

Friends of St Woolos Cathedral

Spring Newsletter – March 2025

From the Secretary

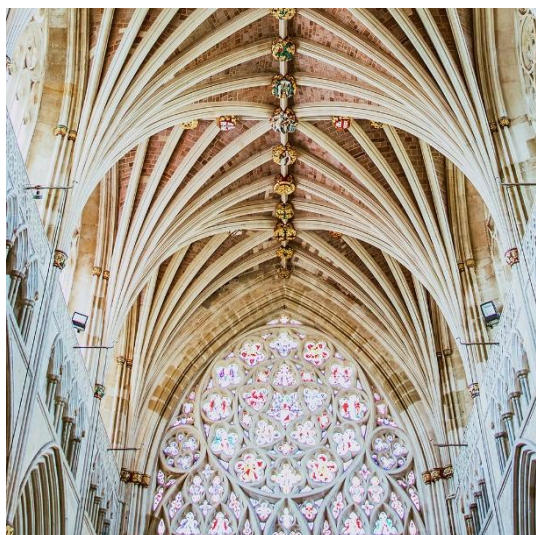
Every cathedral is a centre of worship, activity and outreach and this is certainly true of our own Cathedral. Lectures, meetings, concerts and more, not to mention the daily round of prayer and worship, keep the Cathedral a busy place. But none of these things could happen without the building that houses them. Its ancient fabric needs constant attention and maintenance. One of the biggest improvements in the last few months has been the installation of a new lighting system. Even with the lights on, the Cathedral was becoming a place of gloom and those of us who attend the 8 o'clock regularly were in danger of being 'the people who sat in darkness' but now we have indeed 'seen a great light'. The new system gives us much more choice in how the Cathedral is lit and a much more reliable and, indeed, safe system compared to what preceded it. Work is now underway to install a lighting system in the grounds, again for reasons of safety and soon work will also be underway to rebuild the gully that runs along the north side of the St Mary Chapel. This will not only improve drainage but will also prevent accidents. In addition, preparatory work for the repair of the Tower is well in hand with the technical aspects and plans now complete. Needless to say, nothing is cheap these days and the repair of the Tower will require careful financial planning and no doubt an appeal to people's generosity. This generosity, however, has always been very evident at St Woolos and can be seen in the new Cathedral sign and noticeboard which have been paid for by money raised by the congregation at Cathedral coffee mornings. The Friends too are playing their part in supporting the life and work of the Cathedral. We have agreed to pay for designs to enhance Cathedral worship in the future and to provide the funding for a new anthem to be sung by the combined girls and boys choir in the autumn.

Worship, of course, remains at the heart of everything we do and with Lent now upon us and Holy Week and Easter in prospect, why not join us at the Cathedral for a service or one of the other activities that mark this season of the year? Details may be found on the Cathedral website.

The Friends Annual Lecture 12th May 2025 7pm - Dr Mark Lewis

This year's lecturer is Dr Mark Lewis, Senior Curator (Roman Archaeology) at the National Roman Legion Museum, Caerleon. Dr Lewis holds an MSc degree and doctorate from Cardiff University and is an acknowledged expert on the Roman legionary fortress at Caerleon and on the archaeology of this area. He is Chairman of the Gwent Archaeological Trust. His lecture will be about recent archaeological investigations at Caerwent Parish Church and Goldcliff Priory. In case this might seem a dry subject, I can assure you that Dr Lewis is an excellent speaker. I was fortunate enough to hear a lecture he gave recently. The venue was full and all of us found it both interesting and entertaining. **Don't miss it! Put May 12th at 7.00 in your diaries or phones now!**

The Friends Annual Outing 18th June 2025 – Exeter Cathedral

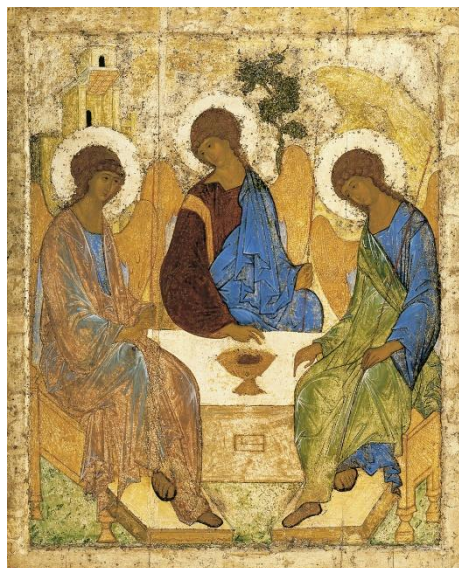


Why not join us for this year's outing to Exeter Cathedral? Exeter is one of the most magnificent cathedrals in England. Founded in 1050 with the enthronement of the first Bishop of Exeter, it is perhaps the finest example of church building in the English Decorated style. Although parts of the original Norman cathedral remain, the main part of the building dates from the 12th to the 14th century. It boasts the longest continuous medieval vaulted roof in the world and is a feast of fascinating decoration and colour. There is much to see and much to enjoy. Set in the heart of a bustling modern city with many restaurants and amenities, this should be a visit to remember. More details to follow **but get that diary out now!**

The Trinity: How not to be a heretic by Stephen Bullivant (Paulist Press Paperback £13.99)

I have a friend who is very interested in religion but is not a believer. He's never been baptised and is of a generally sceptical frame of mind and yet he has a genuine interest in the faith. As such, he often asks me questions about the Christian faith. Sometimes I can answer his questions and sometimes I can't. A little while ago, he started asking me to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. This, of course, is the sort of question that I, and I am sure many others, shy away from. I am not sure of my ground and, as this book says in its opening chapter, we try to avoid these questions not just because we are unclear in our own minds but we are afraid that we will mislead and fall into heresy. Faced by this challenge, however, I knew what I had to do. Any one who knows my house will know that one thing it does not lack is books. There are books everywhere and, I am tempted to say, on everything. I knew I had a book on the Trinity and, rather more remarkably, I knew where it was. That book is the subject of this review.

This is a short book – some 121 pages long – and it is written by Stephen Bullivant, who is a relatively young man (only 40 – well that seems young to me!) who has qualifications in theology and sociology and is a Professor and Director of the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society at St Mary's University Twickenham as well as being a Professor at the University of Notre Dame, Sydney. This little book is very clearly written and uses some inventive and surprising comparisons to explain the points that he is making. Bullivant stresses that there



are three essential points to make about the Trinity: (1) There is only one God; (2) The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is each God; (3) The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not the same. The debates – and heresies – about the Trinity arise from failing to hold to these three essentials. Bullivant argues that the doctrine of the Trinity is not self-evident but rather is rooted in the Scriptures and in the experience of Christians, especially in the early centuries of Christianity as Christians struggled to make sense of their faith. This wasn't (and isn't) easy. Some stressed the oneness of God and suggested that the different persons were simply different modes of the same being. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were like the *persona* of Greek tragedy, the masks worn by the same actors to play different parts. But attractive as this might seem, it was attacked by Christians like Tertullian (who invented the word *Trinity*) for failing to reflect the experience of God as it is revealed in the New Testament and by application in the Old Testament (remember Abraham meeting three visitors at the oak of Mamre). Later the teachings of Arius became popular. Whereas the modalists stressed the Oneness of God, the Arians (and Arianism for a time became

very popular) stressed the individual persons of the Trinity to the extent that the Second Person became a kind of superior archangel, highly exalted but a creature nonetheless. The implication of this is that Christ was not really God, the incarnation was not 'God with Us' as Christians had always believed. Gradually Arianism lost its hold on the Christian mind. What became the orthodox view was expressed at the Council of Nicaea and confirmed at the Council of Constantinople that the persons of the Trinity were consubstantial, they shared the one Godhead. Otherwise, great figures like St Athanasius argued, we could not enjoy the fullness of salvation if God had not been in Christ and Christ had not only been raised from the dead but taken up our humanity into God itself, so that we too may share the Divine Life. Another great saint, Gregory of Nyssa, compares the Trinity to gold. Gold can exist in many forms – keys, ornaments, rings – which are different from each other and yet they all remain gold in their substance.

So, did these ideas solve my problem in explaining the Trinity? Well, no, not really. The real problem, of course, is the starting point. You have to believe in the Trinity before you can even see what the discussion is about. You have to make that all important leap of faith before you can enter fully into the Christian mindset. As St Augustine said: 'I believe in order that I may understand'. And we must remember that we are talking here about things that we cannot fully understand. St Thomas Aquinas, one of the truly great minds ever to have applied themselves to theology and philosophy, argued that God's being is not the same as ours and that we can only really talk about him by analogy. Aquinas wrote thousands of words on religion but towards the end of his life he was granted a vision of the Divine while offering Mass. After that, he never wrote again, since he felt that what he had written was like straw compared to the reality he had seen. Of course, we should try to understand and this book certainly helps in that regard but, in the end, it is living the faith that really matters.