

The Lion, the Lamb, and Brotherly Love

Thought for the Day

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One of the problems with metaphors is that they get worn out; another is that they come home to roost – so if I say “seismic shift”, you think Iceland. But perhaps the most dramatic shift affecting us these days is in the tectonic plates of Westminster, now that the Conservatives share the government benches with the Liberal Democrats, and there’s at least the possibility of a fraternal rift in the Labour party.

That’s an interesting contrast: on the one hand there are two groups who were denouncing one another – or at least each other’s policies – in apocalyptic terms less than three weeks ago and now are making common cause. Their agreed programme runs to 36 pages and covers everything from Banking to Universities, and will be enshrined today, if leaks are to be believed, in no less than 21 Bills. On the other hand are two brothers, brought up in the same home, with the same education, and much the same experiences, competing to lead the Opposition.

Of course the media, with their taste for exaggeration, look up the Child’s Big Book of Clichés, and dramatise the contest as Cain versus Abel. For the avoidance of doubt, I should make clear that I am referring to a story in the book of Genesis, not a novel by Jeffrey Archer! It tells of the first murder, in the first generation after the Creation, of one of the sons of Adam and Eve by the other, in a fit of jealousy. It’s interesting what they fell out over: whose sacrifice was better, or more appropriate. The moral of the story is quite clear – that even when we’re trying to do the right thing, the dark side of human nature can get the better of us. As the Talmud says, in the giving of charity, the worst person is not the one who doesn’t give, but the one who doesn’t want others to give.

But in any event, there is no reason to dramatise disagreement or competition in these fratricidal terms. If the lion can form a coalition with the lamb, why should brother not speak peace unto brother?