

**Peter Hitchens address to City New Year Service
St. Michael's Cornhill, January 2005**

Well, here I finally am in an actual pulpit, instead of the metaphorical one I have occupied so noisily until now. How odd it is that I live and move and have my being in a world in which "preaching" is generally used pejoratively. I reckon it took more courage than almost anything I have ever done to make an explicit favourable reference to Christian belief in a British newspaper - not because of editorial resistance or disapproval, but because such things just are not done among educated professional people in my generation.

My purpose here is to state a simple truth, itself founded on the greater truth that we are the children of a great Father, the Author of Peace and lover of Concord.

It is that by acknowledging the Sovereignty of God over us, and our unworthiness without Him, we most truly attain the sovereignty over ourselves which leads to the nearest possible approximation of God's Kingdom among us.

On this understanding hangs our fundamentally Christian civilisation of law and self-government. In our modern, arrogant rejection of it, and our foolish imagining that we need no grace and owe no service, we have not even attained sovereignty over ourselves, but squalid tyranny and what C.S.Lewis called 'the abolition of man', the destruction of our true nature in a dead, totalitarian world.

But my actual text is a few words from Thomas Cranmer's 1662 Book of Common Prayer, where I now begin and where I intend to end. These words have a sweetness and persuasive beauty that strikes me in the heart each time I hear them read out upon the nineteenth Sunday after Trinity "Forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee".

"Forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee"

And how are we to please Him? How on earth can we possibly be good and just in a world that it is not only fallen, but actively digging itself deeper into the muck that lies at the bottom of the pit into which we have tumbled?

How can we be brave and strong when dealing with the powerful, and gentle and generous in our transactions with the weak?

Where can we find the courage to do what is right instead of what is convenient, good for our careers or safe?

What are the springs of true unselfishness? I don't mean the easy, painless gift to charity or the meaningless bonhomie that turns to viciousness under stress. I mean the real, hard thing.

Where can we find good reasons to be patient, to suffer long and be kind, not to vaunt ourselves or puff ourselves up, not to fail at the moment of the test?

How can we convince ourselves that, as G.K.Chesterton once said in a frightening and haunting passage "What we do here, matters somewhere else"?

We are in a sort of moral twilight, what Milton called "Not light, but darkness visible" We have very little illumination to see by, in a society whose leaders claim to have abandoned the idea that anything is absolutely true or absolutely right. Actually it is worse than that. This pose is a fraud.

In truth, those who dominate our state and culture invite us to make our own choices on one strict condition - that they are the sort of choices they approve of. The modern liberal will defend to the death your right to agree with her completely.

Accusations of 'preaching' and intolerance are levelled only against those who try to defend an older system.

The greatest lie told in modern England is that there are no moral judgements here any more, that our culture is value-free. The enemies of the great Christian law of liberty may not know what they are FOR , but they know very well what they are AGAINST

In truth, a harsh anti-Christian moral code is propounded. Mostly it is subtle and roundabout. But its coldest expression is now found in the most dangerous place- in the schools, in sex education lessons which reduce human love to technique, equipment and passing pleasure, and which offer limitless methods of disconnecting such love from the procreation of children. There is almost no word or expression they will not use, no form of coupling or relationship they will not endorse- except one, and that is marriage.

The supposed purpose of these classes is to reduce disease and unwanted pregnancy. If this is really so, then no educational programme, anywhere in human history, has so utterly failed on its own terms. The more sex education we have, the more sexual infections, underage single-parent pregnancies and convenience abortions there are.

Yet the sex education industry grows in wealth and size and power with each passing year.

This, I fancy, is not the place for a long lecture upon sex education, especially with visual aids. Some of you, I hope, will have read the things I have written about this strange topic elsewhere.

I mention it because it is the most blatant, glaring example of the Enormous Lie which has our society entangled in its net, the lie that we have been liberated from a repressive moral tyranny and ushered into a shining colourful world of free choice, democracy and unstoppable progress. The liberty on offer is actually an enslavement, to pleasure as substitute for happiness, to self indulgence as substitute for mutual love and companionship.

I will, however, make one more point about this paradox of our times. I think it is historically true to say that sexually self-disciplined societies have generally been philosophically and politically free ones. The converse is that slaves (and the citizens of enslaved societies) have generally been allowed promiscuous sexual relations - but utterly denied marriage, private family life or parenthood.

The idea that sexual morality is a tiny corner of the architecture of the universe, patrolled by puritan obsessives, simply is not true. That is why it - and especially the question of marriage - has been at the heart of the war between liberty and despotism since Christianity began.

As D.H.Lawrence interestingly wrote: "It is marriage, perhaps, that has given man the best of his freedom, given him his little kingdom of his own within the big kingdom of the state, given him his foothold of independence on which to stand and resist an unjust state.

"Man and wife, a king and queen with one or two subjects, and a few square yards of territory of their own...

"Make marriage in any serious degree unstable, dissoluble, destroy the permanency of marriage, and the church falls...Break [the marriage tie] and you will have to go back to the overwhelming dominance of the state which existed before the Christian era."

I speak to you as an apostate Marxist who has spent the last 20 years of his life trying to reconstruct a moral universe from the arid wreckage which Marxism leaves behind it. But I have one advantage in having come over from the other side. I know what my enemies and former comrades are thinking.

I know the purpose and nature of the cultural revolution which they seek, why they so enjoy the debauching of Christian moral positions. In many cases, I know it better than they know it themselves, having been deeper into the theory of revolutions than most of them. That purpose, the triumph of the supposedly benevolent state over all, is fatal to almost everything which we under this roof know and enjoy and admire.

And I have come here today to urge those who care about saving a uniquely free, ordered and civilised society to understand the foundations on which it was built, and to engage in a wholehearted defence of them.

Thatcherism had no answer. It turned out to be all about money and I suspect history will treat it with contempt. After all those years in office, the enemy was stronger than he had been before. As for New Labour, despite the ostentatious Christianity of its leader it has energetically pursued the fake liberation which threatens to subject us to state and corporation in a seven-day- a week , 24 hour culture of work first, nannies for the rich, baby farms for the poor and private life when you can spare the time. And to make up for its emptiness, it supplies semi-legal dope, 24-hour drinking and the jangling cacophony of the fruit machine.

Yet there is an ideology, if you like, which eloquently and powerfully opposes this dismantling of love and liberty.

It stands all around us, neglected and ignored by the very people who should love it most. With sweet persistence it continues to pour down the continual dew of its blessing upon us, whether we notice it or not.

The Christianity of the Anglican Church, and especially of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, is a subtle and beautiful philosophy of life and indeed of human self-government, based upon the sovereignty of a merciful God.

Its insistence that we are fallen and unworthy is not pointless self-abasement, as the atheists would have you believe. It is the essential preliminary to the necessary modesty in thought and action which brings men to limit their own exercise of power, and to seek to discover right and equity, justice and truth, rather than assuming that they know -unaided - what they look like.

Its poetry of language, its music and its buildings, is not some kind of aesthetic irrelevance, but an understanding that beauty is telling us something we mere humans do not have the words to understand.

Human logic is inadequate for understanding the universe. No human architect - even one ablaze with faith - could ever design anything as beautiful as an English oak tree or the high peaks of the Himalayas.

Words arranged in certain ways have a power which we do not fully understand. In the music of versicle and response, and the majestic cadences of the psalms, we may encounter the Glory of God. We may perceive that "it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves" and recognise the need for, and the quality of His mercy. Above all, we recognise that liberty comes only to those who willingly embrace a law which is above us all.

At its very heart lies that marriage service which, to the consternation of modernising clerics, cannot quite be persuaded to go away, whose language, not least that great pealing phrase "till death us do part" survives all revisions as an honoured part of the English tongue.

Nearly 150 years of humanist arrogance, prompted by what Richard Dawkins now admits is the unproven faith of Darwinism, have brought us a terrible domestic catastrophe, one I describe and criticise every week and could never have enough space to denounce, and which I will not dwell upon here because it would be black night before I had finished and we would all miss our lunch.

Meanwhile we neglect a treasure of great price, and do not just neglect it. The Church herself, compromising for whatever reason with the spirit of the age, actively seeks to dismantle its most powerful weapons.

I do not and cannot believe that all is lost. I ask you to listen carefully to - and carry away with you - two prayers which seem to me to stand at the heart of what we need to know and what we need to rebuild. They are small samples of the riches of our church. Said over the years, they yield up meanings you may not even dream of now.

"Oh God who art the Author of Peace and Lover of Concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom, defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies that we surely trusting in thy defence may not fear the power of any adversaries"

and "O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, grant unto thy people that they may love the thing which Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou dost promise, that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where True Joys are to be found."