



The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter – October 2007

Romantic but Wrong ...

I T WAS *1066 and All That*, I think, which described the Cavaliers as 'Romantic but Wrong' and the Roundheads as 'Revolting but Right.' It's a fun description, perhaps, of the rough and tumble of political life. In his time, Tony Blair has been both the Roundhead and the Cavalier of the description. Mr Brown, the son of the manse, was always set to be the dour Roundhead but, if you see an old picture of him as a student, the haircut at least was more Cavalier than Roundhead.

We seem to do everything by clichés and slogans. In parliament people take sides and every radio discussion seems to be set up as the clash of two very different points of view. So, what are we? A country in which gangland violence is taking over or a country in which there has been a decrease in violent crime? A Christian country or a secular society? Even the Church has to be described in terms of a pitched battle: Catholics versus Protestants, orthodox versus liberals, homophobes versus homophiles (as if a label is sufficient to describe anyone).

Those with a scientific training will remind the rest of us that everything is binary. A kettle is on or it's off. A computer works by making millions of yes/no choices. 0 or 1. Light or darkness. Night or day. Alive or dead. Male or female. Little or big. Fat or thin. The trouble is that real life has its 'maybes', its 'twixts' and its 'tweens'. Twilight. Babies not yet born. Alzheimer patients still hardly with us. People neither as fat as a barrel nor as thin as a rake. We manage to be a country with a worrying amount of violence, especially amongst the young, *and* a country of increasing peace and prosperity. We manage to be a country with strong faith communities – including strong churches – *and* a country where secular commentators make a great splash.

The poor old Church has its quarrels too, which we read about in the papers, but, funnily enough, they are not what local congregations talk about or are concerned about. When I visit churches, people don't talk to me about women priests or gay rights but about their joys and sorrows, their prayers and their worries. If they're worried about the Vicar it's not because of his sacramental theology but because he's working too hard – or, much more rarely – letting them down.

Let's avoid the clichés and the slogans - romantic or revolting – and see in each other the neighbours whom God has created, neighbours who, for all their faults, are probably getting at least as much of it right as we are.

May God our Father forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

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