



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

27th January 2023

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23-24

Recently I watched a documentary about a conflict just within living memory in which dreadful genocides were committed. It questioned some on the perpetrating side, now very elderly, about whether they knew what was happening, and to what extent they felt responsible or guilty. How did they see it decades later; did they regard themselves as perpetrators?

Their responses varied; some were surprising. At one extreme a man had no compunction over what happened and his part in it; he still believed in the ideology that had led to mass murder; he regretted the deaths, but now believed that the 'final solution' should have been reached another way. Another outlined the classic 'excuses': "I didn't realise what was happening, if I had I would have acted differently; I was only obeying orders; I had no choice, if I had resisted I would have been shot."

Perhaps the most moving response was that of a man interviewed by college students. He got heated when challenged by those who were not brought up with the same ideologies and pressures. But his closing remark, passionately expressed to those young people, was "Don't be blinded!"

It reminded me of a current discussion from history: To what extent were European people (and Churches) aware of the slave trade which supplied cheap primary products and brought the wealth behind many of today's cities and institutions? Should reparations be made now, and if so, how? Then there are the complex arguments about subsequent colonialism and -for us as Christians- its role in mission and doctrine.

And what of today? With all the spectrum of media there is no concealment from genocide, terrorism, persecution, corruption, injustice, exploitation, profiteering, trafficking, violent rejection of democratic process, and so on. No-one can say "I didn't know".

Scripture shows this is not new. At the end of Judges we read, *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit."* (21:25); and it didn't get much better when there were kings! In Romans 1 and 2 Paul sums up in graphic terms what happens when people turn from God; then he concludes, *"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (3:23). So we are all -in a sense- both victims and perpetrators of a fallen world. Early last century a similar discussion was conducted in the press: 'What is wrong with the world?'. Writer G. K. Chesterton responded in The Times, *"Dear Sir, I am."*

We thank God that this verdict is not the end of His salvation story. Paul goes on, *"...all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* This is our Gospel. God is not finished with us or with His world, even though at the moment, *"the whole of creation (is) groaning"*, In His good time, *"the creation ... will be liberated"* (Romans 8:22 and 21). The challenge for each of us is to cultivate that inner life with God, even through the valleys of shadows, expressing His proactive love in today's world in whatever ways we can, knowing that on another day we will be enfolded in His arms in a new, tear-wiped world.