

Roddy Doyle jokes in The Guardian that he would support the idea of God as a delusion if it weren't for the fact that Richard Dawkins had written a book about it – which is an interesting take on why people are turned off both religion and atheism – both are ultimately incarnated in individuals and something of that theme is present in today's gospel passage. Jesus is not excoriating the Temple and all it stands for but it's abuse- those who use it for their own profit, in marked contrast to the poor widow who gives all she has to live on. It's how we practise what we believe that matters. This will unfold over the coming years as we see Trump's victory, for example, for what it really is – an abuse of the idea of God in order to enrich a few at the expense of the many. This is God co-opted in the service of the rich and powerful. Jesus does not oppose the religion of his day but its malpractice – the concentration of power in the hands of a few: the scribes who like to walk around in long robes to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares and so on and more pertinently in this instance apparently because they had governance of a widow's inheritance when the husband died, or a responsibility at least to look after the widow and the orphan. Instead ' they swallow the property of widows while making a show of lengthy prayers'.

I was once driving Bishop Cormac Murphy O' Connor, as he was then, to an airport and took the opportunity to ask him what a rich parishioner had asked me – which was ' what to do with all the money he was very good at making'. Cormac readily responded 'Tell him to give it to the Church', partly to shut me up no doubt, but it's a joke that works because there's substance in it - it's a common expectation of many, believers and non- believers alike, that ' the Church' that is the institution of the church as represented by it's priests and bishops, and particularly the Vatican, is really only in it for itself – a means of accruing power, wealth and influence. And a look at the history of the Church will find plenty of support for this point of view. But the reality on the ground, and one might add ' in heaven', is that the church is not essentially an institution but incarnated in an amazing range of individuals of all stripes and persuasions struggling to live a holy life,, struggling like the poor widow and the widow at Sidon to live in this world in an honourable way with respect to both God and neighbour, and mostly and ideally in an unselfconscious way – just getting on with it and responding to both their own needs and the needs of others in as best a way as they can – spontaneously and transparently without undue calculation. Perhaps a better response to the business man who was so good at making money would have been ' to pray' and to live a life so whole or holy that what to do next would have come as naturally aka supernaturally as that of the two widows. We can blame ' the Church' for all sorts of things but ultimately it lies with us as individuals to be that Church for others. On this Remembrance Sunday that is also the best way perhaps that we can honour all the dead of so many wars, many of them fought, ostensibly ,on religious grounds.

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