

EASTER 2003-04-17

The moment of triumphalism must have seemed tantalisingly brief to the hawks of the Whitehouse. Within hours, the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein was followed with scenes of looting and anarchy. Having won the military battle, the Bush administration appeared strangely unprepared for what to do next in Baghdad.

For Britain the question of what to do next must start with counting the collateral damage from the war. Not only the collateral damage in terms of humanitarian disaster but also in terms of our standing as a nation. Most immediately, there is the division it has put between us and our European partners. Our partnership with the Bush administration has put in jeopardy our friendship with Germany and France.

Then there is the damage which has been done to our standing in the developing world, where we are now widely perceived to have supported a war, not of liberation but of imperialism...

This is particularly true in the Islamic world. The most difficult strategic question in International affairs is how the west can now reach out to the Islamic world in peace and understanding. The work of religious leaders for many many years, in Christian and Islamic countries, struggling to come to a common interfaith understanding, lies in shatters. The fundamentalists on both sides have had all their worst judgments confirmed.

We are now in a unique phase of human history. Never before has there been so much destructive power in the hands of a single nation. The United States has military fire-power equal to the combined fire power of the next ten big spenders on defence, and under the Bush administration the annual addition to that power is more than the entire defence budget of most European nations.

At the same time, now, in the aftermath of this invasion of Iraq there is a new source of bitter resentment towards the west. The net effect of this is that we are more vulnerable to attack from terrorist

groups than ever before; terrorist groups who will probable have more firepower that they need to inflict massive destruction on western countries on an unprecedented scale.

Our faith as Christian people is being tested. Our hope of the coming of God's kingdom where the blessed ones are the peacemakers and where the meek will inherit the earth seems naïve and idealistic. Our belief in the resurrection of Christ seems in the present historical context a myth from a fairytale. How do we sing the Lord's song in this strange, violent and terrified world?

Two thousand years ago, the combination of the imperial power of Rome and the fundamentalism of the Jews brought about the death of the son of God. Perhaps the only message of good news that we can proclaim on this Easter Day 2003 is that the world has witnessed great darkness before this current war and in spite of all signs to the contrary, that man Jesus of Nazareth still appears to us and offers us the opportunity to place our hands in his side and believe. 'Peace be with You'

Amen