

## **"A Blatant Spiritual Clash" - Week 80**

Why is it these days that virtually every news report we encounter refers to Islam in one form or another? - be it jihadists, Islamic militants, the Taliban, Islamists, rebels, al-Qaeda, terrorists, ISIS, Sunni and Shia, al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and all the rest of them.

A great gash of misery lies across the globe from West Africa to South Asia, directly or indirectly involving parts of Mali, northern Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the Gulf States, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Many parts of the world where Islam holds sway are on fire: frenzied hatred against "the infidels" or fellow Muslims; vicious atrocities, now so numerous that they are hardly reported; appalling violence; an endless supply of weaponry, ammunition and explosives; self-appointed militias; young men and women queuing up to be suicide bombers; governmental ineptitude and corruption.

Hundreds of thousands have lost their lives, millions have been driven from their homes, livelihoods and countries. Aid agencies do a wonderful job but are severely stretched, and the willingness of western governments and donors to remain involved is being sorely stretched too.

Then we turn to Europe - where over recent decades millions of Muslim people have settled. In most of the countries of Western Europe which now have significant Muslims populations, there are frictions between the values of the "host countries" and those of Islam. These frictions tend to focus on matters of dress, loyalty, nationality, laws and customs.

Whenever a source of friction arises - for example in Britain it is alleged that Muslims have been plotting to "take over" several State schools in the Birmingham area - the Muslim response tends to include some or all of the following: there is nothing in these stories / a media witch-hunt / the police should do more / the government should do more / discrimination against Muslims / we are all peaceful / we are all as British as anyone else.

The latest problem to hit the headlines is the "radicalising" of young men in the West, who are persuaded to go and fight in Syria or similar places. They do not seem to be too bothered that they will be fighting fellow Muslims, but there is a real fear that those who survive such fighting will return to their home countries in the West and carry on their fight right there.

In view of all these facts, it is no surprise that western politicians now tread very carefully indeed so as not to upset the resident Muslim communities. But what this often means in practice is a subtle "ratchet effect", whereby those Muslim communities are given more and more freedom to practise their Faith, in growing contradiction to the customs and the laws of the countries in which they have chosen to dwell.

As Christians we need to acknowledge three basic truths in all this. First, western nations are what they are very largely because of the deep influence of the Christian Faith and Gospel over the centuries. The fact that the nations of "the West" are seen as being so attractive these days in comparison to other parts of the world is in no small part due to their unashamedly Christian heritage.

Second, if Islam is allowed to develop unchecked in any non-Muslim society, the end-product of that society is going to be very, very different from the societies in which we currently live.

Third, unfortunately the West's Christian heritage is wilfully ignored these days, in many quarters and for many reasons. Instead of our returning to "the God of our fathers", politicians boast about our "liberal, secular, democratic values", and about our tolerance and inclusivity, as if somehow these hold the key to our ultimate defence against encroaching Islam. How ever virtuous some of these things may be, reliance on them wholly misses the point. It is only when the western nations turn back to Almighty God Himself, in repentance and obedience, that the tide will turn.

Until then, the Lord will continue to shout at us, through His loud-hailer of all this Islamic turmoil which He is allowing, to come to our senses and to come back to Him - as nations. For what is going on before our eyes is nothing less than a blatant spiritual clash, with God's truth in Jesus Christ at stake.

And for Christ's faithful sheep? - eyes wide open as to what is going on; voices raised, both in humble prayer and in persistent political input; and courtesy to Muslims, our fellow citizens, while yielding not one inch over the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ: He is God incarnate, crucified, raised, ascended and glorified, the Way, the Truth and the Life for one and all.

Those precious truths are God's truths. They are completely beyond challenge, competition, denial or defeat. They will never, ever be changed.

We praise Him.

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