

	<p style="text-align: center;">The Order of St James (UK) Newsletter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">March 2023</p> <p style="text-align: center;">www.orderofstjames.info</p>	
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Love is the central theme of the New Testament and as Christians we accept that this is the pivot on which our faith is balanced.

I use the word 'balanced' because 'love' as described and defined in Holy Scripture comes with conditions. It is not something that allows everything and anything. That would be anarchy and chaos rather than 'love'.

The first things to understand is that 'being in love' is different from 'love' and loving others'.

'Love' is the everyday stuff that we build our lives on and even rely on to get us through the changing circumstances of each day, and it makes any and all relationships work. (Refer to last month's newsletter for an explanation.)

It is also different from loving one's partner for which the expectations become a little more focused, the separation of the love we show to others as opposed to our partners in life, our spouses or those we are engaged to, those whom we wish to spend the rest of our lives with, even if they are far from perfect in our own eyes. There is just something we can't put our finger on that makes us want to be with that person and the one person who whatever their faults makes us feel whole and complete.

Both these are good and positive.

Then there is 'being in love'. Whilst it is exciting, there is also an element of deceit about being 'in love' we do need to be aware of.

We believe it, we trust it, we like it, we enjoy it, but it is almost a self-fulfilling fiction, and we can get addicted by it, even if it seems like 'the real thing'. So sorry to disappoint you, but you may be suffering the effects of an almost self-inflicted chemical overload..... and this is the explanation in simple terms.

Source extracts:- Science Focus – some editing for clarity

Being in love is mostly a biological trick that evolution plays on us to encourage us to reproduce effectively and make sure there are future generations.

Those memories of your fantastic first date are burned forever into your brain. You can blame that on the extra proteins in your bloodstream that encourage new neuron connections in your brain when you're in love. But that's not all...

*1. You feel happier: your brain releases more of the hormones **dopamine** and **oxytocin**. These feel-good chemicals give a euphoria similar to the effects of cocaine.*

*2. You're possessive: another hormone produced by the loved-up brain is **vasopressin**. Studies in animals show that this chemical increases the sense of attachment and territoriality.*

3. *One-track mind: elevated levels of **adrenaline** and **norepinephrine** hormones, coupled with lower **serotonin**, make you anxious and can cause a sensation of obsessive focus on your love interest.*
4. *Jangling nerves: **adrenaline** and **norepinephrine** also cause more physical symptoms of stress around your crush, including sweaty palms, a fluttering heart and a dry mouth.*
5. *Wide eyes: the autonomic nervous system – which regulates the body's unconscious actions – is deeply connected to the arousal centres of your brain. When you see someone attractive, your pupils automatically dilate.*
6. *You feel less pain: a 2010 study at Stanford University found that staring at a photo of someone you're deeply in love with reduces moderate pain by 40 per cent.*

All this to ensure the next generation

This is nothing new although we perhaps have a better understanding of this process than our forefathers, but it doesn't take a genius to see that chemically driven relationships bring about their own set of problems and there needs to be some built in protection if there is to be social stability.

'Falling in love' will nearly always lead to eventual disappointment in the growing realization that 'the perfect partner' is found to be increasingly flawed..... sometimes even to the point that the relationship is unable to continue.

So how do you stop the cycle of disappointment, one that means that there is the constant breakdown of relationships, the constant search for the perfect partner, and the inevitable exponential growth of single parent families?

The answer is an old one and one which has been tried and tested over several millennia. It isn't perfect but it is the best answer we have ever been given as a society, and that is the concept of 'betrothal' and 'marriage'.

The Early Church had already picked up on this process when it accepted the definition of Christian marriage as being 'between a man and a woman, for mutual comfort, for the procreation of children and for life.' That was a carry-over from their Jewish foundations, and in fact was the accepted norm in many other societies, and remains so.

Marriage was usually preceded by a period of betrothal, a time that allowed partners to get to know one another properly, away from the influences of the chemical highs of 'being in love'. If you like, a chance to have a reality check when it comes to relationships and just slow things down.

Remember the old saying, 'marry in haste, repent at leisure....'?

Betrothal and marriage are both more about 'discovering love' rather than 'falling in love' or even 'being in love', and this is where its success lies. It focusses on what you have rather than what you haven't. That is the better part in the end, but I admit, it still needs some kind of catalyst or spark of recognition to bring two people together, and then the realization they aren't just lovers but more critically best friends.

In a comment that would sit well in today's society, St Paul says this about those whose 'inflamed passions' put their faith and relationships at risk:

1 Corinthians 7, verses 8-9 Now to the unmarried I say: if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

I personally would have put it slightly differently based on today's sexual freedoms – 'if they are good enough to sleep with (have sexual intercourse with), they are good enough to get married to....'

Almost ironically, the basis of marriage is so much more than 'the inflaming of passions' (selfish and overwhelming desire?) and such statements fail to capture the fullness and breadth of the real and Godly basis of marriage.

I admit 'falling in love' and 'being in love' are exciting and it can seem as if there is nothing to surpass it, but in reality it is not sustainable or something that can always be built on. Once the passion has subsided, ask what is left?

Louis de Bernières asks the same question in 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin',

Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes and then subsides.

And when it subsides you have to make a decision.

You have to work out whether your root was so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part.

Because this is what love is.

Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of promises of eternal passion.

That is just being in love, which any fool can do.

Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident.

Those that truly love have roots that grow towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossoms have fallen from their branches, they find that they are one tree and not two.

‘In love’ isn’t even ‘love’ in the end, but a simple biologically necessary chemical deception which ensures the continuance of the human race, but there is no reason why, as passion cools, it couldn’t be the door to something of worth rather than remain an empty and shallow and very fragile deception.

The danger is though, that as reality kicks in, our hopes of the mythical ‘happy ever after’ gradually begin to fall apart as we come to realise that our ‘perfect partners’ are not as perfect as we first thought, and we may want to give up on the relationship we have put so much trust and hope in.

The hard truth is that ‘happy ever after’ it isn’t ‘a right’ as many believe. It takes time, work, effort and sacrifice in making it so.

So what happens next depends on whether the relationship has matured sufficiently to get past the excitements of being ‘in love’ and is transitioning towards something founded on genuine, growing and sustainable love, something that actually has a future, and something of great value.

So let's look at marriage in real terms. Happiness is a harvest, not 'a right. You have to put the time and effort into making marriage work and you get out of it what you put in. It comes down to four simple principles:

1. 'Getting married' is easy. It's just 'one moment on one day'.
2. 'Being married' is a lifetime's work, an exclusive, 24/7 commitment.
3. 'Marriage' is what you make it, or let it become.
4. Marriage may be durable but it isn't indestructible, and each partner takes full, shared and equal responsibility for its success or failure.

Those thinking of 'buying into marriage' might wish to consider the following:

Terms and Conditions: 'buyer beware'

Buyer is of sound mind and accepts full responsibility for own actions.

This is a lifetime purchase but you will never ever actually own the item.

Buyer is fully accepting of all terms and conditions which may be varied frequently without notification.

No returns, no warranty, no guarantees, sold 'as seen', no replacement if found faulty/temperamental/unpredictable/unreliable/imperfect/fails to function as expected or break down with or without warning.

Item may also give the appearance of being faulty or non-functioning whilst remaining fully operational from time to time.

Buyer is responsible for safe storage and care of unit.

Buyer is responsible for all maintenance and repair.

Do not mis-treat or use for purposes not intended.

Item will give life time service if cared for properly. Item is easily damaged so treat with extreme care.

No owner's manual provided.

'Happiness', 'love', 'fulfilment' and 'satisfaction' not included with item but may be generated as by-products if item is used correctly.

Additionally:- in broader societal terms,

(a) if a marriage fails, then it is also society that suffers, (not just the couple and their families, friends and colleagues)

(b) if a marriage succeeds then all of society benefits

(c) it is up to society and especially the church to ensure intending couples know what to expect and are not building their futures on false, unrealistic and unachievable expectations before they commit to marriage

(d) and, to provide support and encouragement if (not when) things go wrong

(e) the church needs to be absolutely clear about what Christian and scripturally based marriage is and not allow society to dictate otherwise.

(This has been outlined in previous newsletters. The church is the servant of God, not the servant of society, and God is not a democracy whose will can be changed by popular vote.)

Pastorally, my experience as a priest is that when asked directly, most couples have no real reasons they can give as to why they want to get married, let alone what marriage offers that is different from just living together as is the socially accepted practise these days. Reasons for getting married, when I have been given them, include the following: (the list is not exhaustive and all are genuine responses)

1. for the photographs in church
2. for the party afterwards
3. I've already bought my dress
4. it's my big day/I want her to have her big day
5. it will be the best day of my life
6. it's what you do isn't it?
7. to show him/her I love him/her
8. to show everyone she's/he's now 'off limits', and is now mine
9. so I/we can start a family
10. because I love him/her
11. her/his/our family/families expect it

12. so my dad can walk me down the aisle before it's too late
13. we want a church wedding even though we don't go to church
14. to get him/her to commit to our relationship
15. no idea why/because I asked/not sure why I asked either
16. all our friends are married and it's our turn
17. she told me I have to.....
18. I've been planning my wedding since I was little, all I needed was a man
19. trying to fix a broken relationship
20. to make a point – our family say we haven't a cat in hell's chance of staying together, etc., and we want to prove them wrong
21. feeling of added security
22. I don't want to grow old on my own
23. it seems to be the right thing to do but can't explain why
24. why not get married? does it matter if we don't have a reason?
25. anything to keep her happy (and stop her going on about it)

You can perhaps see why I give some couples a lot more time when it comes to preparing their services and reserve the right not to cover their service if I feel they are making a mistake/not getting married for the right reasons.

I have had some proper and valid answers as to why couples are getting married but they are very sadly few and far between. Nearly as rare as couples (0.3%) not already living together as if they were already married.....

When I ask about the future, many couples hope that they may be gifted with children but seems to have no idea how that will change or affect their relationships or marriages or have made any preparation.

Dangerously, some never discuss marriage basics like 'having a family' but instead make wrong and hugely damaging assumptions.

I have had one instance of a couple separating just before their wedding because one partner wanted children, the other not, and it had never been discussed before. That difference was enough to end their relationship with some immediacy. Exemplary and open communication is essential in any and all relationship, and especially when it comes to marriage.

Worryingly, many still believe they can continue to behave as if they were still single, doing whatever they wish, whenever they want. 'Getting married' doesn't change anything they say. So it begs the question why get married?

These things perhaps speak volumes and may indicate as to why there are so many marriages that fail. Couples, generally speaking, have no idea of the difficulties they are getting themselves into.

But then how would they know if no one has talked to them, given them counsel or has been a good role model, things that HMGov, society and the church seem hell-bent in avoiding?

This state of affairs is simply unacceptable and we need to think seriously about what the church is teaching, what it should be teaching, and where those all-important Christian role models for marriage are that are inspiring couples to make a success of their own marriages.

This is going to take some doing in the current social climate, but with God's help, nothing is impossible. However, it will take the very same kind of commitment, dedication and resolve that marriage itself requires.

Putting it bluntly, we as a church need to seriously get off our complacent backsides and make the effort to support and encourage Christian marriage and family life, cut through all the myths and make believe, set realistic expectations and be there for people, otherwise we are doing both God and them and society a complete dis-service.

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Almost as a post-script, in teaching about marriage, one area we need to look at in depth is marriage being 'for life'. Marriage is not meant to be a temporary social contract of convenience but it is rapidly becoming so.

I often hear couples say, 'if it doesn't work out, we can always get divorced.' Divorce is **not** a good pre-considered back up plan should a marriage not meet expectation, but in a consumer based society that buys new and throws things away don't work rather than fix them, I suppose it shouldn't come as a surprise.

Divorce shouldn't even be considered an option if couples treat marriage seriously and give its due value and worth, and it shows a complete lack of both understanding and commitment as to what marriage is, and even more so when we think about Christian marriage.

Easier divorces, especially 'no fault' divorces, offer an easy, no effort way out of disappointing marriages, but the reality is that all it does is compound the problem, cause untold damage and make it easier to create 'failing' marriages. Added to this, the church, which has been largely silent on the subject, shares culpability with HMGov when it comes to failing to support and promote marriage, family life and family values. Divorce is definitely not ok.

This has been clearly evidenced by the increase in number of divorces, single parent families and the number of abortions that statistically demonstrate society has abrogated its social, moral, spiritual and economic responsibilities. I include economic because all this has a huge financial cost to the country. That is to say nothing about mental health consequences either.

We really need to be clear as Christians about what we are saying about 'Christian marriage' and have a clear and consistent scriptural definition of what 'Christian marriage' is. It is as much for the sake of society as it is for our own spiritual sanity. It's also importantly about upholding God's will.

Around 95% of all marriages are heterosexual and aspire to all the qualities of Christian marriage even if the participants are people of no or little faith. If the majority has spoken by its actions, even if it has been silent in the public debate about marriage, then why can't we as Christians get our act together?

For me, **Christian marriage** remains between a man and a woman (as defined at birth), is for mutual comfort, for the procreation of children, and is intended to be for life. It is scriptural, exemplar and aspirational, so why all the confusion?

+Ian

More 'watch this space'.

Original source articles by Max Stephens, Gabriella Swerling, Aine Fox and others. Extracts.

At an Oxford Union debate, the Rev Ian Paul, a member of the Archbishops' Council, argued that those supporting same-sex unions within the Church were allowing the views of the state to ride roughshod over religious teachings.

Dr Paul, a General Synod member, told students that allowing same-sex marriage would be a "clear contravention of God's word". He said that supporting the proposal was "voting for a church which detaches itself from the clear and consistent teachings of Jesus. If you vote for this motion you are, as a non-religious group, assuming secular authority can determine religious belief".

Calvin Robinson, an evangelical Anglican deacon and TV presenter for GB News, echoed his comments, saying: "2,000 years of Christian doctrine cannot be altered on the whim of a few bishops. What is God-ordained cannot be adjusted to suit our new liberal progressive views. Marriage is heterosexual, monogamous and should be open to the possibility of children," he said.

The Association of British Muslims (ABM) has written to the Most Rev Justin Welby regarding its "concern about the teaching of sexual identity politics in schools, including Church of England schools" and "the lack of open and inclusive discussions regarding the traditional understanding of marriage within faith communities".

The ABM letter, written by Paul Salahuddin Armstrong, its managing director, warned the Archbishop: "If the current proposal by the bishops is implemented, every Church of England primary school will teach that both heterosexual and homosexual marriages have equal validity, starting from this summer.

"While it is acknowledged that the law of the United Kingdom recognises the validity of both types of marriages, it is important to note that many faith communities, both locally and globally, still hold to the traditional definition of marriage as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, 'the formal union of a man and a woman, as recognised by law, by which they become husband and wife'.

"As people of faith, it is important to ensure that we have a voice in matters that pertain to our beliefs and practices. This includes the traditional family structure, which many consider to be a fundamental aspect of our faiths."

In an unexpected turn of events the following was announced:-

"Vicars who bless same-sex couples in church could be taken to court, a group of lawyers warned the General Synod ahead of a crunch debate on the proposals.

But a group of six barristers and solicitors who sit on the Synod have warned that the legal basis for the blessings is flawed and could see priests who offer them sued in court.

In a document seen by The Telegraph, the group argue there is a “strong possibility [the bishops] are legally mistaken” and this would “expose the clergy to the risk of litigation”. The bishops proposed the same-sex blessings – known as Prayers of Love and Faith – last month after six years of internal wrangling over LGBTQ issues.

Synodical rules mean a two-thirds majority would be needed to officially rewrite Church doctrine to mean marriage can include gay couples. Knowing they could not reach this bar because of conservative opposition, the bishops instead argued that they could bless couples after same-sex civil weddings while leaving the traditional teaching of the church unchanged.

Accompanying guidance from the Church of England’s legal team argues that the Prayers of Love and Faith, despite blessing married same-sex couples, do not contradict the Church’s doctrine that marriage is only between one man and one woman.

This is because, since the introduction of gay marriage in 2013, civil marriage in the eyes of the state has been different to Holy Matrimony as the Church understands it.

Speaking on 8th February, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, spoke in favour of allowing the blessing of same-sex partnerships in the Church of England. Within the proposals, the position on gay marriage will not change and same-sex couples will still be unable to marry at church.

Justin Welby, who is supporting the motion, said “I cannot duck the issue any more than anyone else here.... I ask each member of Synod to vote with their spirit-inspired consciences, scripturally and spiritually-guided and not because groups or lobbies or outsiders have told you to.... We are not divided, but we disagree, and that is very painful.... I know there is fear of a slippery slope, of what may or may not happen at some point in the future.... But let us not give in to the fear of a future which we can neither predict nor control. Fear leads us to do the wrong things – trying to secure the future for God tomorrow, rather than trusting the Holy Spirit today.

During the debate, he added: “I am supporting these resources, not I think because I’m controlled by culture, but because of Scripture, tradition and reason evidenced in the vast work done over the last six years so ably by so many. I may be wrong. Of course I may.”

Archbishop Welby had already said last month that he welcomes the proposals but will not personally carry them out due to his “pastoral responsibility for the whole communion”.

In the wide-ranging debate, others questioned whether the motion would go some way to condoning sexual relations outside the traditional setting of marriage, which the church teaches remains an institution between a man and a woman.

As if this wasn’t enough, there are moves in the CofE to strip God of the title ‘Father’ and replace the title with something more ‘gender neutral’.

The topic is being “explored by two commissions in a new joint project”, reported Sky News, though the “specifics of the project’s aim and outcome remain unclear”.

The project was prompted by the Rev. Jo Stobart, who asked bishops how the church would develop its use of “inclusive language” and “speak of God in a non-gendered way”. It comes as the Church of England grapples with its role in modern British society amid a wider decline in organised religion.

Traditionally, many priests have referred to God in male terms, as He, Him, and the Father. Some, however, already “prefer to replace the terms” with non-gendered alternatives, a practice that is “decades old and predates current debates over transgender or non-binary people”, wrote The Times.

Those using inclusive terms argue that Christian doctrine says “God does not have a sex or gender”, while there are parts of the bible that describe God as “providing solace ‘as a mother comforts her child’”, the paper said.

A formal change, which would first need to be approved by the church’s lawmakers in the General Synod, would be a “departure from centuries of tradition”, said The Telegraph. The proposal has already been “criticised by conservatives” who have “warned that ‘male and female imagery is not interchangeable’”.

The Rev. Ian Paul told The Telegraph that a formal change in language would be “moving the doctrine of the Church away from being grounded in the Scriptures”.

A spokesperson for the Church of England told Sky News that there had been “greater interest in exploring new language in the last 20 years”, but despite the new project there were no formal plans to “abolish or substantially revise currently authorised liturgies”.

Taking all the issues covered in this article into account, it is beginning to look like a broad fronted and sustained attack on both Holy Scripture and on God, and also on the traditionally accepted teachings of the church. In company terms, it increasingly looks like a takeover bid regarding the organization, the replacement of the CEO and an attempt to obtain all the assets.

What we should remember that if God goes then so does everything that is God's – He holds all the cards and is where the wealth of the church lies. Outvoting and deposing Him doesn't mean 'we' will become the inheritors. Far from it as the following parable informs:-

Matthew 21 NIV

The Parable of the Tenants

33 “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

35 “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.

36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

Worldwide Anglicans question CofE's 'fitness to lead'

Source: Harriet Sherwood – edited extracts

Conservative Anglican churches in developing countries will consider radical action over the Church of England's decision to bless same-sex couples in civil marriages as they question the archbishop of Canterbury's "fitness to lead" the Anglican Communion.

The Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (GSFA), which represents churches in 24 countries and provinces including Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, said the C of E's new stance "goes against the overwhelming mind of the Anglican Communion". The "reality" of the C of E's decision was a rejection of the (*biblically based*) doctrine that marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman.

The GSFA, which claims to represent 75% of the global Anglican church, said it would take "decisive steps towards resetting the Anglican Communion". Its members would not leave the global church but "with great sadness must recognise that the C of E has now joined those provinces with which communion is impaired".

Key church leaders from the global south are expected to consider moves to take a leading position in the Anglican Communion, reducing Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, to a having a marginal role.

Samy Fawzy Shehata, the archbishop of Alexandria in Egypt, stated that “crossing this line of blessing same-sex unions will alienate 75% of the Anglican Communion” and “lead eventually to impaired and broken communion”.

Stephen Kaziimba, the archbishop of Uganda: “God cannot bless what He calls sin. The C of E has departed from the Anglican faith and are now false teachers.”

Archbishop Justin Badi Arama, the head of the Anglican church in South Sudan, said Welby was “failing to defend biblical truth”, and his role as moral leader of the global Anglican church had been “severely jeopardised”.

GAFCON, a coalition of conservative churches, said the C of E had “authorised the blessing of sin” and was “moving a step at a time to fully accept the practice of homosexuality as part of the life and the practice of the English church”.

Conservative churches have already broken off relations with churches in the US, Canada, Brazil, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, which offer church weddings to same-sex couples or bless their civil marriages.

Comment:

These are the very churches that are growing whilst the CofE remains in steady and rapid decline. It seems there is an obvious lesson to be learned – stick to Holy Scripture whatever the circumstances or pressures. The writing is definitely on the wall.

Same sex marriage is being forced on the church.

Source Laura Parnaby – edited extracts

The Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken of being “threatened with parliamentary action” in an attempt to “force same-sex marriage” into the Church of England.

Speaking at a global Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) meeting in Ghana, Justin Welby also said that “many” members of the General Synod have ignored or even dismissed his concerns about recent reforms.

In his presidential address to the 18th plenary of the ACC, Mr Welby said that “rules about sexuality in the Church of England” have been tabled for discussion as a “result” of growing atheism in the UK. He told those at the meeting, held in the Ghanaian capital Accra, that in the global north, Christian values of “community and mutual responsibility” have been “almost eliminated” in favour of “individualism”.

“The result is clear. In the last few weeks, as part of our discussions about sexuality and the rules around sexuality in the Church of England, I talked of our interdependence with all Christians, not just Anglicans, particularly those in the global south with other faith majorities.”

“As a result I was summoned twice to Parliament, and threatened with parliamentary action to force same-sex marriage on us, called in England ‘equal marriage’.

“When I speak of the impact that actions by the Church of England will have on those abroad in the Anglican communion, those concerns are dismissed by many, not all, but by many in the General Synod.”

“In the UK and in many parts of Europe the majority of people now belong to no faith at all,” he said. “They are not Christians, they are not Muslims, they are not pagans, they are not Jews, they are not Hindus. They do not belong.”

“We are in a completely different culture in the financially richer world, to where we were 30 years ago.... We’ve replaced morality and Christian faith with personal control over our bodies. Birth with genetically-designed babies is not far away.... And death is something that so many believe we have a right to choose in the way and at the time we want.... Even my predecessor but one, George Carey, has spoken strongly in favour of assisted suicide in the Houses of Parliament – in the House of Lords.... Modern European global north morality is a morality for the wealthy, the powerful and the intellectually well-educated, it is a morality that does not believe in human sinfulness and failure.... It does not believe in forgiveness, it does not believe in hope. This is where the Church struggles.”

Comment:

So, do we make the assumption that the CofE, along with HMGov, has now been sufficiently infiltrated by very ideologically aggressive LGBTQ+ and Feminist organisations to the point they now can dictate CofE/HMGov policy and direction because everyone is afraid to voice a different opinion or view?

It seems neither the CofE/HMGov speak for the people any more, just small but vocal minorities.

‘Woke’ and ‘cancel culture’ has a lot to answer for. It is not a work of God but a work of evil in my view. And it is neither democratic or supports free speech or the exchange of ideas or even supports open discussion.

I think the evidence appears to be a ‘Yes, that appears to be so.....’ And for what end?

An own goal as it appears, that will destroy the power and authority of the very same organisation they wish to take over.

So what happened to the voice of the ordinary member, the bottom on the seat in a pew in some church somewhere, wondering what on earth is happening and why?

And what also of their shepherds?

Their silence was noted and it was taken as assent to defy Holy Scripture.....

Tragic.

So it appears that the exceptionally small percentage of the population who subscribe to socially aggressive LGBTQ+ and Feminist ideologies dictate the views of the remaining 96% or so who are clearly heterosexual by both choice and practise but less vocal and certainly more passive.

What is the saying? 'It only takes the silence of good people to allow evil to succeed?

The Shepherd of the Sheep:

So, for us as priests, what does the bible actually say our roles as 'shepherds' is to be?

1 Timothy 4 Extracts NIV

4 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars

6 If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

11 Command and teach these things.

12 set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

¹³ devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you when the elders laid their hands on you.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

2 Timothy 3 Extracts NIV

3 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.

² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God —

⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Have nothing to do with such people.

⁶ They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, ⁷ always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as their folly will be clear to everyone.

¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,

¹⁵ you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

On Full Time Paid Ministry and the Priesthood:

John 10:12

The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.

Read into this whatever you will. 'He who has ears, let him hear....'

Former Archbishop's Warning to 'Think Again'

Sources: C4M/Times – some editing for simplicity and clarity

The Church of England's bishops have been urged to "think again" by former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, who said they were "out of step with the Bible". Carey, who is 87 and was in office from 1991 to 2002, said it was "obvious that the next step can only be the acceptance of same-sex marriages".

His intervention came after the General Synod, the Church's parliament, voted to support the bishops' proposal to provide prayers for the blessing of same-sex couples on the occasion of their civil marriage, or at another point in their long-term relationship.

In a letter to the Times, Lord Carey wrote that the decision would concern many, including him, "who believe that marriage can be a true sacramental rite only between a man and a woman (as defined biologically at birth) in a lifelong union of love".

He said the move left the Church "out of step" with most churches worldwide, both in the Anglican Communion and outside it, and "more seriously" with the Bible. He urged the bishops to "think again" about their proposals before July, when the final version of the prayers will be brought to Synod for approval.

Separately, lawyers who sit on the General Synod have warned that the proposed prayers may not be lawful as they imply “approval” of marriage-like relationships.

The Church has relied on legal advice that the proposed prayers are not “indicative of any departure” from the Church’s understanding of marriage.

The Synod passed an amendment saying that the final prayers “should not be contrary to ... the doctrine of the Church of England”, but the bishops believe that their proposals already meet this criterion. However, the Synod group of lawyers disagree.

They argue that any prayers which, in context, express or imply “approval of the decision of a couple to live together as (if) a married couple” while not being married according to the Church’s understanding would likely indicate such a departure.

England’s state church is at a decision point on same-sex marriage. While (the Synod’s vote).... moved the process forward, no prayers have yet been produced or agreed. As the bishops now prepare to finalise them, there (is support for).... Lord Carey.... calling on (the Bishop’s) to think again.

Man-woman marriage has stood as a central Christian doctrine for millennia, and for good reason. Nothing else comes close to providing the stable foundation people need for a successful family life.

Abuse of Holy Scripture:

I recently saw the following text used as a scriptural reason for supporting same sex (homosexual) marriages and wedding blessings by those who support this move by the CofE.

Genesis 2 v18

¹⁸ And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Well, shame on you for abusing Holy Scripture in this manner. Not only did you take this out of context but your intent was to give substance to your argument and mislead those who disagree with your real intentions.

We all know that you can take Holy Scripture out of context and suggest it means something else other than intended. Indeed, it is not impossible to find a word, phrase or sentence to justify any opinion, but it is the context of the passage in which it lies that give it its truth.

So here is the main text of Genesis 2 which relates immediately to v18:

¹⁵ And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

¹⁷ But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

*¹⁸ **And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.***

¹⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

²⁰ And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

²¹ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

²² And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.

²³ And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

²⁵ And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

This is God's intender plan right from the beginning and it isn't debateable - man, wife, biological male, biological female. How clear does it need to be?

Watch This Space - update 20th February.

Laura Parnaby – edited selected extracts

In a further development in the on-going saga of the Church of England sanctioning same sex marriage blessings, the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches (GSFA) has said in a statement that it no longer considers Justin Welby to be “leader of the global communion”, and it has “disqualified” the Church of England from being its “mother church”.

In its statement released on Monday, the group accused the Church of England of “taking the path of false teaching” and going against “the historical biblical faith” by allowing same-sex blessings, adding: “This breaks our hearts.... We pray that our withdrawal of support for him to lead the whole Communion is received by him as an admonishment in love.

The GSFA said it speaks for 75% of Anglicans around the world, officially representing 25 member provinces – mainly in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Statement by the GSFA

They said the archbishop had “sadly led his House of Bishops to make the recommendations (for blessing gay couples) knowing that they run contrary to the faith and order of the orthodox provinces in the communion”.

The GSFA added that this has caused a “leadership crisis” and it is now working to “re-set the communion”.

The signatories include the GSFA's chair, Archbishop Justin Badi, along with the archbishops of Chile, the Indian Ocean, Congo, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Uganda, Sudan, Alexandria and Melanesia.

Of the GSFA's 25 member provinces, 22 are part of the wider Anglican Communion, a global fellowship of 42 Anglican churches..

Lambeth Palace said it "fully appreciates" the GSFA's stance, but added that "no changes to the formal structures of the Anglican Communion" could be made without Mr Welby's consent.

The spokesperson added: "In a world of conflict, suffering and uncertainty, we must remember that more unites us than divides us. Despite our differences, we must find ways to continue walking and working together as followers of Jesus Christ to serve those in need."

Comment:

Or perhaps, this is no more than an opportunist power play for the top job in the Anglican Communion. Not everything is always as it seems.

I recall one Australian bishop many years ago making a statement that was something like 'we are a church in crisis – we are discussing how we should redecorate one of the rooms when the house is on fire.....'

A pity this comment was not taken seriously....

Reflection

Jesus is coming again and He is coming whether we are ready or not. That is why Jesus is using the example of Noah's time to warn us about our behaviour now and what will happen to us in the future. While we still have the time, and that time is now, we must be ready to meet Him when He comes. What does it mean exactly by being ready?

It means to be holy because Jesus is holy and we all know that holiness and sinfulness can not mix. While it is true that as human beings, we always commit sin, it is also true that we can strive with all our might that we can be holy though we are sinners. And here is the application or usefulness of being awake. To be ready means to be awake. It doesn't mean we don't sleep. It only means that during our waking hours, we live in the present moment with God. It means that we should always be aware of His presence in our life. It means that in everything we, whether we work or rest, eat or drink, we give glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31). When we do this, we live in love and continuously ask for His forgiveness for our sins.

Moreover, living from moment to moment with full awareness of God's presence give us the familiarity with Him to the point that we are not afraid to meet Him and instead we have the eagerness to live in His kingdom in eternity.

Therefore, if I am always aware that at any time, Jesus comes and take away my last breath, every moment then is spent in loving God and the people around me. There is no more time to waste in trivial misunderstandings as well as storing grudges in my heart. I learn to let go of everything knowing that my life is short and that I would rather spend every minute to be happy and at peace with everyone. I will now give my best in everything I do and most especially, I now learn to forgive and to give love to others before it is too late. I will now guard heavily my happy and loving moments so that the enemy (the thief) will not spoil my final union with my creator. Amen.

PRAYERS

Let us pause for a short silence, and collect our thoughts together.

OPENING PRAYER

Wherever Jesus went crowds flocked to be near him, and even today we gather together to hear his words, to sing his praises and to learn more about our Saviour. Be with us Lord, in our singing, our prayers and our meditations. As we meet with you today, bless us, that we might become a blessing for others. Amen

You are our fortress, Our defender, Protector from the storm. The one in whom we take refuge. You are our foundation Our solid rock in whom our confidence rests.

You are Justice, Compassion, Peace, And Love, You are everything to us.

Lord, we seek that love which offers refreshment to all who drink of it. Light to all who walk in it, and strength to all who hope in it. Healing to all who have need of it and wholeness to all who live in it. This is the God we serve, The God we worship, The God we proclaim this day and all days with our words and our lives.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Father, we thank you for all who put their lives in danger, when they are risking their own lives making sacrifices for others in their daily duty. We remember our doctors, and nurses so tired and fatigued serving in our hospitals. We pray especially for our surgeons working under the most stressful conditions attempting to reduce the waiting lists for surgical procedures. As we clasp our hands in prayer, the surgeons delicately use their hands in saving lives. Our emergency services struggling to keep 24 hour coverage for those in immediate need. Bless them with the support of the communities that depend so heavily on them in these times of crisis and travail.

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Lord, we come to you and pray for all those suffering any physical, emotional or mental illness and pain. Help them to keep their eyes fixed on you, give them that courage to face the trials and temptations that come. Especially we pray for.....

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Merciful and loving God, give rest, give peace and security to the souls of those having departed from our lives to meet with you. May they now, released from such pain or sorrow, find life eternal and rest in your presence. Help those of us who are saddened by such earthly loss, with reassurance that one day we too will share the feast with them too. (add names of the recently departed)

Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for this time together in prayer and as we look forward to the weeks to come, help us to be an example to others and show us the practical steps we need to take to develop consistency and integrity in all that we do in our lives..... Amen.

Merciful Father

Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE LORDS PRAYER

THE BLESSING

May the grace and the peace of Christ give us the eyes of faith to reach out more urgently to those in need around us; and may the Blessing of God the Father, God the Son ~~✝~~ and God the Holy Spirit, be with us as we follow Him. Amen

FURTHER ARTICLES

Did John Write the Last Chapter of His Gospel?

We know that it has been asserted by some critics that this chapter must have been added by another hand, because the evangelist concluded his work in the previous chapter. This, however, is not accepted by sound scholarship, for the reason that it is not unusual in the New Testament writings and in other good books, for authors to insert supplementary matter, to which class the chapter in question clearly belongs. There is no evidence that John's Gospel was ever known in the early Church without this chapter. John, it is true, refers to himself in the third person; but he did so also in chapter 19:35 in practically the same terms as in 21:24. The best commentators agree as to the genuineness on prima facie evidence.

Was John the Baptist Elijah?

The statement in the affirmative is made a number of times in the New Testament (See Matt 11:14, 17:10-12; Mark 9:12,13. See also Mat 4:5.) But some of the ablest commentators hold that we must interpret the connection figuratively, and that there is no reason for believing that this means any more than that he was the new Elijah of his time, a rugged prophet, like Elijah in temperament, habits and speech, unafraid even of kings. He himself said distinctly that he was not Elijah (John 1:21). The sense in which the expression was used is made clear in Luke 1:17: "He shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah." In the narrative of Elijah's appearance at the transfiguration there is no suggestion that he was John the Baptist, whom all the men present had known and seen, and who had only recently died. One of the things that distinguishes the philosophy of the Bible from that of uninspired teachings is that it never confuses or obscures personal identity. Each soul has a distinct personality, which can never be merged or changed into another.

What Is It to Be "Risen with Christ"?

Paul had described himself as having been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). He was dead to the world through the death of Christ, dead to sin, to worldly ambition, and to all the worldly principles and motives.

But he might have been asked, "Was he really dead?": and, in Col. 3:1, he answers that, like Christ, he had received a new life, having been raised with him, as he had been crucified with him. This was the resurrection life by which he had become transformed, and was a new creature in Christ Jesus. It was this that Augustine meant when he was greeted by a dissolute companion of his youth, whom he had passed on the street without recognition.

"August, it is I, do you not know me?" He replied: "I am August no longer." Having become a Christian (risen with Christ) he had abandoned all his old life with its companions and associations.

When Was the First "Church" So Called?

The word "church" is first applied by Luke the evangelist to the company of original disciples at Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:47), and is afterwards applied in Acts, Epistles and Revelation to the whole Christian body or society, as well as the sanctified of God (Eph. 5:27), and to those who profess Christian faith under ministers or pastors (I Cor. 12:28).

It was also applied to early societies of Christians in cities and provinces (Acts 8:1), to Christian assemblies (Rom. 16:5), and to small gatherings of friends and neighbours in private houses (I Cor. 11:18 and 14:19, 28).

In those early days and for a long time afterward, there was no distinctive body and certainly no denomination; the church was simply an appellation describing groups of believers anywhere.

Later, these groups were organised into congregations and districts and parishes were defined. Then they were called "Christians," the first use of this appellation being at Antioch.

The Romanist claim to priority is an old one, but it does not stand the test of history. The title "Catholic Church" (meaning the "church universal") was originally given to the Christian Church on account of its not being confined to Jews but embracing other nationalities. The earliest use of this title was about 166 A.D., whereas the Roman Catholic Church as such did not come into existence until several centuries afterward, when the original church divided in consequence of the rivalry between the bishops of Rome and Constantinople.

The letters 'cf'

I received a question from Johann recently requesting if I could assist him understand what the letters 'cf' meant in front of a Bible verse or quotation? A good question and one taken for granted by so many, who see the letters but never look up the answer. They read the Bible verse...but ignore those letters. I answer your question Johann as best and accurate as possible.

The abbreviation cf. (short for the Latin: confer/conferatur, both meaning "compare") is used in writing to refer the reader to other material to make a comparison with the topic being discussed. Hoping this explains your question. +David.

MIND YOUR WORDS!

When we speak or when giving a sermon we really do have to watch our words! For the simple reason that none of us know what the person standing or sitting opposite us is going through, or has recently gone through. An example I can quote is of a well known named person. John Wesley, the great evangelist who looked on the world as his parish, expected of others the same spirit of service and sacrifice of which he himself was such a shining example.

Once he showed his indignant anger with two brothers who, both bachelors, seemed to give so little to the church and its mission.

He rebuked them, and they remained silent under his censure until he had finished.

Then one explained, "A member of the church has got deeply into debt, and my brother and I live on a pennyworth of parsnips a day in order to pay off his debts and set him on his feet again. John Wesley never again condemned anyone before learning all the circumstances.

+David.

I know of a lonely old woman, soured and embittered, who will never see her son or grandchildren again. I know a successful business man who hasn't a real friend in the world. I know of a thousand sad and silly quarrels that will never be patched up. And all because someone is too proud to say "sorry".

To them, and to all in similar circumstances, I pass on and offer this advice:

An apology is a friendship preserver,
Is often a debt of honour,
Is never a sign of weakness,
Is an antidote for hatred,
Costs nothing but one's pride,
And always saves far, far more than it ever costs.

Now for a more cheerful and uplifting story. Just over 50 years ago an Alfred Hull of Luton planted an apple pip. It took root and grew and in 1963 one apple appeared which he gave to his daughter, Pamela.

The next year the tree bore 22lbs of apples, all crisp, juicy and golden. But, tragically, by this time Pamela had sadly died of cancer. To find out what species of apple he was growing, Mr Hull sent samples to the Royal Horticultural Society. After many tests, they told him that somehow he had developed a new apple which was so good that it could be developed commercially. Mr Hull was asked to choose a name for it.

He remembered that first apple, and told them he wanted it to be called "Pam's Delight." And so Alfred Hull's apples will be an everlasting memorial to the daughter he loved.

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble."

"FOLLOW JESUS NOT DENOMINATIONALISM "

+David, OSJ (Wales)

Why Not A New Testament Church In Your Home?

I have thought long and hard about the word "Church" Why not a new church based on the New Testament and conducted in one's home, like an Oratory. When reading newspapers or watching television these days, many Church leaders do not speak for the church members within. Neither it seems are keeping to Biblical Scripture, or do not comprehend such Scripture, yet they do ram their self agendas onto the church faithful. May I offer a few suggestions on finding a New Testament church today...

I would simply and calmly remind such persons to "Follow Jesus and NOT Denominationalism". Why do such people ask, "Are you a Catholic, Anglican, Methodist etc?" The simple answer is "I am a Christian in God's Holy Church". I feel people are putting in place barriers to Christian Fellowship. Does it really matter what church we belong too? If we are followers of Jesus Christ then we rightly are CHRISTIANS full stop.

I would suggest the name of a congregation is a good place to begin. Examine the gospel being preached. Compare the practice with the New Testament pattern.

Whenever possible, we should seek to join ourselves with an established congregation... (again note not this or that church).

There are benefits the Lord designed for us from such fellowship especially when a congregation is completely and scripturally organised.

But it is not always possible to find a congregation of the Lord... Where the authority of the apostles' doctrine is respected. Where the worship is in Spirit and truth. Where the church is engaged in the work the Lord intended.

In such cases, it is possible to start the Lord's church in one's own home...

Priscilla and Aquila had churches meet in their home - read Romans 16:3-5. 1 Colossians. 16:19. As well as other Christians in the first century. Colossians. 4:15; Philemon.1:2. Many families have met in their homes for worship. Indeed, many of the established churches today began with Christians meeting in a home.

[If you wish to start a church in your home, perhaps the following suggestions may be helpful...]

GIVE PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION

TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST...Remember, this is how Christ adds people to His church universal through the gospel, He calls us - 1. 2 Thessalonians 2:14.

As we heed the gospel call, the Lord adds us to His body, the church - Acts 2:41,47.

That is why it is so important that the gospel not be perverted in any way Galatians 1 1:6-9. If the gospel we have obeyed is different from that revealed in the Scriptures...

By changing either the facts or commands of the gospel ...then we have not understood, and the Lord has not added us to His church!

If the church in your home holds to a perverted gospel...You may be the nicest people, but you are still not reforming people. You may profess the name of Christ, both as individuals and as a church, but you are not truly the people of God, nor a part of the New Testament Church! As you give consideration to the gospel, the studying of the two subjects below may prove helpful...

Conversions in the Book of Acts.

Baptism - Both can be found within Internet website studies.

GIVE PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION

TO YOUR INTENTION...

Why would you, or are you wanting to start a church in your home?

Is it because you are fed up with the 'fog' being preached by leaders way off course in promoting Biblical Scriptures? Or feel you can't get along with people in another congregation?

Is it because you have problems submitting to authority (e.g., Priests, Ministers)?

The Lord knows your heart, and will bless your efforts only if properly motivated to serve the Lord faithfully according to His will, To worship Him in Spirit and truth To be simply Christians, members of His body, the church. To one day becoming scripturally organised as a church (with priests and deacons)

Remember that unless the Lord builds the house, labour will be in vain - Psalm 127:1.

[Having obeyed the gospel of Christ in its purity and simplicity, armed with the proper intention to serve the Lord in all things, you are ready to begin. As you meet in your home, be sure to.....

FOLLOW THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN -

WORSHIP ON THE LORD'S DAY...

The first day of the week, when the disciples came together Acts 20:7.

The first day of the week, when the disciples laid by in store 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

One may worship other times, but the Lord's day is essential!

WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH...

Engage in prayer

We have several examples of group prayer in the early church - Acts 4:23-24; 12:5.12

Paul called for prayers to be offered in every place - 1 Timothy 2:1.8; 3:1:15.

Engage in Song

Commands to sing can be found in Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15.

Singing hymns praises God and edifies the brethren.

Engage in the Word

Teaching or preaching was part of public worship in the early church. Acts 20:7.

If priests or preachers are not present, don't worry, just read the Scriptures. One might also listen to recorded sermons, or read Bible studies from the Internet or other sources.

Engage in the Lord's Supper.

Also called the "breaking of bread" "communion" the Eucharist. Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16.

A memorial feast instituted by Jesus Himself 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The fruit of the vine can be simple grape juice, not alcoholic content, in case one person present may be a recovering alcoholic. The bread should be unleavened (like Matzo).

Engage in laying by in store

Also called the "collection" and "contribution" 1 Corinthians 16: 1-2; Romans 15:26.

To provide for the needs of Christians, and to do the work of the church.

[Remember Jesus promised to be present wherever two or three are gathered in His name (Matthew 18:20).] When offered in Spirit and truth, worship can be just as meaningful in a home as in large building. Finally, one more thought or two...

AS YOU CONTINUE:

REACH OUT TO YOUR BRETHREN...

Make contact with Christians in other places even though they may be too far away to assemble on a regular basis. Communicate with them via the Internet or by other means. Perhaps they can provide additional materials for your study and worship. It is edifying to know you are not alone in serving Jesus simply as a Christian.

REACH OUT TO THE LOST...

Seek to share the gospel of Christ with family, friends and neighbours. Offer to have Bible studies with them in your home or theirs. Invite them to your worship on the Lord's Day in your home, so many enjoy even one day out from their home, to meet another person. This now appears more so than ever after the isolation from COVID. Don't forget that we have a Great Commission given by our Lord. Matthew 28:18-20.

REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY...

As you grow, consider renting or building a meeting place other than your home. Many people are hesitant to worship in a home; as you rent, then build, it develops credibility as a congregation in the eyes of the community. Some communities have strict rules regarding the use of a home for worship; as you grow, the need to rent or buy a central meeting place will become necessary.

Consider what will be expedient in your community in reaching out to the lost - 1 Peter 2:12.

CONCLUSION

There are certainly benefits to starting a church in a home...It provides an opportunity for the Lord to bless those in the neighbourhood and community through your presence. It is easier to create a sense of family and closeness among the members. The commute to services is nice if the church is meeting in your house. But again, whenever possible we should seek to join ourselves with an established congregation / membership...

There are benefits and opportunities to be found in a larger group, Especially when a group is completely and scripturally organised.

What is important is that we are seeking only to "Follow Jesus.

Without Denominationalism"...

Not some man-made church or denomination. To be simply Christians, members of the body of Christ, His church

My prayer is that in some way this article may encourage others who love Jesus to serve Him as His Word directs, even praying at home in silence and tranquillity to be nothing more than those who "Follow Jesus Without Denominationalism"...

Amen

-oOo-

Editor:

In the interests of balance, the following article is offered in favour of Same Sex Marriage in Church.

The views expressed, as in the majority of our published article, largely reflect the personal opinions and experiences of their author and do not necessarily reflect the views of OSJ.

As an Order holding orthodox and traditional views on matters theological and scriptural, we do not subscribe to many of the current liberal views being voiced more globally, but we do need to be compassionate and take these views with some seriousness even if we do not agree with them.

We should be aware these differences of opinion as to how Holy Writ should be interpreted cause deep hurt on both sides and may not be reconcilable. In the end it will come down to whether the view expressed can be clearly and substantively justified and supported by Holy Scripture or not, rather than any heart felt, moving but scripturally empty, emotionally based anecdotal rhetoric. It sounds harsh but unless evidenced by Holy Scripture we deceive ourselves and we put our souls, and those of others, in great risk and danger.

This is no game and all our considered responses matter. God's will is God's will, and as Christians we are lovingly by God called to obedience, but we are given 'free will', the choice as to whether we accept or reject God's bidding.

'Free will' comes with great responsibility and long lasting consequences that go far beyond us as individuals and far beyond our own generation, even if we do nothing. We need to take great care with all our choices for all of God's gifts are entrusted to us for the benefit of others, not for the fulfilling of our own personal desires or sensual pleasures or power games, and this applies to both sides of the argument over same sex 'marriage'.

There is too much to lose to make this 'personal'. It is far bigger than that.

'Not my will, but thine....' however painful it may be. And it will be. +Ian

RECONSIDERING LENT

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

I never liked chocolate. Nor sweets. Something to do with my taste buds, I guess. Gave my parents a lovely 'let-out' for having a grizzly constant whining asking for ice-cream when out on visits or holidays - cheap holidays in the post war years but fondly recalled.

So when it came to giving things up for Lent, where should I begin. A life of prayer has encouraged me in these later years of life, to give instead of give up. To spend more time in prayer for the world, a privilege and pleasure of a monastic routine and prayer discipline in my tiny oratory here at my Devon flat.

Time is plentiful and early morning rising gives quiet and peaceful attention to the needs of others and the concerns of our troubled world.

Ash Wednesday occurs as I write this piece. My Palm Cross from last year's Passiontide will be burned and ashes applied to the forehead in the shape of the Cross, our Saviour's symbol of redemption and resurrection.

As death surrounds us, surrounded us through the pandemic and surrounds us in daily news bulletins from around a messed up world, demonstrates the ultimate 'Be not afraid! I have overcome the world', the promise of a Saving Grace for wretches seeking penitence, forgiveness, absolution for hatred and rejection, with assurance that 'Jesus is Mine'.

Recent hurtful decisions by the established Church of England over the heart-rending isolation of gay Christians, now offering a Blessing but not a permanent sanction of marriage, and still a painful 'marginalisation' from so many church fellowships is 'work in progress' but seriously disturbing as, still, numerous countries worldwide persecute and punish same sex relationships, when so many seek a firm lead from our national church, bending its tradition but failing to show that we know what is right and declare it to the world.

Too many 'other fellowships' dictating to the mainstream what they think Scripture is saying and deliberately misrepresenting it to the nascent churches of other emerging nations.

So Lent this year, for me, will be a different 'option'. It is a chance to reconsider new position on the freedom Christ offers us by His sacrifice, once and for all, for us all.

What one author termed 'ash-worthy'. Are you ash-worthy in your tolerance, kindness, concern, prayer for others less fortunate than yourself, or differently orientated from birth - or realign long after birth that their personal desires were differently ordered from your own, and showing compassion, thought, understanding and explanation?

If the answer is no, don't burn your palm-cross nor apply it to your forehead.

Apply it to your heart instead. Make these six weeks before we stand in front of the Cross at Our Lord's Passion and pledge a new thinking - it is never too late, as I, at eighty am finding in my quiet time before The Lord.

Come out to a new vision.

Taking on something new has been a liberation from the entrapment of a pandemic. So many who were able or willing to push themselves through the restrictions and difficulties have been refreshed and stimulated by a new activity, a new sharing, a new closer look at skill or opportunity they have found themselves in a startlingly aware [a different woke] direction and motivation.

Have you?

I was brought up believing and driven to believe obeying the rules without question was the right and correct thing to do. As an elderly - never thought I would make it - I am realizing breaking the traditional Christian rules, in certain circumstances, is the absolutely right thing to do. Rethink them in the context of your private prayer and ask God to steer you into new directions on your spiritual journey, which surely should never end in a cul-de-sac but spur you into pastures new.

Of course, this is only my own personal 'thinking aloud' and I may well be on the wrong track.

Tell me, if you think you have a better explanation.

We are in this country gifted with free speech, earned over tragic years of prejudiced history and misunderstanding. Now time to change?

A new openness and a new focus.

It is your decision, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter which gives us, or should do, a warm feeling this Lent that you are developing and furthering His Kingdom of love in your life - and mine. And His Name be praised.

May it be so for His Name's Sake.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ Lent 2023

-oOo-

Not so much what I think, but what God thinks.....

Not so much what I say, but what God says.....

Not so much what I want, but what God wants.....

Not so much my way, but instead His perfect way...

+Jan

*'Thy will be
done,
On Earth
As it is in
Heaven.....'*