



Paper Cuts, A Memoir

By Stephen Bernard,
Jonathan Cape, £14.99

Well then, rest not in peace Canon Thomas 'Dermod' Fogarty! Another religious leader paedophile brought to book, in this book, a devastating indictment of a dishonest church. Adjectives used by other reviewers of this 'only experiment in autobiography' by an Academic Visitor at Oxford's English Faculty, include 'desolating', 'brilliant', 'appalling', 'riveting' and 'unforgettable'. Far more than 'just' an account of sexual abuse, whatever 'just' could imply, the book is a reflection on so much more. On identity and meaning, on friendship, on the value of scholarship. Not too many words. And a great love letter to Oxford, perhaps unselfconsciously. Worcester College garden as a moment's sanctuary; Brasenose as humane and welcoming; Christ Church as structure and a home. Learning is a lifeline and the 18th century literary milieu present, alive, Dryden and Swift nearby. But such a brief description does no justice to the literature, which will endure.

A University Education

By David Willetts
OUP, £25.00

'Universities are one of the great forces shaping the modern world and driving human progress.' Around this conviction the former Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts (Christ Church, 1975), constructs a bold and well-considered vision of the current and future university, and of the case for being a student. His comparative perspective allows international and regional insights. One of these concerns the profound failure of successive UK governments to successfully fund public research institutes that liberally scatter the OECD. As a result, the role of pursuing economically enhancing activities and research is falling to UK universities more than it might, BUT, the author intones, this is broadly a Good Thing. Willetts is hugely sensitive to the 'twin perils of scholasticism and utilitarianism' but also skewers the false polarity between them. There's room in the middle, he says. He admits, wryly, that the book is also 'a heavily disguised ministerial memoir,' but this is arguably a strength.

Development A Very Short Introduction

By Ian Goldin, OUP, £7.99

One of the central points made by the author, also the founding Director of the Oxford Martin School and a former Vice-President at the World Bank, is that getting from poverty to prosperity nowadays involves far more than just ever-rising economic growth and financial wealth. Quite apart from renewed concern about rising inequality, it involves education, gender equality, healthcare and a vision of environmental sustainability, the very elements enshrined in the UN Millennium Development Goals. Seen this way, of course, the traditional polarity of 'developed' and 'developing' nations gets confused. This confusion is particularly evident if you throw climate change into the mix, given that the wealthiest countries have the highest per-capita carbon footprints. It might mean that rich nations are the 'third world' when it comes to environmental sustainability, although the author only touches on such an inconvenient truth.

Of course other elements such as the rule of law and good governance can still reveal a more traditional distinction between countries that have done well and others that have not. Corruption and development do not mix well. War isn't helpful either, with apparently no fewer than 624 non-state conflicts having erupted since the end of the Cold War in 1989.

A section titled 'Global Public Goods', from p.86, is very encouraging, noting how well-directed aid from multilateral or bilateral donors can benefit, for example, the natural environment or public health. There is no 'downside' or counter-argument to the evidently brilliant success of the Onchocerciasis Control Programme established in West Africa in 1974, to combat river blindness. Yet if rising human population is the most basic evidence of successful development, how much is too much? The book ends on a cliffhanger presaging, possibly, a gigantic human own-goal. Noting the tenfold increase in middle-class consumers, to 5 billion in the next few years, he says, 'This triumph of development is a cause for celebration. But...'