

# The Bishop of Salisbury



## Faith in an Age of Uncertainty

Every three or four years the clergy of Salisbury Diocese gather for a residential conference. This year from 3-6 July we will be in Derbyshire. Our theme will be 'Faith in an Age of Uncertainty'. The title was chosen long ago but it certainly fits the moment. Recent acts of terrorism in Manchester and London, the USA reneging on the international agreement made in Paris in response to climate change as well as all the political uncertainties after the election to do with Brexit, a faltering economy, commitment to austerity and an unwillingness to fund public sector services do indeed make for very uncertain and difficult times. There is a higher level of instability in our civic life than most of us have ever known. We have left a political era in which there was a post-War consensus about how and why we belong together as English, British and Europeans in a world that feels both smaller and strikingly more complex.

'Christian Faith in an Age of Uncertainty' is the subtitle of a book called 'Night of

the Confessor' by Tomas Halik, a Czech priest and psychotherapist who is a Professor of philosophy and sociology at Charles University Prague. Halik is a hugely influential Christian intellectual who is described as, "a wise guide for the post-Christian era". I am less certain about even that brief description of our present circumstances. Was there ever "a Christian era" and when were we ever certain about matters of faith? It has always been the case that faith is in an age of uncertainty. However, there is no doubt our context is constantly changing, that we are now global and plural and that is indeed different to what has gone before.

Night of the Confessor is a deeply attractive collection of short essays. Halik uses paradox and poetic imagery to write "honestly and not superficially" of a Christian faith concerned to be about the truth. The significance of this has intensified in an era of "post-truth politics" in which "alternative facts" compete to describe our circumstances in ways that shape self-understanding and public policy. Christian faith has within it an account of what it is to be human with one another under God. It helps us navigate uncertainties, the changes and chances of life. Christianity has always been one generation from extinction but that is a good reason for us to be confident in that it is an enduring faith. Indeed it might be that our having to work hard for what matters is what draws out the best from us. What Jesus teaches is that if we only seek to look after ourselves we will be sunk. Of this I am certain: walk the way of the cross, love one another, give generously, be thankful, seek the way of truth and peace and we will have life abundant.

All of this is of significance for the cathedral, at a time when we are saying farewell to our Dean, who is going to be Bishop of Llandaff, and feeling new uncertainties. June has been part of Salisbury Cathedral since 1995. As Dean for the last 13 years she has been outstanding. We will miss her greatly; we give thanks for her and ask God's blessing on her, Paul, Meg and Tom in all that lies ahead.

What we now have to do is to describe our present circumstances and to think about the challenges and opportunities for the next phase of the cathedral's life and what experience and gifts we most need in the new Dean. We have started

to think about this and have already come to see that this is going to be good for the cathedral and the diocese. It is a Crown appointment. There will be an appointments panel of five chaired by a person appointed by the Archbishop. In September the Archbishop and Prime Minister's Appointments Secretaries will consult so as to gather information and ideas. We hope an appointment will be made early in the new year and to have a new Dean by the summer. We can look forward to them bringing new gifts, fresh insights to help us navigate this uncertain age. It is what cathedrals often do well, Salisbury in particular.

**+Nicholas Sarum**