

361 A soap bubble in a cathedral

This week has seen a significant public intervention within the political arena by Ephraim Jervis, the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. In a “no-holds-barred” article in The Times newspaper, the writer has expressed great concern over anti-semitism within the Labour Party, and has called on Jews to vote for the Conservatives.

Now there is no intention in these Weekly Reflections to dish out instructions as to how Christians should cast their votes, be it in this or in any other election with which we may be faced, for clearly this is a personal decision for each one of us under the Lord having weighed up the various factors involved. We should take note however of the simple fact of the Chief Rabbi’s unusual intervention and of the nature of his message, for as he made clear, he is not saying these things casually but after much unfortunate experience. How we need to pray for the Jews in this country, and for God’s sovereign mercy over this nation in these deeply divided times.

Quite apart from the Chief Rabbi’s stark message, we need also to consider the strange convention that exists for leaders of “Faith groups” (traditionally meaning the Jewish and Christian leaders in our country) to keep well clear of politics, and especially in the weeks before a General Election. The breaking of this convention by the Chief Rabbi has caused just as much comment as the contents of his message. But on reflection, such a convention is plain potty!

Imagine for a moment that we think of the domain of Almighty God as filling every atom of space within a glorious cathedral; (in reality such a thought is far too limiting but it serves for our simple parable here). Then imagine the House of Commons in Westminster as a tiny soap bubble as blown by a child, randomly floating around near the floor of that great cathedral.

That House of Commons soap bubble is small, fragile and passing, and in the sight of Almighty God the people inside it are, along with the rest of us, minute. Yet those same people are the ones entrusted with making weighty, critical decisions that shape the nature and direction of society itself.

It means therefore that the politicians inside the political soap bubble surely need the guidance of Almighty God at least as much as, if not

more than, the rest of us! - and particularly so when they are chasing our votes with their grandiose plans for the future.

But what happens instead? Via their convention of “No-God-talk-round-here”, they have the effrontery to say - “Keep God out of our bubble, we are in charge, we know best”.

God-ignoring politicians are not in charge, nor do they know best, as a glance at the state of our nation plainly illustrates. Is it any wonder that such human folly, masquerading as rational wisdom but dominated so often by mere short-term election prospects, lies behind the many God-denying laws foisted upon us over the years? Those verses in Psalm 2. 1-5 are one good example of God’s response to this blatant arrogance.

Ironically there is another convention in the House of Commons which was started in 1558 - the saying of daily prayers at the beginning of parliamentary business, by which the bubble-dwellers duly acknowledge their need of the guidance of Almighty God. The main prayer asks for God's guidance that MPs should "never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals".

The attendance of MPs at these prayer times is generally sparse, and atheist and humanist pressure groups seek to scrap them as being "not compatible with a society which respects the principle of freedom of and from religion". This approach conveniently overlooks the fact that Atheism and Humanism are religions – that is, “Faiths” - in themselves, with threadbare credentials when compared with those underlying the Judaeo-Christian Faiths, whose truth-credentials far outweigh those of all rival Faiths, and whose teachings have been so influential in bringing the many blessings we now take for granted.

At the Coronation in 1953, the Sovereign took an oath, swearing to govern faithfully with justice and mercy, to uphold the Gospel, and to maintain the doctrine and worship of the Church of England. The Queen was then presented with a copy of the Holy Bible – “to keep Your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and Gospel of God as the rule for the whole life and government of Christian princes” (egs., Deuteronomy 6 / II Chronicles 7.12-22 / Proverbs 14.34 / Matthew 7.24-29 / The “I AM” sayings in John’s Gospel / Romans 5 and 8 / I Corinthians 15 / Ephesians 1 / ...). Government Ministers are Ministers of the Crown, and are obliged therefore, in deference to their Sovereign and her Coronation Oath, to be “ever mindful of the Law and Gospel of God ...” in their own personal and political conduct.

How we need Christian MPs inside that tiny bubble, whatever their party allegiance, who will have the conviction, the courage and the sense to speak clearly of God's Word and God's ways to their fellow law-makers. Surely such candidates need our prayers – and our votes.

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