

Faithful Cities and faithless Churches

The Church of England's latest report *Faithful Cities* is just one more socialist diatribe after the style of the 1985 report *Faith in the City*. I cannot understand the church's obsession with unreconstructed socialism dressed up as Christianity – unless it has something to do with the politics of envy. The Archbishop of York's criticism of the lavish party for the England football team was not a pretty sight.

How many more times do the bishops and synodsmen, apparatchiks all, have to be told the economic facts of life? They are constantly preaching “more equality” but a country where there is equality is one in which the people are equally poor. The report asks us to challenge the thoughtless accumulation of wealth. This ignores the fact that it is usually the thoughtful people – clever, skilled, talented and industrious people - who actually make money. Moreover the states run on the principles of socialism have always been places where the general mass of the people are badly off.

You don't make the poor richer by making the rich poorer. Self-interest is condemned in the report but, as every competent economist since Adam Smith has pointed out, it is self-interest which powers the economic system and provides the goods and services which people need and provides them more affordably. The same self-interest which goads a man to make mousetraps encourages him to make better mousetraps, so he can sell more of them and more cheaply. Divided Berlin used to be the blatant example of economic reality: on the east side there was socialism in spades and all-pervading poverty, drabness, misery and slavery; on the west side there was capitalism bringing colour, life, energy, prosperity and freedom.

I am surprised that the church misses the theological point about capitalism versus socialism. I mean, the bishops are always banging on about “liberation” and the gospel as something that sets people free. But the socialism they so much admire imposes restrictions on freedom and curtails personal liberty. Did they write this report with their eyes shut? If they had kept their eyes open, they would have seen a nation where the people are living longer than ever before, where there are more people in work than ever and where disposable income for the purchase of all those goods and services is at an all time high.

The report's green-eyed accusations of selfishness are frankly an insult to the thousands of well-off people who give their money away. This country has one of the best records of any country in the world when it comes to charitable giving. Of course the churchmen prefer higher taxes: it goes with their affection for all things restrictive and mechanistic, with their patronising control-freakery and their unwillingness to see any good in anybody not of their own persuasion. Here in the City of London – the centre of the great capitalist Satan – charity abounds.

I am Chaplain to several livery companies which are far more than dining clubs for rich men who like dressing up. The livery companies spend about two per cent of their money on wining and dining, but endless hours in boring committees deciding how to give the bulk of their money away.

The usual shibboleths and obsessions are all found in this report: “racism, fascism and religious intolerance”. Don't they know that talking about these unpleasant things

constantly actually talks them up? And what does the report mean by “a draconian asylum system”? Chance would be a fine thing! What we actually have is the country flooded with so many illegal immigrants that the authorities confess they haven’t a clue as to how many.

The report wants to provide “suitably trained” clergy to work in the inner cities. But by suitable training they mean socialist agitprop, narrow, special interests and “diversity”, “social inclusion” and other such bureaucratic doublethink. They certainly don’t mean clergy who will promote marriage and the family. And how would one go about promoting marriage and the family? By stressing the Christian doctrine of marriage – not blithely affirming any act of coupling between any two bits of flesh irrespective of sex or marital status.

There is a way in which the church can alleviate poverty and deprivation and we have marvellous examples of just how well it works. In some South American and Latin American countries where the churches are teaching traditional Christian morality, the lives of the poorest in the population have been transformed. Where respect and self-respect – not “self-esteem” – are cultivated, there drug-taking and prostitution are reduced and with it the criminal activity which is one of the greatest causes of true poverty.

Socialism is ideological utopianism and it doesn’t work and its futility has been demonstrated everywhere it has been tried. Free market capitalism brings greater economic prosperity and perhaps more importantly democratic freedoms: for free trade requires freedom. Capitalism works with rather than against the grain of human nature, acknowledging original sin and greed and trying to mitigate these things through charity. Socialism is unrealistic, especially when linked to phoney piety. It is sentimental rhetoric. Socialism is a form of cheap grace, a mixture of childishness and crime.

It’s time the bishops and the synodsmen grew out of it