

Preface

IN THE AGE OF Internet search engines, it is easy to look up the pedigree of anyone: family, education, professional positions, etc. Readers are thereby free to fill in the gaps that are sure to occur in these more personal remarks.

I first became acquainted with John in 1987, when he was Fellow and Dean of Chapel at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1984, he had succeeded the late, the Right Reverend Dr. John A. T. Robinson (earlier, my internal examiner—the external one being Robert Morgan). Our Honoree had been educated at Worcester College, Oxford and Rippon Hall. Major appointments followed at the Universities of Cambridge, Lancaster, and London. Prior to his stint at Trinity, he had served as Fellow and Dean of Chapel at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. From 1977 to 1986, John participated in various commissions for the Church of England, including the Archbishops' Commission on Doctrine. Throughout this era, he gave distinguished lectures at various institutions.

During the Easter Term and Long Vacation in 1987, our family of four was residing in town, thanks to a New Testament Research Fellowship at Tyndale House. Living alongside the Cam on Riverside Street in the Barnwell neighborhood, affectionately known then as “Muesli Town,” I would cycle across Midsummer Common, down Jesus Lane, and past Trinity—of which I was a member. So, worshipping there at the beginning of the day came naturally, as it had during my final year of doctoral study in 1973–74. It was in John's sermons and homilies that I first became aware of his wide and deep learning: of the apt quotations from and easy allusions to works in fields other than his own. (Soon, I discovered how many, in the deepest sense, actually *were* his own!) That range of John's interests and expertise is only partly reflected in the titles of the following essays, the professional

1. See n. 3 below in William (“Billy”) J. Abraham's report about the reaction of various specialists to John's 1977 Wilde Lectures at Oxford: “The Sense of God.”

positions held by their authors, the bibliography of cited works at the end of each contribution, and by the separate listing of his publications.

During the following decades—at times on trips between Seattle and Ukraine—I had occasion to visit John and Margaret in Cambridge. Based on the west side of town, I usually cycled across Lammas Land (that vast expanse of green at the southern edge of Coe Fen), past the University Press offices, down Hills Road, and alongside [New] Addenbrooke’s Hospital to their home nearby. Once, when not themselves serving me lunch (which always seemed like dinner), they hosted me at a pub. Typically, John would begin by reading from a collection of prayers, specially printed and bound by J. F. (“Chip”) Coakley—a friend and contributor.² Such generous hospitality sometimes occurred while they recuperated from illness or experienced the limitations of various medications. In between visits, John and I (via the marvels of voice recognition technology) exchanged drafts of works in various stages of preparation, mainly about some aspect of the Gospels, especially about the son of man. My debt to him on this subject is reflected in my essay for this volume. How much have I learned from him—and from the authors in this tribute!

Once the decision was made to inform John of our project in advance, so that he and Margaret could derive double pleasure both before and after publication and presentation, he replied with typical modesty:

I am absolutely unworthy of this—I am not a scholar: in order to rescue the introduction of Religious Studies into Cambridge (when the first of the Government cuts took away a proposed post), I had to change from my early work, and I had to become a Jack-of-all-trades. I have felt like a Victorian explorer cutting through jungles and climbing mountains in order to find new animals and unknown plants without ever quite understanding any of them well! I suppose there is something to be said for trying to show how the different researches of others can belong together and can together be illuminating in a new way, but I could not hope to do research of that kind myself any more. I stand on the sidelines and I admire and cheer on the admirable work that you, and people like you, do. I take delight in it all, and I am grateful for all I have learnt. Anyway, you have knocked me sideways, and I am very, very grateful.

Of course, all of us in this volume respectfully beg to differ! We represent but a sample of those who have been John’s colleagues, students, and

2. His opening paragraph illustrates how a mentor’s “chance” remark can affect the outcome of a student’s career.

friends. Each essay in its own way indicates the debt owed to the life and thought of one whose ideas should be more widely known because of their importance for the academy, the church, and the wider culture—facing as they do the challenges of diversity and the impact of the sciences and technology. There are his works of profound reflection and technical erudition. (It will become clear how many of us keep coming back to *The Sense of God* and to *The Religious Imagination and the Sense of God*.) However, in addition to these, John has produced expressions of devotion, imagination, and fancy—among the latter being the delightful *Uncle Bolpenny Tries Things Out*. He has engaged contemporary issues head on. Edited introductions to a variety of related subjects have enabled him to continue teaching beyond the lecture hall or seminar room.

So, it is with a sense of gratitude and immense pleasure that we present to our Colleague, Mentor, and Friend that which can amount only to a mere token of our respect and love for broadening our horizons, deepening our understanding, and elevating our vision.

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