

The philosopher and poet T.E. Hulme says that an institution is never utterly defeated until it is penetrated by the ideas of its enemies. The example given by Hulme is France in the 18th century. He says:

The Revolution in France came about not so much because the forces which should have resisted were half-hearted in their resistance. They themselves had been conquered intellectually by the theories of the revolutionary side. The privileged class is beaten only when it has lost faith in itself, when it has been penetrated by the ideas that are working against it.

The Church of England does that all the time. Let me give you a very up-to-date example. I shall be quoting from what is billed as *a multimedia campaign* called *Love Life Live Lent* promoted by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York. They urge us to text the word *Lent* to phone number 64343 *to begin receiving suggestions for action* during Lent. Already you feel yourself turning queasy.

The justification for this stunt is provided by the noted intellect Archbishop Sentamu who informs us that:

Recent research has shown that generosity is a key ingredient in making neighbourhoods flourish

Gerraway! Well, it sure beats going round and smacking your neighbours across the chops. But did we need *research* to tell us this? Who paid for the research? The Church?

What we are supposed to do in this jolly wheeze is send off for booklets with a smiling orange on the front. There is a children's version and there is an adult version – which gives pause for thought. And in these booklets we are given spiritual things to do in the great penitential season of Lent. These spiritual things include: *Go to a party...Leave a coin in a shopping trolley...Make someone laugh...Have a meat-free day...Wear a smile....Share a treat...Give someone a hug.* It's more hilarious even than contemplating the Bishop of Southwark chucking toys out of the back of a car

I have one or two questions. Why should I leave a coin in a trolley? The next user might be Mohammad Al Fayed or Victoria Beckham. *Give someone a hug?* What when the Church has just issued that code of conduct for clergy which says we shouldn't lay hands on anyone? *Make someone laugh?* Oh well, I know how to do that: ask him to phone a bishop.

By such glossy, trashy gimmicks we see the abyss into which the mind of the Church has descended. It is a mixture of greetings card sentimentality, cheap advertising cliché with a slice of environmentalism and vegetarianism. Nothing to do with Lent. Nothing to do with the Christian faith at all. It actually emasculates the faith and undermines the Church by camouflaging them as something else, something alien. It amounts to an act of unfaithfulness to Jesus Christ who never hinted that he wished his Church to pervert its true identity in this way.

The point is that no one forced the Church to commit such an act of betrayal. The Church itself decided to go in for this pantomime – just as it has in the past decided to throw out its best Bible and its best Prayer Book, to conspire with the new sexual ethics and to hitch its wagon to every passing enthusiasm from CND to Climate Change.

As if the Church of Christ did not have enemies enough without shooting itself so repeatedly in the foot. There is a progressive secular culture in Britain today which wishes to see Christianity extinguished. To his credit the Archbishop of York has warned us against secularisation. But then he goes and puts his name to this Lenten jape – thus revealing the sheer power of doublethink.

But some of the enemies of the Church are those who were once our friends. I refer to many of the City institutions and the finance houses. Until very recently these institutions were pleased to help our churches financially, because they regarded themselves as part of the historic Christian culture – indeed their own charters and codes of practice had their origin in traditional English Christianity. But now, out of the prevailing political-correctness, many will not support religion at all.

I will give just one example which is so bizarre that you will think I'm making it up. But I'm not. You couldn't make it up. St Michael's takes health and safety seriously, so we asked our architect to design a handrail for our front steps. This has received the approval of the Diocesan Advisory Committee and so I am applying to the City of London Bridge House Trust who have a record of funding these health and safety measures.

I spoke to Jenny over the phone. She described herself as a *small claims assistant* and she told me the rules. The upshot is that the Bridge House Trust just might sponsor our church for part of the cost of the handrail so long as none of this money is reckoned to support Christian worship. I mean they just might pay for that proportion of the handrail that is used by people who come to organ recitals or who drift in to gawp at the ceiling; but none of it can be reckoned against the usage by people who come to services on Sundays or weekdays.

This is just one nasty example of the way that institutions which originally and for centuries owed their identity and self-understanding to the Christian Faith are now active enemies of the Faith. So we see everywhere the Church under vicious attack from the secularists who wish to abolish us. And we see – as in the silly business of that Lent programme and the greater folly which discarded of the real Bible and the real Prayer Book – we see the Church actually aiding its secular enemies.

I have told you before from this pulpit. There is a war on. We are fighting for the very survival of the Christian Faith in our nation. This is not a rhetorical flourish: it is the bitter, unexaggerated truth. It is illegal to teach Christianity in state schools. Christian symbols are frequently proscribed. The government legislates in a way that penalises marriage in favour of adulterous liaisons and fornication. The Catholic Church is victimised in the adoption rules. Sunday is abolished. God and Christ are blasphemed every hour on radio and television.

So what is to be done? We held a meeting of St Michael's Foundation last week and discussed these things. There were a lot of brainy people there and there was much talk about *analysis* and *strategy*. Well of course we need to think straight and plan our mission and outreach properly. But the history of the last forty years is fatuous initiatives. I remember *Call to the North*. Flop. I recall George Carey's *Decade of Evangelism*. Was that the *deaf aid* of evangelism? During the *Decade of Evangelism* Church attendance fell faster than ever. You want to make the devil smile? Ask the bishops to dream up a new wheeze.

Christianity is not a new management scheme. It is not a discussion group for middlebrow enthusiasts. It is not a disguised political programme. It does not exist in order to add pleasant aesthetic sensations to civic pride. It is not a metaphor for anything. There is only one remedy, one thing to do. This is to turn to God in our private prayers every day and to devote ourselves to Christ here in the Blessed Sacrament. Pray fervently for a closer walk with God. Remember this: the worse the persecution gets, the more we shall thrive. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.