

Fr Hoyal Writes

IS GOD RESPONSIBLE?

The devastating earthquake in Peru, an exceptional hurricane in the Caribbean, terrifying forest fires in Greece, fatal monsoon floods in South Asia. Earth, air, fire and water – the elements of the ancients, but at their most violent and destructive.

All this we saw in the space of rather less than a month, to say nothing of particularly grim carnage in Iraq and Afghanistan and, here at home, a disturbing spate of gun crime.

I don't suppose we can blame God too much for what we do to each other, though we often do. But what about natural disasters? How can a good God bring into creation a world where so many suffer and die helpless against great forces of nature?

It is an issue that continues to be debated. In our own decade the horrific Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 brought it to the fore, and there was much theological and philosophical soul-searching. Here we were helped by a thoughtful paper from Kim Taplin, Chaplain of Clifton College.

The classic example of a natural disaster that impressed itself deeply on people's abiding consciousness is surely the huge earthquake that struck Lisbon on All Saints Day 1755. In itself not the worst event of its kind, it nonetheless shook the faith and thinking of millions quite as much as it rocked the city of Lisbon.

The Lisbon earthquake and the tsunami and fire that followed claimed somewhere between 60,000 and 100,000 lives. The sudden, near-total destruction of a devoutly Catholic capital city along with most of its churches, and on an important holy day, provoked much questioning.

The disaster radically shook the prevalent notion, ridiculed so effectively by Voltaire in *Candide*, that all is for the best in the best possible of all worlds.

Voltaire's famous poem about the Lisbon disaster* rehearses with irony a number of excuses made for God by contemporaries:

“The disaster is the inevitable outcome of eternal laws wisely set in place by a God who is both good and free.” But is it really true that only a distressingly ambivalent world like ours could be the appropriate milieu for the spiritual and moral development of free human souls? Just how good and how free can God be, in this case?

“Or it is a work of divine vengeance for the sins of the victims.” But why should Lisbon be destroyed when Paris, no more virtuous, blithely dances on? And how might such an act reflect upon the nature of God's goodness?

At his most satirical in the preface to his poem, Voltaire scoffs at philosophers who argue that all is really for the best. “So everything is fine, then, because heirs of victims will now benefit financially, masons will prosper rebuilding houses, creatures feeding on corpses buried in the debris will thrive. In any case, the disaster is the necessary outcome of necessary causes. Besides, an individual's particular misfortunes are nothing since he is ultimately contributing to the general good of mankind.”

Voltaire vehemently rejects all such sophistry, insisting that we attend with compassion to the sheer awful suffering that so-called acts of God inflict upon victims, regardless of age, virtue or belief. Perhaps he is nearer to being a deist than a theist. But he is not an atheist. His scathing lifelong criticism of the Church was not a rejection of God.

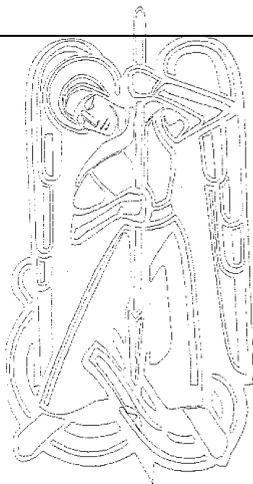
In relation to human suffering he writes in his poem: “One day all will be well; that is our hope. That everything is essentially all right to-day;

that is illusion and folly.” I certainly join him in the last sentiments, combining as they do both faith and realism.

For myself I would want to say this: “By all means, think as hard as you can about the theology and the science of it all, though beware of shallowness. But more important still, care. See you do all you can to alleviate suffering. Hold on to God tenaciously despite suffering, whether yours or another’s. Have a good hope in a good and holy God, for there is no other hope. Remember the Cross.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard Hooker".

- Google *Poème sur le Désastre de Lisbonne*



Feast of Michaelmas

**FRIDAY
28TH SEPTEMBER**

10.30 am LOW MASS

7.30 pm FESTIVAL MASS

Guest Preacher

The Revd David Ritchie

Vicar of St Mary Magdalene's, Stoke Bishop

Party afterwards

***Come and join us celebrate the
Holy Angels***

Churchwarden's Notes

1/7/7 Happy birthday to us, aka, 'The day that the rains came down ...'
Our cake was sponge and Swiss rolls, with the Piper windows executed in cream swirls and the spire a Flake bar. Nice one, Muriel!
I took my pink baseball cap to keep the sun off in the garden and used it to reach to the car without getting my remnant of hair soaked.
I've lost a hymn. I keep singing in my head, 'Thine the glory, thine the power, the high renown, the eternal crown'. WHAT IS IT??

7/7/7 From today's collect, 'we give into your hands our unfinished tasks, our unsolved problems, and our unfulfilled hopes'; hmmm, very apposite, but I suspect we have to retain some level of responsibility for the day to day maintenance of the fabric.

8/7/7 Congratulations, Charlotte and Mark, and welcome to Isobel.

And to Hannah and Jason and Charles.

And to the grandparents!

Fortunately the Baptistery shows signs of becoming a swimming pool, so communal christenings are no problem.

29/7/7 My New Colleague is no better than the last one; he positively races for my back pews. I managed to save one row today, but only by treading on various toes and nearly playing dominoes with the communion queue.

My I put in a plea that we avoid orange inserts in the pew leaflet? The contrasting colours of flyer and Father Fuchsia's front reminded me of a very colourful ice cream I once ate in Prague. There were no ill effects, but I did need shades.

A doughty mountaineer replaced our dead bulbs in the pedant lighting (so called from one of my characteristic typos in the Minutes), and, talking of shades, one lamp shade come away in 'is 'and. I suppose the Sunday after this comes out, you'll all spend Mass gazing up to heaven trying to count which chandelier is short.

1/8/7 Too much going on ... especially re maintenance. I have assignations with window cleaners, electricians, boiler engineers, sound engineers; shortly I shall summon a plumber and I await a missive from a lighting expert. They keep the tree surgeon from me, dunno why. At work, this following sad tale caught my eye:

Winterbourne Churchwardens' Book, 1827. It cost £65 16s 8d to repair the spire when it was struck by lightning, and by 1835 these repairs had proved unsafe and it had to be rebuilt for £387 10s 6d, so no economising on the lightning conductor, Norman.

There was apparently also a note in the Old Book about payments for 'sparrowheads'; if I have much more mischief from magpies not to mention mess, I too may offer a bribe.

They didn't seem to get floods though.

2/8/7 Slightly uneven division of goodies in this morning's prayers. 'The priests I will again feed with plenty, and my people shall be filled with my blessings.' One would *tend* to expect it to be the other way round; but it's OK, the Lord relents, 'Thus says the Lord: my people shall be filled with my good things.'

3/8/7 Not but what I could do without too many good things for a while! I even turned down the offer of a sticky bun this morning. However, later in the day I had an offer I could not refuse. 'Come and sample the new Communion wine', said the Sacristan. So I did. I'd always wondered about the glasses on the shelf, and now I know why they are there. It's very nice. Blackcurrant overtones, smooth, a nice clear red –

and 15% proof. Of course, it was unfortunate that as we left the Church clutching an empty bottle Fr Boss should walk in.

4/8/7 Congratulations to Roger and Andrea: a lovely matrimonial mass, a fantastic frock, and nine more bottles in my black bin.

5/8/7 Today Father-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named preached to us. However, as the slow readers among you – and those who are having to share the family copy of HP7 – may not yet have finished the relevant text, I shall not discourse in detail upon his departures from the original. Instead, I shall endeavour to rebut the miseryguts known as Ecclesiastes, ‘I gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labours under the sun; this also is vanity’. Vanity as in emptiness, as any fule kno. Right. There’s St Ignatius: last Tuesday, he said we were to ‘toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward’. There’s St Paul, ‘I have fought the good fight to the end, I have run the race to the finish.’ Newman admits it’s a troublous life, but he still expects that we keep on until ‘the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done.’ And I fear the Monstrous Regiment of Pedants will have to help me with the source, but who can argue with ‘Laborare est Orare’? Cheer up, Ecclesiastes. Have a stiff cup of tea and a sticky bun.

No more twist. I have spent a very Victorian afternoon. I read the *Church Times*, I sat quietly in the garden and I have hemmed two purple passion veils for the Sacristan. I only had a small amount of thread of the true Lenten shade, and I really thought that as it was in A Good Cause it would, like the widow’s cruise {attaboy, Pedants all!} hold out. But no. So I finished in funereal black. Tough.

Young Master Hugh has acquired a diminutive sausage dog called Nicholas. I was presented, my fingers were sniffed, and I was rejected. He is very attractive. Nicholas, that is.

Not content with teaching Roger to steal from me, Norman has taken to advancing down his pew and Waiting Patiently until I let him out. I'm not slow, I just go with the flow.

To Walsingham tomorrow. Have a nice week, and be good.
6 – 10 August The Walsingham Pilgrimage

This year's theme was the visual battle between Fuchsia – or puce, or magenta – and scarlet. Father Fuchsia's cincture against his canonical scarlet piping is bad enough, but add to this the scarlet seat belts against his magenta shirt, and against the deep pink T shirts so common this year among The Laity, and top it off with Plus Andrew's Fuchsia zucchetto against a scarlet chasuble, and my dear, one positively quivered with colourful overload.

Monday supper was a sustaining meat pie, after which Miss Thea 'Let's play Tag' Griffiths suggested we play tag. As the rules changed every ten feet or so I failed to catch her, and an Episcopal Voice suggested I go somewhere quiet and read Horace. Given the Walsingham well, I countered with 'O fons Bandusiae', but in the circumstances 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius' would have served equally well (sorry!), as the Shrine is both surviving and thriving. It is very beautiful. There is a path with lavender and catmint and rosemary and marjoram (that colour again) which has to be smelt to be believed. Especially when several well grown clergy kneel all over the herbs during Stations. On Tuesday we had tea chez Benton at Docking. A horse was being shod next door, which was very interesting but smelly. Burnt hoof and buttered scone. Yummy. And mugs of tea. Then we had a cold drink as (a) 'It's so hot' and (b) 'The sun is always over the yardarm somewhere.'

We had several good sermons. One referred to the company kept by the BVM as 'apostolic layabouts'. At the Yoof Mass we were urged to read a biblical text and pray as directed, thus avoiding our personal 'neurotic

shopping lists.’ +Andrew urged us to identify and consider the subtle changes our pilgrimage would have brought about in us. Hmmm.

Lighter moments included the glowsticks which lit the late night Youth Pilgrimage Benediction. Mine was blue. A choral companion had orange, and FF had Pink. ‘Let’s play Tag’ accompanied the Stations with reverence and a skipping rope, which aping her elder sibling she swung as a thurible. The concelebrated Mass was preceded by a visit from an apparent archimandrite wearing a velvet tea cosy in – for a change – a wondrous deep purple. The server was a Lord Voldemort look alike, but he had a lovely smile so maybe he is nice after all.

Apart from the outing to Docking we visited the Slipper Chapel; Holt, which boasts the Fuchsia Beauty Parlour, a real second hand book shop and a magnificent delicatessen; Little Snoring, which boasts a Romanesque tower entirely detached from its Church and a harmonium which the AHE Director of Music was encouraged to play; Wells next the Sea, where LPT and I paddled and the Iron Vicar had an ice cream; the Orthodox Church at Great Walsingham. Of wildlife there was little. Lots of white butterflies, two peacocks and a painted lady, two sorts of owl (unseen but clearly heard: Eeewhip and Hoo – oo – oo add a certain something to Benediction), and a pheasant which visited the shrine on Friday morning.

The food is very good. The fried bread, the cold beef and the sausages were all excellent. It would be nice if there were mugs for tea. Three cups sounds greedy. Lavender ice cream from the farm shop is out of this world. There was a small miracle, when the corkscrew failed so we opened a bottle of wine with a wooden spoon. **DON’T ASK.** Overheard, but not, alas, one of us, ‘I had a port and brandy last night. Just one.’ Sadly, none of the AHE/ASC team would stick at just one.

We had lovely weather, cool evenings and warm days, and everywhere was green. Flowers, especially on the old railway track and in the garden, were mostly on the pale blue of wild scabious to the deep pink of

wild marjoram spectrum. There were white daisies and scarlet poppies, but nature is a more accomplished couturier than Mr Gamirelli. Another contrast was the Holy House in the early morning, cool and peaceful, and the Holy House by early evening, ablaze with candles and votive lamps.

It was a lot of fun, and I'm watching out for that 'subtle change'.* Don't miss it. In 2008, be there or be camel coloured trimmed with taupe. C U!

PS Next year I shall exert myself to attend properly a service which my choral companion and I found only by accident, morning prayer intoned by the orthodox priest of the Former Stationmaster's House, with the refrain, 'O sweetest Jesu, save me'.

15/8 Feast of the Assumption. To Church for the sermon. Father F's faithful following supported him sporting suitable shades of shall we say magenta, for a change? The T shirt in the most lurid pink I could find has an elephant on its front, which I admit briefly gave me pause – until I realised the elephant was Wearing a Zucchetto!! Beat that. And watch out for the T shirt.

19/8 Sunday. To Church. All very nice.

Last week grew a really good crop of psalms. Someone once told me that Hamlet was full of quotations. So are the psalms; David must have been cribbing ... This is one of the saddest I know, 'Neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me: for then peradventure I would have hid myself from him. But it was even thou, my companion: my guide, and mine own familiar friend. We took sweet counsel together: and walked in the house of God as friends'. But then ready to cheer me up came 'Moab is my wash-pot: over Edom will I cast out my shoe'. Of course, if it had been both shoes he could have recycled them, instead of being so untidy.

20/8 Monday More cheery psalms. 89/90 tells us 'Our span is seventy years, or eighty for those who are strong.' And speaking as an ancient

historian (but not as ancient as the psalm suggests, right?) I felt that the Gadarene swine reading was not entirely straightforward. First, I cannot blame the locals for asking Our Lord to move on: the loss of 2000 prime porkers must have been an economic blow. Second, what were they doing with 2000 pigs? They could not eat them, so was there a massive pigskin industry?

* Fingers crossed, I may have spotted it

21/8/7 To the shops, for a chair. I'll tell you why, as we didn't find what we want, and you may be able to help. Me and the Editor have been commissioned to purchase or otherwise obtain a comfortable low chair for mothers with very small babies to sit in upstairs in the Lady Chapel, a nursing chair in fact. So we toured Habitat, Pier, Laura Ashley and a very expensive shop next to Wet and Windy in Clifton Heights. We were challenged on several occasions; I suppose we looked a bit odd, taking turns to sit in armchairs thoughtfully cradling cushions, but we brazened it out. Some had seats so long that I couldn't touch the ground; some had backs which provided inadequate support; some had price tags that would have sent the Treasurer ballistic – a fun spectacle, but dangerous. The most comfortable was upholstered in a liturgical magenta that was simply OTT. The most sensible shape and price was made of rattan, but we felt that given the proclivities of ASC something so flammable was asking for trouble. So the Editor is lending a family heirloom, but suggestions are welcome. So are offers, if anyone else has something suitable in the garage!

I think I'd better stop; five pages is excessive. One final gem. We Wardens have been tidying the Parish Office. We decided to move the Giant Bear onto the Carpet .. and already he has a friend! He has been joined by Grandma Bear! Welcome, Mrs Bear.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BVM

Sermon preached by Canon Brendan Clover at All Saints 15 August 2007

Concepts have a history. They don't just come out of the blue. It may take decades, even centuries, for a concept to develop and pass into common use. It may then become so apposite that we may wonder how we ever did without it. Moreover, no concept ever stands on its own. Every concept has its place in a whole network, some concepts almost synonymous and interchangeable, others divergent and contradictory.

The doctrines of the Catholic Church did not come out of the blue either. Even truths 'divinely revealed' did not drop down from the sky: it took time for the disciples to register that Jesus was raised from the dead; it took much longer, and included decades of intense and sometimes acrimonious argument, before the doctrine that God is three persons in one nature emerged.

Certainly this happened with the doctrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. What was held to be true about her death from the time of the infant church was not put into doctrinal form until 1950. Pope Pius XII, in the apostolic constitution *Muni-fi-cen-tissimus Deus*, proclaimed the long held belief in the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a dogma of the Catholic faith: *'The immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory'*.

That is to say, on completing the course of her earthly life (the text deliberately leaves it open whether her soul was separated from her body in death), Mary was immediately taken into a new relation to God: *'It seems impossible that she who conceived Christ, bore him, fed him with her milk, held him in her arms and pressed him to her bosom, should after this earthly life be separated from him in either body or soul'*, so the text goes on, spelling out the reason for Mary's uniquely privileged destiny.

The idea that a human being might be *'assumed body and soul into heavenly glory'* also did not drop down from the sky. On the contrary, there was significant biblical precedent. Enoch was 'taken' by God (Gen 5:24). Elijah 'went up by a whirlwind into heaven' (2 Kings 3:11-12). Late first century

Jewish writings attributed 'ascents into heaven' to a number of holy men, variously including Adam, Abraham, Levi, Ezra, Baruch and Isaiah. The fact that the place of Moses' grave was unknown (Deut 34: 5ff) was taken by some to mean that he too had been translated bodily into heaven.

So the concept of a person being taken up into heaven existed long before Christianity, not to mention before Catholic and Orthodox beliefs about the Blessed Virgin Mary began to flourish. The claims just mentioned may be dismissed as pious legends, and even as totally fictitious. Even so, such beliefs were obviously trying to say something about the eternal destiny of certain individuals who had played particularly significant roles in the history of salvation. The impossible possibility, as it seems to many people today, was always perfectly intelligible.

Whatever one makes of such speculations, the fact that a possibility is intelligible is one thing; that the possibility was realized in the case of the Virgin Mary is another matter. The early history of the belief (it has to be admitted) cannot be reconstructed: the documentary evidence is non-existent or too fragmentary. In 451, however, at the Council of Chalcedon, the Emperor Marcian and his wife Pulcheria asked (as such persons are wont to do) for the remains of the Virgin Mary. When her tomb was opened, the Bishop of Jerusalem told them, it was found to be empty.

As Pope Pius XII noted, *'the Church has never looked for the bodily relics of the Blessed Virgin, nor proposed them for the veneration of the people'*. It is remarkable that, even in the medieval heyday of the cult of holy relics, no remotely plausible claims were advanced on behalf of the Virgin's bones.

Why centuries of celebrating the feast of the Assumption culminated with the dogma in 1950 is, of course, no easier to account for than any other contingent event in the course of history. In retrospect, however, it seems deeply appropriate. In solemnly recognizing Mary's unique destiny the Catholic Church reaffirmed the inviolable dignity of every human person, over against the horrendous degradation of so many in the Second World War.

No such consideration is likely to have been uppermost in the mind of the Pope or of anyone whom he consulted. Yet, just as concepts ripen over the years, and seem in retrospect timely and completely appropriate, the proclamation in 1950 of the dogma that celebrates the Blessed Virgin Mary's uniquely sacred destiny may surely be understood as a prayer of intercession on behalf of millions of human bodies desecrated in the camps, and as an outcry in the name of all that is holy against widespread denial of the sanctity of the human body.

And ever so since: for within the violence and poverty, the addictions to drink and drugs, the human trafficking, the murder and the abuse the Church needs every opportunity to speak about the dignity and sanctity of the human body.

Mary's heavenly body: an inspiration and a challenge.

IN THIS MONTH ... AUGUST 1879

A new debt of £800! What is to be done?

A story with a meaning.

From the top of the stairs in a very high garret a sharp angry voice was heard crying out, "Sarah Ann! Where are you? Come in out of the street directly! Come in, do you hear me? Sarah Ann, come in." And a little thin, pertinacious, creaky voice was heard answering out of the court below; "I hears you, Mother! But the more you calls the more I shan't come! And the mother said "It is of no use talking to that girl. She will have her own way, and so she will have to sleep in the street." And so the door was slammed fast and Sarah Ann found herself shut out, much to her surprise, when she made sure of getting into the House as usual.

Can our Readers interpret our parable? The Editor of the Magazine has been crying out ever so long from his garret, "Do make the Sunday Collections larger. If you do not take care, All Saints' Church will have to be shut up for want of money." Who is like Sarah Ann? How would the All Saints people like to see their church shut up? So the Editor does not mean to cry out any more. Sarah Ann must choose for herself. Under these circumstances the Editor has much pleasure in publishing the following address:

TERRA INCOGNITA, July 1879

Dear Mr Editor,

This is a most delightful place. There are no Churches here open now. They have all been shut up. You cannot think how we are enjoying ourselves. We have just hit upon a plan for shutting up All Saints in the same way. Only think what an interesting Ruin it would make, and how touching it would be to tell the History of the old days when its Services used to be carried on years ago, and how still, and how quiet, it has all become now, just like the beautiful moss grown walls near us now! Nothing can be easier than to manage this. There are so many people that love All Saints, and delight in its Services, and would do anything that they can for it. They are always saying so. Now do persuade them to give as little as ever they can in the Offertory, and to keep the collections down as low as possible. Perhaps you could persuade them to give nothing at all: but, if they would not go as far as this, ask them to agree together to keep the Collections down as low as £10 a Sunday, and then I think we shall have a fair chance of shutting up the Church. Have 800 or 900 numbers of your Magazine printed, and see what you can do before we come back. Your words go a great way. We have the honour to remain,

Your obedient Servants,

The Vicar and Churchwardens of All Saints.

The Editor will not add a word of his own. It is very flattering to him to hear what his friends say of the influence of the Magazine, but he thinks that the eloquence of this Letter is more meaning than his own. He has tried hard to get people to make the collections larger, quite in vain. He feels sure that the letter of the Vicar and Churchwardens will soon make the Collections quite as much as they could wish.

COMING EVENTS

BRISTOL HALF-MARATHON

Sunday 9 September. Andrew Morgan is kindly running on behalf of The Leprosy Mission. Do sponsor Andrew and support TLM's wonderful work in countries where leprosy is still a fearsome reality. See atrium leaflets.

“RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY LIFE IN TO-DAY’S WORLD”

Themes of the 2007 Annual Lectures arranged by Bristol Church Union.

“Benedictine Wisdom for To-day” - 7.30 pm Thursday 13 September at The Apostle Room, Clifton Cathedral - talk by the Rt Revd Dom Richard Yeo OSB, Administrator of Buckfast Abbey.

“Religious community in the City” - 7.30 pm Tuesday 20 November at The Randall Room, All Saints Clifton – talk by Sr Annaliese Brogden CSC, of the Community of the Sisters of the Poor in St Paul’s, Bristol

COTSWOLD CHURCH CRAWL

Saturday 22 September. All Saints (and friends) group is visiting Owlpen and Selsey. These are two Art & Crafts churches in Gloucestershire. For the more intrepid there is also a third church to visit in Ozleworth Park. WE are leaving All Saints at 10 am. Please bring a picnic lunch. Tea and cakes will be provided on our return at the Badman home. If you wish to join us please sign the porch notice at church (or ring Liz Badman 0117 9734156).

EVENING BBQ



From 5.00 pm Saturday 15 September at The Shrubbery, Frenchay Hill – the wonderful garden of Don & Lynn Box. The evening is in aid of All Hallows Restoration Project. Tickets via Fr Richard or ring 9568539.

"DELIGHTING IN THE CARE OF CREATION"

Major diocesan day conference on environment, climate change etc 10.30 - 3.15 Saturday 13 October at The City Academy (Lawrence Hill). Delegates required from All Saints. Please see (pink) leaflets in atrium.

**EXPRESSIONS OF HEALING
& WHOLENESS**

Bristol Cathedral 10.30-3.30 Saturday 20
October.

Main Speaker: Mike Hill, Bishop of
Bristol. See porch notice for details.

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Do You Need a Carer?

My name is Roy. I have worked in the Care Sector for 7 years and have NVQ Level 2 in Care. I am 44, and I have worked in care homes in both London and Bristol. I am trustworthy and have references. I have a quiet calm personality and I like to help people keep their independence. I am not a car driver. I would consider full or part-time work, privately or in a care home. Please ring 07891492598.

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