

Happy New Year!

After the most indulgent season of the year and with a sense of new beginnings at the start of a New Year many of us look to how our lives might be a little different and make a resolution to try to achieve that. Giving up alcohol or cigarettes, eating better or exercising more all figure highly in our aspirations – and with good reason.

I wonder, though, how we are planning on tending our spiritual health as this new year begins.

An interesting feature of faith in this country (and elsewhere in the west as well) is that we are inclined to think that a little religion is much better than a lot. As we view the wave of dreadful terrorist attacks by religious extremists that have taken place, particularly since 9/11, we feel that we are confirmed in this; taking matters of faith too seriously is really not good for ourselves or for anyone else. What is more, as my mother used to say, there is a danger that we are so heavenly minded that you are no earthly use.

A few years ago, Jonathan Sacks, the former chief Rabbi, wrote a book about extremism and intolerance in which he challenges this view. He convincingly argues that those who use (any) religion as a justification for violence are not people of much faith but little. As Jonathan Swift wrote in the early Eighteenth Century we can have 'enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another'. Sacks argues that to take faith more seriously leads us into deeper respect and celebration of those who are different from us, it does not make us hate them.

And so, with that in mind, as we ponder our new year's resolutions can I encourage us to not neglect our spiritual health and determine to seek to go deeper with God in this coming year. If your Bible is gathering dust then take it down, or even treat yourself to a new one in modern English. Why not try to read through the Gospel of Luke and allow yourself to be excited by the picture of Jesus you find there. Or take a little time to pray. If time is tight then why not use time spent travelling or walking the dog. There is a great on-line resource called Pray as You Go designed for commuters which is available as an app or a podcast, and which gives a few verses of scripture and some guidance on how to use those to reflect and pray, which I thoroughly recommend. God made us to be people of body, mind and spirit. May you find nourishment for your whole self in this coming year.

With God's blessing

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'Eob' or similar, written in a cursive style.