

**Foreword** – an exercise in creative writing and gentle satire based around the fictional city of Pychester. This sideways look at the CofE was penned with the issues of Spring 2016 on my mind, but I hope it still makes you smile and maybe think. Views are not necessarily mine, and certainly not endorsed by the Church of St Michael & All Angels, Mount Dinham, Exeter.

## **A Pychester Installation.**

The last day of April 2016, the Eve of Rogation Sunday brings a gentler, warmer afternoon to Pychester. The choir has finished practising and the pre-Service organ music is broadcasting to Mount Dinham through the wide open west doors, as clergy and people from the city and farther afield assemble for the Installation of Frs Basil & Helen to serve, in strictly defined capacities and categories, as Vicars in the Parish of St Pythagoras & All Angles, and at Little St Pythag's mission shed down by the riverside.

Revd Trevor de la Gruyère spikes up his hair as he crosses the unmarked border between posh St Simon's and the inner city. He prefers to be known as Trev the Rev, but don't scoff, his youth church "Unleashed" in the medieval St Jeffrey Arches is going from strength to strength among those who like to do church in an unchurchy sort of fashion, ideally situated also to minister to the nightclub area of the city, and host the late-night prayer support wing of the Street Pastors.

Those who are predestined to know will know about the Charismatic Calvinist congregation meeting somewhere in Pychester. Pastor Klein and a few of the saved have come with their inhalers and a gift of Tulips. In June their Punk-Worship band, "Total Depravity," will ramp things up at the big youth event "ShedLoad" that Trev the Rev is organising in the Cathedral for those who like I mean just kindof so don't do church, y'know. Apparently "ShedLoad" will have live bands, skate park, big screen gaming, sumo wrestling, giant inflatables, pamper zone and prayer!

Meeting in the Community Centre just across the Iron Bridge, the Lutherans of the Pychester Knitwear Church have brought a hand-made warm woollen chasuble and embroidered stole for Fr Helen to use down at the Shed of Prayer. They're chatting with progressive church members from the URC, whose Minister is already up in the Choir Stalls getting ready to sing.

And there with them is Revd Prof Gregor Macrina, who lectures in Scottish Studies at Pychester University; he's started a Church of Scotland outpost under the Columba Declaration at St Giles Without (or should that be 'outwith'). The Evangelical Bookshop that had been at St Giles had closed now that everyone accessed their Scriptures and Commentaries online, so it was either a Fresh Expression of Kirk or conversion to yet more student flats.

From the Cathedral Dean Arius, Canon Flora Pebbles, the Precentor and the Canon Barbarian have all turned out. The Dean will look the part, resplendent in the Procession, as the Tapisers have allowed him to wear their best Cope. He hopes Bishop Rick and Archdeacon Idris will make an effort to look suitably ceremonial, but has his doubts.

To be sure, there's Fr Benny Dicite from Our Lady and St John, and the Civic Dignitaries who seem to have a special devotion to our Lady of Perpetual Roadworks. The local MP and his partner smile and stride up the nave to their reserved seats.

Speaking in many tongues, members of the Orthodox Church, who sing their Vigils and Liturgies in the old Chapel of St Sidwella, seem more united than most, but are starting to be concerned how many of their 14 autocephalous Churches will turn up to their Holy & Great Council of the Orthodox Church to be held in Crete – it's been 1200 years since the previous Council, so it would be a shame for some to boycott it.

The Sage Methodists and the local Baptists are ecumenically minded too these days and have come to check on the quality of Anglican Hymn-singing and Refreshments. Even the Vicar of St Simon Says and his Puritan-leaning, born-again Anglicans have risked the smells & bells and the possibility of Latin to pray that the Bishop's message might touch the hearts of many who are there.

The inspirational leaders of BeauJesus Nouveau are somewhat subdued. Someone has been discipling where they ought not to have been. The word concubine has been heard in the land, but they're confident God forgives a bit of good honest heterosexual unfaithfulness; whereas those wicked "same-sex attracted" clergy with their faithful partners deserve hell-fire and ...

The folk from Big Harvest are confused by the lack of purple-uplighting, and by the strange table with candles and a crucifix on it, where the overhead video screen and the mikes for the worship band ought to be. And how are those singers going to be heard unamplified in such a large building? Traditional church buildings may cost a pretty penny to maintain, but their builders knew what they were doing in terms of sound projection and visible liturgy. Meanwhile the Chaplains to the Hospital and Hospice sit near the back in case one is called away urgently.

And there are children, teenagers even, alighting from the coach bringing the supportive and the inquisitive from Frs Basil & Helen previous parish in London. Their millennium twins are among them; having just turned 16, Mildred (known as Millie – why the heck did you call me Mildew – parents!) and Michael (known as Mikey in solidarity) will stay in London for their GCSEs, but they are here to moan and make demands if they have to move to this Trollopian backwater.

Millie zips up the temporary ramp in her wheelchair, but the loo's not accessible, she'll have to take Communion with the second sitting down in the Nave with the oldies who can't do the steps any more, and singing in the Choir's gonna be tricky.

"It's like the well-resourced London Hospitals compared to the rest of the NHS," her father explains patiently, "The Diocese of London has people with an excess of wealth, with Dragons' Den motivation and penitential giving that gets things done. Folk here aren't any less caring, they just have fewer resources, but we'll get these things sorted, with or without Faculties. The Church thinks having a dozen female bishops means equality is done and dusted. Synod will spend days on Tissues in Sexuality, and maybe one hour on Christians with disabilities or mental health issues. Most of the bishops can't get their pointy heads around any theology of diversity, but things will change."

Too right, thought Mikey, we'll need a branch of WhiCh (Wheelchairs in Church) here in Pychester for starters. Mum says the Shed had some decent technology, at least. Reckon I'll hang out down there with the flower-people and the tree-huggers.

But all of them, in their variety and diversity, are suddenly united in prayer, purpose and liturgy as the choir belts out the opening fanfare of Bruckner's "Ecce Sacerdos Magnus", with the trio of trombones in the West Gallery causing many to turn round as the Clergy Procession enters through the great west doors. Time honoured Christian choreography at its best – still fit for purpose.

I won't bore you with the details of the Service of Institution & Induction, but Bishop Rick's Sermon gives a fascinating insight into the unusual dedication of the Church of St Pythagoras & All Angles, based on the Life of St Pythagoras recorded in the famous Anglo-Saxon Pychester Book in the Cathedral's Chained Library. The "Vita Sancti Pythagoris" is published separately on St Pythag's website and in the Magazine.

Those with the relevant musical knowledge were rather worried when they saw that the Mass Setting was "Mass in B minor by J S Bach", but being St Pythag's this was the B minor, Johann, but not as you knew it. The reduced B minor Missa Brevis edited for Liturgical Use at St Pythag's takes all the great tunes that you know and love, but skips all that tricky development and recapitulation to get it down to 12 minutes or 20 with the Gloria.

Rogation Sunday itself, and the weather angels are on the side of Frs Basil & Helen. After High Mass at St Pythag's, choir & congregation visit Mt Dinham and bless it, incensing some of the residents, and process on down, singing as they go, to the allotments by the River Pyke to meet up with Fr Helen's little crew at Earthy Churchy. And it's amazing what some nearly scriptural smoked salmon sandwiches and prosecco, and rather less biblical sausage rolls and lemon-drizzle cake, can

do to smooth over one's theological differences. A promising start, everyone agrees.

Richard Barnes – this version Friday 12 January 2018.

Pychester's Chained Library



Incensing Mount Dinham



St Pythagoras & All Angles

