

THE WAY OF LIFE

A Sculpture by Jonathan Clarke

This commission arose through a generous donation from the Friends of Ely Cathedral. The aim was to produce a piece of contemporary art of high quality and general accessibility to be placed in Ely Cathedral, whilst at the same time pioneering a new collaborative model for the commissioning of art for cathedrals which tackles their theological and social dimensions. A long list of possible artists was drawn up and from it a short list produced. Jonathan Clarke was selected as the artist by the Dean and Chapter in collaboration with Fiona Bond of *Theology Through the Arts* and representatives of the Friends of Ely Cathedral. Jonathan then met with the other members of the 'Pod Group' to reflect together upon the commission.

One design, produced by Jonathan as a 'doodle' for the back of his portfolio had greatly impressed the commissioning Group. One could go so far as to say that it was this 'doodle' that clinched his success. It showed a cross at the end of a winding path and was nicknamed *The Way of Life*. During meetings of the 'Pod Group', this design was altered, embellished and worked upon but eventually the group returned to the original design - or something approximating to it.

The process was very interesting and informative for many reasons but perhaps most importantly because it proved that the original design had been an inspiration which was not to be improved by refining. It had flowed from Jonathan's pen and any alteration only detracted from it. The beauty of this design is that it fulfills what could be argued to be the most important criterion to be applied to an artistic commission for a cathedral or church: it is aesthetically pleasing (both in itself and in the position for which it has been designed) and it has clear theological symbolism. This latter point is what makes the difference between a commission of this sort and one of any other sort. It is the responsibility of the Church to help people engage with the Christian faith and a work of art in a church should assist that aim.

The beauty of the chosen design is its simplicity. It articulates the theme of pilgrimage at the entrance of this great house of pilgrimage and relates it to the journey to the cross that is the sculpture's inspiration. It was noted by the 'Pod Group' that there is a paucity of crosses within the Cathedral and to have one at the building's West End which speaks to the theme of pilgrimage is a magnificent addition to the Cathedral. It is not obtrusive to the extent of inhibiting the exceptional view down the nave accessible to the visitor on first entering the Cathedral, and its abstract design means that it does not clash with the Hans Feibusch *Christus* standing at its base. Those visitors who look down as well as up will see the nineteenth century labyrinth with which the base of the West Tower is paved, a design that also relates to pilgrimage. The design of the sculpture is accessible and it is beautiful. It will enhance any visit to the Cathedral and will increase the extent to which any visitor is able to engage with the Christian faith as they reflect upon it.