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,

Casting down the mighty from their thrones*
and lifting up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things*
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,*
to remember his promise of mercy,
The promise made to our ancestors,*
to Abraham and his children for ever.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

Ant: Jesus said to his disciples: Arise, and be not afraid, alleluia.

*V. Let us pray. – **Intercessions** are offered for the Church, for the Sovereign (world), for those in need, our Benefactors, and for the dead. Then the Collect is said:*

O God, you declare your almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of your grace, that we, running the way of your commandments, may obtain your gracious promises, and be made partakers of your heavenly treasure. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **R.** Amen.

V. Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

V. Let us bless the Lord. **R.** Thanks be to God. *V.* And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. **R.** Amen.

Optional private prayer to be said after Evening Prayer: To the Most Holy and undivided Trinity, to our Lord Jesus Christ Crucified, to the fruitful Virginity of the most blessed and most glorious Mary, always a Virgin, and to the holiness of all the Saints be ascribed everlasting praise, honour, and glory, by all creatures, and to us be granted the forgiveness of all our sins, world without end. Amen.

Litanies of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Lord, have mercy on us.

R. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us.

R. Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, **R. Have mercy on us.**

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, **R. Have mercy on us.**

God the Holy Spirit, **R. Have mercy on us.**

Holy Trinity, one God, **R. Have mercy on us.**

Heart of Mary, **R. Pray for us.**

and so we respond to each invocation:

Heart of Mary, like unto the Heart of God,

Heart of Mary, united to the Heart of Jesus,

Heart of Mary, instrument of the Holy Ghost,

Heart of Mary, sanctuary of the Divine Trinity,

Heart of Mary, tabernacle of God Incarnate,

Heart of Mary, immaculate from thy creation,

Heart of Mary, full of grace,

Heart of Mary, blessed among all hearts,

Heart of Mary, throne of glory,

Heart of Mary, most humble,

Heart of Mary, burning Sacrifice of Divine Love,

Heart of Mary, fastened to the Cross with Jesus Crucified,

Heart of Mary, comfort of the afflicted,

Heart of Mary, refuge of sinners,

Heart of Mary, hope of the agonizing,

Heart of Mary, seat of mercy,

Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world,

R. Spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world,

R. Graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world,

R. Have mercy on us, O Lord.

Immaculate Mary, meek and humble of heart.

R. Make our hearts like unto the Heart of Jesus.

Let us pray. O most merciful God, Who, for the salvation of sinners and the refuge of the wretched, wast pleased that the Most Pure Heart of Mary should be most like in charity and pity to the Divine Heart of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, grant that we, who commemorate this sweet and loving Heart, by the merits and intercession of the same Blessed Virgin, may merit to be found like unto the Heart of Jesus, through the same Christ Our Lord. **R. Amen.**

A Trinity of Chocolate Biscuits

Gerald Duke writes:

Three unconnected events came together to prompt another essay. A short while ago, I had the pleasure of a chat with Father Gregory at the vicarage with a cup of tea and overly generous plateful of chocolate biscuits. Although pressed hard, I stopped myself at just three! As this essay turned out, it was probably significant.

At one point, I raised my concern that my occasional ramblings in *High Tide* might be too off the wall and not fit in with our Christian way of thought. I was told I would receive a call from him in that event. Before leaving, my passing mention of the Gospel of St. Peter simply led to a blank stare and no call has been received so far.

On the same day, with nothing better to do, I switched on Netflix and the most recent version of *Robin Hood* popped up. It's the usual tale, but rather darker story, of the evil Sheriff of Nottingham, a scrumptious Maid Marion, Friar Tuck, Little John and of course, Robin Hood. During the film, I was particularly struck by one dismissive comment by the Sheriff to the Mohammedan, Little John. He said, "Your problem John, is your dogma. All that faith, all that...belief". His comment intended to highlight the Sheriff's cynical and pragmatic worldview in contrast to Little John's more principled one.

The third prompt had been a reference to dogma in a book I am slowly reading by Paul Tillich called *A History of Christian Thought* which is becoming quite dog eared.

The word "dogma" like "dogmatic", comes with many negative connotations. It can evoke images of rigid rules, stifling independent. Yet, within the Christian tradition, the assertion that "without dogma, there can be no faith" holds true. Dogma, far from being an arbitrary set of dictats, acts as the foundational architecture upon which the very possibility, coherence, and communal expression of Christian faith are built.

Firstly, dogma provides the essential content of faith. Our faith is not a vague feeling or a generalised spirituality; it is faith in something specific. It is faith in God as Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is faith in the Incarnation of Christ, in His atoning death and resurrection, and in the promise of eternal life. These are not optional extras; they are the core beliefs that define Christianity. Without the dogmatic articulation of these truths, faith would dissolve into individual interpretations, losing its distinct identity and shared purpose. Dogma, therefore, provides the "what" of faith, giving it substance and direction.

Secondly, dogma acts as a collective memory, safeguarding the essential truths entrusted to the Church. The Christian story is two millennia old, passed down through apostles, martyrs, theologians, and ordinary believers. Dogmatic statements, forged in councils and refined through centuries of theological reflection, serve as guardrails, preserving the core message from distortion or dissolution. They ensure consistency with the original revelation. Without this doctrinal framework, each generation would be left to invent its own Christianity.

Furthermore, dogma provides a common language and framework for communal worship and identity. Without this shared dogmatic ground, the Church would cease to be a cohesive body, devolving into isolated spiritual practices with no common creed leading to fragmentation and the eventual erosion of the unique narrative and claims of the Gospels. Indeed, the various versions we recite of the Creed clearly spell out our belief.

The four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are generally believed by scholars to have been written in the late 1st or very early 2nd century, closer to the time of Jesus and the apostles. Gospels like Peter and Philip, on the other hand, are largely dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries, long after the apostles' deaths. This immediately raised questions about their authorship and direct connection to eyewitness testimony. For the early Church, the connection to an apostle or their direct companion was a crucial measure for authenticity and authority.

Many of the non-canonical gospels, including those attributed to Peter and Philip, contain Gnostic teachings. Gnosticism was a diverse set of religious and philosophical systems that differed significantly from what became orthodox Christianity. Key Gnostic beliefs that conflicted with emerging Christian dogma include:

From the gospel of St. Peter, the belief that Jesus only appeared to have a physical body, but was actually pure spirit. A “spiritual” Jesus whose body was an illusion would undermine the significance of his suffering, death, and literal resurrection.

From the gospel of St. Philip, portrayals of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Particularly where it elevates Mary Magdalene to a unique position of spiritual understanding beyond the other disciples, which challenged the established apostolic authority and hierarchy.

The problem posed by the Gnostics was that of authority, the question whether the Holy Scriptures were decisive as against the teachings of the Gnostics. The Gnostic teachers said Jesus had passed on secret insights to them during the forty days after his resurrection when he was together with his disciples. Against this notion the anti-gnostic fathers had to establish the

doctrine of the Scriptures. To overcome this struggle with Gnosticism, the church must always return to the classical period, namely the apostolic period of Christianity.

To this end, the four canonical Gospels were widely circulated, read in churches, and accepted as authoritative across diverse Christian communities from an early period.

The non-canonical gospels, while perhaps popular in certain Gnostic circles, did not enjoy the same widespread acceptance and were often actively condemned as heretical by leading Church Fathers precisely because their content deviated from the developing orthodox understanding of Christian faith.

In conclusion, while the pursuit of a personal relationship with God is central to Christian experience, this relationship does not exist in a vacuum. Dogma is not an adversary to genuine faith but its indispensable partner. It is the skeletal structure that gives shape to the body of belief, the historical anchor that prevents drift, and the unifying language that nurtures community. To advocate for faith entirely devoid of dogma is to support a faith that is ultimately formless, rootless, and incommunicable – a faith that, paradoxically, struggles to exist at all. To repeat my earlier words, “without dogma, there can be no faith”.

On a lighter note, I see that “the Book of Mormon” is still playing at the Prince of Wales theatre in London. Having raised that thought, the full title of this church is “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” I have to wonder if we looking at modern day Gnostics. Regardless of that, I recommend a trip to anyone who would like a good laugh and witness a total breakdown of religious dogma and irreverence. Shall we organise a trip?

“This little child Jesus when he was five years old was playing at the ford of a brook; and he gathered together the waters that flowed there into pools, and made them straightway clean, and commanded them by his word alone. And having made soft clay, he fashioned thereof twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when he did these things (or made them). And there were also many other little children playing with him. And a certain Jew when he saw what Jesus did, playing upon the Sabbath day, departed straightway and told his father Joseph: Lo, thy child is at the brook, and he hath taken clay and fashioned twelve little birds, and hath polluted the Sabbath day. And Joseph came to the place and saw: and cried out to him, saying: Wherefore doest thou these things on the Sabbath, which it is not lawful to do? But Jesus clapped his hands together and cried out to the sparrows and said to them: Go! and the sparrows took their flight and went away chirping. And when the Jews saw it they were amazed, and departed and told their chief men that which they had seen Jesus do.” (Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, II. 1-3)

Feast of the month: St. Oswald King, Martyr

9 August

Over the course of history, we see God raising up leaders in various times and places so full of faith in him that an entire people is brought to revival. Such was the case of King Oswald.

A Life Shaped for Mission — Oswald was born in 604 AD to Æthelfrith, the king who had first unified Northumbria and to Acha. Æthelfrith died in battle against Raedwald of East Anglia. Raedwald then installed Edwin, Acha's brother, as the new king, forcing Oswald and his family into exile.

Oswald found refuge in the Scottish kingdom of Dál Riata, where he remained until Edwin's death. During that time, Oswald converted to Christianity, likely influenced by his time at the monastery on the Isle of Iona, and gained a reputation as a skilled soldier. Over the years, he grew in faith, and the strong Christian influence of his time in Ireland would equip him perfectly to bring Christianity back to his homeland.

Evangelising a Kingdom — At age 30, Oswald ascended the Northumbrian throne. However, he did not try to make Northumbria Christian by force. Instead, he knew that the only way to establish Christianity in his kingdom in a way that would last was to convert the peoples' hearts.

Shortly after becoming king, Oswald asked the monks of Iona to send missionaries to establish a Christian community in Northumbria. Iona first sent a bishop named Cormán. However, his harshness alienated the Northumbrian people. When Cormán returned to Iona, complaining about the Northumbrians' obstinance, another of the monks, the Irish-born Aidan, offered that the bishop should have "followed the practice of the Apostles, and begun by giving them the milk of simpler teaching, and gradually nourished them with the word of God..." It was clear that Aidan himself should take up the mission.

Oswald & Aidan — After being consecrated a bishop, Aidan and twelve others travelled to Northumbria in 634. They established a monastic cathedral on the Island of Lindisfarne, which Oswald apportioned to them as a base of operations. With Oswald's support, Aidan and his missionaries achieved great success in spreading the Christian faith.

However, Oswald was not one to sit by and let the monks do all the work. The historian Bede informs us that Oswald accompanied Aidan on his missionary journeys. He acted as an interpreter when the bishop was

preaching since Aidan did not know English well, and the king had learned Irish during his exile.

The Servant King — Oswald also practiced the radical benevolence characteristic of Christ and his apostles, even appointing a servant to see to the needs of the poor. Once, when Oswald was dining with Aidan with a silver plate of rich delicacies before him, a servant alerted him that there was a crowd at the door begging for alms. Oswald had the food before him on the table distributed to the crowd and the silver plate broken up and done likewise. Impressed with Oswald's act of charity, Aidan grabbed the king's right hand, saying, "May this hand never perish!" According to Bede, that hand remained incorrupt long after Oswald's death.

Oswald died in 642 AD in battle against the Mercians at the Battle of Maserfield. Realizing that his forces were overwhelmed and that he would be killed, Oswald knelt and prayed for the souls of his soldiers. The Mericans struck Oswald down while he prayed, dismembering his body and placing his head and limbs on stakes. According to legend, a raven carried Oswald's arm from the battlefield and dropped it in an ash tree, which became the namesake of its surrounding area in Shropshire, called Oswestry (from "Oswald's Tree").

Oswald's Legacy — Oswald was quickly venerated and popularly recognized as a saint in the years after his death. He stands to us as an example of a leader dedicated to Christ who led his people into a revival of Christianity, not by force, but through the preaching of the gospel and living out his faith in generous actions toward those in need. Although he amassed a larger geographic territory than any of his predecessors, life reflected a King and a Kingdom still far greater than his own. As St. Bede records:

"Oswald gained from the one God who made heaven and earth greater earthly realms than any of his ancestors had possessed; in fact, he held under his sway all the peoples and kingdoms of Britain, divided among the speakers of four different languages: British, Pictish, Irish, and English. Though he wielded supreme power over the whole land, he was always wonderfully humble, kind, and generous to the poor and to strangers."

May St. Oswald's legacy remind us that, in the service of Christ, no service to our fellow humans is beneath us, no matter our stature. We do well to learn from the example of service, evangelism, and prayer he gave until his last minutes of breath when the great King of Northumbria met the King of Kings he had long served.

Know the Bible! - The Book of Chronicles 1 & 2

While they are two separate books in our modern Bibles, Chronicles was originally written as one coherent story. It was only divided later due to scroll length. In the traditional Jewish order of the Bible, Chronicles is the very last book because it summarizes all of the Jewish Scriptures. It begins with the first word Adam, the name of the first human character in the beginning of the Scriptures, and it goes all the way through to the last paragraph announcing the return of Israel from exile.

Background — Now, we don't actually know who wrote the books of Chronicles, but we can tell from certain details that it was written by somebody who lived a couple hundred years after the Israelites returned from the Babylonian exile. For this author, Jerusalem and the second temple were rebuilt some time ago but things were not going well. The great prophetic hope was that the city and temple would be rebuilt. God would come to live among his people, the messianic king would come, and all nations would come together under his peaceful rule. It was very clear to everyone in Jerusalem, including this author, that none of this had happened yet. In response, the author of Chronicles has shaped the ancient stories of David and Solomon from the past to provide a message of hope for the future.

1 Chronicles 1-9: Genealogies of Kings and Priests — 1 Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogies, long lists of names and family lines. While you read these, you may think that it's all very boring, which is kind of true, but these chapters are actually really important! Through them, the author is summarizing the entire Old Testament storyline by naming all the key characters.

The author has shaped these genealogies to emphasize two particular lineages connected to the two main themes. The first is the line of the promised messianic king. Lots of space is dedicated to tracing the line of Judah leading to King David, to whom the messianic promise was given. That line is then traced forward to the author's own day. The other family line that gets a lot of emphasis is that of the priesthood, the descendants of Aaron, the first high priest.

1 Chronicles 10-29: King David as the Messianic Ideal — Most stories in these chapters will be familiar from reading the book of Samuel but there are some very important differences. First of all, the author leaves out all the negative stories. We are left only with the stories that portray him as a good guy. There is also new material that shows David in a very positive light. There's a large block of chapters (22-29) in which David makes preparations for the first temple, arranging for builders, Levites, and choirs. The author

even goes so far as to portray David as a figure like Moses. God gives David the plans for building the temple, just as he gave plans to Moses for the tabernacle.

The author is not trying to hide David's flaws. He knows that anyone can go and read about them in the books of Samuel. Instead, he is trying to portray David as an ideal king whose figure points to the future messianic king. This is why Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the coming messiah as "a new David" (Jer 30,9; Ez 37,25).

The author of Chronicles, at the same time, definitively highlights the fact that neither David, Solomon, nor any of the kings from that line were the messianic king. But when that messiah does come, he will be a king like the idealized David of these stories. For the author, these classic stories of David from the past are really glimpses into the future Kingdom of God.

2 Chronicles 1-36: Judah's Kings and an Unfinished Story — As we continue into 2 Chronicles, we find a lot of overlap with 1 and 2 Kings, but, once again, there are a few key differences. The author has left out all the stories of the kings in northern Israel and instead continues his focus on the line of David. There is a lot of new material and stories about these Davidic kings, and the author specifically highlights those who were obedient to God and gained success and blessing. The author also supplies new stories about kings who were unfaithful to God. Those who failed to follow the Torah and led Israel into idol worship faced horrible consequences and ultimately brought about the Babylonian exile. And it was all a mess of their own making.

This whole section becomes a series of character studies for later generations. The author wants all of God's people to learn from their family history and become faithful to their God and to the Torah.

The book's conclusion is unique, too. At the very end of the book, Cyrus, the king of Persia, tells the Israelites that they can return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He says, "*Whoever there is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up...*" (36,23).

That's actually how the book ends, with an incomplete sentence (it's even more awkward in Hebrew than in English). Now, of course, the author knows about the first return from exile and the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah, but clearly, in his view, the prophetic hopes of Israel were not fulfilled in those events. This incomplete ending shows that the author's hope is set on yet another return from exile, when the Messiah will come to rebuild the temple and restore God's people.

So the books of Chronicles, the final books in the Jewish Scriptures, end by pointing forward. It concludes the Old Testament as a story in search of an ending.

Elisha, the bears and the 42 “children”

In last month’s article I promised to look into 2 Kings 2,23-25 in more details. Here it is then!

Where — Bethel (meaning “the House of God”) was a place of special sanctity. It was where God revealed himself to Jacob and where Jacob dedicated himself to God (Gen 28,10-22). In the northern kingdom of Israel Bethel had become a particularly scandalous centre of idolatry. We have then a city which is doubly apostate, having apostatized once from Jacob’s original dedication of it in Genesis, and now again under Israel’s wicked kings.

When — We are at the very beginning of Elisha’s ministry who begins it both with a sign of blessing (healing Jericho’s water) and then of judgment (the bears). Notice how Elisha foreshadows Jesus. After being anointed at the Jordan by John the Baptist, Jesus, clothed with the Spirit, goes out performing signs: his first two signs are changing water into wine (John 2,1-11), as Elisha purified the water of Jericho, and then pronouncing judgment on the temple, the house of God, “Bethel” (John 2,13-22), just as Elisha brought judgment to God’s corrupted “house of God” at Bethel.

But, destroying children? — The common impression is of a crotchety prophet against a horde of schoolchildren. But is this the case? The terms used in our story are the same used in Genesis to describe men old enough to go with Abram on a military expedition (14,24) or for a man old enough to seek marriage (34,19). They are also used of Joseph (37,30) who was seventeen at the time; or of King Rehoboam’s counsellors (1Kings 12,10-14). In general, both terms often simply indicate someone under the authority of another, either parents or masters, and so children are obviously included here, but the terms also describe people we would consider to be young adults.

Likely then, these “youths” of Bethel were at least adolescents, some maybe as old as 19 or 20. And while it is not stated, we might also be meant to assume that these were not simply village children, but acolytes or stewards of the idolatrous Bethel shrine. A gang of young thugs, at least 42 of them, against one man, threatening his very safety.

And what of the old prophet himself? Well, he was not older than 30 at the time of our story, and probably in his twenties. So we do not have a grumpy old man versus third-graders. A young man against other, slightly younger men, is more probably what is described.

Finally, the text does not say that the 42 were killed – it just says they were mauled. The Hebrew word translated ‘mauled’ might indicate less serious injuries. The ultimate outcome of the miracle was to break up the

gang, frighten the offenders and the entire village, and punish them not so much for insulting Elisha as for their impiety.

Making fun of his bald head? — Elisha may have actually been bald. Or he may have shaved his head in mourning for Elijah, his spiritual father. So were they just mocking his appearance? Or more seriously, were they mocking his grief? There is reason to think that there was more to it than either of these. Their jeering was actually a challenge.

If these youths are indeed associated with idolatrous worship, there is probably an echo of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18,20ff, where Elijah mocks them (1 Kings 18,27) and challenges them to a show off power between the gods.

The youths' taunt, if we can paraphrase it, was something like, "Hey, your master is gone, how powerful are you now without him? Why don't you 'go up' like he did?" The presumption of the youths and their blaspheming the Holy Spirit brought down judgment upon them. It was not petty, and it was not trivial.

Why bears? — One of the curses described in Leviticus 26 as judgment upon Israel's covenant breaking is this: "*And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you and destroy your livestock and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted*" (26,22). Wild beasts bereaving them of children. This is what happened to the people of Bethel.

Interestingly, in the earlier story about the water of Jericho, the water is described as making the land "unfruitful," which is literally the word "bereaved," same as in Leviticus 26:22. When Elisha heals the water he declares that it will no longer cause miscarriage (2 Kings 2,21). The incident at Bethel thus contrasts directly with the blessing and healing given to Jericho. Taken together, the stories of Jericho and Bethel indicate the opposite consequences of receiving or rejecting the bearer of God's word and Spirit.

In coming years, the prophet Hosea would denounce the continuing idolatry of the northern kingdom. It seems that bears mauling forty-two of Bethel's youths was not warning enough, because God would say through Hosea soon after: "*I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open*" (13,8). The disturbing act of judgment through Elisha was a warning, and God was patient to give Israel many more decades before they were destroyed and scattered completely by the Assyrians.

So is the story funny, or embarrassing? The fact is, the story does not reflect poorly either on God or on his prophet. Instead, it reflects poorly on those who despise God's word and the ones carrying his Spirit.

The Psalms

Psalms 51: Create in me a clean heart, O God

Psalm 51 stands out among the seven penitential psalms as the most profound expression of repentance in the Bible. It articulates, with extraordinary honesty, the inner turmoil of a person who is fully conscious of their sin and seeks reconciliation with God. The psalm's beauty lies in its unflinching candour—it does not shy away from the gravity of guilt but instead channels it into a sincere cry for mercy, forgiveness, and inner renewal.

Unlike other biblical laments that focus on material suffering, Psalm 51 concentrates entirely on the soul's relationship with God, making it deeply personal and timeless. It takes us to the core of the human heart and lays bare the painful yet liberating process of penitence.

Structure and Flow — Though the psalm does not follow a rigid literary form, it unfolds in a clear sequence. It begins (vv. 1–3) with an invocation asking for forgiveness, grounded in the psalmist's acute awareness of sin. This is followed by a confession (vv. 4–6), then a heartfelt plea for cleansing and transformation (vv. 7–13). The final verses (vv. 14–17) move into praise and thanksgiving, while verses 18–19, likely a later addition, reflect on the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Temple worship.

Depth of Sin, Height of Grace — What makes Psalm 51 so compelling is its intense focus on the nature of sin and its effect on the faithful. The psalmist feels crushed not by social consequences or physical suffering, but by the spiritual weight of his offence against God. His sin is not just personal failure—it is the disruption of his relationship with God.

This is especially evident in verse 3: “*I know my misdeed, and my sin is ever before me.*” The poet's grief is rooted in self-knowledge and spiritual sincerity. He does not deflect blame or minimise his wrongdoing. Instead, he fully owns it, aware that his only hope lies in God's mercy.

The psalmist understands sin primarily as something directed against God: “*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned*” (v. 4). This is not to say others weren't hurt, but rather that sin's deepest reality is its offence against the Creator. Sin, in this context, is more than a moral failing—it is a theological rupture, a breakdown in our relationship with God.

Yet even in despair, the poet discerns divine purpose. The grief he feels is not meant to crush him, but to awaken him to the majesty of God and the seriousness of grace. His misery becomes a vehicle for spiritual transformation. As verse 6 suggests, God desires “*truth in the inward being,*” and it is this inner reality the psalm explores.

Renewal from Within — The heart of the psalm lies in the request for renewal: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me*” (v. 10). This isn’t a prayer for a fresh start in superficial terms. It’s a desperate cry for inner rebirth, for a radical reordering of the self. The psalmist recognises that he cannot generate this change on his own. Human willpower alone is not enough; only God can cleanse and renew the heart.

This transformation is described not as a one-time event but as the beginning of an ongoing relationship. The poet yearns for the Spirit of God, not just for forgiveness but for sanctification—power to live rightly in the future. The psalm thus presents a rich theology of repentance: it is not just sorrow for sin, but the beginning of new life. It is penitence that looks forward, full of hope, grounded in grace.

Joy, Witness, and Worship — True penitence naturally leads to joy. In verse 8, the poet longs to hear “*joy and gladness*” again. In verse 13, he resolves to teach sinners God’s ways—a sign that repentance, when real, overflows into witness. The forgiven person becomes an ambassador of mercy. The experience of God’s grace does not end in private relief, but moves outward in praise and mission.

And so the psalmist commits to praising God openly, recognising that even his ability to worship is a gift. Importantly, he also challenges the notion that God desires sacrifice above all else. What God truly wants, he declares, is “*a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart*” (v. 17). This is one of the most spiritually mature insights in all of Scripture.

Rebuilding and Cultic Reflection — The final two verses (18–19), which refer to rebuilding Jerusalem and offering sacrifices, appear to be a later addition. They shift the psalm’s focus toward communal and cultic restoration. While possibly added in the post-exilic period, they still reflect the desire that forgiveness should lead not only to personal but also to national renewal.

The Spiritual Heart of Sacrifice — Psalm 51 is a model of penitence because it embraces the full depth of sin while lifting the soul toward God. It offers no excuses, no self-justification—only brokenness, honesty, and longing. In doing so, it reveals that the sacrifice God most desires is not material or ritual, but spiritual: the surrender of the proud self.

In the end, the psalm elevates the idea of sacrifice into a deeply personal and inward act. The transformation it speaks of is not symbolic but real. For Christians, Psalm 51 resonates powerfully with the New Testament vision of grace, renewal, and rebirth. It remains one of the most intimate, searching, and hopeful prayers ever composed—a true treasure for all who seek to walk humbly with God.

Symbols of Early Christian Art: the Fish

Based on prof. László Vanyó's book

The fish (Greek: ἰχθύς, *ichthys*) holds deep symbolic meaning in early Christianity. The word itself became an acronym in Greek: *Iēsous Christos Theou Huios Sōter*—"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour." This acrostic was widely known among early Christians as a concise confession of faith, and it frequently appears in the writings of the Church Fathers.

The symbolism of the fish is tightly connected to water and thus also to baptism. Tertullian, for example, wrote, "We are little fish, born in water," meaning we are born anew through baptism into the life of Christ. The association between fish and rebirth appears also in St. Ambrose, who likened the fish to living beings that emerge anew through the waters of grace.

In Jewish tradition, water was often depicted as being full of fish, and in ancient art, fish frequently symbolized the abundance of life. In Christian iconography, fish came to represent not only life but also "living water." Baptismal fonts, particularly in Roman catacombs, often featured fish motifs to emphasize the connection between water, rebirth, and divine life.

But the symbolism of the fish extends beyond baptism to include the Eucharist. In several early frescoes, fish are shown alongside baskets of bread, alluding to the miraculous feeding of the multitudes and to the heavenly banquet of believers. After His resurrection, Christ ate fish with His disciples (John 21,9), reinforcing the fish as a sign of the Risen Lord's presence and fellowship.

The ICHTHYS Monogram and Its Variants — The *ichthys* monogram gained significant popularity in Syria and was also used in Palestine, especially from the mid-second century onward. The monogram had variant forms. One version emphasized Christ's divine nature (*Jesus Christ, Son of God, Word*), while another highlighted the Cross (*Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour, Crucified*). These were used during or after the Arian controversies, either to stress Christ's divinity or to emphasize His crucifixion.

The *ichthys* symbol often appeared in decorative borders in churches, especially around the apse or on mosaic floors. The motif of the fish, or "ikhthys," was frequently paired with water imagery, waves, or a meander-pattern border symbolizing eternal life. In this context, the fish became a rich symbol of the Cross, life, abundance, and divine sustenance.

Fish in Pagan and Jewish Thought — In Greco-Roman culture, fish had diverse meanings. Occasionally, fish were offered to pagan gods, though they played a relatively minor role in myth. In Egypt, fish were generally

considered unclean, yet still served as symbols of fertility and abundance. To the sun god, one specific kind of fish was declared “clean” and sacred. Among Jewish traditions, fish also appeared as symbols of eternity and divine provision.



The dolphin, in particular, held special meaning. It was associated with helping sailors and guiding souls of the dead. In early Christian art, dolphins appear guiding the deceased to the afterlife, serving as a symbol of Christ who leads the faithful safely across the sea of death to eternal life.

Mosaics from the fifth and sixth centuries show dolphins in baptismal contexts. For example, in Kélibia (Tunisia), a dolphin is pictured with three fish beneath it, interpreted as a symbol of Christ with the baptized (*see image*). In another mosaic from Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Peter is depicted drawing in a full net with a dolphin beside him—signifying Christ assisting in the apostolic mission.

Sea Creatures, Death and Resurrection — Early Christian art also depicts sea monsters such as the *ketos* (Greek for sea dragon or whale), symbolizing death, chaos, and the grave. This imagery was often associated with the story of Jonah, which foreshadows Christ’s death and resurrection. The fish or sea monster became a symbol both of destruction and of hope, as Jonah’s release pointed to new life. The motif of the whale with an open mouth—prepared to swallow—is drawn from Isaiah 5,14, “*Sheol has enlarged its throat and opened its mouth without measure...*” This image found its way onto sarcophagi and Christian tomb art. Later medieval art continued to use sea dragons to depict hell and the realm of the dead.

The Ever-Wakeful Fish: Spiritual Vigilance — Interestingly, fish also became associated with *watchfulness*. In ancient belief, fish were thought never to close their eyes, even while sleeping. This “sleepless eye” made the fish a symbol of eternal life, spiritual vigilance, and insight into divine mysteries. In the writings of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and in early Christian homilies, the fish’s wakeful eye was interpreted as the “spiritual eye,” gifted in baptism. The Christian is to be ever alert, attuned to God, and alive in the Spirit—like the fish in the deep: ever-swimming, ever-seeing.

Creation Unfinished

by John M. Grondelski, Ph.D. for CWR

On July 21, 1925, a Tennessee jury convicted John Scopes of teaching evolution. The “Scopes Monkey Trial” has gone down in American history as the caricature of the fight between “religion” and “science.” Why a caricature? Because there is no such conflict. Catholic theology long recognized that the Book of Genesis teaches that God created, not how God created. Those are two separate questions. That said, Catholics need to be wary about the residual effects of the Scopes Trial on our thinking. Catholic theology recognizes that creation is an unfinished work. And that it is unfinished in at least five ways.

It’s unfinished, first and foremost, because God sustains His Creation. Creation is not a self-standing reality. There is no necessary being in this universe other than God. There is no self-sufficient source of life and being other than God. Without God supporting and keeping things in existence, they would collapse into nothingness.

A second unfinished aspect of creation is that God Himself did not make the world complete. He made a world in which man is called upon to “co-create” with Him. He does that in two ways: by giving personal life through procreation and by work. Genesis itself makes this clear when man receives a two-fold blessing and command: be fruitful and have dominion over the world. Such co-creation means that God’s creative work also continues through secondary causes, such as human ingenuity, which turns that piece of copper ore into the copper wire that lights and powers a wooden house made from the forest.

A third unfinished aspect of creation is that creation has its own “autonomy”; it has its own rules and laws by which it normally functions.

A fourth unfinished part of creation is God’s work of salvation. Creation and salvation history are not divisible. It’s not that God created, then man sinned, and God had to conclude, “I was planning to rest after creation, but now I’ve got to do something about ‘salvation,’ too!” No. Creation was always part of salvation history. Man is the only creature God wanted for his own sake. Salvation—being on proper terms with God—was always in the cards from the moment God decided “let us make man in our image” (Gen 1,26).

That is also a telling warning to moderns who sometimes elevate creation over man and get excited about a world of babbling brooks and forests primeval, but deplore the human “carbon footprint.” That approach separates creation from salvation, and it is not what God intended.

That unfinished nature of creation and its relationship to salvation leads us to a fifth point: Providence. Judaism and Christianity are religions in which God is active in history. Human history is not closed off from God. It is not a sealed compartment, run only by its own rules, from which God is excluded.

I mention Providence specifically because I fear some Catholics might imagine God was active back in Biblical times, but that “modern people” certainly don’t believe He does much these days or that miracles still occur.

Part of that bias comes from deism, which had no small influence on the Anglo-American mind. Deism basically maintains that God created a universe that is now self-managed by its own rules. He then removes Himself from the picture, allowing the cosmos, like a self-correcting clock, to run itself.

Deism, of course, was always a counterfeit Christianity because it inherently rejected the Incarnation. But the belief that God became man is the supreme proof that God intervened in human history. At least Thomas Jefferson was honest in his cut-and-paste New Testament when he turned Jesus into a Semitic Confucius who pronounced morally elevated sayings but never multiplied any loaves, cured any sick people, or rose from the dead.

One motive for deism was to account for apparent order and design in creation. The Divine Clockmaker built a precisely tuned device that runs according to internal rules, said the deists. Nonsense, claim many critics today, who insist that it is all happy and accidental coincidence, the entire Shakespearean opus fortuitously pounded out by monkeys at typewriters. Intricate order and harmony are happy “accidents.”

To this, I offer the explanation I used to give my undergraduates. Simply put: you did not have to be. If you were not conceived when you were, you would be a different person. But on that night, your dad could have had the flu or your mom a headache. Millions of sperm began a race, only one possibly achieving their mutual goal. And that was assuming there was an ovum to fertilize there anyway, as during most of the month, your mother is infertile. Then that fertilized ovum had to implant, a phase in which there are losses often not even known. And survive for nine months.

All those things took place for you to be you, and that’s a pretty tall miracle. So, you need to decide: are you the human equivalent of Shakespeare-by-monkey, the serendipitous result of a lucky spermatozoon? Or do you exist because there was a plan by Someone for you to exist, without which creation would be less complete? In other words, do you believe that the unfinished, intervening element in human history (including your own) is not a blind force, but Love (1 Jn 4,8)?

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The Vicar's day-off is Tuesday. With enquiries about Baptisms, Weddings, Banns, or Funerals, please, contact the Vicar. If you are in hospital, live in a care home, or are house-bound and you wish to receive Holy Communion and/or Anointing, or to make your Confession, please let the Vicar know and he will be very happy to visit you.

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