



A MODEST MEMBER

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A modern Moses for the masses?

A friend has a clutch of children with an average age of about 20 and he finds these an awe inspiring responsibility.

When I had a batch of boys of that age I was often sorry for myself, but things have got worse since then.

The other day my six-year-old grandson was having a row with his mother.

After it was over he said truculently, "Mums can't tell boys what they have to wear, can they, Poppa?"

Mums can, of course, but whether boys will obey is another matter.

My friend thinks that the crankiness of the modern generation is caused by the diminishing influence of religion.

"The kids want to depend on something, they want someone to lead them, though they may not know it. They used to look to parsons for leadership, but now they are looking to politicians," he said.

This appalled me. I accept that the economic well-being of my constituents is my responsibility, at least to some extent, but I am not going to be lumbered with their spiritual problems also.

"Look here," I said, "I have had Eccles on my back like the old man of the sea, like an immense irritating economic conscience. Now you want me to carry the burden of people's spiritual welfare also. I'm not cut out for it."

I'm not, either. People don't realise that MPs are likely to be a bit queer.

No normal person would be egotistical enough to go round asking people to vote for him. And if we aren't queer before we start, we would be soon after.

No one could sit through all the committee meetings, hear all the speeches, kiss all the babies, open all the fetes without being mentally affected.

So when I thought my friend wanted to lay this new burden on my quite unsuitable shoulders I went quite pale. But he explained that he wasn't expecting me to act as a political parson.

"You haven't got the necessary qualifications of leadership," he explained kindly.

"What I want, and my kids need, is some political leader with moral authority, someone we can respect and trust, someone like Sir Robert Menzies. We need a modern Moses to follow to

the promised land. The parsons used to lead us. Now we want a political leader in their place. But certainly not you, old boy. You wouldn't be at all suitable."

I was relieved to hear this and it is a judgment that even Mavis would endorse. But I wonder if we will ever get that kind of leader, and if we did, what kind of a go would we give him?

The original Moses had difficulty in getting his people to leave the fleshpots of Egypt. And then on the journey he had to contend with continual complaints.

But a mob led by a modern Moses would carry such placards as "Feed us" or "We want more manna" or "I'm tired, someone ought to carry me" or messages such as that.

And at the end of each day's march there would be a press conference with TV camera peering intimately at Moses, examining his tonsils, his warts and everything about him.

And the all-wise correspondents would criticise the way he took that day, and intended to take the next, and questioning whether he had the Red Sea crossing organised.

And it wouldn't be long before there were dark mutterings about his origins, whether the story about that basket of rushes found in the reeds was true.

And the story about that burning bush would be questioned, and be explained as a natural gas leak.

We have been going through our leaders pretty quickly lately since Sir Robert Menzies retired.

And perhaps even Sir Robert could not have withstood the treatment that the leaders of the recent past and the present have received.

For about six months everyone is nice to them, is interested in them, in their families, in their personal habits, and so on. Then they get hell.

So I told my friend that he should not be optimistic that politicians would spawn a modern Moses for his children to follow.

If we found such a person, and they don't grow on trees, we would soon cut him down to size, would soon know more about his warts than his good qualities.

Our affluence, our education and our media will make political leadership difficult, but it will make moral leadership impossible.