

303 Home Truths

In case any of us hadn't noticed, these are turbulent times! "Natural disasters"; predictions of irreversible climate change; vicious conflicts in various parts of the world; ill-tempered political debate; trade wars; cyber attacks; assassinations; Brexit talks; and great social problems wherever we look. What a comfort it is to remember that the Lord has forewarned of such times, along with His assurance, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Matthew 24.6-8 / John 16.33).

Turbulence indeed, which produces in turn ugliness of debate and conduct, intense anger and mistrust, and a general sense of helplessness in the face of what is going on. No wonder people look to governments to get things sorted out.

Governments have their part to play of course, in terms of their policies, legislation and their spending of public money. As we often have to point out in these Reflections, those in positions of leadership at whatever level in a society carry heavy responsibilities, being accountable to Almighty God and the people in their charge, to set the right direction and ensure that we are "godly and quietly governed" as the old "Church militant" prayer puts it in the Book of Common Prayer.

But there are times when this demand that a government can and must "fix everything" for us can be taken too far. In British politics for instance, deciding just what is the right balance between governmental responsibility and individual responsibility lies at the heart of the political debate between the Labour and Conservative parties – the one seeks more government, and the other seeks less. Both have grounds for their case, but deciding at what point "enough is enough" in terms of government involvement in any matter is the tricky part.

Whatever else we may say about the many difficulties of these days, it is clear that the Holy Bible is given scarcely a mention in the efforts to sort these difficulties out. If the Bible was "the first point of call" in all matters of public and political debate, as it should be and still has every right to be, then society would be in a far healthier state than we find it is in today. In particular, the basic building blocks of any God-fearing society, focussed on faithful, lifelong marriage and stable family life, would still be the norm.

This biblical emphasis on marriage and the family keeps responsibility in its proper place – in the family home of husband and wife, of father and mother and children (eg., Exodus 20.12,14,17). Get that right, and "society knows where it stands"; but get that wrong, set in motion by widespread marital breakdown, then the State gradually takes over responsibility from the family unit and society moves rapidly from stability into the social chaos we currently see.

It is mainly in the family and home environment that each of us also learns individual responsibility, as members of the family, of wider society, and, for Christian homes, of the Christian Church. This home-learned sense of individual responsibility stifles the cry commonly heard these days, along the lines of "My problems are not my fault so I expect others to solve them and fast!". Sometimes that is true and outside help

is needed; and sometimes that is not true and “inside help” - self-help and self-responsibility - are needed instead.

We know that God’s Word is brim-full of divine instruction and guidance as to how we are to behave towards God Himself and towards one another, and our Christian responsibility is of course to follow this teaching in practice, in gratitude and loving obedience to God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

This can be tough, as the McArthur family of Ashers Bakery in Belfast have found over the past four years, facing a charge by a homosexual activist of discrimination against him. Thanks be to God, the McArthurs have been upheld throughout by their Christian faith and the prayerful support of many, and the case against them has finally been thrown out by the so-called “Supreme Court” (on reflection, a most inappropriate name). This case is a timely reminder of our need to stand firm for God’s truth, with pastoral courtesy, courage and clarity. Regarding the Ashers case for instance, we know from the Bible that God sees nothing “gay” about homosexual practice, and that marriage is God-ordained and heterosexual by its very nature (eg., Leviticus 18.22, 20.13 / Romans 1.27 / I Corinthians 6.9 / I Timothy 1.10 // Genesis 2.24 & Matthew 19.5). Modern society may not care for home truths such as these, but there they are in God’s Word, among all the others, given for our guidance and blessing and ignored at our peril.

We are bidden to “owe no one anything, except to love one another ...” (Romans 13.8a). That loving sometimes requires us to draw attention to God’s graciously-given home truths.

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