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## BOLDRE STILL AND BOLDRE

(August 2018)



These two photos  
of St John's from  
"Dine and Divine"

<https://dineanddivine.com/>



*The Reverend Canon Andrew Neaum became the "House for Duty" Anglican priest of the lovely Boldre Benefice in August 2013. The Vicarage in which he and Diana live is on the edge of the New Forest, a couple of miles north of Lymington in Hampshire. He is old fashioned enough a priest to visit his flock in their homes, but "house for duty" clergy are supposed to work only two days a week and Sundays, which means visiting everyone in the parish takes a long time. The following are the **July 2018** weekly ruminations, aired prejudices and footling observations that in the weekly pew sheet augment his visits and help keep folk in touch week in and week out. Earlier articles are available from the Article Page on this Website:*

<http://www.andrewneaum.com/articles.htm>

## (258) “This and That” - 26 August 2018

*Judge not that ye be not judged.* It’s a more difficult saying than appears at first sight.

### Judging Bobby Burns

“Non-judgementalism” is bandied around as the virtue of virtues. Is used to validate all and any behaviour, no matter how vile. Yet to be moral beings we need to discriminate between what is good and what is evil.

Better, then, to concentrate on the second part of Jesus’ admonition: ...*that ye be not judged*, while turning to another of his sayings: *don’t bother about the mote in another person’s eye. Attend to the plank in your own.*

Thomas Carlyle, talking of the less than exemplary poet Robert Burns, puts a wise nautical spin on judging people: “*Granted the ship comes into harbour with shrouds and tackle damaged, the pilot is blameworthy.... but to know how blameworthy, tell us first whether his voyage has been round the globe or only to Ramsgate and the Isle of Dogs.*”

### Risk, joy and surprise

The Christian Faith, at its best, involves risk, joy and surprise. The following piece of verse makes the point. It is by Marcella Marie Holloway (1913-2003). Born in the United States she was a prizewinning playwright and poet. Her doctoral thesis was on Gerard Manley Hopkins and he remained the focus of her scholarly publications. Professor of English at various colleges, she became a nun of the Sisters of St Joseph in 1932. I came across this poem in *Divine Inspiration: The Life of Jesus in World Poetry* published by Oxford University Press.

#### The Risk

*You take a risk when you invite the Lord  
Whether to dine or talk the afternoon  
Away, for always the unexpected soon  
Turns up: a woman breaks her precious nard,  
A sinner does the task you should assume,  
A leper who is cleansed must show his proof:  
Suddenly you see your very roof removed  
And a cripple clutters up your living room.*

*There's no telling what to expect when Christ  
Walks in your door. The table set for four  
Must often be enlarged and decorum  
Thrown to the wind. It's His voice that calls them  
And it's no use to bolt and bar the door:  
His kingdom know no bounds of roof or wall, or floor.*

#### Too much God, too little God

I suggested a piece of scripture for a funeral in Australia once. It was from the First letter of St John. All about the love of God. It contained 119 words.

It was rejected for having too much God in it. The word God appeared eleven times. The word love thirteen. God is modest enough not to demand centre stage all the time, even in church. Yet he is the Church’s *raison d’etre*!

However, judge not that ye be not judged. This attitude to funeral readings from non churchgoers is mirrored by those actual churchgoers who prefer their church to be filled only with true believers as defined by them. Whereas we’re all are at very different stages on our journey to God.

Talking of funerals, how about this little Gospel-based prayer, composed, I think, by George Appleton.

*O Christ, the little girl on her deathbed, the young man on his way to his grave, and Lazarus three days in the tomb, could all hear your voice. May each soul as it passes through death, hear your friendly voice, see the look of love in your eyes and the smile of welcome in your face, and be led by you to the Father of all souls.*

### **Wandering lonely as a cloud**

“Any lone cloud”, said Miles Kington, “in an otherwise clear sky has got some explaining to do. Very probably it has just got cut off from the main herd or has lost its mother, but occasionally it is a rogue cloud looking for someone to rain on. I must say, if I looked down and saw an old poet mooning over some daffodils, I'd be very tempted.”

## **(257) “This and That” - 19 August 2018**

Joseph Heller's novel *Catch 22* tells of a hospital patient wrapped from head to toe in bandages. A bag and tube at his head drips nourishment into him. A bag and tube at his bottom drips out waste. Every twenty four hours a nurse arrives to swap the two bags around.

### **Urine therapy**

Some year ago in Australia I strolled round a New Age extravaganza called The Mind and Body Show. It was in the town of which I was Vicar, and I was duly dog collared.

Queues lined up to have palms read, fortunes told, spirits discerned, auras photographed and feet, backs, faces and insecurities massaged. There were magical beads, amulets and stone lingams for sale and crystals to bring peace. There were gew-gaws, gems and jewellery to ward off evil spirits; incenses, essences and fragrances as meditation aids and all sorts of therapies and counsellors. There were the spirits of Red Indians eager to be called up and consulted.

What brought Joseph Heller to mind was a sad looking little lady commending the drinking of urine. She had a spiel of pseudo-scientific claptrap to do with antibodies, allergies and vaccination. A daily medicinal glass of this less than appetising fluid, I gather, has been taken and continues to be taken by not a few credulous folk.

### **Snubbed and scowled at**

As I walked round, so obviously a proud Christian, reactions varied. Many in the crowd were mere onlookers not devotees. Some were parishioners. I was greeted, talked to and asked questions. Some devotees and practitioners gave me a tentative welcome, others scowled at or snubbed me. I was not the only cleric there. So too was the local Roman Catholic priest, more discreetly in mufti. Likewise the Reformed Church minister, both friends.

We decided that the next time there was such a show we would sponsor a Christian Stall entitled *The Christian Approach To Mystery*. Not in an aggressive or combative fashion, but rather to present Christianity as an interesting, and attractive alternative option.

### **Hair shirts, whips and knotted girdles**

Christianity is no stranger to esoterica, mumbo jumbo and bizarre practices. Devotees of New Age shenanigans are too ignorant of this.

So I argued for festooning our Christian stall with rosaries, prayer beads, icons, statuettes and crucifixes; scenting it with exotic blends of burning incense; serenading it with haunting Gregorian chant; displaying a tonsured, discalced monk with thrice knotted girdle and an all but visible halo; exhibiting hair shirts, whips and revolting Lenten menus; importing an old fashioned, genuine confessional box, with a priest behind its grill, to hear confessions, grant our Lord's

absolution and satisfyingly horrific penances; public readings of the poetry of St John of the Cross with its eye-brow raising erotic imagery; displays of splinters from the true cross, finger nail parings of St Francis and a feather or two from the wings of the Archangel Gabriel.

Sadly, saner counsel prevailed. The post-Reformation Uniting Church minister and the post Counter-Reformation and Vatican II Catholic priest were too suspicious of mumbo jumbo to approve of my preferred approach. The stall we set up was free of the bizarre, but did contain some wonderful books, crosses and pictures nonetheless. Not a few people stopped to chat, look at books, and even to buy.

### **A lesson learned**

What did I learn from it all? Simply this, if people can be persuaded to sip their own urine and swallow the weird and whacky on such a scale, then we Christians should realise that to demythologise and demystify our faith in order to make it more palatable to sceptical twenty first century folk is unnecessary. People will swallow anything. Demystification and demythologising are to be justified only as tools in the revelation and clarification of truth. No other motive is necessary or justified. It is less myth, miracle and the incredible that cause people to reject the Gospel than the moral challenge to love radically and die to self.

## **(256) “This and That” - 12 August 2018**

“There are no atheists in foxholes.” That’s nonsense. As many a firm atheist has asserted. What truth there is in the saying is hardly different from the much older aphorism, “a drowning man will clutch at a straw.”

### **Naivety in extremis**

*In extremis* many of us shed our sophisticated, critical selves and naively turn for help to anything at all. Be it a piece of floating dried grass or God.

Some days ago Diana and I recited Psalm 6 as part of the daily office. We remarked, in passing, on the psalmist’s naïve attempt to strike a bargain with God. Save me, he says, because if I’m dead who will praise you? If I’m dead who will thank you?

What a naïve argument to persuade the Almighty to lend a saving hand! And yet it brought to mind, a far from naïve and favourite poem by Rilke:

### **What Will You Do?**

What will you do, God, when I die?  
When I, your pitcher, broken, lie?  
When I, your drink, go stale or dry?  
I am your garb, the trade you ply,  
you lose your meaning, losing me.

Homeless without me, you will be  
robbed of your welcome, warm and sweet.  
I am your sandals; your tired feet  
will wander bare for want of me.

Your mighty cloak will fall away.  
Your glance that on my cheek was laid  
and pillowed warm, will seek, dismayed,

the comfort that I offered once -  
to lie, as sunset colours fade  
in the cold lap of alien stones.

What will you do, God? I am afraid.

Though raised a Catholic, Rilke left orthodox Christianity behind as an adult, but remained an intriguing mystic of sorts. His poems are full of angels and God, but he addresses the Almighty less as a transcendent deity than a spirit or force, immanent within himself and his art.

Who cares? Even to a thorough going Christian like myself this poem is haunting. Especially the last three words. It is the intimacy of the relationship that is lovely. Hence the fear of that intimacy's end with his end.

### **Is Google ever wrong?**

Last Monday Diana and I sat under the shade of a large oak tree in our garden tackling a lovely summer meal. Smoked salmon, home grown potatoes and a green salad mostly from the garden but augmented by avocado, cashews and feta cheese. To sit in dense shade on a hot and sunny day with heavily leafed trees all around to soothe the eye and a gentle breeze to cool the brow, how perfect. The last half of a sonnet by Edna St Vincent Millay:

Long have I known a glory in it all,  
But never knew I this;  
Here such a passion is  
As stretcheth me apart. Lord, I do fear  
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year.  
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall  
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

We had been expecting guests, a married couple we had met while on the Falkland islands three years ago. They were passengers on a ship that had to be evacuated due to a fire. An unpleasant experience that had involved hours in a life boat on cold and nasty seas. We had lent them some ready cash and the use of the Cathedral organ as therapy. The husband is a church organist.

They didn't turn up for lunch though. We ate it on our own. They had arranged to come on August bank holiday Monday. Our Google calendar declared last Monday, 6 August, a bank holiday and is Google ever wrong?

No! We had missed the qualifying parenthesis: (Scotland). We will see them in three week's time. By then it is likely to be as cold, wet and windy as the Falklands.

## **(255) “This and That” - 5 August 2018**

“Religion, is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant”, said the sociologist Peter Berger. It is the word “audacious” I like. It is so right. Daring, plucky, intrepid. That's the faith I'm inspired by, aspire to and attempt to live.

### **Signals of transcendence**

Berger died last year. He was an influential sociologist and serious Christian. The New York Times obituary quotes him as saying that:

..... people can enrich their religious sensibilities by finding “signals of transcendence” in common experiences: A mother's reassuring a

frightened child that all is well suggests a confidence in a trustworthy universe. A mortal's insistence on hope in the face of approaching death implies a conviction that death may not be final. The ability to condemn monstrous evil suggests a belief in a moral ordering of the universe that may even be comfortable with the notion of hell. Laughter and play affirm "the triumph of all human gestures of creative beauty over the gestures of destruction".

### **Mozart and nostalgia**

I've been listening to a magical piece of Mozart. One of his lovely, easy to listen to piano variations. In remarking on this in my journal, I went onto reflect that it is the theme itself, rather than the variations upon that theme, that stopped my heart. The variations held my attention, in part, simply by promising to redeliver the theme in its perfection. They didn't though. All they offered were tantalising versions, reminders, snatches and hints.

This is similar to nostalgia. The past is irrecoverable. The magic moment departs forever. To revisit or recall is not to recover it. Even when apparently unchanged on a re-visitation, the context is different. We view from a different time and place. Our perspective has changed. This is why nostalgia is always bitter sweet. Things can never be the same again. The ache never entirely goes away.

### **F.X. Mozart**

In days gone by I ran my own church choir with an arrogant ignorance that makes me wince to recall. In my last parish I used to search the internet for pieces of music suitable for what was a two part choir. There I discovered a little piece for two sopranos by the younger of Mozart's two sons. A composer of whom, at the time, I was only dimly aware, Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart (1791–1844).

He was born in Vienna only five months before his father's early death and received an excellent musical education from three composers dear to my heart, Antonio Salieri (much maligned in the film 'Amadeus'), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (of whose music I have several disks) and Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (whom I love beyond telling because he wrote several delightful, if unlikely, concertos for Jewish Harp).

Like his father, Franz Xaver Mozart started to compose at an early age. He became a professional musician, but enjoyed only moderate success, both as a teacher and a performer. Unlike his father, he was introverted and given to self-deprecation. He constantly underrated his talent and feared that whatever he produced would be unfavourably compared with what his father had accomplished. He never married, nor did he have any children.

### **A suitable epitaph**

What really interested me, however, was just how large the shadow of his father loomed over him. Etched upon his tombstone is an inscription that is both moving and telling. I sent it off to my daughter Rachel in an email as follows.....

Dear Ray,

Should you ever be puzzling over what sort of epitaph you might prepare for yourself, you might take as your blue print that of Mozart's son: "May the name of his father be his epitaph, as his veneration for him was the essence of his life."

Love, Me (as I know you do!)

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