

## **477 A Lapping Tide      (March 2022 - Faith & Topical Issues)**

This Reflection is written with the Russian invasion of Ukraine now a week old. It is significant, and very wrong, that this war is between power blocs and nations which all share a common, though fractured, Christian heritage – Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant. We call to mind the heartfelt prayer of the Lord Jesus to His heavenly Father – “that they all may be one ... that they all may be one in us ... that they may be one, even as we are one ... that they may be made perfect in one” (from John 17.21-23, KJV). So far Jesus’ longing for our one-ness has gone unheeded down the centuries, being swept aside by political rivalries, mistrust and old theological quarrels. We long for the establishment of Jesus’ kingdom on this earth (eg., Revelation 20.1-6).

Being aware of the gravity of this situation we continue to pray earnestly for the strong hand of Almighty God over what is happening. We ask Him to foster on all sides restraint of speech (the tongue remains “a little member ... Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”, from James 3.3-4); restraint of action; and genuine discussions between wise people who know their history, to bring this crisis to an end.

We do well also to acknowledge before the Lord that both “the West” and Ukraine will have played some part too in allowing this crisis to develop – how great a part is debatable - by repeatedly downplaying Russia’s concerns over NATO’s eastward expansion. This does not justify Russia’s invasion, but reminds us that the causes of any conflict are often more complicated than they might appear: “... all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God”, that “all” including nations as well as individuals (Romans 3.23).

This crisis in Ukraine is an unwelcome but timely example of what we have been considering in recent Weekly Reflections, namely the virtues and follies of democracy (as found in Ukraine), in comparison to other systems of government, such as “autocracy” as found, in practice if not in theory, in Russia. We have noted how in Britain over the decades, numerous God-defying laws have been passed by only a few hundred MPs in each case: the actions of these few MPs, though perhaps well-meant at the time, affect the lives of millions thereafter, as has happened so appallingly with the Abortion Act of 1967 for instance.

There is no denying that “the Church” in Britain across its denominations has also been pretty feeble in standing up for God’s Word in the face of the liberal, God-ignoring laws that have been introduced since 1952.

Christians in Britain, due to Christianity having a prominent place within our society down the centuries, are not that proficient at defending the Faith and attacking its opponents; thankfully, useful precedents of such attack and defence still abound for our guidance in the New Testament.

A final point concerns how the democratic process is like the tide coming steadily up a beach, lapping round what we can term “the Establishment”, that is, those permanent, mainly Christian-derived, features of our society which until now have been beyond challenge. Examples include: marriage and the nuclear family; family inheritance; privacy; heterosexuality; freedom from undue state interference; private ownership; justice available for all; habeas corpus; the House of Lords; the established Church of England; and ultimately the monarchy.

As we can see, democracy gives us little defence against foolish, or just plain wrong, laws being passed. There is thus little to stop some or all of “the Establishment” being swept away by the lapping democratic tide in times to come, be that for better or for worse. All it takes is for the government of the day to repeat over and over again, “This proposed new law is popular / right / necessary - for the country at this time”, and, barring massive, prolonged, televised, public demonstrations against the proposal, the new law is duly entered in the Statute Book, perhaps in spite of much deep prayer behind the scenes.

In the sight of Almighty God, the wielding of power in Britain over the centuries has been slowly transferred from the monarch alone, via the barons and the Roman Church, via the parliaments and the mercantile “middle class”, finally to “the people” themselves – true parliamentary democracy, with its obvious strengths and weaknesses.

Edmund Burke famously wrote: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”. As God’s people redeemed in Christ, we are still to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (from Matthew 5.13-14) whatever the system of government may be, as a reminder that all people, whether they like it or not, dwell under the gaze and governance of Almighty God, the One who really rules, OK!

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