

475 If my people ... (Faith & Topical Issues / 20 02 2022)

In this Reflection we seek to respond scripturally and spiritually to the many changes in our country during the Queen's 70-year reign, (changes which are set out in some detail in the 5-page pdf on the This Week page of our website).

We start with the reminder that the United Kingdom remains unique among "the major powers" of the world in having a Christian, Protestant constitution, which each new monarch at his or her coronation swears by oath to uphold; (whether or not that happens at the next coronation remains to be seen). All who serve in authority in the nation, in whatever capacity, are thus ultimately answerable to the monarch and then, above and beyond, also to Almighty God Himself. That at least is the theory of our constitution, if the Coronation Oath is to be properly honoured.

Because of this constitutional commitment to Almighty God, it is valid for our nation today to pay heed to the central scriptural lesson demonstrated by the children of Israel, who were also bound to Almighty God, albeit far more closely than we are, by the unique loving covenant which God had graciously made with them (egs., Genesis 17.1-27 / Deuteronomy 4.13,23,31; 5.29,32-33). That central lesson is very simple: obedience to Almighty God, by rulers and peoples alike, brings His blessing, while disobedience to Him brings His judgment.

We now turn to the "seventy years of change". Some of those changes we can gladly acknowledge to have been for the better. The standard of living for the great majority of us is now markedly higher than in 1952, with huge advances made in home comforts, industrial technology, medical treatments, information, transport, telecommunications and so on. We humbly thank the Lord God for endowing the human race with such abilities to be developed and exercised, hopefully for the common good - we are indeed "fearfully and wonderfully made" (from Psalm 139.14, KJV). Let us also thank the Lord that much basic "good-neighbourliness" still exists within our society, despite all the changes going on around us.

These many changes, bringing greater comforts and wider horizons, have brought in their wake the need for strong individual responsibility, as people pick their way through the maze of possibilities now lying before us, their choices shaping their use of time, energy and money; their habits, pastimes and company kept; and the actual priorities which dominate their lives.

Seen from this perspective, of new freedoms requiring serious responsibility, our reaction to these seventy years of change becomes not so positive. Step by step over the decades, and starting markedly in the 1960s, governments of different political colours have passed so-called “progressive” laws, notably over the death penalty, censorship, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, and marriage. The effects have been profound: in granting the Royal Assent to such laws, in accordance with constitutional precedent, the Queen has unfortunately broken her Coronation Oath repeatedly; public opinion on such social matters has frequently been overridden; the “anything goes” floodgates have been swung wide open; and the bedrock of any stable society – the “nuclear family” – has been wilfully downgraded.

So, unsurprisingly, these liberal laws have shared a not-so-merry dance with numerous other social developments listed last time, including the contraceptive pill, television, paid holidays, women’s employment, affordable foreign travel, the “pop culture”, car ownership, substance abuse, immigration and social media, each of which, deliberately or not and to a greater or lesser extent, has furthered the de-Christianising process within the nation, including most significantly within state education. By this ugly mix of secular, liberal laws and social libertarianism, our country has been led further and further away from our Protestant constitution and the plain Word of God: hence the current, widespread social shambles, the causes of which, let alone the solutions for which, seem to be so baffling to politicians and “experts” alike.

In response to this liberal tide, a fair few churches have gamely tried to keep up, by diluting “awkward” doctrines in a bid to remain friendly, welcoming and “nice”. With such an emphasis upon “peace, peace”, rather than on “truth, truth”, results have clearly been patchy and Christian allegiance has steadily declined. Instead we recall the words of the Lord Jesus, “Blessed are those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness ... who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (from Matthew 5.6,10); and of Peter and John, that, when forced to choose, “we must obey God rather than men” (from Acts 4.20; 5.29).

We finish this time with that well-known verse from II Chronicles 7.14: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (II Chronicles 7.14).

Be God's words in that verse addressed to the rulers and peoples of wayward Israel or of wayward Britain, that vital verse still starts with – "If ...".

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