

Column

Grand Ole Opry celebrity Grandpa Jones used to do a skit in which he visits the home of a rich relative. During a tour of the house, the man points out a bed and says, “This bed goes back to Louis the 14th. To which, Grandpa responds, “That’s nothing, I’ve got one at the house that goes back to Sears on the 12th.

King Charles III can go one better. He has a piece of furniture – the famed coronation chair – that goes back to Edward 1 (1239-1307). While this chair is sparsely used (the last time it was officially put into service was June 2, 1953, at the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), nevertheless, it is an outward and visible sign of the continuity of the Royal Family.

Underneath it, at least at times of coronations, is a stone that adds to this continuity. Known as the Stone of Scone or Destiny, it is believed by some to be the very rock on which Jacob in the Bible rested his head when he had a vision of a ladder reaching up to heaven. I have no idea if that legend is true. If it isn’t, it ought to be!

I feel compelled to share my own encounter with the coronation chair. Back in the late 90s or early 2000s, I was in London and went to the Abby for an early morning service of Morning Prayer. When I arrived, a man was just opening the gate leading into building. He directed me to go on in and look for such-and-such a chapel.

It was still dark outside and only a few lights were on in the Abby. I had been to the Abby before, but never alone in that vast space. So, I made my way cautiously around monuments and tombs as I looked for the chapel.

I must have missed it because I found myself in the area where the coronation chair is located. Looking straight ahead at it, the temptation was too great, and I reached out and touched it. Apparently, it was

monitored because an Abby clergyman quickly appeared and chastised me before directing me to the chapel where the service was to be held. Now, I understand the chair is surrounded by a Plexiglass shield . . . I guess to keep such miscreants as myself away from it.

The heartening thing about the coronation at which this chair plays such an important part is that it is done in the context of Christian worship. Holy Communion from the Book of Common Prayer is celebrated, and the new sovereign is presented a Bible accompanied by the words: “We present You with this Book, the most valuable thing that this World affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the Royal Law; these are the lively Oracles of God.”

A truth found in the coronation rite which extends beyond the shores of Great Britain is that earthy rulers, by whatever name they are called, serve under a higher authority. They are under-shepherds of God’s people, not gods.

How should Christians relate to those in authority and the political state? First, there should be the realization that both are part of God’s will and plan. An absence of leaders and structures leads not to human flourishing but to anarchy, a state where the weak go to the wall and there is no justice.

Secondly, Christians are called in scripture to pray for the state and those in authority. This includes bad leaders and well as good. In the case of the former -- bad ones – it might be that their hearts will be changed or, if they refuse, that their wicked plots might be brought to nought and ultimately that they may be replaced by someone who has a heart for what is good and true and just.

Finally, Christians are commanded to obey civil authorities . . . up to a point. That point ends when they command what God forbids or forbid what God demands. It is on such occasions, Peter’s words spoken

to the authorities of his day must be invoked: “We must obey God rather than men.”

All eyes are on King Charles III, and rightly so, but may they be even more on the king who is the ultimate ruler of God’s people, Jesus.

We beseech thee also, so to direct and dispose the hearts of all Christian Rulers, that they may truly and impartially administer justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintenance of thy true religion, and virtue. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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