

Halloween was an uneventful night this year, but a couple of years ago I remember it was different. I made some girls scream. It was freezing and foggy and I had to go out to say Grace at a livery dinner. So I put my thick clerical cloak on. As I turned the sharp corner at the top of Cheapside three young wenches came upon me suddenly and screeched as if they were auditioning for the witches' parts in *Macbeth*. It's come to something when young people see a man in a cloak and don't think *parish priest* but *Dracula*.

Our country has lost the plot. Halloween is celebrated vigorously. But I doubt that more than a few children, putting on their masks and boring eye-holes in pumpkins, could tell you what Halloween really is. All Hallows' Ee'n – the Eve of All Saints. So what modern practice has done is effectively to dislocate good from evil – and then celebrate the evil. We should be putting Halloween before the children in the context of All Saints. We should get them to church on All Saints and celebrate this great festival of goodness – the saints, *lights of the world in their several generations*.

But this neglect, this perversion, is only one thing among many that have gone wrong with how we live today. We used to be a Christian country. Oh yes I know, people were never too religious, not excessively devout. And no one forced you to go to church and say your prayers. But there were unmistakable signs of the Christian Faith throughout society. Sunday was different from the other days in the week. On Good Friday shops, factories and offices shut down. You daren't shut a shop for ten minutes these days or the manic consumers would get withdrawal symptoms.

We face two sorts of opposition: there is militant Islam which rightly scorns our secular materialism and our spiritual shallowness; and there is secularism itself which everywhere screams – like my three girls – that there is no God, that the world came into being by accident, that prayer is mental illness, miracles don't happen and when you're dead that's it. Unless we act now to restore Christianity in England, then the life of our society will become tawdry, trivial and meaningless and, given a little time, perhaps destroyed altogether. Do you want to live in a spiritual wasteland? Well, unless we put things right – and quickly – that's where we're heading.

Let's start at the top. We should hear no more of this nonsense about Prince Charles becoming *Defender of Faith*. No one can defend faiths which are quite different. Anyone who tries to defend Trinitarian Christianity, Unitarian Islam, Ganesh the elephant and varieties of atheistic Buddhism is heading for a bout of schizophrenia. And where will he stop? Will he also be defender of Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventism, Rastafarianism and Scientology? By law and by long historical continuity, the monarch is a Christian. And Charles should – when he becomes King – affirm the Christian Faith as his mother and grandfather did.

The Church of England must restore *The King James Bible* and *The Book of Common Prayer*. The root reason we are at odds with our own teenagers is the loss of the common language which those books provided for four hundred years. It is not even a case of being devout or pious: it's just that for centuries there was a common national idiom. We used Prayer Book language not just in church but in the street and in the pub: *fell by the wayside; some fell on stony ground; heart and soul*. That language

permeated our speech. Now, because it has been thrown out and replaced by inferior versions, our children know no prayers by heart. Our children are as spiritually hollow as the Halloween pumpkin

The teaching of Christian theology must be reintroduced in the universities. Oh I know many universities have departments of theology – but what goes on in them is not Christian. University theology – believe me, I’ve had plenty – takes its cue from debunking and demythologising 19th and 20th century German professors and latterly lunatic Gallic influences such as the incoherent Jacques Derrida and the vile Michel Foucault.

When I say we must restore theology in the university, I mean the interpretation of Scripture, the Fathers of the Early Church, St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, St Anselm, John Donne, George Herbert, Lancelot Andrewes. Those great minds did not lack scepticism: they understood the sceptical attitude better than anyone. The point is they refuted it. We should teach not the failed Enlightenment philosophy which puts man at the centre of the universe, but Christian metaphysics which understands that God is the centre and ground of our being

We must reintroduce Christian teaching in state schools. It may surprise you to learn that this is now illegal. It is permitted only to teach *about* religions. Absolute relativism rules OK. All religions must be taught as equal. The only perspective from which you can teach such equality is atheism. The 1944 Education Act worked perfectly for thirty years. No one was forced, no one indoctrinated. If parents wished it, they could arrange for their children to be withdrawn from RE. But you see the point? It was assumed you were Christian unless you denied it. We opted out. We did not have to opt in.

The broadcast media should present traditional church services instead of the tomfoolery that goes on now. Religious programmes on TV and radio should be grounded in Christian orthodoxy. For example, *Thought for the Day* should be given by competent theologians from all the main Christian denominations, offering each day a doctrinal thought, an expository thought, a spiritual insight or a moral application of Christian teaching. What we have now on the BBC is only a veneer of religion glossing over a soft left political agenda – secular social conscience (as if there could be such a thing); a whiff of Third-Worldism; the aroma of Fair Trade coffee and the infallible dogma of global warming.

Other things to be done. Strong support for Christian chaplaincies in hospitals and prisons. And we know that Church schools work. Let the Church have the confidence then to build thousands more of them. The outlay would be repaid in no time.

But there’s something else. At a meeting of St Michael’s Foundation for Spiritual Understanding the other week, we were discussing tactics and strategies for reviving the Church. Of course we need policies, a manifesto, an agenda. But those things are not the root of it. What we really need as individuals and as a community of souls is to draw nearer to God in our personal devotion. Policies must be grounded in prayer and worship.

For too long the Church has treated prayer and worship as if they were mere metaphors for something else – for social concern, even for a political programme. In this matter, right wing Christians have been as guilty as the Left. Voltaire urged the practice of religion – *for the servants*. There is more than a whiff of Voltairism about today. Many think of Christianity as useful for the preservation of social order and public morality. And it can be. But only if it is accepted as being *true*.

Worship and prayer are not outward form. It is not a matter of putting on your Sunday suit, watch chain and buffed shoes and going through the motions. This is a sort of piety that is worse than atheism – because it is lukewarm. Remember what the Spirit said to the Church at Laodicea in *The Book of Revelation*:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

I am calling us to individual personal devotion. We must not merely *say our prayers*. We must *pray*. And prayer, according to St Augustine, is to be as passionate, faithful and loving as the physical relationship between man and wife. I am trying to get you to fall in love with Jesus Christ, to bind yourself to him, to trust him, to develop God-consciousness every hour of every day. *Pray without ceasing*

Pray like this: *O God take away my faithlessness and fear. Be the centre of my life today and always. Give me the sure comfort of thy presence. Let me know that thou art with me and in me. Rule me utterly and teach me how to serve thee. And do thou make all these things perfectly plain to me, O Lord – for I am a fool and slow of heart*