

Reality is where you place your attention

That's a quote worth pondering on from Dom Lawrence Freeman, as is the following as he wanders around the exhibits at the recent Cop26 conference in Glasgow:

I listened to a presentation at a booth one day which floored me from the first sentence. It began with a frontal attack on 'them' who had excluded 'us' the young people from the conference. It was delivered with the kind of tone you had either to applaud or be accused by. When the tone got too shrill I moved away. Not because the speaker may not have been right. Perhaps there should have been more young people allowed in. I left because the tone and anger seemed self-indulgent, hiding what might in fact have been a good case.

Contrast Jesus, *sitting among the doctors, listening to them and asking them questions* – the beginning of wisdom, all dependent upon where we place our attention. But not without a cost; huge anxiety on the part of his parents who in a moment of inattention had lost sight of where he was. But now Jesus pays attention to them once more, perhaps realising for the first time, like so many children, the cost to his mother and father of parenthood, and so remains with them, as far as we know, until adulthood. And the parents, in their turn, perhaps for the first time, (if we leave the infancy narratives to one side) realising that this child of theirs was also child of a larger understanding, of a Father who would call him away from his family to complete his apprenticeship elsewhere – the moment that all parents dread but know they must obey if their child is to reach maturity. There's a wonderful interplay of this growth to maturity for us all in the passage from the Colossians and, indeed, from Ben Sirach in Ecclesiasticus – it's as if we are all on loan to one another from a greater reality, for a time only, with duties and responsibilities which we are given, not to mould people to our image but to the image of a God, of a Father, if you will, whom we cannot hear and see directly. The art is how to do this in a loving manner; in a manner attentive to the other person's needs, to the other person's reality. Contrast the young man at the Cop26 exhibition: he's on the right lines but has yet to learn the manner, or the manners, of it.

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