

A few words from the Vicar

"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21)

Have you ever wondered why the tax year end is 5th April? At first glance it's such an odd date to choose. A month end, say 31st March or even the calendar year end, 31st December would make more sense.



Well, the tax year end used to be 25th March (an equally odd date). Then, in 1752, the UK changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. This meant that the date jumped by 11 days in September 1752 and so, in 1753, what would have been 25th March became 4th April.

Had the tax year end been left unchanged the Government would have lost 11 days' worth of tax in the 1752/53 tax year, so the tax year end was delayed by 11 days. There was a further adjustment to the calendar of one day in 1800, which takes us to 5th April.

But why set 25th March as the tax year end in the first place? And what's all this got to do with church life?

Well, ultimately, our rather unusual tax year end can be traced back to the influence exerted by the Church and Christianity upon our national life over the centuries. The major milestones in the calendar were mostly Christian festivals (they mostly still are if you think about it). In years gone by rents became due and accounts were settled on quarter days, three of which coincide with Christian festivals; Lady Day (25 March), Michaelmas (29 September) and Christmas (25 December). In case you're wondering, the remaining quarter day is Midsummer's Day (24 June).

So it should come as no surprise that one of those days, Lady Day (a day of obligation for Christians), was chosen in the 13th Century to mark the end of the year and this remained the case until 1752. So, happy New Year to everyone!

End of mystery! The calendar year end changed but the tax year end didn't!

This is just one small example of the many, many ways in which Christianity has influenced the life of this nation over the centuries. Indeed, Christianity continues to play an important part in the culture, heritage and fabric of our nation. And long may this continue.

For example, before the state began to get involved in education during the 19th Century, it was the Church that led the way in educating our children. Indeed, today, even though education is now mostly funded by the taxpayer, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are still major players in the provision of education. Furthermore many schools in the private sector have Christian foundations as do our historic universities.

Historically the same is true of health care. Before the advent of the NHS many hospitals had Christian roots.

Even our language has been influenced by the Bible! Over 300 phrases from the Bible are in common use within our language; phrases such as 'wolf in sheep's clothing', 'the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak', and 'o ye of little faith'.

I could go on (and on and on and on) but it annoys me when some people seek to deny our Christian heritage and somehow exclude the Church and Christianity from national life; to sell out our Christian inheritance 'for a mess of pottage' (another phrase from the Bible)!

Free speech is important and thankfully we live in a free society so, just like everyone else, such people are entitled to express their opinions and attempt to persuade others of the rightness of their viewpoint.

Christians are, of course, entitled to exactly the same freedom and exactly the same right to free speech. Which is why I was saddened to hear that a decision in a recent court case means that councils up and down this land have lost their historic freedom to say prayers (should they wish to do so) before council meetings.

All because a small and unrepresentative minority (the National Secular Society) doesn't like it and wishes to impose its beliefs on others through the courts!

An appeal is to be lodged. I hope it's successful!

And so, back to taxation!

The National Secular Society's latest wheeze is a campaign to demand that the taxpayer should no longer fund NHS chaplains. Conveniently forgetting, of course, that spiritual care is an integral part of healthcare and, what's more, that Christians (and people of other faiths for that matter) are taxpayers too! And, if we're taxpayers too, why shouldn't a miniscule proportion of the taxes we pay to fund the multibillion pound NHS budget be spent on the spiritual needs of patients, their relatives and staff.

I know that the tax I pay helps to finance all sorts of services provided by the NHS; services that others need but I sincerely hope I will never need to avail myself. But, I have no intention of campaigning for the NHS to withdraw funding from such services. That would be selfish!

Dave