

November 2015, thoughts from Father Charles:

A Time of Remembering

November is, of course, a month of remembering. It starts with the festivals of All Saints and All Souls, continues on into 'Bonfire Night', and is then quickly followed by Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day. It feels like a time for reflecting upon things past and present; and upon those people, known and unknown, who are no longer with us; and it provides a sort of lens for us to look through into the future.

Each of these events has a different and particular character with a rather different emphasis. And, for me, it's also appropriate that they take place over the autumnal season which seems to abound with associations of melancholy, as the air turns cool, the skies go grey, summer is ended; people and nature seem to turn inward. Yet, it is also a time for celebration of harvest, and the thanksgiving for 'bounteous fecundity'. Like all seasons there's the combination of features which are positive and those which are less so. So too in these occasions of remembrance which contain melancholic elements and also opportunities for thanksgiving for the actions of others and insights into how we live in our world now.

All Saints and All Souls

There is often some confusion between these two festivals, which is rather dependent upon theological perspective. When All Saints Day became formalised within the Church (by Pope Gregory, in about 731) its focus was upon 'all the saints, martyrs and confessors and of all the just, made perfect, throughout the world'. In this sense it is concerned with those who have attained heaven. All Souls Day, however, may be seen as rather different and concerned with those who have died and not yet reached heaven.

Following the Reformation the festival of All Saints was retained by the Anglican Church. Thus a theological distinction crept in; since, according to Protestant theology, all Christian believers are Saints, then All Saints Day is one on which all Christians are celebrated, both past and present. This is perhaps best shown with the concurrent observation of both festivals of All Saints and All Souls within the Lutheran Church.

The essence of these two days is that in addition to the many hundreds of 'known' saints, there are many thousands, if not millions, of 'unknown' saints who are alive now, or have lived and given their lives for the furtherance of the Kingdom. This is true throughout the Christian world and is equally true amongst the communion of saints who have worshipped, and do worship, here at All Saints. At this time we remember all these people – known and unknown.

Bonfire Night

After 45 years on the English throne Elizabeth I was dying and her successor would be James IV of Scotland (and James I of England). This excited the English Catholics, as he was believed to be warmly disposed to them and was considered likely to halt the persecutions.

This turned out to be the case, and after his accession recusancy fines were ended, Catholics were appointed to key roles and a general relaxation of rules took place. However, in response to increasing pressure from individuals and groups with very strongly held views, (and a couple of minor Catholic plots) a conference was held at Hampton Court (1604) to try to accommodate as many perspectives as possible. Sadly, neither the Puritan nor Catholic extremists could be satisfied, leading to the return of Catholic persecution and the conspiracy of the 'Gunpowder Plot'.

Broadly speaking, we have forgotten the horror that existed during this episode of our history, with large scale persecution and torture, burnings and killings, victimization and exploitation of both Catholics and Protestants. And, a time in which the innocent suffered as much as any other grouping.

Whilst we have turned 'Bonfire Night' into quite a lot of fun, it is useful to remind ourselves that this is an act of remembrance for the terrible things Christians did to each other, simply because of differences of opinion. Worse still, we should also remember that in many and various ways this continues in our world, now. We read of it daily in our papers, where we are provided with accounts of those with extremist views who allow these to override all human values. They even override the values of the faith they hold so dear – and this is true for all three of the Abrahamic Faiths.

Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day

The first Armistice event was held at Buckingham Palace in 1919, exactly one year to the minute from the point the armistice was signed by the Allies and Germany. Since this event took place at this point it had a clear focus on World War I, with the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front. The Act of Remembrance, rightly, became an annual event, always taking place at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

However, Remembrance Sunday emerged during World War II so as to continue the tradition but also leave the week free for wartime production. This has resulted in a very slight difference between the days, with one being concerned primarily with the First World War and the other with both wars and subsequent conflicts.

The essence of these days remains the same. As we stand in the Two Minute Silence we remember and honour all those who have paid the price, the ultimate sacrifice, for our freedom. Furthermore, we stand aware that others continue to take their place, willing to offer their lives and futures for what is held to be right.

Remembrance

It is most certainly a month of remembering. Fr Kim has previously talked about the fact that 'remembrance' is more than the 'recollection of facts'. It is a 'point at which' the past is invited into the present. A 'point at which' the act of remembrance of people, places and shared experiences can inform our lives in the present with greater depth and meaning.

These three episodes of Remembrance in November focus our attention.

- On the Saints of the Church, those who have gone ahead and those who live now, providing examples of how we might, in our various ways, work for the coming Kingdom.
- On our need to live according to our Christian and human values; and not allow extreme or fundamental perspectives lead to actions that are contrary to what is right and just.
- On the gift of life and future that has been given by so many, over the years and throughout the world, so that we and others may benefit from the rights attributed to human existence.

Let us pray that, from these various Acts of Remembrance, we can extract meaning and learning that will inform our words and actions so as to further the Kingdom.

With Every Blessing



Watching for the Kingfisher

This is a book of poetry by Ann Lewin. She has a distinct voice and uses ideas and images from the natural world and daily life to give opportunities for insights, wisdom and windows of spiritual thought. Over this year I have twice listened to her poetry referenced in sermons (once from the lips of Dean David at the Cathedral). And on both occasions I was captured by the thoughts and, as a result, bought the book.

In keeping with this time of year, here is a short poem on the subject of the 'Year's Mind'. These are the names of people remembered on the day of their death, or funeral, that are read within the daily intercessions. In reading this poem, keep in mind that the poet's name is Ann. (Fr Charles)

Year's Mind

Every year, I pass the day
 Not knowing. Someday
 Someone will say. "Oh yes,
 Ann died a year ago."

I pray they will remember
 A day when I lived to the full,
 A day of celebration
 Of the gift of life.

Lewin, A. (2009). *Watching for the Kingfisher*. Canterbury Press: Norwich

ALL SAINTS PARISH RETREAT

19-21 FEBRUARY 2016

ABBAY HOUSE GLASTONBURY

Conductor: The Most Revd Dr Rowan Williams, Lord Williams of Oystermouth

Many of you signed up for this Retreat some months ago, please could you confirm that you still wish to keep your place?

I won't be around at Church until about mid-November, but can be contacted through the Parish Office.

Liz Badman *Licensed Lay Minister*

Unpacking the Collect for Bible Sunday

Sermon preached on the Last Sunday after Trinity by Jessica Smith

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Today's Collect must be one of the most well-known prayers in the Church of England, especially that phrase '*read mark learn and inwardly digest*'. It's been used by those in authority - from the school classroom to the office - who want their subordinates to pay attention, possibly even by some who don't know its origin.

The author of the collect is Thomas Cranmer, of course, the compiler of the Book of Common Prayer of 1549, and I just read the Prayer Book version. Its former place in the Church's calendar was the Second Sunday in Advent, which became known as Bible Sunday. These days it is the Collect for the Last Sunday after Trinity.

The Collects are sometimes addressed to Jesus Christ, but most often to the Father, with the words *Almighty God*, giving emphasis to God's power. This is the only collect to begin with the invocation '*Blessèd Lord*'. Here, *blessèd* has the same meaning as the Latin *benedictus*, as in the canticle at Morning Prayer known as the Benedictus, beginning '*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.*' God the creator is blessed in the sense of being praised and adored by his people and all creation. Blessings are bestowed on us by God which we can't, of course, return in kind. We give back to him by praising and magnifying his name. It is a signal way in which the love and generosity which emanates from God is constantly moving between him and us, and a reminder we're made in his image. God is addressed in this Collect with love and praise for the inestimable gift of the Scriptures, the Big Story of Salvation. It's told in a collection of individual stories, with God at the centre - what he has done and continues to do in the world and with the human race, beginning with creation through to the day yet to come when he will wrap up history at the end time.

The assertion that God himself '*caused* all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning' may be a difficult one to grasp, and why orthodoxy is so important. We know only too well the stumbling blocks put in our way by the delving haphazardly into the Bible to extrapolate isolated passages to suit particular causes. Such random plucking serves to promote at best misinformation and at worst heresy, empowering solely those who promote it. Nevertheless, as St Paul writes in the second letter to Timothy, '*All scripture is inspired by God...*' (2 Tim 3:16) Literally that means God-breathed. As God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7) and the man became a living being, so he has done with his living word in the Scriptures. Holy Scripture, as enshrined in the canon law of the Church of England, '*contains all things necessary to salvation.*' – even if a huge spectrum of theological opinion has to be held in balance! It is there for our good and God's glory.

'*Grant that we may in such wise hear them.*' Those who quote the *read mark learn and inwardly digest* phrase may miss the short one which precedes it. *Hear them.* In Cranmer's day *hearing* the scriptures would have been the way the less-educated (i.e. the majority) would have engaged with them. (No doubt their listening skills would have put ours to shame!) One commentator believes the phrasing there should be *hear them read* rather than *hear them, comma, read ...* etc. Interesting thought! Over the last dozen or so years we have become used to having the texts of the Collect and readings for the day in front of us on the pew sheet, so we can read and hear at the same time, which can be helpful. Nevertheless, part of the task of the one reading is to familiarise themselves with the text, to read what precedes and comes after it, to ponder its meaning and give due expression to it so that it's illuminated for the listeners. Readers will have different insights, which may give us fresh understanding.

Something I enjoy is reading poetry with others. What's so enjoyable is firstly the reading aloud – tasting and feeling the words in such a way they come alive more than when read silently from the page. Another pleasure is in the listening, which likewise draws out meaning

and nuance, especially if the same poem is read by two or three people. And a third pleasure comes in discussing the poems. The reading aloud and hearing of scripture came before silent reading. Not only is the *meaning* enlivened but the *style* also, so we have an idea of *how* it is to be understood – as literature, as history or as law, for example. The books of the Bible were written mainly for a community, not for individuals, so we'll often find that the message addresses us more clearly when we hear and study them with others. The first part of the Mass is the Liturgy of the Word, proclaimed and listened to. An advantage of older translations, in my view, is that they're more rhythmical and pleasurable, both to read aloud and to listen to, which in turn makes them memorable. Example from the Authorized version of 1611: "*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger,*" (Ps 8:2) Compare that with the New Revised Standard Version: "*Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.*" Enough said!

Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them. It's indeed important to hear the scriptures read aloud, but it's also important to let the written word take root in us, and daily reading in private is an important part of our Christian lives. Together with '*hear*' we have no fewer than five verbs by which we pray to take in the scriptures to the depths of our souls, so that they may become part of our very being. We're fortunate in the present day to have available a wide range of biblical commentary, not all of which has been written solely for clerics and theologians. There're now several which, while having been granted the *nihil obstat* (i.e. being attested by a church censor that a book is free from doctrinal or moral error) can be enjoyed and understood by a much wider readership. Alive Publishing produces the excellent *Bible Alive* notes to accompany the daily Lectionary readings. Short and simply written, they're nonetheless profound, enabling the reader to make links with present day life, ending with a prayer to commit what is read to heart.

It's not always easy, hearing, reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting the word of God in the Bible. There're chunks we'd prefer to push to the side of the plate rather than inwardly digest. What about the seemingly indigestible bits? Our forebears' belief was that the slow digestive process of cattle was well-suited to describe the process of consuming Scripture – some parts need more rumination than others! That stands in marked contrast to the language and expectations of a fast-food generation. The older wisdom calls us to a more gentle rhythm of prayerful reading in which patience, silence and receptivity are vital ingredients. In a world of sound-bites we need to learn again the art of listening with the ear of the heart.

It's a gem, the Collect for today. It's in one sense a microcosm of the scriptures: beginning with the *Blessèd Lord* of the Old Testament, it takes us through to the passion of our saviour Jesus Christ and leaves us in the hope of everlasting life. In another sense it mirrors the Eucharist, beginning with the liturgy of the word, being comforted and strengthened by it, before we move on to the second part, the Liturgy of the Sacrament, as we embrace the

hope of everlasting life by receiving the body and blood of Christ. They complement each other, those two. The digestion of Scripture helps deepen the experience of receiving the sacrament. The ingestion of the body and blood of Christ feeds our hearts and minds to give us patience to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the word of God in Scripture. What a feast!

JOIN OUR ACT OF REMEMBRANCE ON ARMISTICE DAY

You are invited to join us for this year's Whiteladies Road Annual Act of Remembrance led by Fr Charles Sutton at the St John's war memorial on the junction of Apsley Road and Whiteladies Road on Armistice Day, Wednesday, November 11.

For the tenth consecutive year the event will be attended by clergy and members of the churches which comprise *Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham and Redland* as well as local residents, pupils and staff from local schools, representatives of businesses in Whiteladies Road and officers from Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

In the past two years the event attracted an estimated 400 people who filled the small pedestrianised square in which the memorial is located.

A brass ensemble from Redland High School will play at this year's event which starts at 10.50 am. Two minutes silence will be observed at 11 am and it is expected that around a dozen poppy wreaths will be laid.

The Last Post and *Reveille* will be sounded by bugler Sergeant Major Martin Dove of the Bristol Army Cadet Force's Corps of Drums. Also present will be Royal British Legion standard bearer Douglas Sandrone.

IN THIS MONTH.... NOVEMBER 1930

CANON V. S. S. COLES recollected by the Vicar, Canon Gillson.

Those who have reason to love and revere the memory of Canon Stuckey Coles, and they are many, will find a treat in store for them in the book which has been produced by the Rev. J.F. Briscoe. It is a composite work consisting of two brief memories which bring back the delightful personality of our old friend to our minds so that we can almost hear him speak and watch him laugh again. The second section of the book consists of letters, some of which are of great interest. Then follow some unpublished Papers and Addresses - "Fifty years of the Catholic Revival," "Twenty-five years in Oxford," and others, and a selection of hymns.

There is one point which I think might have received more notice and that was his great interest in the Church's Overseas Missions and in particular his ardent devotion to the Oxford Mission to Calcutta. One incident will suffice to illustrate. Long after he had retired from his work in Oxford and was living a more-or-less invalid life at Shepton Beauchamp, I asked him to preach here for O.M.C. on the eve of the Epiphany, the date he remembered being January 5th. As the day approached I felt full of compunction at having asked him to leave home in mid-winter. When he arrived in his multitude of wrappings he told me he could not stay the night as he would have to go on to London after Evensong. The preacher at the Anniversary High Mass for O.M.C. had failed and he had been asked to take his place and felt he could not refuse. As the Mass was at 10 a.m. he must travel by night and had looked out a train at 11.30 and had ordered a taxi to call for him. It was impossible to dissuade him and about 11 o'clock he set off for the station. I had hardly gone to bed when the front door bell rang and on going to the door I found Canon Coles in the highest spirits in spite of the fact that the train he had looked out did not exist, and there was nothing for it but to sit up till 3.30 when there was a train getting to London about breakfast time. He refused to consider the suggestion of sending a wire to excuse his absence, and after a cup of tea went boldly forth a second time into the winter night and preached his sermon for the Mission.

[Canon Stuckey Coles was born in the old Rectory of Shepton Beauchamp, Somerset, in 1845, returning there to the living for 12 years after his father died in 1872, then again in 1909 to spend his last days. He was for 25 years from 1884 to 1909 Librarian of Pusey House in Oxford. As Canon Gillson illustrates, 'V S S C' was decidedly a character with a great gift for friendship, and Briscoe's book contains other appealing stories about him. He apparently often preached to his congregation in the Somerset dialect familiar to them. "To see Stuckey", writes Briscoe, "walking up and down the aisle of a Somerset church, talking to the country folk in the dialect that they loved and understood, was something never to be forgotten." He had a rather unprepossessing appearance, being somewhat rotund and having eyebrows of different colours. At the beginning of one October term he entered into conversation with a youthful freshman on a train between London and Oxford. In the course of their talk the freshman informed Stuckey that he had a letter of introduction to a man

called Coles at a place called Pusey House, but did not think that he would present it. As Coles got out of the carriage he turned to the freshman and said: 'I should take that letter to Coles if I were you, you will know him when you see him, as he has got one white eyebrow and one black one,' and then went chuckling down the platform. He is the author of several hymns, including "We pray Thee, heavenly Father," and "Ye who own the faith of Jesus". He died in 1929 aged 84 and is buried in Shepton churchyard].

**Sermon preached at All Saints, Clifton, at 8am & 11am St Luke the Evangelist 18
October 2015**

Amos 5.6-7,10-15

Hebrews 4.12-end

Mark 10.25-45

Today the Church remembers St Luke the Evangelist. However, Luke is regarded as both Evangelist and Physician. He was Greek speaking, from Antioch in Syria, and it is not certain if he was a convert from Paganism or Judaism. He might have been a Gentile or a Hellenised Jew. The Gospel of Luke is very much written for the Gentiles.

The term 'Evangelist' comes from the Greek *Bringer of Good News*.

In the early Church the person who brought the gospel to a town or city was an Evangelist.

The word 'Gospel' comes from the Old English *gōd-spell* meaning 'Good News' or 'Glad Tidings'. Some of you may remember the musical "Godspell".

The Gospel of Luke and also The Acts of the Apostles are attributed to him, and in both works he begins by addressing the writings to Theophilus. Theophilus means 'Dear Reader' or 'God Lover', so they are addressed to us, though there could also have been someone he knew called by that name.

The writer of the Epistle to the Colossians says Paul called him 'most dear Physician.' He is mentioned in Paul's epistle to Philemon as Paul's 'fellow worker' and also in the deuteropauline epistle of Colossians as Beloved Physician and in 2 Timothy the writer says 'only Luke is with me'.

He was with Paul on at least three occasions in his missions recorded in The Acts of the Apostles. So we know something about him. An introduction to a 4thC document says '*Luke a native of Antioch, by profession a physician. He had become a disciple of the Apostle Paul and later followed Paul to Paul's martyrdom. Having served the Lord continuously unmarried and without children, filled with the Holy Spirit he died at the age of 84 years.*'

For those who like symbols, Luke's symbol is that of an ox or a bull with wings. Luke may possibly have been one of the 70 sent out to preach and heal, whom we heard about in this morning's gospel. Though at the beginning of Luke's gospel he says he was not an eyewitness of Jesus's ministry; in The Acts of the Apostles he says he did go on missions with Paul. Tradition tells us that he was the first icon painter. He is the patron saint of artists, physicians, surgeons, students and butchers. In Luke's gospel there are many stories and accounts of Jesus healing the sick and troubled.

So here we have a man who can be seen as a good example to us.

In this morning's Gospel reading Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" In this reading Jesus is sending some of them out to practise the skills they had watched Jesus exercise. There is a sense of urgency in Jesus's message, he knows he has little time and won't be around for much longer. 'The Kingdom of God has come near you.' If people don't respond to His message of the Kingdom then it might be too late for them. If they reject him now there will be no more warnings.

'Peace to this house'. Jesus's contemporaries were not a particularly peaceful bunch. They weren't interested in peace with the Samaritans (and why is a subject for another time!), or with the Romans who had come in and occupied their land. Here we see echoes of the situation and unrest between the Palestinians and Israelis today. Only this time it is the Israelis taking over and occupying Palestinian land. Jesus's contemporaries wanted to get rid of the Romans once and for all, with war. However, Jesus's vision was one of peace. He knew Israel's God as a God of Love and Peace, full of grace and powerful, unconditional, healing love. The message the 70 took out was stern and it was urgent; it offered a way from ruin into a new Kingdom of peace. That message is as fresh today as it was then.

God's kingdom is one of Love, Peace and new creation. To reject this they, and we, reject God Himself. So, it is this life-giving power flowing through Jesus – and now through us that enables us to heal. Now the words 'healing' and 'salvation' come from the same source and the healing that Jesus brought about was totally holistic.

St Paul tells us that we, the Church, are Christ's Body here on earth and so we, The Church, have the same calling, which is to bring healing into our world. Jesus told the 70 that he was '*Sending them out like lambs into the midst of wolves*'. And it can feel like this for us at times. We see the horrors that regimes and countries inflict upon others who are different, in their beliefs, in their customs.

We see the flow of refugees, hear reports of the elderly and the very young as well as the fit struggling on foot across Europe most of them just in the clothes they stand up in having run out of money and our hearts reach out to them. We have seen the Ebola epidemic in Africa and seen the sacrifice that some of the nursing staff had paid for their love and their care of their patients, but they keep going on. This is healing and sacrificial love. Are we taking risks to bring about the Kingdom of God? As Christians we should be, in whatever way we can. We must not let evil take over. We must remember that we have the strength of the Holy Spirit to lead us and we have the Gospel stories to guide us.

When Jesus heals he says to the person he has healed,

'Go, your sins are forgiven' or

'Go, your faith has made you whole'.

Made you whole – when Jesus heals He doesn't just heal the physical or mental ailment, he cleanses and heals the whole person so that they can go and become the person they are truly meant to be. As I said previously, 'healing' and 'salvation' come from the same source. The Church, Christ's Body in the world today, exists to proclaim salvation – healing, wholeness, forgiveness of sins and a new direction for our lives, in Jesus's name. To be growing and effective churches we need to do this.

We need to encourage each other, and anyone else who comes here, to receive the sacraments of Healing, and also of Reconciliation (by that I mean Confession and Absolution). Both sacraments are very much tied up with each other. We need to pray for each other and for healing of relationships. Much of our healing, wholeness and salvation has to do with our relationships within ourselves and to our neighbour and to God. We need to forget our own petty conflicts amongst ourselves, learn to see each other as Healers, learn to love each other so that love and that passion for bringing about the Peace of the Kingdom of God becomes our over-ruling passion and joy.

Jesus sent the 70 out to be risk-takers, let us like them take risks for God and let us dare to ask for prayers for healing for ourselves and for others.

Liz Badman

From the Bishop: Rights and Wrongs.....

The issue of human rights is ever before us. Rightly so. If we want a “newer kinder” mode of politics, then there must be some protections for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. You might think that this is an open and shut case, but there are those who believe that we in the UK should scrap the various commitments we have to the six (yes, six) treaties that there are on human rights.

It can be argued that the contemporary concept of human rights had its genesis in the 18th century. It was however in 1948 that the narrative began with serious intent, and with the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then the whole issue has taken off and most contemporary legislation, directly or indirectly, is to some extent intrinsically fashioned by our understanding of the concept of human rights.

Broadly, I think people recognize that Human Rights Conventions are a good thing. The problem is that human rights can often create a collision course between the rights of one group and the rights of another. The legislation can be utterly ambiguous.

At present, on grounds of their 'human rights', those who are imprisoned but don't smoke, (apparently a clear minority), are seeking to get Her Majesty's Prisons declared a complete no-smoking zone. Imprisoned smokers don't much like this and prison staff are nervous that any such ban could make their prisons unmanageable.

I think we all swallow hard when someone wanted for terrorist offences in another country can't be extradited from the UK, because to do so would be a breach of their human rights!

In an article in the Guardian back in 2014, Eric Posner made a very serious comment: *“The truth is that human rights law has failed to accomplish its objectives. There is little evidence that human rights treaties, on the whole have improved the well-being of people.”*

Part of the problem Posner says, is a fundamental disagreement as to whether human rights are political rights – the right to vote, to free speech, to religious freedom, to not be arbitrarily detained etc., or as the Soviets argued, that human rights are social or economic rights – the right to work, to healthcare, education etc. These two streams seem to have run together in our European understanding. The outcome of this confusion has led to, well, further confusion.

What does qualify as a human right? Sometimes it feels as if what a political party promises today becomes a human right tomorrow! What criteria do we have for settling the question of which minority group has a greater claim to its rights, when those rights are in tension with others?

Most of the developed nations have signed up to the various human rights treaties and Europe has been at the centre of all that. The problem is that often, so-called 'strategic' or 'financial' factors can get in the way of compliance with what we have signed up for. Turning a blind eye to regimes that pay lip service to human rights on the basis that we need an airfield there, or there's money to be made if we trade with them, in the end, will make our commitment look very thin.

The basic idea of a Charter of Human Rights has to be a really good thing. Simply signing a charter and then colluding with regimes that ignore the bits of paper they have signed, needs to be called for what it is – hypocrisy. Politics has to be about compromise – I think we would all accept that – but there is a good deal of distance between compromise and blatant hypocrisy.

Right now there are too many seriously vulnerable people on the planet who require protection.

From the perspective of believers, there is a further point too. The message of many of the prophets of the Old Testament of the Bible, is that privilege (of being God's people) also brings responsibility (to act justly and mercifully). The privilege of power brings with it the responsibility to exercise that power for the common good. Governments and all organisations, not least our global commercial institutions, need to be responsible in the exercise of their undoubted power and its effect upon others. But there's yet another important point, that I fear we are losing sight of. This works from the other direction too. Rights based legal systems, can inhibit the concept of personal responsibility. Not everything that happens to me is 'my fault', but some things really are. Grown up people realise that there are people whose plight is not of their own making and that they need others to help them. Grown up societies encourage people to take responsibility for their actions.

When people stop taking responsibility for what they need to take responsibility for, things become difficult, and sometimes justice can be the victim.

+Mike

November 2015