

5th September 2021

Polling

**"We shouldn't decide everything by polling the masses.
This is the fallacy *argumentum ad numerum*,
the idea that something is true because great numbers believe it!"**

Bill Maher, Real Time with Bill Maher

Ignoring the advice of American TV host, Bill Maher, quoted above, I followed my piece on "popularity" yesterday by researching some Internet polls. There are polls for everything. The most popular politician; the most used washing-up liquid; viewer-ratings for TV programmes; the most common breed of tropical fish – and that's before you get into the realms of the most popular TV clip from the recent Olympics, or the most viewed clips of cats on You Tube. "A recent study tells us that ..." or "A new poll shows ..." are often the first lines of news reports.

I found a poll of the most popular food in the UK. There are several such polls, but the one I worked with certainly got my tastebuds flowing. 10: Steak and ale pie. 9: Haggis (yes, that's what it said). 8: Fish pie. 7: Toad in the Hole. 6: Shepherd's Pie. 5: Bangers and Mash. 4: Roast dinner with all the trimmings. 3: Spaghetti Bolognese. 2: Chicken Korma. 1: Fish & Chips. Discuss! What might the masses who read this have in *their* top ten?

I suppose such a poll *could* be the result of proper research of actual numbers of meals eaten over time, rather than the *vox pop* of people's opinions. But I suggest that "polling the masses" is more important than cynics like Bill Maher appreciate. While we elect politicians, for example, to make decisions on our behalf and know they aren't "mandated" to follow our wishes on *any* matter, how do they know they are acting for the good of all – and not just their party-line or their own prejudices – if they don't have a sense of properly-gathered popular opinion? There would be a greater emphasis on environmental issues and the eradication of poverty for example, if the voice of the people was listened to – so the polls tell us. Might *argumentum ad numerum* not change things for the better?

Let those in power listen to those they represent and make decisions accordingly, so that the voice of the people *is* the poll that matters.

A prayer for today

*Lord, here's my voice. It's the only poll I have.
Please, will it do? Amen*