

Sermon: GAPAN Installation Service 5th March 2008

For ten years now I have had the honour and great pleasure to officiate at your Annual Service. And this is the ten years of my personal involvement with the Guild as your Chaplain. This friendship and companionship I count as one of the blessings of my life. There have been so many memorable occasions. I recall the celebrations for the Guild's 75th. The lunch at the RAF Club when we presented Prince Philip with a ceremonial sword. The visit to the Battle of Britain ops room.

The thrills and laughs – I shall never forget John Hutchinson's magical and hilarious – rude in parts - description of flying *Concorde* to New York. I remember also risking the wrath of the Master back in 2005 during the great Ashes series when I kept sneaking the little radio earpiece in during a Court Meeting. What will stay with me forever is the Trophies & Awards Banquet when those D-Day glider pilots – now all in their eighties – came up to the rostrum to be presented.

I want us to note today how all these things, the life of our Guild, are conducted within the realm of history and tradition, chivalry and the Christian faith. Our parties and knees-ups are uproarious, as they should be. Our proper meetings are conducted politely and elegantly. The Queen is always honoured and the Loyal Toast is a feature. The Master's Installation every year is accompanied by Divine Worship in this church. And prayers are said to begin and end every Court Meeting.

These things are formalities. But they are not *mere* formalities. We have formalities so that certain important things can be taken for granted. The formalities are the bones and structure which, being set in place, provide for an astonishing freedom and informality in everything else we do. These formalities were not invented by the last Master but one. You can trace them back into the early history of the Guild eighty years ago.

And when the Guild began, its Founders sought to root its practices in those of the ancient Guilds of England. And these ancient Guilds were Christian Foundations rooted in the Gospel, built on that Rock which is Jesus Christ Our Lord. The Christian Faith is not an ornament, a bit of sentiment to fuel our nostalgia. It is not what Philip Larkin called *a vast moth-eaten, musical brocade*. It is the truth, for 2000 years incarnated in the life of Europe

Now it is my business today in giving hearty thanks for these things to tell you that they are all under threat. Powerful forces are attacking the Christian Faith and there are many who want to see an end to it. There is a violent anti-intellectual sneering movement by people who hate Christianity: Richard Dawkins, Polly Toynbee, Philip Pullman, Christopher Hitchens prominent. Their arguments are easily refuted and indeed this church has produced plenty of literature confounding their ignorant misrepresentations of the Faith. But what price Christian intelligence in the face of a crass and imbecile, sensationalising mass media which knows as much about philosophy and theology as a hippopotamus knows about the theory of flight.

Then there is political correctness – about which you all have a jolly good giggle. All those urban myths about the colour of bin bags and the tiresome business of having to say *his or her* all the time, or worse, *their for his* – a plural possessive adjective to

qualify a singular noun - thus murdering the English language. But you are wrong to think political correctness is just a joke. Political correctness is a new secular, anti-Christian morality devised by people who imagine they have outgrown religion and who indeed vigorously hate Christian civilisation and despise the past that has made us.

It was reported last week that the government is to find time in its already crammed programme of legislation to abolish the blasphemy law. Justice Minister Maria Eagle said, *The government has every sympathy for the case for abolishing these laws*. She promised there would be consultation with the Church, then added: *This consultation will be short and sharp*. But you might say that to all intents and purposes the law against blasphemy has been abolished already. *Jerry Springer: The Opera* contained more than 3000 examples of God's name taken in vain, yet the courts denied it was in any way blasphemous. But of course it is only Jesus Christ they allow us to sneer at. I think I shall write my own opera: *The Prophet Mohammed: The Strip Club Years* and see what happens.

Totalitarian Secularism rules OK? The Right Rev'd Anthony Priddis, Bishop of Hereford, has been ordered by a court to undergo *equal opportunities training* and pay a fine of £47,345 for refusing to employ an active homosexual in a position of trust with young people. The Cardiff Employment Tribunal declared: *The Bishop and his staff discriminated against the claimant on the grounds of sexual orientation*.

Bishop Priddis had refused to employ a homosexual man, John Reaney, as a youth worker on the grounds that the Christian religion teaches that marriage is the rule in sexual coupling. This case belongs to a state re-education programme like the ones instituted by Chairman Mao. The same week, a Christian married couple were not allowed to adopt a child, because they refused to promise to bring him up to believe that homosexual partnerships were the equivalent of marriage. We are now in the position where a clergyman of the Established Church of England, preaching the Ten Commandments and the moral teaching of Christ is breaking the law.

Go into the schools. The Department for Children, Schools and Families have produced a booklet called *Are You Getting it Right?* In which all kinds of sexual couplings, in or out of marriage, are taught as morally equivalent. Go back to before birth. The Human Fertilisation and Embryo Authority – now there's a title straight out of *Brave New World* – has just granted licences for research using animal-human hybrid embryos. They were supposed to wait for a decision in parliament but they have jumped the gun. But the government will not forbid these experiments. And, almost as a commonplace of social etiquette, are the 200,000 unborn children aborted every year – mostly abortion used merely as a means of contraception.

But morality is not just about *strife below the hip bone*. The Christian Sunday has been abolished. The commandment *Thou shalt not covet* has been replaced by *Thou shalt shop until thou droppest* – as envy, covetousness and greed are reckoned to be essential to growth in the economy. *Honour thy father and thy mother* is translated into *Every child has the right to make up his or her own mind* – on the profound issues of morality and belief. The idea of authority in these matters has been abandoned. In effect, there is no longer what used to be called *schooling*. Naturally,

we are beginning to see the effects in the streets. Give it another generation and the institutional anarchy we now see will achieve its full barbarism.

The first commandment is *Thou shalt have no other gods before me*. Now it is a crime to believe this – because all religions are reckoned to be of equal status. And, in the cavernous incoherence of our constitutional advisers, it is even now being decided that the next Coronation will be multifaith and that the heir to the Throne will become Defender of Faiths – what militant Islam, Scientology, Christian Science, Mormonism? Thus the concept of religious truth has been officially done away with. And while his Christian flock are being persecuted and murdered by Islamic fanatics on three continents, the Archbishop of Canterbury says that some accommodation with Sharia is *unavoidable*.

The abandonment of Christian philosophy has produced minds enfeebled. The continent has lapsed into the old heathenism of food fads, of worrying about what people eat and drink and into pagan, utopian fantasies of *saving the planet*.

Today in church, in our court and at our dinner, we have the chivalrous elegance of Christian civilisation. It looks permanent. But I tell you this: it will not survive the death of the faith out of which it originated. Brutally, if we let the Christian faith go, all those things which enrich our lives, everything we love, will go with it.

Brethren, pray.