

123 Corks in Taps!

Recent headlines across the world have brought home the horrors of the poor folk desperately trying to reach Europe, in overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels operated by unscrupulous people-smugglers. "Something must be done!" is the great cry - and quite right too of course: something must indeed be done, and quickly.

The possible solutions being bandied around at present - such as the sinking of the smugglers' ships and the setting-up of detention camps on the Libyan beaches - are hardly solutions at all. For such ideas assume that the way to mend a leaking tap is simply to block it with a cork: "There, that's fixed it!" - or perhaps not.

No, the reasons why so many people set out on these desperate journeys are many and complex, and often originate thousands of miles from the Libyan coast, in failed states where war, corruption, lawlessness, wanton violence, disease, casual atrocities and economic hopelessness are widespread. Alongside such daily awfulness in these countries is the constant awareness these days - through the internet, social media, radio and television - that life in Europe by contrast is wonderful; and yes, by contrast, that is absolutely true. So the dream gradually forms into a determination to "go for it", and many, many people do so, setting out to get to Europe, come what may.

Unfortunately along the way, in their desperation and vulnerability, they are "easy pickings" for all sorts of further scams and abuse. What must be worst of all, for those who do finally "make it", is their quickly realising that nobody wants them; for the talk is of detention centres, and their being sent back to where they started. If that was us, what would we do?

In these times of a growing gulf between the rich and the poor, the rich become threatened and reach for self-protection, while the poor become angry and reach for anything they can find to survive. Such a gulf is deeply wrong in God's sight, and deeply dangerous for all concerned, for no number of mere corks in taps will make this gulf go away.

It is not hard to see on a broad canvas the sorts of things that should be done to close this rich-poor gulf. First and foremost, effective steps have to be taken to bring fundamental change to the many "failed states", so that the lure of getting to Europe can steadily fade away. Good governance, foreign investment, fair

trade agreements, schooling, health care, transport - all these can play their part in turning things round, as the UN and the wealthier nations get cracking.

Please God, some of these things will indeed happen, but equally, as God's redeemed people familiar with the Word of God, we have to be realistic. The utopian dream of "paradise on earth", so beloved by secular politicians, will never happen here by mere human effort. The Lord makes it quite clear in His Word that before such a time is established on this earth, (it will be - the Kingdom of God no less! - the "millennial reign" of Christ for which we regularly pray in the Lord's Prayer), things are going to become much worse here rather than much better.

In terms of the divine time-scale revealed in Scripture, the indications around us today strongly suggest we are now living in what can be termed "the last times": the Jews, amazingly, are back in their land; the "times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled (Luke 21.24); we await the removal of the true Church (known as "the rapture", I Thessalonians 4.13-18 / I Corinthians 15.51-58), to be followed by the seven-year period of "the Great Tribulation" (eg Matthew 24.21) and the triumphant return of Christ in conquering, judging glory (eg Matthew 24.30-31. (To take you further on this, see "Whatever Next?", on fsmins.org / Publications / Unfulfilled Prophecy, free to read there or download).

So our calling as Christ's "faithful sheep" is to be thoroughly involved in this world's joys and sorrows, expressing the Christ-blessings of peace and hope, of truth and love wherever we find ourselves - be that in a grim detention camp housing desperate immigrants, or simply amongst our neighbours in the street where we live.

At the same time we are to live always in the light of the greater, fuller picture revealed in God's Word, of all the glorious blessings in Christ - so freely offered, so solidly well-grounded - that are yet to be. For in matters of heaven and earth, it's all about the "both-and" rather than the "either-or".

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