

183 Fears, horrors, and a referendum

In view of events dominating the news headlines in this past week, culminating in the cold-blooded murder of a British MP in her Yorkshire constituency, it is clear that all is far from well with the world. We are living in troubled and troubling times.

In last week's Reflection we were reminded that our prayers for "the peace of Jerusalem" will only be fully answered when Christ is enthroned and acknowledged. Until then the Lord has made clear that there will continue to be "wars and rumours of wars" (Matthew 24.4-8), with "men's hearts failing them for fear" (Luke 21.25-26). In the midst of all that is going on, such words of Scripture are a comfort, reminding us that what is happening is foreknown by the Lord, and remains firmly under His authority.

It is appropriate this time now briefly to consider next week's referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (the EU), for the various strands of this angry debate encompass many of the divisions, hopes and fears that are swirling around in people's minds and perceptions. As far as we can tell, how, in the light of His Word, does the Lord view what is going on in the referendum debate?

One issue deserves our particular attention, all the more so as it has scarcely been mentioned in the referendum campaign. It is the issue of nationhood from a biblical perspective.

Scripturally, we learn that the Lord recognises and deals with the numerous nations mentioned in the Bible, regarding them as the basic, divinely-ordered "building-blocks" of human society, sitting above the levels of the individual and the family. Equally, we see that He tends to disapprove of anything bigger than such nations, that is, of attempts to create God-omitting, man-elevating, supra-national bodies. We think particularly of Babel here (Genesis 11), and then of the great empires that later rose and fell, as prophesied for example in the Book of Daniel. The Lord never blessed these empires as such, using them instead as tools in His hands when He wished; their fortunes tended to be related closely to how they treated His covenant people, the Jews.

For throughout Old Testament times the divine focus was always on His chosen people of Israel and Judah, with whom His covenant was based on a very simple principle: "Know, love and serve Me and I will bless you; ignore, flout, and turn from Me, and I will judge you, while always leaving open the door for your return". And that simple principle still applies to any nation today.

Today, alongside a widespread drive to build a "one world" system with all that that involves, we have several supra-national bodies, such as the United Nations, global-scale financial and sports organisations, and of course what has now become the EU. These all have their roles to play, yet without exception they ignore Almighty God.

This scriptural point regarding God's view of nationhood and supra-nationhood is clearly close to the heart of the question before us. The well-being of this nation, as indeed of all others, fundamentally lies in our acknowledgement of Almighty God, the "God of our fathers", done so as an independent nation not beholden to any supra-national, God-omitting body with "grand designs" such as the EU possesses - how ever well-intentioned that body claims to be. Britain should know this all too well, being one of the few countries in the world still with an avowedly Christian, Protestant constitution, and having been so richly blessed by the Lord over the centuries.

For what it is worth, in acknowledgement of God's preference for nationhood over supra-nationhood, and as my tiny expression of honouring that divine preference, I for my part intend to vote for "Leave". Humanly speaking, the turning of this country back to Almighty God is a proverbial "pipe-dream", but who knows? - a re-assertion of British independent nationhood might just prove, under the grace of God, to be a step in the right direction.

Let it be emphasised that there are bound to be devout, well-informed Christians on both sides of the referendum debate, in view of all the issues to bear in mind. Whatever each of us humbly decides, the members of the Lord's "faithful remnant" must pray hard for God's prevailing hand over this referendum, for its consequences will be far-reaching whatever the result.

As the old anthem puts it, based on words from the Psalms - "Lead me Lord, lead me in thy righteousness, make thy plain before my face: for it is thou Lord, thou Lord only, that makest me dwell in safety".