

Sunken Ship Recruiting Now

It's ok, I can hear it in your soft voice; that newly-polished rhetoric that flows so assuredly. You've said it so many times, the phrase itself feels like a close relative of yours. You say it again: "It's a calling." You sit, deep in the words and make light of how alien it seems to pursue a vicar's life on our island today. Indeed, when I press you on why you would chase such a job, knowing you'll hate the idea of it being a 'job', you respond with words that say a lot, but mean very little.

You dare not admit that the lifestyle appeals to you. That all those nasty secular realities will never cross the horizon of your day and that's how you like it. That your dog collar will protect you from certain social expectations of an average man like a sick-note in a P.E. lesson. That you long for the safety of three years of academia around the like-minded churched to over-debate, pontificate and procrastinate. That your rent-free house and £20K will allow you to silently scream how content you've become.

But there's something else within your charmless stall that hides beyond your lights and twitches. I see it, it's an awakening. Deep within your shut-off soul you know that you'll soon become a big fish in the smallest pond on earth. You know you'll become one of the poster boys of a subculture that boasts of less members than diagnosed UK heroin addicts. You know the model of the Sunday show has long since been rejected by the 90 per cent of every diocese who will never darken the door of the faith museum you so ardently idolise.

The awakening passes as your regimented and putrid apathy returns to the fore. Of course, you'll be delivering 'fresh expressions' in this gaunt and soulless religion. You'll cling to your boyish roots and have the ear of the rich and the poor. You'll master self-deprecation to a tee. But you won't be like the rest. You know the taste of wine and its affects. And you were once friends with someone who tried a cigarette. You're a man of the people, a man of experience; a leader.

However, unlike your creepy friends who sneak around like Gollum in an orgy, I'm not smiling or telling you how: "God will use you incredibly," because I don't believe He will. You see this in my cold, bloodshot eyes. I, the notorious thorn, the former preacher, is now looking at you in real-time. And it dawns on you that I rejected three opportunities to take the path you've plunged yourself on. And as soon as you ask me, you regret it. "So, you didn't fancy the

cloth then, Al?"

My response, like a round of bullets, stuns your timid stock into seizure. "If the Church's relevance and influence was likened to a boxing match, it would have been stopped 20 years ago. You represent a guest on the Titanic, praising the quality of the chandelier, while sinking ever further into the abyss. You are standing in favour of a system that has replaced Jesus' instruction to: "Go into the world," with: "Come into our world". You've compromised any chance you could have had to do something different. All you'll become is a caricature in a pretend adult world with zero creativity and less conviction than a tortoise. The only respect you'll get is from the buffoons who fund your Sunday circus and the coffin dodgers who remember how your sort used to have influence."

You hold your shandy tightly, unfamiliar with my tone. And then that unwelcome sense of awakening returns in full flight. You know this 'calling' will do nothing but hinder you from sharing your faith with the 90 per cent of unchurched people in this city. You know the taste of your own future like the taste of cheap wine. And as the Church's necessity for funerals and weddings has albeit diminished, you know that all you'll amount to is a passing stranger on the periphery of a traveller's photograph.

I smile as we stand in the moment, unable to take back what has been said. Your friends arrive, all churched-up and ready for an orgasm of gossip. The moment passes, and we both know you'll never awaken again. Sleep well, Vicar.