

258 Harry and Meghan

One significant feature of the times in which we are living is the extraordinary global interest in the characters and deeds of the members of the British Royal Family; the announcement this week of the engagement of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle is but the latest example of this phenomenon.

Some of the reasons for this fascination are obvious – celebrity and glamour – but as we seek to know more of “the mind of the Lord” over all this, we are conscious of a deeper significance underlying the constant news reports (often delivered in those tones of breathless excitement!).

Leadership in Scripture is always of central importance, for the conduct of leaders in whatever capacity they serve – patriarchs, tribal elders, priests, prophets, kings, governors and the like – sets the tone for those in their charge. We can think of “the good and the bad” among family leaders, such as Abraham (eg Genesis 12.1-3) and then Achan (Joshua 7.1-26); of priests such as Zadok (eg I Kings Chapters 1–4) and Caiaphas (eg John 11.49); of prophets such as Jeremiah and Hananiah (eg Jeremiah Chapters 26 & 28), and kings such as Asa, Jehoshaphat and Jehu on the one hand, and Jeroboam, Ahab and Manasseh on the other.

From such cases the spiritual principle is clear: any form of leadership is critical, and the consequences of whatever leadership is provided will always follow, sooner or later, for better or worse, for blessing or cursing. Herein lies the true context of the significance in the United Kingdom of the Royal Family, Christian leaders, and politicians at national and local level.

This is why the engagement of Prince Harry is so telling. There has been much comment about Meghan Markle: a glamorous American actress, a divorcee of “mixed race” (yet Barack Obama, also of mixed race, is termed “the first black President”), a global campaigner for “human rights”, a “commoner”, and in her own words, strong, independent, successful, “comfortable within herself” and a vocal feminist. The fact that she and Harry are living together already in what will be their marital home seems not to matter at all.

In other words, virtually every assumption about what a royal bride “should be” has been set aside! – though the Established Church still retains a role for legal reasons: Meghan is to be baptised into the Church of England (to uphold the Protestant foundation of the monarchy), and the couple are to be granted a Christian marriage service at St George’s Chapel in Windsor, the marriage of divorced people now having become acceptable in the Church of England. (Interestingly in 2005, Prince Charles in his marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles was required to have a Civil Marriage ceremony first, followed by a Christian “Service of Blessing” at St George’s – another example of how quickly standards have changed).

So this engagement is a significant reflection of where society is deemed to be “at” in these matters, and the many similarities to 1936 and King Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Simpson are marked. The restraints of that era, around marriage and divorce,

Christian teaching and example, duty over personal happiness and so on, are long gone, replaced by very different values, spurred on in this case by the understandable sympathy and goodwill in the country towards Prince Harry and his older brother.

The engagement is itself a consequence, a consequence of the various strands of leadership that have prevailed in the country since 1945 which have produced the society in which we now live. Those with responsibility over such matters as royal marriages have decided that what this marriage involves, though a marked break from how things have been done before, is now acceptable in modern Britain.

Equally the engagement now becomes a great precedent, to which leaders and people will refer, knowingly or not, when making their own decisions in times to come. By this process of cause and effect, of consequence and precedent, the direction of society seems set to continue steadily away from that “fear of God” on which the leadership of this country has been based over the centuries. Constitutionally it still is so based, but evidently only in theory these days.

We finish this time with the supreme example of leadership, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in His roles as Servant, Prophet, Priest and King (eg., John 13.13-14 / Acts 3.22 / Hebrews 4.14-16 / Rev 19.16 / ...). Any leaders with the courage to lead in the personal knowledge that “Jesus Christ is Lord” are able to make a huge and positive difference to the society in which they are set.

We pray for our leaders. We pray for Harry and Meghan as we wish them well. Please God and best of all, amid all the hullabaloo that will now dog them throughout their lives, we pray that each of them may come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Saviour.

Therein lies the path to a truly blessed marriage – and to truly blessed leadership.

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