

The Service for the Queen's 60th Wedding Anniversary was very largely a fine thing. The prayers were effectively drawn from the Prayer Book Marriage Service itself. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke movingly about the nature of marriage as each partner vowing to support the other for life: marriage as a vocation, as a means of Grace, as a Sacrament. I wish they had included those magnificent words which Prince Philip addressed to the young Queen at her Coronation:

*I, Philip, Duke of Edinburgh
do become your liege man of life and limb,
and of earthly worship;
and faith and truth will I bear unto you,
to live and die, against all manner of folks.
So help me God.*

There were only a couple of infelicities, so far as I could tell. The Poet's Laureate's verses were high in cringe factor nine – the phrase “stacked up” put in an unfortunate appearance. But there's never been much poetry in Motion. And then, among the lovely Psalm and the favourite hymns, we had to listen to John Rutter's *The Lord Bless You and Keep You*.

Weddings, funerals, memorials – Rutter seems to have broken out all over the place like bird flu. I suppose he is the appropriate composer for our age: sentimental, shallow, vastly derivative from all the wrong influences. Babyish, really. I cannot understand why anyone should want to imitate, by pseudo-modernising, the mawkish decadence of the late 19th century and the Edwardian period – what you might call *Come Into The Garden Lord* music. It speaks ill of the mind and soul of the church that it should promote this maudlin drivel on even the highest occasions.

I'd like to spend a little time this morning in trying to understand the monarchy – because to understand the monarchy is to understand ourselves. There is a huge deceit which was begun by Walter Bagehot and has been perpetrated upon the public ever since right down to Norman St John Stevas and Matthew D'Ancona. Bagehot claimed a certain importance for the monarchy, but it was only what he called *the dignified aspect of the constitution*.

As Charles Sisson commented:

So Trooping the Colour must be regarded as a leg show of guardsmen, the crown as a bauble, and the Coronation itself as something for the illustrated papers. The Queen was dignified in Bagehot's phraseology – which meant she was not much good. She was for fools to goggle at.

And this is precisely the deceit – to claim that the Queen is only a constitutional ornament to add a little colour and romance while the real business of government goes on somewhere else. This is not true. Of course the Queen does not meddle in the policies of whatever Cabinet of Ministers she is obliged to rule over at any particular time. But then the Cabinet Minister is not hands-on in the running of his department either. His job is to secure the integrity of his department. That is why ministers resign – or used to, anyhow - when their departments make big mistakes. The Queen

secures the integrity of the nation in similar fashion as the Minister secures the integrity of his department.

When we salute or pray for Queen and country, we are saluting and praying for one and the same thing. We have become, since Bagehot's day, so accustomed to the triumph of usurious chaos, calculations of consequences, mere money-making and the technologico-Benthamite jungle that we are in grave danger of supposing there is nothing higher – or even nothing else. As long ago as the 1830s Samuel Coleridge saw where the hell-on-earth of such a mechanistic, industrial and merely instrumental view of the nation would lead. With extraordinary prescience, Coleridge warned against...

Lectures on diet, on digestion, on infection and the nature and effects of specific viruses...the dietetic and peptic text books to be under the censorship of the Board of Trade... Idealess facts, misnamed proofs from history...State policy – a Cyclops with one eye – and that in the back of the head

The Queen embodies the nation that is beyond the latest round of trade figures, the fluctuations in the value of the pound and the comings and goings of particular Prime Ministers and political parties which are in any case bound to be divisive. Gangs of opinion, supporting this sectional interest or that one. When it comes to forming the nation, there has to be something above unconstrained democracy and counting heads – because in every democratic election some are made happy and others miserable; and so in the character of the realm there is a fracture. Roger Scruton has written:

Democratic election can in the right circumstances lead to the representation of the interests of the voters. But not all legitimate interests can be catered for by voting....How, for example, can you represent the interests of the dead and unborn Englishmen merely by counting the votes of the living? And how, in a system where important issues are determined by majority voting, do we protect the dissident minority. The great achievement of the English system of government is that it fostered a society in which no real conformity was required except the conformity to law...

And the laws of the land are the Queen's laws, just as the language we speak is the Queen's English. Ah but I have only been scratching the surface in this great matter. Let me try to dig a little deeper. If you look at the very first line of the order for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953, this is what it says:

In the morning upon the day of the Coronation early, care is to be taken that the Ampulla be filled with Oil for the anointing, and, together with the Spoon, be laid ready upon the Altar in the Abbey Church.

So let us be clear: this is about sacral kingship. The Coronation rite refers back to the anointing of kings in the Old Testament, to Samuel, Saul and David; to when Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon King. And fittingly Handel's marvellous anthem by that name was sung that day in the Abbey. This is a holy event.

As the Archbishop says:

Bless and sanctify thy chosen servant ELIZABETH.

The Archbishop also says:

Receive the Ring of kingly dignity and the seal of Catholic Faith

The historic English Settlement means that the Queen is Supreme Governor of both Church and State. She is obliged to declare herself a Christian Monarch and to promise to defend the Church of England. This is why the suggestion that the next Monarch should be described as *Defender of Faiths* is mere moonshine and a sort of clowning. What – is he to defend so many faiths: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism? Where do we stop? Christian Science, Spiritualism, L. Ron Hubbard and the Church of Scientology? The Monarch, in her person, stands for the reality of truth. And this truth is a particular truth - the truth of the Catholic Creeds.

In the Queen's anointing we approach the central sacred mystery. In the Old Testament, the earliest of the anointed kings enacted a ritual in which they symbolically died and rose again for the nation. The ancient kings of Israel were God's anointed. And their anointing was to service and even suffering. That is why the royal colour is purple – the colour of passion, penitence and suffering. The colour of Advent and Lent. And so the Monarch is a type of God's suffering servant.

Over her long life, our gracious Queen has served; and will anyone say she has not suffered? This service and this suffering is not just personal, the service and suffering of one Elizabeth Windsor – though it is that too. But the sacred Monarchy means that she serves and suffers for the whole realm and in the whole realm: for she *is* the whole realm. Queen and country. One and the same. These are awesome and holy things. Or as Shakespeare put it in *Troilus & Cressida*:

There is a mystery in the soul of state which hath an operation more divine than our mere chroniclers dare meddle with.

God save the Queen!