



Archbishop Justin gave a keynote address at the Royal Society of Arts, the first of a series of keynote addresses by leading public figures in 2024 on their annual theme of ‘Courage’.

Read Archbishop Justin's speech in full, as delivered:

I am delighted to be here today to inaugurate this series of lectures at the RSA on the theme of courage.

In 2017 in my book Reimagining Britain, which Andy mentioned. I highlighted courage as one of the three key values needed in a flourishing society – courage, alongside community and stability, is part of the ‘deep Magic’, as C.S. Lewis refers in the Narnia books, the deep magic which has underpinned our society for centuries, helping us to understand what is good in absolute and permanent terms.

Courage is one of the dynamic groups of values which relates most closely to the needs of our future, to the cause of being a society that exercises love in action and to the nature of human beings. Courage is an area of vast variety, from the toddler who's cut their knee and is told to be brave when a plaster is put on or, in my childhood, TCP. Anyone remember that stuff? Doesn't it stink?!. To the soldier on the battlefield, to the mother sheltering her children during the Hamas attacks on 7th October, or in Gaza today, or the martyrs like the Bishop in Africa in 2008 who, when a militia came to his compound, knelt in front of its commander and told him that before they killed the sheltering refugees they must kill him. They turned in shame at his courage and his lack of hatred or threats.

There are also those in leadership who need to show courage and it is on them that I shall focus today. I'm talking especially about political leadership but it can apply more widely. Their courage needs resilience, the willingness to challenge accepted ideas and patterns like John Maynard Keynes, my favourite economist, I shall come back to him later.

But courage like many virtues has a dark side. Generosity can become manipulative, even love can be possessive, stability can change into stagnation, community into oppression. It is in the holding of all together that each may be powerful in virtue and defended against vice.

And in Christian thinking, I should say at this point that the supreme example of courage is Jesus Christ who because he revealed the nature of God revealed courage as part of the image of divinity placed in us all. My thinking is governed and shaped by faith in him which may not be entirely a surprise given the job I hold; it may even be a slight reassurance.

As we begin 2024 we face crises and challenges on multiple fronts and we live in a context where there is an absence of bandwidth.

Internationally there are new and ongoing conflicts, Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Gaza and those which have slipped from our news feeds but continue nevertheless like Sudan and South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the South Caucasus, Afghanistan. The UN counts 56 conflicts in the world that it is involved in mediation with or trying to have some positive influence.

Then we have migration, more and more driven by climate change. It is a global and generational problem which feeds on war, economics and inequality and which is also driven by them. And these four horsemen of the apocalypse feed on each other's work and collectively block solutions to any single one.

The head of the international panel on climate change estimates that at our present level of increase in global temperatures, and we're heading towards two and a half degrees, never mind one and a half, we're looking at at least a 10 to 12-fold increase in the number of people who are forced to move from their homes, and that's only taking into account the climate impact, not the innumerable conflicts that it will generate, the collapses in economics and therefore the self-fulfilling downward spiral.

Economically we face trade wars, protectionism, soaring public debt, a growing gap between north and south, rich and poor and rising absolute levels of poverty and destitution. Andy reminded me a few minutes ago of something I remember from Liverpool and it hasn't changed, that if you go five miles north of the centre of the city and you live there you lose 15 years in life expectancy.

Socially there are deep divisions within our communities, high levels of loneliness and mental health problems especially in the wealthier countries and the realities of an aging population with the care requirements that that brings. Religiously in many parts of the world religious militant fundamentalism has grown as a marginal but destructive part of every global religion and over 80 percent of the world belongs to one religion or another. The origin of this feature of faith is not divine but is very human I suggest, above all as a means of circling the wagon and keeping out the intellectual, economic and social challenges of modernity which themselves give hope.

Technologically and scientifically the next 40 years will see greater change than any equivalent period in history. If this is a feature of the wealthy world only then the outcome makes the inequalities of the 19th century, for example at The Battle of Omdurman where a British imperial force won with an army a sixth the size of the Mahdist army but equipped with Gatling guns, it will make that kind of difference look small.

If the development is for parts of the world dreaming of power and totalitarian rule and not of humility, love and service, then it will lead to global tyranny unsurpassed in history even in the mid-20th century. And all of this in 2024, when there will be more elections taking place around the world than ever before, albeit some of them will be effectively selections rather than elections.

The ideas and the thoughts of most global politicians are on the next months as a result, not the next years or generations.

And that leaves us a problem with bandwidth.

The incapacity to deal with the range of issues that are faced and the problem of bandwidth is exacerbated by the speed and diversity of communication technology. In politics, in the church, in diplomacy, in management, in finance and economics, the enormous increase in the

speed and reach of communications has completely changed the context of decision making and of strategy.

The instinctive response is to simplify, the necessity is the courage to embrace complexity. Failure to embrace the complexity of a problem leads to solutions that will lead to greater problems. The response to the confusion of our times has in many parts of the world been a surplus of courageous leaders in our time today who are profoundly politically skilled in developing power through populism.

They have courage.

Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) was one of the most insightful developers of the concepts which lead today to populism and he was an influential figure, a jurist of political philosophy in the rise and establishment of Adolf Hitler and of the National Socialist Party in the 1930s in Germany.

His development of the ideas of the sovereignty of the one who identifies exceptions from the hegemony of normal politics and even more of identity being formed through differentiation from the other, have seeped into the mainstream of many political systems. In this thinking normativism is challenged by the courageous and determined leader whose will to power does not accept the constraints imposed by the normal and the conventional. The influence of Nietzsche is obvious.

At the same time both as a fundamental basis of government and also as a tool of gaining power the identification of the other enables the creation of the binary such as “with the people or against the people”. A certain newspaper's headline after a judgment a few years back may come to mind. ‘People’ in this context having the elements of the German word “volk”. Those who are ‘other’ may be a large majority but they are also likely to be disparate, less organized and regrettably less courageously led.

The small, focused, powerful and brave unit has huge opportunities in the world in which we live with the communications which we use. In this way of thinking, courage is a necessary aspect of the objective of power. Successful populists require courage. They require enemies and they require resilience. They abhor more accountability, checks and balances, questioning, effective opposition. There are no acceptable constraints on action.

Populism is on a spectrum from determined campaigning in an election or determined action in government, to totalitarian manipulation in the manner of Hitler or Stalin. Governments slip along the spectrum in one way or another and change is always possible, and this is where courage plays such a strong part for good or ill. Mandela in South Africa, Václav Havel in what was then Czechoslovakia, showed the sacrifice and courage required to move from the dark end of the spectrum to the light and did it in a way that leaves their names imprinted in history.

In Shakespeare's Richard III, in his opening soliloquy beginning so famously with "now is the winter of our discontent", Richard says later on a few lines later "I will play the villain". In one full production that Caroline and I saw at Stratford many years ago, Richard played the villain at the

beginning until the villain began to play him. In his dream on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth in the last act when his victim comes to claim their revenge, he recognizes the price he has paid. It is forced to.

Courage by itself is thus a dubious virtue. In the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, he dies between two bandits. Both are courageous. One curses him, the other seeks and finds mercy and salvation.

Courage is a dubious virtue. It can go either way. Courage is a dependent virtue. It will go the right way when it is being questioned, when it has limits. It abhors boundaries in simplification and good courage embraces complexity and uncertainty.

In his excellent book "The Hour Between Dog and Wolf" John Coates, formerly a bond trader in New York and now a Professor of Neurosciences at Cambridge, sets out the neurological impact of stress and pressure. In particular he identifies three contexts that together and separately cause harm to us physiologically. They are uncertainty, unpredictability and the absence of control.

All three stimulate the brain to produce chemicals and hormones such as adrenaline which with prolonged and continual exposure develop sense either of powerlessness and anxiety or elation and that one has superhuman powers. The markets in the approach to and experience of 2008-9 are classic situations for finding both. Courage is a victim or product of the body as well as a personal decision.

So, courage is a condition that comes from body and mind, from spirit and soul. But what is the human being in which we find courage? What is our anthropology?

Given that courage is a dependent virtue and is deeply affected by our bodies as well as our culture, an essential factor in understanding courage in leadership or elsewhere is how we understand what a human being is.

Social and psychological anthropology and theological anthropology vary widely by culture, by religious background (including of those who reject any idea of faith) and by intuition.

The UK has an implied anthropology in the way society works which has developed and has been seen before. Although I hope no one would recognize these terms, I will argue that it is essentially an anthropology which involves two ancient Christian heresies, Arminianism and Pelagianism.

The latter is known around the theological world as the English heresy because Pelagius was English and it is a very English error. Arminianism says we can achieve perfection, I'm oversimplifying wildly, but Arminianism says we can achieve perfection in this life, we can live with that sin or to put it another way, the norm should be for all our institutions and people to get things right and thus when things go wrong, it is not fallibility but fault. Who is to blame is the obvious question. Somebody got it wrong.

I remember a BBC Radio 4 interview where the first question I was asked about a particular issue was who's to blame? You hear it again and again.

It is an anthropology that undermines courage for it creates a blame culture. It is litigious, angry, unforgiving and makes the exercise of courageous leadership much harder because the cost of failure is so high, especially on social media. It has a deep belief in conspiracy theory rather than cock-up theory. Pelagius believed we could get to heaven by our own efforts. His great opponent Augustine of Hippo said that we will always go wrong and need to accept our fallibility and sin and seek God's forgiveness.

In the late 19th century and early 20th a secularised form of Pelagianism led to liberal optimism that with the belief that with education for all, free trade and democracy, there would be peace and universal prosperity. Remember that Keynes offered the view in one of his books in the 20s, that by now we would have 15 hour working weeks and a vast flourishing of the arts. I wish.

It was a view the liberal optimism, the secularised Pelagianism that was much damaged by the Great War and received the coup de grâce in World War II and the Holocaust. But long years of peace have renewed it.

Do we really believe in this country in human evil, in widespread human evil or do we believe that people are good if they're led well? Ultra-modernity instils in us a hermeneutic of suspicion. Paxman once said 'I always start interviews asking myself what this liar is going to lie about today'. That is as good a definition of a hermeneutic of suspicion as you can get.

Social media has no space for forgiveness, for space to fail, let alone for nuanced understanding. And again that impacts on courage in leaders. It raises the barrier to courage because the consequences of failure are so terrible. It diminishes the support of risk. It atomizes the networks of those who can accompany us and help us. Every major decision involves a wager of your whole future and the body reacts severely to such stress.

In our senior leadership training in the Church of England, yes we do do it nowadays, begun about nine years ago, those who participate end their two years of 12 days a year with an archbishop, accompanying them to a place of horror, Auschwitz, Srebrenica, places like that.

They hear the stories, they reflect and pray and meditate and hear lectures and when they get home, they are asked to reflect deeply and rightly and go and see their bishop with their conclusions on human nature, because for most of them the systematic industrialized evil of a place like Auschwitz, the extraordinary killing of Srebrenica and its ongoing impact, the terrorism encountered by those who are involved in it in Northern Ireland, those are things they've not come up against on the whole, those things that possess our society.

But Christian teaching is that human beings are naturally curved in on themselves, selfish and so forth, power seeking and avaricious but

eminently redeemable and forgivable when their lives are focused on others through being committed to Christ who sets free by grace in forgiveness. In secular life that translates into structures of mediation, no blame cultures, patience with learning and reflection honestly on both failure and success.

Finally two comments on the need for political courage. The absence of courageous leadership has the most terrible consequences in world affairs. The 1930s opposed weak and worried leaders to powerful and courageous tyrants. Courageous, but of the dark side, as they say in Star Wars, and evil rule.

History is not repetitious I believe, it's not a circle but a line in which the future is unpredictable, the present is incomprehensible and the past gives us only occasional flashes of light. The struggle to lead amidst bandwidth inadequacy and a hostile impunitive culture is one that requires courage of the right kind.

Today we have the courageous leaders in the world with a desire for power and little constraint on action except that which they see as achievable. They are not all evil or at the very least, we do not know that they are, that is usually only a valid judgment in history, but they seek a very different kind of world and a very different framework of freedom and dissent. They have access to weapons very different from the past and also weapons very new. With them they seek to convict, convert and conquer.

The courageous leadership that is required needs a number of aspects if it is not to be corrupted by the exercise of its own strength. It must carry a decisive vision. We saw that in Lincoln, Rostock, Kennedy, Reagan, Churchill, Attlee, Thatcher, Blair, we observed it in Monet, Agnard, de Gaulle and many others. We may differ with any or all of them but they set out ideas well formulated in opposition and in government.

Certainly obstructed by events, inevitably failing in many of their dreams, they did not believe in their own infallibility and were accompanied like Lincoln by a company of rivals. They drew on deep thinking in numerous areas from philosophy through the sciences to philosophy.

Courage is honest. In their vision those courageous leaders analysed and spoke of what they looked for, what they saw in comprehensible terms. And they contrasted it with the situation they found with rigorous realism and what Kissinger called pitiless honesty.

Courage secondly must have achievable aims. I've taken these three things from an interview with Kissinger in The Economist on 27th of May last year. Courage must have achievable aims. A symptom of courage in leadership are aims and the dedication of means that goes further than the average politician or leader. Kennedy's moonshot speech is one of them. Attlee's extraordinary list of changes statutory and in policy and the decolonization in one parliament is possibly a greater one.

Courage must relate those aims, especially when they're overseas, to the needs and hopes of domestic life. The Butler Education Act was in 1944,

the year of D-day, long before the end of the war. The Beveridge Report even more, 1942. What an extraordinary moment of courage.

The next election here poses questions in economics, of productivity, stagnation, equality, infrastructure and many others. It poses questions of rearmament of the means and ways to peace and a foreign policy on which depend not only our security but our contribution to the rest of the world. It has high challenges in health, housing, university and other further education.

It has, in this election in other words, to at least set a vision for this nation's place and prominence in the world.

And finally a comment on the schools of political and public courage. Where do we learn it? For it is not in our DNA. The courageous are not born so but made so. It's in our education and formation, in the examples we have from good mentors and in the way we can learn to take risks which have low consequences and build on them. Archbishop William Temple, I think one of the greatest of my extraordinary predecessors, wrote Christianity and Social Order in 1942. He and Beveridge and Tawney were close friends from school days onwards. A remarkable collection. It sold 250,000 copies. I wish. One of his greatest chapters is on intermediate institutions. Those organizations and groups that are between the state and the family.

I argued in my very sub-temple 2017 book, which did not sell 250,000 copies, in Reimagining Britain, that they range from clubs and societies, schools and colleges, churches, hospitals, charities, companies, local authorities and many others. Intermediate institutions are training centres for courageous leadership. Their renewal is essential to developing courage.

In them there is the necessary accountability, challenge, opportunity to fail and recover and the place of developing friendships of accountability. Their encouragement, not their management, should be a value of government if we are to build strength for the future. Regulation of too many of these points is too often aiming at perfection when it should be content with the prevention of harm.

I speak as leader of a church which has serious internal differences on a range of issues. I won't talk about them. And in this we are an example of a bigger social truth. The fact that the ability to disagree as fellow human beings rather than as enemies seems increasingly elusive in our culture and not only our churches.

Courage rests on values that are absolute, not hating others for example but loving your enemy, not dividing the country for the sake of political advantage, the use of so called 'wedge issues' where unity is an absolute need for our flourishing. It is necessary to inspire and that needs courage and to be realistic about aims and that needs courage.

Courage requires, at any level, seeking to serve, not to be served. A political culture that sees politics as a step along the way to wealth is built on sand and will be corrupted. We see both.

As I said on the 1st of January on the Today programme, I believe passionately there is no problem so bad in this country that we have not shown in the past that we have the capacity to overcome it. We have an extraordinary story of overcoming the greatest obstacles, rising above our worst selves and coming together when we need to. We can do so again, but to do so we must set our sights on developing courage of the right kind across our society.

17 min read

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