

5th August 2021

Hats

"I never saw so many shocking bad hats in my life."

The Duke of Wellington (attrib), Upon seeing the first Reformed Parliament.

(Sir William Fraser, in "Words on Wellington", 1889)

A former hospice chaplain colleague has a Consultant in her hospice who is extremely good at her job and highly valued by other members of team. Sadly, the doctor's father took poorly, and, in time, needed Palliative Care. Was he to go to a hospice some distance away which would necessitate a lengthy travel to visit? Or was he to become a patient where his daughter worked? The latter course of action was decided on, bringing with it apprehension for the staff. How were they going to handle their doctor-colleague as a visiting relative? And anyway, how would they know when she was in the hospice as a visitor or when she was working?

They needn't have worried. When the doctor visits her dad, she wears a hat – a fetching, red or brown French Beret, I'm told. And when she's on duty, no hat is to be seen. "It's working a treat," my colleague tells me. "Hat-wearing means everyone's clear what role the doctor is playing." These are no "shocking, bad hats" in Wellington's words. These are hats that give a signal that everyone understands.

When my elder daughter was in P1, I was chaplain at her school. One day I was in the Staff Room after a morning Assembly, when two children, one of them my daughter, came to enquire about something. When they saw me across the room, they both smiled and gave a little wave. Then my daughter surprised us by saying, in that sing-songy way children do, "Good morning Mr Gordon ..." And why? Because *she* was wearing the hat of being a polite pupil, while *I* was wearing the hat of a school chaplain.

We all wear hats like that, not always physical like a sensitive Consultant, but more often metaphorical – like a polite daughter-of-the-manse. We change hats all the time. But make sure everyone knows what hat you're wearing and why. And, when you change hats, make sure you put on the right one. After all, it wouldn't be good if a five-year-old daughter came to the school staff room and shouted, "Hey, dad!" because she'd chosen to wear the wrong hat, would it?

A prayer for today

Today I'm wearing a hat as a loving Child of God. So, "Good morning, Lord."