

What are we Communicating?

East Window, August 1999

We live in an age of new communication technology. But each method of communication through the history of humankind has carried its own culture with it. Writing was a communication technology which allowed us to list and categorise, to remember more accurately, so allowing historical and scientific investigation. The car is another communication technology which brings its own culture with it. You can choose your car's style (sporty or robust) to suit your image, your colour to suit your taste. But more than this, the car-culture with its sweeping motorways, its 'road movies' and its offer of personal freedom and public nuisance is an ideology on four wheels.

But whilst the car moves at 70 miles an hour (if you're lucky) modern electronic communication is an ideology moving at 186 thousand miles per second! We are a very small planet in a very big hurry. But who is asking where we are all hurrying to? Who has the wisdom to grapple with that question? How desperately we need Wisdom.

Industry, commerce and our political leaders are telling us that the Britain of the future must be a 'knowledge-based' culture. For whilst our raw materials are waning and our empire relinquished, we still have a highly educated workforce, and it is this resource of human beings steeped in knowledge alongside the new electronic communications technology, that may become the basis for tomorrow's prosperity. But for all that is positive about that statement, we still have the responsibility to ask, 'is a 'knowledge-based' culture, necessarily the same as a culture which has wisdom? And how we need wisdom!

Wisdom is a sacred gift, and is therefore spoken of regularly in the Bible, and we are even given a whole section of the Bible we call 'the Wisdom Literature'. Jesus, with his Jewish contemporaries, would have spoken of Wisdom as one of the female attributes of God - there with God at the creation. And the early catholic Church, including Ambrose, Alcuin and others, produced prayers and liturgies in praise of Her. Indeed they went further and declared that Wisdom at her most absolute is of the very nature of Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Wisdom then is no simple human attribute to take for granted, but is only given to us because of God's abundant grace. For God chooses to make us in God's own image - and the very nature of God includes that abiding Wisdom of which the Bible and our earliest Christian traditions speak so eloquently.

The prayer for Wisdom then is important to our times when 'Knowledge-based culture' could be offered as a poor substitute. For there is so much being electronically communicated which is not quality controlled, and also so much communicated indirectly by the culture which surrounds our information-technology which is rarely if ever questioned.

We need in the Church to create through our prayer, our reading and scholarship, through informed discussion-groups and through meditation on God's nature, a fresh culture of Wisdom that will help us stand back and ask the questions of our world, society and culture - Where are we going? Why are we behaving like this? What is God's hope for our new millennium? Our clergy must be given space to read more deeply and reflect. The Church must offer our laity more opportunities through our Course in Christian Studies and elsewhere, for open-ended learning - not tied to a particular task or ministry but directed towards the accumulation of Godly Wisdom. We must create a culture of Wisdom around all our Church life and action, by meditating upon God's Holy Wisdom. For without Wisdom, the people perish.

*"...for Wisdom is more profitable than silver,
and the gain she brings is better than gold!" Proverbs 3*

+Laurie Bradwell