

The Weakest in the Centre

By Anand Peter

Have you heard the song about the grandfather's clock which goes like this?

*'My grandfather's clock was too large for the shelf,
So it stood ninety years on the floor;
It was taller by half than the old man himself,
Though it weighed not a pennyweight more...'*
Henry Clay Work, "My Grandfather's Clock," 1876

I chanced upon it this morning. When I thought about the clock, what Paul wrote came to mind: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit... For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:13-14). The Church is likened to an old mechanical clock — wheels within wheels, some big, some small, and yet others tiny. All parts together are the Body of Christ, each of us with a part to play in the whole. Paul cautioned the faithful with much foresight. Like every human organisation, the Church is constantly in danger of corruption. As soon as power and wealth come into the Church, manipulation, exploitation, misuse of power and influence, and outright corruption are not far away. In the bargain, the most important, but often considered the weakest, parts of the Church — the elderly, the poor and the sick, and little children — tend to get left out of the whole.

While the dial with its numbers, and the long and short hands of the clock, are like the most honoured parts of the body — the head, the arms, or the feet, which lead and control — the most important parts are invisible or unpresentable. That is the mystery of the Church. As a people called out of oppression into spiritual freedom, we must recognise that it is the weakest among us — the elderly, small children, the handicapped, the mentally ill, the hungry and the sick — who form the real centre. Paul wrote, "Those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness" (1 Corinthians 12:23). Going back to the clock: it will instantly malfunction if one of those tiny wheels breaks or is displaced.

The Church, as the people of God, can truly embody the living Christ among us only when the elderly, the children, the poor, and the sick remain its most treasured part. Care for them, therefore, is much more than Christian charity. It is the essence of being the Body of Jesus Christ.