

Ed / t   rial



RECORD  
KEEPING  
— AND  
GOD

### **Information Management today**

As a civil servant, there are certain pieces of legislation that you can't help knowing about. Some of these are specific to your own work area, e.g. in my own case, The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009. Other legislation, however, is familiar to more or less all civil servants: a classic example is the Freedom of Information Act. Compliance with this Act, as many readers will be keenly aware, involves searching through files – paper or electronic – to locate, and then collate, pieces of (often very obscure) information that someone has requested. Unsurprisingly, over recent years Information Management has assumed even greater importance within the public sector.

A further aspect of Information Management is Data Protection: ensuring that records relating to individuals are handled in compliance with legal requirements. (These requirements cover a whole range of things, including accuracy, retention, and erasure.) Many readers will know all too well that another piece of legislation will shortly take effect – the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)...

### **Information Management, back then**

As the book of Ecclesiastes says, there is nothing new under the sun. If you read in Ezra, chapter 4, you will find that a request is made for a search of the official archives to be conducted (verses 14 and 15). A little later in the chapter, the outcome of the search is described (verse 19). Another request for information retrieval, at Babylon, is made in Ezra 5:17, and the search was clearly extensive – the relevant memorandum was found in a centre some 300 miles away! (See Ezra 6:1-3.) Earlier in Ezra (2:62), some individuals sought – unsuccessfully – for personal data that would prove their genealogy. The absence of the data led to their exclusion from the priesthood.

### **Accurate records**

Have you ever stopped to consider that God records information about each one of us? This includes quantitative data: the Lord Jesus said (Luke 12:7) “the

very hairs of your head are all numbered”. It also includes **every** infringement by you – and me – of God’s holy law, not just in actions (or inactions) but in speech and even in thought. In Matthew 15:19, Christ lists many sinful things which proceed from the heart; the list is headed by ‘evil thoughts’. If our own conscience makes us feel guilty about such matters, even from decades ago, how can we possibly face an infinitely holy God without being condemned, and banished from His presence? But, you may say, what about my good deeds? Won’t God set them against my sins? The stark, scriptural answer is an emphatic **No**. “No-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” (Romans 3:20, NIV).

Revelation 20:11-15 is, I think, the most solemn passage in all of Holy Scripture. You should take the time to read it for yourself. The scene described is the judgment of the dead. This judgment is entirely based on accurate written records (‘books’). The passage states that the only possibility of escape from damnation is to have one’s name recorded in ‘the book of life’.

### **The right to erasure?**

One aspect of the GDPR is ‘the right to erasure’, also known as ‘the right to be forgotten’. Understandably, people may want information about themselves to be deleted. However, under the GDPR this is not an absolute right. How marvellous it would be if the record of our guilty past could be erased! The good news (which is what the Greek word for ‘gospel’ signifies) is that it can be. In Hebrews 10:17 God says, “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”. How can this be possible? The answer is through the sin-atonement death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.... being justified<sup>1</sup> freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness...” Romans 3:21-25 (NKJV).*

I referred earlier to the book of life. Here’s what John says in his gospel (3:36): “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”. So those who believe rejoice with the psalmist David when he writes, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him...” (Ps 32:1, NIV). We sing from our heart, “Hallelujah! what a Saviour!”.

1. Legally acquitted by God.

## **Sensitive personal data**

It is comforting for the believer to know that God not only knows about their sufferings and sorrows, He also records them. In Psalm 56:8, David, referring to his tears, rhetorically asks God “are they not in thy book?”. In even more graphic language, he requests, “put thou my tears into thy bottle”. The implication is clear: David knew that the LORD had a deep interest in, and loving concern for, him. Moreover, such concern extends to the specifics of everything we suffer. Read the whole psalm, and you’ll see that the psalmist was facing aggressive, unscrupulous, opposition. Yet he could say (v11), “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me”.

## **A lengthy retention period**

God records more about believers than their sorrows. In Malachi 3:16 we read that “a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name”. Verse 14 of the same chapter indicates that some had been questioning whether there was any point in serving the Lord, or keeping his requirements. Verse 16 answers such questions emphatically. At the time, faithfulness to the Lord may seem to go unrewarded and even unnoticed. In fact, it is being recorded in His presence. The promised reward will be “in that day” (v17). 1 Corinthians 15, the great chapter on resurrection, ends with the words “your labour is not in vain in the Lord”.