

231 In Christ alone

In last week's Reflection we rejoiced over "timbrel and dance" at the heart of the Christian life – that natural overflowing of worship and thankfulness for all the blessings bestowed upon those "in Christ" by faith, freely given to us by God the Father, through His Son Jesus the Christ, and conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit.

This week we must reluctantly address the recent atrocity in Manchester, the latest example of the reality of militant Islam in our midst. For the benefit of informing our overseas readers, this sinful act involved a young man igniting a suicide bomb packed with nails, screws and nuts in a crowd of mainly young people leaving a pop concert: 22 people so far are confirmed dead with scores more in hospital, some with very serious injuries.

A brief survey of reactions to this event is helpful at this stage, in which we can ask, "Lord, please, what is your mind concerning each of these things?". So we note: first, apart from the murderer himself and his supporters, all agree that this was a foul and wicked act; second, the well-prepared professionalism of the emergency services; third, the widespread mention of condolences and thoughts, (plus, rarely these days, also prayers); fourth, the immediate, instinctive outpouring of practical love from many "ordinary" people; fifth, the calming influence of careful words spoken by various political and religious leaders; and sixth, how the media rush in on such occasions to give ceaseless, blanket coverage of anything they can find to show, hear or say.

At the Vigil held the following evening and attended by thousands, the Bishop of Manchester affirmed that "love always triumphs over hate", which brought applause, and a local poet evoked "the spirit of Manchester" which brought more applause. A trustee from the suicide-bomber's local mosque said that this suicide bombing has nothing to do with real Islam.

In summary, the overall reaction to what has happened can be summed up as one of unity and defiance - fine as far as it goes, which in reality is not nearly as far as it may seem.

Limited space here prevents full biblical coverage of this complex, sensitive situation "in one go", but much of that biblical coverage has already been given in previous Reflections over the years, which are mentioned here for those who wish to spend more time and prayer on all this. At this point in the text of the online version of this Reflection (available on www.fsmins.org under the Weekly Reflection button), you will find direct hyperlinks to each of these older Reflections to make it quicker to get to them; they are listed here and in the online version in order of their rough place in the whole picture rather than in strict date order, and those marked ** are particularly relevant at this time:

FIRST, some scriptural background: **177-179 The Bible as the Word of God** / 103 One Family Tree / 122 The Significance of Genesis 5 / **79 The Tower of Babel** / **124 But how do we get there? **

SECOND concerning the spiritual situation in the UK: 66 A Broken Triangle / 61 Thinking themselves wise / **71 Three competing faiths** / **80 A blatant spiritual clash** / **105 God's truth at stake** / **113 Sandettie Light Vessel Automatic** / 116 Who's in charge round here?

THIRD concerning our Christian responsibilities:

57 Belief, Truth and Falsehood / 130-131 Everyone's looking for KURT, and Sorting out the KURTs / **133 Clapham Junction and Waterloo** / 60 Freedom of Speech / **112 What is truth?** / 90 Contending for the Faith / **97 Holding forth the word of life** / 98 Those who are without / **99 But why are you a Christian?** / 100 The hope that is within you / 142–144 on Witnessing / 68 Us-ness and Them-ness / 91 Crossing the divides / 145 It shall not stand / 169 Heads above the parapet / 189 Guarding the Deposit / 190 Standing and Resisting / 204 Post-truth and permanent Truth / 214 Walls Good and Bad.

We will hope to take a closer look at some key aspects of the situation next week, but meanwhile we can see that it all comes down to the old questions concerning Truth: Where is Truth to be found? Which Faith, of all the competing Faiths on offer since the Fall of Man, possesses the most solid credentials and is therefore the most likely to be TRUE? Put like that, the answer is crystal-clear – Judaeo-Christianity, as made known to us in the Holy Bible. We thank God afresh for faithful churches and individuals proclaiming by word and deed at this time the central, unchanging Good News, that Jesus Christ is as much “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” today as He has ever been (John 14.6).

It is by Christ alone, through Christ alone and in Christ alone – He has no conceivable rival whatsoever - that all shall be well.

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