



February 2017 - #015

### Dear praying friends in Europe –

*In Romans 13, Paul writes to believers, living in the heart of the ruthless Roman empire ruled by the tyrannical Nero, on the subject of authorities. At first glance, the chapter might seem to promote a passive acceptance of authority. Yet the previous chapter calls for an active and subversive ‘enemy love’, a highly relevant perspective for us today given the dangerous shift in world politics towards nationalism, identity politics, racism and xenophobia.*

*For if Jesus is Lord, we are called to radical community and interrelatedness as members together of one body. We must be living in harmony with one another, loving our neighbours as ourselves, practising hospitality and not conforming to the spirits of this age of ‘our country first’.*



Jeff Fountain

### The politics of enemy love

Reading the new global landscape is confusing. The last two Canopy of Prayer letters highlighted how differently Christians can interpret the Trump presidency, for example. The same is true about European politics. What should our response be to the rising wave of populism and nationalism?

Polls for the Dutch elections, less than a month away, show Geert Wilders’ populist party to be leading his rivals. A good Christian friend posted a video clip of Wilders saying why Christians should vote for the so-called Party of Freedom (PVV): *All Christians should vote for my party because we are against Muslims and for Israel.*

Unfortunately many fall for this politics of fear and hate. We like simple answers. Yet it is imperative for us to mature politically; to learn to be discerning, to see the bigger picture, to ask what the fruit of populist policies will be and to view everything through the lens of the radical politics of God’s kingdom. What will this mean for international peace and stability, issues of justice, the healing of the environment, the lessening of the rich-poor divide, nations choosing the common good instead of seeking their own best interest? Do we really want to return to the days of competing nationalism?

A recent study *‘Saving the people’* (2016) reveals how populists hijack religion for their cause.

#### Please also pray for

- The Maltese presidency of the EU; smaller even than the Isle of Man, Malta has the heavy responsibility of steering the EU through the Brexit process, ironically involving her former colonial rulers.
- The choice of a US ambassador to the EU which will command mutual respect.

Populists create two groups of ‘enemies of the people’: the ‘elites’ and the dangerous ‘others’ who threaten the well-being of ‘the people’. ‘Our’ country has been hijacked, we are told. Globalisation, immigration and multiculturalism is undermining our ‘Judeo-Christian values’. Yet, as with Wilders, most populist parties are secularist and only pay lip service to Christianity as an identity, not as a faith. Christendom is placed above Christianity.

We must avoid the trap of ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking, of demonising the ‘others’. True Christianity requires radical loving, radical hospitality, a commitment to harmony and love of neighbour and ‘enemy’ alike, as Paul writes in Romans 12. We must insist our leaders stand for values of equality and dignity (not just of our ‘own’), choosing solidarity and the common good for our communities, cities, countries and continent.

#### Let’s pray for:

- European political and church leaders to stand for justice, righteousness and solidarity (1. Tim 2:2)
- Dutch believers to see beyond the politics of fear and hate (Roms 12: 9-14)
- For a constructive, informed dialogue about the kind of Europe that would please God: a community of peoples deeply rooted in the Christian values of equality, solidarity, peace and freedom. (Matt 6:10)