

Epiphany III St Bride January 21st, 2018

‘BE not wise in your own conceits.’

St. Paul writes this brief note to the Roman church. Of course, Rome was at that time the centre of the universe. In our day we have many of these ‘centres’: indeed, conceited man has even invented a word for them ‘world cities’. And you might guess that this ambition to be named such a city drives many of our neighbours in many cities to assert all sorts of wisdom in their efforts to achieve this meaningless goal.

The problem is widespread: but it is a problem which has resulted from the gradual expulsion from the political and governance environment of any consideration of a supreme being, the Creator, God, in the preparation and development of any future strategic direction for many countries of this world. In France, this policy is called ‘laïcité’ and dates from the drastic separation of church and state at the time of the Revolution in that country: but the influence of the political situation which that event was widespread: imbuing those who were at the same time working to develop the American constitution, affecting the French already present in Canada and elsewhere around the world.

The French revolution took place from 1789 to the end of that century: the USA declared independence in 1776: but it has only been in more recent times that we have seen the encroachment of many of the factors behind this laicity policy to encroach on our faith life as Christian believers. There are many who fear the encroachment of Islam in this society: I argue that, to defend against that risk, it might be more important to guard against the encroachment of liberal laicity which is the major threat facing this nation today.

If a society develops where man is the initiator of all projects to enhance our life: if man regards himself as the supreme being, then man is indeed ‘wise in your own conceits’: of three major political parties in this country, two require that to be a candidate for election representing those parties, the candidate must attest his or her support for ‘women’s rights’ – including abortion, as well as the rights of those who choose to follow ‘same-sex’ lifestyles. For Christian faithful, both situations mentioned are sin: it is therefore impossible for the devout Christian to endorse such policies.

The fact that many of those involved in the political systems of the country will still regard themselves as Christian simply reflects the fact that Satan does not work in one sector of life in isolation: but he starts wherever he perceives an opportunity for growth in disruption and chaos: I used to argue that it was Satan who developed the atrocious old ‘Cape Horn interchange’ on the Loughheed highway: of course, Satan does the very opposite of the next words St. Paul wrote to the Romans.

‘BE not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.’

If we confess Jesus Christ as Saviour, we cannot apply the eye for an eye when challenged by violence: we must see that justice is done in a fair and proportionate manner. If you suffer abuse, you are to seek advice and good counsel, and justice and reimbursement for loss, you are not to go out and buy weapons to destroy the adversary. That also fulfils the next precept: ‘Provide things honest in the sight of all men’: if a society eliminates the – in many cases, Christian - moral and ethical precepts which have governed it, there is a grave risk that those who seek to profit from the confused standards which result will succeed: and corruption follows: as we read

before, Satan does not work in one sector of life in isolation: but he starts wherever he perceives an opportunity for growth in disruption and chaos. If you want to see what results, you might review the current situation in South Africa, in Congo (DRC), and in South Sudan.

For this last counsel: 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' – we can look to the Gospel for this day, in St. Matthew chapter 8. 'And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean.' How did Jesus know that this man was deserving of healing? Well, he certainly did not come to be harmed or left cast aside! \But first of all, he showed his faith in that he worshipped Jesus: another way of saying his faith shone forth from his gaze: he was enraptured and it must have been hard for him to say the words he had practiced for such a moment: 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean'.....

And then Jesus meets the centurion, who asks that Jesus help cure his 'servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented'. Once again, this man was not wise in his own conceit: he speaks the words which we repeat at each Eucharistic feast: 'The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.' His faith shines forth in his words, and Jesus tells him: 'Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.'

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