

The Rt Rev James Jones

James Jones became Bishop of Liverpool in 1998 having been Bishop of Hull since 1994. Over the last 14 years he has been deeply involved in urban regeneration. For four years he chaired the New Deal for Communities programme in Liverpool (Kensington Regeneration) and has championed community-led regeneration in lectures, articles and broadcasts.

He broadcasts regularly, especially on 'Thought for the Day' for the BBC. He has written a number of books including *Jesus and the Earth* (SPCK, 2003) which looks at the relationship between Christianity and the environment.

James Jones is a member of the House of Lords, Bishop for Prisons, Visitor to St Peter's College in the University of Oxford, Co-President of Liverpool Hope University, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Ambassador and a Fellow of the RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce), Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, and Chair of the Hillsborough Independent Panel.

The Rt Rev James Jones has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Hull University, an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Lincoln and an Honorary PhD from Liverpool Hope University.



The Role of Faith Based Organisations in the Future of Civil Society

The Church of England occupies a unique position both historically and constitutionally. At a local level it is often the source of cohesion, especially in rural areas, the inner city and outer estates that have been abandoned by banks, post offices, libraries, surgeries and even pubs. Its leadership often acts as the convenor of the faith communities, ensuring that their voice is heard in public life, especially locally. Its bishops often provide continuity to civic leadership at a local level. Both nationally and locally the Church acts as the celebrant of our common life in both sorrow and in joy.

Over and above these vital roles in our community the Church is heavily engaged in the provision of public services, not least education. There is a long-running debate about whether churches and faith communities should engage in the provision of state education. Historically, it was, of course, the church that initiated the education of children. It was later bequeathed to the state who, while assuming responsibility, both recognised and welcomed the Church's continuing involvement.

The faith sector believes that spiritual and moral values lie at the heart of education. Indeed, there is no education that is value free. The Church of England and faith communities generally believe that parents have a right to choose an education which reflects their religious values while embracing the requirements of the national curriculum.

Religious education and worship contribute significantly to the development of the imagination of a young person – and it is this development which is crucial to creating a caring and civil society. It is in the realm of the imagination that we develop the faculty to place ourselves in the shoes of those different from us, to imagine their situation and to empathise with them. Without the development of imagination, young people risk growing up unable to empathise with those who are different from themselves, leading to a society where compassion is in shorter supply.

This is not to say that other schools and other disciplines don't develop the imagination. It is simply to recognise that spirituality and its development plays a major part in the creation of a civil society. I believe evidence for this can be found in my own diocese, why so many parents wish to have their children educated in a community which recognises the importance of spiritual as well as moral values.

Over the last 30 years there is no doubt that the public and charitable sectors have been radically challenged and changed by engagement with the private sector. Many of the disciplines that govern the private and commercial sector have been deliberately applied to the public sector to make it more efficient and more accountable. This has been broadly welcomed. At the same time the virtues of the public and charitable sectors have rubbed off on the private sector, which has during the same period developed a much more acute sense of corporate social responsibility.

One of the fears of the future in the economic downturn is that the private sector might give up on its recent commitment to corporate social responsibility. It would be an even greater pity if, at the same time, the charitable sector lost its sharper edge.

However, one of the areas in which we need to be increasingly vigilant is the partnership that has emerged between the third sector and government. Whereas once upon a time local government was the provider of local services, they have now moved towards simply commissioning local services from a range of providers, including the charitable sector.

The problem with developing service level agreements with the third sector for the provision of local services is that it risks dulling the sector's innovative and energetic dynamics. Binding them into local government budgets can hamstring their development and also rob them of that independent and innovative spirit that allows them to rise to challenges as they find them without suffocating them in reams of red tape.

What is at stake as we move forward in this third millennium is the nature and motivation of true community. Market-dominated approaches to public services and economic development have the tendency to reduce people to autonomous consumers who worship at the altar of choice. I believe that social commentators in 100 years' time will look back with amazement, wondering how we could so easily and comfortably describe ourselves as consumers, our society as the consumer society. Did we not know that the word meant to eat, to devour, to destroy? Did we not know that the earth was not a limitless larder and that resources were finite? Did we not know the impact of our choices upon the ecology of the planet? For the sake of our future, we must review radically the understanding we have of ourselves as autonomous consumers. We need to recast ourselves not as consumers but as conservers, and challenge the idea that we are autonomous, independent of our surroundings.

What engenders community is the experience of people being in communion with one another. It is this mutuality and sense of mutual responsibility that defines a community. Our society is desperately in need of recovering that social dynamic. We believe that, although others might write the obituary of the Church of England and other faith communities, this is in fact the time for our contribution to be made and registered as people experience the consequences of autonomy and consumerism.