

The Moral Dilemma

In January last year, I had a letter published in The Witney Gazette. It referred to the 14 Christmas cards we had received, which had unfranked stamps on the envelopes. My dilemma was, should I soak off the stamps and reuse them, thus defrauding Royal Mail of £6-42, or throw them away? There being no mechanism for refunding Royal Mail, I used the stamps on *last year's* cards, hence avoiding the time which would have been otherwise wasted queuing at a post office, and gave the money saved to charity; she was most grateful. The letter ended, "What would *you* do?" Well as I expected there was a zero response. No surprise there then.

Since last Christmas, I have sustained another moral dilemma. Possibly like you, I have a love / hate relationship with my satnav. Again, never having been one to toe the line, I often ignore its advice, and do my own thing. St. John (pronounced '*sinjun*') is courteous, well-spoken and merely says, 'Recalculating route.' However he *is* a tad insensitive and over precise; each time I stray over the speed limit by just one mile an hour, he reminds me, "You are over the speed limit." My dilemma is, do I say 'sorry', and slow down, or do I swear at him and carry on? You see when I was accepted into the Institute of Advanced Motorists years ago, I promised to travel "... quickly, safely and courteously," that means within the law.

What did you say when you were given a scarf for Christmas, which you most certainly wouldn't dream of wearing, and the donor asked, "Do you like it?" Did you tell them the truth or did you smile and lie, thus preventing their disappointment?

Trivial I agree. But what about the question of abortion? Are you pro-choice or pro-life? There are cogent arguments on both sides of the debate. There are no absolutes here; well not according to me, certain religions might not agree.

... and how about celibacy? ... "a law that has to be changed. It's a law made by men, not by Jesus." ¹ And, for some, the uncomfortable questions of gay rights? "... homosexuals need to have recognised rights, including civil unions, but not same-sex marriage." ¹ And that from Pope Francis! Whom the Anglican Archbishop of Argentina, described as "... not so much a Catholic, as more of a Christian, Christ-centred and Spirit-filled." ¹

The debate surrounding assisted suicide is once again in the headlines. Is life so sacred that we have to inflict it on those whose dignity is lost; whose pain is insufferable; whose paralysis is total; who long to die? The civil liberties and human rights lobbies will have a lot to say, I'm sure.

I trust none of you readers ever finds yourself in a war, or terrorist or torture situation. Have you ever considered how you would react if you were interrogated, the choice being your life if you *don't* tell, or the lives of your comrades if you *do*?

At God's command, Abraham built an altar and prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. After he had bound him, Abraham drew his knife to kill him. At the very last moment

an angel let him off, suggesting he sacrifice a ram in place of his son. This calling-his-bluff, was presumably to test his faith in God. I have to tell you dear reader, that if my faith was thus challenged, I would disobey God and spare my child. So where would that leave my so-called faith; my disobeying the will of God? I only ask, because one dictionary definition of sin, is exactly that, "... deliberate disobedience to the known will of God," and as we know, "... the wages of sin, is death (Romans 6:23)

On the other hand, Archbishop Justin says, "Difference is part of being Christian'. Therefore the key was to find a 'safe way of disagreeing.'" "... Christians must learn to disagree 'in a way that honours the gospel..." 2

A further quotation from Archbishop Justin, "...Anglicans are too prone to dodge tough questions' and 'even more prone to have hissing fits, and throw their toys out of the pram.'" 2

A charismatic Catholic priest in a slum parish of one of our cities, ran a highly successful church; the numerous services were oversubscribed; there were meetings and clubs and societies for any and all groupings of people of all ages. Money for buildings and maintenance and supporting charities, was no object. One of his parishioners even left him his London taxi in his will. This he used in any spare time, to raise money for the church and supporting the needy in the parish. Alas he falls in love with a girl in the back of his taxi and breaks his vow of celibacy. He leaves the Roman church but is offered a position as an Anglican priest. The point is, behind all his success in bringing people to Christ, he didn't believe a word of it. So... 3

At this harvest time, with its annual reminders that "All is safely gathered in"; pictures of countless tons of "passed sell-by date" fruit and veg, being bulldozed and converted into bio-fuel; juxtaposed in our minds, with the statistics about the dire need for food-banks in this Country and the starving, dying millions around the world. "What's it got to do with me?" Well...?

I leave you with a final thought from our own Bishop John, who reminds us, "...religious energy is actually in the dark questions." 4

So what *would* you do? Answers please on a postcard to ... anyone, but me.

- 1 "Pope Francis: Untying the Knots" Paul Vallely Bloomsbury 2013
- 2 "Archbishop Justin Welby: The Road to Canterbury" Andrew Atherstone
Darton, Longman and Todd 2013
- 3 "Father Frank" Paul Burke Flame 2001
- 4 "God Lost and Found" Bishop John Pritchard SPCK 2013

Howard Brayton

