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The Royal Law: Source of our Freedom Today by L. L. Blake. Shephard-Walwyn, 2000. ISBN 0 85683 191 3. Quarto. Pp. vii + 119. £12.95.

This book by L. L. Blake, a barrister and lecturer on constitutional matters, centres on the constitutional importance in the United Kingdom of the coronation service. The first of its two appendices gives the main text of the coronation service of Queen Elizabeth II. The second is a translation of a quaint Anglo-Saxon text attributed to Wulfstan, an Archbishop of York who died in 1023.

The book is a confused mix, but might serve a useful purpose in concentrating attention on what changes need to be made in the coronation service before our next monarch is crowned. However the movement of the European Union towards enlargement and federalism, together with growing pressure for a republican constitution for Britain, could in the end render that exercise unnecessary. Such a possibility will not be gleaned from the pages of this book, whose brief index has no mention of the European Union.

The book is very English. The ghost of Denning haunts it, still pontificating. Without religion, he is quoted as saying, there can be no morality - and without morality there can be no law. Like so much in the book, this neat apophthegm is unsound. Many who were irreligious, or worshipped false gods, have produced a wholesome code of ethics. Equally, not a few godless tyrants have promulgated laws that were undoubtedly effective as such.

The author's god is the Common Law (he gives it the capitals). He describes it as the natural law of the English-speaking peoples, overlooking the fact (and here is the danger) that it is nowadays in the hands of unhistorical judges who "develop" it whichever way their fancy leads.

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