CONGRATULATIONS YOUR MAJESTY

Posted on May 31, 2022 by Eddie

Some musings on a long monarchy and what comes next for the church.
Category: Observations

The streets of our village are festooned with bunting and Union Flags in anticipation of the upcoming royal jubilee. I guess that for many people, it's just an excuse for an extra bank holiday and perhaps a bit of a party. However, I suspect that most Brits (even a die-hard republican, such as myself) are genuine in their appreciation of the Queen as she hits a significant milestone. Let's face it, reigning for seventy years is truly impressive. Many people don't live that long, much less serve as the head of state of a country.

To put things in perspective, Elizabeth came to the throne just seven years after the end of the Second World War, ten years before the Beatles recorded their first single and seven years before I was born - and I'm close to retirement. Her first Prime Minister was Winston Churchill!

The last seventy years has been a time of enormous change in the UK. We are no longer an imperial, world power, just a middling sized island-country off the coast of Europe. We still wield a fair bit of soft power, but this declining over time. The heavy industries which were the backbone of our prosperity have declined, while services and finances have (to some extent) taken their place with huge implications for the demographics of large slices of our country. However, perhaps the most important change long term, is the decline of the church in the UK and the rest of the West and its exponential growth around the rest of the world.

Queen Elizabeth is a devout Christian and has increasingly made this clear through her annual Christmas broadcasts. At the same time, she is the representative of a sort of national folk-Christianity; a symbol of a time when Britain was a Christian nation. As such, she has allowed us to fool ourselves that things are not as bad as they could be. The nation still has a Christian heart.

Generally, our monarchy is symbolic, it has little practical impact on the day to day life of the people. However, symbols are important and her long reign has allowed us to hang on to aspects of our past even though they may no longer be relevant.

At some point in the future, we will have a new monarch. Charles attitude to the Christian faith is very different to his mother's. I'm sure he will perform the rituals of the state religion appropriately, but there is little sign of a commitment to Jesus. However, without this personal commitment to the gospel, the hollowness of much of our institutional religion will be laid bare. We'll no longer be able to sustain the comforting illusion that we are in any sense a Christian nation.

No one knows what the next seventy years will look like, but I suspect that the relationship between

the state and the church will change dramatically. Will churches be able to perform state functions such as marriages? (Whether they should do so is a different question.) Will we still have access to charitable status? My suspicion is that we will see some rapid changes over the next couple of decades and they may not be at all comfortable..