

387 Cummings and Goings

The British media have given saturation coverage in recent days to one individual close to the heart of our government, Mr Dominic Cummings, who we will refer to as DC. For the sake of our overseas readers of these Reflections a brief background is necessary, before we consider aspects of this case which serve as significant “signs of our times” from our Christian perspective.

DC is a “special adviser” to the Prime Minister Boris Johnson. As such, he is not elected, he is accountable only to his boss, he operates behind the scenes, and apparently he is very powerful. He is said to be a radical thinker, competent, effective, arrogant and ruthless when it suits, with some loyal fans but numerous enemies keen to bring him down.

Keeping now to the headlines of the story for brevity’s sake, DC took a long car journey for family reasons, a journey that was highly debatable in view of the strict government Covid-19 lockdown measures imposed on the country, in which DC himself had played a part in formulating.

Hence the media outcry - “Sack him! Resign! One rule for us lot and another for the toffs!” – and so on. So far at least the Prime Minister is sticking by his Special Adviser, but things could quickly change if the pressure on DC and his boss is maintained.

With that background in place we now turn to the Lord and His Word, seeking to understand some lessons from this episode for our own Christian discipleship.

For a start, we see afresh that politics can be a very ugly business. Political life in this country has probably always been like this, but these days the confrontational political atmosphere is fanned by the televising of the House of Commons, “24/7” media coverage, instant “comment and analysis” by media-chosen “experts”, equally-instant swathes of comment on social media, and endless opinion polls. No wonder that careful thought and mature political debate are in such short supply, and no wonder that those Christians brave enough to stand for Parliament have to be very tough in putting up with the vitriol flung at them because of their avowedly Christian contributions in debates. How the Palace of Westminster and the TV studios could do with a humble, hearty dose of “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46.10a).

Next, as we keep these Westminster “bear-pit realities” in mind, we note again how television and social media nowadays wield such immense power in our society yet with little accountability. We have just been seeing sobering pictures of the terrible German “blitzkrieg” of May 1940 on this anniversary of the Dunkirk evacuation, but perhaps it is fair to say that anyone caught in “the media’s sights” these days, such as DC with his family, experiences a most intense and unpleasant metaphorical “blitzkrieg” – with 24-hour press surveillance, threats and attacks both verbal and physical, and falsehoods and insults bandied about; (the Duke and Duchess of Sussex know something of such treatment too).

Regarding DC’s conduct we will all have our own opinions. In view of the urgent situation filled with conflicting loyalties in which he and his wife found themselves, a balanced verdict, by colleagues, media and the rest of us, based on “in wrath we should remember mercy” (from Habakkuk 3.2b), may well be the fairest reaction. In terms of DC’s reported character and manner though, the Lord’s words come to mind, (regarding false prophets but surely applicable here too), “... by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7.15-20 & 12.33b). Certainly some fruits in the lives of DC, Boris Johnson, and others in public life leave much to be desired.

We see that this DC episode, with its political “dark arts” and incessant media coverage, is a small but significant example of how our country now conducts itself. Old, Christian-grounded standards are in short supply, of honesty, decency, courtesy, integrity and fair play, (though the lockdown has shown that thankfully these standards still exist). Unfortunately British governments and media companies have set a God-denying agenda over past decades, (with the Christian churches being wholly feeble in stemming the tide), and we are seeing that - “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6.7b) applies these days not just to a man but to a nation as well.

As Christian citizens we are deeply grieved but unsurprised at what is going on. We steadily maintain our Christian presence, influence and voice, as we “warn ... comfort ... support ... follow that which is good ... rejoice evermore ... (and) pray without ceasing ...”, asking the Lord that we may indeed “be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (see I Thessalonians 5.14-17, 23b).

For surely, in the light of all that is now going on around the world, “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5.8b / Matthew 24.29-31), at

which great time all the sinful wrongs of today will, under the rulership of Christ, begin to be put right at last.

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