

PALEY JOHNSON

Paley was invited to address the Fellowship of Trinity College on the occasion of both his eightieth and ninetieth birthdays. At the close of the second speech in 2007 he looked forward to the next in the series; he looked forward too to receiving his telegram from the Queen -- if she lived that long. Sadly that was not to be for him but we can certainly give thanks today for a long and fruitful life of service and for the memory of a good man and a friend.

Paley was proud of his origins in County Durham, though his family tree has been traced via his mother, whose surname was Paley, back to the 16th and to Giggleswick in Yorkshire. It seems likely that he could claim a rather distant relationship with the eminent writer, William Paley, whose book *Evidences of Christianity*, written in 1802, was an important work of Christian apologetic in its time.

Paley himself was born in 1917 in Middlestone, a small mining village composed of stone houses, near Bishop Auckland. The splendour of nearby Auckland Castle and its park and the beauty of the surrounding hills and valleys could not mask the poverty of the years of depression in the Durham mining communities. Paley's headmaster at the Alderman Wraith Grammar School in Spennymoor would remind the boys that it would take a miner a whole night's shift toiling underground to earn enough to purchase one school text book, and that therefore books should be respected.

Paley was hugely indebted to the extraordinary talent and dedication of the school teaching staff. He was the first pupil from the school to go up to Cambridge, fortified by a State scholarship and a County Award. In latter years he saw it as a retrograde step when grammar schools were largely phased out, and young people could no longer take his route to Oxford and Cambridge. He regretted too that the educational system had become encumbered with targets, league tables and the like. He was also later to regret the advance of computerisation if that jeopardized the acquisition of basic experimental skills.

Paley was accepted for Trinity College without interview on the basis of his school record. At the last service he attended in his Methodist chapel before he left home a local preacher prayed for the success of his venture into the outside world...

Arriving in privileged Cambridge from a relatively modest and sheltered background must have meant a steep learning curve, though he was bowled over by its beauty and, reassuringly, there were more grammar school boys in the intake than he had expected. Amongst just slightly older students at Trinity had been the notorious Guy Burgess and Kim Philby, later exposed as spies for the Soviet Union. Paley commented drily, 'I do not think I was seriously affected.' It is significant that he called an Autobiography he wrote in 1993 (and recently published in book form) -- *From An Ivory Tower*.

If Paley was at first bewildered by it all so was his family. The book telling some of his life's story was dedicated to the memory of his parents who 'although mystified encouraged me all the way.'. He remained unashamedly loyal to his roots, remembered with affection the back garden cricket matches with his father, and the

many broken window panes that ensued.. In later years when returning home he was only too happy to play cricket with the local farmers sons' and some of his batting and bowling exploits, though admittedly on rather dubious wickets, are still remembered.

Paley was a passionate man of science. He read for the Natural Sciences Tripos, first Physics with Mineralogy and with Mathematics as a half subject, and then Physical Chemistry. His subsequent research career was to last more than half a century. After a highly successful performance as an undergraduate he received a grant from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research

He began to publish papers and benefited from his exacting supervisor in the production of clear and unambiguous English. By 1949 he was the co-author of a large and influential general textbook on Colloid Science, and many publications appeared in the learned scientific journals

Colloid Science, with its study of large molecules, is a bridge building subject lying at the boundary of a number of disciplines, physical chemistry, biology and mathematics, and has many useful applications. The department, however, was often under pressure from other more traditional disciplines, and eventually disappeared. Departmental affairs did not always run smoothly and as Paley, with his mastery of understatement put it, 'University politics are not always of a refined type.'

In the war as a very young man Paley had worked in the colloid laboratory collaborating with others on various projects; the development of incendiary mixtures and the use of cellulose nitrate in making cordite for rockets; the use of detergents in lubrication; the use of synthetic polymers in warfare... He also had a wartime research Fellowship sponsored by ICI looking at an interest, which remained a serious study, the use of the protein in peanut butter. In his own time he was a member of the Home Guard. becoming a corporal in the light of his knowledge of Chemistry.

For a while he worked for the Royal Institution in London but in 1950 Paley returned to a staff post in the Colloid Science Laboratory, developing a wide range of experimental techniques, some in association with the staff of Addenbrooke's Hospital and exploring a wide range of phenomena, including, amongst many other things, the protein content of muscles and of cows' milk; rye pollen in order to understand the nature of hay fever; tumours in mice; and sleeping sickness in cattle in Africa,

During his more mature years Paley also took his fair share in the time-consuming role of setting and marking examination papers, and overseeing the complex timetable for the Tripos, as well, of course, as supervising postgraduate students.

Paley's periods of sabbatical leave took him to academic institutions across the world. He held a Fellowship of the Institute of Polymer Research in Brooklyn Polytechnic, New York; he lectured at Harvard and at the University of Texas and in Japan, and enjoyed the novelty of the cultures and the natural world.

When he eventually retired, from the Biochemistry Department, the Cavendish Laboratory invited him to continue his research with the. Polymer and Colloids Group

He moved in with his large rotating ultracentrifuge and other equipment and stayed for nine years.

Paley was deeply sustained by a happy home life. He was twice married in this church, first to Margaret, a Homerton College girl, whom he met in the University Methodist Society, and with whom he had his children, John and Helen. He rejoiced in his children and grandchildren and updates on their achievements and concern about their problems would always be part of his conversation. Margaret died sadly after 35 years of marriage.

Paley was to enjoy twenty years of happy partnership with Muriel, who had been a local headmistress. But he spent his last few years alone, and as his health declined and his eyes began to fail he sorely missed the intimate companionship of married life. He knew what it was to be lonely, and with that characteristic smile and twinkle he was glad to welcome visitors to Thornton Road. He never ceased to show his pride in the wisteria at the front and the blackberries at the back of his house. He looked forward too to his regular visits to lunch with old colleagues at High Table in Trinity. He had been a Fellow of his old College since 1962

Paley was a very human and unassuming man, a shrewd and witty chronicler of the human scene, with an eye for the amusing incident, a raconteur with a usually kindly delight in exposing the foibles and idiosyncrasies of his more exotic colleagues in the academic world

Paley also found solace in music. He first played the organ for a church service when he was only six years old. He accompanied worship here at Castle Street many times, though he would have had disapproving things to say about the recent removal of the console to the ground floor. He was a shrewd student of the financial columns of the daily press and an assiduous follower of the political dramas of the day.

Methodism mattered to him. He had been coming to this Castle Street Church for 75 years. At home as a small boy he went to the small village chapel and imbibed its culture; his father was a Wesleyan local preacher... Although Paley came to live on a world map his upbringing left its indelible mark. He was modest and self-effacing, perhaps not always to his own advantage. He was fairly frugal himself but generous towards others.

Faith and science were guiding lights and pillars in his life. He lived happily with both, and was keen to explore the relationship between the two. He would discuss either Darwin, whom he was for, or Dawkins, whom he was against, with anyone who cared to listen. There were inevitably for him big questions about life, the universe and everything still to be answered, but he told me that he clung to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as a sure guide to conduct oneself through life.

And who can say that this gentle man, with his zest for life and his concern for right and his thirst for truth, did not himself embody many of the qualities of a true disciple?

We give thanks for his life and for the memories, public and intimate, we have today Paley Johnson no longer sees through a glass darkly but face to face. May he rest in peace, and grow in love and rise in glory.

Amen