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## EDITORIAL

### Untied Kingdom

Brexit – it's one thing to say 'No' to EU rule, but will Britannia say 'Yes' to heaven's rule? **David Andrew** looks into a matter of national security...

**The logic is simple really... If your society is fragmented, your roads increasingly chaotic, your leadership confused and the populace showing distinct signs of insecurity and disorder, you need to entrust leadership to a 'safe pair of hands' – someone whose voice induces calm and who has the wisdom and commanding authority to restore order. But what if the only person who fits that description is... GOD? And what if no-one thinks Him suitable? What then?**

Brits of all persuasions are awakening to the implications of 'Brexit' – Britain's impending exit from the EU – and that 'safe pair of hands' was never more needed, nor more scarce in the corridors of power. This is not to condemn our politicians. Who of us could take on their responsibilities right now and do a better job? We are commanded to pray for them, and the command is not selective to suit our politics! (1 Timothy 2:1-4) What we need urgently is a leader with the humility and integrity to say publicly to God: *"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you"* (2 Chronicles 20:12). Such a leader we could follow safely into any uncertainty, any future.

#### Strong weakness

The world's first leader to utter this prayer was ancient Judah's king Jehoshaphat. What he discovered when God answered became a great personal revelation to the apostle Paul some 900 years later: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Paul's entirely logical response to God's revelation was: *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In our day, when determined humanism has sanctified self-sufficiency, there could be no more unpopular message. For any national leader to publicly pray Jehoshaphat's prayer today would be political suicide; he would be sacrificing his career for the sake of national security (hmmm... interesting thought). He could anticipate at least as much jeering and ridicule from his own benches as from the opposition. To sit in a TV studio and declare publicly "we don't 'do' God" is a cynical sound bite, a vote-catcher directed at a post-Christian society. The reality is that God doesn't 'do' politicians who don't 'do' God. They're on their own. The proud, self-sufficient, God-denying, politically correct leader is, in reality, a threat to national security – and certainly to his or her own eternal welfare. If you have a powerful aircraft and enough fuel, you can defy gravity, but you can't deny it. When your own resources run out you'll have to reckon with gravity's existence. Anyone can fly without God – but only for a time...

'United' barely describes the kingdoms of 'this sceptred Isle' anymore; 'UNTIED' is tragically more accurate. Britain's newly reclaimed national sovereignty is already under internal stress from disgruntled Scottish Nationalism. Whether we are happy or not with the outcome, Brexit has revealed a confused electorate – split almost 50/50 along national lines – and, as Parliament struggles with the fallout, the immediate future for the nation is also clouded with political confusion.

Whether confusion is national or personal, it follows a very simple cause and effect: **confusion is proportionate to distance from God**. Confusion is the natural partner of self-reliance. *"God is not a God of confusion but of peace"* (1 Corinthians 14:33). The more individuals and nations distance themselves from God's rule, the more they invite confusion. This is why *"righteousness exalts a nation"* (through fellowship with God) but *"sin is a disgrace to any people"* (who deny their need of His wisdom). As the New Living Translation helpfully renders: *"Godliness makes a nation great"* (Proverbs 14:34).

### Godliness - revealed

There it is. If you ever wondered what put the 'great' in 'Great Britain', it was 'godliness', pure and simple. And just what is godliness? Is it imagined moral superiority that gives us the right to lecture others? Not even close... There are, of course, and probably always will be, caricatures of Christianity where religionists do just that. These moralising finger-waggers totally misrepresent the gospel of Jesus Christ and present the world with a hideously distorted image of godliness.

Paul described Christian godliness as a 'mystery'. If that sounds unhelpful, we need to unpack how the New Testament uses that word. To the apostles, a 'mystery' was not something clouded in obscurity, but a concept, veiled and dimly perceived in Old Testament times, now fully revealed and explained with the arrival of the Lord Jesus. Godliness is a 'mystery' only in the sense that it awaited fuller revelation. Jesus revealed and defined its meaning, though there had always been godly individuals in Israel's history whose lives were a forward glimpse of what Jesus would fully reveal. So what is "the mystery of godliness" – and what does it have to do with post-Referendum Britain?

If we ask the question 'who' rather than 'what' the germ of the answer is in the question. When Paul speaks of the "mystery of godliness" (Gk: *eusebeia*), his very next word is a revelation: "he...". Even if you prefer the AV's alternate translation "God...", the effect is the same. Godliness is defined by a PERSON namely, the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. *"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory"* (1 Timothy 3:16). Clearly, Paul is speaking of the Lord Jesus.

The word Paul used would have been widely understood in ancient Greek culture. Classical philosophers also used *eusebeia* to describe the proper behaviour of a worshipper who truly feared the gods. The root of the word implies danger (i.e. inspiring awe, reverence, fearful respect). Although He was (and is) also the Son of God and fully divine, Jesus rejoiced in the title 'Son of Man'. As such, He is the Perfect Man, the perfect display of godliness – what the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) describe as 'the fear of the Lord'. **Jesus is humanity as God intended; humanity before the Fall. He is Man at one, not at odds, with God.** This is godliness.

### Fearing God's ... absence!

How then does the 'fear of the Lord' manifest in this Perfect Man? Answer: "in GOD-DIRECTED LIVING". Jesus put it like this: "...*the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise*" (John 5:19).

Throughout the ages, people have 'feared the gods' as remote, capricious beings – conceived as 'super-humans' with all our worst traits greatly amplified so as to strike terror into mere mortals. This is the exact opposite to the 'fear of the Lord' revealed in our Scriptures. **Pagans fear the presence of their gods; we fear the absence of our God.** Solomon counselled: "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths*" (Proverbs 3:5-6). This is the "mystery of godliness" revealed perfectly in Jesus' relationship with the Father. **The huge deficit of godliness in political, personal and even church life is the greatest single threat to Britain's national security – bar none.** True godliness is not the badge of the morally superior; it is life directed by and visibly dependent on the wisdom of God.

Today's twisted thinkers increasingly equate fundamentalist Muslims and fundamentalist Christians – as if the butchers of Baghdad and Aleppo, who see themselves as superior to the 'infidel', have done for their world what the servant-hearted Wesleys, Whitefield, Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, Fry, Mueller and Spurgeon did for theirs – as directed by their Servant King.

### Peace... and peace

When we preach the Gospel, we are boasting about the goodness of God, not our own. We have no basis for boasting about ourselves, even less for imagined superiority over other sinners: "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). On the basis of the Gospel we are justified freely by His grace and, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Men at peace with God have no incentive to be at war with each other, and every incentive to share this good news with others – even their enemies. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, attempted to do exactly that and was dragged out to be stoned for his troubles; but he died praying: "Lord do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). All the early missionaries had to make a decision. Jesus and His apostles clearly taught that His witnesses would be persecuted; that believers were to bless and not curse when this happened. Missionaries had to decide to 'die before they left home'. If a patriot seeks the highest welfare of his nation, then the Gospel preacher is a patriot to every nation – and bigot to none. Nationalism proves, after all, to be a danger to its own people, because it is an expression of corporate self-interest at odds with the corporate self-interest of other nations – the favourite pretext for history's endless wars.

### National security

We Christians need a fresh view of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for our day. We need to see that the Gospel is inseparable from national security as well as individual hope. The core Gospel message is "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20) What message could be more urgent in Britain today? When a nation's persistent moral rebellion says "Hands off!" to God. That's exactly what He does. It's called 'judgment'. He removes His restraining hand from the nation's own destructive choices and permits them to run their course. He is 'slow to anger'.

He can wait hundreds of years before reckoning with rebellion, but His tolerance of evil has a limit and reckoning is a certainty.

The nation that rejects God and His messengers is rejecting peace with God – and inviting confusion to govern its affairs. All the security summits and cabinet shuffles in the world will bring no answer to the chaos of godless citizenship. Generous hospitality, one just and fair law for all, including the immigrant – these are Biblical principles first taught by God Himself to the Hebrew people He rescued from slavery. Wilberforce fought the wickedness of slavery precisely because he feared God – and feared for Britain...

Hospitality and equity are gifts of God – but when God's gifts are not submitted to God's wisdom they find expression on a lower level. Hospitality degenerates into the Babylonian insanity of 'multiculturalism', twisted notions of equity produce Communism and twisted patriotism produces Nazism and every form of racism.

### Exit: EU terms or God's?

If we continue on our present godless course, Britain's exit from the EU will be an experience of judgment and ruin. Only with God's help can an ungodly nation like Britain escape the clutches of an ungodly institution like the EU. Otherwise, invoking the Lisbon Treaty (which keeps exit terms firmly in the grip of the EU) will be like asking the mullahs of Iran for their blessing to leave Islam. We will not like the terms of the exit.

The people of Britain have spoken to the EU – but, far more urgently, the nation needs to speak to God. Words like "Sorry" and "Lord" need to become part of national vocabulary – but that's never going to happen without fearless, self-forgetting preaching of the Gospel in the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever the cost, Britain – and her churches – need to hear the Gospel again.