

390 “taking the knee”

We cannot quite move on yet from the police killing of George Floyd, because, far from others moving on, various seen and unseen groups, fuelled by incessant media coverage, are using that deed as the foundation for a mighty narrative, long-planned but now being constructed on top.

Two examples of this narrative are worth mentioning, which show both its nature and its power. The first is the common use in the media, in describing the two warring parties as “anti-racists” (with the sub-text of “goodies”) on the one side, and “far right groups” (with the sub-text of “stinkers”) on the other. But why not call the first party “far left groups”, which is exactly what they are, spearheaded by the avowedly communist “Black Lives Matter” movement (BLM)?

In the second example we are seeing members of police forces no less, and now also Premier League football players, with “Black Lives Matter” on their shirts, being instructed to “take the knee” over all this. It would take immense courage for anyone receiving that instruction NOT to “take the knee”, if he or she knows what is good for them! Is this not a scene straight out of Daniel Chapter 3 about that great “image of gold” set up by Nebuchadnezzar (vv 1-13)?

We mention briefly at this point some other lives that matter too. Government figures recently released show that in England and Wales in 2019 there were 209,519 abortions, the highest-ever recorded abortion figures, at an average of ... 574 per day. Were these appalling figures given prominence in any news bulletins? Where is the “taking of any knee” with tears of guilt and repentance over these daily horrors?

We are clearly in an era of stupendous double-standards, and until this profound, yet so casually disregarded, wickedness of mass abortion is confessed before Almighty God and rejected, His righteous judgments will very obviously hold sway. No wonder that many believe that God has allowed this Covid-19 pandemic to run in part as an urgent call for repentance over whatever harboured sins may be present.

In response to the current difficulties between the African and European sub-groups of the single human race, part of our pastoral calling as Christ’s followers is to be as “liberal” and as “conservative” as the Lord Himself. The “liberal” emphasis involves our holding back from instant judgment, while seeking to understand the fuller picture, and then to act

with fairness and mercy. We see one example of this, among the many others, in Jesus' gracious treatment of the anguished woman with "the issue of blood", in the face of nasty mutterings from the crowd about her (Luke 8.43-48 and parallels).

The "conservative" emphasis upholds God's authority, and the reality of righteousness and wickedness and of truth and falsehood. These truths mean that in the here-and-now we have real responsibilities and real accountability before God and others. On many Gospel occasions we see how Jesus spoke very bluntly, often to those in power who were not too keen to hear such "home truths" (eg., Matthew 23.1-33). The close of the incident with "the woman taken in adultery" (John 8.10-11) is a fine example of Jesus using both the "liberal" and the "conservative" approaches together – "I don't condemn you ... but go and sin no more".

As we think of other such examples in the Gospels, we find much to ponder over our own attitudes today. How easy it is in pastoral matters to be too lax or too fierce, causing harm to the people we are trying to care for: "Let no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in [his] brother's way" (Romans 14.13b, KJV). Come what may, we strive to do "everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (from Colossians 3.17).

We close this time with a few verses from Romans Chapter 13: the primacy of love (v.10); the need to wake up, cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light (vv.11-12 - it is armour, not a dressing gown, and it needs to be); the call to walk honestly, "putting on the Lord Jesus" and letting the desires of the flesh wither (vv.13-14); and in summary, from Romans 14.19, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another".

When all is said and done, the Day is coming when everyone who has ever lived will indeed "take the knee" – but "at the name of Jesus", confessing Jesus' Lordship "to the glory of God the Father" (from Philippians 2.9-11 / Isaiah 45.23).

Thanks be to God – what a wonderful prospect!

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