

# GOD IN THE MARKET PLACE

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# THE MEDIA - STORIES WE LIVE BY

## Introduction

As you watched or listened to the news yesterday, I wonder how the stories affected you. What feelings were stirred within you? Were you moved, saddened, horrified or elated? In particular, which are the stories you remember most clearly and why?

We do, after all, all enjoy a really good story. We find stories hard to resist. Allow me to demonstrate: I wonder if you have heard the story about the four vicars who got together and decided to each be honest about their one besetting sin? The first vicar said, "Once a year I go away for the weekend to Las Vegas, and I gamble really heavily. I spend thousands of pounds on the roulette wheels and the one-armed bandits. I come back stony-broke but having really enjoyed myself." The second vicar said, "Once a year I go away for the weekend and I drink like a fish. I get through gallons of alcohol. I get absolutely plastered, and I come back with a terrible hang-over, but I have to say I really enjoy it." The third vicar said, "Once a year I go away for the weekend and I have two days of nothing but sex, drugs and rock-and-roll. I come back totally exhausted but I have to say I would not miss it for the world." The fourth vicar said, "Once a year I break my promise of confidentiality and I allow myself to be a real gossip with everyone I meet!"

Jokes like that may be absolute rubbish but we all pay attention because we want to hear the end of the story.

Two television aerials fell in love. The wedding wasn't much good, but the reception was astounding!

Why do we listen to jokes like that even when we know they are going to be terrible?

I came into church the other day, to find a woman in floods of tears sitting in one of the pews. I asked her what the matter was. Pointing above her, she said with tears running down her cheeks, "It's my husband. He is now up there." "Oh dear," I said, "how long has he been gone?" She replied, "About 40 minutes - he is pinching the lead off the roof!"

## The Power of Stories

You see - it never fails. We have all been brought up on stories. "Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.... Once upon a time..." Stories are in our blood. We love to hear and to retell stories, and we retell them precisely because they have affected us and we want them in turn to affect someone else in the same way. Stories are so very powerful. If you do not believe me, think about the last time you heard somebody talk about you behind your back. If the story they told about you was positive, you will feel very good. On the other hand, if the story they told about you was very damaging or an outright lie, you will feel very diminished and upset. This is precisely why we need to be so careful when we talk about other people behind their backs.

Even the words themselves are so very powerful. If we read our Bibles, right at the very beginning it is no accident that when God wanted to create the Universe, he simply spoke the words and everything came into being. God said, "Let there be light...", and there was light. So it goes on day after day. God's words made it happen. When we turn to the New Testament, we read that the creative and energizing Word of God actually became living flesh in the person of Jesus. "In the beginning was the Word..." Jesus was the "Word of God" in a way people could see and feel. But we also are aware that the devil can counterfeit every good thing that God does, and words can be used not only for good creative purposes, but they can also kill the soul without leaving any evidence or drop of blood behind.

Think about the way that parents talk to their children. A mother may be sitting on her child's bed saying "I love you very much, dear. It has been a very good day. Now do settle down and go to sleep. To help you do that the sandman will come along and sprinkle sleepy-dust in your eyes." So there is this poor child left with a terrifying image of a huge man in a black cloak and a massive hat coming and throwing sand in its eyes, and the child is meant to go to sleep peacefully!

I remember as a child, my mother telling me that if I did not behave she would give me to the rag-and-bone man as he passed by on his horse and cart. To this day I remember bursting into tears as I saw a rag-and-bone man go past with, I now assume, his own little boy sitting next to him. I quite assumed some evil mother had sold her child to that trader. My own sister told me not long ago that when we were very young, I once said to her as she went to bed that she needed to look underneath the bed itself, before slipping between the sheets, as a fox lived beneath it. She told me that for years afterwards she would check gingerly underneath the bed before daring to put the light out. Brothers and sisters are terrible to each other in their use of words! Words can destroy and kill just as easily as they can create and energise.

## **Stories in the media**

Now, stories are even far more powerful than straightforward articles. If we ask ourselves why the tabloid newspapers sell in such huge numbers, it is not simply that their literary level is much lower than that of the broadsheets. It is because they tell the news as stories. The only daily national newspaper which is not only increasing in numbers but still has a very high circulation is the Sun, which sells 3 million copies every day; a long way behind comes the Daily Mail at 2 million and then the Daily Mirror at 1.5 million. We then come much further down to the Daily Star, the Daily Express and the Daily Telegraph each with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million, the Times at  $\frac{1}{2}$  a million, the Guardian at a  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a million and the Independent at a mere 170,000.

It is very interesting that in its main offices the Daily Telegraph has a huge digital screen high on one wall showing how many 'hits' each particular news item has had on its website for that day. That will inform the writers and the editors about which are the areas of news that people want to read and this in turn will guide the choice, content and layout of the stories presented in the newspaper itself. All newspapers including broadsheets like the Daily Telegraph are guided by what it is that people want to read rather than necessarily what the editor really thinks is important.

This is also precisely why it is the soap-dramas on television which consistently have the highest audience ratings. Coronation Street, Eastenders and Emmerdale are way ahead of most other programmes. On holiday we see people go down to their sun-bed by the pool, not only with their towel and sun cream but also with their novels. People love a good story and enjoy the time to relax with them. A good author like J K Rowling can become a millionaire by producing excellent stories like the 'Harry Potter' series. Despite all the prophets of doom, people still flock in their millions to watch films whether at the cinema, on television or through buying DVDs or downloading on to MP4s. That is why bookshops are full of biographies and auto-biographies even if these are written by footballers' wives aged only 20, and whose only claim to fame is that they are good at shopping. In recent years Terry Wogan has sold two quite different auto-biographies: the same life is being portrayed but in different ways and they sold by the thousands. On television, programmes like 'Location, Location, Location' and 'Escape to the Country' are presented not just as visits to places, but at the end the phrase used is often something like "Well, we have been on an amazing journey today" Excuse me! We have not been on a journey at all. We have simply snooped around two or three people's homes. But the programme is presented as a journey to give it the feel of a story.

## **Stories of the Bible**

All this should be no surprise. Our creator, God, himself loves stories. God is a person not an idea or an abstract force. God is not a Greek Platonic, static, emotionless idea, but rather he is a person who, although living in eternity, is very much involved in creation and has created time for a purpose. God's relationship with this creation is itself a story which we are privileged to read in the Bible.

The creation of the universe itself is not a static fact, but is rather a fascinating story of development as the years unfold giving us the shape of life as we know it today.

We ourselves are made as human beings whose lives are stories. We are made with minds, which means that we can both remember our own life stories and we can also try to plan the story as it continues to unfold from now.

Even the Bible itself is not simply a collection full of clever sayings of great wisdom, but rather its wisdom is set within stories of laughter, loss, hope, trial, sex and drunkenness. They are in stories about Abraham and Sarah, David and Bathsheba, Deborah, Elijah, Paul, Mary Magdalene: the list goes on and on.

Even the information we have about Jesus himself is presented to us not as an academic character study essay, but rather in the form of stories in the Gospels.

And, of course, Jesus himself powerfully told stories to communicate his truths. Parables like the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son and the Sower have lasted for two thousand years precisely because they are good stories. Incidentally, it is interesting that in the older versions of the Bible in the parable of the Sower, the sower himself is described as "broadcasting" the seed across the field: he casts it in a broad way. "Broadcast" is a word we normally use today when talking about television or radio. In Jesus' story, the broadcast seed develops a life of its own once it has embedded itself in the soil. In exactly the same

way, the stories that are broadcast today also assume a life of their own once they are released. They develop and grow in the retelling. If you do not believe me then simply play the game of 'Chinese Whispers' and see if the phrase that you first uttered is the same as that which comes back to you after it has passed through twenty other people.

## Six types of story

Those who study stories tell us that there are six basic types - six basic ways that we live the stories of our lives and so fuel the stories we tell others. The six are these:

1. **Domination** - in this story the theme is that of control. "If only I can stay in charge, everything will be alright". This was the story peddled by the British Empire as it took over country after country and justified its expansion through convincing itself that civilization was being spread, and order and control was being brought to the entire world. It is the story that has been used in American foreign policy in recent years. The church itself has used this story at its worst moments of missionary expansion. It is the story of the Victorian father who wants to retain control of his household at all costs. Jesus, however, clearly did not accept this story. He was very much in charge of his own life, and he always encouraged others to take responsibility for their own lives as well, but he never condoned the use of force or manipulation and domination in this sense.
2. **Revolution** - this story is a story against those who dominate, and is usually fuelled by revenge or anger. "If only we can take over then everything will be alright". This was the story used in China and Russia for the twentieth century revolutions. Again, Jesus obviously did not accept this story and certainly did not align himself, for example, with the Zealots, the political militaristic freedom fighters of his day, who were bent on overthrowing the Roman Empire by force.
3. **Purification** - this story takes the line, "It will all be OK as long as we get rid of everything that pollutes us". This is the story that has been used by a whole range of people in history to get rid of, for example, the Jews, black people, gypsies, or eastern European workers. Jesus rejected this story too. He was very critical, for example, of the Pharisees who wanted to purify society by having nothing to do with those who were different and urging a pure society.
4. **Victimisation** - in this story people say, "We are not understood. We are marginalized. It is not fair. If only we could be at the table as well then everything would be OK". Again, Jesus did not accept this story. He most certainly was a victim himself, but he never whinged - we are certainly not presented with Jesus as a whinging victim. Rather, he gave a better vision of a different and alternative table: that of the Kingdom of God.
5. **Isolation** - in this story the line is, "The rest of the world is so bad that we will be OK if only we can withdraw into a group of like-minded people". This, of course, is the story that fuels those who want to live together as a commune or a ghetto. It is the line used by those who want to set up their own fundamentalist Christian Television stations and schools. Jesus had no time for this story either. He did not join the

Essenes, a monastic group of believers out in the desert, but resolutely kept himself in touch with, and a part of, general society.

6. **Accumulation** - in this final story people say, "Life is just too complex. I need to insulate myself against the effects of the world, and so if only I can accumulate enough material wealth I can be safe from it all. I need to own my own home, my own car, I need to dress well and live in a nice area. I cannot control the whole of life but I can certainly control my little bit of it." Jesus had nothing to do with this final story either. If we remember, he deliberately made himself homeless and jobless and accumulated nothing at all.

## An example

Now when we look, or listen, to the news each day, we find that most stories fit in to at least one of these six types. Let me take one particular example: why do we think it is that when the whole of the western world, and the rest of the world by implication, is on the brink of financial collapse that the news still has space to tell us each week about the life of Jade Goody?

If you remember, she is a 27 year old woman, who in 2002 appeared on "Big Brother". That is a programme which is very popular because it allows people to see the stories of people unfold as they relate to each other under the scrutiny of the camera. She was ridiculed by the Press at the time for her gross lack of general knowledge. When asked where Cambridge is, she wondered if it was in London. When she was told it is in East Anglia, she asked "Is East Anglar, abroad?" She was televised taking part in the first sex-romp in the house. Although the Press made fun of her, she allowed herself to be used to fill page after page, but before long emerged making money. She marketed a perfume, which is sold by "Superdrug", and in that store it is the third best selling perfume behind only those marketed by Kylie Minogue, and Victoria Beckham.

In 2007, she appeared in "Celebrity Big Brother" and was evicted amidst a row about gross racism. In 2008, she appeared on an Indian version of it. "Heat" magazine readers voted her the 27<sup>th</sup> most influential woman in the world.

In October 2008, it was disclosed she was suffering from cancer, and in February this year, she was told it was terminal. This month, she married Jack Tweed, a man with his own history, which is unfolding constantly as a story in the news, and negotiated a reported £700,000 with "OK" magazine for the exclusive rights of wedding photographs. She is already planning her funeral, and wants to secure a good future for her children. Even the Prime Minister has said "The whole country is worried about her".

I make no comment on Jade Goody or her life, but simply note that Max Clifford, her publicist, knows exactly what he is doing as an experienced press agent. The real question, however, is why can a story like this run and run? The answer surely is, that it fits each of those six types of story I mentioned earlier:

**Domination** - Jade has certainly manipulated the publicity and has stayed on top. Her life is now materially good in a way that it has never been at any other time.

**Revolution** - she did not win the competitions in "Big Brother" but set out to win by other ways, and did so by using the media.

**Purification** - people wanted to get her out because of her gross racism. Twice she was evicted in order to allow the "Big Brother" household to be more pure.

**Victimisation** - of course, everybody naturally feels desperately sorry for her suffering with cancer.

**Isolation** - it has been reported that at various times she has needed to withdraw with a handful of close friends and advisers in order to plan for her future, and the media has asked that that is respected.

**Accumulation** - Jade is now worth a reported figure of up to £8 million.

It is no wonder that if we 'Google' Jade Goody, a total of 628,000 sites come up, all with episodes from her life story. This surely has to be because she fits into all six of the common types of story.

## A different type of story

There is, however, a seventh story. That is the story that Jesus lived. Jesus lived a life in which he shared a vision of people living in total harmony. He recognised that there is in fact huge disharmony in the world as we know it and he set out to restore this harmony by being ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of others, even if it meant being crucified on a cross.

As a Christian, if I want to see the story that is at the heart of God, if I want to see the story that God longs the world would live out, if I want to see the story that God loves, then I need look no further than Jesus. His story is not one of domination, revolution, purification, victimisation, isolation or accumulation, but rather it is a story of **Salvation**.

We ourselves are very good at telling stories about others and we are good at passing opinions on the stories others live. The really important story, however, is the one by which we live, and the one we live out ourselves.

A Christian is somebody who says: "I know that I fail in my life; I know that in some amazing way the death of Jesus on the cross covers my failures; I know that because of that, I am secure in God's love forever". However, it is no good saying, "I believe in forgiveness", if I do not live it. It is no good saying, "I believe in the new life of heaven", if I do not live it.

Jesus was clear that the Kingdom of Heaven is not a fantasy picture, set only in the future, but rather it is something which begins here and now. It begins as we share our homes, as we generously give our money, as we offer our friendship to the lonely, and so on. It happens as we give a clue about heaven while we are on earth. It is as we live our story according to the story of Jesus, that we in fact explain Christian Theology to the world. It is as we live the story of Jesus that we live out what is called 'narrative theology'.

As we watch the news, and constantly see the six basic stories being told and retold, being lived and relived, the stories of domination, revolution, purification, victimisation, isolation and accumulation, Christians will be people who are always very aware that there is

another story. This is a story, not just of coping with life here and now, but it is a story with eternal significance. It is the story of salvation as lived out by Jesus, and mirrored in those who follow his way.

## **Conclusion**

Bless you as you consider the stories presented to you in the news each day, and bless you as you live your particular story in the full gaze of other people, giving them yet another story to tell.

Enjoy the news tonight!

*(Post Script: Jade Goody died two weeks later).*

# ARCHITECTURE - SHAPES THAT SHAPE US

## Introduction

As I look across the audience today I have to say you all look very smart. Everyone has clearly given a lot of thought to what they might wear today, and you have all chosen clothes which are warm, practical and which look good. That will all have been quite deliberate. When we dress well it makes us feel good.

However, exactly the opposite is also true. I remember as a child being dressed by my mother for school in a way that has scarred me for life (joke!). Starting from the bottom and travelling upwards, the shoes were always black, lace-ups. Then came the grey school socks with two coloured circles around the top and because I was in the cubs I wore garters with little green tabs on each side. Remember them?

Travelling further up the leg, I wore short grey trousers which, of course, were always bought two sizes too big so that I could grow into them. I never did grow into them because they wore out before that happened. But because they were always too large it meant that my trousers extended from my waist to just below my knees. Above my trousers, the first piece of clothing to put on in the morning was a thing called a liberty-bodice. This was a thick brushed cotton vest with rubber buttons down the front. You put it on in September and took it off in March.

Above the liberty-bodice came the shirt with the school jumper over that. The jumper, of course, was grey and had the two coloured stripes around the neck to match the socks.

Before going out in the morning, we had to wear a scarf. Now this was the first of three woollen garments that grandma had knitted, and the scarf had to be worn in a particular way. It was wrapped twice around the neck and then crossed over the chest to stop us getting a cold. Above that came the blue gabardine raincoat, which again, of course, was deliberately bought two sizes too big to let you grow into it, and which again you never actually did. This means the raincoat extended from the neck to just above the ankles. Before doing up the buttons of the raincoat, we had to deal with the second present from grandma, which was the knitted gloves. The gloves were connected by a piece of elastic which was threaded through the sleeves of the raincoat. The trick was to put the right hand into the right glove first, and then stretch the elastic to put the left glove on the left hand without pulling so hard that it made the right hand swing round and smack you in the face!

On top of the head came the school cap with its little peak sticking out in front. Covering the entire head was the third of grandma's presents, a knitted balaclava. This was a woollen piece of clothing which covered the entire head, allowing only a small part of the face to be seen. This piece of clothing was, of course, later popularized by the IRA.

So going to school in the morning, I had my little face sticking out, the only piece of me to be seen, the peaked cap which looked like a duck's beak and clothing which covered me

from my shoulders down to my ankles. Thus I walked to school looking something rather like Donald Duck. This is why I say I was scarred for life!

What is true about the effect that clothing has on us, however, is even more true of the buildings with which we also clothe ourselves. I give you two extreme examples:

My local cinema, in Malton, is wonderful. It is very small with two screens and only seats about sixty people in each studio. To watch a film, you can buy a glass of wine or beer, or a cup of tea or chocolate, and take it in where you sit in lovely big red velvet armchairs. The whole experience is wonderful. You find yourself smiling by just being in the building. It is a wholly positive experience and effects how you feel.

In contrast, whenever I visit Full Sutton Prison I am always struck by the fact that there is no colour anywhere inside. All the walls are painted a dull sandy colour, it is impossible to see out through the thick windows, and no noise can enter from outside. I suspect this is all done in order to suppress the energy and imagination of the prisoners as a way of keeping them under control. For myself, I doubt whether this entirely works as the only place to channel any imagination or energy seems to me is towards the system and the prison officers. My point, however, is that the building itself has an effect quite different to that of the cinema in Malton.

Having said that, let us now go on some imaginary journeys. We will begin with an easy journey, and since we are here in church I invite you first to look in some churches, before secondly we walk some streets, thirdly enter your own home, and then fourthly walk quickly through some passages in the Bible.

## Ecclesiastical architecture

So let us begin with churches. The church we are sitting in today is full of shapes that are specifically created in order to shape your attitude. It is all done with great care. Even **the seat** on which you are sitting is deliberately not a comfortable armchair where you can relax and enjoy yourself, but rather it is hard and upright. The message of those pews is that you are here to pay attention rather like the message of the old wooden and metal school desks. You are told to sit in rows facing the front. From that it is clear you are here primarily not to relate to each other but to listen to and be controlled from the front. Indeed, the whole way the church is furnished makes it quite clear that there is a hierarchy beginning with the clergy at the front, followed by usually a robed choir, and then thirdly, and lastly, the congregation.

I well remember a man from my earlier years in ministry who, after I had taken a funeral for a member of his family, said to me that he had really enjoyed the service but would never be coming to my church. When I asked him why, he explained that going to church reminded him of going to school. He said, "We come into the room, sit on hard wooden seats, all facing the front. When the teacher comes in we have to stand. We can only sit when the teacher tells us. The teacher tells us to get our books out and which page we are to start reading. It is very likely that the teacher tells us off. At the end of the time when the teacher alone decides, then we are allowed to leave but only when we have stood up as he goes past." He went on to explain that, while he was at school, he failed in absolutely everything, and there was no way he was going to relive that by coming to church. The

architecture and the experience of the school room had burned itself into his soul and had completely coloured his attitude towards church.

I often say to people, that coming to church is rather like entering an old-fashioned bus. We enter through a side-door at the back, and walk up a central aisle before being seated in rows where we stare at the back of the neck of the person in front of us. If we are really lucky then the driver at the front might actually take us somewhere, and it is quite likely that half way through the conductor will come and collect the fares. At the end of the journey we all file back down the central aisle and out through the door at the back.

What we have done is to concentrate everything happening at the front of the church, but we have not actually been able to relate to each other. We have not shared with each other in a deep way anything that has been going on during our week. We have not asked each other what we should be praying for, how we are all feeling and what we might be doing this coming week that would be helped by some prayers. We do not ask each other what we have been reading in our Bibles, or what God might have been doing with us. Consequently we need to invent mid-week home group, Bible studies or cell groups to do just that.

The experience of going into a church like Liverpool Roman Catholic Cathedral is quite different. There the architecture is deliberately circular, and everybody is invited to acknowledge and relate to each other, because you simply cannot avoid looking at each other throughout the service. It is not just a corporate event, because the architecture has enabled it also to be a communal event.

Bill Hybels, from Willow Creek Church in America, makes the point that modern churches over there, which often have huge congregations of several thousands, are often deliberately built as a theatre in a wider complex of church buildings which resemble a shopping-mall. He says that is a deliberate policy. When people come to church they are meant to understand it is no different from going anywhere else in life. He explains, that is why in America, sports, celebrities, film stars, and politicians find no problem in talking about prayer and faith in public. "Church" is normal, and the architecture expresses this. Meanwhile, we in this country, with our traditional churches, find religion is marginalized because our churches are quite deliberately different to any other building, and like Alistair Campbell had to say in public that politicians "do not do religion".

In a traditional Roman Catholic or Anglican Church, the altar is likely to be in the centre at the front making the point that Holy Communion is the most important service. In a Non-Conformist church the central piece of furniture at the front is likely to be a large pulpit, emphasizing the fact that the sermon is the most important event in the service. It may be that, in a large nineteenth century Non-Conformist chapel, a large organ will also be at the front behind the pulpit, because when these buildings were erected the architects made no secret of the fact they were copying the very popular musical halls of the day: "why should the devil have all the good music?" When people came to those services they expected to be entertained with really good music, have a very loud sing and experience a powerful sermon.

In an Anglican Church the **font** is usually by the door, making the point that entry into the family of the Church is through baptism. In a Baptist Church it quite different. The baptistery tank will be at the front in the centre, and there the new believer will be making a personal declaration of adult commitment to Christ, with a very dramatic initiation through baptism by immersion.

There are other features of church architecture which we may not even notice. At York Minster, the main west **door** is huge and through that we enter into a vast space. By comparison we feel very small. That is planned very carefully. The Normans who built the Minster knew that they wanted everyone who entered into it to be aware of their place both socially, and spiritually. People were to understand themselves as being small and insignificant before both their Norman overlords and also before a majestic, transcendent God. This contrasts hugely with the message of a small village chapel. Usually this would have been built for poor farming peasants, whose lives were already pretty insignificant, but who perhaps needed to know that they were in fact very significant to God. As they entered through a small door into a small building, so in turn they would feel comparatively large and enhanced. The likelihood is that the message would be that God loves them very much and Jesus died for them personally. They left feeling larger than when they entered.

Every piece of architecture is in fact a sermon. Marshall McLuhan in the 1960's said that "the medium is the message". This is true, as I have explained, even for the pews on which you are seated. There is no such thing as neutral space. We all live in a space within the created world. All architecture is nothing less than sculpted space, and it is designed to sculpt you - your mind and your soul. It is designed to shape how you feel about yourself, how you relate to those around you, and how you perceive the character of God.

Now having thought about the building in which we are seated, let us move outside and walk through some streets. Allow me to offer some extreme examples.

## Urban architecture

A very negative experience I had a few months ago, was to travel by coach with forty foreign guests through the **streets to the centre of London**. I have to say I felt totally ashamed of my capital city. This is a place with an important international reputation, and yet the major arterial road along which we travelled felt utilitarian and uncared for. The shops, offices, garages and flats were crammed into every spare inch, and were simply a jumble of styles, ages, colours and materials. The developers and planners had colluded, presumably because land is so expensive and so every piece must be used. Clearly nobody had given any real thought about the effect on passers-by as they draw nearer to the hub of this great city. There was no sense of excitement being built as one approached the heart of a city which knew its place in the world. The message was simply that this city is nothing more than a jumble of people, all hell-bent on living their own lives, or working in their own place of employment. There was not sense of complementarity or working for the good of the whole. Every few yards of concrete or brick simply said "this is my bit, and I have no relationship with the bit next door: this is the society you are entering. If you are going to live or work here, these will be the values you adopt, and these will be the values you will take with you as you go elsewhere." I was quite frankly stunned and appalled.

Similarly, even in **York**, I do wonder what the message is to people who travel along Lawrence Street towards Walmgate. As we pass shops and offices and gated communities of flat-dwellers, there is no sense of attempting to build up the anticipation in drawing near to this great city. Not only is there no coherence in the architecture which has been permitted, there are not even simple things like flags or banners flying announcing that this city centre is a really good place to enter.

By contrast I notice the variety of buildings in streets like Stonegate and the Shambles. Here the impression is quite different. The buildings themselves are softer and gentler, and they rub shoulders easily. I do not believe this is purely about sentimentality because the places are old. It is rather about the buildings being able to settle into each other because they are not just harsh concrete cubes. In addition, the planners have been very strict about which style of shop fronts or type of merchandise is allowed. Imagine how awful it would be if we suddenly came across a MacDonalD's sign jostling next door to a sign for PC World! They would destroy the ambience. As it now stands, the whole atmosphere is one of fun, light-heartedness, and it is designed to put people in a good mood. We leave those streets having been affected, feeling good about ourselves, feeling relaxed with each other, and feeling light about life. That is the atmosphere we take home with us, and it works well.

Now allow me to give another positive example, but this time with a quite different message. When I was on the coach with all the foreign visitors we were going to **Buckingham Palace**. In order to do this we drove up the Mall. Driving up this large, wide street with trees each side, it was very difficult to take our eyes off Buckingham Palace directly ahead of us. It sat there imposing itself on us all: solid, impressive, coherent, and here to stay. As we drew nearer along this very straight street, we were subconsciously being invited to check the buttons on our clothing, to straighten our ties, and to make sure we were ready for the occasion. A very deliberate attempt had been made to affect how we feel and to prepare us for the experience of entering the royal presence. Exactly the same intention lies behind the design of Bishopthorpe Palace, the home and offices of the Archbishop of York. I well remember the first time I ever went there, for my interview for this job. As I walked up the long, straight path with the imposing building in front of me, and realised I had to walk up a large flight of steps even to get to the front door, the message being given to me was very obvious: prepare yourself for what is to come. This is an important person you are about to meet.

Another quite different example with a very different message is one we find in another major city, **Edinburgh**. In this Scottish capital we find the building housing the Scottish Parliament. In many ways it is simply a concrete box, and yet a real attempt has been made to give a message. Around each of the rather boring rectangular windows has been bolted on the outside sculpted metal which resemble open curtains. The idea is that we see these curtains as having been pulled back to reveal the windows, which means we are able to see what goes on inside. The message is, that in this Parliament nothing goes on which is hidden or shameful. The basic building may just be a concrete box, but the message is clear: the aspiration of Scottish Government, and hence of its life and people, is one of pride, integrity, honesty and openness. I am not sure it entirely works, but I do

want to give credit to those who have tried. It does attempt to make a point to all who go past and to all who work in there, that here things will be different.

## Domestic architecture

So if we have thought about the churches in which we sit, and perhaps some of these streets through which we walk, let us now turn our attention to our homes. Consider your own home. Nothing in there will be neutral. Even the way each room faces will affect you, depending on whether you face north, south, east or west. If you face one way and have bright sunshine in the morning you will probably be happy to get out of bed. On the other hand, if you face another way and have sun in the evening, you may well often see a beautiful sunset which will calm you and allow you to settle easily into your evening.

If your **hallway** is relatively small, then that will tend to make you and your visitors feel quite pinched. On the other hand, if your hallway is fairly large you will be able to enter the door, put your shopping bags down easily, and breathe in with a sigh of relief. If you live in a very grand house with a double staircase, that again will have another effect on you and tell your visitors that you are a very grand person! The message of the hallway is important; it is a message both to you as the one who lives there, and also to any visitors that you welcome. It says a lot about your home's hospitality whether you like it or not.

Neither will your **kitchen** will not be neutral. You may well have in it the obvious items such as a cooker, a sink, and some cupboards. Perhaps if your kitchen is large enough, you will be fortunate and have a table with some chairs. In this case the kitchen is likely to be the hub of the social life in your home. For myself, I know I have probably taken part in more evangelism, and offered more pastoral care, sitting drinking tea around a kitchen table than in any other place at all.

Your **lounge** will also be very revealing about you. If you have chairs which are basically in a row, even a curved row, facing the television, that will tell me a lot about how you relate to each other in your family and what you do. On the other hand, if the chairs are rather in a circle that will give me a very clear but different indication as well.

Your **bedroom** will give all sorts of messages. If your bedroom is somewhere you tend to relax, sleep, rest and retreat from life, then maybe the colours you have chosen are soft pastels, and you have soft comfortable furnishings. On the other hand, if the covering on your bed is bright red silk, gold and black, then perhaps other energetic activities happen there?

When we **decorate** our homes we all know the basic questions we need to ask. First, what is the purpose of this room? This will determine whether we place in it a bed or cooker. Second, who uses this room? We will decorate the bedroom of a seventeen year old boy in a quite different way to the approach we use when we decorate the bedroom for a four year old girl. Third, what is the atmosphere we wish to create? This will determine whether we have bright overhead lighting, or subtle side lighting. It will also determine whether the colours of the walls are gentle or vibrant. Fourth, we will ask whether we want this room to be somewhere which is cosy and intimate, in which case the colours we choose might be slightly darker; or large and expansive, in which case we might go for very

light colours. Even the **pictures and ornaments** give very clear messages. If there are mementos from your holidays, that tells me you enjoy your times away and want to remember or even relive them. If there are photos of your family, that tells me that your family is really important to you and you wish to feel their presence even if you are apart physically from them. The presence of teddy-bears on a chair, or a model racing car on a mantelpiece, again tells me a great deal.

I well remember some Christian visitors from Africa who came to stay with a number of people some years ago. When asked for their impressions of this country, one of their remarks was that they were surprised that when we went to church we allowed ourselves to be surrounded by all sorts of religious pictures and artefacts, and yet at home such things rarely featured on our walls or window-sills. As a result of that, we have tried to make sure in our own home that each room has at least one piece of Christian symbolism, which is there to speak both to us and to any visitor that Jesus is not only important but is very present.

It is all about asking what we want each room to do to both us, and to those who visit, and we all have a lot of scope for this. Near Castle Howard is a **Lavender Farm** which is open to the public. Every wall is painted lavender, and it smells heavily of lavender because in it is sold lavender soap, lavender paper, lavender scent, lavender drinks and so on. On the door is a notice which says "Stress Free Zone". The people who own the farm know that lavender reduces stress and are unafraid to say so. I wonder if any of us have ever seen a church painted lavender, or whether we ever expect to see a notice on a church door saying: "You are entering a stress free zone"?!

I visited a **health centre** not long ago, which offered a very holistic approach to health and healing. No room had a square corner, but each room was rounded in order to relax people. Every room was painted lavender. There were art and music rooms for various therapies, as well as counselling rooms. Outside was a vegetable garden tended by those with learning difficulties. The message of the building, and its surroundings, was as important as the medical advice which was given by those inside who were qualified medical practitioners. The architecture was part of the healing process.

## **Biblical architecture**

By this time you may be wondering what any of this has to do with God, and whether he is at all bothered with our buildings. After all, God is Spirit. I believe, however, that he is very bothered about it and is acutely aware of its effect on us. He went to a lot of trouble to create a physical world with physical spaces and place us in it as physical people. He even came to visit us as a physical person, rather than an abstract spirit, and so knows first hand the effect of our surroundings.

Indeed, there are several passages in the Bible which we tend not to read regularly on Sundays as part of the set lectionary, but they are very relevant. In particular places we can read page after page outlining very detailed descriptions of building-designs, because God is very clear that these will impact people's souls. Let me offer examples from four different eras.

We begin with the Exodus - thirteen hundred BC: at this time Moses was leading the Hebrew people out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom. He was leading a squabbling rabble through the desert, and needed a focus to help them remember that their unity rested in their spiritual life together as they sought to follow God; and that God had a purpose for them, together with values which gave meaning to their lives. He had received the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets from God on Mount Sinai, and these were to be placed in a box. This box was called the Ark of the Covenant, and we have a description of how it is to be constructed in **Exodus chapters 25 and 26**.

With the Ark we are given a vast array of details as to its size, exact measurement, the particular type of wood and metal, and the decorations to be placed on it. There is even a lot of detail about the table on which it is to rest. This detail makes following the instructions of an Ikea flat-pack table child's play by comparison!

Around the Ark of the Covenant and its table is to be built a very large tent - a Tabernacle. Here the details concern the particular cloth to be used, the measurements, the colour, the wood and metal to be employed and the embroidery to adorn the cloth. There is even detail about the curtain rings. All this is there because, although the primary concern is about how the people would relate to God, there is a recognition that this place being constructed would have a huge effect on their feelings and their souls. As people either passed by or entered the Tabernacle, it would affect how they felt about each other and about God. It would mould them in the very depths of their being.

Now we move on to settled Israel - nine hundred BC: in **1 Kings chapters 5 - 7**, we are given a lot of detail about the Temple which Solomon built. It reads like a long Quantity Surveyors report and is very precise about the wood and the stone to be used, the size of the doors, (remember the different effect of the door of the Minster as opposed to that of a village chapel), the size of windows, and the relationship between the entrance hall and the other rooms. There is description of how the floor and ceiling are to look, and instructions about how furniture and statues are to be designed. What is behind all this is a great deal of thought about the effect on those who come to worship in the Temple.

When we read **Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1 - 8**, we come to the occasion when Isaiah is in the Temple, and clearly everything he sees physically in front of him allows his soul to be lifted to heaven. It is almost as if the Temple furnishings come to life as a vehicle for this meeting with God. Of course, this is precisely what was intended. In this chapter we read that Isaiah saw God sitting on a throne, high and exalted, with his robe filling the Temple. It says above him were six flying seraphim each with six wings. This vision is clearly suggested by the carved seraphim who were placed above some of the pillars in the Temple. As these seraphim flew and worship, so it says, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the Temple was filled with smoke. The Temple would, in any case, have been filled with smoke because of all the sacrifices and the incense. Isaiah goes on to say that he felt by comparison to God very unclean, but was then purified as one of the seraphim flew to him with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched Isaiah's lips with this coal and so symbolically purified everything that would now come out of his mouth. Obviously, the architecture of the Temple had allowed, and encouraged, Isaiah to have this vision.

Thirdly we read about Israel in Babylon - five hundred BC: when the Israelites were conquered and taken from their homeland to Babylon they were in exile. During this time Ezekiel was given a vision of the new Temple that was to be built when the people returned to Jerusalem. In **Ezekiel chapters 40 to 47**, again we are given huge detail about how the Temple is to look. It is to reflect nothing less than the glory of Heaven, and enable worshippers to meet with God in just the same way as was made possible for Isaiah. The architecture was to preach theology and make possible the spiritual encounter which changes lives.

This is no different to today when we see in western countries how the finger-like pinnacles of church spires reach with precision into heaven, demonstrating the fact that Westerners have tended to feel they approach God through precise belief. By contrast, in eastern countries the roofs of churches are often covered in a wide dome. Under this dome there may be lots of incense and music, and it really does not matter when one enters or leaves the worship or even if the worshipper utters any words, let alone of creedal belief. People come simply to enjoy something of the mystery of God under this dome. Precision is not the order of the day.

What we have often lost in our church buildings, as well as in our secular buildings today, is that because everything has become very functional, this biblical sense of extravagant beauty and message is no longer there. If we look at the derivation of words, the Greek word for beauty is 'kalos', while the associated word 'kalein' means to call. In other words, beauty is something that calls and invites us. The Tabernacle of Moses called people to remember that a beautiful life is one based on God's commandments. Solomon's Temple inspired Isaiah to venture into nothing less than God's presence in heaven. The beauty of Ezekiel's Temple was designed to invite people to meet with God. Our Western churches, by contrast, encourage us to think about God while Eastern churches encourage us to simply relax and enjoy God.

## **The architecture of heaven**

Finally, our last Biblical example is The Eternal City - one hundred AD: in the last book of the Bible, **Revelation chapters 21 and 22**, while in exile on the Island of Patmos, John is given a vision of Heaven. This is very different to anything described so far and is certainly not a religious building. Indeed, he specifically says there is no such thing because it is not needed: the whole city is a temple, a church.

Rather it is a description of an urban city, full of beauty, which calls everyone to enjoy the holiness of God, and to experience the holiness of being in his presence. It is a city very earthy but unlike that awful arterial road I described earlier which took us into London. It is a place where it is easy to be in harmony. It is a place of unity with a shared common life. It is in many ways an urban planner's dream.

Again, we are given great detail. There is a lot written about particular measurements, the spaces, the beauty, the sparkle, the light and the brightness. There are wide streets, clean available water, green trees, and all different cultures are easily relaxed and at ease with each other. Wealth is not kept privately but is shared, and the beauty that exists in the city is there for everyone. Nothing is hidden under private ownership, in private homes.

There are no locked doors because everything is safe. There is nothing resembling the gated-communities that we see so often these days. Because of the surroundings, everybody is able to be at one with each other, and at one with God.

This vision of Heaven is given to us because it is meant to give us a clue about the ideal for which God looks on earth. The ideal which will inspire us to be ready to meet with him. God is clearly very concerned about architecture, about buildings and about our built-up spaces, not just churches. The message is that even our urban secular spaces can be such that they will affect about how we feel about ourselves, how we relate to each other, and how we feel about God.

## **Conclusion**

Every building has an effect whether we know it or not. It will enhance or diminish our sense of self-worth. It will encourage or discourage us to relate to each other. It will lighten our soul or dampen our energy. It will keep before us a vision of Heaven or encourage simply a bleak view of mere existence.

Bless you as you sit in your churches: may you be aware of what they are doing to your soul, and of what is possible within them.

Bless you as you walk the streets of your communities: may you be aware of what the architecture does to your soul, and of what is possible within these places.

Bless you as you live in your homes: may you be aware of what they do to you and your visitors, and of what is possible there.

# SPORT - FOOTBALL, MONOPOLY AND THE OLYMPICS

## Introduction

The television theme tune for "Match of the Day" is one we will all recognise. It has stood the test of time for many years now and it is obvious why. It suggests both **fun and power**, and these are the twin themes I invite you to explore. I want to ask, "Is it possible for those involved in sport to ride a bicycle in which one wheel is the wheel of fun while the other is the wheel of power, and stay balanced without falling off?" Sport is an activity of extremes. In it we are entering an area of life with huge emotions of both highs and lows, very large attendance figures, massive financial implications, and an interest that runs season after season, so we ought not to be surprised if the bicycle wobbles from time to time.

We will take football as the main, though not exclusive, example, simply because it helps to keep us focused and I want us to explore four related aspects: first to be clear about the sheer scale of the sporting enterprise; second, to look at some of the disturbing issues that constantly arise; third, to ask some basic questions; and then fourth, to see if there are some clues from the Bible.

## The scale of sport

So let us remind ourselves first about the sheer scale of sport. **Consider the figures.** Everybody will remember the 1966 World Cup Final in which England acquitted itself so well. That afternoon 32 million people in this country were glued to their television screens, which is more than watched the funeral of Princess Diana some years later. Even last year, 7.3 million people watched ITV as Netherlands beat Italy 3 - 0 in Euro 2008: 7.3 million in this country watched even though no English team was involved. Manchester United claims 330 million supporters worldwide which is 5% of the total world's population! It is the world's most valuable football club, valued at £897 million. The Olympics in 2012 are reckoned to cost over £12 billion when all the final bills are in.

These are massive figures, but if that is so, why are Christian churches so generally uninterested in this global phenomenon? Anyone who has seen the film "Keeping Mum" in which Rowan Atkinson stars as a vicar will have a clue about the answer to this question. As the vicar, he is very generously included in the village football team, but he is obviously no good at it at all and so is put in goal. I suspect that, like him, most vicars and theologians are rather bookish in temperament, and probably when they were in the school playground were the last ones to be chosen for any sporting team. Consequently, they have grown up as adults with little interest in sport. However, it was not always like this.

Twelve of the thirty-eight clubs in the Premier League began their lives as Sunday school or Bible class teams. Aston Villa, Barnsley, Birmingham City, Bolton Wanderers, Everton, Fulham, Liverpool, Manchester City, Queens Park Rangers, Southampton, Swindon and Spurs, were all founded between 1874 and 1992. They developed in areas of huge urban poverty, where the men tended to get drunk and involved in gang violence as a way of coping with life. They were certainly not attracted into the churches with their 'Women's

Bright Hours', and sewing circles. Consequently, vicars across the country attempted to develop what became known as "muscular Christianity", and started football teams based on encouraging self-esteem, cooperation, achievement, local pride, community and high aspiration. I suspect they would be staggered to see what has developed today out of these small local church teams.

Very recently the Premier League agreed a deal with television lasting three years, valued at £1.8 billion. In the single month of January 2009 the transfer fees for players amounted to over £160 million. Since 2003, Chelsea has spent £600 million and to date David Beckham has amassed a personal fortune of £120 million. Chelsea is owned by the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovitch, while Queens Park Rangers is owned by the Indian steel magnet Lakshmi Mittal. At the other end of the spectrum Real Madrid had its recent debt of £255 million covered by the Spanish Government, and last year, even our own York City football club, announced a loss of over £400,000, partly due to payments to recover ownership of its own stadium.

**Team sponsorship** is equally mind-blowing. The total value of sponsorship of football teams comes to over £100 million per year, but is very fragile. Manchester United is sponsored by AIG, which you may remember is one of the American Banks now underwritten by the US Government. Their sponsorship of Manchester United amounted to £20 million a year. West Ham was sponsored by Excel Holidays who went into receivership last year. Newcastle United was sponsored by Northern Rock, the bank our government had to rescue recently. All these figures would make the Sunday School classes, from which they emerged, look wide-eyed with surprise but because of the scale of the money, it does mean that sport is now very open to abuse, and this brings us to our second area to examine: some real concerns and basic questions.

## **The subversion of sport**

Currently, the police are investigating corruption within football in 19 different countries including our own. Athletics is riddled with drugs with Sebastian Coe having some very hard things to say about that. Dwain Chambers, the second fastest English runner since Linford Christie, now has a two year ban and a life-time Olympic ban. Leading riders in the Tour de France have recently been expelled. Barry Clements admitted giving £500 each month as a 'bung' to managers who would then fix dog racing, and so defraud William Hill out of vast sums of betting money. Allegations about corruption in volley-ball have split their International Committee. Four jockeys are currently under investigation. All this, which began as fun, has been reduced to little more than a quest for power and dominance. Even Sir Alan Sugar left Spurs in disgust. He commented that while the fans were hugely loyal to the team, he regarded the players themselves as little more than "mercenaries": they simply transferred to whoever would pay the highest fee with no loyalty to any one team in particular.

However, it is important that before we feel smug, we ask about our own attitudes. How did you fare the last time you played Monopoly? This game was originally designed by a Quaker lady who wanted to develop a board-game which would illustrate the evils of capitalism. My experience is, that whenever the Monopoly board comes out, everybody soon begins to cheat, tempers become frayed, and unholy alliances are forged, simply in

order to win. Somehow or other the driving force becomes to win at all costs. It feels as if it is no longer fun if we cannot win.

So let us now begin to ask the obvious questions. Why do emotions run so high in sport? Why is it that football teams in this country, which were originally designed as an antidote to drunkenness and violence in our urban areas, have now become the vehicles by which English fans have developed a reputation abroad for exactly that? It is as though the game itself has been subverted to become a vehicle to enable exactly what it was designed to prevent - drunkenness and gang violence.

Why is loyalty to individual teams so intense? My own son joined the St Johns Ambulance Brigade. He hated every moment of it, but was prepared to put up with the uniform and the meetings simply because it enabled him to have free entrance to local football matches at West Ham (probably the best football team in the world - ever!) and, moreover, to sit on the bench in front of all the fans who had paid a huge price for their tickets. What does that say about our need to belong?

Why does patriotism so easily descend into crass nationalism? Why will the Olympics need 31,000 police to control the crowds?

Why do we complain when bankers are paid millions and yet say nothing when our sporting heroes are paid much the same? What does it do to a 19 year old, who suddenly finds him or herself rich and famous, a national celebrity and looked to as a role model? They are given help once that happens, but rarely any preparation for their sudden escalation to fame and fortune.

Why do despotic authorities find it so easy to use sport as a means to appease the masses? The Romans did exactly this when their empire began to fall apart, and Hitler cynically used sport himself to control the restless German population at a time of rising unemployment. It is no different to the way sport is used in prison as a way of controlling the inmates.

Why does even a gentle activity like dancing become so intensely competitive in a programme such as "Strictly Come Dancing"? Only last year there was huge controversy about whether or not John Sergeant should stay in, and who won or lost became more important than anything else.

Why have electronic games become so popular? Nintendo DS has sold 97 million units, PSP 50 million, Wii 45 million, Xbox 29 million, and Play Station 22 million. Originally these were designed as games which could be played on the settee with one's friends. Now, however, they have become increasingly solo-games and often are played through the internet. We only have to walk along the promenade of any sea-side town to look into the arcades to see the obsession these games have engendered in people.

Why is it that rather than joining a rowing club, and actually meet others, people will decide to stay at home, sit on their individual rowing machine, link it up to the internet, and race against someone on the other side of the world who they have never met?

Why are we so obsessed with our sporting heroes like Chris Hoy who won three gold medals for cycling at the Beijing Olympics? Rebecca Adlington is now a hero because of her swimming. Eleanor Simmonds had everyone with her as she showed her prowess swimming in the Para-Olympics. Paula Radcliffe for years has captured the imagination, and last year won the New York Marathon. Lewis Hamilton, at 24, has become the youngest ever Formula One world racing champion. Tiger Woods is the highest paid golfer ever, having won \$122 million in prize money. Joe Calzaghe recently retired as the undefeated world super middle-weight and light heavy-weight boxing champion. Even at school the captain of the athletics team may not have had good looks, and may not have been clever, but my goodness he got the girls - life is a bitch!

Centuries ago when the church was centre-stage in society, the heroes and role-models were Christian saints who had their positive life-stories and achievements in doing good. These are no longer admired or even known, but we still seem to need heroes, and so our cult of celebrity has emerged as a major secular industry.

## **The separation of Christianity from sport**

In the light of this, has Christianity anything to offer at all? Historically, Christians have seemed very reticent to say anything about sport because they are not sure on a number of levels.

**First**, the New Testament does not say a lot about sport despite it being immensely popular in Roman times. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul uses sporting imagery when he talks about running to win the race, and training like a boxer, but he uses it only as an analogy.

**Secondly**, traditional Christianity has been uneasy about the body. It has concerned itself with the soul and spirit as being good and worthwhile, while anything physical has been suspect at best and positively evil at worst.

**Thirdly**, Christians have not been clear about which sports are off-limits, and even today they cannot agree about the morality of boxing or fox-hunting.

**Fourthly**, Christians have a terror about gambling. In the last three years the amount spent on gambling in this country has quadrupled. This has happened largely through deregulation and the arrival of online gambling. The profits of William Hill were up by £32 million last year and Ladbrokes' takings are up by 43% so far this year.

**Fifthly**, Christians in sport have been fairly unique. The popular film "Chariots of Fire" portrayed the life of Eric Liddell, the early Olympic runner, who said, "When I run I feel God's pleasure," and was the athlete who refused to race on Sunday because of his belief. But it was film-worthy because he was unusual. KaKa, who plays for AC Milan, wears tee-shirts on which is written, "I belong to Jesus". He unashamedly prays on his knees on the pitch before and after each game. Recently he declined to join Manchester City despite being offered £½ million because he said that after he had prayed he simply felt it was not right. These examples, however, are few and far between.

Having said that, there is a very important clue from the Bible about sport, what it is designed for and what has happened to it over the years, and this is the fourth and final area I would like to explore.

## **From fun to power**

In many ways sport is simply a picture of life. We are built for community. We are built to live and work and play together. God loves to see cooperation. God himself played at creation. But when enjoyment becomes less a game for fun but rather a power game, something quite sinister is happening. When the drive to win becomes more important than the drive to enjoy a good game, then we have surely lost the plot.

Curiously, by definition, winning is hardly ever likely for any participant. In any football league statistically there will be far more losses and draws than wins, and in any case only one person or team can ever emerge as the outright winner. Yet the drive for domination and power so easily takes over, and not only on the football pitch or the athletics field. See how we drive down the motorway, which so easily becomes not a journey from A to B but a race. Why is it in our cars that men especially seem to need to catch-up and then overtake the car in front, in a way that they do not feel it is necessary when they are walking along the pavement behind another pedestrian? On a more serious level, watch how parents compete for the prized school place. It has been known for them to cheat on their application form, or to use money to move house in order to acquire a different post code. This may not be quite the same as sport on a football pitch, but it is no different in the end. It is about people wishing to elbow others out of the way in order that they may come to dominate, even if it means others are significantly deprived.

Perhaps we have often seen how the friendly discussion in the pub, or at a dinner party, develops into a row because someone simply cannot bear to lose. The drive to dominate is always lurking close under the surface. How often have we seen that happen at PCC meetings? Jesus experienced exactly that when he went out into the wilderness after he was baptised. He went there in order to sort out his priorities and, in particular, we are told he was tempted especially to achieve power at the cost of doing what was not right.

## **Powers and Principalities**

In the light of that, let us now turn to **Ephesians chapter 6**. Paul recognises in verse 12 that when the drive for fun becomes subverted into a drive for power, then it is not simply "one of those things". Rather, there are sinister forces around that are lurking to gain control of our social structures and institutions in just the same way as they are lurking to gain control of us as individuals. Social structures and institutions seem to acquire personalities and characters and a life of their own which is often very hard to control, once created, and they seem to become open to exactly the same forces as our own individual human lives. In verse 12 Paul writes: "Our struggle is not against just flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." In other words, more is going on than just a little problem.

Now, sport in itself is neutral, in just the same way as money, sex, books, television, the internet, and the internal combustion engine, are themselves all neutral. They can each come under the sway of either good or evil. But when a social institution comes under the sway of evil the impact is huge. That is why Paul urges us to do nothing less than "put on the armour of God". In other words, we are not to run away from the difficulties, but rather to stay involved, engage and be ready for an intense battle.

## The armour of God

He urges us to put on:

**The belt of truth:** we are to be honest about what we see happening in ourselves and in others (recognising the temptation to win and gain power at all costs), as we play or as we watch, whether it is football or Monopoly.

**The breastplate of righteousness:** we are to keep our motives and actions clean and above reproach (recognising the temptation to cheat), whether we are engaged in cricket or chess.

**We are to put on our feet the shoes of peace:** whether we win or lose we are to maintain a good relationship with the others with whom we are engaged. The relationship of peace, is much more important than the result of the game whether it is rugby or cards.

**We are to employ the shield of faith which alone will extinguish the arrows of the evil one:** we should expect to be tempted in all sorts of subtle ways, whether we are active in athletics or sitting with our PlayStation.

**We are to put on the helmet of salvation:** we are to use our minds and think clearly about what we are doing whether we are rowing or playing dominoes.

**We are to use the sword of the Spirit in prayer:** we are encouraged to pray for the players who have such huge pressures and influences brought to bear on them. We are to pray for supporters who are open to such huge manipulation if they are not careful. We are to pray for managers who carry huge responsibility for setting the tone. We are to pray for chaplains, like Chris Cullwick who serves York City Football Club, as they deal with all of these issues week by week.

## Conclusion

Perhaps finally we can remember that short passage which never made it into the Gospels from the life of Jesus. Jesus went to a football match. As the red team scored he cheered wildly. But then when the blue team scored, he cheered equally wildly. When he was challenged by those around about which team he supported, he responded simply that he was not here to support either team but rather just to enjoy the game! It is of course not a true story, but it is a story with a truth. God intends us to put fun before power.

May all of you enjoy sport whether you play, or just watch it. Enjoy the game as a game.

# WORK - CAREERING OUT OF CONTROL?

## Introduction

Later on today I expect many of us will be tempted to watch BBC 1 at 9pm when there is yet another series of "The Apprentice". You will all have seen the trailers on television and heard Alan Sugar's gruff voice enticing us with the statements, "This will probably be the toughest interview of your life; but it may also be the last interview you ever need!" During the series we will watch a number of young people being exposed to ruthless tasks and interviews and we will enjoy seeing how they cope. It will be very demanding for everyone involved and there will be a lot of tears.

By comparison, my daughter is a professional model-maker. She is involved in the construction of models and puppets for film and television, and was involved in the creation of "Bob the Builder". Listening to Bob the Builder's song and watching his antics on the screen suggests that work is in fact very easy and great fun. If only it was that simple.

So, how are we going to explore this whole area of work? It is important there are no misunderstandings as we can so easily get into a lot of trouble. Only earlier this week, I was very proud of the fact I managed to find somewhere to park in a side-street. When I came back I discovered that somebody had left a very affirming note on my windscreen. It said "Parking - Fine!" So let us not have any misunderstandings, and be clear about how we will tackle this issue. First, we will set the scene; second, we will delve into the heart of the matter; third, we will unveil a number of major issues, and then fourth, we will see what practical clues we can take away with us. Please bear with me as some of this is quite complicated.

## No uniform attitude to work

So, first we set the scene. No two people ever have exactly the same attitude to work. I remember an architect who told me, beaming with pride, about the excitement he had when he finally saw a building of his completed. He said when the lights were finally switched on, people were inside, and it was fulfilling its function, he felt very happy indeed. As he spoke I could see the tears in his eyes with all the emotion that excited in him. More recently I was speaking with a Professor of Medicine, who was thrilled at the calibre of the medical students he was teaching, and also of the new equipment coming on the market which they could master so quickly. On the other hand, I spoke only last week with somebody running an organisation of about fifty people, which offered help and advice. His comment was that you should never ask the person in charge of a business how it is all going, because the person in charge spends most of their time dealing with problems, and they see the business through that lens.

As an industrial chaplain to a nuclear power station, it quickly dawned on me that morale in the work-force was very high among those at the top of the staff-tree, but very low among those at the bottom. It seemed as if those who were the managers were making decisions that were important and effective and they felt valued because of that; while those who

were the cleaners and groundsmen felt their contribution was minimal and they were hardly valued at all.

A year or so ago I visited an organisation which had an annual budget of several million pounds, and a workforce of thousands of men and women. When I asked the person in charge what were the most time consuming issues he had to deal with, he pointed to a cracked window pane. He explained that he could easily make decisions involving a great deal of money and many people, there was a straightforward process. However, to arrange for a window to be repaired seemed to take an enormous amount of paperwork, bureaucracy and time quite out of proportion to the actual cost. That was where his frustration lay.

A couple of years ago I visited a factory within this Archdeaconry which is a manufacturing base operating twenty-four hours a day and employing mainly Eastern European workers. The factory, itself, resembled something like the scene you see from a 1950's film of Poland. The atmosphere was filled with dust and fluff from the process, and the floor was covered with about three inches of dross. Everywhere there were signs telling people to wear hard-hats, visors, ear-defenders, and breathing masks. None of the workforce did this. The whole operation was run by only one person who was in fact the Human Resources manager: there was no other management on the site at all. It was like walking back into history. It reminded me of my time thirty years ago when I used to go in to the steel mills of Sheffield. One of the workshops was large enough to contain four ocean liners, such was the scale. The furnaces were enormous and the molten-steel was terrifying as it sped past on rollers. The average age of mortality, of those who worked there, was 56, and most died with respiratory problems.

Only a few months ago I visited an office, where about fifty women were all concentrating to their computer screens in an open-plan room. At the centre were four women whose job was to do nothing but scan in letters which had arrived through the post so that they could then be sent electronically to the appropriate desk for a reply. The room was silent apart from the clattering of the keyboards and nobody was allowed any human contact with anyone else in the room. As I was taken round, in the presence of the office manager, I could see the fear in the eyes of those with whom I stopped to talk, as it became obvious that they should not be ceasing from their work for very long or there would be trouble.

One memorable visit I made was to a very famous advertising company in London. When I commented to the manager that the workforce appeared very young, she explained that there would be nobody over the age of 35. People were taken on between the ages of 18 and 21, worked extremely hard, paid very well, and then "spat out, drained and completely empty". She explained that those people would never ever work again, but would have no need to because they had been paid so well. There was no hint of remorse or doubt in her voice about what was going on.

Within my own family, in the last few weeks, one relative has explained that she has been told by her boss that the contracts have dried up and there is simply no more work, and therefore no more salary. The question that arises for her is not so much, "how do I feed myself?" but rather "how do I pay my mortgage?" For her the worry is not whether the unemployment rate is 5% or 10%, but the issue is that unemployment in her life is 100%. As

someone who, in my childhood, had to move more than once as my father faced the prospect of redundancy I know exactly what all that means.

On top of this, all through the years, I have watched parents bringing up children. Some of these parents go out to paid work, while others choose to stay at home. In both cases I have seen some who manage this very well, while others crumble under the stress.

My point with all these examples is that there is no clear, simple picture. It is a jumble of experiences and feelings and no two people are in the same situation and have the same attitude to their work.

## The church and work

Having said that, the attitude of our churches to work is very strange. Work is certainly a global activity, and for the majority of the world's population work is what dominates their waking hours. Indeed, for a very high percentage of people, work dominates their lives from childhood through to death. For many there is no such thing as extended education, holidays, or retirement. Yet we hear very little about all this in church.

When was the last time you heard a sermon in church about work, about how to handle the prospect of promotion or, about whether down-grading in your work life might be something that reflects the very nature of Jesus, who emptied himself for our sake? When was there last a sermon about office relationships, about exploring the prospect of becoming a baker or a dispatch rider as Christian vocation or about the whole matter of the relationship between work and its effect on our life at home?

Think about the intercessions you hear in church each week. Most churches are obsessed with their own internal lives. Consequently, we may well be encouraged to pray regularly for those who teach in our Sunday schools, but probably not to pray in a personal way for a church member who is a Special Needs teacher and is having a really tough time with a particular child. It is almost as though the work beyond the church does not exist.

I suspect most people, who sit in our pews, have no idea about the name of the boss the person in front of them works for. Yet the boss will have an extraordinary impact on the life of that person. I well remember from my own childhood, at one stage my father worked for a particular man. I never met this man and to this day have no idea what he looked like. He may have been tall, short, fat, thin, fair or dark: I simply do not know. Yet he was spoken about so much at home, often in quite violent terms, that it was almost as though he was a physical member of the family. I cannot remember this boss, or any reference to his equivalent, being mentioned in anyone's intercessions in church. Yet for all of us, relating to the person who is our immediate superior is extremely important, and may be either a happy or a difficult experience. Either way, why does it never come into our corporate prayer life?

There are a number of reasons for this. **First**, today we tend to live in one place, go to church in another, and work yet somewhere else. Three hundred years ago, we would probably all live in a village, and rarely leave it. We would live, work, play and worship all

within a few yards of one another. Today, our church life is physically separated from our work life, and it is difficult therefore for us mentally to reconnect it all.

**Second**, today we often see church as something which we do as a hobby in our leisure time. It is not seen as the over-arching important factor which gives unity to our lives. Consequently, church is relegated to our spare time and is kept separate from work.

**Third**, there will, of course, be many who collude with this refusal to mention work at church. For those whose experience at work is not a happy one, the last thing about which they wish to be reminded is work itself.

**Fourth**, there are many aspects to do with our working lives about which Christians simply are not sure. For example, what is a Christian theology of ambition? If I said my overriding ambition was to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, most people would think that was a completely unsavoury hope for me to nurse as an ordained minister. On the other hand, if a member of our congregation aspires to become the chief executive of their company, many would say that it would be really good to have somebody like that in such a position of authority. We are ambivalent about ambition and where it fits into the Christian life, and this is true of other matters as well.

## **Jesus and work**

Yet for Jesus there was no separation between work and the rest of life. He seemed very relaxed meeting people at their very place of work. He met with Matthew the tax collector while he was sitting at his desk, and with James and John while they were mending their fishing nets in their boats. He met with the woman at the well while she was fetching water as part of her home-making work, just as he met with Mary and Martha in their own home. He spoke with a soldier, very naturally, about his work, and he met with a beggar while he was doing his work sitting at the roadside. He met with traders at their stalls in the Temple, with rather unhappy results, and I do wonder if when he met with the woman caught in adultery, she was actually in the middle of her work? Jesus was constantly, after all, criticized for mixing with prostitutes.

Jesus also talked very easily about work using it to illustrate his stories. His parables included those of the sower, those who were building a tower, a merchant on a journey, fishermen, a tax collector, rulers, a gardener and a woman who was sweeping the home. It all feels very natural.

The Bible itself also seems very comfortable about describing God himself as a worker. God is addressed in the Old and New Testament as an architect, a builder, a doctor, a gardener, a potter, a home-maker, a teacher and a father. The suggestion is that he finds work very rewarding.

So, if we are made in the image of God, why is it that we often find work so unrewarding? Why is there so much unrest in work today?

## Unrest in work

Here we go into the heart of the matter. Unrest at work is a very real problem. Only recently we heard of the possibility of an industrial strike amongst our refuse collectors, because of the pressure they are now under in having to work so hard and so fast to complete their tasks. Some may remember their strike of the 1970s or 80s and the mayhem that produced. Amongst professional workers the number of days off through stress is now at the level of a national epidemic. As far as job cuts are concerned, at the moment, it is clear that private industry is bearing the brunt of this. Redundancies are rare in the public sector, and it is our manufacturing and business base which is carrying the cost at the moment. Within the public sector itself, we wonder who these days would now ever offer to become a Social Worker. They are getting such bad press that anyone considering working for Social Services must surely have some questions in their mind. On top of this, there is the constant issue of those who decide to stay at home in order to raise children; but then feel undervalued because they are not in paid employment.

Years ago I worked for a time on a building site. I was given a pick and a shovel and my job, with three others, was to dig a hole twelve foot deep for some foundations for a dairy. The whole gang with which I was working resented their work immensely. The only release they could find was in being difficult with the foreman. After I had been working there for a time, the foreman came over and said that the boss had visited the site and decided that three workers must go. They were simply employing too many. Since I was one of the last three to be taken on, I was one who would have to leave at the end of the day. The others in my gang were so incensed they decided to make their reactions known. I do not believe that this had anything to do with solidarity with me, but rather it was simply a chance to get their own back at the foreman. On my last day, at 11.50am, a lorry load of quick-drying cement was delivered and poured on to the main drive. At 12 o'clock the gang of workers I was with all decided it was the time for their lunch-break and left the building site. The poor foreman was left on his own with just a shovel to move this huge pile of quick-drying cement. At the time it just seemed rather funny, but looking back now it was an awful comment on just how bad the industrial relations had become.

I contrast this with my attitude to digging other holes. Whenever I move house, one of the things I do is to construct a pond. Using exactly the same tools as I did on the building site, a pick and a shovel, I will dig a hole very happily. Why is it that I resented digging that hole on the building site, but thoroughly enjoy digging holes in my garden? It is after all the same job and the same tools. The clue has to be, surely, that in my mind the digging has a different purpose. Purpose is the key word here.

## A purpose in work

If we turn to the Bible, and to **Genesis chapters 1 and 2**, we have the story of Adam and Eve. While this may not be a story which is literally true, it is still a story with truth and is relevant for every age and every culture. The story makes it clear that God is the worker who created everything. Human beings created in his image, were given the work of caring for the Garden of Eden. This went well at first, until Adam and Eve began to realise that they could have ideas of their own and began to wonder if these ideas were better than the way that God had shown them. The result was that they fell out with God, they fell out

with themselves, they fell out with each other, and they fell out with their surroundings. In pictorial language, they fell out of the Garden of Eden. This is the traditional doctrine to which we refer as "The Fall". Adam and Eve had lost their sense of working for, and with, God, and of working for the good of the whole. The picture of everything being held together suddenly became torn apart.

In Samuel Pepys' Diary there is a wonderful passage in which he describes how he was walking through the streets of London and bumped into a young boy pushing a barrow-load of bricks. When he asked the boy what he was doing, the boy answered not that he was pushing a barrow-load of bricks, nor that he was earning six pence, but rather that he was helping Sir Christopher Wren build St Paul's Cathedral. That is a wonderful deep truth, and obviously transformed that boy's attitude to his physical work. That young boy realised what Adam and Eve had lost. While Adam and Eve were working for God (as the boy was working for Sir Christopher Wren), they were working for the good of the whole, and there was a real sense of purpose. The point of their work was that its purpose was part of the greater purposes of God.

Once we begin to understand that, it makes sense of all the particular jobs that we might do. Some time ago I watched a friend of mine as he was doing his work with accounts. Personally, mathematics are not my forté at all I struggle hard with numbers. When I asked him how he could do this day in and day out, he explained that for him it was extremely fulfilling. He said that when a client brought to him a cardboard box full of cheque stubs, statements, invoices and bills, he would get to work on it, and if at the end of the day, he could make all the figures balance and be reconciled then he would feel, rather like God at creation, that he was bringing order out of chaos. In other words, he was reflecting God and working with God. As he explained that, although I still have no love of numbers, a light came on for me about attitudes to work.

That approach helps, for example, the hospital cleaner to realise that when the floor is being swept or washed, it is not simply that the floor is being cleaned, but rather that this work of cleaning is precisely the thing which enables medical operations to happen. If the cleaner does not do the work properly then the operation cannot happen, because the ward will be closed and people will continue to be ill.

A conversation with a basket weaver was revealing in a similar way. When I asked how she could do this day after day, she said that as she wove the basket she would pray. She would pray that those who bought the basket would find good use for it and would enjoy using it. She said that her basket became a basket full of prayer to be taken into someone's home. She did that with great happiness.

It is about the furniture salesman realizing that his job is not simply to sell the most expensive settee possible in order to make money for the business, but rather his job is to sell the right settee to the right person. If he does this, then that settee in that person's home will be the place that people can sit and relax together and so contribute to their well-being. Selling the settee thus has a much greater purpose than simply earning money for himself, or for the shareholders.

## The relationship of jobs

All this makes sense of a curious little passage in **Genesis chapter 4**. I have no doubt that this will be known by heart by all of you! "Cain lay with his wife and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city and he named it after his son. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech. (I am sure you all recognise this passage!) Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron."

That is hardly a passage I expect people to know, hidden away where it is. However, what it does mark is something which is theologically, socially and historically true, and it underlines the fact that all work has a purpose beyond itself. The point made here, is that the first industry to arise was that of agriculture. "Jabal was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock." It is a historical fact that it is only as we ceased being hunter-gatherers, spending all our time searching for berries and following deer in order to kill them, that we were able to have spare time. Because there were those who were able to raise animals and crops in one place, that meant there was time for others to develop arts such as: "playing the harp and flute," ie music, and other sorts of industry such as "forging tools out of bronze and iron." There would simply be no science, art, culture, literature or television without farmers. It means that the farmer up the road is not simply earning money, nor simply caring for fields, nor even simply producing food. It is because the farmer does that particular work that you and I are able to enjoy the fullness of life which is available to us. It is when we lose that sense of our individual purpose having a place in the purposes of the whole that our problems begin, and then look in the wrong place for ways to deal with the consequences. Let us explore four of these.

## The loss of relationships

The first thing we lose is our **relationship with ourselves**. My wife was trained as a school-teacher. She taught for some years. Then the children came along, so she stopped teaching. Then she returned to teaching for a few years and then stopped again because there simply was no work where we subsequently chose to live. Over the years she has become extremely fed-up with being asked "What do you do?" At the age of 50 she discovered an effective answer was to say, "I am on extended maternity leave!" Now that she has reached the age of 60 she is very pleased to be able to say "I have retired." That seems to allow people to accept that she does not do professional work.

We all know the three basic questions we get asked when meeting strangers at a dinner party: What is your name? Where do you live, and what do you do? It is what we do that especially seems to define us, and what people really want to know is: What do you do at work and what is your title or role or position there? Thirdly, of course, the question we never dare ask is, "How much do you earn?" If you want to lose friends there are only two questions you ever need to ask, "How much do you earn and how much you have saved?" We all seem to regard money as such a private matter that this becomes more important than sustaining a good relationship with people!

Jesus, however, questions all of this. Being defined by his work was not an issue, since he deliberately made himself jobless. Titles were not important to him - "Do not call me master". Human recognition was not what he sought either. In fact, he deliberately seemed to attract abuse, conflict, and personal attack. How is it that he was so secure? The answer has to be found right at the beginning of his ministry when he was baptised by John in the River Jordan. As he came out of the water, we are told that he heard a voice from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." He was completely affirmed knowing that his heavenly father loved him absolutely. Because he knew he was beloved by his father, other peoples' opinions of him were nothing more than hot-air.

If from all we are about today you take nothing else home, please do take the fact that like Jesus, you are very beloved by God, and he loves you very, very much indeed. Anybody else's opinion of you is utterly secondary. If God is at peace with you, then you can be at peace with yourself regardless of any job you do or do not have, and regardless of any human recognition you receive each day.

The second difficulty that raises its head is our **relationship to time**. I remember in one of the parishes in which I served, many of the residents were commuters who worked in the City of London. They would board their train at 5.30am and return to our local station at 7.50pm. Our PCC meetings each month began at 8 o'clock. Those poor men would come in full of the angst of their working day, tired from the length of it and the responsibilities they had had to carry, and weary from their travelling. PCC meetings were often extremely difficult as these men poured all their pent-up emotion onto the vicar who just happened to be the one in the Chair. There was nothing wrong with the vicar, and the agenda was often very bland. All that was happening was that the vicar happened to be the one who caught all their emotion. I also know on the days when there was no PCC meetings it was often the wives who caught the same expressions of rage. It was all about the length and pressure of the working day for these men.

We all know the old truism that nobody on their death-bed ever says they wish they had spent more time at work. However, the drive to work long hours is very real and, I suspect, much more acute for men than for women. Men seem so much more easily seduced into working a long day. I have heard about the practice in some places where men will go home from the office having deliberately left their jacket on the back of their chair. This is because the boss might leave after them, and if he does he will go past the open door, see their jacket on the chair and assume they are still at work. Similarly, if the boss returns earlier in the morning, he will again see their jacket on the chair and assume that this particular man has begun work even earlier. Why does this happen? It is because inside every grown man there is a four year old boy craving for the praise his father never gave him. At work the boss becomes the father or authority figure, and this is true whether the boss is a man or a woman. Men seem to want to work longer hours because they long for recognition, and the boss is the one who can give that recognition either as promotion or as a pay-rise.

Some years ago, when I was a vicar, we held a monthly men's group. About thirty-five to forty men would meet on a Saturday night, and on one occasion we asked a Christian

Counsellor, who was a member of our congregation, to lead the evening on the theme of fatherhood. Her aim was to split the evening into three twenty minute sessions. The first would explore our experiences of our own father. The second would explore our experiences as a father, (and every one in the group was a father). The third session would explore how we relate to God as a father in the light of the first two sessions. For the first session she asked us all to split into pairs. Each of us had to pretend to be our own father. We were then invited to describe ourselves to the person opposite. In other words, I had to pretend I was my father and describe me (the son) to the person opposite. In almost every case the description of the person was very negative. Everyone felt their father was not proud of them. That whole evening we never moved beyond the first session. It was an appalling indictment of how fathers relate to their sons, and quite naturally raised questions for each of us about how we were relating to our own sons in turn.

Many will have read the novel "The Shack" by William P Young, which is doing the rounds at the moment. If you have not read a copy, then please do, it is absolutely amazing. There is one particular part of the story where God is speaking with the central character, who asks "Why do you reveal yourself always as God the Father?" God replies that this is done because he knew that in so many cases the father in the family would be a very poor role-model or would be totally absent. Because male role-modelling is so important, God says he felt he had to take this on himself. It is only as we realise that God is the only really important parent figure we need in our lives, that other things being to fall into place. Again, because God loves us so much we do not need to impress any substitute authority figure by working longer hours. It is when we get our relationship with God right that the rest falls into place, including the hours we work.

The third area is to do with our **relationship to money**. On the news at the moment we are being constantly assailed about the financial crisis and the central place in this of the bankers. The bankers have, in fact, become public enemy number one despite the fact in reality we are all to blame. We all have loved the boom years and none of us complained while things were going well. What people are angry about now is the way that bankers have been awarding themselves such huge financial rewards and are continuing to do so. However, this should not surprise us. Once we have lost the sense of the fact that our work is for the good of the 'big picture', the good of the whole, then we feel we are only working for ourselves. Therefore, for bankers to want to preserve their own salary, their own bonuses, their own pensions at all costs is a natural consequence of the human condition.

When we work only for ourselves and not as part of this picture of the whole, then the money with which we are rewarded will never ever be enough, even if the figure is huge. If I give to one person a five pound note simply through the goodness of my heart, that person is likely to be very grateful. However, if I give the next person a ten pound note, then the first one will probably become jealous and angry. The five pounds suddenly becomes not enough. Jesus told a story about this in his parable of the labourers in the vineyard. Everything was OK until the same money was paid for different amounts of work.

It is very curious the effect money has on us all. It never satisfies. Two and a half thousand years ago Isaiah said in chapter 25, "Why are you seeking bread that does not satisfy? Listen to me, eat my good words, allow your soul to be fed". All this brings us back to the vision of God and the fact that God loves us regardless of who we are, what we do,

and the pay we are awarded. Indeed the pay itself has nothing to do with our real value which is to be counted only within the value that God places on all of us. He values us so much he even sent Jesus to die on the cross. When you see that what else matters? It is that alone which will feed and satisfy our inner being.

The fourth and final issue is that we lose our **relationship with each other**. My daughter has worked for the same company now for about fifteen years. The company gets the orders and the workforce then executes the jobs. None of them are employed by the company but rather they are all self-employed. Consequently, there is no sick-pay, pension contribution, maternity pay or other benefits. All the risk is taken by the individual.

For a time my son worked for a major music retail outlet. He left after six months because of the huge emphasis on competition. Each month a series of spreadsheets and league-tables were sent to all the managers. The first league table simply showed how that month's takings compared with those of rival companies, and that of course is perfectly acceptable. The second set of sheets showed how each store in the company compared with one other across the country. This was regardless of whether a particular store was on the High Street in an affluent area or a less prominent position in a poorer area. The most disturbing set of papers, however, showed how even the different sections of the store were faring when compared to each other. So the sales of 'Rock and Pop' were compared with 'Folk and Country' and 'World' and 'Classical' music. The feeling was that everybody was competing against everybody else. There was no team work or cooperation. The relationship with each other is broken.

Although I do not very often go to the hairdresser these days, I am told that especially for women when they book an appointment they are often asked, "Who did you last time, was it Susan or Elizabeth?" This is not anything to do with customer loyalty but rather it is that Susan and Elizabeth may each simply be renting the chair from the owner. In other words, it is really important for the income of each of the hairdressers that they retain their particular customers. Even those in the hairdresser's shop are competitors rather than cooperators with each other. Again, their relationship is broken.

We see a similar picture in many works canteens. The management will sit at one set of tables, the secretaries at another, the industrial staff at another and the cleaners at yet another. Some companies have sought to put that right. Only a few days ago on the news, we heard that the John Lewis Partnership had suffered a decline in its profits and the result was that each worker would receive a smaller bonus than the previous year. However, since all those who are employed by the John Lewis Partnership are also share-holders, and each has a stake in owning the business, they all realised that the state of the business was something for which they all held responsibility. There was therefore no great cry of complaint when the bonuses were down. Everybody knew they were in it together.

Again, a few days ago we heard that some of the Japanese car companies in this country had agreed with the workforce that everybody should take a 10% pay cut rather than lose 10% of the workforce to redundancy. Solidarity was paramount.

As I said earlier, I know from personal experience how awful it is to be forced to move from one place to another. When that happens, one's whole social network and support system

is removed at a stroke. Across the country it is true that when unemployment is high domestic violence increases, as does crime, incidences of mental health difficulties, and physical ailments will become more marked. Children's education tends to nose-dive and many people get very angry and are only too keen to find scape-goats. Not long ago we heard about the strike organised in resentment at the way that one company in Britain was employing only Italian workers. It is all about looking after ourselves and forgetting we are part of the whole. It is as if we are reliving the story of the Tower of Babel. When we build a human empire that is all about 'me' sooner or later it will collapse as we lose our relationship with each other.

## Practical clues

So finally, are there any practical clues for the Christian? Most of us are not hugely important industrial or financial magnates. We are not the political architects of our nation. But we do all play our own very small part in the picture of the whole. If we ask who is our greatest role-model in terms of someone who worked to restore humanity in the image of God - a God who enjoys work and finds it fulfilling - then the answer surely has to be Jesus. Jesus came to be seen as the Messiah, "the anointed one". In the Bible there are three classic roles for which one needed to be anointed: those of being a **prophet, a priest and a king**.

In **St Matthew's Gospel**, Jesus is portrayed as the king. In the early pages it is made clear that Jesus is of the line of David, and he is a descendant of all the Old Testament monarchs.

In **St Mark's Gospel**, Jesus is portrayed as a prophet. His relationship with John the Baptist and therefore all Old Testament prophets is made clear from the start.

In **St Luke's Gospel**, the connection is made between Jesus and priesthood. The link with the priestly family of Zachariah and Elizabeth is there for all to read.

This may sound very churchy but it is in fact just the opposite. It is very relevant to the world of work.

A **prophet** is one who speaks with such authenticity that others have to listen and take note. It is not about shouting but rather it is simply about speaking self-authenticating truth. You are a prophet at work if you speak against bullying, racism, sexism, gossip, a blame-culture, an atmosphere of 'us and them', poor environmental decisions, accounts being fiddled, or shady deals being done in the gents' toilets. The prophet will be the one who, perhaps, questions whether the constant quest for titles or pay is the answer. Earlier on I suggested these were not answers but simply a symptom of a deeper problem. The prophet will need discernment, the ability to guide and communicate, and will be somebody unafraid to fight evil with good. If you are such a prophet, then you are very much needed in the work place today.

A **priest** is somebody who manages boundaries. In the Old Testament, the priest managed the boundary between God and his people. In the New Testament, Jesus is described as the Great High Priest, and on the cross especially, he managed the boundary between God

and humanity, time and eternity, heaven and earth. Later in the New Testament all Christians are described as a royal priesthood - the priesthood of all believers. When a Christian engages in pastoral care, then the boundary is being managed between present difficulties in life and a better future. When prayer is offered for healing, the boundary is being managed between dis-ease and health. In evangelism the boundary is being managed between unbelief and belief, and so it goes on. At work the priest, therefore, is the one who will manage the boundaries between one group and another or one person and another. The priest is the one who will help people manage the boundary between work and the rest of their lives. Here in York, New Earswick was planned, designed and built by a Christian philanthropist who was working very hard to manage the boundary between people's hours in the factory and the rest of their lives. We see similar things elsewhere in the country at, for example, Port Sunlight, and Saltaire. The significant historical names include those of Cadbury, Rowntree and Barclay. They were bridge-builders, managers of boundaries, trying to reconcile the different aspects of people's lives. They were priests.

The **king** is the person who is the ruler and carries responsibility for the whole. Just as Jesus was the vice-regent of the Kingdom of God while he was here on earth, so any boss at work is in fact the vice-regent working under God for his place of work on earth - managing it on his behalf. To be a Christian boss does not involve necessarily being soft and doing what people want. It may involve being very tough, saying what people do not want to hear, and becoming unpopular as a result. But it will involve the wise use of resources, of people, of talents and of money. It will involve keeping an overall sense of the whole plan and coordinating everything for the good of the whole, beyond the concerns of the individuals with their own small part.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, as you leave here and return to be the prophets who will speak out, the priests who will be managers of boundaries, or the kings who will carry responsibility; whether you are returning to the office or the shop, the home or the café, the factory or the search for a job, go with the blessing of God. Go with the smile of God, since the word blessing simply means smile. Enjoy God's smile because he loves you very much. As he smiles on you, so may you bring a blessing, a smile, to those around you. In the old Disney film of Snow White, the dwarfs walked to and from work singing that famous song, "Hi ho, Hi ho, it's off to work we go". Sing it silently in your head as you go. It will be impossible to sing it without a smile on your face - and as you smile so you will be a blessing to everyone around you.

# GOVERNMENT - BUT FOR WHOM?

## Introduction

What is the similarity between a portrait by Picasso and Parliament? The answer is that with both we have the "ayes" to the right and the "noes" to the left! In fact, we often view Parliament in much the same way as we view a Picasso. We recognise the picture very easily: we all know what Big Ben looks like, we recognise the face of the Prime Minister, we know what the major parties are called, we know what the initials MP stand for, and yet we have a certain quizzical look on our face. This is because for many of us with Parliament there are three great uncertainties.

## THREE UNCERTAINTIES

**The first is that we are just not sure how powerful Parliament really is.** On the news each day we are given the impression that Parliament is the most powerful institution in the land, and yet in any power analysis, the Government actually comes along way down and is seen to be at the mercy of many other groups. The recent financial crisis demonstrates that very clearly. The Government is left having to "sweep up the mess" as a result of the difficulties created by all the major banks. Parliament finds itself looking rather undignified and certainly not in charge. When I lived in London I was acutely aware that fifty years ago the Dagenham Plant of Ford's Motor Company produced one car in every three on the road. Today, there is not a single Ford car produced in this country anywhere. All the major decisions were made in America at the Ford Head Office, and in each decade our Government has always been left simply trying to pick up the pieces afterwards.

In York, if Norwich Union decided to relocate all its offices to India, it would be the Government who would be left trying to work out how to help all their employees. On the other hand, if Bill Gates of Microsoft decided to relocate his company to York, the Government would probably wag its tail and smile all the way home! My point is that we are just not sure about Parliament and where it fits into the total scheme of things. Finance houses, major industry, commerce, and especially global international companies all, in fact, call the shots.

**Secondly, we are not sure about the quality of our Politicians.** We operate a very strange system. Members of Parliament form one of the very few public professions which need no previous qualifications or experience. It would be impossible to become a teacher, a lawyer or a doctor without both qualifications and experience. Yet those in Parliament today set the rules for exactly those who teach, practice law or are doctors. Even in America, President Obama has recently been elected to great acclaim. He may well turn out to be an extremely good President, but nobody has yet been able to tell me what he has achieved already in his life except for winning the election. What is it that qualifies him for this very powerful job except rhetoric? Where is his track-record?

And yet in a strange way, that is the point of the way our Parliament works. The Government is full of people who have been teachers, lawyers, doctors and also actors, railway workers, and industrialists. The theory is that they bring with them a wide variety

of experience of real life from across the country. They are not blinkered by professionalism, and so they are representative of the country as a whole. But that does still leave for some people a very real question-mark about their ability.

**Thirdly, we are never very sure about how to relate to our Politicians.** At one level, if I was to announce that next week the Prime Minister would be visiting this particular church, I am sure the clergy and congregation would be filled with emotions of both excitement and panic. They would know that somebody very important was about to arrive. And yet, when we hear on the news at the moment, story after story of how MPs are abusing their expenses system, it does make us wonder what we really think about them as people. Most of us know that the vast majority of MPs work extremely hard, and yet we seem to be very happy to relax on our settees at home and watch television while people make fun of them on programmes such as "Have I Got News for You", or they are made to squirm by interviewers such as Jeremy Paxman.

Consequently, we find it very tempting to make light of politics. You may have heard the amusing definitions:

In capitalism, you own two cows: you sell one of them and buy a bull in order to produce a third.

In socialism, you own two cows: the State takes one of them and gives it to your neighbour.

In communism, you own two cows: the State takes both of them and sells you their milk.

In Nazism, you own two cows: the State takes both and shoots you.

In the European Union, you own two cows: the State takes both, shoots one and pours the milk of the other down the drain.

## **POLITICS AND RELIGION**

At this point you are asking what has any of this to do with religion, and here again we are not too sure of ourselves. Alistair Campbell, a few years ago, made a public statement about Tony Blair and his relationship with his own faith, to the effect that politicians do not "do religion". This is very strange because Tony Blair made no secret of the fact that he was a committed Christian. Similarly today, Gordon Brown and David Cameron are both regularly in church and yet neither will ever talk about their faith in connection with their political activity. And yet, it was Archbishop Desmond Tutu who said, "Those who say that religion and politics do not mix must be reading a different Bible to me." Well, I want unashamedly to open my Bible and take you on a quick sprint from beginning to end. As we do that, we find we are given a developing picture of the relationship between religion and politics.

## **THE OLD TESTAMENT**

In Genesis chapter 4 we have the story of **Cain and Abel**. Cain had previously killed his brother Abel and when God catches up with him he asks, "Where is your brother?" Cain's reply is simple, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer of course is "Yes - you are all responsible for each other". This is picked up in Genesis chapter 9 in the story about **Noah**. After the flood when the world is given a new chance, God makes it quite clear to Noah and

his family that each individual will be called to account about how they have dealt with the life of each other, especially if any blood is spilt.

In Genesis chapters 12 to 20, we find the story of **Abraham**. Abraham was the founding father of a large and growing tribe. As the numbers continued to increase he found he had to govern his people and make very far reaching decisions about issues such as land ownership, property, family ties, and relationship with other groups. After a time, it all became so complicated that he had to develop a system of "officials" to help him with the management. These were, in effect, early civil servants.

Through the first five books of the Bible there are dozens of chapters telling us the story of **Moses**. If you remember, Moses was the person who helped the Hebrew people escape from Egypt and find their way through the desert towards the promised land of Palestine. As Moses took this disorganised and unruly rabble through the wilderness, he discovered that a whole system of laws was needed in order to keep them together. Consequently, he developed laws governing property, money, justice, punishment, marriage, kinship and health care. Over the forty years of their wanderings, with so many people, it became extremely complicated, and Moses like Abraham needed help. Moses' response was to develop a system of "Judges". The Judges would hear the disputes of the people, and they were to share not only the management, but also the governance of God's people.

A little later in the Bible, we come to the Book of **Judges** itself. Here we are given a picture of the Hebrews having settled in the land of Palestine. At this point, the Judges have evolved into a more developed system. They would regularly sit at the gates of the city and hear the people's disputes. This was the time of leaders like Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Eli and Samuel. Not all of them were particularly good. Some were outright thugs, while others were desperately weak. In 1 Samuel chapter 8, this period is described as a time of total anarchy - "everyone did what was right in their own eyes". As a response to this the people came to the prophet Samuel and demanded: "Give us a king like the other nations". They wanted somebody to take control. (This is very similar to the way that people today often ask for a Prime Minister who will be rather like Winston Churchill: "Give us a bulldog who will give us a real sense of direction." In reality of course, what they really want is a poodle, but that is another thing!). As Samuel heard their request he was not happy, and through him God warned the people that if they did have a king they would soon find that this ruler taking their sons and daughters for his own purposes, imposing conscription, collecting taxes, lining his own pocket, and the king himself developing an inordinate love of power. We know from our own history in this country how we have seen that in the past, and today we see this picture in countries like Zimbabwe and Sudan. Power is always personally seductive.

In the end Samuel gave in and anointed **Saul** as their first king. He was not a great success and so God stepped in and gave them a new king - **David**. Under his rule, the land of Israel experienced a time of great growth. But things did fall apart after the reign of his son Solomon. As a result, Israel split into two kingdoms - Israel and Judah - and over the coming centuries became weaker and weaker until they were overrun and dispersed.

Through these centuries two different strands emerged to illustrate the way in which religion and politics related. On the one hand there were the **priests**. These people had

their place in the Court, they had the ear of the king, and they were part of the status-quo. On the other hand, there were the **prophets**. These were the people who kept themselves separate from the monarchy, shouted from the sidelines and often behaved rather like an opposition party. Today, people are still divided as to which is the better place for the religious voice.

Those who opt for the model of the **priesthood** tend to be the ones who emotionally feel easier in a close relationship with the rulers. This, of course, was the system in our own country until the Reformation. Until then the Archbishop of Canterbury was a key character in the inner-council of the king: he was a key advisor. Today, there is an element of this which lives on in that the Queen is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, while the Prime Minister is the person who leads her Majesty's Government. There is therefore, a connection through the Monarch and, of course, even now we have Anglican Bishops in the House of Lords. This also emerges at a local level, in that often local councils will have a chaplain to the Mayor, and many of us who are clergy will have occupied that role. This does mean that as the Mayor's chaplain you would be able to speak easily with both the Mayor and the Leader of Council, and perhaps say things that would not be possible otherwise. The trade-off is that if the Church of England wants to appoint, for example, women bishops or develop a new service book, then this needs the approval of Parliament, and of course, there are always those who are very unhappy about this.

Consequently, there will be others who feel emotionally happier with keeping separate from the political system, and these will prefer the **prophetic** model. To adopt this position allows freedom, and one's criticisms can be sharper because there is less fear of upsetting an ongoing close relationship. Such prophets are, of course, very much needed when really hard questions need to be asked. An example of such conflict is given in the following example: I have no idea myself what the Archbishop of Canterbury might want to say to the leaders of the G20 Nations who are gathering for their Summit this week. However, it is difficult to imagine that because he is somebody who is able to pick up his telephone and book a time to speak with the Prime Minister very easily; he would also feel comfortable marching with the demonstrators through London today. He may well feel that he wants to question the constant mantra we are given that economic growth is the answer to everything. If he wanted to assert that we live in a finite world, and therefore infinite economic growth without either trampling on the poor, or trampling on our environment, is simply impossible, he might find that very difficult to say at the head of a march through London, when at the same time he occupied the position of being a "priest" to the Prime Minister. I give that just as one possible scenario.

Similarly, those who are prophets will always want to warn priests that they need to be careful they are not being abused by those who are in power. This has become a real issue following 9/11. After that horrendous incident, it became very obvious to all political leaders that religion is not simply about personal opinion and private activity in our leisure time. Rather, religion has very public consequences. This is dangerously true for those who are radical extremists. As a result of this, the Government decided to set up a Faiths Council. Leaders from all the major religions were called together to enable the Government to consult about how best to go forward to encourage social cohesion and discourage radicalism. After a time it was realised the issues were very complex. For example, it is impossible to assume that all religions are basically the same, or even that all

denominations within a faith can speak with one voice. It is significant that, as far as I am aware, there is no one on the Front Bench who has any qualification in theology and so it is not surprising they often find themselves out of their depth.

What has happened, however, is that the Government has realised that radicalization amongst young Muslims happens very easily when those who are Imams, who have been trained abroad in other cultures, then come here in order to lead Mosques. They are unable to help young people relate their faith to the British culture in which they live. The Government now wants to help out by offering money so that Imams can be trained within our own country and culture. This makes good sense in encouraging social cohesion. However, the danger is that the Government is seen to be using religion for its own end. It is not far removed from our experience as Anglicans over the last thirty years or so, where we have witnessed claims that a Prime Minister blocked the appointment of particular bishops because their views have not accorded with that of the ruling political party.

So, going through the Old Testament, what we see is a story that has led us from leaders exercising small local management, to the establishing of a national government, and religion relating to that government through a system of either priests or prophets. It is, of course, slightly more complicated than that as certain prophets were also priestly people, such as Ezekiel. Having said that, the distinction still holds as a general rule.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

If we ask whether the New Testament takes us any further, then we are taken into more complicated territory. **Jesus**, of course, is extremely difficult to pin-down. Just as he was not a religious animal, so neither was he a political animal. He knew that both religion and politics can so easily ravage people's lives if let loose. At the beginning of St Matthew's Gospel, the author is very keen to emphasise that Jesus was born of the Line of David. In other words, Jesus was the legitimate king as opposed to the illegitimate and immoral line of Herod. Jesus is portrayed as the proper ruler. As an adult, Jesus came out with phrases like, "Render unto Caesar, that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's". In other words, he was saying to people, by all means pay your taxes, but never give away your soul. From a distance Jesus was very critical of King Herod, and yet, in St John's Gospel we have the story when after feeding the five thousand, Jesus himself refused to be made a king by the crowd, which is what they wished to do.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem. This episode drew from the ancient festival of the annual ceremony during which the king rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, through the very gate which Jesus himself used. But Jesus did not ride up to the fortress or the palace in order to confront the political authorities. Rather he rode up to the Temple and did battle with all that went on in there. When faced with Pilate at the end of his life, he was asked the question, "Are you a King?" Jesus' reply was "Yes, but my kingdom is not of this world". In other words, just as he had stated in John chapter 17, he was asserting the fact that he was "in Pilate's world but not of it". He was in effect saying: "do not define me by your political system even though I have to live within it."

A little further on in the New Testament we come to the person of the Apostle **Paul**. Paul, of course, was a good Roman citizen and as such appears very establishment-minded. In

Romans chapter 13, he wrote that all political authorities are established by God, and therefore to rebel against the authorities is nothing less than to rebel against God himself. He stated that the rulers are there to preserve the good and dispense with evil. They do so as agents of God on earth. It follows, therefore, he said, that we are to pay our taxes and obey the laws. In Colossians chapter 1 verse 6 he wrote, "All thrones, all rulers and all authorities are created by God." He was very unequivocal.

However, when we reach the last book of the Bible, **Revelation**, we come to a situation where fifty years later the early Christians were experiencing political authority as a very destructive force. The political rulers and Romans in particular, are described in chapter 18 as "the beast of Babylon", "a home for demons, a haunt for every evil spirit". They are described as stealing goods for themselves, abusing people and ignoring the fact that there is a greater ruler in God. This is, of course, exactly what Samuel warned against when the early Hebrews asked to have a king just like the other nations. And here we have the heart of the issue. Once any government forgets that it exists on behalf of a greater authority, trouble emerges. You may have heard the joke about the time when the Prime Minister arrived in Heaven. God looked at him and asked, "Just who are you?" The Prime Minister replied, "I am the Prime Minister of Great Britain and you are sitting on my throne." Now I can tell that joke because that certainly would not be true of Gordon Brown, but it makes the point.

It was G. K. Chesterton who wrote "Once we abolish God then government will take his place", and this is exactly what has happened in those countries which have tried this social experiment, such as China and Russia: the government has taken the place of God.

## **GOVERNMENT - BUT FOR WHOM?**

If we return to the question of our title - Politics: Government - but for whom? Then the obvious answer is that any Government is there in order to serve the people, and at its best that is exactly what happens. Good Governments will enable a good and just society, with ethical decisions supporting all policies about finance, trade, education, housing, health care, transport and so on, with special care being given to support the vulnerable and the weak (which is surely the test of any civilized society).

However, Jesus did not say "Seek first the kingdom of humanity" but rather he said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God". In other words, it is vital that those in government keep at the front of their minds that they are only there as God's representatives and one day will be accountable to him in just the same way as will all of us. Every single one of us is accountable to God for the way we govern our own lives and the way that our own lives affect and govern those around us. This will be true whether we are in the position of governing our own household, governing areas of authority at work, governing aspects of any club or church we belong to, and any other area of life where we carry responsibility. Even in my own small way, it is constantly before me that when my time comes, God will not ask me whether I have faithfully kept the Canons of the Church of England. Rather, he will ask whether I have faithfully used the opportunities laid before me to open the doors of the Kingdom of God for people. This is why on certain occasions I am quite happy to play fast and loose with Church rules. And in case you are wondering: yes, I have said that to the person who is my immediate boss! We all need to carry that at the front of our minds.

## POLITICS IS NEVER EASY

Now I am very aware that this lecture is happening on April the first - April Fool's Day. I have tried very hard not to crack cheap jokes at the expense of our politicians. It is so very easy, so I would not dream of going for a cheap laugh by asking what is the definition of politics? "Poly" means many, and "tics" are irritating blood suckers! It would quite wrong to use a joke like that today. It would be as cheap and easy as all the jokes we hear about vicars only working one day a week.

The fact is, being in government is a horrendously difficult balancing act, and those who have the courage to become Members of Parliament have my total sympathy and support. The vast majority of them, at least originally, entered Parliament because they had a vision of a better society and wanted to work towards that. However, in practical terms they always need to keep one eye on the next election. If they put forward policies or make decisions that are not popular, even though they might be right, they are unlikely to be voted into government next time and so will lose any further opportunity for exercising their responsibility. Unfortunately, the fact is that all of us human beings - as voters - are basically selfish. We all want a fair distribution of wealth, but not many will vote for a Party that achieves that by reducing our own assets; which is the obvious corollary. We all want high employment, but few would agree with that if it means we all have to be prepared to work less hours and earn less money in order that others might keep their job. We all want to use electricity, and yet few will agree with a policy which places a nuclear or coal-fired power station nearby or erects wind-turbines at the bottom of our garden. Any such policy would mean the local MP will lose at the next election. Consequently, governments always tend only to be able to plan for short-term gain within their own brief term of office.

On top of that they constantly have to cope with a very cynical media and with an opposition which naturally bay for their blood. They have to deal with in-fighting within their own Party, and each MP is expected to comment constantly on everything from the death of Jade Goody to the latest football result.

## TWO SIMPLE NEEDS

Today, being in government is as complex as ever. The pressures are huge. So how can our politicians, even those who are committed Christians, hold at the front of their minds that statement from Jesus, "Seek first the Kingdom of God", and keep his values before them? I want to suggest two very simple things. They are extremely simple, but because they are so simple please do not dismiss them immediately. I would suggest that we need:

1. **people in government** who recognise that they are accountable to God before they are accountable to the electorate. Without that, those in political power will always sell out to the selfishness of their voters.
2. **people amongst the electorate** - that is you and me - to encourage, support and pray for those who are in government. Whether you feel more comfortable as a priest (perhaps with a close relationship to your MP or local councillors, and maybe as a member of a political Party), or as a prophet (keeping separate so that there is no

conflict between any loyalty to personality or Party as opposed to principle) - and there is a place for both - we need to keep before us the image of the Chaplain in the House of Lords.

Before each session, the Chaplain walks into the House. He stands and looks around at everyone gathered. He then raises his eyes to Heaven, turns round, crumples to his knees and utters a loud prayer for them all. That is no bad posture for any of us to adopt.

The task of all Christians surely is to join him on our knees before God: to pray for those who are in government, those who hold authority on behalf of the God before whom one day they will be called to account.

May God the supreme governor bless each of us as we do that.