

ALL SAINTS NEWS

12th January 2025
The Baptism of Christ

Institutional Sin; An Exploration

I'm taking up my pen to write in response to my colleague, Fr Paul Tiernan's, article in last week's ASC News. I am filled with admiration for him in tackling (in print) a subject which is regarded by many as so fraught with danger that most avoid it. His article was the written equivalent of tiptoeing through a mine-field. The purpose of this piece is not particularly to take issue with Fr Paul, but to explore something of the complexity in which the Church, and our wider culture, finds itself, and to highlight dilemmas which raise some philosophical and theological questions, which are very challenging to answer in practice.

I have been deeply blessed by evangelicalism over the years, notwithstanding my commitment to the catholic heritage of ASC. At university, I was a member of the Christian Union, and am of the same age as many of John Smyth's UK victims. I know at least three of them personally. The Smyth scandal is but one of a series of scandals which have and will continue to impact the Church of England, over its failure to expose and bring abusive behaviour to justice. At least two more are 'in the legal pipeline' with forthcoming cases due to be heard in 2025, which will open the media storm again in this coming year. The biggest question currently facing the Church – and now, this week, also the Government - is what appropriate action should be taken by powerful institutions after it is discovered that they failed to take reasonable steps to protect the vulnerable who were abused, nor did they respond in a listening, prompt and sympathetic way to those victims after the historic abuse had been unmasked?

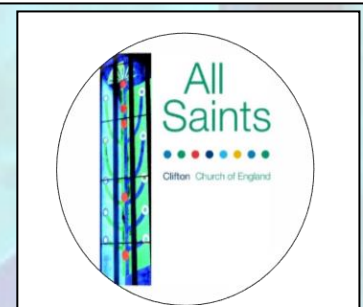
Abuse of a minor is probably one of the most heinous sins human beings are capable of. It is a betrayal of their innocence and vulnerability, and harms the person permanently. It is an inversion of the natural order of a just society and, therefore, it is no surprise that Jesus specifically condemned it so vehemently. Most serious sins are to do with injustice, so the injustice that occurs in the abuse of a child or vulnerable adult is great. What do we do when injustice occurs? The problem with sins like abuse is that the effects of the injustice are so difficult to un-do – indeed, they are probably impossible to un-do. In these kinds of injustice, any just society has to assess the appropriate response – not in order to 'reverse' the original injustice, as that is impossible – but to (a) communicate to the individual victim society's horror at what they have suffered, (b) to affirm its nature as a gross injustice, (c) to meat out an appropriate punishment of the offender, and (d) to demonstrate, by corporate action, its

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The views and opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the All Saints Church community.

own learning through making changes to any ways where its own flawed institutions and structures allowed the injustice to occur and be perpetuated. This last point is of particular importance in cases where victims were either not believed, ignored, or sidelined. This is where a compounding, institutional, sin follows on from the original injustice, so that the initial injustice is perpetuated and accentuated. It comes about when an institution has competing motives for covering the abuse up. In the case of the Church, this was to do with the risk of reputational damage, were the abuse by its clergy/leaders to be made public. In the present case affecting the government, it was to do with the risk of fanning the flames of wider racial hatred. In the case of any institution, that failed to act in the face of the injustice, an additional sin is committed against the victim and the injustice is no longer solely from an individual abuser, but now also from the institution which fails (often repeatedly) to take the necessary steps, ((a) to (d) that I mention above) to act appropriately in the light of the original injustice. In the case of abuse, this is devastating because it further isolates the victim, and amounts to acting in tandem with the abuser, and the original abuse.

This takes us into complex territory to do with institutional sin, which challenges historical approaches in theology and moral philosophy. What should a society, or an institution in society, do when it is found culpable of injustice, or (in more theological terms) guilty of institutional sin? I'm going to stick to theology, as I am not a moral philosopher. When an entire society or large institution is found guilty, the appropriate theological action is a rite of corporate penitence: crying out to God for forgiveness. This rite, in its turn, (a) acknowledges the injustice, and (b) proclaims the degree of falling short – injustice – perpetuated by the institution's actions or inaction. Surprisingly, the Church has very few examples in its history where it has gone in for an act of corporate repentance (and where such rites of corporate repentance have occurred, it has not been by the Church before wider society, but by wider society on the advice of the Church – such as during times of plague). So currently, a penitent Church has very little to draw on by way of theological and liturgical resources.

And what about punishing the offender, when it is a society or institution which has sinned? This can be done by means of internal discipline structures and, where appropriate, by criminal prosecution – but this can take time, as it is governed by legal process, the need to establish facts and degree of culpability, and gives the accused the right of a defence. It is in this context that we can examine the action of resignation – a voluntary laying down of power and office. This is not the same as discipline, but is more like part of the ritual of repentance. It is not a legal act, because it doesn't address the *level* of culpability, but is a ritual act – and therefore only really forms parts (a) and (b) in my sequence. It is in this context that we have to interpret the action of Archbishop Justin's resignation. That it was done in the context of the Church, which has a conceptual and linguistic framework for such a ritual also meant that it was liable to be misunderstood and misinterpreted by a wider, less religious, society. The press, some of the victims, and the wider public tend to equate resignation with punishment. This in turn raises the judicial, rather than the ritual, question of whether the 'punishment' of resignation has adequately matched the crime, and so the call for 'heads to roll' could potentially never end.

Theologically, the problem is that in many societies and religions, a sacrifice is made as part of the rite, but by its very nature it is a limited act. It can only express the cosmic disruption that injustices like abuse create – it's a problem that, ultimately, calls on God to do what we cannot do – make things right. But practical justice also must follow rituals – this is the message ringing out from the Old Testament prophets. For Christians, the only fully effective sacrifice we can plead is that of Jesus on the cross – this is expressed ritually in the Eucharist; but for a wider world, this ritual is increasingly obscure, barely understood, and hidden away. So the call for 'contemporary' sacrifices will continue – until the wrath of society is somehow placated. But what, then, of the original victims? Part of the land which lies between the ritual and the judicial lies in public restitution: which, in the case of victims, means payment of compensation – and expressly not the kind of compensation which is associated with legal gagging clauses. Compensation does not un-do or reverse the original evil, but it does recognise the need to rebuild a just (though not necessarily friendly) relationship between the abuser (in this case, the Church as an institution) and the victim. But of course, today, compensation is not an easy process, at least from the legal point of view, and is fraught with potential to un-do progress towards relational justice made on other fronts. The judicial evaluation of

appropriate compensation should precede any ritual of repentance, although the payment of that agreed compensation could form part of the follow-up after the ritual.

The nature of sacrifice, and the sacrifice of Christ, point to the fact that the damage and injustice caused to victims can never be 'un-done', although that does not mean that the Church should give up on the need to find ways to express its penitence in rituals that victims can understand and relate to. But what is all the more important is not to try to do what we *can't* do, but to do what we *can* do. That is (c) discipline and punishment – mediated by systems of justice and (d) demonstrate learning through making changes. That these last two things take time is frustrating, but that doesn't mean the Church should confuse rituals of corporate and societal penitence with the more pedestrian and costly business of making things better for the future. Nor should it mean that the wider world should confuse an Archbishop's (or any future) resignation and payments of compensation with 'fixing the problem' as human beings, all by ourselves.

Fr Paul Roberts

'Into All the Parish'

Saturday 25 January 2025, Christ Church, Downend Road, Bristol, 10 am – 3 pm.



Pioneering Parishes provides tools and ideas of how to unlock the creative energy in your parish/es and find new ways to engage with God's spirit and those unconnected to your church. All welcome, ordained and lay, leaders and members, church teams and individuals!

Pioneering Parishes are offering to work for a year with a number of churches in the Diocese to facilitate and support learning through courses and resources, focusing on:

- learning to pay attention to the culture around us
- helping congregations discern who they are called to be for God and their local community
- offering tools, skills, postures and practices to support steady culture change
- growing a healthy ecology of church; further extending the care of souls into all the parish

Pastoral Letter from the Archbishop of York



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**6 January 2025,
Feast of the Epiphany**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Mindful of the ongoing challenges facing the Church of England, I write to you, the clergy, lay ministers and people of the Church of England on this Feast of the Epiphany, trusting that with God's guidance, we can look to the future with great hopefulness in Christ. The Magi came to the Christ child and their lives were re-directed. Please join me in praying for the renewal of our church as we come again to Christ to seek God's way for God's church.

First, I want to express my deep gratitude for your faithfulness. The unstinting witness and service of parish churches, chaplaincies and other Christian communities brings hope and light, embodying the message of the Gospel, a message of peace and of new beginnings that is needed so urgently in our world as well as our church.

The events of recent weeks, particularly the publication of the Makin Review, have sometimes felt as though we have been separated from the light and hope of Christ. Reading reports of abuse, cover-ups, and institutional failure, we are confronted with a darkness that has harmed so many. To those who have been hurt, I offer my deepest apologies.

These painful reports serve as a stark reminder that victims and survivors are asking for – and deserve – more than words of lament. They call us to action.

Significant progress has been made. Every week, thousands of parish safeguarding officers faithfully attend to their duties in churches across England. They are supported by over 100 professionally qualified safeguarding staff working at both regional and national levels. More than 20,000 clergy, lay ministers, and church officers now undergo safeguarding training as part of their roles. Alongside them, thousands of volunteers who work with children and vulnerable adults complete rigorous vetting through the Disclosure and Barring Service. This essential safeguarding work is so important, and I am profoundly grateful for the dedication and commitment of all involved.

However, there is still more to do in order for us to become a safer and more accountable church, and for our processes to be trusted. Whether it is my decisions that are called into question or anyone's within the church, our safeguarding practices must be subject to independent oversight and scrutiny.

Consequently, the House of Bishops, the Archbishops' Council and the other relevant National Church Institutions are committed to leading this change and are working with the lead bishop for safeguarding and others on several key initiatives, including:

- Bringing forward new proposals on independent safeguarding to the General Synod in February. This would include models for independent oversight, scrutiny, audit, and complaints, as well as for day-to-day operational safeguarding.
- Seeking final approval in February for new clergy conduct measures that will strengthen the Church's disciplinary provisions.
- Ensuring the Church's National Safeguarding Team continues its work alongside Safe Spaces to provide support for anyone wishing to raise safeguarding concerns, while also managing the process for addressing issues raised in recent reports.
- Reviewing the recommendations of recent reviews through the National Safeguarding Steering Group and implementing them with guidance from the independently chaired National Safeguarding Panel.
- Finalising the provisions of the forthcoming Redress Scheme so as to express in tangible ways the Church's heartfelt sorrow and shame for the abuse survivors have suffered.

I want to reach out to all people of goodwill, and especially those who have been consistently and courageously advocating for change in the Church of England and invite support for these proposals.

There are other things to consider this year. We must attend to issues around clergy wellbeing and do all that we can to increase the stipend level. It may also be the time to look again at clergy terms of service to increase accountability (including that of bishops) and possibly ask the question as to whether clergy should become employees.

Moreover, as we remember Archbishop Justin's ministry and his decision to step down as an acknowledgement of the institutional and collective failings of the Church he served so steadfastly, we need to reflect deeply on what we expect from an Archbishop of Canterbury. It is at least four jobs wrapped into one. Spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Spiritual Head of the Church of England. Primate of the Province of Canterbury. Diocesan Bishop.

We also face decisions about Living in Love and Faith (LLF). I believe we should focus again on the things we have in common, whatever our theological conviction on these issues. In this respect, I am convinced we are united in our desire to ensure that all our churches are places of welcome for everyone regardless of difference, but we also live with profound disagreement about how that welcome should be expressed towards same sex-couples.

Prayers of Love and Faith have become one option. They are now commended for use in existing services. Many same-sex couples in faithful, stable relationships have benefited from this, something I welcome.

Later this year, we will consider introducing bespoke services. With this must go provision for those who cannot support these developments. We must, therefore, properly honour the conscience and theological conviction of clergy, lay ministers and churches who can't use the services and then develop our practice of delegated episcopal ministry for these ministers and communities. In this way we will have that symmetry of provision I have always believed necessary. But since the Makin Review itself warns how tribalism can endanger accountability and make oversight more difficult, we must not do this in a way that further breaks the Body of Christ.

Working closely with Sarah, the Bishop of London, in her role as Dean of the Province of Canterbury, for most of the next year it falls to me to help guide the Church of England through these challenging times. I am hugely grateful for the affirmation and support I have received, though I know and accept that some people

people have concerns. But aware of my own needs and shortcomings I pledge myself to learn, and I pledge myself to do what I can to steer through the change we need on these important issues and to hold myself accountable, both to the processes we have at the moment and to the new ones we will introduce. I invite the clergy and people of the Church of England to do the same and in your parish and worshipping community to pray for the stability, good governance, and renewal of our Church. I will then look forward to working closely with whomever the Spirit calls to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

Alongside this, I will continue the work I have been called to in the North of England, particularly getting on the road to teach about the way of discipleship Jesus offers us in the prayer he taught us. The Lord's Prayer, the prayer of Jesus, is the prayer that takes us right to the heart of God. It teaches us how to live, as well as how to pray. At the moment, we need this more than ever.

Such a renewal of prayer, a new dependence upon God and a new focus on discipleship, living out our Christian vocation each day, will, I believe, help us to become a simpler, humbler and bolder church – and by 'church' I mean here both the universal Church, the bride of Christ and the community of the redeemed, and the thousands of local parishes, chaplaincies and other expressions of Christian community that are the bedrock and lifeblood of the Church of England.

Finally, in this Epiphany-tide, I am reminded that in Christ God comes to us in the most vulnerable thing we can imagine: a tiny, newborn child. Let us learn from this and ensure that we are putting the needs of the vulnerable first. Let us commit ourselves to becoming a Church that looks and sounds like Jesus: penitent, kind, and in tune with the will and purposes of God, the safer and more accountable Church I believe we are called to be.

Yours in Christ,

++Stephen



United Society Partners in the Gospel(USPG) is the Anglican mission agency supported by All Saints. They are holding a Regional Lunch for supporters from across the Southwest and Wales here at All Saints on Thursday January 30th (12noon - 2pm): an opportunity to learn of and be encouraged by the good work of USPG'S partners around the Anglican Communion.

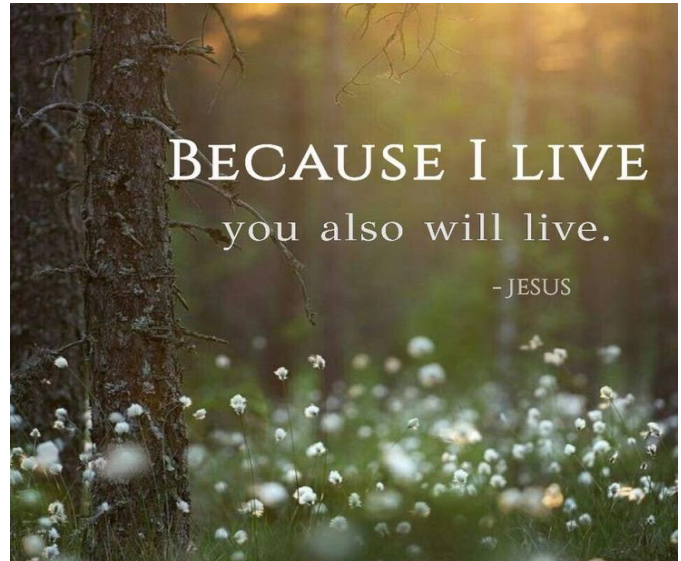
Members of All Saints are warmly invited to attend. We need to know numbers, so please let Fr Paul (H) if you would like to come.

Prayers Requests

'In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.'

(John 14: 19).

Please let Fr Charles know of anyone who would like to be remembered within the weekly prayer list or anyone who you would like to be remembered in prayer.



Those of the parish and our hearts whom we remember in our prayers:

Sunday

Tabitha Clark, Ruth and Richard Harding, Katie Norman, Neal Gordon, Joyce Shepherd, Cynthia Ashford Elisabeth Morgan Sathia Aruliah Jean Detheridge Jack O'Sullivan and family Susie King Arthur Cleaver Sebastian Kloss Vyard Angel Wray Nic Epinay Oussama and Claire Sader Sarah James Cooper

Monday

Sue Hilliar Hugh Farry

Tuesday.

Ryan Lindsey George Lympelopoulos Pam Parker

Wednesday

Katrina and Katherine King, Philip Miles, Diana Verity, Samantha Tucker, Maureen Mumford

Thursday

Steve Cooper Barbera Freeman Remi Clarke

Friday

Charlotte Hopkins, Caroline Semon, Nicole Kaneza Nadine Benn John Badman

Saturday

The Departed

Stephen Jordon Maureen Badman

Years' Minds - this week we remember:

Mervyn Stockwood (Bp) Kenneth Biggs Clara Henderson George Meade – King Alma Powell Rosalind Brennan

ALL SAINTS PRAYERS

Mon 13	<p>Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, Teacher of the Faith, 367 Kentigern (Mungo), Missionary Bishop in Strathclyde and Cumbria, 603 George Fox, Founder of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), 1691</p> <p>Pray for brother and sister Christians who are 'Quakers'. Quakers are renowned for their active campaigning for economic justice, peace, sustainability and human rights – may the whole church become an increasingly active voice on these subjects.</p>
Tue 14	<p>Pray for all those who work in the broadcasting industry. Television and radio (and on-line streaming) are hugely important in bringing news and entertainment to all. Pray for those whose main connection with others is through TV and radio.</p>
Wed 15	<p>Mass 10.00am Pray for cavers, potholers and speleologists. Caving as a sport and for research reasons is increasingly popular; many locations are now tourist sites. Remember also those engaged in mine exploration and archaeological research.</p>
Thurs 16	<p>Religious Freedom Day</p> <p>Pray for the work of the world's religions and religious organizations that bring good to the world. Thank God that Religious Freedom exists in many parts of our world. Pray for those who suffer persecution - and for those who deliver such persecution.</p>
Fri 17	<p>Mass 10.00am Antony of Egypt, Hermit, Abbot, 356 Charles Gore, Bishop, Founder of the Community of the Resurrection, 1932</p> <p>Pray for the life and work of the Community of the Resurrection, and for the College of the Resurrection. Give thanks for the life and work of Brother Andrew (John Norton) – at ASC and in South Africa with the Community.</p>
Sat 18	<p>Amy Carmichael, Founder of the Dohnavur Fellowship, spiritual writer, 1951</p> <p>The theme for 2023 is "Do Good, Seek Justice." The theme is inspired by Isaiah 1:12-18, which laments a lack of justice among the People of God. Yet it also promises redemption by encouraging acts of justice. Like Isaiah, we hope to inspire a renewed desire and effort for justice among the Christian peoples around the world.</p>
Sunday 19	<p>Epiphany 2</p> <p>In Christ You make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory.</p> <p>Early Worship 9.00am Parish Mass 10.30</p>

If you would like to give regularly to the Church, please set up a standing order to the church account, details below
Parochial Church Council of All Saints
Account No. 65256747
sort code 08 92 99

Gift Aid forms are available from the office
office@allsaintsclifton.org

We are committed to safeguarding children, young people, victims of domestic abuse and vulnerable adults.

If you have any Safeguarding concerns please contact :
 The Parish Safeguarding Officers - Caroline Davenport & Janice Callow at office@allsaintsclifton.org marked for the attention of the Safeguarding Officer.