

155 "Rolling up His sleeves" - 3

In the midst of current alarming events, we humbly "seek the Lord". We realise that nothing is happening in our times without His knowledge and allowance; that the Lord has clearly spoken in His Word of troubled times and divine judgement before the triumphant return of Christ; and that every single promise within His Word shall come to pass, just as all His previous promises have so done.

Alongside a growing list of "natural disasters", it seems that militant Islam is one of the agents God is using as a "wake-up call" to the once-Christian West. We see scriptural precedents for such enrolment of unpleasant forces to further God's purposes in His use of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and Cyrus of Persia (see your concordance for references).

France, the victim of two bloody attacks this year, has a particularly strong streak running through her self-identity of revolution, atheism and secularism: the Holy Bible, and the glorious, simple Gospel it contains, have never sat comfortably within the French psyche. "Je suis Charlie" and "Je suis Paris" form classic responses to the attacks - strong on defiance and solidarity, yet without a hint of the need for self-reflection, let alone repentance where such repentance might be necessary.

The United States is more of a "mixed bag". In the Constitution there is specific detachment of the State from any religious affiliation, yet the national bank notes carry the words "In God we trust" - alongside various masonic symbols! Church attendance in America remains comparatively high, yet the country has led the way in moral decadence and finds itself resented or hated in many parts of the world, being described by some as "the Great Satan". The attacks of September 2001 deeply shook the nation, provoking vast military ventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, but we still await signs in America of "In God we trust" in practice.

Britain is different again, for this country, though you wouldn't know it, still has a clear, Bible-based, Protestant Constitution. We are so used to politicians ignoring this fact, replacing it with their favourite phrases and buzz-words - "British values", "a liberal, secular democracy", "tolerance, freedom, inclusivity" and so on - that Almighty God is usually entirely ignored. In the recent parliamentary debate concerning possible RAF bombing in Syria, there was occasional mention of the theology of the self-proclaimed ISIL, but no speaker went on to emphasise that this is therefore a clash between two "THEOLOGIES" (rather than mere "ideologies"), the one shown to be true by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1.3), and

the other one false, without a shred of evidence in its support. Britain has been deeply blessed by the Lord over the centuries, being the location of several wonderful revivals, and the home-country of thousands of missionaries carrying the Gospel far and wide. Yet look at us now. Can we imagine God's reaction as He hears "Rule Britannia!" being bawled out by the crowds? On what possible grounds do we imagine that Almighty God would still think "Good old Britain!" these days?

Islam was founded by one man, and spread quickly by military conquest, its message to the "infidels" being "Convert or die" - just as we are hearing today from ISIL. By the grace of the living God, Europe was saved from Islamic dominance by the great victory at Tours in 732 AD, but what is happening today? For years Muslims have dwelt in parts of Europe without trouble, but in recent decades things have been changing.

While most Muslim people seek a quiet, normal life, there is no doubt that on occasions they tend to act as "a sea" in which militants can swim or hide. Two further points are relevant for us: the distinct appearance and dress of Muslims proclaims their presence in any community; and the establishment of a new mosque in a neighbourhood is seen as a significant advance.

Many Muslims are now entering Europe as refugees or economic migrants, and while overall numbers of Muslims within the European population are still quite small, in the areas where they are in the majority, the way of life quickly changes. Is the Lord not allowing this Islamic influx, and the foul atrocities of the "jihadists", as a wake-up call to the wayward nations of the West to return to Him? The old Prayer Book words come to mind - "we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep".

Within our prayerful Christian concern for Muslims, may there be a steady presentation of the truth about Jesus Christ. He is NOT merely a revered prophet who has now been upstaged by Mohammed. Jesus Christ is LORD, as one day all will acknowledge (Philippians 2.9-11); and His Lordship, with all the blessings flowing from it, is the best possible news that any of us could ever wish for.