WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT THE PAST?

Posted on May 10, 2018 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

Yesterday, I wrote a post that questioned why so many people seem to prefer the cultural *status quo* to the possible changes that are coming to our society. Today, I'd like to play with that sort of thing a bit more and think about our possible reactions to the past.

It's not unusual to hear statements something along the lines of "what Britain really needs is to recapture its Christian heritage". Can I lovingly and gently say that I think this is absolute tosh!

Let me explain...

- Firstly, I'm not convinced that there really is a golden age of Christian heritage that we can recapture. Over centuries, Christianity has influenced many aspects of British cultural life, however this has been a long slow, osmotic process. And while this process was going on, the influence of the Gospel at any one point in history was always more limited than we might like to imagine.
- Whatever Christian heritage we did have was supported by institutional Christianity. In an increasingly secular and multi-religious country it is unthinkable that one faith group could dominate the institutions of state in the way that the church did for hundreds of years.
- The previous point is getting towards the big issue which is the simple fact that the future will be different to the past. Britain's Christian heritage, such as it was, grew and developed in a particular set of circumstances but the world has changed dramatically over the last fifty years and the pace of change shows no sign of slacking. We need to find new ways to interact with the world, new ways for the church and for Christians to make their voice heard.

We can no longer expect to be listened to on the great cultural and moral issues of the day, simply because we are Christians. We have to earn the right to be heard through intelligent, gracious and prophetic engagement. This means that we have to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider how and when we will speak out. Harking back to a mythical golden age will both take our focus off the real issues that we face and make us look faintly ridiculous in the eyes of a watching world. Being ridiculous for Jesus is one thing, being ridiculous because you are out of touch is another thing altogether.