

Old Nick to Be Archbishop of York?

Let us hope fervently that our Bishop Richard is not snatched away to fill that vacancy which has arisen in York. We value – and my word we need – his support here. There aren't any others of the same quality. And, Charles Sisson said, *I am glad to come across a little sanity wherever I find it.*

Usually the post of Archbishop of York is filled in the secret councils of the Crown Appointments Commission and the Prime Minister. However, this time the Church of England has taken the unusual step of advertising the job in the press. Well, it so happens that there has fallen into my hands – by what instrument I know not – a letter of application from a most unexpected quarter. It is headed...

From the Office of His Satanic Majesty...Nether Hell by Thames...

To: The Office of the Prime Minister,

The Church will no doubt think it strange that, in response to the advertisement, I am sending you my application for the post of Archbishop of York. There has of course been a history of unpleasantness between your enterprise and mine, but I do feel that in these modern ecumenical times we ought to pay more attention to the aims we have in common rather than dwell on those things which traditionally divided us in the bad old days.

I will not evade the matter of sin which always used to be a point of contention between us. You were, if I may say so, particularly insistent about this, declaring firmly that all have sinned and stand in need of forgiveness. I am therefore gratified to see from your new liturgy as set out in your *Common Worship* that you have greatly softened your line.

For example, I note that the outdated concepts found in your Missal and the thankfully discarded *Book of Common Prayer* have been much brought up to date in keeping with the fashions of permissiveness. In liberated modern society, who now would dream of praying such reactionary lines as *Marriage is a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication!* I am so relieved to see that you have got rid of this nonsense and replaced it with a prayer that the couple *be tender with each other's dreams.* And in the much-improved modern marriage service the bridegroom promises her *All that I am I give to you.* I have a suggestion to make: could arrangements be made for the choir to croon this in the style of *Candle in the Wind?*

I was always hurt when you used to make the godparents at the christening *Renounce the devil and all his works.* You must admit it's a pretty rude thing to say. Now you have deleted this and I begin to feel so much more at home in church.

Do you remember how you used to stress some of – what shall I call them? – the rather more honest and down-to-earth realities of life? I mean in *The Burial of the Dead* you used to harp on about *worms that destroy this body* and you even referred to mortals as *vile bodies.* Happily, you've removed all this downbeat stuff now as well.

Incidentally, I adore that moment in your new service when the priest says, *Let us offer one another a sign of peace*. And the result is, of course, that all hell breaks out as the congregation fall over themselves in a fit of back-slapping, kissing and cuddling. There are plenty of opportunities for the beginnings of sordid encounters here, I can tell you!

If you were to ask me which of the many improvements the church has made over recent years most encouraged me to apply for this distinguished post, I would mention the Bishop of Oxford's wonderfully progressive declaration that Your Master's words in the Holy Communion, *This is my body...this is my blood* should be omitted. As the bishop rightly says, *Or else people will think we are cannibals*. It is this sort of new accommodation you have made with the lowest levels of candid mis-apprehension which shows the church has a sense of the ridiculous. (By the way, I am rather envious in case such an outstanding intellect as that bishop be preferred over me for the York job).

Your social ethics have progressed immensely too. The whole Council of Hell welcomed your backing for research on human embryos – for the best of therapeutic reasons, naturally. I am especially grateful for the way in which this shows your support for the utilitarian philosophy which allows human beings to be treated as means to an end instead of as ends in themselves – as God originally (and, if you ask me, peevishly decreed). And the General Synod sensibly keeps pretty quiet about the annual tally of 190,000 abortions as a means of contraception.

I would greatly enjoy working with the Archbishop of Canterbury with whom I agree when he lays much of the blame for Islamic terrorism on the Christian West. And all hell rejoiced when the terrorists' massacre of the children at Beslan caused him to say that his faith was shaken by it.

I do so admire your modern theological scholarship and general debunking of the Bible itself, particularly the recent report which showed that many priests disbelieve in the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. Fewer still believe in life after death. And almost none in eternal damnation. They'll be in for a rude awakening! (Ignore that last remark. I was only joking – honest!)

It has been said that the Devil lacks a sense of charity. I repudiate that assessment. Why, I applauded to the skies the terrific charitable enterprise of the Church Commissioners when they threw away £800million of investments and sold off the fine ancient vicarages.

You ask what particular skills applicants might bring to the job. Well, I see that you are presently locked in two mighty disputes which threaten the very future of the worldwide church: the row over women bishops and that other row about homosexual bishops. Do you foresee any homosexual women bishops, by the way? It is in just such a time as this that you need me to help with the administrative arrangements which will bring these wonderful innovations about. The devil is in the detail, as they say.

Yours Sulphuriously

Nick

(...also known as His Satanic Majesty, the Father of Lies, That Old Serpent and Mephistopheles)

O God, that it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted; and to raise up them that fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet: we beseech thee to hear us Good Lord.