



**The Inaugural Rodwell Lecture
given by the Bishop of London Dr. Richard Chartres DD FSA
in the Church of St Ethelburga on March 10th. 2009.**

This little Church and its Tent of Assembly in the former graveyard to the East, has been visited by 20,000 people during the past two years to participate in its activities.

What a contrast to the situation in 1993. St Ethelburga's as often before in its story was heading for closure under the ugly sounding "redundancy procedure". Life here was at a low ebb and the Diocesan authorities had decided not for the first time that enough was enough. The insurance policy was removed – a prudent decision at the time and seven days later the Bishopsgate bomb went off and this ancient church was reduced to rubble. A photo-journalist, Edward Henty was killed sheltering in the doorway and more than fifty people were injured.

It was expensive rubble which had to be carefully stored, since as a rare survivor of the great fire and the blitz this small fifteenth century church was of course a grade one building.

I was Bishop of Stepney at the time. It seemed obvious to me that we could not allow the IRA to succeed where Hitler had failed. My colleagues who perhaps knew more of the details than I did and who had lived with the Ethelburga problem for many years disagreed. I was outvoted 12-1 and it was decided to hold an architectural competition to construct a suite of offices while preserving the one arcade which had survived the blast. The resulting design was turned down by the city planners 18 -1.

By this time I had become the Bishop of London and was able to change the arithmetic in the Diocesan team. With the ready assistance of Cardinal Hume and Janet Sowerbutts, Moderator of the Thames North Province of the United Reformed Church, I set about raising the funds to build a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace to prevent and transform those many conflicts in the modern world which had a religious dimension. The idea from the beginning was to offer the Centre as a gift to all the faith communities but since the quarrel which had ignited the bomb derived some of its energy from an intra-Christian dispute, those originally involved in the building of the Centre came from every part of the Christian Community although we were soon joined by friends from the other Abrahamic traditions.

The Centre was originally established in the back room of the Old Deanery where Andrew Dunnett the Director [now head of the Vodafone International Charitable Foundation] and Viscount Churchill, Angela and Richard had their desks.

With all the City Churches, my idea has been to respect and interrogate their stories in the conviction that if we understand their connections and continuities we shall be led to discover the most appropriate extended use for them in our own day. In the case of St. Ethelburga there was of course shocking discontinuity and destruction and as I contemplated the rubble this moved me to attempt some kind of bridge building between people of faith. Even in 1996, I saw that we were not going to be allowed to take a holiday from history and that the orthodoxy in N.W.Europe that religion would be steadily marginalized as the process of modernization unfolded was being challenged – not least in the Islamic revolution in Iran.

At the time this was not the received wisdom even though in that year, 1996, Professor Samuel Huntington's book on "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" was published. I had the privilege some three years later of giving a lecture at the Humbolt University in Berlin in which I surveyed some of the evidence which pointed to the need to establish a Centre at St Ethelburga's. The arguments I deployed then of course seemed obvious once the dreadful events of 9-11 in New York had changed the way in which we regarded the very different landscape of the 21st century.

[I said at the Humbolt University, "It is evident that many of the violent conflicts in the modern world are rooted in threats to identity and they are misunderstood if analyzed in merely Marxist terms. We only have to look across the Irish Sea to acknowledge the truth of this proposition. Religion in many parts of the world is crucial to social cohesion and is therefore likely to be co-opted in any struggle which centres on the identity of any particular group or people. Folk wisdom understands how the highest ideals are bent to the most malign purposes. As Jonathan Swift, an Irish Dean and the author of Gulliver's Travels lamented, "how is it that we have just enough religion to hate one another but not enough to love one another?"

As a believer, I can very easily see the perils of religion and I can sympathize with the position adopted by a great 18thc. clergyman of the Church of England, Bishop Warburton. The Bishop was said to occupy a small corner of reasonableness within the Ark "as much disgusted by the stink within, as by the tempest without". The trouble seems to be that if we do not exercise our faculty for worship in a worthy tradition then the vacuum is filled by something unworthy. In this century, [I was speaking at the end of the 20th century], that vacuum has been occupied by the ersatz liturgies of the messianic state according to Stalin or Hitler.

Is it possible however to move beyond the idea that reasonable religion serves to occupy the space where cults of unreason may otherwise flourish? Are there positive resources within the traditions and institutions of the world's faith communities capable of making a contribution to peace making? Is it possible that "Religion" is "The Missing Dimension of Statecraft" as the title of an influential book by Douglas Johnston and published in 1994 by the American Centre for Strategic and International Studies, suggests? Obviously in what follows I am referring to a "dimension" of a multi-track approach to preventing and transforming violent conflict and not a substitute for another approaches.

There is certainly great resistance to the idea that religion has any positive contribution to make in the Anglo-American world. Religion has often been edited out of grown up Anglo-American discourse and relegated to the realm of private taste. This attitude can have serious consequences.

It seems obvious now that US monitoring of Iranian politics ought always to have included the religious dimension but as a report from the Washington based "Center for Strategic and International Studies" has revealed, "the one recorded attempt to do just that within the CIA, before the revolution, was vetoed on the grounds that it would amount to mere sociology, a term used in intelligence circles to mean the time wasting study of factors deemed politically irrelevant."

The proposition that the role of religion in society would inevitably decline in the process of third world modernization, just as it had in 18th. & 19th. century Europe, now appears more questionable. In contemporary world politics the modernization process often makes the public role of religion a more salient part of the post colonial transformation of states and

societies. This is not only a third world phenomenon. Who would have dreamed even ten years ago that the Russian Patriarch would have been an indispensable presence on the podium as the Russian President was sworn in? Who would have contemplated the extraordinary reversal of history represented by the restoration of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, dynamited by Stalin in his attempt to expunge the symbolic presence of religion from his new social order.

At the same time, the achievements of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu suggest that personal spiritual motivation, often combined with the authority of religious institutions can make a positive impact on the possibility of effecting peaceful change. I think of the role of the Church in former East Germany in offering symbolic space in which fundamental questions of peace and justice could be addressed - this has been studied far beyond your borders and provides another encouraging example.

On one occasion, John Foster Dulles invited an Israeli and a Syrian, a Jew and a Muslim to meet him in a private heart to heart about the tensions in the Middle East. He began by warmly shaking them by the hand and then asked, "Why can't we all sit down together and work this thing out like Christian gentlemen?" The anecdote may illustrate a certain cultural myopia but a religious frame of reference can let a little more space into the debate about competing national interests and was conducive to movement and risk taking.

The experience gained over a number of decades has been fed into more contemporary efforts to realize the potential of the faith communities for peace making in the former Yugoslavia. The Centre for Strategic and International Studies has sponsored a project for representatives of faith communities to assist them to become active partners in preventing and transforming conflict. Up to December last year the CSIS had held 22 seminars involving about three hundred people and the results of the exercise have been written up by David Steele in an important essay in *Peaceworks* published in July of this year.

Experience in the Balkans demonstrates the need for a three tiered approach. First, there is a relational challenge. It is obviously vital to attempt to build trust through intrapersonal and interpersonal reconciliation. Second, there is a need to equip participants with appropriate problem solving skills fitted to particular problems. Then third, there is the systematic challenge of finding ways of preventing the development of cultures, not least religious cultures in which the other side is demonized and violent conflict can flourish.

Some valuable experience has emerged. It has been possible to examine the cyclical relationship between victimhood and aggression. "As Serbs, Croats and Muslims recognise that today's aggressors are often yesterday's victims, they also start to reevaluate the role their own people have played in both the near and distant past," writes David Steele. "For example a Muslim Imam from Sarajevo shared during an exercise in mapping the conflict, that meditation had helped him to understand and accept that Serbian fears and needs for survival lie beneath their actions." It was a good illustration of the potential of theology to translate the understanding of needs into the language of common or even compatible interests.

Cynics are always tempted to believe that force is a short cut to solutions but the history of the Balkans suggests that war, at best, gives a breathing space in which a better moral order can be built. Failure to do this work merely results in conflicts breeding and martyrs multiplying.

Nobody as far as I am aware is calling for the call up of platoons of clerics and mullahs to shuttle between capitals like ersatz diplomats but we must try to be practical. One of the

besetting sins of much Christian talk about peace and reconciliation is what Professor David Martin calls "hyper-moralism". This stance "first of all establishes a moral viewpoint sufficiently elevated above all the concrete choices to be made in proximate situations in which it never has to pay the costs of given policies... At the point where the rapid and limited deployment of violence can avert future conflict say in the Rhineland in 1936, it refuses to act because it is paralysed by generalised guilt." Hyper-moralism lacks practical wisdom. It is always vital to hold in tension a clear vision of the "Holy City" founded on blood willingly sacrificed for others with a practical wisdom about the needs of the "Earthly City" which is built both on blood given and on blood taken. Both hyper-moralism and the complacency that confuses being realistic with being imprisoned by the passing moment, they are both alike to be avoided like the plague.

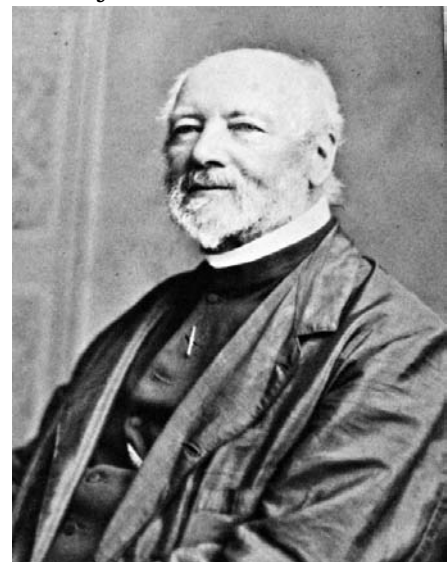
With all this in mind I was contemplating the rubble of one of the churches in the City of London, St Ethelburga's in Bishopsgate. The church survived the Civil War, the Great Fire of 1666 and the blitz but not the effects of an IRA bomb in 1993. St Ethelburga's is a place which bears the scars of a conflict which does have a religious dimension. This is why, greatly encouraged by the late Cardinal Hume and other Christian friends, I determined to rebuild St Ethelburga's as a Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. In particular the intention is to focus on the potential of the faith communities, worldwide, in preventing and transforming conflict.

The partnership which has been established to rebuild the church is itself a sign of reconciliation within the Christian community. The work that is being planned, however, will involve from the outset partnership with members of other faith communities and individuals who simply acknowledge the spiritual dimension of peace-making without any particular institutional allegiances."

In 1999 however this was still a thesis which did not convince many of those who had developed a view of religion as a more or less harmless lifestyle choice with little significance in the daylight world.

At this point I want to pay tribute to the wisdom of the Clothworkers' Company in transcending this fashionable complacency. Livery Companies can be charitable entrepreneurs and take risks whilst other corporate bodies are understandably more conservative in their approach, preferring those causes which have obvious contemporary resonances and an active cat of existing "stakeholders". Caroline, my wife and I invited the leading Clothworkers to a Pepys Supper in the Old Deanery. We followed hints in the Diary in constructing the menu with the exception of the only Chateau of the Bordeaux mentioned by Pepys – Haut Brion because it was too expensive. The phylloxera free ancient vines of Chile had to do. After hearing the case the Clothworkers pledged more than a million pounds to help build the Centre as their Millennium Project.

I said that the idea was born from contemplating the radical discontinuity and devastation of the bomb but then by sheer chance, I was glancing idly at volume 37 published by the admirable London Record Society and entitled "Unpublished London Diaries. A Checklist." I happened to see entry 437 relating to a Rector of St Ethelburga's, J.M.Rodwell and went to the Guildhall to read it on my day off. [You can see what sad diversions are enjoyed by bishops.]



After some biographical notes I was astonished to see a notice of the second and revised edition of Rodwell's translation of the Qur'an. There were indeed continuities between the story of St Ethelburga's and its present restored state and purpose. Just as we have seen this church, like a Phoenix rise from the ashes so it is right that this pioneering scholar should be restored to living remembrance and this is the theme of this first Rodwell Lecture.

Soon after making this discovery I was present in this church in November 2004 when the distinguished scholar and modern translator of the Qur'an Professor Abdel Haleem arrived bearing a copy of the version which had just come from the presses of the OUP. Professor Haleem has been an unfailing adviser and friend in the development of the Centre and he did me the honour of presenting me with this precious book. I told him about Rodwell's connection with St Ethelburga's and he was immediately able to point to his preface where he discusses previous English translations.

Rodwell himself was well aware of the deficiencies of the principal previous version in English, translated by George Sale in 1734 and based on the researches of Father Maracci. Rodwell had the advantage of copious German researches. The Arabic text which he used for his 1861 translation, was edited by Fluegel and published in Leipsic in 1841. Contemporary German scholarship also informed Rodwell's re-arrangement of the suras and in this he mainly followed Professor Noldeke's "Geschichte des Qorans" in which an attempt was made to recover a chronological sequence.

Professor Haleem describes this disregard for the traditional Muslim arrangement of the suras as an "oddity" and he also notes that some of the footnotes contain "material that is incorrect and offensive to Muslims". He goes on however generously to recognize the real advance in scholarship represented by the Rodwell version. "He had a linguistic talent that enabled him to come up with innovative solutions to previously intractable problems. It is easy to perceive the influence of Rodwell's work on many subsequent translators. Rodwell also instigated the practice of partial numbering of Qur'anic verses, providing some help to those wishing to cite passages from his translation." Thus the judgment of one of the most distinguished Qur'anic scholars of our own day.

On the title page of his translation Rodwell printed a quotation from Thomas Carlyle's celebrated lecture on the "Hero as Prophet" in which the Scottish sage comprehensively rejected the customary negative estimate of the prophet Muhammad. "The lies which well meaning zeal have heaped round this man are disgraceful to ourselves only." Instead Carlyle proclaimed, "Sincerity, in all senses, seems to me the merit of the Koran." Carlyle saw the Prophet as a kind of Hegelian agent of reform forging a new unity which propelled the Bedouin tribes to form a great Arab civilization.

Carlyle's Lecture was originally delivered in May 1840 and represented a no doubt flawed attempt to reach out and understand the roots of a civilization which from time out of mind had filled Christian Europe with fear. Rodwell's work also had the effect of providing the basis for a more accurate and sympathetic exploration of the Other in Victorian England.

Rodwell's Journal records the appearance of a second "carefully corrected edition" in 1876 priced at the substantial sum of 12s. This is the edition which went on to be published in the Everyman Library. A paperback version was published as recently as October 2007 according to Amazon.

It is hard to tell how Rodwell acquired his profound linguistic learning which embraced not only Arabic and Hebrew but Coptic, Ge'ez or Ethiopic as well. He was responsible for other

published translations including the Book of Job, and passages from the Prophet Isaiah together with material from Ethiopic and Coptic liturgies. In 1870 he published a translation of the Coptic version of the Liturgies of S. Basil, S. Gregory and S. Cyril from a manuscript of the 13th century, part of Lord Crawford's collection at Haigh Hall, which Rodwell catalogued.

There is a fascinating glimpse in the Journal of how he spent one day in 1865. "July 17 Perhaps someone in the days that are to come may like to know how a Parson of this period spent his day. So I give a minute analysis of this. Rose at 7. Read Isaiah 3 and 4 [Ch] in Hebrew – wrote letters after Breakfast – wrote five pages of a sermon from the Epistle for Sunday next – was kept in doors by Thunderstorms and heavy rain – Read another Chapter of Isaiah in Hebrew – went for a short walk – Read the Evening Papers, being specially interested in the matter of Mr. Gladstone's [the present Chancellor of the Exchequer] Election as M.P. for Oxford.- Read an Ethiopic Hymn from the MS [?] of the B. & F. Bible Society – smoked a cigar – and went to bed. Thus placidly glide away the days of our mortal span. Deo Opt. Max. etc. Amen."

The Journal begins with some bare biographical details - "In the year of Our Lord 1808. April 11 the writer J.M.Rodwell was born at Barham Hall in the County of Suffolk. – educated at Bury school under Dr. Malkin B.A. of Caius and Gonville College Cambridge 1830 M.A. 1834.

From the Reverend W. Kirby Rector of Barham, the celebrated naturalist and father of English Entomology I derived great advantages and [?] in 1833 became his curate. He was also my uncle having married Miss Charlotte Rodwell, my father's sister in 1816. A debt of everlasting gratitude is due from me to the memory of my maternal uncle the Rev Robert Kedington M.A. of Babergh Hall in the aforesaid County, who took an unceasing interest in my education – early instilled into me sound church principles – a love for natural science - and a taste for learning generally, especially languages. He was Rector of Bradfield Combust, a devoted parish priest and in every sense a thorough English Gentleman.

For more than 30 years has the grave closed over this good man, the guide, companion and friend of my youth. Never a day passes but I think of him, and all my intercourse with him with deepest gratitude. If there is any one individual who I would desire to meet again in the world to come it is this good man. God only knows how I loved him. Can the brief unions and loves of this mortal life, be doomed to an everlasting extinction? May I go to Him, seeing that he cannot return to me."

I am most grateful to Gemma Jamieson and Najat Douslimane for their researches which have amplified the information to be gleaned from Rodwell's own biographical fragment. He entered Caius College in Cambridge in the autumn of 1825 as a Scholar. As well as reading Hebrew from an early age with his uncle, he acquired the rudiments of Arabic with the help of one Joseph Catafago. The state of Arabic scholarship when Rodwell was at Cambridge might well form the subject for a future lecture in this series but I am not competent to deliver it.

He was also a talented oarsman and rowed for his college. He was an original member of the very first Caius Boat Club and in 1892 when already 84, he described the origins of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat race in the Long Vac. of 1827. The Oxford crew, he wrote, "went ignominiously aground in the Chesterton reach". He stayed in touch with Caius and in 1886 was elected to an honorary fellowship.

Rodwell was ordained Deacon at Norwich on 5 June 1831 and was priested in London on June 17th 1832.

In 1834 as a marginal note in the Journal records, he married Elizabeth eldest daughter of the Reverend William Parker, Rector of St Ethelburga's. Two sons from this marriage survived him. She died in 1857 and was buried at Broxbourne in Hertfordshire. Two years later he married Louisa Rohrs at Hampstead Parish Church.

Rodwell's own account continues thus, "In the year of our Lord 1843 I was appointed to the rectory of St Ethelburga Bishopsgate on the Collation of the Right Reverend Charles James Bloomfield DD Lord Bishop of this Diocese. I had previously laboured for nine years in the charge of St Peter's Saffron Hill as the first incumbent of that populous and poor district containing 13,000 souls – and the Bishop was good enough to say that he presented me to St. E's in acknowledgement of what he was pleased to term "my arduous and earnest labours in that anxious sphere of duty".

He was a busy parish priest but kept up his scholarly interests which were not confined to linguistics. As a Cambridge friend of Charles Darwin, he accompanied the great scientist on botanical excursions. The Darwin Project web site records correspondence between the two men soon after the publication in 1859 of *The Origin of Species*, the 150th anniversary of which we are celebrating this year. Charles Darwin had given an example of the action of natural selection in his great work with a reference to the blind rats found in the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. Rodwell adduced further examples of enormous blind rats from the opening of the Fleet Sewer sealed up since the days of Elisabeth I. He also made observations on Darwin's correlation of deafness and blue eyes in cats. In "Variations" Darwin admitted that he had heard of exceptions to what he had suggested as a rule and Rodwell's letter contains the evidence which Darwin acknowledged in a warm response written from Eastbourne on November 5th 1860 – "Of the multitude of letters which I receive not one in a thousand is like yours in value."

Rodwell continued to take a sympathetic interest unlike many of his clerical brethren in Darwin's researches and another letter survives commenting on CD's later work "The Descent of Man".

"Letter from J.M.R to Darwin June 1 1877

My dear Sir, As one of those who have derived immense instruction and satisfaction from the perusal of your various works and not least from that on the *Descent of Man*, with the conclusions of which, I upon the whole quite agree will you excuse my forwarding to you for your amusement an extract from a volume of sermons just forwarded to me from Chios and there preached by a certain Archimandrite of the name "Gregory" who has the repute of being one of the best men of his order in the Greek Islands. It will perhaps be a source of satisfaction to you to know that your works are read in those parts and apparently believed in and that the worthy priest can only meet your arguments by abuse."

The extract anathematizes those young people "barely able to utter a little French" who admire that "charlatan Voltaire and that deplorable descendant of the ape, Darwin."

In science and linguistics Rodwell was open to the most advanced thinking and research of his day. Similarly in his great work of translation he gives evidence of sympathy and admiration for Islam which was anything but universal among his contemporaries. "The more insight we obtain from undoubted historical sources into the actual character of Muhammad the less reason do we find to justify the strong vituperative language poured out upon his head by Maracci, Prideaux and others in recent days." He also notes in manner reminiscent of Carlyle that the Qur'an was responsible for transforming wandering

Bedouin of Arabia “as if by a magician’s wand into the founders of Empires, the builders of cities, the collectors of more libraries than they at first destroyed, while cities like Fostat, Baghdad, Cordova and Delhi, attest the power at which Christian Europe trembled.”

In his approach to Christian theology and ritual by contrast he was anything but liberal.

Writing his fragment of autobiography in 1865, Rodwell looked back at some of the ecclesiastical and theological turmoil of the previous twenty years.

“With the year 1842 and 1843 commenced a most eventful period for the Church of England. The ancient Barriers were now broken down; the old bonds between Church and State were one after another gradually loosened. Romanism and Dissent had commenced their attacks. A High Church movement commenced in this Church itself and these all have been steadily developing during the last 25 years.” To this movement Rodwell was an early adherent although he admits candidly that there had been other tendencies at work.

“Of course there have been other phases of religious opinion – the Broad or Liberal Church Party and the Evangelical or Puritanico-Calvinist School. The latter sensibly diminishing for some time past both in number and in influence. And also by the side of High Churchism has also grown up no small amount of German Theology and this I have no doubt is steadily though stealthily on the increase. It has its fautors in High Places and the name and writings of Bishop Colenso will mark, I believe, an epoch in the History of Religious Thought in England. Whether those views and principles are destined largely to overspread the church remains to be seen. If I may venture to Prophecy, I believe that they will. I have kept my eye steadily upon this subject for many years. I have read much of the Literature associated with it and am decidedly of opinion that the orthodox party have not yet manifested learning and research equal to that of their opponents. I shall not live to see the issue of these attacks upon the Old Faith. But if these remarks last 200 years hence, I venture to think that whoever may read them will find that much of the old Catholic creed as now held by High Churchmen and orthodox persons generally, will have been eliminated from the creed of Englishmen, when he compares the creed of his days with the standards and formularies of the Church of this day. Regeneration in Holy Baptism, the Eternity of Hell Torments, the Inspiration of Scripture are already open questions; and there are certain portions of the sacred text itself which seem likely to fare ill at the hands of critics. For my part stare super antiquas vias is my motto and so far as my individual efforts go I will never give up, whatever difficulties I see and feel, any portion of the old Catholic Faith. There may be reasons for faith in mysteries which are above me and for clearing up perplexing difficulties which I do not see or know. The old system as it stands has worked well, works well still, is the stay of millions living and dying and as my belief is that the whole edifice will be imperilled, if any part is tampered with, I am for this reason as well as for others, a thorough conservative in religion and wish to leave on record this my testimony for the ancient creed. Englishmen seem to be fast unlearning their religion.”

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“The immense circulation attained by Essays and Reviews, Colenso’s Works, The Westminster Review, The Daily Telegraph Newspaper etc clearly shews how large a section of the Public holds very loosely to the Faith of their Fathers.”

“Essays and Reviews” was a work by seven members of the Church of England, several of them clergymen. It was published in March 1860, four months after Darwin’s Origin of Species and sold 22,000 copies in two years – more than “Origin” sold in its first twenty. The Essayists epitomized the results of the challenge to Biblical history by three quarters of a century of critical research and to Biblical pre-history by scientists working in the new fields of geology and biology.

Rodwell was in a good position to understand the strength of the challenge and the particular doctrines which he mentions in his Journal are among those questioned by the Essayists, two of whom were indicted for heresy. They were deprived of their posts in 1862 but they then appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. In 1864 the Privy Council overturned the judgement, “dismissing hell with costs” as Bishop Wilberforce furiously exclaimed. 137,000 laity signed a letter of thanks to the Archbishops for voting against the majority of the Committee.

Was Rodwell despite his immense learning and sympathy with Darwin and openness to other religious perspectives simply being obscurantist when it came to his own faith? He talks of Christian mysteries beyond the reach of rational analysis and in this I believe he has an intuition of the weakness of the faith which his friend Darwin lost. Nick Spencer of the Theos Think Tank has just written an interesting book [published February this year] on “Darwin and God”.

He rehearses the well known fact that Darwin was deeply affected by the death of three of his children in childhood especially the painful death of Annie at Easter, 1851. This proved subversive of an orthodox belief which really rested on natural philosophy.

Archdeacon William Paley’s book “A View of the Evidences for Christianity” was published in 1794 and was a set book for all Cambridge undergraduates. Paley’s “happy world” remarks Spencer “had little room for suffering which offended its sense of order and harmony and it offered no resources for dealing with suffering. That was one of the reasons why Cardinal Newman railed against it, claiming that it “cannot ... tell us one word about Christianity proper.” Such Christianity was more philosophical than theological, built on the foundation of seemingly secure and universal human reason rather than on the particularities of the Christian story, let alone the counter- intuitive scandal of the Incarnation and the Cross.”

Rodwell believed that the perspective on the world which is opened up by what he called the “giants” of his day – “Rationalism and Materialism” did not exhaust the possibilities of describing the reality in which we are immersed. Rodwell’s faith was not that of a general philosophical or conventional kind of which he was a trenchant critic but steeped in the particularities of the Christian story. In this also he is a worthy patron of the Ethelburga Centre which does not seek some lowest common denominator, homogenised reduction of the great world faiths. This is a particular temptation in our own time when religions are accessible to one another in a way unparalleled in history and some people seem to want to select from the smorgasbord of religious options, the delicacies most appealing to their taste.

In reality this kind of dilettantism stifles all spiritual progress and keeps us precisely where we start. There is no spiritual progress without commitment to a particular way. This does not of course imply that we should vituperate those who follow other ways and indeed in the plan of Providence there may come a day for Christians when the Word of God, Jesus Christ himself is more clearly seen because of the witness of friends who have followed other spiritual paths and not least those who in different ways look back to Abraham as their ancestor.

One of Darwin’s legacies is an enhanced understanding that everything has a history including the universe and life itself. This was part of Rodwell’s DNA and one can see him in the Journal casting his mind two hundred years beyond his own time – to the period indeed into which we are moving amidst the uncertainty of the present turbulence in the

global economy, which most probably presages at least a return to a multi-polar world in which India and China will have recovered some of their ancient weight and prestige.

Rodwell had a profound sense of being a beneficiary of the story of the Hebrew Scriptures and this is evident in the sermon he preached on the restoration of the Temple by Nehemiah on the occasion of the re-opening of this church in 1862. The campaign of refurbishment here involved the removal of the pews, the substitution of free and open seats and the enrichment of the Sanctuary.

The sermon which I owe once again to excavation work by Gemma Jamieson and Najat Doulismane is firmly rooted in the Biblical narrative but has a non exclusive confidence which eschews any sectarian mentality and is reaching for the fullness of Catholic faith unqualified by any adjectives.

“We affirm that as Catholic Christians we are Independent and Baptists, and believe in the unity of the Godhead and practise a true Methodism, in the ways of the old faith, and receive the whole Bible, all in one as Catholics. We hold and we profess the old Catholic creeds as they have come down to us from the very beginning, refusing to admit what the Church of Rome may have added, and refusing to give up what the various sects may have taken away.”

Incidentally the fund raising which made the rebuilding of the Ethelburga Centre possible and for which we owe a particular debt of gratitude to Viscount Churchill, has also been one of the continuities of life here. Even this sermon of 1862 was printed with a note on the front cover to the effect that “Any profits arising from the sale of this sermon will be given to the restoration fund for which £300 is still required.”

The Journal records the visual impact of the recovery of the Christian memory here in 1866.

“On the first Sunday in August the Proper Eucharistic Vestments were used at St Ethelburga’s. i.e. the Amice, Alb, Girdle, Maniple, Chasuble without the slightest objection on the part of the congregation to whom my intention of using the Vestments had been announced from the Pulpit and their opinion asked. No opinions however of a dissentient kind were received, but many expressed a wish for their restoration. I had therefore no option but to proceed if the wishes of the people were to be consulted. Accordingly I informed the Bishop of L. of my intention to act in accordance with the opinions expressed, and the permission given by Convocation. The Bishop expressed himself coldly upon the subject as might have been expected, but did not forbid the addition of the Vestments.”

Difficulties multiplied in the following years, however, especially after the passage of the Public Worship Regulation Act in 1874. Archbishop Tait described by Rodwell as an “Erastian” had hoped to put down Ritualism of the kind practised at St Ethelburga’s with Parliamentary sanction. Passions had been raised by the agitation over the dis-establishment of the Irish Church, the controversy over the place of the Church of England in national education and the “no popery” furore excited by the First Vatican Council.

In 1877 Fr Arthur Tooth was sent to prison for refusing to obey court orders issued under the 1874 Act and Rodwell was also delated to Bishop Jackson and subject to harassment by members of the Vestry. In March 1877 Rodwell wrote to the Congregation explaining why he was not proposing to follow the example of Mr Tooth. The Church would be closed during the week and celebrations of the Sacrament suspended in face of the threat of being sent by “Lord Penzance to a felon’s jail” under the Public Worship Regulation Act.

The Bishop ignored a memorial signed by 534 Communicants; 360 men and 174 women who complained that the Vestry Meeting which had delated the Rector was attended by only 17 people “of whom several were dissenters” and not one a member of the congregation. The memorialists pointed out that congregations and collections had increased since Rodwell’s arrival in the parish and that the Vestry had withdrawn the Church rate in 1847 leaving the church in a state of “ruin, decay and dirt”. The rector and congregation had spent nearly £1000 in 1862 restoring the fabric.

It looks as though Bishop Jackson was trying other avenues in an effort to bring Rodwell to heel. Pasted into the Journal is a record of a decision of the Privy Council instigated by the Bishop to remove £400 p.a. from the Ethelburga endowment in favour of St Botolph’s Aldgate from the date of the “avoidance” of the rectory of St Ethelburga “from whatsoever cause”.

The Church Times for April 13 1877 reported that Mr Rodwell was the first of the City Clergy to open the church for short mid day service. “Unfortunately, however, Bishop Jackson like his predecessor had come to the conclusion that the City churches were useless not to say dangerous, as inviting spoliation; and Mr Rodwell having demonstrated the right rev prelate’s opinion to be groundless has received his reward..... Bishop Jackson is content to let the City drones convert their benefices into sinecures but this admirable worker must be treated as if he were the scum of the earth. The right rev prelate may depend upon it that he is accumulating matter for bitter remorse. This is not one of his *Little Sins.*”

It was at this time that Rodwell withdrew from London and spent his remaining years at work on literary projects and translations at Censing House, Upper Maze Hill, St. Leonard’s-on-Sea.

He was still there in 1898, 21 years later according to that invaluable if bitchy book on the City Churches by the Reverend H.W. Clarke. He claims that the rector had not visited his city parish during that period – the duties being performed by a Curate who was an even more extreme ritualist than Rodwell himself.

A Commission had been appointed by Bishop Temple in 1894 and reported in favour of uniting St Ethelburga’s with St Helen’s – another idea which had resurfaced in the early 1990’s. After the union, the church and site of St Ethelburga’s were to have been demolished and sold. The resistance of the congregation and Rodwell’s long life ensured that our little church was spared this fate.

The City Press of 29th January 1898 reports “an uproarious vestry meeting” at St Ethelburga’s held on the 27th of the month. Mr Kensit of the Protestant Truth Society was present and spoke of the “dirty confessional”. Mr Hill shouted “Let us see the back of the present rector and the end of popery.”

There follows an open letter to the Bishop published in The Times and signed by three parishioners. “Our curate figures in the list of members of the Romanising “English Church Union” for 1896 thus – Rev. Wilmot Phillips. He is also a member of the SSC Holy Cross Society – that is the Society which to promote the re-introduction of the system of secretly confessing of sins by women and children to pretended “priests” issued the indecent book, *The Priest in Absolution.*”

The controversy even reached the shores of America where in April 1899 the New York Times reported that the Vestry had once more written to the Bishop – this time my distinguished predecessor Mandell Creighton, urging him to compel Rodwell to resign. In

his reply the Bishop said “I have written to Mr Rodwell on the subject ... Mr Rodwell is not prepared to resign and the matter of resignation is within his own discretion. I have the power to compel him to reside in the parish but after so long an absence and in his present age [ninety-two years] and condition of infirmity, I do not see that any good purpose would be served by doing this.”

When the letter was read to the Vestry Meeting one Vestryman demanded – So the Vicar won't resign and we can do nothing?

The Vestry Clerk replied – That is so. The matter was accordingly allowed to drop. Our rector finally died in 1900.

Let us close the chapter on the tedious ritual controversy there .Most of what was alleged against John Meadows Rodwell is regularly performed by the present Bishop and a far greater danger to the ethos of the Church of England now arises from those who see no need to follow any liturgical form whatsoever.

When Rodwell was born in 1808, the United Kingdom was locked in a life and death struggle with Napoleon's marshals in the Iberian peninsular. The majority of the population still lived as they had done for the past millennium in rural villages like the ones Rodwell knew in the Suffolk of his youth. Communications moved at the speed of the stage coach and post horse. When he died in 1900, England was an urban land with a vastly increased number of inhabitants despite a century of emigration. The roads surrounding this ancient church were choked with traffic including some of the new fangled motor vehicles [1900 was also the year in which Daimler the German Engineer died].

During his 92 years which spanned these extraordinary changes, Rodwell had kept abreast of astonishing scientific developments not least in his friendship with Darwin and he made a significant contribution to scholarship in a translation of the Qur'an which did more justice to the beauty of the original and so contributed to the growing appreciation of Islam in Europe.

His was an open enquiring mind aware of the spirit of the times but not confined by it. He cast his mind into the future and foresaw lean times for orthodox faith but did not despair. I like to think that our determination to engage with the faith of others in the peaceful spirit of bridge builders without idling in neutral with respect to our own, would earn his approbation. I am certain that the incense laden rites with which we celebrated the restoration of St Ethelburga's would have excited his admiration and while he would have enjoyed the grim satisfaction of seeing the successor of what he regarded as the “semi-Presbyterian and Erastian” Bishops of his own time, standing here this evening to celebrate his life and legacy.

[END]