

233 “Another nice mess!”

(Suggested: Copy, paste and read in Subfolder: Faith and Topicals)

In recent Weekly Reflections we have identified several features of the current scene that are of particular biblical significance, including a God-ignoring attitude of defiant unity in the face of Islamic terrorism (the London Bridge atrocity now joins the list); the visibility of “non-indigenous” Faiths in our land compared with the invisibility of the “indigenous” Judaeo-Christian Faith; the realisation that Islam is not a benign fellow-traveller alongside the Christian Faith; and that Satan remains hard at work in trying to obliterate the central truth of the unique Lordship of Christ.

In addition to all these, the General Election has produced a “hung Parliament”. The country thus faces yet more endless punditry, uncertainty and instability, made more acute by the imminent start of critical negotiations concerning Britain’s exit from the European Union. It is no wonder that Oliver Hardy’s frequent catchphrase to his hapless companion Stan Laurel - “Well, here’s another nice mess you’ve gotten me into!” – comes to mind.

In short, these dangerous, tumultuous times for the country bear distinct hallmarks of divine displeasure and gradually increased judgement. Yes, we are one of the few countries to retain a Protestant-based constitution, but in practice as the Lord looks upon us, on what possible grounds could we assume that He is pleased with how things are going?

Yet mercifully the Lord is no stranger to nations getting themselves into “another nice mess”. The blueprint for godly nationhood is fully spelt out for us in the “life and times” of God’s original covenant people, the children of Israel.

In that blueprint we find first the call to remembrance. Time after time, the children of Israel were urged to look back, remembering all that the Lord had done for them and all the ways by which He had led them up to the present time. Half an hour spent in a Concordance on the word “Remember” and its offshoots is time well-spent! – as we see what the Lord Himself remembers, and what the people are to remember themselves. Nothing has changed on this point since those days.

In Britain quite rightly we remember the dead and wounded and their families from past and present wars, but when it comes to the more specific remembrance of focussing on the blessings of God in our land over the centuries in post-Bible times, as the school report would have it - “Must try harder ...”. Too often the teaching of History or Religious Education in our schools bypasses the wonderful divine blessings bestowed on this land especially since the Reformation. In the churches also, in their bid to be “with it”, the old is often set aside in favour of the new, with notable features of church history being forgotten, along with so many spiritually-rich old hymns. When we forget to remember, are we not much more prone to being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” – be it as a church or as a nation (Ephesians 4.14)?

Then we come to the central feature in the biblical blueprint concerning nationhood - simple obedience to the Word of God. This is well put in Article XX of the Thirty Nine Articles, words as applicable to any God-fearing nation as to any God-fearing church: "And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written". As we think back over laws passed in this country, mainly since the 1960s and by governments of different political persuasion, the distance this country has wilfully travelled away from the Word of God is stark. The biblical consequences of disobedience are always the same – repeated divine calls for repentance by way of warning, and, if or when these calls are ignored, judgement follows.

Repentance, springing from both the remembrance of the Lord's gracious dealings and from the awareness of our wilful disobedience, is the third feature of the Bible's "nationhood-blueprint". That repentance literally means a turning-around, away from the wrong paths and back on to the right paths once more. We know full well how the Lord welcomes the repentant individual, church or nation, for "He is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 103.8 / and, eg., II Chronicles 7.14).

Our country finds itself facing major problems at this time, most of which have an element of being self-inflicted – a sure sign that the Lord, still being merciful, is firmly warning us of our national need to return to Him, "the God of our fathers" (see Exodus 3.13-15). How we need to respond to His warnings! - by praying for our leaders in both Church and State (eg., I Timothy 2.1-6), by informing them as to the grave spiritual realities of the situation, and by urging them to speak unashamedly of our national dependence upon Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

If this nation will tread once again the old paths of remembrance, obedience and repentance, we can then be sure that "another nice mess" will be a thing of the past!