



Justice and Truth in the Public Square

By Peter Barnes

It is fearful how often the condition of ancient Israel resembles that of the modern world. One example of this is found in Isaiah 59: 'Justice is turned back, and righteousness is far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey' (Isa.59:14-15a).

A modern journalist could have written these words, assuming there is a modern journalist with some understanding of these things. Because Dietrich Bonhoeffer became involved in the conspiracy against Hitler, he had to be unnaturally guarded in all relationships, and he lamented: 'We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds. We have been drenched by many storms. Experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open. Are we still of any use?' The world had descended into terrible evil, and there was little common grace left.

In 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, William Butler Yeats, a troubled Irishman of Protestant background but steeped in theosophy, wrote his oft-cited poem The Second Coming:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Despite the prevailing belief in progress, civilization did not get any better, and W. H. Auden, for example, was to label the 1930s a 'low, dishonest decade'. Nazism confronted Communism, but it was difficult to tell the difference. Georges Clemenceau,

nicknamed 'The Tiger', was Prime Minister of France in World War I, and he famously wondered whether the USA was the only case of a people who had become decadent without ever going through the stage of being civilized. By the twenty-first century the whole Western world is vulnerable to the same charge – or at least the first part of it.

JUSTICE IS TURNED BACK.

There is a well-founded and widespread suspicion that justice and the legal system do not necessarily have much to do with one another. Laws are increasingly based on what is perceived to be public opinion or in step with 'the right side of history'. One only has to accuse one's opponent of being out-dated, and any number of tribunals will side with you. Justice in its traditional sense has lost its meaning. There is a lack of law and grace, since the former gives meaning to the latter. Instead, we are often treated to justice carried out by electronic lynch mobs. This is without dealing with justice which is so long delayed that it becomes a form of injustice.

TRUTH HAS STUMBLERD.

It is not just that there is fake news; there has always been fake news. But there is hardly anything so ridiculous that it might not be true. The Daily Mail and Vanity Fair reported on 3 March 2019, via the royal reporter Katie Nicholl, that Prince Harry and Meghan will raise their child as gender neutral, and will not enforce any male or female stereotypes on the youngster. Anything is possible! Gender is fluid but sexuality is fixed! Prince William has recently taken on the guise of Prince Valiant in favour of LGBTQTI rights. Republic or constitutional monarchy – neither seems to offer a solution to anything at the moment.

Jussie Smollett (whom I had never heard of until recently) played the victim as a homosexual African American actor when he claimed that he was subject to a racist and homophobic attack by two men wearing MAGA (Make America Great Again) caps who even put a noose around his neck. It turned out that the so-called hate crime was a stitch-up which Smollett paid for, with a cheque no less. The case was then strangely dropped, but the publicity remains.

Those who turn to the political left for some kind of answer see the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) demonize Joe de Bruyn, a long-term pillar of the union movement, over his opposition to same-sex marriage. Those on the right fare little better as corporate Australia, in the form of QANTAS, the ANZ bank and the like, champion what God calls an abomination. When the British Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, introduced the bill to legalise same-sex marriage, he did so on the grounds that he believed in marriage. Malcolm Turnbull said something similar, and declared that life was all about love – unless one was replaced as party leader.

THOSE WHO TURN FROM EVIL ARE PREYED UPON.

This is what can happen; the prudent are forced to keep silent

in evil times (Amos 5:13). When evil rules, it is the one who departs from evil who becomes the outsider. We are witnessing what remains of a once-great culture being pincered between violence and degradation. In the 1940s T. S. Eliot warned: 'If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes. Then you must start painfully again, and you cannot put on a new culture ready made ... You must pass through many centuries of barbarism.'

Our first task must concern the Church. We cannot advocate Christianity because it may save the culture. We must advocate Christianity because it is true – the Son of God did die and did rise from the dead never to die again. All the alternatives are both untrue and, ultimately, degenerate. G. K. Chesterton once quipped that 'When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.' The recently deceased Australian poet, Les Murray, added an ominous codicil that 'They will bring blood offerings to it.' In the degradation of life and decency, so has it proved. To resist this will take courage that is born of faith.

*Peter Barnes is the editor of AP and pastor at Revesby
Presbyterian Church NSW.*