

In a wonderful evocation of Britain in 1945 the historian David Kynaston lists some of the differences from the Britain of his day 2007

“No supermarkets, no motorways, no teabags, no sliced bread, no frozen food, no flavoured crisps, no microwaves, no dishwashers, no Formica, no vinyl, no CDs, no computers, no mobiles, no duvets, no Pill, no trainers, no hoodies, no Starbucks.” and later, *“Heavy coins, heavy shoes, heavy suitcases, heavy tweed coats, heavy leather footballs no unbearable lightness of being.”* (Austerity Britain 1945-51, p19)

It was a time of great austerity, but also a time of great hope, of relief from the fact of war, at least for a time. The problem was how to grasp this opportunity for change, this period of peace, when the money and the materials needed for rebuilding were in very short supply. There then emerges a tussle between the top down approach to rebuilding and what the mass of the people really want – employment, a home on the ground with a garden, and privacy. No community centres, thank you, and no flats in the sky. We could replicate this struggle throughout history between those with a vision that meets our needs and those without and of course the forever battle between war and peace. Jesus steps into just such a scenario in his own time

“Take care not to be deceived” he said *“because many will come using my name and saying “I am he”* and *“The time is near at hand and when you hear of wars and revolutions do not be frightened for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.”*

Jesus says this in the context of a Temple still incomplete but destined to be a truly magnificent and beautiful building with a life of barely 6 years. Whether Jesus knew this or not is not the main point but what he did see was that the faith of his own people was misplaced and that the Temple was a sign of this. The struggle is cast in apocalyptic terms – that is in terms of catastrophe – and in terms of eschatology – are these the end times, is this it for humanity? And could just as well apply to today as then. The vision which Jesus brings is not, however, one imposed from above but one in which he becomes just as we are but without sin. Follow me and I will show you another way to live in this world which will win you your lives. It’s not about a removal from this world but a living in it as if faith matters. There’s something of this in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians,

“We gave you a rule when we were with you not to have any food if he refused to do any work..... In the Lord Jesus Christ we order and call upon people of this kind to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat.”

Paul of course was a great worker but like everything else in this present world it’s not an end in itself, not a means of simply growing rich. It has a greater purpose. It has a sacramental purpose. It’s a way of living in the world as if God matters. What is missing from David Kynaston’s list is the fact of faith – reading the list now without this, one wonders whether there’s really been any betterment since those days of heavy coins, heavy shoes, heavy suitcases and so on. Being a Christian is as problematic now as then, and as it was in Jesus’ day. It’s not a solution to our material woes but it does show us a way to live in this world’s struggles with a bearable lightness of being. In Christ we are invited to be born again – in this sense a vision *“from above”* but also a gift *“from below”*, from one like us in all things but sin.