Proverbs 29v18 Europe ??

The 24th of March is Lady Day, the Feast of the Annunciation. The day falls exactly nine months before Christmas, and commemorates the message the Angel Gabriel brought to the Virgin Mary to tell her that she would give birth to Jesus. So the day heralds good news, deliverance, salvation.

Was it by design that on that very day sixty years ago, the leaders of six European countries bound themselves together in a treaty that would bring into being the European Economic Community, what we now call the European Union? Those who originated the European project after the devastation of war were largely Christian politicians and statesmen. They fervently believed that such a treaty was the only way to save the continent from future wars and ensure that nations would flourish together by working together. They were deeply influenced by the insights of Catholic social teaching. Hopes were high as they signed the Treaty of Rome on Lady Day 1957.

Last Wednesday the British Prime Minister Theresa May sent a letter to the President of the European Union Donald Tusk which started the process by which Britain will leave the Union. She was thus fulfilling what the majority of British people who voted in the referendum last summer requested. Is this act of the British Government wise or is it an act of folly?

Such a debate seems a long way from the pulpit, particularly the pulpit of an American Church. Most American Christians are adverse to churches getting involved in politics, with the exception of a limited number of topics. So many churches have spoken out on topics such as abortion, women’s rights and Lebian, gay, bisexual and transsexual issues. Churches in Europe are more likely to tackle a wider range of issues. The reason for this difference has nothing whatsoever to do with how true these churches are to the bible or the tradition of the church. It is bound up with the history of these churches and the culture in which they are set.

 This church is in Germany and the events of the 20th century have left an indelible mark on the churches here. They are very insistent that they do not want to repeat the mistakes they made in the past. The majority of Christians welcomed the founding of the Third Reich and were enthusiastic supporters of Adolf Hitler. So today both the Evangelical Protestant of Germany and the Catholic church work very closely with many of the established parties and vet any new developments with great vigour. However, it is a frequent criticism of the Protestant church that much of its criticism is too trendy and superficial.

 So how do we as citizens of democratic states, in various parts of the world, fulfill our obligations to society. Of course before we even begin to answer that question, we must ask another. Why should we be interested in politics ? Why not leave it to others?

 As Christians we are called to be those who are the salt and the light of the world. Like salt we are to be those who preserve a society from decay and destruction and as light we are there to show the ways of God to the world, so that people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. This is clearly a task for each and every Christian. But we cannot fulfil that task unless we band together with others to do God’s work.

But how do we avoid the danger of simply being trendy rather than having a prophetic vision of the future of our countries?

A concern for the future of the nation is not new. If we go back thousands of years before the coming of Christ, we find that in almost every country of the Ancient Near East, there were prophets who spoke out in the name of God and foretold the future. We are familiar with the great Jewish prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah and the so called minor prophets such as Amos or Habbakuk. They did a tremendous job of declaring God’s word to their day and generation. But they worked closely with another tradition that is not as well known. This is the so called wisdom tradition. This movement had one simple question is this wise or is it stupid ? They understood wisdom as leaving its mark on everything well made or well judged,. So it includes a great variety or words and actions. “In other words it is at home in the realms of nature and art, of ethics and politics, to mention no others and forms a single basis for judgement on them all. Like prophecy it begins with a fundamental trust in God and a desire to serve him. And both worked hard to **make people think. The prophers repeatedly said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” Hos 4, 6 Is 1.3 5.13 Jer 4.22)** Being ignorant is no excuse to God, For where there is no vision the people run wild.

This happened to the people of God, just after they came out of Egypt and were in the wilderness. As Moses comes down from Mount Sinai he sees the people running wild and that Aaron his deputy had led them get out of control. And so they became a laughing stock to their enemies. As Solomon, the wide king of Israel was to write in the book of Proverbs, Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint, but blessed is the one who hears wisdom’s instruction. Proverbs 29v18

This is our calling in our time. To seek out the ways of the Lord. The details of his way are often not easy to find in our daily life. But the broad stokes are as clear as a bell. The small details are not there and sadly the Jewish faith at the coming of Christ had lost its way by looking for them. As Jesus put it, they were putting their water through a sieve to get rid of the gnats and then swallowing camels. In other words they want to follow unthinkingly a code of rules, instead of thinking out what it means to be a follower of Christ at this moment in time and in this place. We don’t have to start from scratch, we not only have the Bible, but also a great wealth of Christian tradition. Part of that tradition are good commentaries. Franz Delitzch a German bible commentator of the 19th century pointed out the benefits of seeking for wisdom. “People are truly happy , when they earnestly and willingly subordinate themselves to the word of God”. So whether we are thinking about our relationships, or how much alcohol we drink, or where we go shopping or the political scene. Our aim is that of Paul, a peson full of the Holy Spirit. In I Cor 2:15 he says, “The person with the Spirit makes judgements about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgements For Who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him. But we have the mind of Christ.

What a hope, but what a challenge.

“Follow these laws” Whatever promises of prosperity and wellbeing were made in the past, these would only be realised if the people embraced laws and principles that embodied justice, truth, compassion and inclusion for everyone. Simply arriving at their desired destination was not enough; prosperity is founded on principles and actions. Similarly, our future does not simply depend on a decision we made at a referendum, irrespective of whether we believe it was right or wrong, but the kind of society that we build together in its wake

What principles are important to you?

Which do you think should shape the future of our society?

•• “Teach them to your children” Much of the language speaks of engaging with future generations and taking actions that served the long-term well-being of the nation. The people who had ﬁrst left Egypt were not the ones who entered the new land – it was their children and grandchildren. Their entire journey was a personal sacriﬁce for the sake of the next generation.

What do you think we can do to safeguard the well-being of future generations?

•• “What other nation?” However, we relate to the EU or any other political entity, we are part of an international community. The narrative reminds us that respect for a nation comes not through oneoff actions or political grandstanding, but by an ongoing commitment to building a wholesome and just society.

What do we want to be known for in the world?

Prayer