

Tradition

by Bill Dawson

You may have noticed by now that British society is riddled with 'tradition'. Indeed, many people will tell you that tradition forms the backbone of our life - its stability, its admired democracy, its former glory and its present success in remaining a world power. 'Fabric of society' is a phrase much favoured by our established leaders, as something constantly being placed in danger of destruction by the abandonment of a single tradition.

But is this really so? Is the whole network of British tradition something to cling to, to be proud of? Or is it an aspect of life that brings about stagnation and decay in our society?

Before we can answer that we need to know exactly what tradition is. The dictionary tells us formally that it is 'established custom, practice or belief handed down to posterity.' In simple language, it is practices or beliefs copied from what other people of our land did or said before we were born - or even hundreds of years ago.

Should we blindly copy things that our forefathers or ancestors did? Is there any logical reason for doing this? Of course there is, so I'm told: "If it were good enough for my father, and his father before him, it's bloody good enough for me." What could be more reasonable than that?

Or, if you belong to the 'higher classes': "What? This modern riff-raff come along and want to stop our simple pleasure in chasing a fox and enjoying watching our hounds tear it to pieces? When we've been doing it for hundreds of years? What they need is a damned good thrashing, what?" Now who can argue with that?

We British love our traditions. You see and read about our pageantry - of royalty, court, parliament and the Lord Mayor's Show - and you probably think, "How quaint and colourful!", and that may well be so. But perhaps you don't realise that virtually every aspect of our lives is governed by traditions - unnoticed because we're so used

to it, so conditioned: christenings, marriages, funerals, schooling, prisons, self-abasement before a god, male domination of society, eating the corpses our fellow beings, secret police, rules of morality - the list is endless. And why? Because we blindly copy what our ancestors did in their day, who in turn copied their fathers.

I hear the howl of protest from my fellow countrymen, "But what would we replace these traditions with? It's our whole way of life. What's the alternative, then?"

Well, I have an ultra-radical idea, and I know that many people will find it deeply offensive - or too revolutionary to contemplate: *Why don't we think things out for ourselves? And even allow our young ones to think for themselves?*

This is our world - it shouldn't be ruled by the ideas and opinions of the dead. Have we any reason to believe that our ancestors were any more intelligent than we are? Or any more benevolent? We were born with brains of our own - thought patterns geared to the age we live in - **our** age. *Why walk in dead men's shoes?* We are quite capable of making our own - if only we have the courage to put them on.

So - does that mean that I'm committing the sacrilege of wanting to destroy all past ways and traditions - like the Taliban, when they took over Afghanistan, destroying all the ancient statues of Buddha and co.?

Not at all. I'm merely proposing that we look afresh at every aspect of life we have been used to following automatically, like robots - then pick out and retain the traditions that we, of this 21st century, consider to be good and useful to our society, and put aside the ones that are cruel, impractical or just senseless. And by all means keep the colour and pageantry for those who like it - and are willing to pay for it.

I don't know about you, but personally, dead men's shoes don't seem to fit comfortably on my feet - and to be perfectly honest, I think some of them stink.

Bill Dawson
