



Anglican Catholic Church



## Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

December 2016

*My dear friends and colleagues,*

The Power of Love was a classic 1984 Christmas no. 1 from Frankie Goes to Hollywood. The *Power of Love* – now that is a title for a Christmas song. When Mary laid Jesus in the manger, played with him, fed him, or welcomed the strange assortment of visitors who had followed a star (it seems GPS is nothing new!), did she love him because she thought she ought to, because it was some kind of moral duty? No. She loved him because he was her little boy and he was precious to her. And she found it easy to do this because of her own background – because she was raised in love by her parents, whose names were discovered, in a second century manuscript, to be Anna and Joachim; and she knew the love of Joseph, her betrothed, who considered rejecting her when she became pregnant, but was overruled by the *divine love*, by God himself, who chose her rather than any other to be the *Theotokos*, the ‘God-bearer’. Love is indeed powerful.



Perhaps one of the reasons people go to church at Christmastide is that they recognise the magnetic power of the kind of love which is at the heart of the Christmas story. As we try to come to terms with the human tragedies behind the revelations about Jimmy Savile, Cyril Smith and so many other prominent and trusted people in all walks of life; with the uncovering of the deception which has caused so much heartache to the relatives of those who died at Hillsborough; with war and violence in Syria and the Middle East; we long to see signs of that love in our world. That’s why, in the end, the bitter verbal assaults against the Christian faith by Richard Dawkins and company move us not one bit, because they bring no love or hope, comfort or reassurance – just a dictatorial confidence in the supremacy of Man which deep down we know to be utterly vain and pointless.

John Betjeman knew Dawkins’s type, as we discovered in one of his re-published poems:

The Advent bells proclaim ‘Prepare!’  
Across the starry winter air  
A sweet encirclement of sound  
To all the moonlit hamlets round,  
‘Prepare!’ along the whistling hedge  
‘Prepare!’ beyond the Parish edge,  
Till in the lighted market town  
An eight-bell peal begins to drown  
The bells of ev’ry neighbouring steeple  
‘Prepare! Prepare, beloved people!’  
‘Prepare for whom?’ says Mr. Flight,  
Always grammatically right.  
‘I think Mahomet, Moses, Buddha  
Were just as good as Christ – and good-er.’

‘Oh, yes,’ he says, ‘Christ was a teacher,  
A charming man and splendid preacher.  
But do you also think him God?  
Dear me,’ he says, ‘how very odd.  
I fear I can’t be troubled with  
So highly primitive a myth.’  
But still the bells ring out the news  
Quite unaffected by his views.  
And every listening Advent brings  
Its message down on angels’ wings  
That He who made the stars and sea,  
The universe and you and me,  
Took human flesh and lived on earth  
And Christmas Eve recalls his birth.

With every blessing for Christmas and the coming year

*Fr. Raymond Thompson*

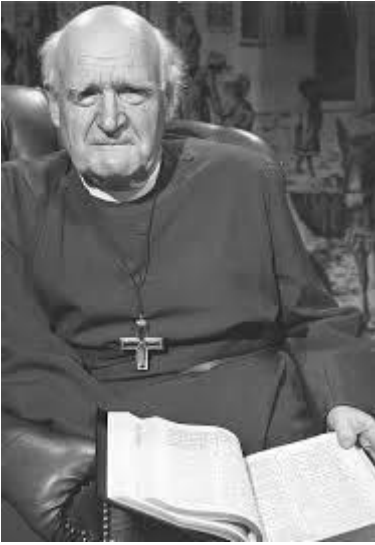
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## A New Year message, given one year by Archbishop Michael Ramsey to his clergy



I had the pleasure of meeting Archbishop Ramsey on two occasions and of listening to him lecture and preach several times, and consider him to be one of the most holy men I have ever encountered. He was wise and humble, humorous and compassionate. I found the love of God which he radiated and his own personal charisma to be mesmerising. This might be considered strange, as he was socially awkward and had no small talk. Indeed when he was invited to attend banquets or dinners it is a fact that people used to dread being seated next to him. It was a very silent meal with time-delayed one-word answers to any forlorn attempt by his neighbour to begin a conversation! He would seldom begin one himself. Yet he was one of those individuals who did not need fiery oratory or an extrovert personality to captivate. What shone out from within was sufficient. One of my cherished possessions is my licence bearing his signature.

One New Year he sent this message to his clergy, which is still relevant for 2017 and also holds some insights for faithful laity:

*“1. Thank God. Often and always. Thank him carefully and wonderingly for your continuing privileges and for every experience of his goodness. Thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.*

*2. Take care about confession of your sins. As time passes the habit of being critical about people and things grows more than each of us realise. [He then gently commends the practice of sacramental confession.]*

*3. Be ready to accept humiliations. They can hurt terribly but they can help to keep you humble. [Whether trivial or big, accept them he says.] All these can be so many chances to be a little nearer to our Lord. There is nothing to fear, if you are near to the Lord and in his hands.*

*4. Do not worry about status. There is only one status that Our Lord bids us be concerned with, and that is our proximity to Him. ‘If a man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there also shall my servant be’ (John 12:26). That is our status; to be near our Lord wherever He may ask us to go with him.*

*5. Use your sense of humour. Laugh at things, laugh at the absurdities of life, laugh at yourself.*

*Through the year people will thank God for you. And let the reason for their thankfulness be not just that you were a person whom they liked or loved but because you made God real to them.”*

Finally, from his book *The Anglican Spirit*, a quote which concludes with a message I would leave you with this Christmastide: “Consider the following. God creates the world by a process of creation that is compatible with the findings of Darwin. The human being is the climax of the process. Then there comes the Fall – not to be identified with what happened in the Garden of Eden, but with a deep estrangement of the human race from the true path of godliness. While human progress – that is, moral, spiritual, and intellectual progress – is a great reality, there is also a tragic deviation. Humankind cannot be rescued into its right shape apart from an act of God coming to the rescue.”

– Arthur Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury 1961–1974.