

# Why St Paul's is at the heart of the debate on #OccupyL...

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A [commentator on this blog this morning](#) has said:

*I really don't think this post is a useful contribution to what's happening. You appear to be trying to make St Paul's the enemy and every time we do this, the press make this more about OccupyLSX versus St Paul's and less about the real reasons for the occupation.*

*St Paul's initially welcomed the occupation and I reckon they'd continue to if more effort was made to let them carry on as normal.*

*The church is not an example of capitalism. It is not trying to make a profit. It is just trying to hold services (which are free by the way) and pull in enough money to keep a magnificent building in good repair.*

*We have an important argument to make about the state of modern capitalism but instead of doing that we're taking potshots at a body that should be our natural friend.*

Respectfully, he's wrong.

Of course St Paul's was not the original target of the #OccupyLondon movement. That it has become so is an accident, but not an unfortunate one, or even one that was inappropriate. And there are good reason for saying so.

As Dan Plesch noted in the Guardian yesterday this site outside the West end of St Paul's has for centuries been a location where the right to free speech and dissent has been exercised. That the #occupylondon site is there is therefore part of a long and largely honourable tradition. The simple fact is that the rights we have in this country are not ours by luck or chance, they arose because over decades and centuries people argued for them, protested for them, and even on occasion were utterly unreasonable in demanding them.

So votes for all, and especially for woman, were hard won. Employment rights were hard won. Many civil rights were similarly the result of hard, patient and sometimes

impetuous and intemperate struggle. And we're richer for all these things.

It would be great to say the Church of England had always been on the side of those demanding these rights: that they had lived up to the testament of the Gospels that all stand equal. It's a sad fact that with some honourable and notable exceptions this is not true. The Church of England is the establishment church, and it shows.

I have shown how especially true this is in the case of St Paul's - where the Foundation is dominated by the City and the list of sponsors is a roll call of the institutions that are to be found there. And as the Times is reporting this morning the result is that St Paul's itself is now divided. The Dean and some other members of the Chapter want to evict #occupylondon, siding with the City - the state within a state in the UK that has unique powers to rule the Square Mile on behalf of the elite in this country. And apparently opposed to them is Giles Fraser - to whom I owe an apology if this is true.

But this is not just a fight about the duty of the Church to side with the poor - although for me that is why I have become involved in and I hope helped fuel this debate. It is about the capture of a body which has a very clear and unambiguous duty to the oppressed so that it is instead standing up for the rights of a tiny minority to oppress the majority - which is exactly what is going on, and which is precisely what neoliberal economics is designed to do.

And as I have shown I have no doubt at all that St Paul's has been captured for that purpose. The appointment of a Dean who was previously Bishop of the Isle of Man where he showed no problem with tax haven behaviour was, I am sure, no coincidence. He was selected to do the City's work and looks like he is doing it admirably, even if, as the [Guardian has said](#):

This rather messy and absurd situation has handed the dean and chapter of St Paul's a truly historic opportunity to discredit Christianity in this country. They seem determined to take it. They should think, and stop.

So what is this really about? It's about the power of money to capture all that is in its path to ensure that the opportunity for an elite to make money without impediment is not interrupted. St Paul's should be ensuring that ability is impeded where it oppresses, as it clearly does at present. The fact that it is not opening its doors to the protestors; that is it not outside with them; that the clergy are not appearing (as I have) in Tent City University; all those things make clear the Cathedral is part of the problem because it has been captured by the City for the benefit of the City.

It's that fact that St Paul's is in the pay of the City - as are also so many of our politicians - that means they are not peripheral to this debate but are now properly at the core of it. Since the Dean, and his Bishop, Richard Chartres, have so clearly aligned themselves with wealth, the status quo and oppression they are absolutely appropriately now the target of protest as the paymasters who have put them in post

and publicly support them. When an institution is captured it becomes synonymous with those who captured it: St Paul's has been captured and as such is as much a problem as Goldman Sachs.

That's why the occupation must continue.

I am in London today and will try to get there.

If I don't I will next week.

All of which again suggests that the argument about night-time occupation is irrelevant - this is a protest by people from all walks of life- not all of whom can stay overnight. And it will not be going away.