



Friends of St Woolos Cathedral

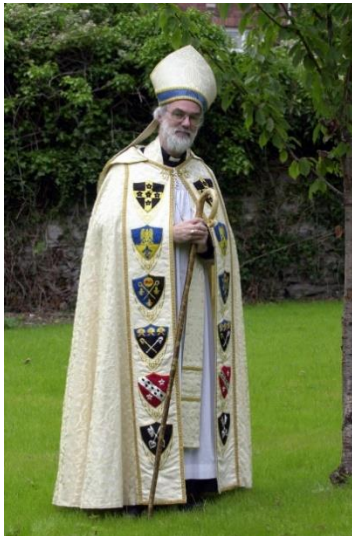
Spring Newsletter – March 2024

From the Secretary

First, just some reminders. With Holy Week and Easter fast approaching, don't forget that all the details of Easter services are available on the Newport Cathedral website. If you haven't yet returned your subscription to the Friends, please do so. Lastly, the Cathedral will be closed on Sunday 7th April. This is to allow the removal of several trees which are deemed dangerous. Closing the Cathedral on a Sunday is a decision taken only with great reluctance. However, to remove the trees safely requires the roads around the Cathedral to be closed and the local authority will only consent to this on a Sunday.

This year's programme for the Friends is almost complete and the highlights are described below. Get your diaries out now!

The Friends Annual Lecture 17th June 2024 7pm – Lord Williams of Oystermouth



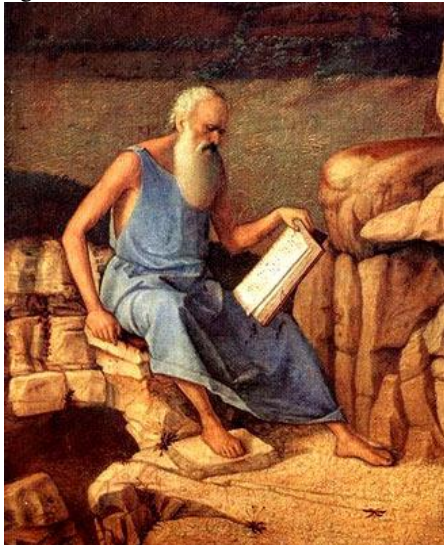
We are delighted to announce that Lord Williams of Oystermouth has generously agreed to give this year's Friends Lecture. Lord Williams is, of course, a man of immense distinction. Born in Swansea into a Welsh-speaking family, he had a brilliant academic career at Cambridge and Oxford, becoming at the age of thirty-six Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford and more recently Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and Professor of Contemporary Christian Thought. Ordained as an Anglican priest in 1978 he has served both as Archbishop of Wales and Archbishop of Canterbury. An outstanding scholar and poet, he is a prolific writer and much sought after as a public speaker. Yet, when all this is said, I have, of course, omitted his greatest claim to fame – namely, his tenure as Bishop of this diocese where we remember with affection both him and Jane and their family. I have promised him a warm welcome, so put **Monday 17th June 2024 7pm** in your diaries or phones **now. Don't miss it!**

The Friends Annual Outing 26th June 2024 – Worcester Cathedral

Last year's trip to Winchester was a great success, so why not join us this year on an outing to Worcester and its Cathedral? We will start with a tour of the Cathedral which was begun in 1084 and exhibits the whole range of church architecture from Norman to the present day. Famous for its medieval cloisters, Quire and Lady Chapel the Cathedral houses the tomb of King John and the Chantry Chapel of Prince Arthur as well as a library renowned for its medieval manuscripts. In the afternoon you will be free to explore the city of Worcester which has several museums including the Royal Worcester Porcelain Museum, the Commandery, the Tudor House and a number of military museums. Worcester was, of course, the site of the last battle of the Civil War in 1651 which saw the defeat of the Royalists under Charles II. In addition, Worcester boasts a modern shopping centre and an array of cafes and restaurants. Details of the trip will be available nearer the time but for the moment **put the date in your diary!**

Rowan Williams: Passions of the Soul (Bloomsbury £11.99)

One of the great benefits of retirement is the freedom it gives you. When I retired, one of the first things I did was to attend lectures at Pusey House, Oxford, in a series called Recollections. The subjects of these lectures were figures whose influence on the faith had once been considerable but had been somewhat neglected in recent years.



One of the best lecturers in this series was the Metropolitan Kallistos, for many years Spalding Lecturer in Orthodox Studies at Oxford. The Metropolitan lectured on some of the early saints and fathers of the church with elegance, learning and humour. In one of these lectures the Metropolitan mentioned Rowan Williams, remarking that his D.Phil. thesis was the best he had ever read. It is obvious in this short book that the admiration was a mutual one. Certainly, our former bishop has remained fascinated by Orthodoxy and what it can teach us here in the West.

This book uses as its basis the writings of the Desert Fathers as they are revealed in the *Philokalia* - a work compiled in the 18th century but drawing on writing of the 5th to the 8th centuries. In recent years these writings have become more available to English speakers, following a project to edit and translate them for a new English language edition. The Metropolitan Kallistos was much involved in this project which has only recently been completed. Many of the writings of the *Philokalia* are from the Desert Fathers and discuss the

challenges the believer faces as he or she tries to draw closer to God. The quality which they sought was *apatheia* from which we get our English word 'apathy' but what the Greek Fathers meant by this was very different from our modern concept. For them this was a state of detachment from the 'passions' of the soul which prevented them from clearly seeing and experiencing the love of God. Lord Williams uses the advice of men like Evagrius of Pontus, Cassian and others to help us understand what the passions are and how they might be countered. Passions in this sense are tendencies within us which may be good in themselves but get out of control and come to dominate us. The Fathers called these tendencies demons and they saw their time in the desert as a battlefield against everything that kept them from God. Evagrius thought there were three ways in which we can see the world: the angelic - where we see the world as it is, as God gives it to us; the diabolic - where we only concerned with what we can get out of the world, what serves our interest; and the human - which is a mixture of both the angelic and the diabolic. Our aim should be to see the world as the angels see it, as God has given it to us, 'in clarity, in truthfulness and in freedom and compassion.'

What then are the 'passions' that lead us into sin and keep us from God? The Greek Fathers listed eight (somewhat simplified into the Western Seven Deadly Sins): *greed and gluttony* where our normal appetites are exaggerated and out control; *lust* where natural instinct becomes perverted; *avarice* where fear and possessiveness takes us over; *anger* which takes us over and blinds us to reality; *dejection* where we lose sight of who we are and get trapped in a negative view of ourselves; *listlessness* - or *acedia* in Greek - a state of restless lassitude, a discontent that has a particular relevance for monks and those in the religious life; and *self-esteem* and *pride*, the first a desire for ambition and status while the second is the deadliest sin of all, the cause of Satan's downfall, a sense that God is not needed, that we ourselves are gods. The antidote to this series of sins, Lord Williams believes, lies in the Beatitudes and he shows how each has something to teach us about resisting sin and opening ourselves to God. To give one example, the answer to pride lies in the first of the Beatitudes: Blessed are the poor in the spirit or, in the New English Bible version, Happy are those who know their need of God. Indeed, if there is a theme that runs through this book it is our dependency on God. As Lord Williams puts it time and again: We are because he is. Only when we realise this, can we be open to the change that God wants to accomplish in us and to the love that is ours for now and eternity.

In more ways than one this is not always an easy read but there is much in this short book, just 150 pages, to ponder and take to heart. Most of the book is a series of lectures delivered to the Anglican Benedictine community at Holy Cross Convent, Leicestershire and that is important. The Desert Fathers did not make a distinction between the practice of the faith and the theology of the faith. To them they were both one. They, like their modern counterparts, were called to live the faith, to be open to God - and surely that is the calling of us all. This little book helps us to see how.

M. Phillips