

How can we face the future with FAITH, HOPE & VISION?

Nehemiah 2:17 'You see the trouble we are in? Come, let us rebuild the wall!'

Will we, like Nehemiah, respond to the challenges of today with faith? or with panic activity? will our works be faith-based? Do we have faith in God for the future? for Europe?

- Jim's survey: - sobering, revealing false hopes
 - shakings of God: marxist world, muslim world, world of mammon
- Ultimate hope, proximate hope
 - *temporal hope: what we can desire and envisage reflecting within this world the ultimate hope of a new creation - Baukham*
- What vision, faith, hope for Europe?
 - Jean Monnet: *'I have always been a believer in Harry Truman;'s saying, where there is no vision the people perish!...' Monnet didn't know his Bible, but he had vision for Europe. What vision do we, who know our Bibles, have?*

The paradox of EUROPE:

- the continent most shaped by the gospel, yet the continent which has most suppressed the knowledge of God (Rom 1)
- the nursery of Christianity yet now the most needy, challenging and strategic mission field
- from pre-Christian to post-Christian pagan cf. virgin and divorcee (Newbiggin)
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What made Europe Europe?

How did Europe get her soul?

- see map of world, with continents
- Europe the one continent that is not a continent
- western peninsular of Eurasian landmass
- where did our foreparents come from? the East
- what worldview did they have? polytheistic?
- what languages do we speak? Indo-European
- So why are we not simply called western Eurasians?
- How did Europe get such a strong identity, distinct from the East?

Answer: THE BIBLE!

- **The story of Jesus** has been the single greatest factor shaping Europe's past
 - why not the future also?

- **The Bible** has been the main source of inspiration for Europe's culture
 - influencing art & music, agriculture and gardening, architecture & design, business & economics, education & training, health care & social welfare, language & literature, time & history, human dignity & rights, law & justice, politics & democracy, science & technology...

- **Truth and love** - the soft powers of Christianity that has steadily and consistently brought transformation to Europe. (not half-truths and fear).
- **God's faithful minorities** have had a totally disproportionate impact on the course of European history, shaping society and culture through the soft powers of Christianity, *truth and love*, despite the negative examples of some church history, bringing renewal and reform throughout the centuries.

Yet today: the reality of secularisation:

Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age* - last sentence of chapter on Religion Today, p535: *We are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee.*

In search of Europe's soul

- through the process of secularisation, Europe has lost her soul, the Christian foundations
- Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, 1992: *unless we find a soul for Europe within the next ten years, the game will be over.* Is today's crisis evidence of this, or is there still hope?
- Robert Schuman: the soul and spirit of Europe
 - *soul*: that which animated European life and society - Biblical worldview;
 - *spirit*: the recognition of this soul and the choice for solidarity of this family of peoples shaped by this worldview, in order to bless the world (i.e. not exclusive)
- The process of secularisation: 'secular' a church word, 'of this age'; Reformation brought secularisation of monasteries > later deism (absent God) was big step towards atheism ('no God');
- today aggressive atheism > fear of renewed religion (See 'God is back', by two Economist editors) but secularism, atheism, humanism are parasites - they have no independent roots of their own; they live off what they oppose; secular Europeans are squatters living in a house built on Judaic-Christian foundations.

What can we hope for Europe today?

1. SHALOM, right relatedness, body life, forgiveness, dignity, justice, peace, freedom, equality...

SCHUMAN: *what kind of Europe would please God?* Love for God and neighbour; forgiveness, even of the Germans: (*De Gualle - treason!*)

Four perspectives:

- 1. What is God's will?** it is always God's will for his will to be done - also in Europe!
- 2. Death and resurrection** - when things get bad, we know God will do something new.
- 3. Wheat and tares** - the best of times, the worst of times
- 4. Faithful minorities** - a consistent story of disproportionate impact.

Paul writing to the Ephesians: where was he when he wrote these amazing passages about the church?

In a Roman prison. To whom was he writing? a handful of new believers in a powerful, intimidating pagan city famed with the temple of Diana. There was no evidence of the truth of Paul's assertions. But time passed, Rome fell and Paul's message triumphed!

Let us not be intimidated. Let us take the long view and realise that God is sovereign in history!