

15th October 2021

Necessity

“Necessity is the mother of invention.”

Mid-16th century proverb

Reflecting on “inventions” yesterday, it’s no surprise than my mind went back to the proverb quoted above. It is a truism that necessity stimulates the intellect and creativity of clever people: the telephone, penicillin, the microchip, Covid vaccines, even the humble safety-pin ... the list is endless. But what happens when inventions go *beyond* necessity?

The American writer, Joan Didion, in her 1968 book, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, offers us a reflection on “Morality”:

When we start deceiving ourselves into thinking that we want something or need something, not that it is a pragmatic necessity for us to have it, but that it is a “moral imperative” that we have it, it is then that we join the fashionable madmen ... and then is when we are in bad trouble.

Are we not in *really* bad trouble when we believe we have a “right” to something which serves no other purpose than to gratify our own pleasure, or selfishness, or greed?

There is a “hedonistic” part of our current society which I find worrying. Take, for example, the recent so-called “Freedom Day” (in England) when many of the Covid-related social restriction were lifted. We saw the opening of nightclubs, crowds coming back to sporting events and the reinstatement of music festivals, among other things. Now, I have no problem with people enjoying themselves. Goodness, have we not all missed out on so many enjoyable things because of Covid? No wonder some grabbed “Freedom Day” with both hands to find the enjoyment they crave. But it was the comments of people at a nightclub, lifting its restrictions at one-minute-past-midnight at the start of “Freedom Day”, that interested me. “We deserve this,” one said. “We’ve got back what was taken away from us,” said another. “We need this, it’s a must-have,” said a third. “Taken away”, “need”, “deserve”, “must”? Is this not the dangerous, trouble-filled hedonism Joan Didion warns us against?

Inventions arise from necessity. I get that. But when necessities become imperatives, are we not deceiving ourselves?

A prayer for today

Lord, what do I really need today that I don't already have? Amen

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