

**Vicar's Vista** Feb 15

## **Liberté, égalité, fraternité**

The Seventh of January (2015) will become a memorable day in France just like 9/11 in America.

On this sad day three gunmen with evil intent murdered two policemen

and ten staff including four cartoonists at the Parisian premises of 'Charlie Hebdo', a satirical newspaper. The motivation for the killings is assumed to be retaliation for editorial and cartoons that lampooned and thus questioned the logic of radical Islamists. The cartoon I have reproduced above is from Australia and is the artist's comment on the mindset of the terrorist(s). The Terrorist self-righteously says; "He (the French cartoonist) drew first" !



Our Western liberal democracies (imperfect as they are) have at heart the rights of the individual. The right of free speech - the right to question, reject, challenge, speak against, and to use satire to expose hypocrisy, corruption, the abuse of power and privilege and all other narrow-minded, bigoted and intolerant ways is long-established and central to our way of life.

Liberté, the relative freedoms we enjoy, is worth more than silver and gold and must be protected by all citizens. We do not wish anyone harm so that the right to liberty is equal, including the practice of religion at no harm to all.

Egalité is the principle that all are equal under the law, no one can claim any special position that is not earned by merit and all have equal opportunity.

Fraternité has its roots in the French Revolution and the unified movement of the peasants to gain freedom from the aristocracy. It remains as the life-blood of the modern French nation, which has been barbarically attacked.

There are other slogans from the Jacobin era (1790's) that we hold dear and should never take for granted such as Justice, Reason, Unity and Security.

This outrage by 'a few' is an attack on 'the many'. We invite all to enjoy our freedoms and we must not be divided and provoked into over-reaction. We are prompted, once we have shown solidarity and have mourned our shared loss, to boldly take up the cause of liberal democracy and protect, promote and develop it – for it is the way of virtue and I believe to be the true-Godly way of peace and harmony. We stand together for liberty and equality.





## **Why does the date of Easter change, whereas Christmas doesn't?**

That's the question that a youngster has just asked me...Being a vicar I really should know the answer, but can I explain it? Do you really want to know?

The date of Easter is Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015. It will be 27<sup>th</sup> March in 2016 and 16<sup>th</sup> April in 2017. If you want to know the method for calculating Easter you will need to consult tables of computations that had their origins at the Council of Nicaea in 325AD but took several hundred years to agree! There is still a disparity between Western and Eastern dating. That's because the Jewish dating system was fairly arbitrary – it was even geographically inconsistent.

In essence, Easter is related to the Jewish Passover Feast. According to John's Gospel Jesus died on the 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan as the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. His empty tomb was discovered on the third day, being 17<sup>th</sup> Nisan. The Jewish months were lunar and not fixed; that was common in ancient agrarian cultures. It was much easier for ordinary folk to count the phases of the moon in antiquity. Passover is a spring festival; the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan begins on the night of a full moon after the northern vernal equinox. The date therefore varied according to phases of the moon (and observations thereof; a cloudy night might delay things a day or so!).

Lunar months are 29.530587981 days (29 days 12 hrs 44 min 2.8016 sec). Twelve lunar months equate to about 354 days which is about 11 days shorter than a solar year (about 365 days). Here then is the 11 or 12 day overall variation either side of the fixed Easter date (14-17<sup>th</sup> Nisan).

We don't know what year it was either! Many eminent theologians have tried to work it out, including Sir Isaac Newton. They have analysed the New Testament Gospels and writings, to relate the events described in them to fairly well known dates – like the death of Herod the Great and of John the Baptist; the reign of Tiberius Caesar; the pro-consulship of Junius Gallio and the governorship of Pontius Pilate etc. The dates of Saint Paul's Conversion or ancient lunar eclipses and other diverse matters are also in consideration. The best estimate is that the first Easter was in 30-33AD, although there are opinions spanning 29-36AD. The date of Easter still tracks that of the original Jewish Passover and still varies with the phases of the moon. We have even less certainty about the date of Jesus' birth and our Christmas is thus an arbitrary date – ask me why in December!

## Ascension to Pentecost

April has gone in a blur – with so much activity after Easter. The Vision Day and the Bishop's visit on the weekend of the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> are behind us and the future lies ahead. Actually Zahra and I are looking forward to a holiday this month and a week's rest.



But there is no rest for the... church at West Moors. We need to keep our sights firmly on the gospel imperative of the Lord and progress together along His Way.

Ascension (Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May) is the time when the disciples finally lost sight of the Lord as he was carried up in the clouds, to the heavens. Rev'd Lynne will lead the evening Eucharist at 7.30pm as we mark this mysterious event. By then we will be forty days post Easter! After Jesus' resurrection, during this period, Acts 1:3 informs us that Jesus showed himself by many proofs but then was bodily taken from them. Jesus died and rose on the third day, appeared to his disciples and many others, but finally left them - it reminds us of Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene in the garden, "*Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'*" John 20:17 N.I.V.

The church then, ten days later, (on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May) celebrates Whitsun also known as Pentecost (meaning fifty); the sending of the Holy Spirit as promised by the Lord to be the divine assistance of God.

The disciples lose the bodily presence of the Lord Jesus but gain his Holy Spirit which enables, empowers & enthuses. This was a time of letting go, reportedly with fear and trepidation but then the gaining of so much more.

The church develops and grows because of the Spirit. In our time and place perhaps we need to let go of some things so that we too can develop and grow. Those fearful, paralysed disciples became the bold and courageous evangelists – the Apostles = proclaimers of the Gospel. (*The painting of The Ascension and Pentecost is by Giotto*).

I thought it might be appropriate to write about my book, *Articles of Religion*, that many of you have kindly purchased. The title is a pun on the 39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England. It includes all the main theological articles that I have written for this magazine over the past decade. Many of you have asked how long it took to write – the answer is that it took the forty days of Lent to pull together the ten years of accumulated writings. I adapted and edited the original texts for the book mainly because of the removal of the original pictures and captions (which if they had been included would have considerably increased the printing cost). I also enlarged several of the articles but soon realised that I would not have time within Lent to undertake a major expansion. The project had been set as a personal development goal by Bishop Graham following my last annual ministry review. I have sent him a free copy to read on his travels as he leaves us... Bishop Nicholas readily (pun intended\*) bought a copy!

I first wrote commentaries on The Lord's Prayer and then the Creeds. I followed this with an explanation of Holy Communion in an attempt to answer the common questions that people were raising with me. I then adapted my course notes for the Anglican Confirmation Course which I hoped would act as a 'refresher' for us all. Along the way I wrote two more introductory articles on all the books of the bible (Bite-sized bible guide). These I have now expanded somewhat.

Finally, discussions about the weighty issues of Atonement, Grace and Predestination led to a series of forty-one 'Christian Concepts' articles that is completed for now with this month's consideration of Glory and Worship. I'm sure there are more concepts in the wings and this series, if expanded, could become a book in its own right. (We'll see what the publishers say!).

I had one hundred copies of this special edition printed for our parish which includes selected *Vicar's Vista* articles and there are about thirty left. I am not intending to print any more in this special 'tenth anniversary' form. If you would like a copy please get one from me soon. The book is priced at £10 with a donation going to the Episcopal Church of South Sudan... and yes, I'm happy to sign a copy. If/when I reprint the book it will have to be edited and depersonalised for a wider readership. It might well appear electronically on Kindle though.

What next? I have decided to write in the same concise magazine style about Christians of note – next month I will begin a series which will be entitled ‘Faithful Heroes’. I think it will be interesting to research the lives of the remarkable people who have faithfully followed in the Way of Jesus. This might take a few years as there are quite a few to consider – some better known than others. You might suggest a few candidates?

And we are all called to be faithful heroes! The summer beckons with all the joyful celebrations that brings of Weddings and special events: -

Please reserve in your diaries the Church and School Fete on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June; we need you to both participate and help! Before then, on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June, we are all invited to join with the diocese in the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Magna Carta celebrations. There is the option of a short walk from Old Sarum to New Sarum (from the old to the present cathedral) which is for all of us and our Messy Church are particularly planning to support. The main event will be at Salisbury Cathedral.

Please also note that it is our turn to host the Churches Together Songs of Praise which will be held on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June at 6pm.

Happy days!

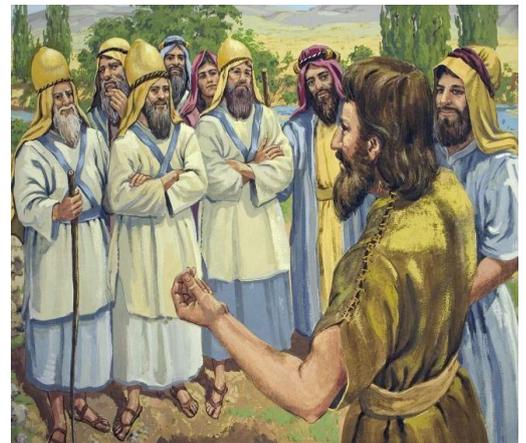
With every blessing – Andrew

\* Why so many ‘puns’? It is a literary characteristic of Jewish writings; many await discovery in the bible....now that’s another potential set of articles for the future.

Try this...

*But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt 3:7-9).*

The Hebrew words for ‘Sons’ and ‘Stones’ are very similar, thus ironically emphasising that (with such a tiny difference) the all-powerful God can readily replace the Pharisees and Sadducees. There’s nothing more deadly than the venom of many vipers!





What a splendid view of New Sarum (Salisbury) is attained from the top of the mount of Old Sarum! On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015 a coach party of 'pilgrims' from St Mary's (Messy Church families included) made the journey, after Sunday morning church, to join in the diocesan celebrations.

At 12:30 pm we alighted (thankfully at the top) and then joined with a thousand others as we sat on the grassy ramparts of the old fort and consumed a goodly picnic luncheon. To my mind it was such an important event that Pork Pie and Scotch Eggs, Sticky Buns were all fully justified even though the household authorities didn't exactly approve! Amesbury Town Band played for us and the sun valiantly shone through the clouds. The children climbed the ancient ramparts and in the heavens light aircraft and parachutists peppered the sky, and all was well.

Just before 2pm The Bishop appeared, greeting the crowds and declared: *We are all gathered today to recall the importance of Magna Carta in the life of our nation and the wider world. We thank God that Justice is for all and that everyone is equal under the law. As we retrace the journey of Magna Carta from Old Sarum to New, may we do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.*

After words from Isaiah 2:2-5 and appropriate prayers we set off heartily singing, "We are marching/living/moving in the light/love/power of God". It took an hour to walk down the hill and into the present cathedral grounds. Salisbury is amongst the most beautiful cathedrals (because it was built in just 40 years thus its gothic style is cohesive and consistent). It houses the world's second oldest mechanical clock and sport's England's tallest spire...all built upon just a few inches of river bed gravel! The cathedral towers over Salisbury and is an even more splendid sight close up, than from afar. It points to the glory and majesty of God and is immortalised in those cherished paintings by dear John Constable.

Salisbury; City, Cathedral and Close is quintessential England and all the more special because for hundreds of years, tucked away in a forgotten cupboard lay what is the best preserved of four copies of Magna Carta – the Great Charter signed (under duress) by King John on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1215 at Runnymede to pacify the revolting Barons. They were led by Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury. The king wanted to disown the charter and appealed to the pope and also promulgated new laws. BUT it was too late! The freedoms unleashed were to transform Britain. Parts of it are either still law or incorporated in our current statutes here and throughout the modern world. I leave you dear reader to research the full enormity of Magna Carta (and of course, we remember the fact-filled talk by Robert Key, former Salisbury M.P. who gave the church a lecture on the same a few months ago). It really was more about the death of despotism than the birth of freedom.

In front of the West Face we met Robert Key again, a band played and a tea, cake and refreshments marquee, together with more sunshine and smiles, and a closing act of worship. Ice creams all round and even a spare Vanilla Rocket. “Hi Bishop, we are children from St Mary’s West Moors”, said Mia and thrust the spare ice cream into the noble Lord Bishop’s hand! He smiled and as they say, our joy was complete!

The event concluded with more worship and a short homily from the bishop reminding us that because of Magna Carta we are equal under the rule of law; that the executive (monarch or ruler) has limited power, and also that weights and measures are fair and consistent. So the formerly powerless obtain rights and freedoms from the powerful (feudal rulers) ...very much in line with the Magna Carta of Jesus; His great charter of blessing in God’s kingdom, is laid out for us in the gospels and particularly in Matthew Chapter five. The meek inherit the earth.

The bishop drew on the parable of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus showed that the ‘human’ interpretation of religious law was at odds with the compassionate ‘actual law’ of God. Laws provide order and structure in which human society can flourish, but not at the expense of universal rights and freedoms. This striving after the good of the many was not well received by those who exercised power and ultimately cost Jesus his life.

That’s the *Vista* we need to continue to hold as we look out on life. The Magna Carta was a decisive move by one set of rulers (barons) to obtain justice from a despotic absolute ruler king (John). Thankfully that enabled a process of common emancipation that continues to this day and we thank the God for it. Your friend in common – Andrew, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2015

## **Wonderings about Wanderings**

These past summer months have been full of news and comment about the 'Migration Crisis'. People are migrating into Europe seeking both safety and a better life (so-called Asylum Seekers and Economic Migrants).



It is interesting how the media has focussed on this story. I often wonder whether they are reporting the story, or writing it. They are certainly colouring the story and influencing popular opinion. I have had various interesting and disturbing discussions about the present 'crisis'.

My role is to provide a Christian viewpoint. Firstly, the bible has the God-inspired migration of Abraham & Sarah as a foundational story. They travel from Ur (Iraq) down through Syria to Canaan and to Egypt. We learn how their descendants (as numerous as the stars) are rejected and become slaves in their host (?) country. The alien Israelite tribes are both needed for the building boom in Egypt but also feared and despised because of their difference. This triggers the next big migration story of the bible and that is the escape into 'The Wilderness' for forty years of wanderings before they enter and settle/conquer Canaan (later known as Judea & Israel).

After some generations there is a forced migration of the Israelite ruling class and artisans to Babylon (Iraq) and Assyria (Syria). A further period spent in captivity ends with a return migration back 'home'. As time goes by Alexander the Great (Greek) and Roman (mainly Italian) forces 'pass' through and the Israelites loose both freedom and autonomy. They had wanted nationhood and a king like the other great powers but God was displeased – He was their king and the eternal kingdom of heaven was theirs – not some earthly temporary territory! (see 1 Samuel 8:4-22).

Many of the prophets of biblical times wandered over the lands – fixed borders with passports are a modern invention. Jesus also was a wandering Rabbi in the tradition of his peoples. At times he sought refuge from persecution by travelling north into Lebanon (Tyre & Sidon) and as a baby was taken to Egypt. After Jesus, the main biblical characters are Saints Peter & Paul and they travelled with companions from Judea to Rome and many Turkish and European places in-between. The bible is literally a moving story. It is a theological story of migratory peoples. Certainly the journeys described therein are formative for them and us!

Actually migration is foundational to humanity. Scientists have recorded humanoid footprints dating back 800,000 years at Happisburgh, Essex. We are told by geneticists that the earliest 'Adam & Eve' Homo Sapiens were 'Out of Africa' (Ethiopia) and that humans progressively spread across the planet from 60,000 years ago, completely displacing the Neanderthals.

Britain set up an empire that comprised 800 million people at its zenith (remember the pink on the world maps in our classrooms). In 1948 post war labour shortages led to the opening of the UK to free immigration from all our Commonwealth Countries citizens. This was progressively curbed from 1968 & 1972 onwards as fears were raised about their rate of influx. Then joining the Common Market (EEC/EU) opened our borders to further migration. The 2010 statistics for Europe show about 9% of the population was born outside the EU (interestingly in Britain this was lower at 7.7%).

The expansion of the EU widened the numbers able to live and work here. Wars in Afghanistan, Syria & Libya have triggered new waves of migration. Our Prime Minister unhappily recently referred to 'swarms of migrants'. This is all a bit emotive. Clearly there is a new wave of migration occurring. Britain alongside Europe has changed to become a multi-cultural, multi-racial land. The second and third generations are taking their place in our society; our gene pool is diversifying rapidly. This cannot be reversed.

As Christians should we be alarmed? The collapse of traditional British Christianity coupled with the diverse faith and cultures now established here may feel threatening, especially as some clearly feel a 'remnant' in their own homeland. However statistics show that the influx of migrants from Christian countries has actually boosted UK church attendance.

I've done a bit of wandering myself; our family happily unites 'foreigners'. So I've been wondering about all these wanderings and what it all means. I cannot avoid the feeling, as someone called to follow Jesus, who came down from above to show all of humanity the Way to Heaven, that we should all calm down. If we believe that there is one God and Father of all, what are we worrying about? Jesus taught us to value the foreigner; he had no time for nationalism and pointedly preached against exclusivism and xenophobia. Our spiritual father Abraham was a Wandering Aramean.

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded a *movement* for Salvation of all the world. He said, "The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Our citizenship is in heaven – that's where we 'followers' are all *migrating* to, in His footsteps!

## **To not to be, or to be....**

Member of Parliament Rob Marris has used his Private Member's Bill to reintroduce a Bill first put to The Lords by Lord Falconer. It will have had a reading and vote by the time you read this.



To not to be, or to be, that is the question! This is of assisted dying (AD). Most of us are aware that Dignitas of Switzerland provide support for those wishing to end their lives. They offer this service to all-comers subject to particular conditions including compulsory medical interviews – and about one Brit every fortnight is making a final journey with them.

Media research reports a further 200 self-suicides a year in this country for medical reasons – to end life before it naturally becomes extinct. It is not legal to assist 'suicide' in this country. Regularly now we are made aware of harrowing stories where someone (or a loving couple) is caught up in this 'debate'. Sadly for them it is not a matter of theoretical ethics. It is impossible not to feel great compassion for those who want AD.

Medical science has progressed to save and preserve life beyond our forefather's dreams. Life expectancy has soared and this has brought its own challenges – viz the retirement age and recent legislation changes. An awareness of individual rights has grown in our liberal culture. Does the right of the individual outweigh the corporate rights of society?

In Holland (who have always been more liberal than we) assisted dying is now legal and deaths have risen steeply towards 6,000 per year from nothing just a few years ago!

The media informs us that former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey supports the right to have a choice, but current Archbishop Welby opposes assisted dying. Apparently up to 80% of the general population want a law to establish an AD choice with reasoned parameters. This debate will go on, whatever the result of the latest vote in Parliament. I rather feel an Assisted Dying Law will come sooner or later.

Dr Robert Twycross, Emeritus Clinical Reader in Palliative Medicine at the University of Oxford wrote in the Church Times this week saying he was against a change in the law. I quote him:

*My reasons are: (1) legislation will do more harm than good; (2) negative attitudes towards the disabled and the frail elderly will increase; and (3) incremental implementation is inevitable.*

*Palliative-care doctors are against a change, not least because almost all patients change their minds when in receipt of high quality palliative care. Generally, an expressed wish by a terminally ill person to hasten death does not mean they want Assisted Dying; rather they want to express their frustrations and fears, and to be understood.*

He has many other reasons including something I know to be true and that is the fact that 'prognosis' is frequently inaccurate. It is easy to have a theoretical stance on any great ethical issue – but faced with reality one does have a tendency to change one's mind! I am often with people who are dying and I have never felt that there was great degree of suffering at the individual level. There must have been in the past; death was a fearful thing – and let's be honest often the church milked it for all it was worth!

I am sure that the majority of the church will reject assisted dying as a general rule and yet our scriptures and history reveal a time when Christians were willingly martyred as a means of a noble death, hastening them to heaven. Saint Paul also writes of his sufferings for the gospel:

*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you (1 Philippians 21-24).*

I recall meeting a holy lady (Mrs Lockyer) who was bed-ridden with arthritis from her youth until her death some sixty years later. She encouraged others, prayed fervently and composed letters to support others – who would never know of her individual plight. The lesson from her was that she was not selfish; her life as difficult as it was, had meaning and she made a difference – even I remember her from nearly fifty years ago and through her spiritual influence upon a young lad such as me, her grace and truth is heard. I just wonder if she might not have been gently persuaded to end her life if legislation had offered her the opportunity and the underlying culture encouraged and assisted her so to do – after all it would have been an unselfish act towards all those who had to care for her!

Christians have a firm hope and expectation in the life to come, according to the promises of our Lord Jesus, but we also have a strong commitment to life which we hold to be sacred.

*Thoughtfully yours - Andrew*

## **Can anything good come from Nazareth?**

Nathaniel asks this question of Philip at the very beginning of John's Gospel (John 1:46). At this time of year we are celebrating the Advent of Jesus who though he was born in Bethlehem is oft referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. This must be because that is where he was brought up (excepting an early interlude in Egypt). Jews actually called Jesus' followers 'Nazarenes', until the Greek term 'Christians' was adopted.

What was meant by Nathaniel's question? Nazareth was an unremarkable, almost unknown village in the obscure North (Galilee) – with hindsight this of course fulfils a prophetic expectation of the Messiah, that although Jesus is born in Royal David's city (Bethlehem) of royal lineage, yet he is of humble origin. Prophecy also said the Messiah would be called from the East (Egypt).

I am writing this from the East as I spend some time preparing for a family wedding which is to take place tomorrow at a place called Jiye in Biblical Sidon, Lebanon. It is close to Cana where another wedding took place in the Nazarene's times. Apparently there are three places which claim to be Cana, one here in Lebanon and two in Israel; with scholarly opinion divided about their claims. I would suppose though it was the Cana nearest to Nazareth, after all it was a family wedding.

I am often teased about turning water into wine at Weddings; that won't be a problem here because it is a Shiite wedding where there will be no alcohol served. Since I've been here I've learnt that amongst Lebanon's diverse populations recent genetic studies have determined that it is the Southern Lebanese Shiite Muslims who are the original Syro-Phoenicians. The term 'Phoenician' is also the Greek for the original name which was Canaanite. So I am literally going to a wedding in Cana too! The whole extended family will gather and due to its size there will need to be a considerable provision. It will take place at night on the coast front and the temperature will be a relatively cool 28 degrees! Family have come from all over the world for the event as my nephew Judd (Truth) marries Lara (Famous). Now I've been at a few weddings this year; all have been joyous and a moment where a happy couple are feted; becoming famous amongst others and promising to be true to each other. Something good and optimistic, something exceptional, comes from the promise and union of marriage.

Nazareth and Cana lie a few more miles to the east across the modern border. But here we are in the region of Tyre and Sidon where Jesus of Nazareth ministered, and here the Nazarene Canaanite church in Lebanon is alive and well. Something good coming from Nazareth!

Blessings from the East - Zahra and Andrew

## British Values (II)

Last summer (2014) I wrote an article about education and British Values. I invited you to respond by proposing a definition. I am now pleased to inform you that an official national definition has been promulgated. My wife, Zahra, as a

nationally regulated Child Carer registered with OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) has now to ensure that she conducts herself according to 'British Values'. As a school governor, (soon to become Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education sponsored Member of The Heath Multi Academy Trust) I have to comply also. I'm sure Anglican clergy, as part of the 'education world' are effectively bound by this too.

Here is the abbreviated official definition of Fundamental British Values:

Democracy

The Rule of Law

Individual Liberty

Mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths

According to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) rules no-one is permitted to actively promote intolerance of other faiths, culture and races. Furthermore gender stereotypes and segregation of boys and girls is prohibited and children may not be isolated from their wider community. Finally all behaviours (whether of staff, children or parents) that are not in line with the Fundamental British Values must be challenged.

The context for this is a growing realisation by our government of a need to counter alienation within our multi-cultural nation, and of late, the apparent 'threat from within' as some British citizens act against the common good, leading in extremis to acts of terrorism against our nation.

Since June 2015 the Ministry of Education has provided new advice under 'The Prevent Duty'. I quote from them:

*This advice is non-statutory, and has been produced to help recipients understand the implications of the Prevent duty. The Prevent duty is the duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 on specified authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.*

It may be *non-statutory advice* but Zahra has had to add it to her burgeoning list of policies for compliance. Not to comply is to face official sanction! That is fearful proposition. Oh, that there were just 'Ten Commandments' to keep!



Rules are there to make us behave properly. Sadly, in the end, all that they do is convict us, because we just cannot seem to keep them, whatever we intend (I have Saint Paul's teaching on our relationship with God using the analogy of marriage in mind – see Romans 7:1-6).

This concern for Fundamental *British* Values has got me thinking about Fundamental *Christian* Values. I am bold to propose some corresponding Christian values below:

The free-will submission of the individual to the reign of God (Mark 1:15)

The command to love God and neighbour (Mark 12:30-31)

The self-sacrifice of oneself towards the other (John 15:13)

The recognition that God loves all (and is thus involved in all creation)

(1 John 4:6 & 16)

Now please compare the two sets and consider see how they match or differ. Are Christian values at odds with British values – definitely not! There are however nuances that must be drawn out. Democracy is a form of people's government in common, with the objective of equality and accountability. Jesus was a man of the people who taught by word and deed that for the love of God we should subordinate (or even forgo) our personal autonomy and rights (liberty) for the sake of others. A 'neighbour' was anyone we could help. The Parable of the Good Samaritan radically characterises this doctrine (Luke 10:25-37). How shocking to the audience was the idea that despised foreigners were also righteous ones, beloved of God. The book of Jonah has a similar overtone; throughout the bible there are instances where exclusivity is decried. Inclusion and embrace of the outsider, though often unsettling and superficially fearful to human sensitivity, is however, of God's kingdom!

Meek and lowly Jesus is born in a cattle shed and laid in a humble manger. His parents' were unmarried and though his line was of Royal King David\* he himself was a Galilean 'outsider' (can anything good come from Galilee?) and regarded by the establishment as somewhat disreputable. \*(Did you know King David was born into a blended family of mixed foreign parentage)?

The birth of Jesus, Son of Man, is about the rebirth of Godly righteous values. These are for us to choose for ourselves. No amount of rules will get us into the kingdom of heaven by themselves. The rule of law is to be respected for what it is and for the good it seeks to enable, but good and evil come from within (Mark 7:21-23). Christians are *righteoused* by the grace (unmerited favour) of God. We cannot save ourselves – the Lord saves us.

For me, as I celebrate the birth of Christ, I find ultimate and lasting value in the righteous spirit of God that accepts me for who I am and urges me on to be part of the eternal kingdom that was promulgated in and through Him. Peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind: Hark the Values the Angels sing! A Happy and Blessed Christmas as we worship the Lord together – Andrew