



The Princess Who Dazzled The World

'All the film people in the world, if they had scoured the globe, could not have found anyone so suited to the part.'

So said Winston Churchill, soon after Elizabeth's Coronation. Seven decades later it's hard to capture the sense of wonder, joy, and excitement that Elizabeth generated as she prepared to become Queen.

She sparkled.

Cecil Beaton, the great fashion photographer, said,

The unspoilt childishness of the smile, the pristine quality of her pink and white complexion, are all part of an appearance that is individual and gives the effect of a total entity.

She was beautiful and also wholesome, vivacious and self-effacing, confident and humble. She embodied the possibility of a

Photo left: A portrait from the 1953 documentary film *A Queen is Crowned*



fresh start for nation and Commonwealth – spring after the long winter of war, austerity and rationing. Indeed, before 1953 was over, Churchill, who rarely spoke of God, wrote:

I regard it as the most direct mark of God's favour we have ever received in my long life that the whole structure of our new-formed Commonwealth has been linked and illuminated by a sparkling presence at its summit.

The Faith of Queen Elizabeth
by Dudley Delffs

If he were alive today, I suspect Churchill would marvel even more at the grace of God to nation and Commonwealth. God, he believed, had chosen Elizabeth for this role. And Elizabeth, in awe and humility, saw it the same way.

Indeed, before Elizabeth Alexandra Mary Windsor began what was to become the longest reign in British history, there were two kings in her life.

There was the father she adored, King George VI, who, after his brother's

abdication, had wholeheartedly embraced the responsibilities of the crown that he had never expected to wear.

And there was her God to whom she was entirely devoted.

At her Coronation in Westminster Abbey, Elizabeth made several promises before her God and her people:

She promised to serve him and his church.

She promised to serve the people of the United Kingdom and the peoples of the Commonwealth.

She promised to rule with justice and mercy.

She made those promises with words written by other people, but six months before, it was in her own words that she asked the people of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth to:

Pray that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve him and you, all the days of my life.

After over 70 years in the role, no one would dispute that she kept those promises.

But she did it in such a kind and determined, dignified and down-to-earth, wise and wholesome way that she won not only the gratitude and affection of her richly diverse nation, but also the respect and admiration of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Still, it is one thing to appreciate and honour someone's achievements, it's another to understand what has enabled them to excel. What, then, was the secret of a life so well lived in the public eye?

Curiously, although we know very little about what the Queen thought about a whole host of issues, she was crystal clear about the source of her strength, pointing with characteristic humility away from herself:

I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God. I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.

Christmas 2002

Her answer goes some way to explaining how she could be so extraordinary and yet so down-to-earth, so celebrated and yet so modest, so uniquely privileged and yet so attuned to the needs of others.

Many biographers have noted the significance of her Christian faith; this tribute seeks to explore it. Faith in God is often seen as a support in hard times, a source of comfort, strength and wisdom in the trials of life. For Elizabeth that was only part of it. Her faith was just as vital in the good times as the tough times. It shaped how she saw her successes; her times of high popularity, good health, diplomatic successes, family growth, wins at Ascot...

For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life.

Christmas 2000

At the heart of this was her understanding of her call to a life of service modelled on Jesus:

This is the time of the year when we remember that God sent his only Son 'to serve, not to be served'. He restored love and service to the centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ...

Christmas 2012

It was her trust in his ways that taught her to 'give of my best in all that the day brings,' from advising Prime Minister after Prime Minister to tramping across heather-clad hills, from agreeing seating plans for state banquets to laying and clearing the table at her log cabin barbecues on the Balmoral Estate.

In Elizabeth's life, faith was like yeast in bread. Yeast is not the only ingredient in bread but it's the one that makes all the difference. Indeed, trying to understand the Queen without understanding her relationship with God is like trying to understand an apple without looking at the tree.

And, even as a young girl, the tree was already budding.

