**Men’s Breakfast Discussions: Feb 2009 onwards**

*2009*

Feb Obama – can he really save the world?

Mar The Credit Crunch – cereal bar or serial disaster?

Apr Spare Rib or Selfish Gene – has 150 years of Darwin undone 5,000 years of Creation?

May [No meeting]

Jun Who paid for your moat or Moët? Reflections on public, corporate and individual morality in times of change.

Jul Why do people worship fame? (with particular reference to the life and death of The King of Pop [Michael Jackson})

Aug [no subject]

Sep Forgiveness, Compassion and Criminals.  How do we feel about the recent releases of the Lockerbie bomber and Ronnie Biggs on compassionate grounds and, perhaps even more difficult, the kidnapper of Jaycee Lee Dugard who “is a religious fanatic who claimed that God spoke to him, acquaintances have said”.

Oct Is community dead? – the implications of the death of Fiona Pilkington and her daughter, Francesca.

Nov “What the Pope said to the Archbishop!” (or “Is this the start of the Counter-Reformation?”)

Dec Advent or Advert….  Presence or Presents….  How do we make it all special?

*2010*

Jan Sharing our thoughts on the ups and downs of the Noughties – were they good, bad or just plain indifferent…?

Feb Does the captain of a national team has any wider contribution to make to society?

Mar Bullying in the workplace.

Apr Are American evangelicals right to oppose health care?” (or should that be “Where was an ambulance when the Good Samaritan needed help?”!).

May [cancelled]

Jun The theological basis for the Coalition’s policy proposals.

Jul The war in Afghanistan.

Aug The government’s proposal to scrap compulsory retirement.

Sep Obesity – an epidemic of our age or just good old fashioned lack of self-restraint?

Oct Does the Bible believe in retirement?

Nov What sort of role model for society is provided by the X-Factor, the Apprentice and similar shows with their obsession with self importance.

Dec David Cameron’s proposal that we should forget the RPI, the Footsie 100 and the adrenaline (and bankruptcy) inducing excitement of spread betting with IG Index and instead focus on a new “Happiness Index”.

*2011*

Jan [no meeting]

Feb Dudley is able to join us to tell us about his coming Cambodian work/rest/play plans. If that’s not enough we might well consider the theology of an Archbishop and two Bishops agreeing with Alan that at 30p a year per taxpayer the Forestry Commission is a good thing.

Mar The Arab Spring.

Apr [Wetherspoons - Mervyn Roberts]

May Was Obama right about Osama?

Jun [not known]

Jul The proper response to the Greek debt crisis or, with half an eye to Deuteronomy 15:1-2\*, “*Should Europe cancel Greece’s debts?*”.

Aug The contradiction between what we say (“Isn’t hacking terrible!” and “I insist on my right to privacy!”) and what we do (buy newspapers that, to a greater or lesser extent, depend on the salaciousness of their readers for their very existence…).

Sep [not known]

Oct In view of the differing messages coming out of the various party conferences, whether capitalism is dead and we are all social democrats nowadays.

Nov Sharing thoughts, reactions and responses to some of the ideas and challenges that came out of the presentation by Dave Hopwood, author of (among other things) *The Bloke’s Bible*, on why “Real men don’t go to church”.

Dec Following “Living with the Amish” on Channel 4, whether there are any ways in which the style of life and attitudes of an isolated rural community in a far-off land, as portrayed in the programme, could be relevant and helpful to us in living out lives of Christian witness in 21st century Surrey – and elsewhere.

*2012*

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb Iran and its nuclear programme and Israel’s possible response – could this be the gateway to Armageddon?

Mar The South Atlantic and whether it really is a case of “My country right or wrong - the Malvinas oil is ours”.

Apr [Note: Easter Saturday] The rise of secularism and the question of whether Christianity really is on the ropes in this country.

May Is there a Christian view on the Olympics? For example, should we be spending so many billions on a couple of weeks’ prime time telly coverage, should drug cheats be allowed to take part, etc.

Jun Queen's Jubilee Breakfast [topic not known]

Jul Organisations are suffering a collective loss of moral compass (eg Barclays fixing LIBOR, Glaxo peddling drugs to unapproved users, exam boards dumbing down to chase markets, and Google biasing the results of searches to maximise the benefits to itself).  Look at what is happening out there from a Christian perspective.

Aug Against backdrop of Olympics, the values that we want to share with the world ... are they Bean, Bond, Beatles? ... or something completely different?

Sep In light of the Prince Harry frolics, are there limits to privacy, or alternatively, should “partying” be enshrined in a new written British constitution as an inalienable human right?

Oct An outrageous blasphemy or a storm in a tea cup?  (in the context of the film “Innocence of Muslims” that sparked riots and murder across swathes of the Muslim world.)

Nov “*The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones*” (Mark Anthony in Julius Caesar, Act 3) in the context of revelations about the double life of the late Jimmy Savile.

Dec The rejection of women bishops – the last straw that will tip the Anglican church into schism, or a shining example of how Christians should approach a potentially irresolvable problem?  The Anglican version of an omnishambles, or just a further step on a difficult path towards a more relevant, and more authentic, church?

*2013*

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb A cross on a chain: is it just jewellery or a symbol of faith (or indeed something we should all wear)?

Mar A variation on the old saw “Is the Pope a Catholic?”, namely “Does it matter who the Pope is?”?

Apr The welfare cuts and the changes to the legal aid framework. George Osborne has defended them and numerous bishops and archbishops have attacked them. Who is right? And in the context of our post-breakfast discussions at our monthly Men’s Breakfasts, is this something that should worry us as Christians in Busbridge?

May [Cancelled – organisers and many of regulars away or ill]

Jun The proposed vision for Busbridge & Hambledon churches.

Jul The ethics and consequences of the constantly increasing demands on natural resources – including water, but also fossil fuels and food – with a particular eye on the planned Ethiopian hydro-electric dam and its effect on countries down-stream, such as Egypt

Aug [Wetherspoons – Centre being used by Holiday Club]

Sep The situation in Syria and whether the vote not to get involved was right.

Oct [Bring along your own “hot topic” to share and enjoy with the rest of the group.]

Nov Can we still trust the police in the light of Pleb-gate, the Leveson enquiry revelations about the close (some would say corrupt) links between parts of the tabloid press and officers in the Metropolitan police, and the 2011 London riots following the shooting of Mark Duggan?

Dec In the light of the death of Nelson Mandela, exploring the qualities that made him great, and reflecting on why it is that there seem to be so few people in public life of equivalent stature.

*2014*

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb Does it matter if a French president (or a British prime minister) can’t keep his trousers on?

Mar Alan Betts – reflections on Nicaragua trip and the pros and cons of different types of “mission” and overseas aid generally.

Apr The recent goings-on in Ukraine and what lessons we can draw at a local, personal or business level from such geopolitical shenanigans.  Does the end justify the means?  Is bullying ever acceptable?  Is possession nine tenths of the law?  Who is our neighbour?  Should *we* stand up and be counted if we see colleagues, or individuals or organisations, subjected to similar behaviour?

May In the light of the abrupt “termination” of David Moyes as Manchester United's manager, questions and issues, such as: Where was the succession planning and should Fergie have been so involved in selecting his successor?  Was Moyes set up for failure from Day 1?  Did he make some bad decisions and mishandle existing junior management/support staff?

Jun The massive impact that the rise of UKIP is having on the political landscape.  Scripture is somewhat lacking in specific guidance on how to select a political party to support, but what scriptural principles should we follow?  Or might it be argued that we should not allow our religion to interfere with our decisions in such areas in the first place?

Jul The conviction of Rolf Harris raises a number of obvious issues, many of which we covered at the end of 2012 following the Jimmy Savile revelations.  But the case does raise other issues as well...

Aug [No breakfast?]

Sep The issue of IS (or Isis, or Islamic State, or whatever it calls itself this week) as it spreads across Syria and Iraq.  What *should* our response be?  Live and let live (although judging by their behaviour that would not be reciprocated)?  Military strikes?  An international intervention - but by whom and under what banner (shades of the Crusades, possibly)?

Oct Introducing James Ellin and Michael Johnston, plus the question of nationalism and explore what scripture has to say about it.

Nov On the weekend when we have Remembrance Sunday almost exactly 100 years after the start of World War 1, what could - or should - we discuss other than “The Great War and Remembrance”?  *Why* do we/should we remember? What the Bible tells us about remembrance, and much else besides.

Dec Last year Archbishop Justin Welby warned that the “absurd and ridiculous” pressure to have a perfect Christmas puts relationships under strain and spoils life.  How do we respond to Justin Welby's strictures?  *Do* we respond to them??

*2015*

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb The whole freedom of expression issue in the aftermath of the Paris attacks. Was the Pope right to threaten a bashing for anyone who insulted his mother? Or was that other great spiritual leader Dave Cameron right in begging to differ with the Pontiff?

Mar The recent Bishops 52 pager on how to vote – or if the press is anything to go by, why the Bishops are a load of pinkoes with social pretensions who can’t even pay their own staff the living wage.  What do we think is the role of the CoE in placing before the nation a Christian view?  Should they keep quiet for fear of hypocrisy or be unafraid like the Old Testament prophets before them?

Apr The General Election?  What biblical principles should be brought to bear, both by candidates and by voters in assessing who to support?

May Busbridge Central.

Jun The amazing Vanishing Sepp Blatter story! Share thoughts and views on corruption, power and morality.

Jul The sad news of Charles Kennedy's untimely death, widely linked to his battle with alcoholism, and the press coverage and other responses around it.

Aug [no record]

Sep If William Shakespeare were still around, would he be rewriting one of his plays, this time to be entitled Labour's Love's Lost? Where as Christians should we be positioning ourselves, and how should we as Christians be reacting to the Corbyn phenomenon?

Oct Dieselgate.

Nov The great TalkTalk data theft fiasco and should we all have a simple tattooed bar code on our wrist that will control everything and everyone (*Revelation 13:16,17*)

Dec The impact that Daesh (otherwise known as the self-declared Islamic State or Caliphate) is having on the lives of millions of people. Is the “war” against Daesh a “just war” (if such a thing exists)? Should the UK be taking action, and if so against whom/what, when and where? And most importantly, how as Christians should we respond to all this?

*2016*

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb Death – the recent deaths of David Bowie and Terry Wogan, and how they planned and managed their deaths, have caused some of us who have had recent experience of losing our own family or friends to pause and think….

Mar EU Referendum/Brexit

Apr Cecil Rhodes statue at Oriel

May The Trump phenomenon

June Anti-Semitism and related issues.

July Brexit – the aftermath

Aug Overseas Aid

Sept Dennis Amy – Dennis always provided us with jars of his home-made marmalade, and this coming Saturday we will be sharing our last jar of his marmalade in his memory.

Oct Aggression and bullying

Nov US Election - the shenanigans in the US election raise all sorts of questions about politics, society and religion, and what our response should be...

Dec Human sexual relationships (led by Simon T)

2017

Jan Côte Restaurant brekkie

Feb Globalisation! Christians may point to the story of the Tower of Babel as a warning but Christianity itself was one of the first globalising forces.

Mar Fake News.

Apr Terrorism

May Christians in public life

Jun The General Election.  What is true and what is fantasy or fiction (or downright lies)? And most importantly, how as Christians do we approach this?  How should we make our decision how to vote?  Should we vote, even?

Jul How to be “salt and light” as a Christian in a largely secular world.

Aug Women... In particular the prominent roles they play in all our lives...the head of the Met, the London Fire Brigade, the PM, three leaders in Scotland, Head of the Supreme Court...and yes Dr Who......let alone the Queen and Katy Perry...and not counting all the BBC women who are paid less than Gary and Chris.... For a discussion full of political correctness do join us....we may miss out that bit in 1 Timothy 2.  11 & 12....

Sep Attitudes towards minorities

Oct Party conference season - what, if any, guidance scripture, tradition, reason and experience give us in assessing the rival claims and approaches of the various political parties’ ideologies.

Nov The Balfour Declaration - it was a group of evangelical Christians in the Cabinet of 1917 that was so supportive of a Jewish homeland so we will reflect on what our attitude as Christians might be today.

Dec The engagement of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle – this discussion could go anywhere!  Do come along for the ride…

2018

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb crime and punishment – not Dostoevsky, but quite what is going on in the police and justice systems.  What should a Christian approach to crime, justice and punishment look like?

Mar The weather!  What is it that feeds this particularly British obsession and what of the impact of bad weather on rough sleepers, food banks, the elderly and the infirm … and how should we respond? Do dig out your wellies, put snow chains on your car and come along to share and enjoy…

Apr Homicide…

May The rise of Robots and Artificial Intelligence.

Jun The arrival of the new Old Rectory.

Jul World Cup Special: Football – whether as a metaphor for life, as a religion, as a way of escaping the tedium of existence, or (perish the thought) simply as entertainment.

Aug Is our democracy at risk? The pros and cons of social media and networking sites…

Sep Sexual abuse within the Church.

Oct Feedback and reflections on the “Evening with Bishop Andrew” (held the previous week)

Nov Reflections on how the UK should respond to the Jamal Kashoggi by Saudi operatives.

Dec The “B” word (speak it softly and with eyes averted) … Brexit. If ever there was a need for national reconciliation and healing this is it, and yet there is no sign of either.  As Christians, what should our practical response be and how can we contribute to the necessary reconciliation and healing?

2019

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb THE BEST A MAN CAN BE.... Gillette have decided that shaving has a moral aspect to it (!). (Please shave before you come to discuss…!)

Mar Positive discrimination (or negative, depending on who you are?)…

Apr When does money become so tainted that it is dirty (Sakler/Oxycontin)?  When does someone’s natural tactility (if that is a real word) stray into the realms of inappropriate behaviour (Joe Biden)?  Where to draw a line all the time in our every day lives…?

May Confidentiality… Should we always keep to the rules or is there a time to speak out?

Jun Character and leadership. Eton, Oxford and a pleasant wife with 2.4 children was once the bare minimum for success…but times have changed. Does it matter what our leaders are like if they can do the job, cut the mustard and win elections?

Jul In the context of our local MP running for the top job, the delights of representative democracy and how we have shown the world how it is done [irony!]…

Aug The early Church model in Acts and whether there is any merit in rethinking our whole lives…

Sep Should Babyboomers feel guilty?

Oct Greta Thunberg - should we take her seriously, and if so what should we do about it?

Nov No discussion [Rugby World Cup – England vs South Africa on TV]

Dec General discussion on General Elaction.

2020

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb No specific topic – a *pot pourri*…

Mar A reflection on the conjunction of flood, fire , pestilence, locusts and financial meltdown that have made the news lately. What do we think nowadays in our ultra modern world where we thought we had it all under control?

Apr [Lockdown – no meeting]

May [Lockdown – no meeting]

Jun [Lockdown – no meeting]

Jul [Zoom meeting – no topic]

Aug [Zoom meeting – no topic]

Sep [Zoom meeting] The pervasive increase in extremism and divisiveness, whether in politics or religion or ... well, pretty well anything.

Oct [Zoom meeting] Wealth creation …. a topic generated by the recurring news that our huge hospitality industry and  the  thousands of associated jobs are in dire peril.

Nov [Zoom meeting] Uncertainty, lockdowns and the death of democracy.

Dec No meeting.

2021

Jan 2020: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly...

Feb [Zoom meeting] Farewell to Dave Preece.

Mar [Zoom meeting] The place of hope in our present extraordinary and exceptional circumstances. Will tomorrow be a better day or as Christians should we cast the net wider and look to our eternal destiny?

Apr Two simple questions: (1) Are you looking forward to getting back to church? and (2) Have you become more ... or less ... spiritual during lockdown?

May [Zoom meeting] Reflections on the life, death and funeral of Prince Philip.

Jun No meeting [Covid surge]

Jul In the context of the proposed “irreversible” return to “normal”, what we are most looking forward to doing over the next few months and whether, and if so how, we think “normal” will have changed since January 2020.

Aug [Zoom meeting] No topic.

Sep The CofE Vision and Strategy paper (led by Simon T)

Oct What does panic buying tell us about us and our society?

Nov Climate change and COP26.

Dec After 300 years of solid democracy do we now have the politicians we deserve? (AKA The Peppa Pig Special)

2022

Jan No meeting.

Feb What is truth? (In the context of Partygate, Ukraine and … everything!)

Mar Update on the Minster Project (David Wilkin)

Apr Ukraine.

May Ukraine, the Falklands War 40 years on and various other topics.

Jun Simon Willetts – his background, his music and his journey to where he is now.

Jul No meeting.

Aug The cost of living crisis.

Sep The Crown Court and Waverley Council offices development proposal.

Oct Reflections on our response to the upheaval of the Queen’s death and funeral, the proclamation of King Charles as our monarch, the wholesale changes at the top of government, the turbulence in the financial markets, and Putin's latest threats of nuclear Armageddon.

Nov What spiritual (and practical) insights we can draw from our experiences and observations of 2022.

Dec Christian Hope (led by Simon T)

2023

Jan [Wetherspoons – no discussion]

Feb Freedom of expression – where should the line be drawn (if at all)?