

309 The beat of a different drum

With some regret but out of necessity, this Weekly Reflection is once again about “Brexit”, but please restrain that immediate instinct to hit the Delete button! For within the current turmoil we need to keep in mind, from our Christian, biblical standpoint, what is actually going on both on the surface and beneath the surface. There is no denying that the situation is precarious, and the prayers of people like us, crying out for God’s sovereign mercy over this sinful, yet still constitutionally-Protestant, nation, remain vital.

After over forty years of membership, extricating this country from what gradually morphed into “the European Union” was never going to be simple, and the metaphor we hear about “how to remove the British eggs from within the EU omelette” aptly sums up the difficulties. With hindsight it is easy to argue that Britain should never have joined what was then the Common Market in the first place, for even in the early 1970s this was seen as a rather controversial step on both sides of the English Channel. Since then numerous British politicians have wrestled with the recurring issue – when to go along with the drive for “ever closer union”, and when to resist it. Is it not really these politicians, most of whom are still alive, who should really be “in the dock” over their many sell-outs? - rather than poor Mrs May to whom it has fallen to try to sort out the mess we find ourselves in.

The Brexit negotiations involve three strands of concern, two of which are frequently mentioned in debate but the third, of most concern to people like us, is rarely mentioned. The first strand, highlighted by the “Remainers”, involves the many practical issues, notably over trade, research, security, defence and so on. The second strand, highlighted by the “Leavers”, involves such issues as sovereignty, independence, nationhood, freedom and law-making. Clearly both of these strands are valid and carry support within the nation and Parliament. To ride rough-shod over either strand would therefore be foolish, so it makes the most sense if somehow our departure from the EU is able to give due weight to both of them.

And that is just what Mrs May claims that her “deal” achieves – a laboriously-constructed agreement that tries to accommodate both strands, but therefore inevitably satisfies neither. In that sense, the howls of protest from both sides may well suggest that the Prime Minister has actually got things about right! - for if either the Remainers or the Leavers were “cock-a-hoop” that would be a sure sign that the departure-deal was pitched too far towards one side or the other.

In view of this need to tread a middle path, respecting the interests of both strands as much as possible, is the Prime Minister not entitled now to receive support from MPs and the nation when the current deal comes before Parliament? Because of the complex realities of the situation, and in spite of the many protests against her, could anyone else really have done better? Whether we personally agree with this deal or not, the Prime Minister surely merits our respect and support for how she has stuck at the task in the face of endless difficulties, difficulties that are often exacerbated by the media’s instinct to contrive and prolong feverish debate. Christians are to be loyal citizens to the “powers that be” as far as is consistent with God’s Word (eg., Acts 4.19-20 and 5.29), and that is surely our calling in times such as these.

And so we come to the less obvious but highly important third strand concerning the underlying spiritual realities. As we have occasionally mentioned before in these Reflections, the “European Project”, which was born out of a sincere desire to ensure peace between Germany and France, has Roman Catholicism and humanism as its spiritual foundations, neither of which fits with Britain’s true spiritual foundation of Biblical Protestantism. Because of this deep foundational clash, among our other Brexit prayers we can continue to pray that the Lord will indeed release us from this union in which Britain has never felt quite “at home”. The fact is that ultimately this nation and the EU are each “marching to the beat of a different drum”, which explains many of the difficulties there have been over the years.

Please God during our departure from the European Union, our Christian leaders, from the monarch downwards, will re-affirm without apology our Biblical Protestant roots as a nation, for how we need to turn back to those roots from the bleak liberal, humanist agendas whose ugly fruits dominate the news bulletins.

“Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isaiah 51.1, KJV).

Thanks be to God, our leaving the European Union gives us a timely opportunity to do just that.

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