The Thirteenth

ERIC SYMES ABBOTT

Memorial Lecture

delivered by

Canon Eric James FKC

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and subsequently at Keble College, Oxford

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Spirituality, Shakespeare and Royalty

There are at least a dozen reasons why I have decided to take as my subject for this year's Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture *Spirituality, Shakespeare and Royalty*; and I've felt it right to spend some time at the beginning spelling out those reasons.

The first is Eric Abbott's own associations with the Monarchy. He was Chaplain to His Majesty King George VI from 1948 to 52 and to Her Majesty The Queen from 1952 to 59; and he prepared three royal princesses for their weddings here. He officiated at many other royal occasions, and was a much loved pastor to the Royal Family. In 1966, Eric was therefore made a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

Secondly, on some memorable occasions, my own relationship with Eric involved, let us say, an oblique relationship to the Royal Family.

I well remember telling Eric, in 1952, when, as Dean of King's, he was living in Vincent Square, and I, as a curate at St. Stephen's, Rochester Row, was living not far away from him, how I had been invited to go, late at night, with the Vicar, George Reindorp, and the other curates - all in cassocks - to join the thousands who had waited, in the sleet of that February, to enter Westminster Hall, and file past the catafalque of King George VI, lying in state. The scene was unforgettable; the guards standing motionless in solemn silence; the tall unbleached candles at each corner of the coffin, guttering in the darkness. It would be a poor psychologist who failed to notice the deeply serious core of feeling that accompanied the seemingly endless file of people at that time - a poor psychologist, and, I think, a poor theologian.

But I must also record that the next year, the first year of my priesthood, it was as the guest of Eric, Chaplain to Her Majesty The Queen, that I sat next to him, in a stand immediately opposite Buckingham Palace, at the Coronation of Her Majesty, on June 2nd, 1953.

I have myself been a Chaplain to Her Majesty The Queen from 1984 to 95, and have been an Extra Chaplain since 1995. That office requires one primarily to preach in the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace; but preaching without a pastoral concern for the Royal Family, and for its future, is, to my mind, unthinkable.

I myself remarked, when giving a lecture here on the first anniversary of Eric's death, that "not all Eric's friends who visited him were equally positive in their reaction to the galaxy of signed royal photographs with which he was pleased to surround himself"; but I was careful to add "this was, not least, because not all recognised the profound theology of royalty Eric brought to this aspect of his ministry". We shall examine some aspects of that theology later in this lecture.

I suspect some of us this evening will have found it impossible to enter this Abbey without recalling the tragic events of last September. On the day of Princess Diana's death, I happened to be preaching at St. Saviour's, Pimlico the church where, in the church hall, Princess Diana had looked after the children of the Young England Kindergarten. After the morning service that day, a young man of about twenty entered the church, carrying a bunch of flowers, and with them a handwritten message. He asked me where he should place the flowers. I talked to him for a while. He told me how, as a toddler, Princess Diana had looked after him. He said "there'll always be a place for her in my heart". Little did I know that that bunch of flowers was but the beginning of an avalanche.

All that week, the Mall was a slowly moving procession of those who mourned the death of Princess Diana. And on Saturday, there was, of course, the unforgettable funeral here. On the Sunday morning I tried to interpret the events of that week to a village congregation in Bedfordshire. In the afternoon, at the invitation of the Bishop of Southwark, I preached to a crowded Southwark Cathedral, at the Diocesan Memorial Service to the Princess.

In the Spring Number of Prison Report, the magazine of the Prison Reform Trust, there appeared this letter -

> "I am a life sentence prisoner … I am on a wing occupied by 100 lifers. The death of Diana profoundly affected the atmosphere on the wing, in a way which is extremely difficult to describe. The general demeanour of both staff and prisoners was certainly one of sadness and regret. Of course, there were exceptions. But those who were not touched by Diana's tragic death were an insignificant minority - even they could not avoid being affected by the sombre mood.
>
> I spoke to many of my fellow prisoners about how I and they felt about the death. It was extraordinary that so many men, from so many different backgrounds, should be as united in grief as we were.
>
> On the morning of the funeral, many of the men gathered in a television room and sat silently throughout the entire proceedings. I saw men surreptitiously wipe tears from their faces as we watched Diana's cortege proceed past the crowds of mourners. Such is the pressure to be tough in prison, this is a sight rarely beheld. I knew that I was not alone in inwardly weeping for the Princess. Just as Diana's coffin was commencing the final leg of its journey to her resting-place, officers started locking us all up for the lunchtime 'bang-up'. An officer came into the television room, took one look at the faces of the men watching the Princess being carried to her grave, and departed without a word.
>
> Several minutes later, as the motorway leg of the funeral journey commenced, we all left the room to go to our cells. I could hardly wait to get behind my door to cry in private. I later discovered that many of my friends did likewise
>
> Steven Jones
> HMP Nottingham"

Since that sad week, there has been the service here to mark the Golden Wedding of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. The mood of the nation - and of the Monarchy - has perceptibly moved, even in these last memorable months. But this Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture is the first after those tragic days of last September; and it is in large part those momentous days which have given me my subject.

On Eric's gravestone, here in the Abbey, one of the carefully chosen phrases is "he loved the Church of England". I think it is appropriate to say here and now that I believe Eric would never have loved the Church of England more than last September, when this House of Kings, served the Royal Family, the Church of England, and the whole nation, so conspicuously, in shaping, in a few days, a service for the funeral of Princess Diana which voiced the inarticulate prayers of millions of people, not only of this land but of the world. Those prayers, it seems to me, provide part of our subject today.

So far, however, I have only outlined the easiest part of my subject. There are other reasons why I have chosen *Spirituality, Shakespeare and Royalty* as my subject, and some of them are inescapably controversial.

Canon Alan Wilkinson, the noted Anglican historian, and Diocesan Theologian of Portsmouth, wrote an article for the *Independent*, a week after the funeral of Princess Diana, which concluded;

> "For Jesus, being anointed meant washing feet, as our monarchs did up to James II, on Maundy Thursday. Can we envisage a reformed monarchy anointed not for wealth and privilege but for servanthood? Though this is a Judaeo-Christian concept, it would appeal to people of other faiths and none as well. We already have hints of that concept in Prince Charles' concern for the inner city and the unemployed. When things go wrong with hopes and relationships, we often react by wanting to be rid of the source of the pain. This is how many people are reacting to the failures of the monarchy. Ought we to abandon an institution which is woven into every period of our history, out of disappointment or a fit of pique? There is still time to salvage the monarchy, but there is not as much time as some in authority once seemed to assume".

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales, has been the occasion, but not wholly the cause, of many of the questions that people have been asking about the Monarchy. But mortality is something close to us all however much we avert our gaze.

Her Majesty The Queen - I am myself keenly aware - is less than a year younger than I am. The Duke of Edinburgh is but four years older.

If the Duke of Edinburgh were to die, would the Queen, without the huge help of a consort alongside her, retire from the scene - like Queen Victoria? Or would she abdicate? Or would she continue to serve as Monarch as devotedly as she has done for over forty years?

And what would happen were the Queen herself to die?

The Prince of Wales waits in the wings, so to speak; though his waiting is both active and creative. And, in time, he will no doubt have his own thoughts about his role as monarch.

Prince William is sixteen in a month's time.

There is another very relevant question. The Government has raised the question of hereditary peers. There is, surely, a certain illogicality - even naivete - in thinking you can raise - as a matter of principle - the question of hereditary *peers* of the realm, but think you can leave entirely undisturbed the question of the *hereditary monarchy*.

As we contemplate entering a united Europe, we clearly foresee a degree of union with countries which have other models of monarchy, with which we can compare and contrast our own.

Membership of the Commonwealth also has something to say to our British model of monarchy. The idea - and more than the idea - the recent living process of Australia becoming independent of Britain and free of the monarchy, rediscovering its identity, is not without its implications for what we used to call the "Mother Country". "The isle" - this isle - we may yet discover, if we have ears to hear, "is full of noises" - of voices seeking to rediscover *our* identity. Some of those noises may be made by people who are British and, say, Muslim rather than British and C of E.

Finally, there is the role of monarchy in relation to the Church of England - which Eric Abbott loved.

The title given to the Queen - "Defender of the Faith" - is one conferred at his own request on Henry VIII, in 1521, by Pope Leo X. Parliament recognised the style as an official title of the English monarch, and it has been borne since that day by all British sovereigns.

It would be foolish to think that the future of the monarchy could or should be discussed without the Church of England playing a significant part in the discussion. As the Archbishop of York has said recently the future of the House of Lords begs the question of the future representation of the Church of England in that House - and, indeed, of other Christian bodies - and other religions - and the relation of the Church of England to those other bodies.

It would also be foolish of *me* to think that within the compass of a single lecture we can discuss at any depth most of these questions. I can only indicate their importance. And I think it is right to call for them to be the subject of public debate. But to call for such a debate without providing the public with some sort of study guide to the debate that clearly spells out the main issues, would surely be unwise.

I respectfully suggest that the Archbishops should set up a broad-based Commission on *Church and Nation*, with special reference to the future of the Monarchy. So far, the Churches have been strangely silent on the modernising of the Monarchy, though, surely, they have much to contribute through what the Bible says on Monarchy - not least through the prophets, but most through the self-revelation of God in Jesus, and the model He provides of leadership in His Kingdom, in contrast with our all too human requirements of distance, rank, status, possessions, hierarchy - which, of course, meant originally "rule by the priests" - and what Shakespeare called "degree" - "take but degree away, untune that string, and, hark! what discord follows". Such a Commission would surely have valuable insights for our secular, multi-racial and multi-faith society. Gospel, Kingdom, Church, Nation, Establishment, Monarchy would all be on its agenda.

I cannot myself lay claim to be a professional theologian; but I think what I should do in the rest of this lecture is to raise some theological questions about the future of the Monarchy; and I judge that to be particularly appropriate for me to do in the context of this Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture.

When I first began my training for ordination, at King's College, London, we had a curious survival custom at the end of term, called "Collections", when we shook hands with all our mentors, and they said words of wisdom and encouragement - or discouragement - to us. Eric Abbott, then Dean of King's, at one of the first "Collections" of my academic career, shook hands with me and gave me the gnomic instruction; "Think theologically, boy". I didn't know what he meant, and wrote him a letter to say so. He asked me to come and see him, and then patiently explained that he thought I had a better mind than I imagined, and that I must now bring to every bit of experience, past, present and future, what I was learning in theology. At the time, there seemed a great gulf fixed between the world I had left - of dockers and riverside wharves, where I had worked for seven war-time years - and the theology which I was being taught. But I have no doubt at all that Eric would want me this evening to "think theologically" about the Monarchy and its future.

At the beginning of my training for ordination, I knew, of course, very little theology; but I knew much more than most people about William Shakespeare; for the curious reason that the riverside wharf where I had worked was on Shakespeare's Bankside. The Bear Gardens of Southwark were almost as familiar to me as they had been to Shakespeare. The wharf where I had worked has recently seen the new Globe Theatre rise on what was its site. When I learnt the organ in Southwark Cathedral, two hundred yards along the Thames, if I looked into the organ mirror I could see the grave-stone of Edmond Shakespeare, for whose burial service in the Church of St.Saviour,

Southwark - now Southwark Cathedral - his brother, William, had paid, and paid for the bell to be tolled, on a bitterly cold day, when men, women and children played on the frozen Thames.

When I got to know Eric Abbott, I soon discovered we had William Shakespeare in common. I remember Eric saying one day, with amazement in his voice, "Shakespeare knew it all, boy!". And that was, of course, particularly true concerning "this royal throne of kings". So when, in 1949, I first came across John Danby's penetrating study of *King Lear*, entitled *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, I soon shared my enthusiasm for it with Eric.

In fact, that study concerns much more than *Lear*. Through *Lear, Richard II & III, King John,* and *Henry IV Parts I and II*, Danby defines Shakespeare's idea and ideal of monarchy, and reveals his remarkable understanding of a true theology of the royalty of humanity.

Danby's study appealed to Eric Abbott, not least because he penetrated the mind and heart of Shakespeare through what he calls Shakespeare's "inner biography". He pictures Shakespeare, the son of a small farmer - leather-merchant - butcher - glove-maker, who'd lost both money and status in his country town, coming up to London to "snatch at opportunity".

In London, he encounters an age not unlike our own, a society not yet outgrown, its standards come down from another age, assuming a co-operative, reasonable decency in people God to be worshipped, parents to be honoured, others to be used by us as we ourselves would be by them. That Old Society existed, cheek-by-jowl, with another, the brash beginnings of another age. In this New Society, even kings "break faith upon commoditie" - what nowadays we'd probably call "the Market". Edmund, in *Lear*, like any outsider today, abjures tradition, crying "Wherefore should I stand in the plague of Custom?"

The king himself, the crown of humanity, the figure of God's majesty, his captain, steward, deputy-elect, could be deposed or killed, or lose his wits, or have his eyes put out. Kings could prove to be "sneaping" kings; the crown, a wretched, cankered, blistered, hollow thing; the majesty of kings all counterfeit, their royalty banished or confounded.

The crown, Shakespeare knew well, had constantly to be defended, but not by mere assertion or assumption. No-one's authority in Shakespeare's time could rest secure upon his status or his ancestry. A king, so quickly made, could be unmade as quickly. A king could be a king but have no kingdom. Yes; but if that's so, the question had to be faced. What is it that makes a king? And what makes human nature royal?

Shakespeare underlined the common humanity of royalty. I so well remember, in 1968, going with Eric to see Ian McKellen as Richard II, and, after the play, as we walked together down St. Martin's Lane, Eric repeating Richard's almost unbearably poignant words:

> I live with bread like you, feel want,
> Taste grief, need friends, subjected thus
> How can you say to me I am a king?"

The question is, of course, rhetorical. It is, indeed, such humanity that makes a king. And Shakespeare employs a subtle play on words - "*subjected* thus" - to underline that it is the very closeness to his subjects which makes a king "'Tis not vestures which shall make men royal."

It's significant that in *Lear*, when the blinded Gloucester asks Lear "Is't not the king?" Lear replies "Ay, every inch a king". But it is after he has recognized the sufferings of others, and gone though much suffering himself, that that is *now* his reply.

In *Lear*, almost everything turns on seeing. It's a play about blindness and vision those two great New Testament words. It's about *royal* vision and blindness, and indeed, about blindness and vision in our royal humanity. Gloucester, blinded, thinks only of suicide, and seeks a guide to the cliff over which he has made up his mind to leap to death. He enters, led by an old man, who has befriended him. It is one of his own tenants, who, by plain intention on the part of Shakespeare, is almost exactly Lear's age. The blinded Gloucester begs his guide to leave him, lest the guide injure himself with those in authority, for helping him. "You cannot see your way," the old man protests. "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes," Gloucester replies, "I stumbled when I saw."

When Lear meets the blinded Gloucester, he says "O, ho! are you there with me? No eyes in your head, nor no money in your purse? Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light, yet you see how the world goes." "I see it *feelingly*" replies Gloucester.

The authority of vision; of what you see; of what you can only see by feeling; of what you see by experiencing and suffering; that there is no more royal feature of human nature than vision. That, certainly, is what *Lear* is about.

One of the most moving moments in *Lear* is when, out of his experience of suffering, the king exchanges the arrogant authority that comes from the absence of equal interchange and the flattery of court sycophants for an emerging humility. Seeing through feeling the sufferings of others, he utters a prayer which would have been inconceivable earlier in his reign,

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
> From seasons such as these? O I have ta'en
> Too little care of this take physic, pomp,
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just.

Shakespeare was speaking then, surely, as if he had been addressing the royal family of every age and clime - including our own. The life of a royal family can never be truly royal if it "takes too little care" of, say, homeless families and those on benefit. "Take physic, pomp" is a wonderfully terse yet realistic instruction; but "physic" meant to Shakespeare a purgative, and "pomp" had also a more negative meaning than now - as in the Prayer Book's phrase "The pomps and vanities of this wicked world". "Take physic, pomp", was Shakespeare's dismissal of all courtly pomposity that ignored, or was out of touch with, the social realities.

Lear discovers his royalty not in his riches, but in his poverty, his humbling and his emptying; not in his sanity and wisdom, but in his madness.

But Shakespeare's prayer is not only a prayer for kings. It's a prayer for us all. Shakespeare moved beyond the Divine Right of King's to the Divine Right of Everyman - whose royalty is all of a piece with kings "There is a divinity which shapes our ends.." Edgar says to Gloucester, "Thy life's a miracle". It is the priestly role of the king to help the people to discover their royalty, the royalty of their nature; so that the king in Everyman responds to the king on the throne.

The words “nature”, “natural” and “unnatural” occur over forty times in *Lear* alone. Shakespeare had no naive understanding of nature. He had struggled to penetrate the mystery of evil, as well as of good, in nature “Let them *anatomize* Regan” Lear cries. “See what breeds about her heart.” And, bewildered by two of his daughters, he sustains his cry “Is there any cause in *nature* that makes these hard hearts?” Mercifully, he has another daughter, who “redeems nature from the general curse which twain have brought her to.” That daughter is, of course, Cordelia. She reveals the royalty within her nature,

> “It seemed she was a Queen
> Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,
> Sought to be king o’er her.”

Often, in Shakespeare, you scarcely know whether he’s talking of a person, or of a principle, or of a community - like a nation-state.

One thing is certain, Shakespeare was familiar with the thoughts of those two great minds of his time, Bacon and Hooker, who had grappled with the problem of nature and society.

Shakespeare warns us through such plays as *Lear* that the future of the monarchy is not a subject that can be left today to the media, or to populist politicians on the make - or, indeed, to preachers! But neither can things be left just as they are.

Shakespeare saw the Elizabethan playhouse as the successor to the medieval pulpit. His plays help us to think as profoundly as we can - and must - about nature, and the kind of structure or society and it’s leadership nature calls for, indeed, demands.

Shakespeare may be full of quotations, but they are not the sound-bites of today that will die on our lips tomorrow. He was calling us to contemplate the mystery of monarchy, on the throne and in each individual. He returns to the subject in almost every play he wrote.

We shall not get the subject of monarchy right in a day, nor dare we use that word “mystery’ as an escape. Shakespeare asks sharp questions. He knew - as we do - that part of the problem of royalty is the court, the cult and class that hedge the monarch - for which, of course, the monarch is, in part, to blame. Security is the breeding ground of toadying sycophants. And few of us have the courage to rise above that excessive deference to royalty which defeats its object.

The question needs to be posed again, in our own time, whether the mere accident of birth can ever now be expected to produce a man or woman fit for the role that royalty requires with, from birth, the fierce glare of publicity on the heir’s upbringing, education and development, and the investigative frenzy of the media that will accompany his making of friends, wooing, and so on. The relation between the private person and the public role - it must be faced - now makes all but impossible demands.

In England, until 1213, the monarch was elected. Maybe the time is returning for election to the task and role.

As an Extra Chaplain to Her Majesty, I would want to pay tribute to the devotion with which, I believe, the Queen has served the country as Monarch. Nor do I believe that now is the time for an immediate change in our mode of Government; but it is, surely, time for a profound reflection upon and reconsideration of the role of Monarch.

The problem of hereditary monarchy is obvious and simple. The monarch *now* may be above reproach; but you can never tell what you are *going* to get. And there's not a lot to be said for such a lottery!

Shakespeare, in *Troilus*, said

> Take but degree away. Untune that string.
> And, hark! what discord follows.

He speaks of

> The primogenitive and due of birth,
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels.

Bagehot, the great expert on the English constitution, said that "in 1802 every hereditary monarch was insane"; but Hilaire Belloc - in, of course, a somewhat different context! - memorably advised

> Always keep a-hold of Nurse
> For fear of finding something worse.

Exactly sixty years ago, Kingsley Martin, then editor of the *New Statesman*, wrote; "If we want democracy to work we must be sensible. If we cannot be sensible about Monarchy we had better have a Republic and try to be sensible about a President. At present we still believe that Monarchy best suits our traditions and preserves our liberties." It was clear that Martin thought this would be safer than going for Republicanism. "The advantages of Constitutional Monarchy" he wrote - in 1937 - "are more obvious in the post-war than in the pre-war era. If we drop the trappings of Monarchy in the gutter, Germany has taught us that some gutter-snipe (or house-painter with a mission) may pick them up."

None of Martin's asseverations have been more quoted than this. Yet it is a somewhat pessimistic posing of alternatives to the Constitution - as it was in 1937 - or a gutter-snipe or house-painter. A mature democracy like ours today surely can - and must - do better.

Tom Nairn, in his not unsympathetic study of Britain and its Monarchy entitled *The Enchanted Glass*, published a decade ago, called his readers to look at "the sociology of grovelling" - as he surveyed the nation's attitude to the Royal Family. He looked at "the royal soap opera" - with the help of a fairly typical week of women's magazines. He examined both the illusion of ordinariness and the snobbery that surrounded Royalty. "The present ruler and royal family" he said "have carried equestrian worship to novel heights of intensity, and show-jumping, polo and horse-carriage driving have all benefited immeasurably from Royal practice and patronage."

No one reading Tom Nairn's study is likely to think it a very radical idea that there should be profound reflection upon the role - the *representative* role - of the monarch, and also on how that role should now be initiated and invested.

The Chaplain of an Oxford College - a trustee, as it happens, of the Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Trust - told me recently how, when he played the recording of the 1953 Coronation Service to a group of serious-minded undergraduates, they were reduced to helpless laughter by parts of the service. Clearly much of what the nation wanted to say fifty years ago, and said through the Coronation Service, much of the nation can no longer say.

Edward Carpenter, the revered historian, and erstwhile Dean of Westminster, in his magisterial life of Archbishop Fisher - Archbishop of Canterbury, of course, at the time of the last Coronation - sets out with clarity and authority what I will call the "Coronation Story: its history, ancient and modern". He makes clear that the task of drawing up the Order of Service rests with the Archbishop of Canterbury, but that, in 1952, Archbishop Fisher fully recognized his need of help, and appointed an advisory committee. Carpenter writes of the situation in 1952, "The Rite was self-evidently medieval and as such its feudal ethos was felt by some no longer to correspond with the special and political realities of post-war Britain. Not surprisingly, therefore, many responsible people thought drastic changes were necessary if the Coronation Rite was to communicate any meaning to a largely industrialized and secular society. Also there were problems created by its exclusively Anglican character which inevitably led many to ask whether other Christian denominations ought not to participate, and beyond this, what about other Faiths within a newly emerging Commonwealth? Such concern and questioning found public expression in a leading article which appeared in *The Times* newspaper on 5 May 1952...*The Times* leader writer was not the only one to call for a serious reappraisal." That was nearly fifty years ago.

How much more urgent it is now that the Archbishop should appoint his advisory body - again, broadly-based - to begin work, while there is yet time, on the shape of the next Coronation Service, ere the reign of Queen Elizabeth II be brought to its close, work which should, of course, be carried out in the closest co-operation with the heir to the Throne.

It was not Shakespeare, but the Catholic poet and playwright James Shirley, who wrote - half a century later than Shakespeare

> The glories of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things;
> There is no armour against fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings
> Sceptre and crown
> Must tumble down,
> And in the dust be equal made
> With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

There are two other facets of my subject which I think the memory of Eric Symes Abbott must stir us to consider.

Those who knew him well will agree that Eric was above all concerned with priesthood. In the number alone of clergy for whose training he was directly responsible he was without equal. Yet Eric would have said he was primarily concerned with the priesthood of humanity. It was thus with the royalty of priesthood he was concerned, and this led him to be concerned with the priesthood of royalty.

Eric would have been the first to recognise that society has need of focal people; and often priests and monarchs fall into this category. Both are representative human beings.

Last year, at the time of Princess Diana's death, she was often said to be an "ikon". It was a good and important word. We were told that Diana was an "ikon" of compassion; and this was clearly true. But, for the whole truth's sake, it will not quite do to leave the matter there. There were other "ikons" of Diana. There was the ikon of her crucifixion in a Mercedes, after a journey at, literally, break-neck speed, along the Via Dolorosa of a motor-way and concrete underpass from the Paris Ritz Hotel. There was the ikon of a Princess who, after the tragedy of her broken marriage, was understandably involved in a compulsive search for another companion and partner

in a string of affairs. Ikons should neither be romanticized nor over-simplified. And, again, where Princess Diana was concerned, there was the complex contemporary question of the relation between the public and the private self, and its almost impossible demands. Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford and erstwhile Dean of King's, in a notable article in *The Tablet* last December, called the Princess "a mythic figure". She was without doubt a focal person.

One of the favourite phrases of Eric Abbott, when talking to priests, was to remind them that "the diaconate is never discarded". He would quote the words from St. John's Gospel "I am amongst you as one that serveth" - literally, in the Greek; "as a deacon" - 'ws diakonwn'. Jesus took upon himself the form of a servant not least when he washed his disciples' feet. Eric would say, "Do not discard your diaconate. It is the human basis of your priesthood."

New translations of the Bible have meant much to us in our age. There is much evidence that the Geneva Bible, published in 1560, four years before the birth of Shakespeare, meant much to him. And if you had pressed him on the subject of the royalty of humanity, I would not myself have been surprised had he turned to his Geneva Bible, and to the thirteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel:

> Before the feast of Easter, when Jesus knew that his houre was come
> that he should departe out of this worlde unto the Father,
> forasmuche as he loved his which were in the worlde,
> unto the ende he loved them.
> And when supper was ended
> (after that the devil had put into the hart of Iudas
> Iscariot, Simon's sonne, to betray him),
> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all thynges into
> his handes, and that he was come from God, and went to God,
> He riseth from supper, and layeth aside his upper garments,
> and took a towel, and girde himself.
> After that, he poured water into a basyn,
> And began to wash his disciples' feet,
> And to wype them with the towel wherewith he was gird...
> So, after he had washed their feet and received his garments,
> and was set down again, he said unto them
> Wot ye what I have done to you?
> Ye call me Master and Lord,
> and ye say well for so am I.
> If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your fete,
> Ye ought to washe one another's fete.
> For I have given you an ensample, that ye should do as I have done to you.

I suggest there has to be something parallel to the diaconate for every monarch to be truly royal. The foot-washing is the means and point of contact with humanity. The monarch has to distribute the Maundy Money, but the symbol has to be steeped in the roughness of human reality. However, whereas the priest can refuse his or her vocation - the choice is there - the monarch has his (or her) vocation thrust upon him - simply by the fact of birth; though, before the monarch is crowned, he or she must choose their future, or abdicate it. Abdication ought, surely, to be seen to be an honourable alternative before a coronation, and, indeed, during a reign.

The last aspect of this important but intimidating subject which I have invited you to consider this evening, I would like to relate to the Installation of Eric Abbott as Dean of Westminster, here in the Abbey, on November 30th, 1959. Eric was himself the preacher; and it was clear that on this climactic occasion in his ministry, he was saying in his sermon things that were of supreme

importance to him. There was one quite demanding paragraph and passage in that sermon which I believe may have something profound to add to our considerations. Eric said "Our prayer to God is partly articulate and partly inarticulate. For most of us it is more inarticulate than articulate. I would appeal to the sense of the inarticulate prayer which I believe every human heart is making and which the Holy Spirit of God is seeking to make articulate in us, as more and more a conscious and deliberate faith is formed."

After the funeral of Princess Diana, and the millions that wanted to share it, I don't think many of us will be entirely surprised by Eric's distinction between "partly articulate and partly inarticulate" prayer; but I think it's worth posing the question in this particular place "What kind of prayer lies behind our thought concerning the Future of the Monarchy?"

It may help to return again to Shakespeare. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare gives to Cleopatra, before she ends her own life, a remarkable petition,

> Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
> Immortal longings in me.

There is, of course, ambiguity about that sentence - as there often is in Shakespeare. Why does Cleopatra need her robe and crown if her longings are truly immortal? Harold C. Goddard, in his great book *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, writes "After she renounces the intoxicants of earth, a celestial intoxication comes over her. She feels herself being transmuted from earth into fire and air. Whoever, as he listens to her, does not feel, in however diminished degree, a like effect within himself, misses, I believe, one of the supreme things in Shakespeare."

"I have immortal longings in me." It is surely not unreasonable to suggest such immortal longings are inarticulate prayer. And it could be that, last September, the death of a young and beautiful princess, a focal person, a "mythic figure", reminded many people who had never faced the question of their own death, of the immortal longings within them. That is what "focal people" do.

I think it is helpful to ask what inarticulate prayer there was in Princess Diana. Our wounds can be our prayers. Perhaps the wounds of Princess Diana were her best prayers. I think it is no less helpful to ask what inarticulate prayers were evoked by the Princess.

She was, Elton John made clear to millions, from this very place - "A Candle in the Wind". And a candle is of all things something profoundly symbolic. In a materialistic world, it is light and life, yet so easily the victim of the wind. Of all lights, it is the most vulnerable; of all life, the most easily extinguishable. "Out, out, brief candle" Macbeth soliloquizes. And it's significant, surely that Solzhenitsyn, in 1960, wrote his play *Candle in the Wind*. In that play, Alex, the scientist become philosopher, says to Philip, the philosopher become scientist, concerning Alda, his cousin "She's a little candle, Philip! She's a little flickering candle in our terrible wind. Don't blow her out! Don't harm her!" Yes, the fact and symbol of royalty - of the vulnerable princess - can, like a fairy tale - a tragic fairy tale - provoke prayers within us all.

To call Shakespeare to our aid for the last time

In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke, afterwards Henry IV, has usurped the throne. Richard is brought before him, and utters words of great pathos

> Alack, Why am I sent for to a king
> Before I have shook off the regal thoughts

Wherewith I reign'd? I hardly yet have learn'd
To insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my limbs
Give sorrow leave awhile to tutor me
To this submission. Yet I well remember
The favours of these men; were they not mine?
Did they not sometimes cry 'All hail' to me?
So Judas did to Christ; but he, in twelve,
Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none.
God save the king! Will no man say, amen?
Am I both priest and clerk? Well then, amen.
God save the king! Although I be not he;
And yet, Amen, if heaven do think him me.
To do what service am I sent for hither?

When we pray "God save the Queen", or sing it, what is the inarticulate prayer behind those oft-repeated words? What lies at the heart of them?

I suggest that sometimes that prayer is specific for some member of the Royal Family; but sometimes it's an inarticulate prayer for, say, the future of the nation and its government. "God save the Queen" may, indeed, be a heartfelt prayer - articulate or inarticulate - for the Future of the Monarchy - not least when that prayer is shouted in the Coronation Service. And Shakespeare's final question, put into the mouth of Richard II, is relevant "To do what service am I sent for hither?"

It's an appropriate prayer, in the form of a question, for every member of the Royal Family, and for every member of the royal priesthood of our humanity. To quote Richard Harries, it may express "the idealism that continues to lurk beneath our cynicism, our ideal of a truly compassionate human life."

There is one more "Eric" anecdote, with which I think I may appropriately bring this lecture to an end.

One day in 1963, I came past the Abbey when Eric was Dean. Clearly there was something of importance going on. Official cars were arriving and departing; flags were flying. There were a lot of people outside the West Door, mostly black, many in national costume.

I soon discovered it was a service to celebrate the Independence of Nigeria. "Who's preaching?" I asked a friendly verger. "The Dean" he answered. "May I slip in?" I asked. "Of course" he said, and showed me to a seat in the nave. I wondered what Eric, Dean of Westminster, would make of such an occasion. I need not have wondered. The sermon was vintage E.S.A., and everyone, as they left the Abbey, was saying what a marvellous sermon it was. I smiled to myself - not superiorly, but affectionately. I had first heard Eric give that sermon as a devotional address to theological students in the chapel of King's College Theological Hostel, when I was a student. It wasn't that Eric had taken an old sermon out of the "bin", dusted it, and used it again. He saw his theme to be profoundly true for the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and people of Nigeria - and for the royalty of Great Britain, gathered there, and for the representatives of our Government as profoundly true for them as it had been for theological students. He centred all he had to say on just three words "Independence; Dependence; Interdependence", which, characteristically, he frequently reiterated.

It was a sermon which was profoundly Christian yet would speak as profoundly to a Nigerian Muslim. Indeed, that day Eric epitomised in his sermon what he had said in his Installation

Sermon, when he had talked of appealing to the "sense of inarticulate prayer" which he believed "every human heart is making".

On Eric's grave-stone it refers to his striving to make "this House of Kings a place of pilgrimage and prayer *for all peoples*". It is that sense and that striving which I believe should govern the hearts and minds of those who, ere long, should, begin to frame and fashion the service for another Coronation. It does not - or should not necessarily - raise controversial questions of "multi-faith". It simply raises the question of "the inarticulate prayer which *every human heart* is making".

It is that inarticulate prayer which I believe makes it appropriate for me to end this lecture with those four familiar words of both articulate and inarticulate prayer "God save the Queen" .

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