

*A message
from Revd. Malcolm Strange*

Dear Friends

All change platform one! We have a new government and as I write my article the new MPs are being sworn into parliament, it takes three days once the speaker has been hauled into place for all the niceties to be completed. I am told that we now have the most 'Godless Parliament' in history with forty per cent of MP's making a secular affirmation rather than a religious one. This



is of course broadly in line with national data with 42 per cent of the population saying they do not believe in a divine being (God) and 53 per cent declaring no religious affiliation or membership. We have come a long way since 1888 when the first openly atheistic MP Charles Bradlaugh, was barred from taking his seat because he would not swear the oath of allegiance to God.

The papers tell me in the light of this latest evidence of religious decline that there is a sense of rejoicing in humanist circles, as Christianity continues to circle the wagons and face up to what might be its last stand. I have never quite grasped this rabidity and desire amongst some 'Humanists' to dance on the grave of organised religion and particularly in the UK Christianity.

As well as being a Priest I am also a qualified RE Teacher and have always advocated the importance of valuing and teaching the Humanist position in the courses I have delivered in the classroom. I have always admired their desire to promulgate the best qualities to be found in the human condition, promoting key values that can help society to be a better place for us all. Like many Christians, I have to a degree, reflected this in my own ministry being focused on our human talents, gifts and strengths as much as on divine deliverance, to be honest there is something quite incarnational in all this.

What saddens me is that sometimes Humanists can come across as just as fundamentalist as some of the religious positions, beliefs and practices they challenge and seek to eradicate. This is a shame given that one of the greatest of human strengths is the desire to understand others and value them as human beings.

In my experience of working with young people and families it is clear, that adherence to an organised faith position is very much in decline. The one thing which is not though, is the reality that most humans are very spiritual beings and awareness of this is, actually, on the rise as greater numbers engage with and explore the spiritual side of their nature.

Perhaps it is in this spiritual oneness, that both non-religious and religious people might find a common denominator which helps us all to live better lives and enhances our understanding of each other. Thus, enabling the communities in which we live to be built on the firm foundations of love and care for all.

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