

**DIOCESAN SYNOD  
November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007**

Presidential Address by the Bishop of Salisbury, the Rt. Rev. David Stancliffe

Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State  
requests and requires in the Name of her Majesty  
all those whom it may concern  
to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance,  
and to afford the bearer  
such assistance and protection as may be necessary.

Such is the rather splendid form of words inside the front cover of a passport issued to any British subject of the crown. But for how much longer? I ask the question, because the government is showing signs of substituting the language of citizens for subjects as part of a move towards a written constitution, where the rights of each person are defined in line with modern European Human Rights legislation, and away from the network of relationships implied by the remnants of a feudal monarchy, where trust and loyalty has been the basis of our unwritten constitution.

I expect legislation in this area to be introduced in the Queen's Speech which will open a new session of Parliament this Tuesday, and all my instincts tell me that when legislation takes the place of relationship, and appeal is made to contract rather than covenant, something precious is likely to be lost and litigation and bureaucracy loom over the horizon.

The best copy of the Magna Carta is here in our cathedral, and it points towards a covenant relationship. What is the appropriate response to the institutional mistrust that is corroding the fabric of society in our day?

These are questions in the public domain. Who are we, and how do we take our place in the common life of our nation? They are also questions we ask of ourselves as members of Christ's body, the Church. Who are we, and how do we take our place in the common life of the Church?

Our fundamental identity – the thing that makes us who we are – is our baptism. Baptism in Christ makes us subjects of the King of the Universe and citizens of heaven, and this is much more significant than Ordination. Once we tumble to it that this is who we are, then a number of things follow.

- First, we must affirm our discipleship: we are all learners, journeying on the way together. Baptism is about joining that pilgrim company with all the saints of God, and responding to the call of God to change, grow and mature as disciples of Christ. That is why we have established the opportunities for learning that you have been hearing about over this last year, and are now being offered all round the diocese.
- Second, how are we to nurture imagination and desire? Baptism and Confirmation are more than passing the test to gain admission to the Lord's table – indeed, our admission of the baptised to Communion at a very young age signals that its not our choice, our earning a place that is fundamental: its God's invitation, and he says to each one of us: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go out and bear fruit.' If we

long for God above everything, then our response to the gift of his love will be a desire to live a life that is full and free, and points beyond ourselves to what he is doing. The nourishment we need to grow is not just for our intellects: it's about developing our longing for God.

- Third, we need to rediscover the language of vocation. For many people, a vocation is what you have if you sense that God is calling you to be ordained, to the very specific ministry of a deacon or priest. But God says to each baptised person, 'I chose you'. If God has chosen us, how are we to discern the gifts he has given us, and use them for the building up of his kingdom? What has he appointed us to be? We need a more systematic pattern of development that faces us all with the question of the consequences of being baptised. Who am I? What are my gifts? How should I be using them? How should I pray? How should I use my money? How can I take part in the Church's mission where I find myself? This calling to be open to what God wants is at the heart of what we mean by our baptismal vocation.

These are the questions that we need to address if we are to make much impression on the communities in which we are set. People around us are content enough to have the church present in their communities as a pointer to the rumour of God, to the possibilities of the other and the eternal. They too – perhaps especially in the autumnal season of mellow decay – sense the ending of earthly things, and wonder about a hereafter that they can't quite imagine. Nostalgia builds as we move from All Saints-tide, through Remembrance, to Advent and Christmas.

But the challenge for us is to offer a pattern of living the faith, of a 'Seven whole days, not one in seven' engagement with the things of God that means that the way we do things is recognisably different. Does how we live and how we engage with people and how we spend our energies offer a distinctive style?

Much of what we shall be doing in today's Synod if focussed on this question. I suggest that there are two ways of approaching it. They are not necessarily contradictory, but one is more fundamental.

One way is to say that we are all part of a great company of citizens, with our duties, rights and obligations spelled out and guarded. We belong to God's kingdom, and we should work out what that contracts us to do. We can spell out its claims, and we can set out our goals and objectives and be clear when we have done what we should.

Another way is to treasure the patterns of relationship, and to allow ourselves to be formed by the habits of Godliness in our belonging and believing so that *how* we form relationships, *how* we attend to and so value people, *how* we do things – whatever we do – is conditioned by and shot through with our being grafted fully and utterly into the life of God. Formation in the divine life is the heart of our prayer and liturgy. They are not about us, and Our vision, Our goals, Our desires. They are all about our utter dependence on the God who so loved us that he gave his only-begotten Son for us, and our longing that it's *his* kingdom that will come, and *his* will that is done, on earth as in heaven.

That is the fundamental shift in our Christian life that will do more than anything to bring life not just to the church, but to the whole people of God: that is, to every human person, made in his image and likeness and created for life with him.