

Many of you will be familiar with the world of DBS checks and Safeguarding. There is a comprehensive document on Safeguarding in relation to the choirboys that is updated every year and signed off by the School and the College. I shall shortly have to attend another 3-yearly safeguarding course run by the diocese for people like me whose role in the church may involve working with children and vulnerable adults. University students, for some reason, are not classified as either children or vulnerable adults, though the degree of vulnerability sometimes seems alarmingly high. All members of the Governing Body, indeed all tutors, should surely be as aware of their safeguarding responsibilities as they are of, say, trusteeship or data protection issues.

We all need to feel safe, which is quite different from being mollycoddled or tied to someone's apron-strings. Many people rely on their mobile phone to give them instant access to whatever help is needed, but that can give a false sense of security. In today's Gospel [John 10: 22-30], Jesus addresses our need of safety. That wasn't the question he was asked, but it was the question he chose to answer. Those around him wanted a different kind of certainty: a clear statement of who he was, which would feed their own agenda. In the intellectual atmosphere of Oxford, you may be looking for knowledge in order to feed your own agenda: to boost your academic credentials, or your street-cred, or your relationships, or simply your pride.

Jesus punctures our pride and self-centredness, and directs our gaze elsewhere. What you really need, he says, is a place of safety, of absolute safety, where you can be fully yourselves, and not be driven by destructive agendas imposed from inside or outside. That place is a place of belonging, where the needs of each person, individually and as a member of a community, are fully understood and fully met, by one who is well described as the Good Shepherd. Within that context, your knowledge will be of a different calibre, based on different presuppositions, and with a different focus.

Isn't a school or a college, or a family, such a place of safety and belonging? Many indeed are, thank God, up to a point: and of course many of our institutions, academic and social, were deliberately formed on the pattern of a Christian community that honoured the Good Shepherd as the head. This college, of which I have been privileged to be a member for half a century, is an excellent example of such a community. The President is right to say in his speech of welcome to new undergraduates that once you become a member of this family, you will always remain so. Magdalen is a very special community, a *hortus conclusus* as today's anthem has it [Clemens non Papa, *Ego flos campi*, a setting of Song of Solomon 2: 1-5 and 4: 12, 15], and you will find it to be a place of belonging and a place of safety throughout your lives. You will value, some more than others, the continuing relationship that you have with Magdalen.

But such a relationship is only a pale copy of the relationship that Almighty God has prepared for you. When you hear the *Sicut liliam* passage in the anthem, by all means think 'Magdalena floreat', but think even more of what Jesus has won for you. Jesus says: 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.' Do you know the firm clasp of God's hand, which will steady you and hold you absolutely safe whatever happens, in this life and the next?

A French Catholic poet on whom I have worked a lot was the only lay member of the commission translating the Latin Breviary into French after Vatican II. He suggested avoiding the too-familiar word *Sauveur*, Saviour, and replacing it with *Sauveteur*, Rescuer or Rescue-worker. That was too radical for the commission, but he had a point. Why not venture outside our traditional religious language, and think of Jesus in today's terms as our ultimate Safeguarder, totally committed to our safety and welfare? Reach out to him in faith, put your hand in his, and you will always be safe. Amen.