

## Views from the Pews: First and second things

C S Lewis had some incisive things to say about human priorities. “Every preference of a small good to a great, or a partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good....If Esau really got the pottage in return for his birthright, then Esau was the lucky exception. You can’t get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first. From which it would follow that the question, ‘What things are first?’, is of concern ....to everyone”. In the contemporary church, a strong candidate for the position of First Thing, to be prioritised by all possible means, is the problem of diminishing church membership.

For all of the nearly 50 years I have sat in Anglican pews, I have heard people worrying about the small congregations and the high proportion of grey heads amongst them, and about the implications for the future demise of the Church. Of course that is a serious concern, no-one is denying that. But we are still here, because congregations are dynamic communities, with ongoing additions and losses over centuries. God blesses those whose lives and priorities are set on fire and rearranged by the love of Christ, then uses their example to draw others into the future church to join the faithful, much-loved grey heads of the past.

One very devout Anglican priest once told me, seriously but tongue-in-cheek, “The continuation of the Anglican church is the clearest possible proof of the existence of God”. Christ’s command was to “Seek first the Kingdom of God” as our First Thing; he added that “and all these things shall be added unto you”. The human question for us is how to practice humble, loving and cheerful servant faith. The future consequences are God’s business.

Lewis was writing in 1942, about the widespread concern over the future of Europe during the Second World War. “To preserve civilisation has been the great aim; the collapse of civilisation, the great bugbear. ....It will be replied that our concern for civilisation is very natural and very necessary at a time when civilisation is so imperilled. But.....perhaps it can’t be preserved that way. Perhaps civilisation will never be safe until we care for something else more than we care for it.” When love for God and each other is our First Thing, numbers follow.

*Kim King,*  
citing C S Lewis, “First and Second Things”, pp 19-23, Fount Paperback (1971).