

You've probably heard the story about the little boy who came home from church all excited and told his mother that the bishop himself had preached the sermon that Sunday. "What did he preach about?" asked his mother. "Sin," said the little boy. "And what did he say about sin?" his mother asked, After a few moment's reflection, the boy responded, "I think he was against it."

I don't have to go into detail with regard to the terrible things that have come to light concerning the Metropolitan Police in Baroness Casey's Review published last Tuesday. We can all recognise sin and we are all against it.

Before I go on, a few words of caution. Jesus said, *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.* We are all sinners. Strangely, it is easier to see the sin in other people's lives than it is to recognise our own sins. All God's commandments are summarised in the command to love. Where we fail to love, we sin.

*There but for the grace of God go I.* How do I know how I would have behaved, had I been subject to the same temptations and pressures which police officers face? How do you? If we succeed in resisting temptation, whatever our calling, it is by the grace of God.

However, I, probably like most of you, was brought up to respect and trust the police. *Dixon of Dock Green* was on the telly. As a child, I was told I didn't need to be afraid of the police so long as I behaved myself. The police were there to protect us. If I were to get lost or to get into any kind of trouble, I should approach a policeman for help. The policeman lived in the police house in the next village and sometimes he would be on duty in our hamlet, standing outside the telephone box. I don't think there was much crime. The only one I remember being told about was taking pheasant's eggs. That was late fifties to early sixties.

When I was in my early teens at Wigmore, I remember noticing that, by this time (late sixties), you hardly ever saw a policeman on the beat. If you did, you double checked that you weren't doing anything culpable. There still wasn't much crime, however.

My disillusion with the police service probably began when I was a student in London in the early seventies. One night, near Oxford Street, I was coming home late and there was a burglar alarm going off. Alarms were much less common in those days and I thought I ought to dial 999. To my surprise, instead of taking the matter seriously, I had the impression that the emergency operator thought I was a bit of a nuisance. Perhaps I was. Perhaps, even then they were plagued by calls about false alarms.

But they weren't very interested either when my bike was stolen, nor when a second bike was stolen some years later, even though I could tell them who had taken it. Living at

Orpington as a curate in the early 1980s, I was burgled several times and the police never took it seriously. Neither did they on any of the several occasions after I had moved to Cuxton when I was burgled at the Rectory or the victim of antisocial behaviour. The irony is that it was when I lived at Ramsgate between my Orpington days and my coming here, on an estate which was notorious for its high crime rate, that I didn't have any trouble. I think that's because all the petty criminals in the area knew me! Newington was a close community. Maybe it's the closeness of the community here which has kept me safe for some years now from being a victim of crime, now that people have got to know me.

I would have said that the police were failing in their duty to protect the community from crime partly because they were so undermanned, partly because they no longer patrolled (that's my opinion, not necessarily what people better qualified than I think) and perhaps also because they, like so many other professionals these days, are too much tied up in red tape.

That's my inexpert view of the ineffectiveness of modern policing. But I would never have expected police officers to behave in ways which were illegal, unethical, downright wicked. Perhaps, that's not quite true. I've heard stories and had experiences, but I wouldn't have thought that serious misconduct was characteristic of modern policing. Am I naïf?

Disillusion. At the same time as the police seemed to be decreasingly able to prevent what I call traditional crimes – violence, dishonesty, etc. – or to bring actual perpetrators to justice, there was a multiplication of rules and regulations, petty offences very often, which were enforced strictly and mercilessly, often by council officers or even guards working for private companies, rather than by police constables, usually punished by Fixed Penalty Notices which effectively bypass the courts, unless the defendant is very determined to prove his innocence and has deep pockets. While the police force was apparently too short staffed to send out an officer if your car was stolen, if you had overstayed the time you'd paid for in a car park even by only a few minutes, a fine would be inevitable. It might take the police several hours or even days to attend a reported robbery, but the council could have a man out there in thirty minutes if someone were suspected of pruning a protected tree without permission!

It was my own personal experience that council officers were prepared to behave unethically and to break the law when it suited their purposes and that, if they did so, their superiors would cover for them. So it was not entirely surprising to me to discover that Metropolitan Police officers too could act as though they were above the law and that, if they did so, senior officers were more concerned to protect the reputation of the institution than to maintain justice and that, in order to achieve this, they would, in the words of the Prayer Book, dissemble and cloke. NHS trusts behave in the same way when things go wrong. So do Social Services Departments. So do many wealthy and powerful corporations, in both the public and private sectors. Most disgracefully of all, the Church herself covered up the terrible crimes of paedophile priests and even bishops. Only last year, it came to light that a victim of racial abuse in the Church had been pressured into signing a Non Disclosure Agreement. In too many powerful corporations, when there are credible complaints of wrong-doing, whistleblowers are sacked, victims bullied and bribed to remain silent,

witnesses threatened with legal action for alleged defamation, and official statements are obfuscations, half truths and downright lies.

Last Sunday at Halling we read Ephesians 5, which we missed out at Cuxton to make time for the children's presentation. In it St Paul told us to *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.* He's talking to Christians, but, until very recently, for hundreds of years, we had thought of this as a Christian country. What has gone wrong? In last week's sermon, I expressed my disgust that there is so little respect for the truth in this country today – at every level of society. The devil is the father of lies. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The idols of the heathen are illusions. They are nothing. To bow down to an idol, to worship empty lies is to devote yourself to nothing. *The wages of sin is death.*

On the subject of it being a *a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret*, after our discussions in diocesan synod about *matters regarding identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage*, and the recent debate about sex and relationship education in schools, I thought I ought to familiarise myself with what the contemporary world outside the Church apparently takes for granted with regard to these issues. So I started to watch the Netflix series *Sex Education*. I survived half an hour of episode 1, season 1. It was disgusting. I don't think that it is how most people live. I certainly hope that it isn't. But I believe that millions watched and enjoyed the whole series. What has the world come to? St Paul says, (I Corinthians 6) <sup>18</sup> *Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.* <sup>19</sup> *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* <sup>20</sup> *For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

So what are we to do? We shall be told that lessons have been learnt. There will be new codes of practice; fresh procedures; more rules and regulations, no doubt; maybe even changes in the law. Some of these changes may be beneficial, even necessary. But there are plenty of voices saying, *We've heard all this before.* Promises are made, undertakings given. We are assured that such things will never happen again. But then they do. Apparently, nothing has changed after all.

Now it is true that we need things like codes of practice, proper procedures, sensible and effective regulations, good laws. But never lose sight of the fact that law is for bad people. Bad people need to be controlled by the threat of punishment if they misbehave and the promise of reward when they are good. Good people behave well simply because they are good people – irrespective of any threat of punishment or promise of reward. Good people are people of love and love is the fulfilling of the law. St Paul again, *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

How do we make people good people? How do we become good people ourselves? Today is Passion Sunday. The emphasis is especially on what I hope we never forget – what Jesus achieved for us on the Cross, what, in obedience to His command, we remember, proclaim and apply in every Holy Communion service: *ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* The sins of the whole world, that's some quantity of sin. Just think about it for a minute, the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine. And yet *his one oblation of himself once offered is a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* That is how we make people good. That is how we become good ourselves. We truly and earnestly repent of our sins. We put our faith in Jesus Christ. And we are forgiven. We are washed clean. We make a fresh start with a clean state. We do this when we first come to faith, when we are baptized, and we do this every day of our lives here on earth. We repent of our sins. We are forgiven. We make a fresh start every day in Christ. We've been given the Holy Spirit whereby we acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and speak to God as our Father. He has supplied us with the means of grace – including prayer, Christian fellowship, the Bible and the Holy Sacraments. It is by these means, and many other such means, in His infinite goodness and mercy, that He makes us good, that He enables us to become what essentially we are, the children of God.

We do need things like codes of practice, proper procedures, sensible and effective regulations, good laws, but none of them is enough. Religion is not an optional extra, something some people find helpful to add on to the essentials of life – family, friends, food, fun, work, the material things. Faith is essential if we are to be fulfilled as human beings and to fulfil our place in God's plan for the world. We have laws to deter bad people from doing evil. But, much more than that, what we really need, if we want to live in a decent society, is to believe and share the Gospel so that bad people may become good people (including us), to the end that that all of us may live good lives here on earth and dwell eternally in the Light of Christ.