

That you act justly . . .

Br John Deeney

In the Acts of the Apostles we can sense the euphoria that affected the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus. But it wasn't long before the realisation also came to them that the glory and peace of the resurrection was not going to fall like dew and just transform the world. The changes had to be worked for and the followers of Jesus would have to share his experience of suffering. That is still the case today. We can easily find places where Christians are suffering specifically because of their faith – India, Iraq, Indonesia to name just a few. There is also a less intense struggle taking place in Britain today as religion is challenged, faith schools are placed under suspicion and the insidious erosion of ethical values means that Christians have to stand out against some of the trends in our society. Not that the joy of the resurrection should be absent from our lives: we may be in the midst of a struggling world but our salvation is never in doubt.

Rhetoric and reality

If you listen to the speeches of George Bush, you can't help noticing the frequent use of the terms 'liberty', 'freedom', 'independence', 'safety' and so on. It seems that the President of the US believes that these are the privileges of US citizens and not the whole of humanity. He has acted to veto legislation that would prevent the CIA from torturing terrorist suspects and has thus also contradicted any claim he might have to be upholding Christian values. By any sane definition 'waterboarding' comes under the category of torture as it is the equivalent of the sensation of drowning but can be repeated again and again. A British survivor of such torture in a Japanese prison camp recounted his experience recently and made it clear that this was inhuman behaviour. To its credit the US Congress is attempting to fight this veto. A bit of pressure from the rest of the world might help, though we have not been very successful at affecting what has taken place at the Guantanamo prison camp, another story of shame in US history.

Unreality

It would, of course, be a gross error for those of us in Britain to think that injustice was something that occurs just in other countries. Refugees and asylum-seekers regularly have serious struggles with our systems but the problems can creep into what

we might describe as 'ordinary life'. A Christian couple who had fostered four children had their application to foster another child turned down. The reason was apparently that their views on homosexuality were out of line with 'diversity standards' despite them stating that they would love any child regardless of sexual orientation. One wonders what would happen to potential foster parents who were fanatical supporters of Manchester United. Would they be expected to encourage their child if he/she opted to support Portsmouth or Man City? After protests, at least some sanity has been re-established as the couple's application has been restored.

Justice and law

Jack Straw has announced recently that Britain has the most expensive legal system in the world. That may make us worry about standards in other parts of the world where the expenditure is not so high but we should also be concerned about the difficulty that this creates for those who have to use our system. Our Labour government is plumping for a new 'market-driven economy' (does that phrase ring a bell?) in legal aid in order to trim the costs. The impact of this is hitting the most vulnerable rather than the high profile fraud and murder and terrorism cases. It seems that the government's talk about a fair society is not going to apply to all. To quote from an article by Madeleine Bunting: 'The only protection of those on the margins against arbitrary bureaucratic power is through the law. It is the deprived whose only security from domestic violence, eviction from their home or being sacked is through the law. ... The harsher and more inegalitarian life opportunities are, the more desperately needed the recourse to law becomes ...' Caring for the poor and the marginalized is one of the markers of a truly civilised society. Law ought to be for the protection of the poor rather than for the enrichment of the few.

Life matters

With the current review of legislation concerning abortion and the high-profile problem for some MPs of voting according to conscience, there are various campaigns taking up the matter. There is information and a petition available to sign at: www.aliveandkickingcampaign.org

