

What are these people waving their arms in the air for?



Are they doing aircraft impersonations or aviation impressions or pretending to be birds?

Well, actually they are part of the “Global Day of Prayer” (GDOP) movement and they are supposed to be praying for the nation and they are planning a major event in September, 2012, at which they want to fill Wembley Stadium (capacity 90,000) with Christians willing to pray for a Christian renewal and a new Christian vision for our country.

Sounds reasonable, does it? So why am I reticent about this venture?

Well, when I see the photograph above I see people who look full of themselves, puffed up with pride, arms in the air, trying to gain attention, with the underlying message of “it’s actually all about me and how I feel!” They have the look of immodesty, of the over-confident, even cocky people, for whom religion is all about telling others what to do, what to say, what to think and what to believe, because they know best.

Unattractive? I think so.

The root problem, and this is as old as the hills, is that there is no Christian vision, but rather, there are Christian visions, some of which are deeply contradictory and perhaps impossible to manage under one umbrella. That is, when you think about it, why we have so many different churches and denominations. It also explains why church people are so often at each other’s throats and why some of us can’t abide to be in the same company as each other.

The ways of being Christian are many and various. It is obvious if you think about it just for moment or two.

Those expressions of Christianity whereby some Christians want to make other people change and be more like them are a really bad advert for Christianity. They make people hate Christianity and dismiss the Church as an agency for social control, a thing that should be consigned to the dustbin of history as we are all now past that sort of thing, or should be at any rate.

The Church has a long history of being an agent for controlling people, putting the fear of God (literally) into them to make them compliant and submissive. The Church has a long history of chastising minorities and even attempting to wipe them off the face of the earth. This approach is still around today and I see it in various activities which happen in the name of Christianity. It does seem to boil down to bullying in the end. I do not want any part of this process.

The Christian faith is not about making other people believe or act the same as you. It is about freedom, it is about openness to the truth, it is about humanity finding its true self and enjoying itself, it is about having fulfilling and satisfying lives through which we express our love at various levels and serve each other's needs and find joy in so doing.

One of the obvious drawbacks for this approach to being a Christian Church is that it has a close affinity with African Christianity which is a clear and firm upholder of a very conservative view of humanity. You have to remember that in Uganda and some other African countries, the open expression of homosexuality is punishable by long terms of imprisonment or even death. The acceptance of women as priests has been slow and reluctant in the African Anglican churches, with the exception of the Church of South Africa, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the concept of women bishops is being resisted as an aspect of cultural tradition. Do we want to promote this approach in our country today?



I don't.

I believe that the real agenda of the Global Day of Prayer is an attempt to turn back the clock on many of the liberal values which we have grown now to take for granted. Look at this quotation from the GDOP website:-

"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7: 14)

Not much there about love and openness and service and equality and respect and acceptance of people. But now have a look at what follows 2 Chronicles 7: 14...

19 'But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, 20 then I will pluck you up from the land that I have given you; and this house, which I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.21 And regarding this house, now exalted, everyone passing by will be astonished, and say, "Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this house?"22 Then they will say, "Because they abandoned the LORD the God of their ancestors who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods, and worshipped them and served them; therefore he has brought all this calamity upon them." '

So there you have it. The GDOP people are convinced that we have travelled back in time thousands of years and now stand in the same time zone and situation as the ancient people of Israel who, in the mind of whoever wrote that passage, deserving of being cast out of the sight of God and having calamity upon them.

Not very Christian, is it?



They're at it again!

In my view, with the observance of Christianity waning and respect for it among the young seriously diminished because of the negativity with which it has impacted on so many, this kind of GDOP Christianity may push Christianity out of the reckoning with the vast majority of kindly, "live-and-let-live" people, open-minded people who are willing to respect people who honestly feel that they are better with a same-sex relationship or who feel that women are equally called by God to positions of leadership and responsibility in the church and world at large.

This kind of Christianity could ring the death-knell of the Christian Faith in Europe because the young who are having children now and their families will reject any suggestion that they are in any way associated with their conservative agenda and will throw the baby out along with the bath water.

Young people will associate themselves much more with the movement for change expressed in the protest camp around St. Paul's Cathedral in October –November, 2011. They will look for spiritual fulfilment in the ancient ideas in the world of paganism and in alternative life-styles and therapies. They will forget the extraordinary and positive influence on the lives of ordinary people affected by the followers of Jesus Christ for 2000 years, and see only the horrific abuses and tyrannical popes and bishops.

I think we should resist being drawn into these umbrella-type grouping like the GDOP and concentrate on building up our parish life, our congregational relationships, our charitable support for good causes locally and globally, our support for justice and an end to poverty, our caring for the church buildings which silently proclaim the love and beauty of God and live our lives as Christian people as best we can in the hope that the light of Christ shines though, in our normality and sincerity. They won't see that in the arm-waving gestures of noisy Christian rallies but through the quality of love and commitment we are able to show each other and all God's people, however we come across them in this complicated life.

I sense a spirit of panic in movements like GDOP. As someone once said, I advise you "Don't Panic!" Let us be ourselves, continuing the good work year by year and trust in God enough to let our witness to his love speak for itself, and never mind the arm-waving!



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