

## Reflection for September 2019 - Peter Millar

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### **\*\*\* *The lack of truth in high places and the place of self-respect:***

I am writing this on Sunday September 8<sup>th</sup>. An hour ago I returned from a church service in a local church. There I heard again these familiar words from Paul's letter to the church in Galatia...**"the Spirit of God is working in us and it produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control."** Listening to that group of human qualities which come from God and find their birth in our souls, I was almost in tears as I thought of the present political chaos now dominating every aspect of UK life. Some may think otherwise, but my belief is that embedded within the political confusions of our time is an underlying spiritual crisis. In our constant and frenetic attempts to satisfy only ourselves and our own goals, we have become disconnected from the life-giving possibilities in these human qualities which Paul articulated in his letter to the Christian church in Galatia. Yet millions seek to be re-connected to a spiritual vision. One element in this restoration of human dignity is **self-respect**. I quote here from an article which reminds us of self-respect. The author of it is the distinguished Irish columnist Fintan O'Toole. Although he is here reflecting on the British political situation, his words relate to many situations beyond the shores of the UK - a nation which is now in the midst of an ideological civil war.

**\*\*\*** "The authority of the British Prime Minister is evaporating primarily because it came up against a force that still has some purchase on British politics: self-respect. No self-respecting parliament could go along with what the Prime Minister wanted Westminster to do, which is not just to render itself impotent but to collude in an obvious lie about why that parliament was being suspended for several weeks (in the midst of a political crisis for the whole country). That collective self-respect was mirrored in the relatively small but crucial group of Tory MP's who simply could not abide the self-abasement that the Prime Minister demanded of them. We sometimes mock politicians for their self importance, but this last week in Britain was a reminder of why it matters that enough of them think sufficiently highly of themselves not to be content to go down in history as mere toadies.

Having floated to the top on wave after wave of deceit, the present British leader has never had to understand that you can't exercise power in a democratic system unless a lot of people trust you. In his case, almost nobody does – and now it matters. His whole strategy has been to make No Deal credible to the European Union, in the belief that once they accept his willingness to light the fuse, they will try to mollify him. But it has also been the opposite: to try to convince his own parliament that he really does not want No Deal after all and is threatening it as a negotiating ploy. This double confidence trick would be very hard to pull off in any circumstances but it is patently impossible when he has no credibility to begin with.

There is, of course, one way out for a Leader like this. His lack of credibility matters so only long as democratic norms of scrutiny prevail. The deeper international rightwing project is to abolish those norms. The Prime Minister of the UK can hope that a fervent English nationalist election campaign might do so by creating a new populist contempt for parliament itself. He can still gamble that he can do without trust and credibility because enough voters simply don't care about them. The guy can be a bully and a liar and they will still vote for his leadership.” \*\*\*

It may take years and years for countries as a whole to counter this contempt for truth in high places. No one can tell. For many of us it is also a sorrow that some Christians in their voting for leaders ignore the human qualities of the person. Other Christians simply close their eyes to the whole mess and tell us that chaos like this was predicted centuries ago in the Bible. They believe we are at the end of days, so why worry and why be surprised?

My own belief, and that of many others, is quite different. God matters: Creation matters: And each of us matters to God. At every level, this is a serious, beautiful world, created not by us yet of which we are stewards. And in that cosmic stewarding, patience, integrity of soul, humility, self-control, faithfulness, the ability to forgive and loving-kindness are of huge significance. When evil and lack of truth flourish we do not remain silent, not because we seek to draw attention to ourselves, but because we belong to God. We carry within us the divine image, and we see “the other” not as an enemy but as a sister or brother who like us is held within divine light and divine possibility.

**\*\*\* And other notes**

Let us give thanks at this time for the life and witness of **Toni Morrison** one of America's greatest contemporary writers who enabled her readers to enter into the reality of poverty and oppression experienced by millions of black Americans through the centuries. As a black woman she wrote primarily for a black audience, but her great novels made millions of whites more aware of black history, black wisdom, black courage and black hope.

\*\*\* If you ever see in a second-hand bookshop or charity shop a copy of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "**Made For Goodness: and why this makes all the difference**" (ISBN 978-1-84604-252-2) first published in 2010 and co-authored by his daughter Mpho Tutu, it is worth buying. As one reviewer said: "If you are thirsty for spiritual drink, come to the water of this beautiful book." And speaking of Desmond Tutu who was at the centre of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission some years back, do we not need a similar Commission in many nations today – healing our divided, often anger-filled societies?

\* ***The way you look at people can transform them.*** Jean Vanier of L'Arche who died in 2019

\* ***A radical conversion of the non-poor is needed today.*** Maria Neal

**\*\*\* And a prayer for our world**

*Do not forget the joy of the Lord is your strength, but remember this:*

*We are called not to be fearful, we are called to love:*

*We are called not to be all-knowing, we are called to believe:*

*We are called not to parade our holiness, but to be faithful:*

*We are called to serve and to walk humbly with our God:*

*We are called to look out upon the world, not in hatred and anger, but through the eyes of God's tender compassion for us all.*

*(based on a prayer originally from South Africa.)*

\****A final thought: The whole creation is pervaded by God.*** Bede Griffiths