

THE COURAGE TO CHANGE

Give me courage to change what can be changed, forbearance to accept those things that should not be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference. That prayer, read out in my school assemblies, might well have been aimed at behaviour and discipline, but what should or should not be changed is of much wider concern. Even our politicians are stressing change.

For change to be possible there has to be choice. In general, changing something means choosing a better alternative. But better for whom? We see the benefits for ourselves of choosing to do things differently, but do we think of others who might be affected? There is always the temptation to say 'this I will do and no one is going to stop me'. Other people are always affected, and we need to find who or what will be harmed because of the changes we plan.

All religions, all faiths, emphasise thinking of others and not just yourself. Jesus instructs us to love our neighbour as ourselves. When asked who is our neighbour, he gave the parable of the Good Samaritan, stressing that we should be thinking of those in most need. We never make choices and changes in a vacuum, and we should not make them just to suit ourselves.

Change, real change, is never easy. Recognising our neighbours' needs is not easy either. Those with religious faith will know that there is a power beyond self whose help can be sought, but it is not only those who have this faith that must seek courage to change what can be changed, forbearance to accept what should not be changed; and particularly the wisdom to know the difference.