

169 Heads above the parapet

An interesting event in Britain this week tells us much about the general state of the nation.

We have had an attempt by the Conservative Government to relax further the Sunday trading laws in England and Wales. This move would have made Sundays in this country hardly different from any other day, but was trumpeted as being a Very Good Thing for all the usual reasons - jobs, prosperity, freedom, devolution of power to local councils, moving with the times, present laws are outdated, falling into line with other countries, and so on.

To their great credit, some members of the government party had the courage to say "No thank you", for reasons which at least mentioned a genuine issue - the continuing benefit for us all, whether Christians or not, of a shared day of rest each week. Sadly the days are long gone for any British government to "keep Sunday special" for the real reasons - that, in what has been an unashamedly Protestant Christian country for centuries, of course we are keen to uphold the precious, God-given, biblical principle of one day of rest in seven. But at least these brave MPs "stuck their heads above the parapet".

As a perfect illustration of what this "head-above-the-parapet" can involve for a Christian in public life these days, we note the experience of one of the "rebels", as the media termed them, a Christian MP named David Burrowes. Mr Burrowes was interviewed on BBC Radio 4, and the first question went - "Isn't this just an attempt for you to impose your minority views on the wider public?". How about that for BBC neutrality?! Would that question ever have been put in such loaded terms to those in favour of loosening the current restrictions on Sunday trading? Of course not. Was it not rather the case that the ones doing any imposing were the law-looseners themselves? - with no manifesto commitment and very little public support for these massive changes to our national way of life?

Does not such a spiked question to a Christian MP reveal something about us as a nation? It seems that Christians are singled out these days as being fair game for the casual "boot in the chops", for daring to speak up about the other, now-neglected but infinitely better ways of running a country, given to us all in God's Word by the only One who knows.

But, thanks be to God, this saga had a happy ending! The Conservative "rebels", forming an extremely odd alliance with the Labour and Scottish Nationalist parties (each of which had their own motives for opposing the motion), meant the Government was defeated. So the grand, secularist, "money is all that matters",

"away with the Christian Faith" juggernaut has been stopped in its tracks, at least for the time being.

These incidents bring to mind that memorable passage in Jeremiah Chapter 36 - well worth reading again when you can. All God's warnings to Israel and Judah had been freshly written down "upon a roll of a book" (vv 2,4, AV). This was read publicly in the house of the Lord (vv 5-10), and then to the princes and officials, who said in their fear that the king had better be told of these things (vv 11-16).

How evocative is the scene in verses 20-26! - with the king, sitting by the fire in his winter-house, casually cutting through the pages with his knife and tossing them into the fire: what slow, deliberate and total contempt for the Word of God. In the light of what is going on in Britain and elsewhere these days, are we not seeing much the same attitude as that of King Jehoiakim?

Then see what comes next! (vv 27-32). At the Lord's instruction Jeremiah simply had another book made (vv 27-28), longer than the first one! (32 end), and solemnly uttered the word of the Lord against Jehoiakim and his seed, and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah (vv 28-31). All those judgements came true. Wickedness was divinely punished - and it still is.

With grateful hearts we humbly hold to Jesus Christ's unchanging words still at the heart of all human existence, whether recognised by the powerful or not - "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14.6).

And if that sometimes obliges us to put our Christian heads above that parapet, then so be it.

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