



Jesus means getting involved in politics to help serve the

Politics and church are risky things to do at the same time. Five of my predecessors as Archbishop have died violently, three because they were involved in politics.

Most famously, Thomas Beckett in 1171 caused the king to ask "who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" Four knights promptly did so, with swords in Canterbury Cathedral.

Two centuries later, Archbishop Simon of Sudbury made the mistake of being the king's main tax collector. After a crowd stormed Lambeth Palace, they took him to Tower Hill, cut off his head and played football with it.

You would have thought that we might have learned. Stay quiet, don't collect taxes and keep your head down (and on).

The trouble is that's not what Jesus Christ did. He was never party political. No wing of politics – left or right – can claim God as being on its side.

But Jesus was highly political. He told the rich that, unlike the poor who were blessed, they would face woes. He criticised the King as a fox. He spoke harsh words to leaders of the nations when they were uncaring of the needy.

He did this because God cares for those in need and expects those who claim to act in his name to do the same. That means action - and words.

Actions are obvious. The churches and other faith groups run the vast majority of food banks. The Church of England alone looks after about 4,700 schools (other churches such as the Roman Catholics have huge numbers of their own), teaching children well, and doing so in many cases in areas of great deprivation.

The churches run debt counselling, and help families in difficulty in marriages and family life. They really are often the glue that holds society together, not entirely alone, but as a crucial part.

National education, many hospitals, most hospices, the majority of full time youth workers: all these were started with or are run by church and other faith groups.

Many football clubs started from churches, Liverpool and Everton for example - although nowadays they use footballs, not Archbishops' heads (for which I'm most grateful).

But what about words? Quite rightly people mistrust people who pontificate, lay down the law, tell them what to do or how society should be run.

In 1942 Archbishop William Temple wrote a wonderful book called Christianity and Social Order. Even in the depths of the World War II struggle against tyranny, he knew that God's care for the poor, and for all of society, meant that after the war there must be a more just society than in the 1930s.

He was old friends with William Beveridge, a top civil servant and another Christian, who wrote his great report that designed the welfare system, the health service and much of what we now take for granted in social care. They were friends with R.H. Tawney, a social philosopher, and again a

Christian.

Drawing on Christian understandings of justice, generosity and human dignity, they described the kind of country that they felt reflected God's values better.

Thank God they did interfere. They were political. And in part through their politics, millions now have better lives.

Of course, thankfully no religious leader has the authority that they had hundreds of years ago. But every person, group and institution in our wonderful, democratic country has the right and obligation to care about our future.

In 1945 it was obvious we needed to reimagine Britain. The economy was broke. Our empire was about to go. People's expectations had changed dramatically.

Today also we face not only great challenges with Brexit, new technologies and changing ideas. We also have incredible opportunities.

There is much to be hopeful about. This country is as gifted as ever – full of potential, with remarkable people and an extraordinary heritage.

What happened in the post-war period was a reimagining based on the clear values to which Tawney, Temple and Beveridge, among many others, contributed.

Those values were expressed in remarkable legislation. Successive governments of different parties created great institutions and systems like the NHS and others.

Those institutions did not emerge out of nowhere. They were based in large part on our Christian heritage, put into practice by believer and non-believer alike.

We need to face our challenges today with a fresh vision that is confident, practical and outward looking. We need to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, as the churches often are (although they also often get things wrong) and also by speaking of a vision for society. I passionately believe it can be done.

There will be great changes in our country through technology and science, through changes abroad and at home. We may base change in good values. We may just let things take their course.

But if it's the latter, then the consequences for the poor, the sick and those on the margins will be dire. Our pride will be diminished, and our contribution to the world stifled.

If we all take part in forming our values, if we base them in what is good and precious in our heritage, then our future can be better than our past. Our children and grandchildren can remember us as a generation that gave them hope and purpose.

For me, that is worth risking one's head for. It justifies the church not only speaking about Jesus Christ, but also, like him, calling for – as well as working for – the society that God calls us to pursue.

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