

To Peers involved in the Grand Committee considering the Welfare Reform Bill.

From Rev Paul Nicolson, Chair, Zacchaeus 2000 Trust .

A contribution on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral on Saturday 29th October at 3.pm to the "Sermon on the steps" organised by Christian supporters of OCCUPY LSX. Quoted in the Independent on Sunday and Z2K listed as a Christian supporter of the OCCUPY LSX in The Observer.

My sermon is directed at the Bishop of London and the Dean of St Paul's because I don't think they understand the enormity, the magnitude of the economic injustice that has happened and is happening now, or the hurt it causes, and about which we protest robustly but non-violently and peacefully. My understanding of our faith is that we love everyone and put our impoverished, our sick and our old fellow citizens first. We believe that love should inspire the use of power, which should be exercised in the interests of justice.

The British Parliament lost sight of those principles when it deregulated lending while copying the government of the United States in the 1980s. The next governments in both nations continued to allow the City of London and Wall Street recklessly to exploit that lack of regulation for private gain and to allow landlords to profit from the consequent rise of land prices and rents; so housing benefit rose to £22 billion a year in the UK. Parliament never put the lid on it. It all blew up in 2008.

To deal with the inevitable financial crisis the present government is taking £18 billion out of the welfare paid to the poorest citizens and capping their housing benefit. They have not hit the landlords in any direct way who profited from that £22 billion in 2010 and many more billions each year before that. Parliament is hitting the poorest hard. Parliament is not hitting the wealthy in any effective way. That stands on its head the Christian principle of love inspiring power and justice which put the poorest citizens first.

Dear Bishop and Dear Dean the inconvenience of a few tents on your doorstep is nothing when compared to the anguish of several million tenants threatened with debt, eviction and the bailiffs because they cannot pay the rent in this country through no fault of their own, or the increasing poverty of many millions in many parts of the world because of the reckless, uncontrolled and disorderly behaviour in the City of London and Wall Street. You have lost your sense of proportion. Our peaceful but determined outrage should have your Christian support without threatening the use of the coercive and punitive powers of the State .

The Corporation of the City of London has begun legal proceedings against you. The Corporation's moral and democratic authority to do that should be challenged. It is a democratic anomaly. Its members are businessmen who have to be resident in the UK, Europe or the Commonwealth. The majority of the Corporation's electorate do not live in the City and can vote for their own local authority elections as well as the City's. The Corporation is very wealthy and wields power far greater than any other group of UK citizens with immediate access to 10 Downing Street. Its failure to regulate its constituency has diminished, if not negated, any moral authority they might have had in a debate about the economic catastrophe which they allowed to happen, and continue to happen, let alone to set the police onto peaceful campers with a fully justifiable anger.

I will finish with a prayer for peace which was first used in 1986 when Pope John Paul invited all the faiths to Assisi to pray for peace. Remember when we say "peace" it means not only the absence of conflict or violence but also the presence of wellbeing and good will----- and justice.

Heavenly Father, in your word you have given us a vision of that holy city to which the nations of the world bring their glory.
Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth.
Renew the ties of mutual regard that form our civic life.
Send us honest and able leaders.
Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice and oppression,
that peace may prevail with righteousness,
and justice with order.
That men and women from different cultures
and with differing talents may find in one another
the fulfilment of their humanity.

Amen

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