

*"Is it sinful to fly on holiday? The Bishop of London, Rt Revd Richard Chartres, has been reflecting on the moral dimension of environmental issues, he's producing a booklet on the matter, which will be distributed to all the Church of England's dioceses - and he's in our radio car. You were quoted in yesterday's Sunday Times as saying that 'making selfish choices such as flying on holiday or buying a large car are a symptom of sin'. Do you care to unpack that sentence for us?"*

Bishop of London: I'd be glad to. Obviously it's not my business to issue *fatwas* just like that against flying. But it is very important that people should be helped to take responsibility for the decisions they make, and people of faith - Christians certainly and others as well - regard 'living in sin' as an idea which has sometimes been presented in rather a small way; living in sin is really living a life that is turned in upon itself. We're meant to be connected, we're meant to be responsible, to God, to the creation, to our neighbour and to our own wellbeing, and so as we try and understand our responsibilities it's extremely important to put it in that context. And clearly there are all sorts of decisions in life that can be seen in that light; I launched a campaign called 'Shrinking the Footprint' - which I might say is addressed, as you quite rightly reported, to the Church - we're not pointing the finger at other people, because you don't have a right to speak to other people unless you have put your own house in order.

*Sorry to be a bit crude about it, but I'm not quite clear as to whether I understand from that that you are or aren't saying that buying a big un-environmentally friendly car or taking a plane to somewhere nice in the sun is a sin?*

Bishop: What I'm saying is that as you begin to audit your own use of energy, decisions about which car you use and the way in which you use air travel clearly are very vital - I don't want to issue *fatwas*, because some people need large cars, they have large families or they live in the countryside - so it is a question of individual decision and people have got to be helped to make those decisions responsibly for themselves.

*But that's something that anybody who's concerned about this debate, and about the environment, could say - you're a bishop and what gives what you say particular force is when you give it a moral dimension, which is why I'm trying to establish whether you are saying... whether the language of sin is appropriate to use in the context of these decisions?*

Bishop: Well I think the language of sin has sometimes been shrunk too small. The language of sin is absolutely right as we look at our responsibility as people living in what we believe to be a creation, the responsibility to their neighbours, especially the poor of the world, and our responsibility to our wellbeing. So I think it is very proper to put these questions in the context of our moral responsibility. And that's what a Christian understands sin to be - sin is living a life that is turned in upon itself, a life that is unaware of responsibility and connections.

*I thought that sin was something that is offensive to God...*

Bishop: Yes, unaware of your connection and your responsibility to God, the creation, your neighbour and your own wellbeing, absolutely.

*So we should think about things like the sort of decisions we make about the car we buy in the same context and in the same way as we think about decisions you make about relationships with other people, sex, all those issues which perhaps have more traditionally been the area that people have used terms like 'living in sin'.*

Bishop: Well that's absolutely right, because our energy use is something that has an impact on the creation and on other people; and seeing that, and seeing it as a really important moral issue, is one of the ways in which the Church has to respond, I think, to the conditions of today. And this report, this campaign – 'Shrinking the Footprint' – is very much addressed to the Church.

*Richard Chartres, thank you very much for talking to us."*

**ends**

More information on the Shrinking the Footprint can be found on this dedicated website:  
<http://www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org/>

**Church of England Communications Office**  
Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3NZ

Direct Dial Telephone: 020 7898 1326  
Out-of-hours Telephone: 07774 800212