

Power and Responsibility

There has been a lot in the media recently about people in positions of power and influence who misuse their hold over others to abuse or exploit them. This has been particularly evident in the film and entertainment industry with increasing allegations of sexual harassment and worse by producers and others. It has also come to light in politics and other areas of life. This is of course nothing new. The difference is that such revelations are coming out into the open and general public disapproval for such behaviour is increasing. Not before time, many would say.

The common denominator is arguably the temptation amongst those in high positions that they are above the law, that accepted norms of behaviour do not apply to them, even that they have a right to behave in such a way. Of course many do not succumb to this temptation. Yet the atmosphere is easily sullied by the minority.

Much the same applies to leaders of countries who are intent on retaining their power and influence at all costs. Syria is perhaps the most obvious current example, and, until recently, Zimbabwe. There are sadly many others too, though.

The abuse, harassment and exploitation of others is always wrong. That goes without saying. But on the political level it can have serious consequences for the peace and stability of a country. Again Syria is the most obvious and yet far from unique example. Peace and reconciliation require dialogue and even sometimes compromise – something that those hanging desperately onto power often refuse to accept.

A clear expression of the ideal is provided in our Bible reading just now from the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 8.10-17). For those who lead others knowledge and wisdom are better than material riches. In the good ruler there is no place for pride and arrogance, only justice.

Of course leaders of nations are human like the rest of us. Few attain this level of perfection. Indeed in the Old Testament even those two kings who are held up as models, David and Solomon, had their faults which the Biblical writers do not attempt to hide.

And so we pray and hope for wise leaders who will act justly and with integrity, who will accept their responsibilities, who will respect and value others, who will work not for their own ends but for the good of all.

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