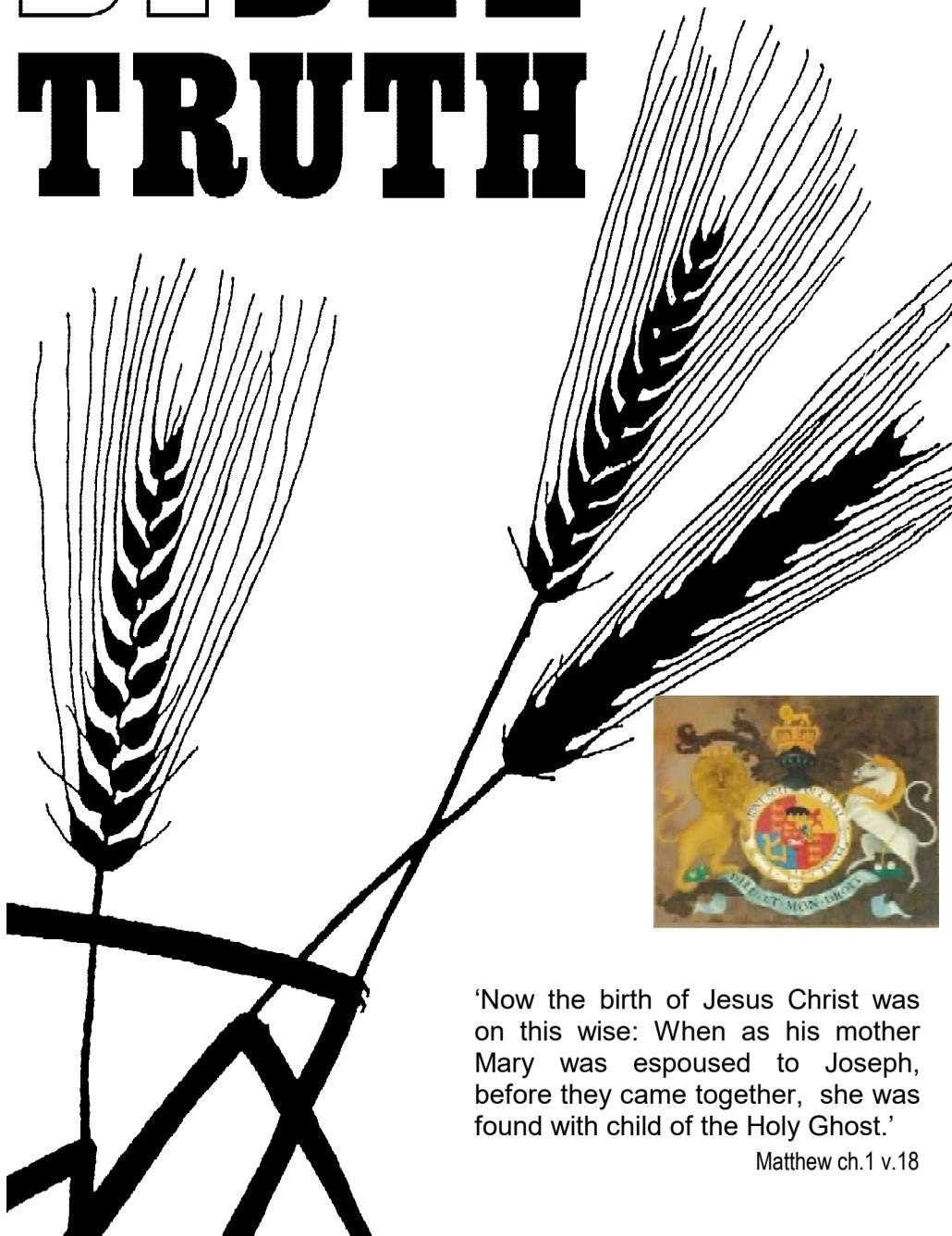


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'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.'

Matthew ch.1 v.18

National Sovereignty & the Kingdom's Good News

by Paul Boyd-Lee



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Introduction

On 9 September 2015 an extraordinary landmark was reached for this island nation when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II became the longest reigning monarch in British history.

It is thus a very suitable time to consider kingdoms.

The Churches rightly proclaim the eternal kingdom of God, but temporal kingdoms on earth also have their place particularly within the national life of Israel and indeed other nations.

In these respects it is well to remember that the public ministry of Jesus and His disciples was taken up with the teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

‘These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

Matthew ch.10 vv 5-7

What is this Gospel of the Kingdom all about, has it a temporal aspect we should take note of in this our day?

Sovereignty in the world today

At the present time there are about 30 monarchies in the world, HM the Queen being one of them. Some are mere figureheads, whilst others have different levels of authority, so how does the current Queen Elizabeth compare with the others?

In many ways she is unique reigning over about 16 states and countries including the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and numerous other places such as islands, about 8 of which are in the Caribbean. In total this is a very large area of the world's land mass compared with that ruled over by other monarchies.

The throne in Britain and its Origins

Britain has the oldest surviving monarchy in the world. Since King Egbert of Wessex (802-39) gained power over the whole of England there has always been a King or Queen reigning except during the Commonwealth Period (1649-60). *The Westminster Abbey Official Guide* (Jarrold and Sons, 1971 p.98) had this to say about the Stone upon which sovereigns are crowned.

Tradition identifies this stone with the one upon which Jacob rested his head at Bethel - 'And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it' (Genesis ch.28 v.18). Jacob's sons carried it to Egypt and from thence it passed to Spain with King Gathelus, son of Cecrops, the builder of Athens. About 700 B.C. it appears in Ireland, whither it was carried by the Spanish King's son Simon Brech, on his invasion of that island. There it was placed upon the sacred hill of Tara, and called Lia-Fail, the 'fatal' stone, or 'stone of destiny', for when the Irish kings were seated upon it at coronations the stone groaned aloud if the claimant was of royal race, but remained silent if he was a pretender.

The tradition of how a sovereign is crowned in the United Kingdom is unique compared with monarchies elsewhere. It is not surprising that this throne has endured so many millennia considering God's promises to the House of David, repeated through several prophets.

'And thine house and thy kingdom **shall be established for ever** before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.'

2 Samuel ch.7 vv 16-17

'I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, **Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations.** Selah.'

Psalms 89 vv 3-4

‘Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season;

Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers.’

Jeremiah ch.33 vv 20-21

Why was there a monarchy in Israel?

When the People of Israel, after coming out of Egypt in the second millennium BC, were first formed as a nation they had no sovereign leader for God Himself was their head. However, even while they traversed the Wilderness God made provision for temporal kingship over them.

‘When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;

Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.’

Deuteronomy ch.17 vv 14-15

This highlights several things to remember in connection with the monarchy.

1. At Sinai, though surrounding nations had a secular sovereign, Israel’s king was God. But after they had possessed the Promised Land for a while God withdrew temporarily from direct government of them and appointed Saul, and then David and his House, as viceroys until Jesus comes to reign.
2. When a secular sovereign was granted to Israel, the people had no choice in the appointment (i.e. Who it was). So it is with the monarchy in the UK today, it is hereditary.
3. The First Book of Moses prophesies ‘the sceptre shall not depart ... until Shiloh come ... ’ (Genesis ch.49 v.10). That is, there will be a transition when that happens. (Shiloh is a name referring to Jesus Christ.)

The Monarchy today and how it governs

Interestingly there is actually an organisation that offers to trace whether you are a descendant of King David and they supply a list of 150 common surnames of people who might descend from him, which include Cohen, Bach, Bernstein, Fuchs, Gofdon, Spire, Winkler etc.

Queen Elizabeth I specifically eschewed the title 'Supreme Head of the Church of England' for that of 'Supreme Governor' in order to make clear that she had no divine or overall power. This concept still prevailed during the Commonwealth period in England when Cromwell governed (protected) under God.

To add weight to the idea of governing under God, sovereigns are instructed in accordance with the following teaching.

'And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites.'

Deuteronomy ch.17 v.18

In order to show this in operation these days the Sovereign receives an already printed copy of the Bible.

How do things stand with regard to future coronations?

Her majesty the Queen is currently 89 years of age which urges the question in many minds of what sort of coronation might her successor have? In this respect there has been rumour and criticism of her heir, Prince Charles, having beliefs incompatible with his mother's. Claiming to be Defender of Faiths and Defender of Faith have been examples attributed to views he has expressed. So can he qualify for the position of Supreme Governor of the Church of England, one of the offices he would hold and could he be enthroned by a coronation of that denomination?

Another matter of concern is how much might political correctness be allowed to intrude upon a virtually timeless liturgy based upon large portions of history and scripture? It is difficult to pre-empt this question's answer. Certainly there will be pressure to make it as inclusive as possible whilst preserving the richness of the traditions that have surrounded previous ceremonies. Though it has been assured that the Stone of Scone will be returned to England for the service, where it will be held and the nature of the service is not set in stone. Quite clearly there is strong precedence that the Abbey at Westminster, The Collegiate Church of St Peter, should continue to

be the setting for the event. When it comes to Coronations the remit for the service has been in the hands of the Dean (presently The Very Reverend Dr John Hall), advised of course by the Chapter, Archbishops and others of senior note. Strictly speaking the Abbey is a 'Royal Peculiar', that is it belongs to the monarch and does not come under the jurisdiction of a bishop. However, the rules relating to Peculiars have recently been revised which could mean a change.

The line of succession

Official lines of succession have largely been in place since 1701 but in 2013 a new Parliamentary Bill was passed which could have a profound effect on future sovereigns. The important parts of this law are these.

1. In the past, women have been superseded by their brothers in succession, even if they were the first born. With the new law the Sovereign's first child is allowed to become monarch, regardless of whether they are a boy or girl.
2. The new act will also allow the future monarch to marry a Roman Catholic.
3. As well as changes to succession, the bill will also remove a requirement dating back to 1772 for descendants of George II to seek permission to marry from the monarch, replacing it with a requirement for the first six people in the succession to seek the sovereign's consent.

This Succession to the Crown Act 2013 came into force once it was approved by all 15 Commonwealth countries where the Queen is head of state. In fact the legislation was agreed in principle at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Perth, Australia, in October 2011. In reality it raises two important issues, first concerning primogeniture, the second, a Protestant sovereign.

Primogeniture

In actual fact gender has not been an issue for inheritance in Israel since the daughters of Zelophehad queried their rights.

'... thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.'

Numbers ch.27 v.7

As our throne is hereditary the new Bill does not make a problem though it will be a break with recent tradition.

With regard to those currently foremost in the line of succession, when the Bill was passed the gender of Prince William's first born child to be was unknown, causing some speculation as to whether the new law would be brought to bear. As it happened Prince George of Cambridge was born on 22 July 2013 and Princess Charlotte on 2 May 2015 being the current children of Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge.

Will there continue to be a Protestant sovereign in future?

Early in this millennium Prince Charles spoke of becoming 'Defender of Faiths' in an attempt to embrace other religions in Britain. At the time this caused some controversy within the Anglican Church. Be that as it may, it now seems that he has compromised because in 2008, on his 60th birthday, he spoke of taking the title 'Defender of Faith' to reflect Britain's multicultural society. That may well place him in a better position when as a new monarch he takes the role of Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

When the 2013 Succession Bill became law the BBC's explanation of the new law was, 'The current prohibition on the monarch being a Catholic will remain in force'. As things currently stand that of course has to be the case because the Supreme Governor of the Church of England must be a communicant member of that denomination. At present then, the status quo looks preserved.

What sort of powers does the Sovereign still have?

In reality the responsibilities are quite extensive and include these.

- Head of State,
- Head of the Armed Forces,
- Head of the Commonwealth,
- Supreme Governor of the Church of England,
- Patron or President of hundreds of organisations,
- The Sovereign's head appears on our currency and postage stamps (perhaps surprisingly so since the 'Royal Mail' is no longer a Government body but is now a Public Limited Company). It is worth noting that it is said that in 1987 the

Queen made it clear she did not want the Post Office privatised. So much then for the government of the time's respect for Her Majesty's wishes!

In addition to the foregoing roles Her Majesty has other important duties which arise largely in accordance with her Coronation Oath whereby she,

- gives her assent to all Bills passed by Parliament,
- opens and prorogues each session of Parliament,
- dissolves Parliament on the advice of her Prime Minister,
- opens and prorogues the General Synod of the Church of England (the Third legislative body of Parliament).

The Queen and an increasing national liberal attitude

In recent years there has been much concern about legislation passing through Parliament, to say nothing of EU encroachment upon the affairs of the nation and its effect in eroding the Sovereign's powers.

Indeed it raises the question of whether the Queen has herself given in to liberal ideas? Thus people ask if the Queen has agreed to these things and if not, why has she permitted them? Are they not contrary to the Coronation Oath she swore? The answer to this to some extent surely lies in the wording of the oath which asks,

'Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the people of this United Kingdom according to the statutes in Parliament agreed on, and respective laws and customs of the same?'

That is, she governs according to what Parliament agrees, rather than dictating policy to them. There is a subtlety here that some people find hard to grasp and find rather disheartening.

The Royal Prerogative

Some people would claim she has abrogated her duty and why does she not exercise her Prerogative to block certain bills? Historically the last sovereign to exercise the Prerogative in order to refuse assent to a Bill was Queen Anne in 1704. Prior to that time, the 17th century, Stuart kings relied heavily on prerogative powers to govern without the sanction of Parliament and could,

- disband the army,
- pardon offenders,
- issue passports,
- declare war,
- exercise the right to print the Bible.

In spite of these now largely historic powers, the fact is that if Her Majesty exercised her prerogative it would cause a constitutional crisis by challenging the Government's authority, which in effect, might well dissolve it. Then, as in past history, the Sovereign would find themselves with the responsibility of governing the country, rather than delegating that task to Parliament. Some may think that would be a good thing, but just consider the consequences?

In reality the Queen does not give her assent to Bills but this is handled by her Commissioners who are all Privy Councillors meaning that several Government ministers have the power to exercise the Prerogative (on behalf of the Sovereign). So that in effect, though the Queen is Head of State, she side steps the issue of being to blame for legislation she does not personally agree with - she reigns through her ministers. When things are going agreeably that is a good system but at the present time, maybe it does not serve the nation as well as it might.

Relationship between Britain's Throne and the Kingdom of God

During Israel's early days as a nation whether in Church or State, the Lord God exercised His kingship. In our day the Sovereign, as Supreme Governor of the Church and Head of State, also does this but in a far lesser way. It is giving an example of and reflecting the greater glory to come. Rather than this process being left to our imagination, here is a real life situation giving us some sort of picture of Christ's coming reign, albeit seen 'through a glass darkly'. So while the theocracy is in abeyance, David's successors reign as sovereign but vice regent - indeed ruling princes in Israel!

The Kingdom's Good News

We have some chance of grappling with the concept of the United Kingdom, but the biblical 'Gospel of the Kingdom' is not well known, either in the Church where it should be nor amongst people in

general. In a way this conclusion should surprise Christians because of the many places in scripture and in our prayers where the subject of the kingdom occurs.

- In the Lord's prayer we pray '**Thy kingdom come ... for Thine is the kingdom ...**'
- At Nativity time the words of the angel Gabriel are usually repeated.
'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of **his kingdom there shall be no end.**' (Luke ch.1 vv 32-33)
- 'These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, **The kingdom of heaven is at hand**' (Matthew ch.10 vv 5-7)
- The kingdom was specifically mentioned between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.
'there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just: ... he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself **waited for the kingdom of God.** ... This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.'
(Luke ch.23 vv 50-52)
- Jesus frequently preached the Gospel of the Kingdom (100 times in the Gospels compared with a mere 40 for the word 'love'). A handful of times, the words actually record that Jesus 'preached' the 'Gospel of the kingdom'.

Bearing these many examples of the kingdom in mind, it is hardly surprising that the disciples were anxious about when the kingdom would come. In fact it was close to their minds as they ask Jesus just prior to the ascension,

'... Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ...'

Acts ch.1 v.6

It is likely that they were looking for a power to overcome the Romans who oppressed them but Jesus says all power can come to them by the Holy Spirit. Likewise today we may feel overwhelmed with ungodliness about us and look urgently for the coming of the

heavenly kingdom, but the same power of the Holy Spirit is there for us to call upon also in our day.

‘And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.’

Acts ch.1 vv 7-8

That is to say, the message is to change our priorities from looking for an easy way out at the present time to witnessing and placing emphasis on looking for the Second Coming of Christ, which is yet future.

The Gospel of Salvation v the Gospel of the Kingdom

When one considers the amount of scriptural teaching about the kingdom it is surprising that often one hears churchgoers saying that the Gospel of Salvation is more important than the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The fact is that the concept of the ‘Gospel of Salvation’, or even that exact phrase, are not found in scripture whereas the ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’ is found, and many times. That is not to demean the concept of Salvation as a necessity but it is not ‘Good News’ as such; it is an event, a happening, a being born again. After that comes a new life, and part of that life is to learn of the kingdom which previously was not appreciated in its depth. In short Salvation is a personal thing, the Gospel of the Kingdom is for all to share in.

What should be done about the Kingdom at this present time?

There are a number of factors to consider here. First, in answer to the Pharisees demand to know when the kingdom of God would come he answered,

‘...behold, the kingdom of God is within you.’

Luke ch.17 v.21

This statement on its own is somewhat mystifying until it is looked at in its context. The answer is actually sandwiched between two sections of text about sin, forgiveness, faith, and service in which He instructs his disciples using several worked examples such as healing a leper, a blind man, ministry to children, dealing with a ruler

and so on. Thus the inference is that at the present time we are to show the kingdom of God by the way we live.

On a national basis, there is a need to acknowledge the fact that Jehovah is king and that the House of David is His appointed (anointed) representative in Israel for ever. On the basis of historical and prophetic evidence the nearest fit to that House of David amongst the nations at the present time would be found in Great Britain and the original Commonwealth of nations. That is Canada, Australia, New Zealand and so on. As mentioned previously the ancestral line of their Head of State is the oldest in the world and some notable genealogical charts show it stretching back to David who ruled about 1000 BC in the Holy Land.

If the foregoing be so then these people should acknowledge the fact amongst themselves and preach to the other nations that they shall find peace and prosperity under the flag of the kingdom and under the rule of the Throne of David.

At one time this was the message that many missionaries carried overseas. It is not preaching the rule of Britain, but preaching the rule of Jehovah through His appointed agency of Britain.

In this way then, it is a means to prepare the world for the coming of our Lord and king Jesus Christ.

What will the Kingdom of God be like in the age beyond the present?

- According to scripture the only nation in the world over which God made himself king is Israel. At first this might be questioned but remember those of the first resurrection shall reign with Him (see Revelation ch.20 v.6 as well as the Epistle authors who wrote of this such as 2 Timothy ch.2 v.12).
- In a world where many long for peace, this is He that will eventually bring in peace and union in the earth. Surely we have a duty to give a glimpse of the Kingdom in our feeble way but He will lift these things of the Kingdom to a higher level than we currently know.
- It will not just be respect as may be shown to sovereigns reigning in a temporal tense but He Himself will be the object of worship.

- In the Developed world today much is made of values and equality but the coming Jehovah will be administering eternal values and affairs.
- Praise God that in recent years average life spans have been increasing, yet illness still plagues us. Happily though, He will be attending to the health of His people and will be the centre of eternal life.
- Then there will be the matters of State and activity of those within the Kingdom. First, since He is risen from the dead and as scripture prophesies, He will be amongst the people. There He will direct their activities and regulate their wealth.

In short, the dual administration of Church and State will be going forward in principle as now but upon an altogether more exalted level. Today's monarchy is a precursor, towards the greater event

'The sceptre shall not depart ... until Shiloh come; ...'

Genesis ch.49 v.10

(Note that Shiloh is a person = Jesus Christ)

So there is a time to come when there will be a transition from a secular to a divine monarchy. This is when Jesus as God will dwell in the midst of His people and be the object of their love and worship.

Christ offers a perfected kingdom to the Father

Some churchgoers these days look towards the Church being the agent that perfects the world in order to offer it to Christ when He appears. The truth is that the world is presently a corrupt place and tragically scripture makes clear it will not improve until Christ appears. It is He who will then perfect the world (His kingdom) which He will then offer to His Father.

'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.'

1 Corinthians ch.15 vv 24-26

Is there a link between the so called Gospel of Salvation and that of the Kingdom?

Yes there is and this is brought out clearly by the apostle John.

‘ ... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’

John ch.3 vv 3 & 5

Conclusion

I have taken the liberty of concluding with the following succinct letter Ian Bradley, (author of *God save the Queen - The Spiritual Dimension of Monarchy*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), wrote to The Times (22 November 1997) following the service in Westminster Abbey marking the 50th anniversary of the marriage of the Queen and Prince Philip.

‘In all this talk of a Royal Family more in touch with public opinion, we are in danger of missing the essential nature and purpose of monarchy.

The monarchy is not a democratic institution, still less the creature of popular opinion, but rather a divinely instituted symbol and mystery. At their coronations, our kings and queens are anointed in a ritual which has its origins in Old Testament times and underlines the spiritual nature of their calling. They are thereafter accountable first and foremost to God and not to a fickle populace so easily manipulated and swayed by the mass media. Their role may not be to lead public opinion, though in deep and subtle ways they can both express the mood of the nation and also exert a powerful example, but most certainly they are not there to pander to it.

We need to think much more about the religious basis of monarchy and the exercise of its spiritual function. In the case of our present Queen, it has been expressed in a sacrificial commitment to duty and public service and a sure and steadfast Christian faith fortified and nourished through regular churchgoing. In the case of her eldest son, who I fervently hope will be our next King, it may well take a different form, in keeping with his declared desire to be a defender of faith and his deep sensitivity to spiritual issues.

The Royal Family were clearly engaged in and deeply moved by Thursday morning's service at Westminster Abbey. Many of the courtiers and commoners attending it, by contrast, were caught by the television cameras chattering, giggling or maintaining a sullen silence through the great hymns of the Christian faith.

They might care to reflect on the message of those familiar words which rang through the Abbey as the Queen and Prince Philip left. God will save the Queen, not public opinion and certainly not the media.'

In his book Ian Bradley concludes by saying,

I chose to end that letter with the first line of the national anthem, which I have also used for the title of this book, because it speaks so clearly and strongly of the spiritual dimension of monarchy. Like other aspects of royalty and religion, 'God save the Queen' is not much in favour nowadays. It is often drowned out at football matches, has been dropped by a number of universities for graduation ceremonies and is dismissed by Jeremy Paxman in his book *The English* as 'that dirge-like glorification of the monarchy whose job it is to unite the disparate parts of an increasingly tattered political union'. Fewer and fewer people bother to stand up even on those increasingly rare occasions where it is still played in public places.

I am delighted to say that when it was struck up at Buxton Opera House on the opening night of the 7th International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival in July 2000, the entire audience rose to their feet and sang, but then I fear that will only serve to confirm everything that the apostles of Cool Britannia think about fans of Gilbert and Sullivan. I also have to confess to being delighted to read (in the Daily Telegraph, of course) that on the opening day of the Conservative Party conference in October 1999 a reporter who remained seated during the National Anthem was hit over the head with a briefcase by an outraged Tory peer.



The Royal Coat of Arms displayed over the north door of St Mildred's Church, Nurstead, Meopham near Gravesend, Kent.