

Sermon 9th January: Spiritual Wickedness in High Places

The boy Jesus had a proper upbringing. According to the Jewish law he was circumcised on his eighth day and, twelve years old, he was presented in the temple. Joseph and Mary belonged solidly to the Jewish tradition and they brought up their Son in that tradition. All this gave him what he needed to learn to live his life in obedience to God: *Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* As a teenager, Jesus would have known all the Psalms by heart and he would be able to recite whole passages of the scriptures – preparing to take his place as the head of a family and pass on the tradition to his sons. In Jesus' case his sons were his disciples and his family is the church.

Where do we now turn for the solid, reliable tradition which alone can help us fashion our lives according to God's will for us? Would we, as Jesus did when he visited the temple, turn to our fathers in God, the bishops and senior clergy in the established religious institution of our land, the church? Well, would we? Let me get something out of the way at the start. From time to time you have heard me from this pulpit relate and make fun of the crazier doings of those in charge of the Church of England. You have also heard me make more serious criticisms – criticisms for example of the chief abortionist and champion of human cloning, the Bishop of Oxford. This is the same man who tells us that we should not use the words *This is my Body...this is my Blood* – no matter that Christ commanded us to use them.

But modern churchmen will not accept the notion of being *commanded* to do anything. It's far too authoritarian for them. They want to make up Christian teaching on the hoof as if we were never *commanded* to do anything. Now I said I wanted to clear something up at the start - and I will. When I make light-hearted fun of the hierarchy, or when I offer more serious criticisms, some of the response I get from my hearers suggests that I'm really being a bit naughty, a bit mischievous, a bit insubordinate. It's this bit that I'm wanting to clear up. I mean to say I am tired of being thought of as a cheeky little radical when my aim – as ought to be plain to anyone who does not have cloth ears – is to defend and promote the traditional faith against its detractors.

The modernising bishops and the other senior clergy have dominated the English church these last forty years and all but destroyed it. They have denied or distorted every cardinal doctrine of the faith. The Resurrection of Our Lord reduced to a subjective feeling of cheered-upness among the disciples. The Virgin Birth dismissed as a mistaken reading of the *Book of Isaiah*. They have swallowed whole the notion of secularisation and adopted as their keynote the words of the demythologising theologian Rudolf Bultmann: *You can't believe the miracles and the Resurrection in an age of electric light and the wireless*. Why not? And the doctrine that we are all sinners merely offends their refined metropolitan sensitivities.

These *liberals*, as they like to be called, who constitute the hierarchy detest the Christian past and dismiss our forefathers in the faith as *primitive*. Really they are old-fashioned Whigs in new *Guardianista* clothing - apostles of the discredited doctrine of *progress*. And God help anyone who stands in the way of these ecclesiastical totalitarians as they bully conservative clergymen and steamroller traditional parishes

into adopting their puerile new versions of the Bible and their trashy modern liturgies. Their aim, largely accomplished, is to remove entirely from use at public worship *The King James Bible* and *The Book of Common Prayer*. As the then Bishop of Birmingham, Mark Santer, once boasted to me, *I don't have any Prayer Book enclaves in my diocese.*

Roll up, roll up to see all the formative articles of the faith denied! Original Sin, along with “the devil and all his works” obliterated from the Baptism Service. And in the progressive hierarchy’s long march to the sunlit uplands there is no hint of the frailty of human nature. But if there is no sin, what was Christ’s death *for*?

African Christianity is now doing so well that it sends missionaries to Britain to preach the gospel to a people who have abandoned it. It was the traditional Catholics in Poland and other Soviet satellites who did much to throw off the dehumanising totalitarianism of the Communist evil empire – though this is of course regarded as a retrograde step by the ecclesiastical fellow-travellers. In short, Christianity is alive and well wherever it is being celebrated, preached and practised according to the traditional model. Catholics who use the Latin Mass and Anglicans who have stuck to *The Book of Common Prayer* and the *King James Bible* report well-attended services. The Orthodox, who have not much altered their liturgy since AD 1054 are thriving.

In truth, Christianity everywhere is enjoying a big revival. It is only in northern Europe with its post-Enlightenment ragbag of liberalism, pluralism, secularism and political-correctness that the churches stand empty. In other words, it is precisely the modernising, debunking, snobbish and patronising attitudes of these traitors which has done so much to remove the historic faith from the cultural landscape of England. I must say that one of the great joys among traditional believers these days is the spectacle we can now enjoy of the liberal hierarchy’s Pyrrhic victory. At last there they sit in full control of the Church of England – except that the only meaningful parts of the church have gone their own ways, leaving the liberal bullies with no one to boss about. We shall hear more about this from the Bishop of Fulham when he comes to preach for us in Lent.

Bullies I say? Yes - but I wonder sometimes if people truly understand how vicious those in authority really are? I have received hundreds of letters from churchwardens in other parishes asking me where they can turn when their Prayer Book vicar leaves or retires and the trendy bishop and archdeacon have ganged up to deny those parishes a traditional parson as the replacement. Do not underestimate their sheer nastiness and the intensity with which they hate everything that belongs to decent tradition and wish to abolish our living history.

Let me give you an example from a few weeks ago, here in St Michael’s. The PCC has decided to accept a war memorial from the Stock Exchange. Of course we sought legal approval from the diocese. The officials came to inspect the situation, looked at the names on the memorial of those who had given their lives for us and objected, *But some of these men weren't even Christian!* At the City Service on Friday we shall sing the second verse of the National Anthem – of the Queen, *O Lord our God arise, scatter her enemies and make them fall.* Last year someone objected to my using those words. Knowing the love which such people have for *relevance*, I said, *Why,*

aren't they RELEVANT? But if anyone thinks the Queen no longer has enemies, let him look no further than Blair's cabinet

Do not be under any illusion: there is a fight to the death for the very soul of English Christianity and for the continuance of a faithful church in our country. There are people in high places who hate us and all we stand for and who want to do away with us. This is a time to rejoice, then – for the Lord said we should be glad when we are persecuted for the truth's sake. Rejoicing, we shall persist. And we shall triumph in this spiritual warfare:

Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God...for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

And He said, On this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.