

MISS STEPHENS (02)

The Prime Minister was much taken with some radio broadcasts by John Selwyn Gummer on the early morning religious spot a couple of weeks ago. She wrote to him to say so, and in return he promised to let her have a transcript. Nothing has come so far. Since you know him a little better than the rest of us, could you remind him of his undertaking and say that the Prime Minister very much looks forward to seeing them?

MJ

28 September 1979

FILE

WLC

John Selwyn GUMMER

1 October 1979

Many thanks for your postcard received today. I did not realise that you were taking yet another holiday.....

Amazing though it may seem, the Prime Minister was rather impressed by some of your radio broadcasts and has requested that you send her the transcripts. As these have not been forthcoming, could you kindly let us have them on your return?

CAROLINE STEPHENS

John Selwyn Gummer, Esq., M.P.

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From: John Gummer, M.P.

Gummer

IAN Gow

P.M. wrote
manuscript letter
after hearing him
on Radio.



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(F) 1/10.

24th Sep. 1979

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter.

I very much appreciated it — not only because you, busier than any of us, found the time to write but also for the kind things you said.

The response to the series has been very encouraging. There do seem to be signs that the collectivist tide is turning and that the moral and intellectual argument is over to win.

I hope to have transcripts from the BBC very soon and I shall send you a set as you asked.

Yours ever,

John

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY - John Selwyn Gummer, M.P.

I

Some Churchmen are inclined to bang on about Political and social issues and claim some sort of divine backing for the particular views they happen to hold. They seem to think that their religious faith and theological expertise gives them a special insight into economics and politics, commerce and industry. It is as if Christianity has a specific programme for our affairs, corporate, national and international.

In fact, of course, Christianity is concerned with a much more important matter: it explains man's real nature and reveals the God who created him. It talks directly to each individual and demands a personal response. Of course, that makes it very disturbing and extremely demanding. Christ doesn't ask for our general assent to a vague programme of world improvement. He actually lays claim to our whole personality and expects us to think, speak and do as He wills. Not that is a very uncomfortable gospel; no wonder so many Churchmen prefer an alternative one. Personal morality takes a back seat, and instead we are called upon to take up moral stances on world issues. Showing solidarity with a group becomes more important than loving our neighbour as a person. Political action and social protest become the marks of Christian concern instead of prayer and fasting, worship and sacrifice.

And of course this let us all off the hook, Instead of asking myself "Is it right for me to strike?" We call for a new social order where the just demands of our social group are met. Even worse, we merely say that all our mates are coming out, so we must! Instead of asking, "Do I fiddle my expenses?" - we press for a reform in the tax system and a fairer reward for initiative - or more often we say, "everybody else does it, otherwise we can't make a living."

Superficially, all this sounds much less self-centred - actually it absolves us from any personal responsibility. It is understandable - we all feel that on our own we can do little to change things. Our personal contribution seems so small - the strike will go on despite us, people will cheat whatever we do. It is a tempting attitude. No wonder so many of us fall.

Even Christians begin to lose faith in the effectiveness of a personal response and call instead for some group political and social action. Action which is essentially corporate and which pushes the individual and his responsibility into the background. Yet that denies the unique nature of Christianity. Our faith is supremely individual. The world does not matter, but each one of us personally matters utterly and eternally. Christ's call is to each one of us. Our response must therefore be individual; our responsibility our own. He is the living proof of the change the individual can make.

So today and for the next couple of mornings I hope we can actually buck the trend and face squarely Christ's claim upon us. Perhaps to start off, today, before we get down to work, we can think of the best we have known - the people we really admire and whose standards we really look up to. And we can ask ourselves, in that light, what is it in our own lives which makes us ashamed.

II Thought for Today. Wednesday 19 September 1979.

Shame has always been a powerful emotion. The anxiety-makers of Victoria's reign - hellfire preachers and popular medicos alike made much of sexual shame to force people into morality.

Today the new evengelists: the progressive clerics and guerilla-supporting moralists - they use shame too. We must make reparation for our imperialism, make up for our past exploitation - redeem ourselves by a proper sense of the iniquities of the West. We are all guilty.

This sort of corporate shame is less effective than the highly personalised and individually embarrassing taunts of the Victorians. There can't be many who are without sin by their reckoning. Yet the new guilt is still very pervasive. Guilt by association, by birth and by background feeds a different anxiety. It produces people who are ashamed of their country, their family, or their circumstances. People with an inferiority complex about their own and their Nation's past.

What a nonsense! There is no such thing as corporate guilt. Christ did not die for the sins of the group but for you and me. It is our personal responsibilities which should concern us. It is precisely this liberation from the sins of our fathers which Christ achieved. We are free - free to love or to hate, to do good or ill. That is the greatest liberation of all.

Yet some fashionable commentators are busy cashing in this true liberation for the false political liberation of the guerilla and the agitator. The gospel of God will not be affected by the sort of government which emerges in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. The Church will seek to bring the gospel to those who rule, but it cannot have its hands tied by adherence to a particular political programme or set of economic theories. The Church's rôle is not to effect political change but to ensure personal conversion. It is soul by soul and silently that God's kingdom proceeds.

As a politician it is my duty to do my best for my constituents, my country and the people of the world. It is the Church's job to see that I approach that task loving the Lord my God and my neighbour as myself. She must constantly remind me of the truths of the Faith and recall me to the stringent demands of the Gospel. She has no business telling me how to do my job, any more than she can tell an engineer how best to operate a lathe. I have to deal with immigration, the recognition of Chile, and holding the Olympic Games in Moscow. The Church and its Ministers are concerned with saving souls - with producing men and women filled with the Holy Spirit - people who carry their convictions into the exercise of their vocations - be it politics or engineering, farming or factory work. Just as the Pope's learned that it was not their job to tell Gallileo about the solar system, so today's prelates and pastors must leave aside amateur politics and economics and show instead a zeal to save the souls of politicians and economists.

Perhaps we should then see the Bishop of Winchester and Canon Oestreich join the whole Church in a call to repent - for the Kingdom of God is at hand. That would fulfil the apostolic function - it might actually change the hearts and minds of a lot of politicians too and, through them, it may well change the world.

III Thought for Today. Thursday 20 September 1979.

The call to repent - that sounds a really old-fashioned idea. Shades of John the Baptist, hair shirts, and locusts and wild honey. Yet, if the Kingdom of God is at hand - if we really are individually going to be called to account - then preparation is clearly in order. We shan't be asked questions about our views on great world issues, on population control, the money supply, or women's liberation. We shall be asked how we loved.

That question is within everyone's competence. Yet in a sense it is the greatest compliment of all. It can only be asked of free agents, of individuals who matter. For love is only possible for those who are free to choose it. Love cannot be compelled - as every dictator has learned and as sadly most families experience.

So we who can love should prepare for that question and our repentance is the process of measuring ourselves against the best. Holding up our lives against the pattern of Christ. We concentrate, not on our own failures, but upon the example we have been set. Shame and guilt are swallowed up in gratitude and joy as we lose ourselves in looking at him. Repentance removes shame.

And of course we are changed. This is the revolution which Christ came to produce. He showed we mattered - that we were too important to throw ourselves and our lives away. That is the great claim with which he challenges us. The claim that we matter too much to cheapen ourselves by accepting anything but the best - the highest standards and the greatest love are the only things fit for us - for we matter so much to him. Christ has brought a dignity to man and none of us must allow Marx or Freud to take that dignity away. Each day we must remind ourselves that we are too big to be selfish, too much loved to be mean, too close to God to cheat or lie.

It may not seem to make a difference to world peace or racial harmony, to national prosperity or political freedom, but it does make a difference to us and we matter. If we are changed, then the world can be changed. This is not a big-headed or self-centred claim. We matter because we are loved enough to matter. It's the kind of mattering that makes us wear a seat belt - not to save our own skins but because someone else needs us and cares about us. So today we can begin the day with a confidence which comes from love. We can continue in that assurance because we are part of a loving community which is God's Church. We are individually important but it is within the Church that we find the strength to reach to our fullest potential. There is the continuing power of Christ in his Word and Sacraments.

What a remarkable revelation this all is. The confidence to live our lives and the continuing strength to succeed. That is the lesson which the Church ought to be shouting from the rooftops. That is the power that makes the new man. And that is the revolutionary force which will really change the world.