

St Marylebone Confirmation 17-v-2015

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” John XVII: 17

My Sunday duties took me recently to the parish where Muhammad Emwazi alias Jihadi John lived as a school boy.

The topic of schools and religion was hotly debated

One teacher “We leave religion at the school gates”

Sympathetic in view of the crimes committed in the name of religion

But every educational regime is based on certain assumptions about the nature of human beings and what is worthwhile about life. There is no such thing as secular neutrality - one of the most implausible myths around. Many schools are based on the assumption that the economy is the only game in town and fitting young people to be productive units in the economy is the supreme task.

Cannot exorcise the satanic by creating a vacuum and indeed religion cannot be stopped at the school gates because it enters for good or sometimes for ill with the students.

And there are two surprising truths which must be born in mind.

Everyone worships. Of course I know that there are people who put “atheist” on their census returns but it is only human to shape our future and ourselves by reference to something attractive or fearsome to which we ascribe worth.

Most often these days that something is an idea - wealth, power, glamour. The Greeks clothed these ideas in human form. Hercules and Aphrodite. Now projections on to celebrities and their lifestyles.

In some cases this universal disposition to worship takes a more sinister form. Idolatry constantly denounced by all the prophets is making gods in our own image; projecting some part of ourselves and naming it god. Typically the bruised and humiliated ego surreptitiously re-ascends by projecting its own rage and lust for power.

This is serious because of second surprising fact of the spiritual life. Certain prayer always answered. You turn into the God you worship. The money grabbers and those who are generous grow into what they worship.

What God are you worshipping?

You have decided. Soon you will say I turn to Christ.

God so loved the world that he was generous. He gave himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the human face of God and God's plan embodied in flesh and blood. Love for God is not so much an emotion as it is self-giving. His way of self-giving love revealed in all its depth on the cross is strange good news for the whole human race. Jesus said "I and the Father are one". "I have given them thy word."

It is natural to take the path of self-aggrandisement; bigging ourselves up but Jesus taught that the first step in becoming a human being is to refuse to be a little god. He went down to the river Jordan to accept baptism at the hands of John. I have

been to the site 1300 feet below sea level. The lowest place on earth. No one can enter the Kingdom of God except by the water and the way of humility. The only way is not to make a god in our own image but to cultivate the beginner's mind and receive the God who gives himself away. You are beginning a spiritual adventure. We cannot tell where it will lead you but we are convinced that if you keep company with Jesus Christ you will be a blessing to the world.

Today you are being embraced by the Spirit to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ so that more people may see what he is like. As Jesus said, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." John XVII: 17

Amen