

## Signs of the Times

‘And Jesus answered, “When it is evening, ye say, *It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,*” ... ’ Ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?’ (KJB Matthew 16:2,3) It was the evening of 15<sup>th</sup> August 1952, as we stood with others on the cliffs at Treyarnon Bay, on Cornwall’s north coast. The sunset was spectacular, no-one had witnessed such an awesome sight before. That night 23cm of rain fell on Lynton and Lynmouth; 34 people died, and 420 were made homeless, 100 buildings and 28 bridges were destroyed, and 38 cars washed out to sea.

‘And God said, “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a token between me and the earth.”’ (KJB Genesis 9:13) However, did Ezekiel know better? ‘Like a rainbow in the clouds after the rain, was the sight of that *encircling* radiance ... like the appearance of the *glory* of the Lord.’ (REB Ezekiel 1:28) Pilots above the clouds tell us that a rainbow is actually a circle, named by NASA as a ‘*glory*’. My father used to look to his beloved Malvern Hills, “If you can see them clearly,” he’d say, “it’s going to rain. If you can’t see them clearly, it’s raining!”

Maybe we should continue to use fir cones and seaweed to predict the weather, at least we understand the science of humidity, which is responsible for their changing appearance. And watch for the early arrival of birds from the Arctic, and the early devouring of autumn berries, both of which herald a severe winter. Early spring arrival of swallows, and rooks building high in the trees, herald a fine summer. Or maybe we should take Old Wives’ and Old Testament tales for what they are, just that.

We are surrounded by signs; some offer advice, some information, some are optional, some are mandatory. Can we read them? Is their intention clear? Can we understand them? Do we *heed* them? Consider a few examples. Road signs are ubiquitous. ‘Stay in lane’ is clear. ‘Get in lane’ should say ‘Get *into* lane’. How often do we re-read the Highway Code? Remember LIP – Look, Indicate, Position? Usually drivers are observed pulling over and then indicating as they start to turn – if indeed they bother to indicate at all! If you read the signs, how is it possible to drive the wrong way along a motorway?

Ale-houses, Inns, Taverns and Pubs have had signs since the 14<sup>th</sup> century; originally a stake, reminiscent of the striped pole outside the barber/surgeon’s shop. Then came the naming and pictorial signs of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for the information of the illiterate. I do wonder sometimes, about the literacy of the sign writers of The Kings Arms, Butchers Arms, Farmers Close ... 1. where are the apostrophes?

Food packaging carries a plethora of information decreed by the EU, informing us of the nutritional content: Display By date, Best Before date and Sell By date. As a result, millions of tonnes of perfectly edible food are dumped both by supermarkets and by ourselves. Seen alongside the statistics for the starving masses worldwide, and the undernourished in our own country, this is profligate and obscene. Incidentally, did you know that the sell-by date on bottles of water, refers to the plastic of the bottle, not the water it contains? Well now you do!

And what are some of the other signs of the times?



Free Cash  
**'I wish!'**



My badge is  
not disabled



Is the shop  
secondhand?



All pedestrians  
aren't slow

British party politics has been changed for ever. The EU is under threat from within. There is a mass migration of peoples. People are living longer with obesity and diabetes. There is an insidious insurgence of warped ideologies; Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, IS, and the Taliban, to name but a few. There is a cooling of relations with Russia. There is a fear of green-house gas emissions and global warming ... 1. If you read the Daily Paranoia, as millions of 'Middle English' do every day, you could be forgiven for turning into an eternal pessimist; but keep a sense of perspective. Think of all the good we don't hear about, because it doesn't sell newspapers. Just remember, we only know what we are told; someone, editors, are filtering what they decide we should know! Like: Church attendance is falling. There's a break down in family life. Divorce is at an all-time high. More and more children live with a single parent, or are brought up by others. There is no longer any discipline in schools ... 1. And freedom of information will shortly be charge for.

As Advent and Christmas approach, the materialistic signs are impossible to ignore; illuminations, cards, present ideas, wrapping paper and baubles .... 1. so let's look on the bright side.



**(PARTY SIGN  
Appeared in August)**

What are the *positive* signs? In 1900 there were an estimated 10 million Christians in Africa. By 2000, the figure had grown to 360 million. Similar growth figures are given for Latin America and for Asia. It is in the Britain that church adherence has dropped to 10%, in the USA it is still four times that figure. Have they ceased to believe, or is the church no longer speaking their language? Because it is a fact, that all religions are increasing in numbers, reflecting people's need and searching for a spiritual anchor in their lives. "By the middle of this century, there will be three billion Christians in the world, one and a half times the number of Muslims." <sup>2</sup>. That is 31% of the world's population. Take heart!

In his Christmas Day message of 1961, Pope John XXIII, wrote, and it's just as true today, "...the church should listen to, and learn from, the world around it. It should learn to read the signs of the times."

*Maranatha*

*A Blessed Christ-Mass*

1. Add your own perceived signs of the times.
2. Jenkins, Philip, *The Next Christendom* (OUP USA 2011)

Howard Brayton  
15/10/15  
Updated 01/11/15