

ADDRESS GIVEN BY**The Rt Rev and Rt Hon the LORD CHARTRES****Burghley 500 Westminster Abbey 22-vi-2022**

Let us pray

For kings and all that are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour who will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth. Amen

Picture the scene in this Abbey Church on Sunday January 15th 1559, the day appointed for the Coronation of Elizabeth I. Owen Oglethorpe, the Bishop of Carlisle was presiding. He began the Coronation rite but still did not have a copy of the oath which he was to administer to the Queen. When the appropriate point in the service came, Mr Secretary Cecil emerged from the side of the stage and in full view of the assembled court and nobility handed the text of the oath to the bishop. It was the version composed by Elizabeth's godfather the recently martyred Archbishop Cranmer but with an extra clause in which the Queen vowed to rule "according to the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel established in this kingdom". It was a theatrical demonstration of the partnership between monarch and minister which was to guide the fortunes of the realm for the next forty years.

Napoleon said that if you wanted to understand a man you should know what the world looked like when he was twenty. When Cecil was twenty he was just leaving St John's College Cambridge for law studies at Gray's Inn. He was already married to the sister of Sir John Cheke who had been on the reformed side in the religious convulsions which marked the later part of the 1530's. Cecil himself remained loyal to the religious convictions he had formed as a young man

There is a common complaint about politicians in our own day – that they lack experience outside of the Westminster bubble. Before he was thirty, Cecil had already been secretary to Lord Protector Somerset, witnessed at first hand the sanguinary battle of Punkie and been committed to the Tower after the fall of his master. By the age of thirty he had been appointed Junior Secretary to King Edward VI. As an alumnus of Gray's Inn he had a lawyer's eye for detail and an astonishing appetite for work.

[In this period Cecil acquired a house in Canon Row close to us here in Westminster Abbey. It was in this house in November 1551 that a group of intellectuals were assembled to debate the theology of the mass. Cecil, his brother in law John Cheke former tutor to the King and Edmund Grindal future Archbishop of Canterbury defended the new reformed doctrine. John Feckenham soon

to be re-instated as Abbot of Westminster under Queen Mary argued for the traditional view. It is a reminder of the small size of the Tudor Establishment and the importance of personal relation and family ties.]

Even as a relatively young man and throughout his life Cecil was plagued with illness. If that was not serious enough, 16th century remedies were often bizarre and dangerous. In 1553 Lord Audley, who clearly nourished medical ambitions, said to the young secretary, "Tell me of any disease you have and I will send you a proved remedy." The recipe which arrived was for a "compost" of a quarter of hedgehog put in a still with a quart of red wine, a pint of rosewater, a quart of sugar etc and twelve turnips. The wonder is that Cecil survived until the age of 78.

Soon after, Edward VI himself died and there was an attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne as a substitute for the legitimate heir the Lady Mary eldest daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. Cecil's close identification with the Edwardian regime put him in great danger but with an impressive sureness of judgement and a disinclination for either martyrdom or flight he was able to retire into Lincolnshire. Although he conformed when necessary to the mass and supped with the new Archbishop of Canterbury Cardinal Pole, there was no doubt that his own

religious sympathies were with the reformed cause. When the wheel turned he was ready once again to serve the Tudor dynasty in the person of the daughter of Henry VIII's second wife Anne Boleyn.

In the winter of 1558, the new reign began in very unpromising circumstances for those who wished to restore "true religion" as it had been in the reign of Edward VI. The old regime was legally intact and the international situation was perilous. No one knew how long the new queen might survive and the most obvious successor to the crown was Mary, Queen of Scots who in 1558 married the heir to the French throne. Very soon, much to Cecil's indignation the couple were using the royal arms of England stamped on their dinner ware.

In these circumstances there were many who counselled caution but if recent research is right in identifying Cecil as the author of the "Device for the alteration of religion", the new Master Secretary offered an uncompromisingly radical plan for a revolution in church and state aimed at the restoration of "true religion" as it had been in the reign of Edward VI.

It is probable that he wished to go further than the pragmatic Queen was prepared to allow. One of the peculiarities of the English settlement of religion was the survival of bishops and much of

the traditional apparatus of church government. It appears from the painstaking work of Brett Usher that Cecil wanted a more thoroughgoing transformation. Instead of bishops with their seats in the Lords and vestiges of their wealth and local influence intact, he seems to have favoured a more pastoral and less prelatical model of “superintendents” with fixed salaries, as on the Continent.

There was one place however where Cecil’s influence was exercised in a way that had a profound influence on the development of a Church of England that was more hospitable to ceremonious worship and a tradition of liturgical music – Westminster Abbey.

Cecil was appointed High Steward in 1561, an office which he held until his death in 1598 when he was succeeded by his son Robert.

Cecil’s patronage secured the appointment of Gabriel Goodman as Dean, an office he held for forty years. Goodman had been a fellow of Christ’s College Cambridge when he was chosen to be school master to Cecil’s growing family. Like his master, Goodman conformed during Queen Mary’s reign but seems to have had a more conservative almost Lutheran religious outlook. He preserved a store of vestments left behind by Abbot Feckenham which survived into the 17th century.

He also shared with the Queen a love of liturgical music at a time when the chanting of Psalms was the usual diet in Reformed Churches. The example of the Abbey has had a profound influence on the worship and music of the Church of England to this day.

The magnificent tombs of Mildred Cecil, Lady Burghley and Cecil's beloved daughter Anne, Countess of Oxford remain in St Nicholas's Chapel with a lengthy inscription composed by Lord Burghley, as he was then, recording the family's grief.

[But Cecil as High Steward was not just visible for the great occasions in the Abbey. With his astonishing appetite for work he involved himself in the minutiae of the affairs of the Abbey and the school.

I am indebted to Dr Payne the Keeper of the Muniments for an example of Master Secretary Cecil's assiduity. There is a surviving letter from the Dean of Christchurch, Oxford. He writes that they have complied with Master Secretary's request that they elect two scholars from Westminster but they beg to be released from the obligation to do so in future since they have many better candidates. The connection between the school and the College survives to this day. Master Secretary's wishes are not so easily ignored.]

Burghley 500 has provided an intellectual feast in which many of the aspects of Burghley's life and career have been examined and illuminated.

Others have discussed Burghley's role in preserving Elizabeth's person and realm; his practice of the political dark arts to frustrate domestic plots and the malignity of the great powers of the day. He served a Queen whom he regarded as chosen by God yet he was no sycophant and did not refrain from offering unpalatable counsel when the safety of the realm was at stake. As he wrote to his son Robert, he would never bend his opinion merely to suit Elizabeth's wishes, "for that were to offend God, to whom I am sworn first". "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

In way that until 9/11 our contemporaries found it hard to credit, the contest over religion was the decisive episode in the emergence of the modern world. On Burghley's watch there was no religious civil war as in France. There was no massacre to parallel St Bartholomew's Eve although enemies of his precarious religious settlement were harshly dealt with. Now that modernity itself is passing into history Burghley's wisdom and integrity deserve the attention that has been stimulated by the events of Burghley 500.

Although he lies in Stamford, Burghley's funeral was here in the Abbey in 1598. Anthony Watson, Bishop of Chichester and Lord High Almoner preached the sermon on that occasion and much of the ceremonial was in the hands of William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms and sometime Headmaster of Westminster School.

Camden's encomium on his former patron is a fitting coda to our celebration of Burghley 500. "Certainly he was a most excellent man, who [to say nothing of his reverend presence and undistempered countenance] was fashioned by nature and adorned with learning, a singular man for honesty, gravity, temperance, industry and justice. Hereunto were added a fluent and elegant speech [and that no affected but plain and easy], wisdom strengthened by experience and seasoned by exceeding moderation and most approved fidelity but above all singular piety towards God. To speak in a word, the Queen was most happy in so great a counsellor, and to his wholesome counsels, the state of England shall be forever beholden."