

Egregious omicron?



Until recently the word 'egregious' has been one of the lesser-used adjectival descriptions of conspicuously bad and flagrant behaviour in the lexicon of everyday use. In archaic form it originally meant something like 'distinguished' or 'eminent' but typically, as with the ever-mutating English language, it has taken on an ironic sense that is entirely applicable to aspects of today's political and other leadership. It has latterly become a favoured vehicle to label and criticise those (who should know better) associated with mendacity, sleaze, and even corruption.

Very recently the Archbishop of Canterbury in a masterly exercise of understatement in the British press called for "more honesty in public life."ⁱ He did not use the word egregious but the British Parliamentary Committee on Standards did in its report on a now former senior minister.ⁱⁱ

In a world where increasingly political leaders seem detached from those they supposedly serve, the phenomenon of what has been described as 'elected dictatorship'ⁱⁱⁱ is emerging. This seems to be associated with populism and nationalism and is often erroneously justified as the will of the people.

The phenomenon of a global pandemic has not improved the situation. The latest omicron variant and iteration of Covid 19 is named after the fifteenth letter of the Greek alphabet for good reason. By constantly mutating, replicating and proliferating the virus is acting very successfully in its own self-interest. If it were human we might say it is acting egregiously.

Unfortunately, in these circumstances the word egregious certainly has some application. At national level developed western nations have made some good progress with vaccination against the virus. Yet at the same time the so-called third world remains exposed, vulnerable and literally helpless. Where are the billions of doses required to save millions of lives? Inefficient and inappropriate use of public money coupled with inadequate political oversight associated with unenlightened self-interest won't work.

Once again it's time for the Church to speak out. The Archbishop of Canterbury has made a small start. In November the Pope offered the admittedly vague "Justice and peace must overcome political and economic contradictions"^{iv} but mostly churches and their congregations seem as impotent as the people they serve. The loudest voices seem to

come from the American evangelical right, whose interests seem at best introspective even in denial.

All this on the cusp of the great Christian festival of hope centred in the form of a baby in a manger who is (if we but care to see) Emmanuel that is $\epsilon\mu\mu\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon\eta\lambda$ (Isaiah 7 v 14) or $\epsilon\mu\mu\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon\eta\lambda$ (Matthew I v 23) 'God with us'. To which we might add 'God help us'.

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ⁱ See: <https://www.uktimenews.com/archbishop-of-canterbury-calls-for-honesty-in-public-life/>

ⁱⁱ "The Committee found that [his] actions were an egregious case of paid advocacy, that he repeatedly used his privileged position to benefit two companies for whom he was a paid consultant, and that this has brought the House into disrepute". Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-lawmaker-should-be-suspended-over-egregious-paid-lobbying-watchdog-2021-10-26/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/tim-walker-interviews-ken-clarke/>

^{iv} <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-11/pope-francis-jpic-bishops-conferences-covid-development.html>