

course, and of school teachers, college tutors, craftsmen with apprentices, just about anybody entrusted with the care of others with skills which need developing. And when it's done well, the results can be astonishing, even with what might appear pretty unpromising material. In words attributed to Michelangelo: 'I saw the angel in the marble, and carved until I set him free.'

I grew up with that story as an illustration of God's desire to release individuals to their true potential, to shape lives and set free qualities which have remained hidden because no one has ever quarried for them - the Great Sculptor gazes at what everyone else sees as a solid slab of marble, and releases the angel trapped inside.

It still works for me in those terms, as an invitation to allow God to go on chiselling through whatever layers of self-concern keep me from being what I could be and should be. But it also challenges me look more imaginatively at other people. They could have so much that is good and lovely and creative within them released, and many besides themselves would benefit. But it stays locked away if with others I can't be bothered to look more closely, dismissing them in effect as useless slabs of humanity.

That doesn't mean creating unrealistic expectations.

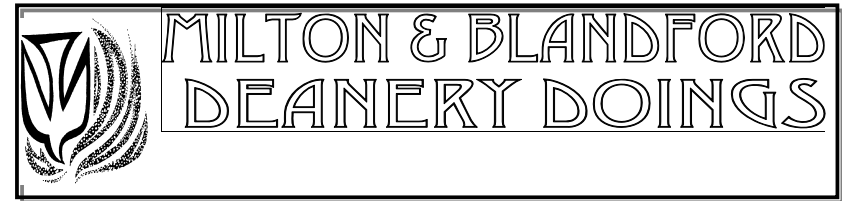
One of Harry Redknapp's former players speaks of his ability to get his team believing they can be world-beaters, but also of the stark honesty which goes with it: if you're playing well he'll tell you, if you're rubbish, he'll tell you.

Jesus Christ offered people life in its fullness. But he began his public work with a stark call to mend their ways, and the hard truths didn't end there. Enabling anyone to realise their potential will always involve constant encouragement, but it might also require the courage to speak the tough words which they'd prefer not to hear.

(Thought for the Day on Radio 4 by the Rev Roy Jenkins)

(Perhaps church leaders have something to learn from Harry)

DEANERY DOINGS is published by Jimmy Hamilton-Brown the Deanery Information Officer and Adviser in Mission to the Milton & Blandford Deanery. Feel free to copy or quote from it. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Rural Dean or the Synod. Contact Jimmy at April Cottage, Winterborne Stickland DT11 0NT 01258 880627 or jumperhb@btinternet.com



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FROM RELIGION TO BELIEF

I have recently been fascinated by a BBC broadcast by John Grey in which he suggested that followers of a religion did not necessarily accept the beliefs that go with it. This was further highlighted in the new book "The Great Partnership" by the Chief Rabbi (Lord Sacks). They both suggest that what seems to count is that people are associated with religion in some vague way. For example, much to his surprise, Sacks was asked by a leading atheist friend to conduct his funeral. The explanation was that although his friend did not believe in God, nevertheless he was a loyal (but of course non-practising) Jew, & therefore wanted a Jewish religious funeral.

If such a suggestion is correct it goes a long way to explaining how it is 70% of the population still call themselves Christian. Your religion apparently does not depend upon what you believe. It also explains something that has always puzzled me - namely how it is that people change their religion so easily, especially for example when they marry someone from another faith. Truth and belief do not seem to come into it. As the atheist philosopher Alain de Botton writes in his new book Religion for Atheists "*The most boring and unproductive question one can ask of any religion is whether or not it is true.*"

At the other extreme (It was the outlook of the C of E at the time the Prayer Book was compiled) what really matters is what doctrines you subscribe to. The basic ones being outlined in the creeds starting "I believe...." At that time the church seemed to be saying that all Christians had to do was believe the right things and you were OK and you could call yourself a Christian regardless of whether it made any difference to the way you actually lived.

John Drane writes "*We have distanced ourselves from the Jesus of the Gospels (who challenges us to behave like him) preferring instead a Jesus of the creeds (with whom we can agree or disagree at will). This surreptitious shift should be challenged because it lies at the heart of much of the church's difficulties in mission today*"

In the 1960's Bishop John Robinson of Woolwich was saying very much the same thing in his book *"The New Reformation"*. In chapter 2, entitled *Starting from the Other End*, he suggests that even in those days people were put off by doctrine. First people need to be attracted by the human Jesus, whom we might call the Son of Man. Then, in the company with others they may go on to discover that this man is the Son of God, whom we Christians would call, as Thomas did eventually, "My Lord & my God".

"You belong before you believe" is one of the discoveries that came out of the Decade of Evangelism. I noticed this when I started many years ago involving lay people in ministry. I deliberately set out to involve new people in the caring life of the church. (I was accused by one local evangelical of using the "unconverted"!). As we met together regularly for discussion and prayer you could see many of these people grow spiritually. When people are involved in fellowship such as this, the penny begins to drop and they begin to see that what we believe actually makes sense. JJHB

THANKS to Stephen Coulter for this apposite prayer from the book of Proverbs at this time of recession and hardship for many.

Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say "Who is the Lord?"

Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.

Prov 30 8-9

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

OPEN MEETING of Deanery Synod March 8 at Shroton Village Hall
"Social Responsibility" 7 p.m.(coffee) for 7:30p.m.

Bishop's Visit to the Deanery March 14

Deanery Synod July 10 at Milton Abbas Church **"Church Alterations"**

The Parish Buying Service This national scheme covers a range of deals, regularly monitored to ensure competitive pricing and service for energy, fire safety, IT software, office products and photocopying. Contracts have been vetted where required. Buying guides allow parishes to buy with confidence, saving time and money. . www.parishbuying.org.uk

Parish and People, publishers of 'Deanery Exchange', has a new web site allowing you to buy publications online and offering a range of resources for local churches that you can download free of charge. Visit us on www.parishandpeople.org.uk. The next booklet, out in March, has been compiled by Michael Ford & our Diocesan Communications Team.

CHANGE or DECAY?

This summer, on Trinity Sunday, I shall have been ordained for 50 years. I have seen vast changes in the UK & the church. I started in a parish of 35,000 with 6 churches and up to 11 assistant clergy - Southwell was the first diocese to have what we now call non stipendiaries. I can remember being asked to conduct 8 funerals in one day. I did two, one of them a Sunday School child, and another at the crematorium. That same day we moved house & the removers took our furniture to the wrong Vicarage and started unloading!

My record for services was 13 on one Easter Day - not good for me or the congregations! So change has not all been for the worse. Clergy today think they have a lot to do with benefices of 10 churches or even more. (I am told there is one in the Chelmsford diocese with 24.)

Church attendance has dropped, partly due to the arrival of home entertainment, Sunday shopping, and the ease of travel; & partly because we live in a society where people have discovered that they can easily live without reference to God. Now we live in an atmosphere where the church appears downright stupid: We do not help ourselves by our squabbles and divisions, in particular expecting all Christians to be the same - in other words like "me". We need to learn that the opposite of unity is not diversity, but discord.....I could go on but instead quote Paul's description of what he was trying to do and what I hope I have tried to do.

It is Christ whom we proclaim, warning everyone & teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. Col 1 28

IS THIS TEAM MINISTRY?

Harry Redknapp will understandably be focussed this afternoon on his team's game with Newcastle. Victory would be the perfect ending to the week which saw the Tottenham manager's acquittal on tax evasion charges.

But with Fabio Capello now free to spend more time with his art collection, Mr Redknapp would be superhuman if he didn't allow himself the odd moment of speculation: after the nightmare of a long-running criminal case, could he really fulfil his lifelong dream of managing England?

Certainly bookmakers and pundits seem to think so, not least for one particular ability: 'The players don't just love him because he is loveable,' said his former chairman Milan Mandaric, 'they love him for what he gets out of them.'

He sees potential, that is, draws it out, shapes it, directs it and gives the player confidence to use it. That's the task of every sports coach, of