

Operation Nehemiah

Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Way Ahead: Returning Britain to its Christian Path*
 Barnabas Fund, £1 + p&p from Barnabas Fund, 9, Priory Row, Coventry CV1 5EX;
www.barnabasfund.org

For some years Barnabas Fund has been doing very good work aiding persecuted Christians worldwide. Under the leadership of Patrick Sookhdeo, Barnabas Fund is now also turning its attention to the plight of Christianity in the West, and especially in the United Kingdom.

This is a serious and soberly written pamphlet: but you would not think so from the typography. The invitation to read it soberly and seriously is impeded by the glossy-magazine style. The double columns are interrupted on every page by a tag-line or motto or example in blue handwriting-script across both columns, and in boxes are some more examples in white reversed out of yellow. (In artificial light yellow gets very pale, so read these bits by daylight.) Illustrations are mostly adapted road signs, an idea at least as old as the Tribune Group tract *Keep Left: One Way Only* of more than fifty years ago, and now a cliché. Type is a rather heavy sans-serif. Company annual reports now generally follow comparable typographical practice, and I expect I am not the only investor who suspects that this is done in order to discourage reading. At any rate, this sans face is quite unsuitable for a fifty-page pamphlet aiming to be read. It is necessary to make what may be thought to be a minor point at this length because to the extent that the medium is the message the medium in this case inhibits the message. It is not helped, either, by the cover-letter that introduces “our exciting new campaign, *Operation Nehemiah*”. Excitement is beside the point and also another cliché. What could be less exciting than contemporary “exciting” and is the point to be excited?

The message is a very important one, about Islamist impact in the West, and how the Christian Church may hope to survive. There is some disproportion between the parts. The detailed accounts of the combined impact on British society of the Islamist offensive, secular humanism, post-modernism and confusion within the Church, in the the first forty-four pages of the booklet, are very well done. They are too reasonable to be dismissed as “incorrect”, drawing succinctly together what we probably know vaguely already. The proposed remedy, “Operation Nehemiah: ‘Let us Start Rebuilding’”, takes only two pages.

As one in hearty sympathy with both the analysis and the recommendations, I comment that the latter are impracticable, for two reasons. (1) The enfeeblement of Christianity in the West has gone far too far to be reversed by Operation Nehemiah or any similar initiative. It will take more to make the Western nations return from whoring after some very strange gods. But Christians do believe in the power of the Spirit, and to God all things are possible, so at least this is one beginning.

The more important reservation is: (2) There is a flaw in the logic. Barnabas Fund consistently campaigns for human rights to be applied in Muslim countries. That is: freedom of religion as practised in the West should also be adopted in Saudi Arabia, as well as China, North Korea, Burma and other unlikely places. That it should be part of the foreign policy of Christian nations to encourage toleration of Christianity everywhere is surely true. One of the generally unnoticed results (but noticed by Barnabas Fund) of the Anglo-American aggression in Iraq has been the

introduction into that miserable state of anti-Christian persecution. Christianity, a steady minority presence in Iraq, and older there than Islam, has not quite been eradicated, but many Christians have been murdered and many more compelled to flee the country. It is a savage irony that some Islamists present the occupation of Iraq as a Christian crusade. But: the equality of all religions? How can this be held by anyone who believes that all but one are at best in some degree of error? (A position held by the vast majority of adherents of *all* the major religions except perhaps Hinduism and Buddhism, and certainly including Dialectical Materialism and Humanism as well as Christianity and Islam.)

In the historically Christian west we have gone much further than toleration. The modern Western “universal human rights”, which are not found in the Bible, is an insistence on the equality of human beings so that any political belief, any religion, any “sexual orientation” is exactly equal to any other. (With notable exceptions like the predilection for pederasty or child pornography.) The treatment of all religions as equal, and the freedom to pick from all the competing equal religions, cannot be advocated at the same time as the restoration of the West as a set of Christian societies. This is the difference between toleration and equality.

Salvation, of course, cannot be made compulsory. There is the freedom of the will. But it is not accidental that there is a far higher proportion of Christians in (shall we say) the U.S.A. and Canada than in Turkey. If there is a human universal here it is that we usually follow the tradition in which we are brought up in family and country. Islam has an immediate advantage in taking it for granted that the state is a divinely inspired society, which Christians too would have taken for granted until a couple of centuries ago.

The real aim of Operation Nehemiah ought to be to restore England as a Christian society. That is: a society where, for instance, Christianity is securely established, where infant baptism and marriage in church are both *ordinary*, where Sunday is the first day of the week and laws do not contradict Christian morality. The language has to be redeemed. One aim, even if it is about as likely as the Marxist withering away of the state, should be a reintroduction of test acts. The precedent of Bradlaugh is a bad one. This leaves other faiths, and even militant atheists, to be tolerated (within reason: Voodoo should not be tolerated): not persecuted, but not treated as equals.

The evangelical tradition as now practised overestimates the importance of individual conversions. *Society* has to be converted. Historically this was done by the conversion of kings and their courts. They then took individuals and the next generation with them. Next time it will have to be by the conversion of our own ruling classes and their “media”: a taller order because they are more securely sealed against reason than our ancestors the Saxons and the Danes. But perhaps there is enough reason about to make people realise that we don’t *really* believe that all beliefs are equal.

Islamist is the word for the vigorous, well-oiled set of movements that is spreading Islam in our world both to individuals and to states by way of the imposition of Islamic establishment and sharia law. What we need, and what Barnabas Fund should be pushing for, is the restoration of Christendom by way of a *Christianist* movement. After that it can be left to the Holy Spirit.