

## Speaking Personally (part two)

leoh Ming Pei was a Chinese architect whose buildings gained fame. For a couple of years I taught English at Tunghai University in Taiwan and worshipped in the soaring chapel he designed, shaped like hands rising from the ground in prayer. He once said of building: **"Let's do it right. This is for the ages."**

Those who first imagined Westminster's relocation to Cambridge did it right. They created a building that sits on a prime bit of land and that manages to be both entirely in keeping with the Cambridge college context and yet deliberately subverts much that might be expected. It is a building many of us have fallen unashamedly in love with.

The first public building in Cambridge to include electric lights, Westminster speaks of the great skill of a host of craftspeople. In true

Arts and Crafts style, it has elements that repeat and thus create a unity. Again and again I am caught out by the ways in which the curves of so many of the ceilings echo and re-echo in unexpected places. There is a simple pillar design that you find again and again right through the building as it frames corridors, fireplaces, shelves, doors and windows. There are so many signs of attention to detail which, 121 years after it opened, still shine.

Of course, buildings can become idols. They can soak up money and divert attention from things that matter more. I know the risks. Anyone involved in churches knows the risks! So I also rejoice that we, in our generation, are doing it right. Looking after the building is, rightly, an endless task. It deserves to be cared for so that it can be



used well for the URC. The renewal of the building I wrote of last month has ushered in a new era in which Westminster can be more welcoming, more friendly, lighter and brighter, warmer and safer and more accessible than ever in its history. The Woolf building complements the site superbly; brand new honouring the brick of the Victorians. The reconfigured Bounds House lets people have space to flourish in. The Art Studio acknowledges that our humanity can find many modes of expression.

Henry Hare was our original architect. He did it right. I thank God for the gift he gave us, now, to cherish.

**"Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'"**

**Genesis 18: 16-17**

## Coronavirus



The virus has changed most things for most of us. Together, we endure the uncertainties and fears, listen for news and wish it were better, care for ourselves and others and long for this to end. Thank you all for the myriad ways in which you have helped us reshape college life so that we can wait as we must and carry on with what we must. My prayers and good wishes are with you as I am thankful that

yours are with me and my family.

Amidst it all, little glimmers of normalcy matter even more. For that reason I am going to carry on as I planned in using *Imagine* through to a final one in June to reflect upon Westminster as I have known it. The transition to new leadership is well in place with Robert Pope becoming Acting Principal now and Sam White becoming Principal for September. I am grateful that God has given us their gifts and experience, and grateful that they have such glorious colleagues around them. It is impossible to play down the scale of the challenges we are all facing daily. It matters that we know that this will pass.

