

BLESSING the NATIONS – 800 Years of MAGNA CARTA

"...I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3

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Most Valuable

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the proclamation of Magna Carta. Magna Carta has been one of the most valuable exports of Great Britain to the rest of the world. Magna Carta has truly blessed all the families of the earth. Magna Carta was the first Statute, the first written restriction on the powers of government.

Foundational

Magna Carta, signed by King John at Runnymede, 15 June 1215, recognised foundational Scriptural principles: Justice must not be sold, delayed, or denied; no taxes may be levied without the consent of representatives of those being taxed; no one may be imprisoned without a fair trial by a jury of their peers; property must not be taken from any owner without just compensation. Religious freedom is foundational and must remain inviolable, with all *"its rights undiminished and its liberties unimpaired."*

Magna Carta is recognised as the grandfather of all Bills of Rights. Magna Carta was the inspiration for the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the model for the English Bill of Rights of 1689; and for the Bill of Rights of the United States of America.

Lord Denning described Magna Carta as *"the greatest Constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot."*

Reformation

During the greatest century of Reformation, in the 16th century, there was a tremendous upsurge of interest in Magna Carta and strenuous efforts to apply these Biblical principles of justice and freedom into all areas of British life.

Liberty

Magna Carta is an important symbol of liberty today. It is greatly respected worldwide by both historians and lawyers, as a potent foundational document for the protection of personal liberties. It has been described as one of the most important legal documents in history. ***"Do not remove the ancient landmark..."*** Proverbs 23:10

God-Honouring

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, wrote Magna Carta, which declares: *"John, by the grace of God, King of England... know ye, that we, in the presence of God and for the salvation of our soul, and the souls of all our ancestors and heirs, and unto the honour of God, and the advancement of the Holy Church, and amendment of our realm... by this our present charter confirmed, for us and our heirs, forever; that the Church of England shall be free, and have her whole rights and her liberties inviolable..."*

Bible-Based

The Bible was clearly recognised as the foundational authority for Magna Carta. ***"You shall do no injustice in judgement. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour."*** Leviticus 19:15

Justice

Magna Carta established the right of Trial by Jury to protect the accused from capricious condemnation by authorities. The high value that Christianity, from its inception, has placed on the individual is in stark contrast to the ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Chinese, Greek and Roman cultures, in which the individual was always subordinate to the state. True liberty, individual rights and respect for human personality found no place in the ancient world.

Christian Emphasis

It was the Christian emphasis on the individual that established the freedoms and rights enshrined in Magna Carta of 1215, and the later English Petition of Rights of 1628, the English Bill of Rights of 1689 and in the American Bill of Rights of 1791.

Under God and Law

Sir Edward Coke, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, challenged King James I, that Magna Carta gave the Courts of Common Law the right to provide justice *"from the highest to the lowest"* because the king was *"under God and the Law."* ***"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above..."*** John 19:11. All civil authority is delegated by God and answerable to God.

The Christian Roots of Liberty

Dr. Alvin Schmidt, in *How Christianity Changed the World*, documents that the freedoms and liberties expressed in Bills of Rights and Declarations of Independence, are extensions of Magna Carta, which is thoroughly Christian. Civic freedoms and liberties could not have occurred had it not been for the Christian values that prompted and shaped the formation of these documents, all of which are extensions of Magna Carta. Magna Carta is revered throughout the world as the cornerstone of modern freedom.

Reaction to Tyranny

Sir Winston Churchill noted in his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, that the rights and liberties of English speakers owes more to the vices of King John, than to the virtues of any man. King John was one of the worst kings that England ever had. His cruelty and capriciousness drove the barons of England to mobilise and compel King John to set the royal seal to Magna Carta, or Great Charter.

Habeas Corpus

The sealing of Magna Carta, 15 June 1215, was a splendid victory for the English people. It marked an end to the arbitrary power of any ruler to throw a man in prison without granting him opportunity to prove his innocence. Magna Carta decrees that any man arrested must be tried in court and if it cannot be proved that he has done wrong, he must be set free. *"To no one will we sell, to no one deny, or delay, right or justice."* ***"He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord."*** Proverbs 17:15

Just Weights and Measures

No taxation is legal that is not authorised by those being taxed. Weights and measures must be standardised. ***"You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the Lord your God."*** Leviticus 19:35-36

Parliament

A Great Council of nobles and bishops is to advise and guide the king in governing the country. This Great Council soon developed into the English Parliament, which is the model and mother of all parliaments (Exodus 18:21).

Rule of Law

The right of a fair Trial by Jury of one's peers, the right of having a voice in the running of the government and in determining taxes, the right to a just and uniform standard of weights and measures for money and goods, are just some of the many blessings which have flowed from Magna Carta. **"Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate... let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."** Amos 5:15,24

The Authority of the Archbishop

Archbishop Stephen Langton strongly sympathised with the Northern barons who openly rebelled against King John. The Archbishop declared that if John refused to negotiate, then he would excommunicate every man in the Royal Army. The Barons advanced on London, where they were warmly welcomed. By the time they had pursued the king to Staines, Magna Carta included 63 demands. On Monday, 15 June 1215, the Barons met the king in a meadow named Runnymede, on the South bank of the Thames River, halfway between Staines and Windsor. John agreed to the demands, but another four days were spent in hammering out the details of the wording and in making copies of the document. On Friday, 19 June, John fixed the royal seal to Magna Carta.

Enduring Legacy of Liberty

Despite attempts by King John to violate his commitment, and the hostility of Pope Innocent III to Magna Carta, the regency of John's younger son, Henry III, reissued Magna Carta in 1216, and his son, Edward I, reissued Magna Carta in 1297, confirming it as part of England's Statute Law.

The Dooms of King Alfred

During the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, there was an upsurge of interest in Magna Carta as lawyers and historians traced the principles of freedom in the Great Charter, to Biblically-based laws enacted during the times of the Anglo Saxons, such as *The Dooms* of King Alfred the Great at the end of the 9th century, which begin with The Ten Commandments, The Case Laws of Exodus and Christ's Sermon on the Mount. **"...It is not good to show partiality in judgment. He who says to the wicked, 'You are righteous', him the people will curse; nations will abhor him."** Proverbs 24:23-24

Restoring Liberty

Both James I, and his son, Charles I, attempted to suppress the discussion of Magna Carta and this led to the English Civil War of the 1640s and the execution of Charles for high treason. The violation of the Rights of Englishmen as outlined in Magna Carta led to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which ousted the Catholic James II, welcoming Protestant William and Mary to the throne and the signing of the English Bill of Rights in 1689. **"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."** Proverbs 14:34

Charter Rights in America

The colonists in the 13 colonies of North America protested the violation of their chartered rights as outlined in Magna Carta when Parliament failed to provide redress for their grievances. In 1687, William Penn published *The Excellent Privilege of Liberty and Property: Being the Birthright of the Free-born Subjects of England*, which contained the first copy of Magna Carta printed on American soil. Penn's comments reflected those of Coke's, that Magna Carta was fundamental Law. The American colonists quoted extensively from Magna Carta concerning their rights to Trial by Jury and *Habeas Corpus*. The American founding fathers declared that their Constitution was to preserve their rights and liberties as enshrined in Magna Carta. The American founding fathers claimed Magna Carta as foundational for their American Constitution of 1789, which became the supreme law of the land in the USA. In 1976, Britain lent one of the four surviving originals of the 1215 Magna Carta to the United States for their Bicentennial

celebrations and also donated an ornate case to display it. A replica is still on display in the United States capital crypt in Washington DC.

From Sea to Sea

William Stubbs in his *Constitutional History of England*, published in the 1870s, documented that Magna Carta had been a major step in the shaping of the English people as a nation governed by laws under God. The British dominions, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa, all regard Magna Carta as foundational to their laws and sought to model their Constitutions on its provisions.

Birth Certificates of Freedom

Four exemplifications of the original 1215 Magna Carta remain in existence and are held by the British Library and the cathedrals of Lincoln and Salisbury. At least 13 original copies of the 1215 Magna Carta were issued by the Royal Chancery at the time. These were sent to county sheriffs and bishops who made more copies and ensured that the provisions were understood by the population. The original Charters were written on vellum sheets, using quill pens, in abbreviated Latin. Each was sealed with the royal great seal using beeswax and resin, most of which have not survived. The 63 numbered clauses of Magna Carta were introduced by Sir William Blackstone in 1759 as the original Charters formed a single, long unbroken text. The four original 1215 Charters will be on joint display at the British Library this year, to mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta.

Precious Heritage

Lincoln Cathedral's original copy of the 1215 Magna Carta was being displayed at the World Fair in New York when the Second World War broke out and spent the war years in Fort Knox. Prime Minister Winston Churchill attempted to gift the Charter to the American government, hoping that this would encourage the USA, then neutral, to enter the war, but Lincoln Cathedral refused to hand over the rights to such a precious heritage.

Invaluable Documents

Only one exemplification of the 1216 Charter survived and is held in Durham Cathedral. Four copies of the 1217 Charter exist, three of these are held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and one at Hereford Cathedral. The Australian government has a 1297 Charter on display in the Members Hall of Parliament House, Canberra. The National Archives in Washington DC has a copy of the 1297 Charter. (In 2007, a 1297 Magna Carta was sold at an auction for US\$21.3 Million, the most ever paid for a single page of text.)

Christian Heritage

The Church in England played a central role in drafting Magna Carta, initiating the negotiations between the Barons and the king, and at least eleven other bishops were present at the signing of Magna Carta, along with its author, Archbishop Stephen Langton. ***"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*** 2 Corinthians 3:17

Continental Clash and Contrast

It was not surprising that Pope Innocent III reacted with hostility to Magna Carta and attempted to annul it. The Inquisition was being established on the continent with its *Corpus Juris*, while the Church in England was establishing *Habeas Corpus* and Trial by Jury. ***"...Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you."*** 2 Chronicles 19:2

The Threat from Brussels

For those who think Magna Carta is only a matter of distant interest for historians, Britain's membership of the European Union is threatening to undermine our Chartered Rights as

Englishmen. Brussels is attempting to create a unified European criminal code which would abolish Trial by Jury, *Habeas Corpus* and other safeguards entrenched in Magna Carta. More influenced by the papal Inquisition and Napoleonic code's *Corpus Juris*, if allowed to progress unchecked, an EU prosecutor could issue European warrants, which could violate the foundation stones of our freedoms established in Magna Carta. ***"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."*** Psalm 127:1

God's Law or Chaos

Those who reject God and His Law have no objective basis for justice. If one rejects Creation and the Law of the Creator then social and moral chaos is inevitable. What does secular humanism offer us? *"You came from nothing! You are going nowhere! Life is meaningless!"* From goo to the zoo to you, from mud to monkeys to man. No ultimate standards of right and wrong. Situation ethics and relativism have led to the lawlessness tearing families and communities apart. We need to return to God's Law of perfect Liberty. ***"But he who looks into the perfect Law of Liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."*** James 1:25

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage... For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Galatians 5:1,13

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