

Lord Howell of Guildford

My Lords, so many good things have been said this afternoon about our late and wonderful Queen. There have been some really uplifting speeches, one of which we heard just now.

I shall concentrate on just one aspect of the whole wonderful story. The Queen was the founder of the modern Commonwealth. There have been lots of references to her famous 21st-birthday dedication of her whole life and efforts to what later became the Commonwealth; it has been quoted here and in broadcasts many times.

I have two further insights from Her Majesty to cite in making my feelings understood. The first, 62 years after that dedication on her 21st birthday, was:

“The Commonwealth is in many ways the face of the future.”

That came out of her Christmas broadcast in 2009. The second was when she observed, only a few sad months ago:

“Today, it is rewarding to observe a modern, vibrant and connected Commonwealth that combines a wealth of history and tradition with the great social, cultural and technological advances of our time.”

Let us ponder those two statements. I say: what prescience and insight they show into the 21st century, which we should all have been sharing and following much more closely. As the world switches increasingly to Asia and Africa and an entirely different international order from that of the last 60 or 70 years, it is our membership of this giant network, consisting of eight nations at the start and 56 now, with several more wanting to join, that gives us back our strong role with purpose and direction and, if handled wisely, our advantage and our exceptionalism. That is what I place at the centre of my thoughts at this sad time.

For me, this reflects the constancy throughout the Queen’s long lifetime and her understanding of the future, well beyond most of those around her. For that insight and wisdom, I believe we must now give deep thanks beyond words. We wish King Charles all the strength and good fortune in the world to follow in his mother’s footsteps. I believe he will do well. He is the best-prepared new monarch in our history. Long may he reign.
