

The Spiritual State of the Nation

Clifford Hill (February 2015)

21st century Britain is a tragic example of the overindulgence of goodness; the liberal assumption that human nature is essentially good. Since the 1960s the culture of Western civilisation has been dominated by an increasingly aggressive form of liberalism that worships at the shrine of tolerance but practices intolerance.

Culture Change

There was much that needed to be challenged in the culture inherited from our Victorian forebears that had taken the social ranking of feudal agrarian society and institutionalised it into the social class distinctions produced by the Industrial Revolution. The liberalism produced by the Enlightenment in the 19th century challenged the inequalities and injustice that pervaded urban industrial society. It gained traction through the work of 18th century philosophers such as Rousseau whose thinking prepared the ground for the French Revolution.ⁱ

Rousseau believed in the innate goodness of human nature which still forms the basis of modern liberalism which has led to radical changes in the law and moral values of the nation. It is liberalism that has led to the liberalisation of laws on abortion, divorce, gambling, drinking alcohol, the deregulation of financial markets, the removal of censorship on pornography and violence: all of which have changed the culture of the nation. On the positive side liberalism has led the way in opposing racial and social prejudice and in measures to promote equality.

The Enlightenment

Evangelicals love to hate the Enlightenment; the triumph of intellect, rationality, social justice and human freedom. But a wholesale rejection of liberalism would undermine the gospel and the teaching of the New Testament where love and justice are not opposites but are a synthesis of creative dynamics. The teaching of Jesus challenged the establishment assumptions and traditions of his day: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”*.ⁱⁱ

The 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the appalling cruelty of the Nazis which has been broadcast to the world on television should surely dispel any illusions of the innate goodness of human nature. Anyone who has seen a baby in a temper tantrum or a bunch of infants fighting in the playground must surely recognise that there is something in human nature that needs refining. There are strong elements of liberalism in the gospel but where liberalism is divorced from its biblical roots in the nature and purposes of God it becomes a force for the destruction of human society rather than for its good. This is what has happened in Britain and the Western nations in recent history, the outcome of which is the inevitable destruction of Western civilisation.

Creating Disaster

At Jeremiah’s call to the prophetic ministry, of the six verbs describing his mission four were negative and two were positive – *“To uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant”*ⁱⁱⁱ. In order to transform a society that is heavily into corruption, some of its institutions and practices have to be torn down. This is a principle that runs right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, but it can only be understood in terms of the sovereignty of God and his nature and purposes as revealed to Isaiah: *“I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and **create disaster**; I, the Lord, do all these things”*.^{iv}

We do not like to think of God creating disaster; but the prophets were so convinced of the ‘sovereignty of God’ who held the nations in his hands ‘as a drop in a bucket’^v that they rarely distinguished between the direct actions of God and his allowable will. They knew that God only

had to remove his cover of protection over a nation or community and they themselves would bring disaster through policies dictated by their unredeemed human nature. At the same time God always offered (to **any** nation, not just to Israel) the opportunity of a change of direction from disaster to prosperity: *“If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and **not inflict on it the disaster I had planned**”*.^{vi}

Spiritual Forces of Evil

This is the situation that faces us in 21st century Britain; our corporate and personal values have become indelibly corrupted by spiritual forces of evil that are driving our society towards inevitable destruction and disaster. God has been warning us of this with ever increasing signs of urgency for the past 50 years but the warnings have been ignored with the consequences that we see around us and are even recognised by secular politicians who refer to “Broken Britain” and who bewail the behaviour of young people who binge drink, fight on the streets and who crowd into the A&E units of our hospitals. But how have we reached this point where a generation of young people have unrestrained personal moral values and care little for conventional social norms?

The Church in the Post-World-War II Period

A seismic change in the spiritual state of the nation took place in the post-World War II period. Politically the mood in the nation was for change. Despite the huge popularity of Winston Churchill (whom everyone acknowledged had won the war against the Nazis) the nation gave a landslide victory to a Labour administration led by a drab uninspiring little man - Clement Attlee. But although the politicians pressed on with fundamental social reforms that included nationalisation of basic services and industries and the establishment of the National Health Service, in terms of social attitudes the mood of the nation was conservative.

There was a strong desire for a return to normality after the upheavals of the war. The 1950s re-emphasised traditional morality as illustrated in the film *“Brief Encounter”* (1945) which explored a woman’s unbearable guilt through a mild affair that clashed with her role as mother and wife. Women who had worked during the war gave up their jobs to demobilised men and the nation accepted that a woman’s place was in the home. As late as 1961 the *Woman’s Own* was advising women that if they wanted “deep and safe happiness in marriage” they had to realise that a man wanted his wife to be at home looking after his children and “waiting for him with a decent meal and a sympathetic ear when he got home from work”.^{vii}

It was a time of austerity with rationing covering food, clothing, furniture and petrol which had a strong controlling effect upon social mobility. But this emphasis upon traditional values of family, home and personal morality also affected piety with impressive growth in church attendance, not seen since the 19th century. The mood of religious revival spread across Britain with the Billy Graham crusades of 1954 – 56 with nearly 2,000,000 people attending the 1954 London crusade and 1.2 million attending the 1955 Scottish crusade. Yet numbers going forward for spiritual counselling were minute: 1.2% in London and 2.2% in Scotland. The follow up for these enquirers for the most part was disgraceful showing the un-readiness of the church of all denominations to deal with spiritual growth. This was foreshadowed in a report *“Towards the Conversion of England”* (1945) published by the Church of England following an extensive enquiry ordered by the late Archbishop Temple. It had some telling phrases such as *“The Church cannot rise higher than the [spiritual] lives of its clergy”*.^{viii}

The enquiry noted that the church was largely unprepared for the evangelisation of the nation following the war and incapable of responding to the spiritual needs of post-World War Britain. It stated, *“It is alarming to discover how few clergy have been given any training in the work of an evangelist... Few have been used of God to bring a soul to new birth; and many are embarrassed and tongue tied when the occasion arises.”* Clergy had received *“inadequate training in prayer... and the ignorance of the Bible amongst many of the clergy (and particularly the younger clergy) is really horrifying”*.^{ix} This was the situation not only in the Anglican Church but also in most of the Nonconformist churches where sterile Biblical Criticism had dominated teaching in the theological colleges since the 1920s and gained strength in the post-World War II period through to the *“God is dead theology”* of the 1970s.

Historically the Charismatic Movement of the 1970s and 80s can be seen in hindsight as God re-equipping his church to deal with the rising onslaught of secularisation. Sadly the gifts of the Holy Spirit were accepted as the personal blessings of recipients rather than resources for fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus to his disciples. Internal division among the Christians and the lack of a biblical theology to deal with advancing technocratic urban industrial civilisation contributed to the steep decline in churchgoing and the rapid secularisation of society going into the 21st century. *“Where there is no vision, the people perish”*^x or as the Living Bible puts it *“Where there is ignorance of God, the people run wild.”*

The Sexual Revolution

It was the spiritual poverty of leadership in the traditional denominational churches at the beginning of the 1960s that opened the door to the Cultural Revolution that took place in that decade. A major feature was the Sexual Revolution which was a major step in the liberalisation of the culture. The widespread availability of the contraceptive pill enabled the sex act to be separated from the procreation of children and transformed intercourse into a leisure activity. This occurred at the same time as attitudes were changing in regard to social norms that had remained fixed for hundreds of years such as single motherhood, sex before marriage, cohabitation and short-term relationships with no long-term commitment.

The decriminalisation of homosexual acts in private between two consenting males in 1967 was a major step in promoting the Sexual Revolution which paved the way for a mega change of culture culminating in the redefining, in 2013, of the biblical basis of marriage to accommodate a tiny fraction of the population. Same-sex marriages became legal in March 2014. The untold harm that this redefinition of marriage, which is part of God’s act of creation has done, has yet to unfold. It will undoubtedly be yet another step in the weakening of family life and the generation of more dysfunctional families with devastating consequences in the lives of children. We are a nation of child abusers!

What the British people do not realise is the extent to which we have been brainwashed by a tiny minority of ultra liberal Marxist/anarchists intent on destroying the Judaeo-Christian heritage of the nation by undermining and destroying traditional family life. In 1972 a group of homosexual activists issued a manifesto in which they stated *“The family as the source of our oppression must be destroyed.”* From the 1960s they have been planning a campaign to change public opinion and step-by-step weaken family life so that eventually they could accomplish the destruction of the family and replace it with a communal system in which all forms of sexual intercourse would be permitted including paedophile activity. Their rate of success in changing the values of the nation to accept their practices has been quite phenomenal.

“The family is the building block of the nation” said Jack Straw in 1998 when Home Secretary. ^{xi} It is the family that gives stability to a nation: it gives identity to individuals and it provides for the socialisation of children including the passing on of the culture, social values and behavioural norms from one generation to the next. Destroy the family and you destroy social cohesion which will inevitably lead to the disintegration of social order which will lead to chaos and disaster on a scale that will make the Tottenham riots of 2011 look like a picnic.

Family and Marriage

The lack of spiritual strength in the churches in the greatest period of social change in the 20th century is reflected in the number of marriages that fell from 471,000 in the 1940s to 237,000 today ^{xii}; with the biggest change being effected by the Marriage Reform Act 1969 legalising no-fault divorce. The witness of the church to the central importance of the family for the health of the nation was virtually absent in the 1960s and 1970s; the result is that today 300,000 children suffer a broken home every year with overwhelming evidence that this causes lifelong harm to children including mental and physical health, emotional instability, educational disadvantage and poor employment prospects. A July 2013 survey of NEETs in England and Wales found that 37% rarely leave the house, 40% feel alienated from society, 33% have depression, 15% are involved in alcohol or substance abuse. ^{xiii}

The social effect of individual behaviour has a variety of consequences such as the 1.2 million hospital admissions each year that are related to alcohol or drug abuse and the 1 million violent crimes that are related to alcohol. ^{xiv} It is the loss of moral compass rooted in a vibrant spiritual experience of God that is having a widespread effect upon the economic prosperity as well as the moral well-being of the nation. The cost of family breakdown is now estimated to be £46 billion a year which contributes to the national debt of £1.33 trillion with 9 million people in the nation said to be in serious personal debt. ^{xv}

The Sexualisation of Children

The spiritual state of a nation is vividly illustrated by the way it cares for its children in passing on standards of the righteous behaviour from one generation to the next. The weakening influence of the church in the public space has allowed secular humanists to challenge convention and push the boundaries of social change over the past 50 years. This has affected every part of our personal and corporate value systems particularly in terms of behavioural norms. Today’s pop videos would have been banned as pornography 10 years ago. The collapse of moral values is accelerating exponentially. The foul language now used freely on television by comedians and entertainers would not have been tolerated a decade ago.

Sex education in schools would similarly have been banned as a corrupting influence upon children – we tell them how to do it and then we are surprised when they do, especially when 11-year-old boys rape seven-year-old girls. Of course, it is not only school sex education that influences children; it is the whole culture of the nation and the free availability of explicit sexual acts on the Internet which children can view on their home computers, their laptops, iPads and their smart phones. Will Hutton (by no means an evangelical Christian!) said in *The Observer* “Our extreme liberal stance has seen us deluged under a wave of pornography” ^{xvi}

Even the economy promotes the sexualisation of children through the widespread use of sex in the advertising industry and in commerce such as shops that sell pole dancing kits for seven-year-old girls! Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children’s Commissioner for England and Wales speaking as a

witness at the trial of Asian men in Rochdale who were accused of gang raping children said that Internet porn was changing the lives of children and distorting their understanding of normal sex. She cited instances of children performing sex acts that they had seen on video. She said *“I wish I could say this was uncommon, but it is quite common. What is being done is terrible. People need to put aside their denial”*^{xvii}

The Economy

The Judeo Christian heritage of the nation has traditionally been a powerful influence in business practice, particularly in terms of the Protestant ethic in Northern European nations as identified by Max Weber.^{xviii} Biblical principles have restricted usury and the charging of excessive interest rates. The collapse of the spiritual life of the nation from the 1960s allowed liberal principles to dominate the market. Margaret Thatcher is usually hailed as an ultra-right-wing politician: but her liberalist philosophy of the free market led directly to the deregulating of the City of London and the breaking down of traditional norms of self-regulation. These biblically-based practices rooted in the principles of honesty, integrity, loyalty and trustworthiness were enshrined in a booklet produced in the 18th century and still given today to Aldermen and Freemen of the City of London, every page of which has quotations from the Bible. These principles set the standard for business practice in the City that established it as the foremost financial trading institution in the world. London traders could simply shake hands on a deal and their word was their bond.

This biblical basis of business was swept away through the greed and corruption that invaded the City through the application of liberal free-market philosophy which brought about the collapse of large finance houses in the banking crisis of 2008. The damaging social effects of the banking bailouts and the ongoing austerity measures imposed upon the nation are incalculable. Instead of producing a more equal society the gap between the rich and the poor has widened in Britain as it has worldwide; with 99% of world wealth at the beginning of 2015 being estimated to be in the possession of 1% of the world's population.

Secularisation

The spiritual bankruptcy in the churches of 1960s' Britain was reflected in Margaret Thatcher's liberalism which overcame her Methodist background and Nonconformist practice of keeping Sunday as a holy day. In 1986 she introduced a "Shops Bill" to lift restrictions upon Sunday Trading. It was the only time in her political career that she was defeated. She anticipated opposition from the Labour benches due to pressures from Trade Unions who feared that their members would be forced to work on Sundays. But she did not reckon with the Christian convictions of her own backbenchers where a remnant of biblically-based spiritual principles still existed. Their widespread revolt was no doubt due to pressures from the "Keep Sunday Special" lobbyists and churchgoers in their constituencies.

Despite these pressures she rightly judged that the churches were now sufficiently weak in the public space to allow her to reintroduce the Sunday Trading Bill in 1994 which was passed despite widespread opposition from across the country. This marked another significant step in the secularisation of the nation and the weakening of traditional spiritual values as part of the national Judaeo-Christian heritage. It is the older generation who are still holding onto this heritage today although it is of little value in the lives of young people. This was demonstrated in research in the USA 2014 which showed that the level of secularisation increased with decreasing age as shown in the following table.

Elders (born pre-1945)	Boomers (born 1946 – 1964)	Busters (born 1965 – 1983)	Mosaics (born 1984 – 2002)
28%	35%	40%	48%

Source www.barna.org/research: 2014

Health and Welfare

It is of particular significance in assessing the moral and spiritual state of the nation to note indicators of the health and well-being of young people. Health statistics published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show a relentless rise over the past decade in the number of sexually transmitted infections, especially among those in the 15 to 24 age group. A similar rise is noted in the MSM (male sex with male) group where syphilis and gonorrhoea are the most common.

Among 15 to 19-year-old girls 4,000 in every 100,000 were diagnosed with STIs in 2013. In the 20 to 24 year group with both male and female the rate is similar, 4,000 in every 100,000. Of greater interest in reflecting the behaviour patterns of young people in these age groups is the number of STI tests that are carried out. In 2013 1.7 million girls in England and Wales in the age range 15 to 24 were tested for Chlamydia of whom 139,237 tested positive. This is an indication of the level of sexual activity in this age group. The advice given at Sexual Health Clinics is that a fresh test should be carried out with every change of sexual partner because multiple partners increases the risk of sexual transmission.

It is of considerable concern to many parents that the health clinics in schools do not communicate with parents who may be in total ignorance that their child is sexually active or is consulting the clinic for advice on sexual activity or sexually transmitted infections.^{xix} The school clinic can even arrange for a child to have an abortion without consulting the parents^{xx}. The liberalising of health care facilities for children is yet another factor weakening family life and undermining the mores of the traditional family.

Church and Religion

At church-based meetings in England and Wales during 2014 the Issachar Ministries Team addressed the subject of “Living in Babylon”. Each meeting started with a question answered by a show of hands. The question was “Is Britain a Christian country?” The answer in every meeting was an emphatic “No”, with only a tiny minority holding onto the view that Britain is still Christian. In every meeting people responded by stressing that the Christian heritage of the past has largely been lost, although there are still traces to be found in our legal system, our welfare practices and our concern for overseas aid. These still reflect Christian values which indicate that the spiritual basis of the nation rooted in biblical principles has not been entirely eradicated by secularisation.

The 2001 national census showed that 72% of the population counted themselves as Christians. The 2011 census showed that this figure had dropped by 13% to 59% although there were regional variations. London had only 48% claiming to be Christian whereas the North-East topped the regions with 68% and the North-West was close with 67%. These figures, of course, do not reflect church attendance where research shows that 15% of the total population are regular in church attendance – at least once per month.

Church membership figures show a decline in all the mainline denominations. By contrast the new churches in research published in September 2014 show a 9% increase in the years 2000 to 2013. This is outstripped by growth in the Pentecostal churches of 21% in the same period. The smaller denominations also showed an 18% growth. But the most spectacular growth was in Fresh Expressions where their small numbers of 19,000 leapt to 72,000 showing a 273% growth rate. All this growth in the new sectors of the Christian churches has not countered the overall decline in church attendance which continues to fall. This is in spite of the influx of Christian immigrants from Africa who now have the largest congregations in Britain.

Church Membership: Which Denominations are Growing?

Denominations	2008 membership	Percentage of change 2000-2013	2013 membership
Anglican	1,436,329	-5%	1,362,855
Baptist	208,488	-9%	189,152
Catholic	1,611,954	-13%	1,399,942
Independent	232,281	+3%	239,709
Methodist	270,832	-15%	231,357
New churches	195,993	+9%	212,911
Orthodox	390,659	+19%	464,194
Pentecostal	358,370	+21%	432,687
Presbyterian	814,669	-20%	649,067
Smaller denominations	155,425	+18%	182,723
Fresh expressions	19,300	+273%	71,900

Source: UK church statistics 2: 2010 – 2020 by Peter Brierley, 2014

The numerous kinds of 'fresh expressions' of Christianity, 'messy church' and the week-day meetings are all showing healthy growth rates which is a trend that church leaders ought to take very seriously. The most spectacular growth has no reliable statistics at present: it is the formation of the house church groups for Bible study, prayer and worship. The number of these has grown significantly in the past 10 years with a mixture of Christians from different traditions meeting on weekdays, many of them ex-denominational-church members who are disillusioned with traditional churches but are longing for Christian Fellowship, informal worship and study of the word of God.

This study of the word of God is incentivised by the dramatic events taking place on the world scene and the rapid rate of changes in Britain that are rarely dealt with by preachers in the traditional churches where the Old Testament is neglected, the eschatological teaching of Jesus and the Prophets are rarely expounded. Issachar Ministries is in touch with a large number of these house groups through a prayer group coordinator. This facilitates the sharing of insights or revelations from one group to another. This communication is now being extended through the

formation of regional 'Prophetic Hubs' where local group leaders come together for fellowship and sharing.

According to research by Peter Brierley in his UK Church Statistics the actual number of churches in England and Wales increased in the period 2008 to 2013 and this increase is expected to continue to 2020. In 2008 the total number of churches was 49,727. This grew in 2013 to 50,660; while the estimate for 2020 is 51,275. The table below shows the growth and decline of church buildings by denomination.

Churches Opening and Closing 2008 – 2013

	Angli- can	Bap- tists	Indep.	Meth- odist	New churches	Pente- costal	Presb- yterian	Smaller Denoms
Opening	0	+1	+104	+4	+256	+640	+9	+1,937
Closing	-324	-76	-112	-813	-4	-2	-183	-38
net diff.	-324	-75	-8	-809	+252	+638	-174	+1,899

Source: UK church statistics 2: 2010 – 2020, Peter Brierley

The most alarming feature for the future of Christianity in Britain is the age gap in many of the traditional denominational churches in Britain where the majority of the congregation is aged over 60. The gap between the generations is a chasm in many churches where they have a few children, a large number of elderly worshippers but very few in the middle generation. It would appear that the older generation of Christians were unable to share their faith effectively with their own children. Unless they are able to reach their grandchildren and see them accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, there is very little future for these traditional churches. Most will be closed within 20 years.

At present there seems little prospect of the traditional denominational churches being successful in evangelistic outreach in their catchment areas as they have little vision and no strategy of mission commensurate with the rapidly changing 21st-century situation. Research published by the Peter Brierley Consultancy in August 2014 showed significant negative perception of Christianity among non-churchgoers citing Judgementalism (68%), being anti-homosexual (78%), hypocritical (63%), old-fashioned (70%), and out of touch (63%).

These findings were said to be consistent with similar research done in the USA by Kinnaman and Kimball.^{xxi}

Significantly, the younger age groups were found to have more strongly negative views, which gives a poor prognosis for the future of the gospel in Britain. Peter Brierley commented that it is deeply troubling that a message of grace appears to be masked by negative perceptions so that the grace and love of God is not communicated.

Pentecostals and Charismatics

The situation among Pentecostals and Charismatics sharply differs from that of the denominational churches. Their growth rate in the past 50 years has been considerable. Of particular interest is the more recent growth among African churches in Britain which now have the largest congregations in

the nation. The Redeemed Christian Church of God which is Nigerian-based has two celebratory events each year at the Excel Centre in East London. Each of these events draws 50,000 worshippers of all ages to an all-night prayer meeting running from 8.00 pm on a Friday evening through to 6.00 am on Saturday morning.

These events are not merely for prayer and worship but are also culturally orientated celebrations that generate fellowship and unity among the expatriate Nigerians in Britain who come to London from all over the country meeting friends and fellow countrymen. The spiritual aim of these gatherings is to pray for the evangelisation of Britain but the contribution of these African churches to the re-evangelisation of the nation is minimal. Most of their congregations only attract expatriate Nigerians and it is rare to find even other Africans or Caribbeans, and even rarer to find white worshippers in their churches.

The Caribbean Pentecostals by contrast have lost the vibrant life and growth rate that they enjoyed back in the 1960s and 70s when the first generation from the Caribbean islands were eager to share their faith with other migrants and to meet together for prayer and worship. That growth rate has not been maintained in the second and third generations and largely reflects the white English traditional churches' experience.

Today most of the Caribbean churches have elderly worshippers and children but lack the middle generation. It was no doubt the experience of hard times in the early days of the settlement of the first generation that influenced the second-generation and the faith of their parents was not communicated to them in a way that enabled them to stand against the peer pressure from their white friends.

The cultural differences between the African and Caribbean communities seem to create impenetrable barriers to cooperation and unity which makes it hard to foretell the future for these churches. The major question facing the African church leaders is whether or not their churches will follow the same pattern of decline as the Caribbeans' and lose their second generation who are most likely to succumb to white peer pressure.

God's Activity

Having briefly reviewed the desacrilisation of the spiritual life of the nation, it is appropriate to ask questions about the activity of God in this period. If we believe in the sovereignty of God and his influence in world history we have to ask questions of how he is working out his purposes today. The great shaking prophesied in Haggai 2 and Hebrews 12 is clearly taking place in many parts of the world today; not only in natural phenomena and unusual weather patterns, but in the shaking of the political, economic and social institutions in the nations. At the beginning of this essay we noted the declaration revealed to Isaiah: *"I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and **create disaster**; I, the Lord, do all these things"*.^{xxii}

We have noted the destructive forces of social change that been loosed into the world especially in the Western nations but we have not noted the vast changes that have been sweeping through the Islamic nations in the Middle East in the past decade. In order to understand the spiritual significance of what is happening we have to note that the most recent changes in the Western nations have been uncovering injustice, greed and corruption. In Britain this has affected one institution after another: the bankers, the politicians, the newspaper moguls and journalists, the police, the celebrities, the NHS and most recently Islam.

The rise of the 'Islamic State' in Syria and Iraq is a major factor in contemporary world history that is shaking the confidence of ordinary Muslims in their religion. Accounts of the appearance of Jesus in dreams and visions to Muslims in Egypt and other parts of North Africa and the Middle East abound today as Muslims ask the question, "Who are the true representatives of Islam?"

My wife and I were at the baptism of 15 former Muslims from the Middle East who publicly witnessed to their faith in Christ in a church in Leicester on Sunday 25th January 2015. Several more gave their lives to Christ at the service and await baptism after they have been discipled which is symptomatic of a growing movement among Muslims who are appalled at the atrocities committed in the name of Allah where Islamist Jihadists use their religion to justify their beheadings and crucifixions just as Muhammad did: *"It was not you, but Allah, who slew them. It was not you who smote them: Allah smote them so that he might richly reward the faithful. Allah hears all and knows all"* ^{xxiii}

Major changes are taking place among Muslims throughout Europe. In Britain only 8% are regular in attendance at a mosque while 51% say that they never attend a mosque. Is this the beginnings of a Muslim harvest for the gospel? Only time can answer that question but this is occurring at a time when the Western nations are being shaken in their political, economic and social institutions. Britain today faces a General Election, the outcome of which there has never been greater uncertainty as people are rejecting the political establishment and looking for any viable alternative. A similar process is taking place throughout Europe following the example of Greece.

What does the future hold? If we are right in our understanding of contemporary world events, that they are the fulfilment of the prophecies in Haggai and Hebrews, and in our understanding of the way God works out his purposes through allowing disasters to bring about a seismic change in human activity, then we must expect a mega catastrophic collapse in Western civilisation as well as in the Islamic world.

Islamic Prognosis

There are some alternatives facing us in formulating a prognosis for the future development of both Christianity and Islam. One is that Islam will undergo a radical transformation in which the Islamic scholars are forced to study the tenets of their religion including historical records of the life and work of Muhammad which will lead them to redefine Islam in terms acceptable to the modern world, declaring that the verses in the Koran that urge followers to kill non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians (the people of the book) are no longer valid today.

This westernisation of Islam could make it more acceptable to people in the West at a time when institutional Christianity is weakening which could lead to the imposition of a revised form of Sharia law and the Islamisation of Europe and America. At the same time it is foreseeable that other forms of Islam such as those practised by the Wahhabi sect in Saudi Arabia, by the Islamic State, by the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram will react against this revisionary process causing a major divide between East and West that could cause an implosion within Islam which would negatively affect its acceptability in the West. Whether or not this Islamisation of the West takes depends largely upon the future development of Christianity.

Christian Prognosis

A fundamental change in Christianity as an outcome of catastrophe is a possibility which would be fully in line with what the prophets of ancient Israel described as *"the deeds of the Lord"*. The exile in Babylon is a good example of the way in which God used the disaster of the destruction of

Jerusalem and its Temple to prosper a remnant living in exile in a hostile social and spiritual environment to produce a redeemed people to go back to their homeland, rebuild the city, its social and commercial life, centring its spiritual life around the Temple with the ultimate objective of being “*a light to the nations*”^{xxiv} which was partially achieved through Messiah Jesus, and whose ultimate objective will be achieved through what Paul describes as the “*one new man*” when Jew and Gentile believers in Christ are reconciled to evangelise the world.^{xxv}

If the coming collapse of Western civilisation is to achieve what we believe to be God’s objective in allowing disaster to come upon the post-Christian nations there has to be a radical change in the spiritual mindset of Christians to enable them to break through the constraints and corruption of truth that have come from generations of liberalism which have perverted the gospel, created distorted institutional structures that masquerade as churches, and destroyed the creative dynamic of spiritual power given to the Early Church to transmit to the world.

The early Christians had to live in a hostile society before the church was married to the state. The coming catastrophe may well recreate that kind of situation in which a purified remnant can cast off the corrupt image of the past and communicate a pure gospel to a disillusioned population with rapid results through a dynamic reformulation of a mission strategy based upon the teaching of Jesus, directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit capable of transforming the nations offering hope and true prosperity to the people. This would be in line with the words of Jesus to his disciples at the raising of Lazarus, “*Take off the grave clothes!*”^{xxvi}

This alternative prognosis is largely dependent upon the present remnant of believers in the institutional churches and new churches rediscovering the biblical revelation of the nature and purposes of God so that they can understand what God is doing today. There is little such knowledge among church leaders today but without such basic biblical revelation there is little chance of the survival of the gospel through the upheavals that lie ahead.

If a rediscovery of the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, takes place in the midst of the great shaking that could trigger a spiritual awakening to sweep across the nations which, in the timing of the Lord, could be a preparation for the Parousia. This would be in fulfilment of the word of the Lord in Hebrews 12, a prophecy that was still in the future at the end of the first century in the Christian era; “*The removing of what can be shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*”^{xxvii}

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ⁱ Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Du Contrat Social*, 1762

ⁱⁱ Matthew 5.43-44

ⁱⁱⁱ Jeremiah 1.10

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- iv Isaiah 45.7
- v Isaiah 40.15
- vi Jeremiah 18.7
- vii Monica Dickens: in *Women's Own*, 28th January 1961, quoted in Callum G Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800 – 2000*, Routledge, 2001
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