

We need more awkward people

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2024/12/26/we-need-more-awkward-people/>

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George Bernard Shaw once suggested all progress was dependent upon the existence of unreasonable – or awkward – people. St Stephen – the first Christian martyr – was definitely one of them. We need more of them to make the world a better place.

<https://youtu.be/T30oDmMOn5g?si=4aoYzoxv-hUrBsTn>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=bw9c7-1783d05-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

And this is the transcript:

Happy Boxing Day! Or, as the Christian Church would have it, St. Stephen's Day.

And St. Stephen was an interesting character. And so whilst we could talk about the curse of materialism today and the fact that no doubt there will be some people who watch this video, who will also be dragging around shops to celebrate the day after Christmas, let's just think about St. Stephen for a moment.

St. Stephen makes a brief appearance in the Bible. His story is told entirely in Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 6 and mainly 7. He was a Hellenic Jew, in other words, a Greek-speaking Jew, who appeared to live in Jerusalem at the time of the very early church, soon after the death of Jesus, whose birth we celebrated yesterday.

And, the point about St Stephen was, he was a bit of an awkward character, if I'm completely honest with you. He didn't buy the way that the Jewish authorities were running the church of which he was a member. He was pretty darned unhappy with them to be totally honest. And if you read what he had to say, he didn't hold back.

He had his own view of the world. He believed that they should be running it for the benefit of the people who Jesus was concerned about. And that was the poor. And he didn't believe that God only lived where the high priests were. He thought God could be seen everywhere - which was a pretty radical vision for the time.

And he paid a high price for being this cantankerous. St Stephen was the first-ever Christian martyr. He was stoned to death for his views, and somebody called Saul, who was later called Paul, and became the most prolific of the Apostles when it came to writing the New Testament, stood by and apparently watched the event of the stoning.

Now, what is the reason for referring to all this? It is very simple, it's very straightforward, and it is that if change is to happen in this world, we need cantankerous people. People who will stand up and say to the emperor, you are wearing no clothes, as Saint Stephen did. We need people who have a vision of change as he had.

We need people who will hold their convictions, whatever the situation. as he did. And I think that in that sense, the reason why Stephen's day is straight after Christmas day is partly to draw a contrast and even a comparison between the two. The contrast, of course, being that Stephen was meant to be very much a human being with all the normal flaws that we all have. And of course, by then Christianity was claiming that Jesus was divine. Take it or leave it. I'm not telling you which to do, but Stephen also died for his convictions, and the point that I made yesterday when talking about Jesus is that he died for his economic convictions.

And I'm not suggesting that anyone should ever die for their convictions because I sincerely hope that will always be unnecessary. But do need people who will live with the discomfort that being outside the mainstream brings.

Because it is uncomfortable to be a critic.

It is difficult to see your career blocked by those who don't want to hear what you have to say.

It is difficult to know that most of the world disagrees with you and would rather not hear until the moment when they realise that you were right all along.

Stephen never got to that point. He died before that opportunity arose, and as I'm saying, I hope that is not the case for today's critics, but my point is we definitely need them.

All change is dependent upon the existence of awkward people. Stephen was an awkward man, a man who would stand up and say, "I don't agree with you however much you wish to persecute me." If we are to have a better world, then we need some more awkward people.