

291 “O earth, earth, earth ...”

Our nation continues to be in a bad way over “Brexit”. In Parliament there is deep anger, bitterness and confusion: resignations, plots, threats, last-minute deals and numerous close votes in the House of Commons are now the “new norm”. We have a vulnerable government led by a Prime Minister of Christian faith and understanding, who we can presume is doing her best in an almost impossible situation and under an almost impossible workload. Whatever else is to be said, we Christians need to be praying hard.

As loyal Christian citizens in our concern over all that is going on, we also look beyond what immediately confronts us to “seek the Lord”. Historically our country has been singularly blessed, notably since the messy political period around the Reformation from which we emerged with a Protestant monarchy and constitution, and the intention for “an open Bible in every home”. Thus we became one notable channel through which the Lord brought blessing to others via the worldwide spread of the biblical Gospel.

Time and again our role in Europe has been to intervene so as to counteract any over-powerful nation that is threatening the peace of the continent, most notably over Louis XIV, Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler, and the thousands of war memorials in our land are a solemn reminder of that role. We have always been “on the edge” of Europe, geographically, politically, and spiritually as an avowedly Protestant nation, being both detached yet involved at the same time. This history explains much about the current debacle over the EU – our longstanding need to get the balance right between detachment and involvement, currently being represented by “the Leavers” and “the Remainers”. The fact is that both camps speak sense.

At the same time we must acknowledge as the Lord’s people that this country has seriously turned its back on the Lord and His ways since the 1960s. Not surprisingly we are now beset with the consequences of the many liberal laws and practices that have been brought in, notably over abortion and, most recently, homosexuality. The result of this national turning-aside is that God must now regard us as a deeply sinful country, all the more so in the light of Luke 12.48 – “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required”. As a nation, by God’s grace we have indeed been given much over the centuries, and we can only imagine how He must react when hearing the lusty singing of patriotic songs such as “Land of hope and glory” and “Rule Britannia”. How apt are the Lord’s instructions to Ezekiel regarding sinful Israel - “Thus saith the Lord God ... (I) have made thee a reproach unto the heathen, and a mocking to all countries” (Ezekiel 22.3-4); and again in Jeremiah, “for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the Lord, even lovingkindness and mercies” (Jeremiah 16.5).

The referendum result of June 2016 was narrowly won by the Leavers, (“against all the odds” it must be said, and in answer to much prayer), and we can see this result as a mercy, a warning and an opportunity given by the Lord. It is first a mercy and an opportunity, for we can come away from the Rome-based European Union and become an independent nation once again, as we have been throughout our history apart from the last 45 years. That reclamation of sovereign independence, which should never have been given away in the first place, is precious, and needs to be

genuinely achieved if the referendum result is to be honoured. In comparison with this, all other issues, while part of the wider picture, are surely of secondary importance.

But crucially the referendum result is also a stark warning. In His mercy the Lord has given us this one-off chance to come away, to re-assert our true identity once more under Him as a God-fearing, Christian, Bible-honouring nation. As part of that re-assertion of who we really are and should be, He looks for our profound repentance as a nation, and if that is not forthcoming (humanly speaking, sadly that is the most probable outcome), we are likely to continue on the road of less blessing and more judgement. Therein lies the stark warning.

In May 1940 after Dunkirk and under the threat of imminent invasion, King George VI called for a national Day of Prayer. His call was heeded by the population of this country, and God graciously answered: He first delivered this nation, and then, with vital Allied help via this nation, He delivered Europe itself.

Times are now very different, but we are once again in a time of mercy, opportunity and warning. Those old words from the Lord through Jeremiah still apply as much as ever - "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord" (Jeremiah 22.29).

May we be found faithful in proclaiming this message loud and clear.

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