

## Sermon for The Guild of Air Pilots, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007...

It's a couple of years since I addressed the Guild from this pulpit, so I think I ought to begin by bringing you up to date about a few goings-on at St Michael's. But if you think the Rector makes the rules here, you're mistaken. For I've just been informed that from next year I shall be obliged to put up NO SMOKING notices in church. So, if this sermon gets tedious and you feel like a fag, light up now – 'cos next year it'll be against the law.

Now I have never ever seen anybody smoking in church – not in thirty-seven years as a priest and ten years an altar-boy before that. But this doesn't deter the fascist political bureaucracy which now misgoverns this country: the same bureaucracy which has its doubts about the renewal of our weapons systems and whose latest gimmick to fight crime in our streets is to set up "mini-jails" in supermarkets. "That'll be six months hard labour madam – and 250 points on your Tesco card!" This is the state bureaucracy which wages war on smokers, chubby people, foxhunters and anyone who drinks more than the whiff of the barmaid's apron and has just invented a series of tests which babies under a year have to take to measure their "social development."

We used to be guided by the Bible. Now there is a new book of commandments and it is written in the language of political correctness. The first and great commandment is *Behold, in all things thou shalt be compliant and especially in Health and Safety*. I sometimes wonder how we ever managed before health and safety came along to save us from ourselves. How did Douglas Bader get by without a disabled ramp for his Spitfire? Well of course at St Michael's we are very keen on compliance and so we took seriously the advice from the Gestapo that we should have a handrail by the side of our front steps.

And lo in those days there cometh politically-correct persons from the Diocesan Advisory Committee, from The Council for the Care of Churches and even from English Heritage. And they spake unto the churchwardens and said, "Take care that thou makest not the handrail at the one side of the steps for behold it hurteth the stonework. Thou shalt put the handrail up the middle of the steps and then shalt thou be exceeding compliant."

When they heard these things, behold the churchwardens stood up and spake unto the bureaucrats and said, "You gotta be joking mate. A handrail up the middle of the steps will just be in the way. And what happens when we need to get a coffin up the steps? We'll look as daft as Laurel and Hardy with that piano!"

But this was only the start of it. We then had to find the money to pay for the handrail. There is a charitable institution in London called The City Bridge Trust and the Trustees will often pay specifically for disabled access projects. I applied and they sent me the "information package", a foot thick. Its main requirements make instructive reading. The Trust *might* pay for disabled access to a church providing this funding is understood as being used only for secular purposes.

So the physically (or mentally?) disabled at our Monday organ recitals, City workers come in to eat their luncheon sandwiches, and blundering tourists come to gawp at the

ceiling are all deemed worthy recipients of the charity of the City Bridge Trust. But the Christians are excluded. In other words, the Trust will give charitable assistance to churches provided that on no account is the money used to ease the passage into church of those who wish to worship God.

The scandal is, of course, that the very idea of charity was originally a religious idea and that organisations such as the City Bridge Trust owe their ethos to the religious commitment of their Founders. But now they have been so captivated by aggressive secularism that they oppose Christianity with all the practical means at their disposal.

And this leads me into the most serious part of my sermon. So please don't nip out for a smoke at this point. People laugh about Political Correctness. I have written a satire about it and people respond by smirking and telling me how *naughty* I was to write such a book. But my satire is one of the most serious books I've written – because Political Correctness is not a joke: it is the means by which secularisation is inculcated throughout society.

Three out of four firms refused to put up Christmas decorations last year. The majority of Christmas cards no longer featured the Nativity scene. More shops and stores than ever opened for business on Christmas Day. These are just the outward signs of an increasingly militant secularism, for the fact is that the progressive elite in Britain today detests Christianity and wishes to destroy it. The country is not being destroyed by alien terrorists but our traditional way of life and self-understanding is being undermined by aggressive secularisation.

It may surprise you to learn that teaching Christianity in state schools 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. Christianity used to be at the centre of public life and it was strongly represented in the mass media, particularly in broadcasting. 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.

At the centre of the secular atheistic project is the destruction of the historic basis of our way of life: marriage and the family. This has been achieved by the secular doctrines of rights and egalitarianism according to which childbearing and adoption procedures are extended to homosexual couples. Government economic and social policy consistently discriminates against marriage and in favour of any alternative cohabiting arrangement. It is getting to the stage when the Vicar will have to watch out for the politically-correct commissar before he ventures to preach against adultery.

The Christian era which held sway in this country for 2000 years was not oppressive – unlike the totalitarian secularism which threatens to replace it. After the Restoration in 1660, various Acts of Toleration allowed dissenters leeway provided they kept the peace. But it was always tacitly understood that you belonged to the Church, to Christian civilisation unless you opted out. All that has changed. And as if to emphasise the fact that the European Project is blatantly atheistic, all mention of Christianity was left out of the draft EU Constitution. But Europe was built out of the

Christian faith: the great cathedrals, a parish church in every village, Dante, Aquinas, Leonardo, Bach.... And if Christianity goes, European civilisation goes with it

What can be done? The antidote to the destruction of our society by rampant secularism is for the church to recover its wits and its confidence. The philosopher and President of the Italian Senate, Marcello Pera, spells it out: "Christianity is so consubstantial to the West that any surrender on its part would have devastating consequences. Will the Church and the clergy and the faithful be able to be purified of the relativism that has almost erased their identity and weakened their message and witness?"

The bishops and the synod will do nothing of course. They have themselves adopted the secular gospel for forty years now. The restoration of Christianity in public life is up to the clergy and the faithful: that's you and me folks. You come up our front steps. You believe with all your heart and mind. And you vote with your feet.