

A Tribute to Her Majesty The Queen during the Advent of Her Platinum Jubilee

110 Purves Road
Kensal Rise
London NW10 5TB

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II,
Buckingham Palace,
London SW1A 1AA

27 January 2022.

Dear Queen Elizabeth,

Re: On the Approach of Your Majesty's Seventy Years on the Throne – 6 February 2022

I am writing now rather than on 6 February because I so much wanted to offer my personal tribute, as many others will be eager to do, in the hope and expectation – *Deo volente* – that the great day will come just as we prepare in Advent for the joyful date of Christmas. Your Majesty's Christian faith has been, and remains, at the heart of the unique position which our Queen holds in the public life of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and the wider world. My concern is that, while others recognise this too, it might be lost sight of in the current times, and I wish to help ensure its significance will always be remembered.

Thus I may at some future date, if it seems appropriate, circulate this letter more widely unless your Majesty objects, or would prefer not, in which case it will remain private.

1. 'In the beginning was the Word...'

At your coronation on 2 June 1953 the Holy Bible was placed into your hands. This Word has been your Majesty's guide, together with your Coronation Oath, ever since. I truly believe that every year, or perhaps even day or week, the imprint of that solemn, yet joyful, occasion has helped motivate and sustain that reign. A visiting priest at our church last Christ the King Sunday spoke of this defining moment and of the special significance your Majesty attached to receiving the Word of God on that day. His testimony and the warmth of his tribute, despite his republican sympathies, confirmed my resolve to write for your Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, if the opportunity arose.

.../cont'd

Yet it is remembered that your accession to the throne on 6 February 1952 occurred at a moment of profound personal grief on the death of your beloved father, King George VI. When the rest of us can retire into private grief, shared with family and friends, on the passing of a loved one, your Majesty had to put public duty first. Your father's leadership in wartime and in seeking post-war peace and justice amidst the ruins of Europe was based on trust in God's strength and guidance. So, your Majesty then continued that historic tradition ably supported by your rock, the late Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and other members of the Royal Family.

'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... a time of war, and a time of peace.' (KJV, Eccl. 3: 1, 8b)

2. The Greatness of Your Majesty's Reign

It has often struck me what a paradox it is that the Head of State in this country should be non-political as the State itself is the political institution *par excellence*. While all authority under God flows from the Sovereign, your Majesty has little or no power herself which vests in others across each arm of government. Hence the Sovereign cannot be proceeded against in civil or criminal courts – though your Majesty is scrupulous in observance of the law – due to lacking the rights of a common citizen in courts that derive their authority from the Sovereign herself. It is as servant that the Queen reigns both of Christ, the Servant King, and in the service of her people. By that power of example for nearly seventy years your Majesty has sought to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

First and foremost, as Sovereign your Majesty has given unstinting support to the armed forces as one crucial aspect of the work to secure a state of peace in a troubled and divided world. Those who sacrificed their lives in the two world wars and many other armed conflicts since then are especially remembered on Armistice Day with veterans having pride of place. That Day was the centrepiece of the first and (at that time) only letter I had written to your Majesty on 31 October 2010 which received a touching and thoughtful reply – well, two in fact but the second, from one of your faithful secretaries, apparently oblivious to the first!

This leads directly on to the second power of example: support for the public and their representatives and every branch of government and loyal opposition. Touching thousands of hearts and minds not only by diligent correspondence, as in my own experience, but directly and through your Royal Family in personal meetings. I vividly remember briefly meeting your eldest son, H. R. H. Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, in a church in Camden on Candlemas almost a decade ago. How impressed I was at the way in which His Royal Highness took an interest in each person he was introduced to and talked with so naturally. The image from the media may not always do justice to the warmth and humanity evident in personal contact. Your Majesty became and remained a symbol of national unity especially in moments of crisis, as through this pandemic, for which our heartfelt thanks are given.

Thirdly, and close to your Majesty's heart I know, is your work with the Commonwealth. For out of Empire, and despite its oppressive and hurtful aspects, is the recognition of some quality that binds us together as nations of the one true God of all. On your many foreign visits including to Africa, my second home where I was brought up, you have sought to bring out all that is best in the traditions and cultures of many different peoples. It is surely work at the core of humanity's long, elusive search for a lasting peace, which God's Kingdom offers.

Thus, just as your father's legacy was principally of leadership in war and post-war reconstruction, so surely your Majesty's reign finds its consummation in the role of religion and learning, as complements to democratic politics and military power, being the true basis for ensuring peace and prosperity in the future. One of the wisest and best of your Majesty's judges provided a definition of 'an irenic perspective' in a charity case I argued in person in 1998, endorsed by a higher court in the millennium year, that has allowed us to use this concept to predict the prospects for a state of peace or war in various regions of the world. By competitive analysis, soon to be enhanced through applying data science, humanity may be rescued in future from the most destructive great power wars of the past. Did God not promise in his covenant with Noah that he would never again destroy every living creature (as we now have the power to do)?

While there have been other monarchs in British history that have been great in the traditional sense of conquerors or empire builders, and who were also motivated and guided by their Christian faith, yet it has been your Majesty's destiny by divine providence to live at a time of profound re-evaluation of the nature of power and how it can be constrained. Your Majesty's example is so inspiring not because it is perfect but because it is so human and seeks to reflect the life and teaching of the Prince of Peace, the Servant King, who lived and died and rose again for the salvation of the world. Your Majesty's life, and reign of nearly 70 years, lives out the poem of Minnie Louise Haskins offered by your father (and suggested by you as a child, I understand) in his Christmas Day broadcast of 1939:

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year

'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'

And he replied,

'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.'

3. 'For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?'

Long may your Majesty continue to reign over us!

Day by day we keep alert and pray for we do not know the day and hour when Christ returns. Yet when the sound of God's trumpet is heard, and the Father calls through His Son, surely even the glories of Handel's Messiah will pale before the music of heaven as the Lord's voice is heard: 'Well done, good and faithful servant;... enter thou into the joy of thy lord.' (KJV, Matt. 25: 23)

As that great African saint, Augustine of Hippo, observed in almost the concluding words of The City of God:

The important thing is that the seventh [day or epoch] will be our Sabbath, whose end will not be an evening but the Lord's Day, an eighth day, as it were, which is to last for ever, a day consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, foreshadowing the eternal rest not only of the spirit but of the body also. There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?

That end is open to all for we are saved by grace and not by works, by faith in God rather than our own efforts. Before raising Lazarus from death,

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die... (KJV, John 11: 25-26)

I have the honour to remain your Majesty's most humble and obedient servant.

Peter Southwood

Acknowledgements

Quotations are from The Authorized (King James) Version of the Holy Bible, shown as KJV except on the page 1 sub-title which is from John 1: 1. My Bible was originally presented to my father on 1 November 1944 in the Merchant Taylors' Hall.

The poem by Minnie Louise Haskins is in The Servant Queen and the King She Serves published by The Bible Society, HOPE and the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in 2016 as a tribute in celebration of Her Majesty's 90th birthday.

The quotation on this page is from St Augustine, The City of God (Penguin Books, 1984), p. 1091.