

The Church of England turns its fire on England

It used to be said unhelpfully that the Anglican Church was the Conservative party at prayer. As a once well attended national Church it needed to be and was more inclusive than that. It was true that in the last century many Conservative MPs, Councillors and voluntary workers swelled congregations alongside people of other parties and the non political. Today more Conservatives stay away, knowing they are not welcome. The Church which failed to oppose Labour's policy of creating a hostile atmosphere for illegal migrants switched to opposing the same policy from Mrs May, a keen Churchgoer herself. Today the Church of England seems to favour Extinction Rebellion and the crusade against CO2 ,the resurrection of U.K. membership of the EU and proportional representation. Its national leaders encourage a hostile atmosphere for Conservatives and the English majority.

Last summer the Archbishop of York lectured England that it needed to be broken up into governing regions on the EU model. He had failed to notice the referendum vote against an elected government of the North East, or the hostility of many English Leave voters to the way the EU insisted on trying to break up our country by denying England any place on the map or in the constitution of their Europe. I asked him to debate the matter with me as a fellow Parliamentarian. He could not even be bothered to send me a personal reply to decline the opportunity.

The Archbishops should remember the history of the Anglican Church. The Church tolerated different views of the once explosive issue of transubstantiation. It left most sensitive items of belief to individual judgement and inner conviction. The Church did a good job opening up the Christian message to the masses with the bible in English and the great language of the James Bible and the Elizabethan Common Prayer book. The Reformation which created the Anglican Church was based on a rejection of the courts and government from Rome. The dissolution of the monasteries was a welcome social and economic revolution connecting more priests with local communities.

It is possible to be more critical of the failure to follow the surge of urban populations in the nineteenth century when the break away Methodists and other non conformists served congregations and added greatly to hymn books in the absence of interest from the mother Church. More recently I see bishops using their privileged positions in the Lords to back European and regional causes voted down by a majority of voters.

If the Archbishops ever want to win back lost congregations they could try being more positive about the country they serve.

I do not want the Church to preach Conservatism from the pulpits nor to agree with all a government does. I just ask that national unelected Church leaders with seats in the Lords show some sympathy with majority views and some understanding of why their congregations have shrunk so much.

There is too much international regulation

There are three main problems with excessive international regulation. The first is it can curb competition and innovation which would otherwise improve service and performance. The second is countries like the U.K. take compliance seriously only to see many other countries gain exemptions or simply ignore the rules to gain competitive advantage. The third is democratic governments charged with the domestic task of lawmaking find an increasing number of areas where they cannot change, improve or repeal as they and the publics they serve wish owing to international agreements.

Some have written in here to condemn new global rules on pandemics from the World Health Organisation. There is no agreed new Treaty nor even a text of new Treaty for negotiation so that is no immediate threat. Many countries will doubtless be reluctant to surrender powers to lockdown or not lockdown to supranational unelected officials. There needs to be plenty of world debates about what if any strengthening of global rules might be helpful and acceptable to enough signatories.

I read that some in U.K. government think the U.K. should adopt forthcoming EU regulations on speed limiters in cars. I can see no good reason to do this given the technical problems with variable speed limits, difficulties in tracker devices knowing exactly which road a vehicle is on at complex junctions, and with temporary speed limits. Ministers must tell the civil service we have no wish to adopt new EU rules in most cases. New rules should only be formed when the U.K. public and Ministers think there is a problem which regulation could help solve.

On the doorsteps

I have been out and about in Wokingham, Earley and Shinfield ahead of the local elections. The main issues raised continue to be local to do with the pace and location of development and the need for better roads and less congestion. There is still no mention of Ukraine. If asked people are concerned about the cost of living squeeze.

There is strong support for weekly bin collections rather than less frequent and for keeping the Council Tax down.

Why don't the railways want our business?

It's the Bank holiday week-end. Many people want to travel to be with family or friends. Others want to take a short break at a UK holiday destination, giving some work to our hotels, visitor attractions and restaurants. An effectively nationalised railway which is heavily loss making has an opportunity to provide us with a great public service. It could take some of the strain off the roads. It could earn some much needed extra revenue to offset some of the huge losses it is racking up and expensing to the taxpayer.

Instead the papers and media report a long list of closed lines and services. Maybe when the railway earned most of its non subsidy money from fleecing commuters for the their five days a week service it made sense to do maintenance at Bank holidays when the commuters did not need the travel. Haven't the railways noticed the five day a week commuting model is broken. We have witnessed the post covid revolt of the commuter, with so many agreeing with their employers far fewer days in the office to escape the high costs and poor service of their past railway experience. Surely the railway bosses should be scouring the booking patterns for holidays, special events, sporting activities and the rest to see how they can capture more of the leisure and pleasure market. That means not only keeping open the full range of lines for a busy Bank holiday but also flexing the pattern of services to attract more of the travelling public. The A 303, the M5 , the M6 , the M25 and all the other overloaded holiday roads need this help from this expensive set of great straight routes spanning the country and giving traffic free access to all our main cities and tourist destinations.

The largely nationalised railway is another example of huge sums of public money and public sector power being deployed by so called independent bodies. Ministers need to intervene more when so much public money and the public interest is at stake. If the railway management will not serve the railway demand when it is there they need to be told to do so or changed for those who will. We need business people guiding the railway and helping the Ministers who want to grow the business and make sensible offers to people who do not want to sit in endless traffic jams if there is something better on offer. A big sporting or cultural event should be a business opportunity, not a reason to ration or even close the relevant station for fear of too many people.

Good Friday Churches Together in Wokingham

I attended the coffee morning at St Paul's Church today and enjoyed seeing the displays and tasks for the children around the Biblical account of the death of Christ. I joined those walking into town and attended the ecumenical service in the Methodist Church with 48 others from the range of Wokingham Christian Churches. I am grateful to those who organised these events under the banner of Churches Together and invited me to attend.

During the morning three told me they dislike the Conservative party and our current leader intensely and wish to see him and the party out of office. The immediate complaints related to the breaches of rules over covid in Downing Street but there were clearly wider and long standing disagreements. Local Conservatives accept the Prime Minister's apology and do not wish to see a leadership election now given the need for clear leadership over Ukraine and the cost of living issues.

Two lobbied me against the plans for a new approach to try to stop the trade in dangerous small boat journeys across the Channel. My email box is more balanced on this issue with some writing in wanting the new approach or questioning whether it will be sufficient to end the people trafficking, as well as some sending in a campaign email against the proposals.