

**DRAFT TRANSCRIPT OF FIRST KEENE LECTURE BY THE RT REVD DAVID JENKINS UNDER
THE OVERALL TITLE:
'IS THERE A UNIVERSAL GOSPEL FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM?'**

5th November 1997

'The Christian Claim - Revelation, Gospel and Universality'

I want to start with this consideration of the Christian Claim - Revelation, Gospel and Universality from to, perhaps it is pictures, to provocations, to problems. The first is the millennium dome in Greenwich and the second is looking at oneself in a mirror.

So start first with the millennium dome. In some ways it does seem to me, at any rate up until an article which appeared in the Times yesterday morning, to which I may make reference, that the point about the millennium dome was that it has taken a good deal of trouble in deciding to put it up and nobody knew what was going to go under it! That is to say that there is, at any rate publicly, a considerable lack of clear and excited consensus about what we are celebrating, which draws attention to the fact that, strictly speaking, in a purely, the merest historical factual sense, what we are celebrating is a conventional dating system which must be real, of course, because it has come to upset computers! And that is reality.

The next question is, where did the dating system come from? Again, if you are simply working back purely in a narrow sense historically, well, it came causally, surely, in the immediate causality from the commercial and imperial spread of the West, which was the original heart of the industrial revolution that led to the amazing explosion of wealth and of the pursuit of industrial affairs and so on right across the world, and, therefore, what the West had as a dating system became the conventional dating system for the whole world. Of course, all sorts of people have got their own dating systems but, for instance, (and this isn't entirely just a joke about computers) people are worried in the financial market as to whether they ought to close down somewhere around about the 28th December 1999 in case it turns out over the next few days that the computers can't cope and therefore, of course, the whole commerce and finance of the world will be thrown out; so it is a conventional dating system which has a very universal application and is most significant in relation, once again, to money, and when you put money and computers together, you have got reality and power indeed. So, that is there because of the commercial and imperial expansion of the West. The next question is, where did the West get it from?

Now, I take it you all know this, as we are getting so near to the millennium, but I think it worth just going through it again, in case not everybody does know it, or rather so that we may reflect on the remarkable significance of this almost teasing nature of the answer to the question: 'where did we get it from?' The answer is that we got it from the calculations of a Christian monk in Rome during what we now call the sixth century AD. This monk was asked by the then Pope to deal with the fact that the annual dates for the celebration of Easter, which had been drawn by Cyril of Alexandria some time ago, were running out, and the Pope, I think, formed the view that as he wasn't quite sure when the end of the world would come, we'd better have at least a hundred years' worth more dates of Easter, and he therefore asked this rather learned monk to calculate them, which he did because he knew about epochs and cycles and how to work out Passover moons and all the rest of it and so he worked out a list, note, a list of dates for celebrating Easter, that is to say the Spring festival when the Christian church celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and he had a problem, of course. It's no good having a list of annual dates if you can't correlate them with some commonly received index which will show everybody which year in the list you are in; therefore you need an index for the list of dates. As I say, I'm sure you are all clear about this, but it's as well to go through it again because I think the impact of it is very considerable, really. Now, he had a very bright idea. He didn't terribly want, I think, to use the Roman dates, you know, *ad urbe con dita*,(?) from the foundation of the city from the conventional date of Rome, not least because he had his doubts about certain Roman emperors who were all together forgotten by then, like Diocletian, who had really had a good swipe at wiping out the Christian church, so he didn't feel that that was all together suitable for indexing the dates of Easter; and he suddenly thought, well, it's quite simple, I think (as all true theological insights are, of course - it's people like bishops who muck it up!), but I mean, it suddenly occurred to him that Jesus was indeed the Christ and being declared to be God's Christ indeed was true to the beginning and end of everything, or, as it is put in the book of Revelation, the Alpha and

the Omega, the obvious way to date things is from the beginning of his incarnation, and the beginning of his incarnation was his conception, and there was already floating around things which don't really matter at the moment, the date of March 25th for the Festival of the Annunciation, and as being a true and sound believer he was quite clear that when God did anything he did everything perfectly, it followed therefore that Jesus would be born nine months to the day after his conception, which picked up the Winter Festival, December 25th, and he then worked from what he thought to be New Testament data to arrive at the date which was the beginning of the year of Jesus' conception in March which would be the first Year of the Lord, you see, Anno Domini, in the Year of the Lord. Now, as you probably know, owing to the fact that the West, as usual, was really rather barbaric and behind the times, they hadn't thought of zero. It was only the Arabs who had thought of zero. So, of course, he got it wrong by a year straightaway because the last year before it finished at the end of BC1 and that started AD1, so you've lost a year in what might be called 'real time' so of course, as we don't want to go on for three hours, we can't discuss the matter of real time just now! But the scholarship is generally of the view that he didn't only leave out zero, which he didn't know about, but he got it almost certainly four years wrong, do you see, which of course is a matter of unspeakable comfort to those of us who are terrified by what we call the year 1999, more and more apocalyptic hopes will come, poor bishops will be asked on television about 'why isn't the end of the world coming?' and all these things, and as that's interesting, I mean the more crazy people there are about, really the better television it makes, and as of course there is some reference to a second coming even in the Creed, bishops won't know what to say and, as usual, we shall be shown up to be fudging all the issues that matter! But all you need do, when people get into a panic about the year 2000, is, I can do very well by putting my glasses down and looking like Corporal Jones, you see, all you need say is: 'Don't panic! Don't panic! It happened three years ago!' (Or maybe four, but I mean). Now, I think it is well to laugh, you see, because sin mustn't have dominion over us, but as I shall be pursuing in all these three lectures, you see, it is quite incredible how stupid religious believers can be, and the theme I want to pursue is, what a bad advertisement for God religious believers are, and as I firmly believe in God, and as I am now in my eighth decade, I don't really care what I say about that, because I think it is so immensely urgent that the best possible case which God will enable us by his grace to make, should be made. I mean, he can cope, he's had to cope since Genesis 3, after all, you see, with things going wrong, but I really think we ought to be very clear, and I think (half making a joke - that is why I went into the detail, you see) is the amount of rubbish that is going to be talked in the name of the Bible, in the name of Jesus and in the name of God between now and the year 2000 is immense, and it's up to us not to support it, because it will just remind everybody else that religion is a sort of stupid superstition by neurotic people who cannot face reality. So they go in for all sorts of things about dates and Old Moore's Almanac and think the Bible is no better than Old Moore's Almanac and so on. I am really very fierce about this. I have decided God will ride it out, but we need some knowledge of the possibility of the revelation of the possibility of God and therefore that is why I raised this question because, you see, think actually of what AD means. It is actually a claim that because of something which was in Jesus, revealed through Jesus and, as we believe, lived out by Jesus, (he so believed it that he died for it, so he must really have believed it), the claim is made that this is pointing out that the whole of the universe, the whole of time and space and every person that lives in the universe, whether here or in another galaxy and so on, is going somewhere or can go somewhere, you see, leading up to BC to AD and going to an End, there is a purpose, and I don't myself doubt that one of the contributions to the notion which is still around which is that process can somehow be progress, that if somehow you get the right clue and follow up what's going on, you will find that it could go on in a profitable way, in a much broader sense than profit, in a worthwhile way, in a way which somehow improves things and adds up to things and points to things, you see. I think the history of thought will show that this actually came in because of some belief in Jesus and was helped by this (I'm cheating here) anonymous monk - he called himself Dionysius Exiguus, which means 'poor little Dionysius', which was very proper and monkish of course. So, you see, it is quite remarkable, but we, of course, do not live in a world which generally assumes that the basic reason that we can go somewhere hopefully or progressively or hope to go somewhere progressively on the earth is because of our Lord and because he stands for God who is Lord and because of the plans and providence and promises of this God, of course we don't, I mean I am not at all sure and this is one of these I want to pursue in these lectures, is that we Christians believe it really, but it isn't commonly and necessarily shared, is it? And indeed I think one could put this most sharply by saying: 'Just consider for a moment, if you had the power to summon a UN Committee, which ought to decide and make a recommendation about what date should follow the 31st December AD 1999, what would you do if you were responding, shall we say, to the sociological reality of the world in which we live?' Probably, of course, what you will do is that, having got the computers right, you will

simply use the convention you've got, and it is purely conventional and it doesn't mean anything except it helps us to date things, especially commercial contracts, you see. But if you were to consider, is there any other system of universal worldwide dating, I can think of only one possible candidate, and that is to suggest that the 1st January after 31st December AD 1999 might be, with some plausibility and allowing for translation into different languages, but in English or American, which is more important (!), the 1st January GME1 where GME means Global Market Era, because the only thing which generally speaking, whichever country you go to, the papers worry about, politicians put their hopes or fear in, people think will bring them prosperity or is threatening them with continuing poverty, is the market, and it is global market era, and I think this is well summed up, really, by a thought which came to me when I was doing a mission somewhere in America, and I suddenly looked at a dollar bill and I thought to myself, yes, in God we trust, but on the market we rely! And in particular, of course, the guardian angels on which we rely are people like Eddie George, Mr Greenspan and the German Central Bankers, who keep things in some sort of order and balance so this can go on, and that is what, shall we say, runs the world. And even the article in the Times yesterday about the millennium dome is really more or less the same thing, because apparently the millennium exhibition in Greenwich will contribute up to £1 billion to the economy and help to modernize the nation's image, and Peter Mandelson said that the country needed to shift from defining ourselves by our past to defining ourselves by our future and he goes on to point out that what we need is a new sort of brand name which will call people to look forward, and even Geoff Mulligan, the Director of Demos, dear me, said that re-branding of Britain was urgent, and that a positive, easily recognisable brand image could give added value to our country as well as it could to a company. But if that isn't, you see, market image, what is? So, I have found out now what is under the millennium dome - it is selling Britain like you would sell soap. So I think GME is just about right. And that is what leads to the first question, you see. Where shall we go from here? Can we be going anywhere hopeful and promising so that there is good news for all, or is this bright idea of the 6th century, early medieval monk, simply non-sense? And posing us Christians with the point that our actual dating dates the whole of human being and possibilities for all time by one man, Jesus. That is what it does, you see. I am not saying this is believable, I am just saying it is offered, and I do not think there can be any doubt about that, although I know, now that I am in my eighth decade, that about as many people doubt the indubitable as believe the incredible, but surely it is clear, you see. Theis that the way forward arises because of what the one man, Jesus, has shown us about the one God. Now, go from that so here you see you have a very remarkable, whatever is to be made of it, and whatever Christians have made of it so far, that there is a particular person, Jesus, who is somehow particularly charged with universality. OK? A particular person, Jesus, who is somehow particularly charged with universality.you may not believe it, but that's the position.

Now look at the second picture, which is looking at oneself in the mirror. I don't recommend it just before you go to bed, of course, because it may give you nightmares! But try, you know, after you've got over the waking-up business and had a cup of tea or something and are feeling better, you see, to look at oneself in the mirror, and gaze at yourself straight in the eye and say: 'Who or what am I looking at?' Well, of course, the answer is obvious - 'me'. And it is further obvious that that's different in everyone's case. To which the answer surely is: 'so what?' After all, consider the evidence of physics and biochemistry, all the way from the big bang through the genes to DNA. As you doubtless know, on the whole the evidence is accepted that nowadays we can understand that our DNA is different by plus or minus 2% with that of the larger apes. I am inclined to take comfort from the fact that on the whole the chimpanzees have it by a small percentage point, nought-something-or-other percentage, which is encouraging because I have always thought that on the whole chimpanzees look slightly more friendly and intelligent than gorillas, but I believe that is due to the fact that gorillas have a bad press, actually! But I wouldn't be too clear about that. I am slightly relieved by the fact that orang utans don't seem to come into it because although, being God's creatures, they are obviously beautiful, they don't look like that to me! But we are clearly emergent and are we therefore to be reduced to that from which we are emergent? Here, the point is we have emerged and we know it and are even acutely aware of ourselves. There is a little sub-theme which could be followed up which is, as I understand it, it is actually the case that each of our DNAs is unique, which I always think is a comfort to our relatives, because at least there is nobody else like us! And therefore, when looking in the mirror, is it the correct thing to say 'Hiya, (higher?) latest ape!' and do we have to understand this by saying, well all this business about the Fall, you know, the best way to put it into history is to take it that when an ape which has almost become humanoid if not human, not only pinched a nut from its neighbour but actually enjoyed it - there's sin for you, you see. There's the Fall.

Is that the way to go about it? Well, higher ape, latest ape, in fact of course, practically, far more dangerous than any ape and in some way or other far more wondering than any ape, whether far more wonderful, of course, is quite another question. We have emerged and we know it and of course we can muck it up. We are pretty well having quite a good go at doing that at present, you see, and again, so what? And so who? Isn't that the sort of metaphysical question which we have thought up for ourselves, a question without any possible answer and further, (and this will be part of my subject for next week, if anyone comes back, and I'm afraid some of you will so I'll have to do it, so there we are - it's like at Oxford, if they go and elect you four times and nobody turns up, you get out of it and you still get paid - it used to be, it isn't allowed now, that's inefficient - it shows how ancient I am, you see) it is surely a question best forgotten, because look at the pathologies you get when people produce religions about it, but I am going to deal with the pathologies of religion next week, and in any case if you started thinking about it, wouldn't you be reduced to a sort of superstition, like AD, instead of being practical about things like global market eras and get on with it. And here, I think, we do need in this Cathedral and in the sense the terms and the purposes of the Keene Lectures to consider really just how taken for granted the case is that, of course, talk about God is nonsense. One example, yet again, came up in the Times this week (I do read other papers than the Times, you know, but I don't want to be misled by, you know, dangerous left-wing papers like the Guardian for these sort of arguments, you understand - we want to keep in the main stream!). This is an article by that splendid columnist Matthew Parris called 'Wishing upon a star'. In the we had been discussing the nature of crinkle-cut crisps and possible theories of their superiority over straight-cut crisps. But now in the dark (walking home, you see, in Overhatton(?) the conversation turned to God. Does God exist? None of us knew the others' opinions. Simon asked mine: 'No', I said, 'What do you think?' 'Don't be absurd', he said, 'I'm amazed you asked; it's unthinkable. There is no room even for doubt. It's never crossed my mind for so much as an instant that there might be a God. You, Rob?' 'Oh, no, no God.' We climbed over a style and walked on, examining the possibility that even the people who say they believe in God are secret agnostics! As I shall argue next week, quite a few people in God's actually believe in the Devil, but that's another matter; while those who say they are agnostic are secretly atheists. I advance the proposition that about 5% of the British people seriously believe in God, most of them Muslims. I think that's a very shrewd observation, a challenging one, anyway. I recall that once when I'd mentioned the afterlife to my deeply conservative grandmother, born in 1888, she had brought me up short by glaring at me and saying, in a most matter-of-fact way, 'You don't think I believe in all that, do you?' Whereas grandpa was more of a Zen Buddhist than a Christian, professing an openness to the counsel of all men, save vicars and insurance salesmen. And then he talks about their making a wish because they saw falling stars and he says: 'There is one superstition I have struggled for years to throw off and I honestly cannot. I do believe in the danger of I do believe in the perils of tempting the gods. I cannot rid myself of the fear that, should I ever assume that all will be well, it won't be. And that leads him into a very interesting observation, I think. It is fear that we are discussing, not, at root, belief. Anthropologists sometimes write as though primitive superstitions were part of a belief system, something essentially positive explaining the world and giving meaning to existence, but I can reach no such conclusion from my travels through Africa or through my own mind. Fear is the root of the driving force. And that leads him to the conclusion that superstition tries to seal things off but the antecedent is fear, and he ends up 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was not love but fear.' I think that is a very interesting article indeed, for all its lightheartedness, you see. In the beginning was the Word - he even gives it a capital 'W' - and the Word was not love but fear. Now, you see, the challenge is absolutely direct, absolutely direct and the more direct it can be, I think, the better. Where does the word of love of the Gospel come from? What weight has it? And the answer, as I believe now increasingly, from within the Biblical and Christian traditions, is really somewhat uncomfortable and I think very rarely faced in its fullness. The answer to both the question, 'Where does the word of love of the Gospel come from?' and to the question, 'What weight has it?' is: it comes through revelation received. It is to do with both the possibility and the weight of it with kindled, sustained and realistic faith, and there is no exigency (?) or external authority but an established tradition of independent and personally received convictions which have led to commitment, to pilgrimage, to experiences and to experiment. It is the revelation of the God who gets in touch, who keeps in touch and does not give up. And that is where the evidence comes from; whether we are of faith or of no faith, it is essential to be clear that the tradition of faith, of the word of love, of any word of the Gospel depends on encounters of revelation and response, and not on arguments of reason and generally obvious probability. I haven't got time to go into this in this lecture. Revelation may be seen to be or argued to be in accordance with reason. For instance, you may say it's a reasonable account of the great mystery of freedom or it is a reasonable account of the fact that although we have emerged, we have

this wonderful capacity to wonder and all sorts of other things, let alone to love and suffer and so on, but of course, I mean, that's reasonable when you've got a reason for holding it, but it is the deliverance and the hopes of revelation which establish and give you anything to argue about with reason. For, surely, the God of Biblical Revelation exists because he is God and for no other reason whatever. For example, as you often get, if you say, 'Well, why is there something rather than nothing?' well, why is that a good question? Especially now that you've got, you know, more and more bangs and more and more space and more and more chance and all the rest of it, you see, (I'll come back to this in a different way next week.) I mean, why should that question have any answer? And if you go on to say, 'How shall we vindicate morality?' if there isn't anyone to give us hell in fact, then that's very doubtful morally, and in any case, why should morality make sense - there are lots of sorts of it, and most people don't make sense of it anyway, and certainly don't live up to it, you see. And if, of course, you come down to the really banal one: 'well, what will become of us if there isn't a God?' well if God's got nothing better to do than bother about us, good grief. I mean, has it ever occurred to you - actually I'm in my eighth decade, you see, and I'm only preaching now in what would normally be called 'accident time' and I've exhausted the Biblical allowances, and I don't want to survive - I mean, fancy surviving for ever with you lot! I mean, it would be more like somewhere else than Heaven, wouldn't it, quite clearly, and if you survived with me, you see - there's no point in surviving - good grief! I honestly don't think there is. I think I may think that more easily because I've had such a wonderful life, you see, but I see no point in going on and on and on. The only possible reason for wanting to survive is because there is a God you can survive with, you see - do you follow me? The point is this, really, and it's a very important point - if we hold that the reason that God exists is in order to or on the grounds that he asks a question, a need or a fear (to pick up Matthew Parris) of ours, then you must be absolutely clear that he or she or it is not God but a creation, a projection and a protection of ours, which is what most religion looks like. And when you're a bishop, people write to you and say, 'We want a new vicar because there's a vacancy' - you'd think that, having survived the last one, they'd do without - but there it is, you know, they do want another one, and they write letters which say, 'We want somebody who is about forty-seven, and has a wife who will help him, some delightful children, and who won't change anything and who will bring the young people in!' They do, don't they. I don't want to drag you into this, but they do - I mean, I've had letters Religion isn't in order to change things, to be caught up in the glory of God, to try and follow Jesus, it's to keep us comfortable. It's as plain as a pikestaff, especially if you keep a bishop - but I should add, mind you, that there's one thing that's kept me going, which is that even the church can't keep a good God down; I'll come back to that - but you see, and again, it's right to laugh because we believe that sin won't have dominion over us, but that's no reason for dodging sin, you see, and that is why next week I'll have to start from, among other things, the pathologies of religion and the fragile and faithless fears of the fundamentalists, you see. It's obviously protective and it isn't as great as God, or even beginning to be as great as God would be if he were God. And you have to contrast the unexpectedness and the directness of the Biblical traditions. And it goes back, of course, I mean to the usual litany - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and so on. I mean, Abraham, you see, who was called to go out, not knowing whither he went, and above all, of course, to the prophet of prophets and the centre of the revelation of the name of God, Moses. You can look it up in the sort of 'primer' account - it's in Exodus 3, the burning bush and the voice that says: 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob', picking up the tradition so far and then telling him: 'I have come to deliver, you will go and deliver', and Moses very sensibly says: 'If I arrive out of the desert', and especially, of course, he might have said nowadays, 'and what's more I've been mixed up with the Egyptian Royal Court, which rules me out anyway, who shall I say sent me?' And you get this mysterious passage which is mysterious philologically as well as everything else. God said to Moses, 'I am who I am'. That is the translation in the text of the particular version of the Old Testament that I've got here. It is worth noticing that this particular version, which is a fairly new version, has a footnote which says 'I am who I am might be, I will be what I will be', and then God also said to Moses: 'Say to the Israelites, "the LORD" (and you know when you get the LORD in block capitals in the Old Testament, that is standing for this mysterious whatever it is which is usually translated YHWH - it isn't another name for God, it isn't another word for God, it is the name of God, the LORD, that is to say Yahweh or or however you happen to pronounce it, you see) and then the footnote in my translation here is, which says, which I think is about the best you can do with the philological complications, the Hebrew for Lord (that's Yahweh) sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for I Am in the previous verse. In other words, God's name is something to do with I am what I am, I will be what I will be and as some philologist said, 'I am there. Quite apart from the fact that you've got to keep the name of God mysterious because they thought that if you had the name you'd got power, and of course God is totally free, the point is that he is totally free to be not

only who he is but who he will be, and the next time anyone on the PCC or the Diocesan Synod or General Synod said, 'Ah, but this has never been done before, so we mustn't do it now', the answer is, how do you know; I mean God will be what he will be so watch out! There is this impact, this immense impact of the God who will be what he will be and who is free to be as he will be and he will be there. He is a freedom, he is a presence, he is an unexpectedness, but there is a consistency, the only point being that you can rely on him but you can't count on him, because he will be what he will be and he may work out to be what he will be by doing something you didn't expect but you will find out afterwards that that was totally reliable of him. Do you follow me? Counting on God is just belief. Relying on God is faith. Awkward, really, for people who have to run churches! And you see it leads on through John the Baptist, who after all went into the wilderness, obviously looking like a prophet in order to be a prophet, and who bore testimony to Jesus, and Jesus turned out to be the unexpected Messiah. Anyone who has studied the text in the New Testament which is supposed to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, only by looking them can see that nobody would have thought of that if Jesus hadn't been found to be the Messiah and then you can look back and find out. I mean there is no Jewish tradition that the suffering servant was directly the Messiah and so on, you see. Jesus was the unexpected Messiah, and now I come on even thinner ice, he was declared to be such by the unexpected revelation, the enigmatic revelation, you see, which convinced those who were convinced by it and went on to live by the faith of it and in the spirit of it, of the life, the presence, the promise, but of course it is a resurrection which is neither provable nor actually in any version proves anything. That's what I got into trouble for, didn't I? I was only stating the obvious. You see, because you can't possibly prove that it happened - after all, it could easily have been, as Matthew says, 'the priest said the soldiers (somebody) came and rolled it away while the guards slept' - you see, you could make up all sorts of explanations for an empty tomb, but that isn't really the important point; it doesn't prove it. The point is, even if, and this is my famous trouble again - I got accused of saying it was only a conjuring trick with bones - I never said it. I said it was *not* a conjuring trick with bones. But supposing there *had* been an amazing miraculous conjuring trick with bones, and, as some Muslims believe, Jesus had woken up again and wandered off to Kashmir where, as you know, he died and helped to found thesect and all that, you see, what would that have proved? What it does, the resurrection, is to open up the possibility that Jesus is exactly who he said he was, died (through?) the Father, who is indeed God, and God has raised him up. But it simply is not either provable, or even if it was, so what? Unless you're caught up into this faith and this hope and this glory, you see. And therefore, it is in faith and through faith that we join in the faith of the apostles and become the community of apostolic faith, which was brought into existence by the resurrection encounters with Jesus, raised up by the God who will be what he will be, and who now is known as the God who is as he is in Jesus. And this faith, this account of God, this story of God's promise and presence, is picked up through the encounter with Jesus and kept alive by the Spirit. So we are part of the community that tells this story of the God who is worshipped in the name of Jesus by the power of the Spirit, and we are part of the community who goes in for the pilgrimage, the witness and the worship which goes with all this. And as I say, even the church cannot keep a good God down, and actually you cannot do without the church, because faith has to be handed on, lived, entered into through worship, maintained by prayer, pursued in pilgrimage, you see. And that is what is kept alive and if you want to know more details about it, do read Hebrews 11, which I think is magnificent on the subject, and I won't go into that now, there isn't time. And so we have this faith of the apostolic community and the next point is this - I have to rush on - in the church this faith-creating experience of God is summed up in the icon of the Trinity. I use the word 'icon' because it isn't exactly a diagram, it certainly isn't a dogma, and it's a set of words which is iconic, which, I mean, points to a faith discovered and a faith declared, like this, you see. The icon of the Trinity sums up God's revelation of his own story towards us and says that this revelation is focussed in a three-fold pattern and power of reality. There is the God who gets in touch and is found to be the God of all gods, the only God, God over all, God for all, God in all, sometimes described as Father, certainly as (force?), certainly as care, certainly as the one who covenants, certainly the one who comes and promises, and this is God the mystery who is there and will be what he will be and might be but as God greater than great. Just to remind us also, of course, that that's why I sometimes talk about God as he/she/it, just to remind us that no language does include any gender language for God. But he is greater than great, but, (no, not but), *and* this God is truly and really love, so much so that he can be and he reveals himself to be love in particular, one of us, Emmanuel, God with us, and as one of us, utterly down to earth, for all, and done to death, the death which is the death of each and any individual, real death in particular, and in his case this real death in particular expresses the universal love which gives to the uttermost for all. So the God who is greater than great and mysteriously universal is the one and the same God who is more loving than love and sacrificially in particular. But this is not just

some elegant theory or a reasonable and exciting bit of myth which is neither here nor there, rather like the small boy said: 'a parable is a heavenly story with no earthly meaning'. We are not up, you see, to such a mystery of universality and such a wonder of love in particular, but God is down to it, not, if I may say so, just in Jesus though unbelievably and wholly in Jesus, and not indeed just in the calling and the inspiration of prophets and saints. The God who is greater than great, who is the God who is more loving than love, is also equally and wholly the God who is closer than close, God the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and who works between us. 'Don't you know', says St Paul, 'that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?' Or, in Romans 8, which is a marvellous chapter anyway, there is that terribly encouraging bit at the end, I think it's near the end, not the marvellous climax, but on the way to the end, in which Paul says: 'We don't know how to pray as we ought', which cheers me up no end. I mean, if the apostle Paul didn't know how to pray, then the fact that I keep on getting it wrong..... you know, it shows there is still hope, you see! But, he says, the Spirit, which knows the mind of God, teaches us how to pray, you see - right down to earth, closer than close, and prayer is attention and keeping still enough to look within, as often as not we get worried (when?) God isn't here, and he's closer than close and we won't look in and wait and see. So, God is this mystery, this availability, this promise and he/she/it is the power that is greater than great, the active engagement that is more loving than love, and the empowering intimacy who is closer than close. And the point of going through this course of lectures, quite apart from the fact that it excites me more and more and I do think it means something, though I can't do it, I mean it's only in worship or prayer that I get anywhere close to it and then I don't, but I keep on repeating, I'm not up to it but God is down to it, so there is hope, you see. But this is indeed a revelation of universality, you see, which is to all and for all, which is about the beginning and the end and about the fulfilling of all time and all place and all persons, and the answer to looking in the mirror is, 'Yes - you have the potentiality and the calling to be in the image of God' - and at which point one repeats again, we are not up to it but God is down to it. And the Christian revelation is as great as this. It clearly claims to be as great as this, however feeble we are, however faithless we are, as I shall have to come back to next week. And I think I might say that this revelation is offered as *all* or it is nothing. Anything less than being caught up into the all is a set of superstitions, fendings off, fallings short and being too frightened to go on. I just put that in, I don't want to insist on it, but I want to fly it as a flag, you see. That is the trouble with us, we don't actually believe but we are betwixt and between, and I often feel really, you know, like years ago a very ancient bishop said to me that one thing he found most vexatious was people who kept regularly coming to confession and never confessed a real sin, and he wanted to say, 'Oh, go away and sin!' because most of our religion doesn't take us up into heaven and doesn't get us down to earth enough to enjoy it. You see what I mean? There is a challenge to the all or the nothing, and that I think is the case for atheism - people are perfectly right, it seems to me, very often to believe there is nothing, it's happened, it will unhappen, what else? This is a perfectly possible interpretation of lots of things and would be a release in many ways - it could be, couldn't it, you see - because at least the bloody agony of it won't go on for ever. Pardon me, I shouldn't swear from the pulpit, but you see what I mean, I'm not swearing, I'm trying to express the truth. But there is this offer of all, there is this offer of the pilgrimage of faith and worship which is both mysterious and at the same time very particular and personal. So what we Christians have to reckon with is that there is indeed a universal Gospel for the third millennium and there is a real sense in which AD is not nonsense; it points to universal promise and the possibly universal future, though whether you can express it like that now is quite another matter, and that is what we shall be pursuing, but I just want to round off with one or two more points because in a sense one is inclined to say, when you put it like that, 'what a hope!' And as I shall discuss at the second lecture, it does look like hopeless nonsense, quite badly really, and religions contribute to it, but I shall get on because I really believe what I'm trying to put before you, but I can't get the language right, that the third lecture is about how to hope in practice into the third millennium, in the Spirit, of course; we are not up to it but God is down to it. And I think I have been inclined to think that the real motto outside the millennium dome or for the church's celebration ought to be like I once saw on the front of a Christmas card, a choirboy dressed up and looking angelic and stamping his foot, and the Christmas card said: 'O, come on, all ye faithful!' That is the topic, I think, you see, for the millennium, but two footnotes, quickly, because they'll have to be taken up later. To make this claim about Jesus as the man whom God chose to become and all that, is to make a claim for him as unique, and undoubtedly that is to make a claim about him being unique in particular. Now what we have got to wrestle with, I believe, is that if you understand this calling of Jesus and the uniqueness of Jesus, you see it is the calling of Jesus on behalf of, in the person of, almost, you might say, but certainly on behalf of God, his uniqueness is inclusive, not exclusive. How do we work that one out? That's the great challenge, you see, because once you make it exclusive, you get all these types - 'I've got the true Gospel and you haven't and all

the rest of it, and best way I can show you I've got the true Gospel and you haven't is that I believe enough to, if you're really wrong, to kill you,' or something like that, you know, all these absurdities which follow. How does the uniqueness become an inclusive uniqueness? And the second thing is that being faithful to the tradition, the tradition of the Trinity is always a question of facing up to the realities now, with whatever resources we have picked up so far, with a view to the future. That is what God is about, moving forward, and as my much-revered teacher, Dennis Lineham (?) once told General Synod, as far as he could see, there is nothing in the New Testament against doing a thing for the first time. But you'd think so, wouldn't you? It must be looking forward, and this is very, very important - God will be what he will be. Abraham went out not knowing where he went, God is ahead of us. And if we are going to enter into the next millennium we must go forward and we must go forward in faith and we must be clear that faith has no other authority than that which we are able to share. There is no authority outside faith; unless you are part of the faithful, who would ever believe that the Pope got it right? I mean, there is plenty of evidence that a lot of things he got wrong, his predecessor. You always have to be in the community of faith. If there was no community of faith, who would ever believe the Bible is the word of God? I mean, look at the rubbish it says. I mean, it may be against homosexuality, of which we are glad, but it also tells us to put them to death, you know. I mean, people aren't even quoting Leviticus on homosexuality without leaving out half a verse, and we wouldn't wrestle with the Bible at all if it weren't for the community that thought it was the word of God in there. The Bible proves absolutely nothing at all. One of the things I find - usually I get told off if I say it - 'and when you quote that, which verse did you have in mind? Which translation did you have in mind, and why did you choose it?' That's pulling my rank, it's not fair! There is no authority outside faith. You may attach it to the Pope in faith, and there may be a reason for it. There is no authority in the Bible - words don't do anything, do they, because at any rate you've got to read them, you've got to say them, you've got to translate them, you've got to choose them, you've got to apply them. What nonsense! What utter nonsense. Blasphemous nonsense. People just want spells, you see, they don't want faith and God and perseverance and enlargement. They want to get rid of the whole thing. And I'll give you stronger reasons for that next week. Faith can only be witnessed to, offered, explained and expressed - it cannot be claimed, imposed, demanded. And any form of evangelism which tries to bully people into faith is already denying the faith, because it is contradicting Jesus. Can I close with a question, posed splendidly by my favourite theologian, now alas dead, called Calman (?), the man who used to do cartoons on the front of the Times and elsewhere which showed troubled little people and wry captions underneath. And he had a whole set called 'Oh my God'. I've got a private one of that because I knew him and he sent it to me and it shows God sitting up in Heaven at his office desk and there is an in-tray and an out-tray, and the in-tray is very high and God says, 'Not the Bishop of Durham again!' So you see, I have an affection for Calman, I did know him slightly. But he's a very good theologian, like so many atheist Jews are, and one of them shows God trying to go to sleep on his cloud and up from the earth is coming noises and bashes and all the rest of it, and God leans over the cloud and says, 'Love one another, or I'll come down and bash you!' Well, now, you see, how does the authority of God work? How does the love of God work? How does the faith of the Gospel work, if God is as he is in Jesus, he is the God who raised up Jesus and we have the Spirit of Jesus with us, and that's the question on which I wish to end this lecture.