

Bacon Sandwiches & Salvation

*A Humorous Antidote
for the Pharisee in All of Us*



Adrian Plass
International best-selling author

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Introduction

The Sacred Diary of Adrian Plass had its birth in a regular feature on the inside back cover of *Christian Family Magazine*. *Bacon Sandwiches and Salvation* grew out of a column that appeared for several weeks on the back page of *The Baptist Times*. Similarities do not end there. The kind of nervous commitment (“panic” might be a better word) that I tend to put into the production of material for a column, especially one purporting to be amusing, is in some ways more urgent and painstaking than the energy required to begin a book from nothing. In each case that original material from the columns, although a small proportion of the completed work, has provided me with a sort of creative and imaginative racing start and made the quest to compile an entire book that much more vital and exciting.

A word of explanation about the title of this book. I found myself next to my friend Liz in church one day. Liz and I are not really very good for each other in this situation. At our worst, we are like two naughty children messing about and making silly jokes at the back of the class. We have never actually been formally split up yet, but it could happen. Halfway through the service our minister asked the congregation a question.

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“For you,” he asked, “what is the most important thing in the world?”

Liz and I answered more or less simultaneously. My reply was very proper and holy for a change.

“Salvation!” I cried piously.

“Bacon sandwiches!” suggested Liz, with all the passion and wisdom you would expect from a retired magistrate and area schools adviser for religious education.

Yes, I thought to myself. Of course. Bacon sandwiches and salvation. That just about sums it up. A God who can create the indescribable tastiness of a bacon sandwich must be planning something pretty incredible in the salvation line. A title was born. Thanks, Liz.

I have had such fun with *Bacon Sandwiches*. I hope that most of it will make you laugh, or at least smile, and I also hope that you will not hurt yourself too badly when you trip over the occasional serious or whimsical bits.

God bless you.

A



ASSYRIANS

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Adam: first example of someone who ruined his life by taking banned substances that had been growing in his garden. It was his chick's idea, and she got busted as well.

Afterlife: (1) something dreaded by those who believe it will be like one of their Sunday morning services, only going on for ever and ever. When you've sung "Shine, Jesus, Shine" for the nine-millionth time. . . .; (2) a place where God will chew a straw and fill us in on how things really are; (3) a time when, according to Oscar Wilde, good Americans will go to Paris and bad Americans will go to America.

A growing time: ghastly phrase used as a verbal sticking bandage to cover a period of one's life that was so horrible, hopeless, and apparently lacking in the presence and power of God that none of the other statutory religious terms will cover it.

Agape love: (1) Christian fellowship, especially as distinct from erotic love; (2) kissing with your mouth open.

Agnostic: (1) a person who believes that nothing is known, or can possibly be known, of the existence or nature of God, or of anything beyond normal phenomena; (2) Gnostic with a.

Alcohol: substance recommended in moderation by Saint Paul for medical reasons connected with the stomach, in which case there must be an epidemic of severe gastric problems in certain sections of our present-day evangelical culture.

Alpha: outreach system that has brought thousands to faith but has left in its wake a small, deeply confused group of people who have mistakenly asked Nicky Gumbel into their lives.

Altar-ego: alternative persona adopted by Anglican priests during services.

And lastly: phrase employed by preachers, meaning “Don’t even think about so much as shifting in your chair; we’ve got a long way to go yet.”

And thirdly: used by preachers in their endless quest to prove that every single aspect of life has been divinely divided into three parts, each beginning with the same letter, as in “Peace, Power, and Porkscratchings.”

Anglican: (1) a charismatic; (2) an anticharismatic; (3) one who is in favor of women in the priesthood; (4) one who is not in favor of women in the priesthood; (5) one who has close links with Rome; (6) one who abhors Rome; (7) one who sees no problem with the ordination of gay clergy; (8) one who is absolutely opposed to the ordination of gay clergy; (9) one who has just arrived in the hospital; (10) one who turns to her neighbor when “Worthy Is the Lamb” is being sung and says, “I hope the joint’s big enough . . . ,” (11) an institution that has proved it can be laughed at and respected and loved by its members. If the song “These Foolish Things” were addressed to the Church of England, it might read as follows:

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The folks arriving with their Sunday faces
The silent struggle for the back-row places
The cloud the caretaker brings
These foolish things remind me of you

The rousing hymn before the three-point sermon
The deacon's gran who sounds like Ethel Merman
We share our pain as she sings
These strangled things remind me of you

The winds of change, so many priests are female
The current vogue to be baptized by e-mail
Oh, how the pendulum swings
These trendy things remind me of you

Your spires, your choirs, your liturgy
These things are dear to me
The coffee's frightful, but it's always free

The hour's talk on what Mosaic law meant
A short rehearsal for eternal torment
It dries up all our springs
These dusty things remind me of you

The invitation to the peace extended
Deep relaxation when the damn thing's ended
Such wretched murmurings
These awkward things remind me of you

Before Communion the hesitation
 A moment later it's like Euston Station
 Perplexed meanderings
 These puzzling things remind me of you

Sometimes, they say, why C of E?
 I love the history
 I love the muddle and the mystery

The flippant lad who likes to play the joker
 He claims the Bible holds a hand at poker
 Of course he means Two Kings
 These stupid things remind me of you

The grace of God like summer rain descending
 The hush that fills the church seems never ending
 Till someone's mobile rings
 These ghastly things remind me of you

The autumn evensongs we all remember
 Through years that fly like leaves in late September
 The kiss of angels' wings
 These tender things remind me of you.

Anglican Reform: (1) Back to Basics movement within the Church of England; (2) an anagram of gin canal.

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Anthem: (1) elaborate choral composition based on a passage of Scripture; (2) word that means “good-looking” when used by a cockney with a lisp.

Apathy: driving force behind our attitudes toward the Third World.

Apostle spoon: small cutlery item, usually featuring a tiny image of Saint Paul, presumably because his teaching caused such a stir.

Apple crumble: dish invented to commemorate Eve’s temptation and the subsequent fall.

Armageddon: term used in game played by God with an off-duty angel, as in:

“Knock, knock!”

“Who’s there?”

“Armageddon.”

“Armageddon who?”

“Armageddon tired of evil; let’s have the last battle.”

Art: something regarded with deep suspicion by many folk in the church. This sad prejudice was exemplified at the Spring Harvest art gallery a few years ago when someone wrote in the comments book: “Too many bottoms for my liking.” Particularly frustrating when one reflects that most great art produced over the years was influenced or inspired by Christian belief.

As the Lord leads: fairly common phrase among Christians, meaning “I haven’t decided yet.”

Ascension: occasion recorded in the first chapter of the book of Acts when Jesus departed from his followers by being taken up and disappearing into a cloud. A highly significant and reassuring event for Christians, as it demonstrates the preservation of the individual person in the spiritual realm. Those who doubt the sanity of Christian belief, however, might be tempted to adapt the latter part of the story to suit their views:

After he saith this, behold he was taken up before their very eyes, and an cloud hideth him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when, behold, suddenly two men dressed in white standeth beside them. And the disciples explaineth excitedly that their master hath disappeared into the sky.

One of the two men replieth soothingly, “Well, of course he hath, gentlemen, right up into the sky. We doubteth it not. Now, if thou wilt climbeth quietly up into the back of this nice white van that we have broughteth for thine transport, we shall take thee to an peaceful place where thou canst safely stare up into the sky to thine hearts’ desire. Cometh along now. No trouble.”

“And,” enquireth one of the disciples, his eyes bright as he pauseth before stepping into the van, “wilt there be an upper room in this place of which thou speakest, where we may gather and wait to be clothed with power from on high?”

“Upper room?” saith one of the white-coated men. “Funny thou shouldst saith that. Why, verily we specialiseth in upper

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rooms, don't we, George? All you gentlemen can sit up there in one of our upper rooms with the nice soft walls and the en suite facilities and be clothed in power from on high or in Widow Twanky costumes or Lithuanian bus conductors' uniforms, or whatsoever thou wisheth. Now moveth it along, there's a good disciple, or we shall arriveth late for supper. Thine er master sitting up there in the cloud mighteth not be too happy about that."

And he winketh heavily at George. . . .

Ashurbanipal: a name slipped into the fourth chapter of Ezra by God for the purpose of preserving humility in those who think they are such good sight readers that they don't need to prepare the Sunday lesson.

Assyrians: an aggressive people who always seemed to be sweeping down from somewhere and never sweeping back up. Although, when you think about it, they must have swept back up at some point in order to be in a position to sweep down again, mustn't they?

Astrology: the study of the movement and relative positions of celestial bodies interpreted as an influence on human affairs. In other words, the one that's not all right. And, of course, as Christians we just thank our lucky stars that there's no need for us to get involved with such things.

Astronomy: the one that is all right. Patrick Moore may be somewhat eccentric, but he is not the high priest of the occult movement.

Atheist: (1) lapsed agnostic; (2) someone who, according to Chesterton, settles for exploring mazes that have neither a center nor an exit.

“Avoid London—Area closed—Turn on radio”: extraordinary and not-at-all-funny disaster-movie-style sign presented to my wife and me and thousands of other drivers negotiating the M25 on 7/7/05, the day when bombers brought terror to the city of London. We were on our way to Luton (the station from which the terrorists began their journey) to meet our daughter, who was traveling through the capital city by train at the exact time when the explosions occurred. She arrived safely and was unharmed. Many were not. Life was never to be the same for huge numbers of victims, relatives, and friends.

B



BACKSLIDING

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Babes and sucklings: Minor Prophets.

Babylon: (1) city situated on the river Euphrates to which the Israelites were exiled; (2) what a lot of preachers do.

Backsliding: activity shared by wavering Christians and penguins. Both likely to get into deep water as a result, the difference being that the penguins look forward to doing it again a little less than the Christians.

Bacon sandwiches: a seriously neglected evangelistic tool. Imagine if bacon were to be fried at the front of outreach rallies as the evangelist is speaking. The smell would, of course, be heavenly. Members of the congregation would be informed that any person coming forward to make a commitment automatically receives a free bacon sandwich. There would be a stampede to the front. Bacon sandwiches and salvation. What an unbeatable and eminently Jesus-like combination! (See also **Salvation.**)

Baguette: (1) long thin loaf of bread; (2) word used by the French in biblical genealogies, as in:

Solomon baguette Rehoboam,
Rehoboam baguette Abijah,
Abijah baguette Asa . . . etc.

Balaam's ass: part of Balaam, in the sense that he became deeply attached to the creature.

Bangladesh: country where five million children struggle to stay alive every day. Hardly a religious subject. Move on quickly.

Baptist Church: denomination in which one senses that there is an awful lot going on under the surface.

Barking: apparent feature of a comparatively recent wave of blessing in the church that has given rise to such snatches of dialogue as:

A: (overcome by whatever it is) Woof! Woof!

B: Why are you doing that?

A: I'm barking.

B: Ah yes, I suppose that would explain it. . . .

Be bold: chorus sung by Christian cricket fans when the Australians are batting. Until recently not a very helpful activity for those who are looking to build up their faith. A different story since 2005!

Be of one mind: a good idea as long as it isn't taken to mean that the one mind has to be divided up in equal parts between all eighty-six members of the congregation.

Beatitude: (1) declaration of blessedness in Matthew's gospel. Certain omissions are much regretted by modern Christians, e.g., "Blessed are the couch potatoes, for they shall be brought

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snacks.” (2) Not to be confused with a similar phrase widely used in marriage: “I am so sick and tired of your whole B. attitude.”

Behemoth: (1) hippopotamus or elephant mentioned in the book of Job; (2) identification instruction given to a member of the Lepidoptera family by Adam when he was naming the animals.

Benediction: (1) blessing at the end of a service; (2) strange vocal habits of old simple-minded *Crossroads* character who always wore a woolly hat.

Benjamite: (1) member of the tribe of Benjamin; (2) early form of Israeli yeast extract that you either love or hate.

Bildad: (1) the Shuhite, one of Job’s long-winded comforters; (2) second part of his name suggests that he might have been an ancient maker of ankle-supporting boots; (3) phrase completing a sentence frequently used by supposedly grown-up offspring to their fathers: “Any chance of you paying this. . . .”

Billy Graham: (1) anagram of “big rally ham”; (2) sweet man of God, more effective at moving backsides in the right direction than the most popular and heavily patronized proctologist in the world.

Bind us together, Lord: grace sung before a meal of boiled eggs.

Bishop: (1) senior member of Christian clergy in charge of the diocese, a father to his people; (2) one who is not capable of moving in any direction other than diagonally; (3) character that is not supposed to behave like a pawn.

Bless you: buzz off.

Blessed: (1) consecrated; (2) less in bed; (3) big, wide-faced, grumpy actor with annoyingly loud voice who climbs mountains.

Blessed are the wounds of a friend: phrase from the twenty-seventh chapter of Proverbs, occasionally quoted by those who have something extremely unfriendly to say.

Blind pew: (1) scary character in *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, who delivers the “black spot”; (2) worst seat in Anglican church immediately behind a pillar.

Boaz: Ruthless Old Testament character, totally transformed by marriage.

Boredom: largely unacknowledged feature of church life. Worth bearing in mind that Jesus left people angry, puzzled, elated, entertained, fed, disgusted, and overjoyed but, as far as we know, never bored.

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Born-again Christian: (1) person who has entered into a glorious new life with Christ; (2) a tautology. The response to those who ask if one is a born-again Christian might well be: “What’s the other sort, then?” (3) Ill-mannered and misguided believers who try to stuff their boring beliefs down other people’s throats. Not to labor the point, but perhaps those of us who have been remiss enough to unwittingly persuade non-Christians that the latter definition is the correct one should reflect on the fact that the famous nocturnal encounter in John’s gospel between Jesus and Nicodemus did not proceed like this:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the ruling council. He came to Jesus at night, and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he becomes a bigoted, narrow-minded jerk.”

Brainwashing: process by which contrary ideas can be planted in the mind; never used in the Christian church (special intensive courses are available for those who stubbornly refuse to believe this).

Bread of heaven: great and glorious provision that we Anglicans slice up neatly and use to make hymn sandwiches.

Breasts: described by Solomon (who was supposed to know about women) as being like two fawns browsing among lilies.

One can only assume that some initial misconception was reinforced by the shortsighted king's devoted followers ensuring that each wife approached him backward wearing a backpack containing a bunch of flowers and a pair of hungry ferrets.

Bride of Christ: the church, a body that will be presented pure and unspotted to Christ. Well, when I say pure and unspotted, we don't always quite manage such perfection. Sometimes we are not even aware that we are falling short.

I remember sitting in a church that was not my own, listening to a heated exchange between people who, judging by the way they were speaking, must have felt a deep loathing for each other.

This was the Annual General Meeting of an evangelical church situated several miles from my hometown, and I had been invited to attend for a very specific purpose. The elders of this church were keen to put on an outreach event that would attract and draw in local people who would not otherwise darken (or lighten) the doors of the establishment. Apparently the whole congregation felt a strong desire to share the gospel with their neighbors. This being the case, they were wondering if Bridget and I might write and direct a Christian revue that would be genuinely entertaining, but would also provide the chance to make a clear, honest, and unthreatening statement about Jesus. It was an interesting and intriguing proposition, and I had been more than happy to give some thought to the idea. I had been invited to the AGM so that, at some point in the second half of the proceedings, I could outline my ideas.

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The meeting had been in progress now for about twenty-five minutes, and I had had to use an effort of the will to prevent my jaw from dropping in amazement. The chairman of the meeting was a good friend of mine, and he was doing a valiant job, but he was beginning to make Basil Fawlty look like a sedated nun, and I did not blame him in the slightest. I had rarely heard church people, or any people for that matter, being so unpleasant, obstructive, argumentative, loud, and uncooperative. It was not the whole group of fifty or so church members who were behaving like this, but a sufficiently large minority to make this divine event feel acrimonious and uncomfortable, especially to a visitor.

The situation was made doubly irksome by the fact that one of the two main male troublemakers was a tall man who spoke in piercingly high falsetto tones, while the other was small and round and had a mechanical buzz of a voice, not dissimilar to the vibrating drone of a high-speed dentist's drill. These two individuals had a wide range of objecting skills. They objected to what was being said. They objected to the order in which these objectionable things were being said, and they objected to what was said in substitution for the things that were said, but were then objected to by them.

Additionally, they objected to the things that were not being said; and when, at their bidding, those things were said, they objected in the strongest possible terms to the manner in which they were said. If they had been told that every single one of their objections would be met in full, these people would have objected, because then there would have been nothing left to object about; and that would have left no reason for them to

be alive; and how many of those present, I asked myself, could possibly have objected to that?

Perhaps my memory is failing me and I am exaggerating. Possibly, but only just. The conflict and bad feeling flying around in that room, not just from Squeaky and Buzzy but also from several others, had to be seen and heard to be believed. It was a relief to stop for refreshments.

At last teas and coffees had been consumed, and it was my turn to stand up and address the AGM on the subject of the proposed revue. I looked around for a moment at the rows of faces in front of me. My ears were still ringing with the echoes of verbal artillery. Where should I start?

“Well,” I said at last, “thank you for inviting me to your AGM, and I have to say straightaway that I really don’t think you need an outreach revue at all.”

Brows met. Faces contracted with puzzlement. People looked at each other and shook heads. That was why I was there, wasn’t it?

“No,” I continued, “you don’t have to bother with anything like that. Just invite all the local people to one of your AGMs, and that should do the trick. They’ll come here, listen to you sniping and objecting and taking offense, and they’ll say, ‘Yes! Yes! This is what we want. Just to be part of a group of people like this who truly love each other. If this is what following Jesus means, then we want to be a part of it. Yes! Fantastic! When do we start? Where do we sign?’”

There was a moment of silence. Perhaps I had gone too far. Perhaps I should be minding my own business. But I was trying to be a follower of Jesus, and Jesus makes everything his business.

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Somebody laughed. Another person laughed. Lots of people were laughing. I was not able to do a strictly accurate count, but I estimated that the laughers exceeded 50 percent of those present, and therefore the nonlaughers were outvoted, and the unproposed but extremely important motion was invisibly carried:

“This AGM believes that we have been behaving in a very silly fashion and we ought not to let it happen again.”

All this provided an excellent platform for talking about the fact that, if we really wanted to reach out, we had to have some clear idea of what we were reaching out with. What do we Christians have that is worth offering to other people?

Bring and share lunches: largely responsible for the great quiche flood of 1964, in which many evangelical Christians came close to suffocating under the sheer weight of the huge number of tarts thronging church halls throughout the country.

Bull of Bashan: usual old nonsense that we've come to expect from Bashan.

Burn: less desirable option than to marry, according to Saint Paul, who somehow managed to live with the former and, as far as we know, never experienced the latter. Likely to be a lengthy and somewhat restless line in heaven waiting to discuss this matter with the great apostle.