

Love Life: Live Lent

THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK is taking seriously his responsibility for the spiritual life of the nation. He has written the Foreword to three booklets to guide us through Lent: one for “The Family”; one for “Adults and Youth” and the other for “Kids”. Or is that last one for nanny goats?

These glossy booklets feature Mr Men style cartoon pictures whom we must suppose are meant to represent the general public. Achingly politically-correct with all races represented—but no fat people or smokers. Dumbing-down beyond the farthest reaches of infantilisation, the booklets urge us to “Do fun things together. Create a space in your home . . . a corner of a room . . . an understairs cupboard . . . a shelf . . . make a prayer den using furniture and blankets . . . gather some objects that are fun to touch, feel and smell: a piece of velvet, feathers, a tray of sand, lavender bags or pine cones.” These should be enough to satisfy at least some of the more mentionable fetishists among us.

And what are we supposed to do in the prayer space? “Take in some pebbles, shells or feathers”—presumably to demonstrate impeccable ecumenical relations with primitive animists and tree-huggers. And prayers are supplied: “Dear God, make wrong things right . . .” But this is not God; only the sentimental wish-fulfilment of Father Christmas or the Tooth Fairy. We are even educated into the correct manual acts to perform while praying this desolate prayer: “Shake your finger from side to side for ‘wrong’ and then do thumbs up for ‘right’.”

You feel there should be a caution not to do this near a window in case the neighbours see you and phone for the men in white coats.

Lent involves us in acts of practical devotion too. So, “Give a lollipop to your lollipop person.”

Of course, as always in the Church of England these days, the sheer blithering inanities only faintly disguise the right-on political hard sell: “Email or write to your MP about a global poverty issue . . . Buy a fair Trade Easter egg.” But what if you follow the advice of many leading economists who claim so called Fair Trade does nothing to help the poor, and recommend free trade instead?

The only orthodoxy we find in these booklets is environmentalist demagoguery and the pagan superstition of global warming: “Help lighten our load on the planet . . . defrost your fridge and find out how climate change affects poorer people . . . help stop global climate change: recycle your rubbish: save trees, use both sides of the paper . . .” (When doing what, by the way?)

Lent is supposed to be a time when we repent of our sins. But the only sins found here are those of not subscribing to the Christian socialist manifesto and global warming denial.

No wonder the pews are emptying faster than ever, when these booklets represent the mind of the Church of England. Lent is for deepening our understanding of the faith and for growing nearer to God. These booklets contain no nourishment for those tasks.

What might the Archbishop have offered, if he had been in his right mind? That we should all begin and end the day by saying the Lord’s Prayer. Read the Collect, Epistle and Gospel written in the matchless English of The Book of Common Prayer for each of the six weeks of Lent. Perhaps say the Psalms set for every day. Try to attend an early morning or lunchtime weekday service of Holy Communion. Competent shepherds of their sheep would also have recommended some spiritual reading.

These patronising booklets are worse than a joke, worse than useless. They ape the trite and gaudy language and images of a debased advertising culture, babyfied and debauched, and apply it to the Christian Gospel. But faith cannot be taught in this way. It cannot be communicated by the thing it is not, the thing that is actually anathema to it. People have to be taught. These booklets only insult the intelligence of the public. There is no Christianity in “Live Life: Love Lent”—only a blasphemous parody of the faith.

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