

**The Twilight of Our Institutions**  
**“The Golden Lecture”**

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**by**

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**(Copies of this lecture available on [www.st-michaels.org.uk](http://www.st-michaels.org.uk))**

## **Introduction**

My subject is tragedy, contemporary tragedy. For the fact is that our most valuable, historic and formerly cherished institutions are being destroyed – sometimes by a neglect born of colossal ignorance, but increasingly by deliberate policy formed out of malice the hatred for history and for everything that has made us the people we are. But we need to know first what an institution *is*.

Political parties come and go. Institutions are – or used to be – what transcend mere political opinions. They are above the noise and traffic of the daily squabble. They were carved with pain out of great quarrels and even civil wars. Institutions are the stuff of ancient compromises which persist to give life and freedom to the whole of society. Institutions are the remedy for sectarianism. We have institutions so that we do not die of politics. Institutions are not political theories: they are quite simply the way we do things; the refined habits of our civilisation. They are our words made flesh, incarnated.

Today these institutions and the society, culture and civilisation they create are undermined, perhaps fatally. I shall outline how this is happening to each of our great institutions. I shall identify the iconoclasts. And I shall hope to end with a prescription for the remedy.

## **Education**

In 1948 T.S. Eliot wrote:

*The universities of Europe should have their common ideals. They should have their obligations towards each other. They should be independent of the governments of the countries in which they are situated. They should not be institutions for the training of an efficient bureaucracy, or for equipping scientists to get the better of foreign scientists. They should stand for the preservation of learning, for the pursuit of truth, and, in so far as men are capable of it, the attainment of wisdom – (Notes Towards the Definition of Culture).*

But how can *wisdom* even be discussed when there are university course in literary theory which claim that when Christina Rossetti wrote a poem about the sea, she was *really* writing about feminism and racism – or that Shakespeare is best studied in Romanian because his English language gets in the way of understanding him? What can you expect when the new regulations about “A” levels say:

*Candidates are permitted to see their marked scripts, but there shall be no comments on them. No script may be annotated in any way, with tick, cross, comment, explanation or opinion either in pencil or ink. Spelling mistakes must not be corrected.*

If you think I'm making this up, you should read a book by two English academics, *The New Idea of a University* by Duke Maskell and Ian Robinson. The authors list some of the comical new degree courses now on special offer in the supermarket of learning:

*Asset-management, beauty therapy, consumer studies, costume, makeup, counselling. Marketing or tourism with early childhood studies, fashion, golf studies, hospitality management, perfumery, turf science, cosmetic science...*

But it's all cosmetic. Those sorts of courses are precisely what a real university should teach us to reject. But universities today are not centres of excellence – how could they be when *excellence* itself, like *elitism*, is a dirty word? The purpose of the modern university as it defines itself is to produce *key skills to benefit the economy and to promote growth*.

Of course, there is a place where those subjects might be taught – but that place is not the university. Maskell and Robinson explain how this ruination of higher education has come about, not only by the emergence of an illiterate, unteachable yobbish underclass but by:

*...the plebification not just of the ruling but the educated class.*

Example: the former Culture Secretary – but we laughed when we saw Joseph Goebbels in that job. Anyhow, Dr Chris Smith was asked whether Bob Dylan's music was as good as Beethoven's and he replied:

*I wouldn't want to establish hierarchies. We mustn't discriminate.*

But there are hierarchies, Dr Smith, and it is the quality of the likes of Beethoven which decides who is at the top and who is at the bottom.

In the State schools we see near perfection as new highs are attained each succeeding year in the exam passes. Never has more money been spent on schools, yet even according to the Department of Education's own figures more than forty per cent of children leave school after eleven years of compulsory education functionally illiterate and innumerate. Their literacy and numeracy is fine: it's just that they can't write or count

Let us listen to Eliot again:

*We are told now that the highest achievements of the past in art, in wisdom, in holiness were but Astages in development≡ which we can teach our youngsters to improve upon. We are told we must not impose traditional culture upon the young, though we may impose upon them whatever political and social philosophy is in vogue. There is no doubt that in our headlong rush to educate everyone we are lowering standards, destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian hordes will encamp in their mechanised caravans. – (Notes... 1948).*

## **The Law**

The English law has evolved according to the creative myth of the social contract which is a development of the Old Testament notion of Covenant, or agreement, whereby we all live in constructive interdependence under the translucent authority of the law. We have no written Constitution, no Bill of Rights. Thus law is not prescriptive, but permissive: that is to say, everything which is not explicitly forbidden is permitted. It is an organic, easy-going system and its authority resides in the accumulation of case law. What happens in a particular case at a particular time is cited as a precedent for similar cases in future.

Increasingly under the authority of the EU our law is changing profoundly from the social contract system to the system based on the theoretical doctrine of human rights, from the revolutionary politics of 1789. A man recently won permission to play loud music late at night as part of his *right to his form of personal expression*. It is a pity that my right to my personal expression does not allow me to go round and knock him on the head.

But, worse even than alien doctrines of rights, is the threat to our integrity through the way that political correctness has altered the way laws are made. There is now not merely crime, but something much worse: *hate crime*. But what would a love crime be like? *Excuse me, darling, I've just nicked your gold watch. Give us a kiss!* So a murder is adjudged *more vile* if it is a *racist murder*.

Political-correctness renders the law absurd and meaningless. For example, according to the new law about racism passed after the Macpherson Report, whole sections of society are adjudged to be *institutionally racist* – a concept beyond all possible definition. Worse, the law now defines a racist act as *Any act so described by the victim, or any other person*. No rational law can be formed in this way. It is the language of Humpty-Dumpty: *When I use a word it means just exactly what I want it to mean*. I shall have more to say about political correctness near the end.

## **Parliament and the Mass Media**

A recent fashion has arisen for the introduction of policies not by announcement in the House of Commons, but through a ministerial interview with the government's friends in the *BBC*. I sometimes sympathise with the Prime Minister. After all he has to attend to the many great issues of State and bestride the world like a colossus – and still be up early enough to write the political script for *The Today Programme*.

More seriously, Parliament is increasingly subverted by the government and even the most far-reaching and innovative changes in the law are going through on the nod, without proper debate. Only the other week, for example, the new sexual discrimination laws, which compel schools to teach homosexuality as the moral and social equivalent to marriage, were passed without a proper debate.

As for the House of Lords, well the joke is – but is it a joke? – that under the new *democratic* arrangements half the peers will be elected and the other half paid for. The elected/appointed House is not as representative or as unpartisan as the old place in which membership was determined by inheritance. That despised arrangement provided us with a chamber of many talents, people not slavishly voting with any political party; a repository of multifarious knowledge and wisdom as a strong check

on the ambitions of a fervidly partisan government. No wonder the modernisers got rid of it.

A philistine, coercive new definition of *democracy* is now supreme, which consists in merely counting heads and to hell with the significant minorities. Whereas even the arch-secularist John Stuart Mill knew that the essence of good democracy is the provision made for those who go against the herd.

### **The Church**

The Church of England has sidelined *The King James Bible* and *The Book of Common Prayer* and replaced this *treasure house of rare devotion* (as Jeremy Taylor called them) with inferior modern stuff. The result is that no one knows any prayers by heart any longer. And every time a new liturgy was introduced the congregations declined. They launched *The Alternative Service Book* in 1980, trumpeting it as *the greatest publishing event in 400 years*. A mere twenty years later, they banned it. Yes, the *ASB* is a banned book. Banning books is a strange activity for bishops and synodsmen who like to call themselves *liberal*. But of course they are not liberal. They are totalitarian bureaucrats who insist on getting their own way. If you think I'm laying it on a bit thick, when your traditional parish priest retires, just try to get a replacement who will use the old books. The authorities will obstruct you at every verse end.

There is a terrible illiteracy in theology as well as language in the new *Common Worship*. This voluminous compendium of modern liturgical idiocy, like a portable tower of Babel, includes such prayers as *Let them be tender with each other's dreams* and its description of Our Lord's institution of the Holy Eucharist is *he had supper with his friends*.

In its social policy the Church has accommodated itself to the secular permissiveness which began in the 1960s. I have lived long enough to suffer the double misfortune of being able to remember the trendy bishops of those days who preached *the new morality* and to see today their successors support every bit of politically-correct claptrap social innovation going. How long before, when I preach the Ten Commandments, I am arrested for not giving adultery – heterosexual or homosexual – equal status with marital fidelity? Don't laugh at this suggestion as too far-fetched. Anything a satirist invents in the morning is overtaken by actual events by lunchtime.

### **The Monarchy**

I was very fortunate to serve in the Millennium Year as Chaplain to the Lord Mayor. It rained. All the way in the coach from Mansion House to the Law Courts and back it poured. But thousands of people from all over London and beyond stood on the pavements, cheering and waving flags. Those cheering, rain-soaked people were celebrating something that gave them their sense of identity. Despite the great egalitarian brainwashing that has gone on since the end of the Second World War and which has reached insane proportions recently, people still have an urge to defer to something or someone they esteem and value. And the quality of what you revere, what you value, shows you what you're worth. People will revere *something*. Better a thousand year old monarchy than some celeb on *Big Brother*. I have a new definition of a *celebrity*: a celebrity is someone you've never heard of.

The Monarchy is not just the decorative aspect of the Constitution, as Walter Bagheot vainly imagined. The Queen rules through her ministers just as the minister at the head of one of the great departments of State rules through his civil servants. The Monarchy is not undemocratic – though there is a whole class of politicians who wish to make us believe it is. And the Bishops have altered the prayer for the church in the Holy Communion and put themselves above the Queen in the order of petitions. But Roger Scruton has reminded us of the peril of turning against the Monarchy:

*The monarch owes his crown to no personal quality, to no effort, talent or achievement, but simply to the accident of birth. Kingship therefore represents, in the eyes of the ordinary subject, the accidental character of his own condition and, by reminding him of the immutable facts of human destiny, reconciles him to the discipline of government. Hence government by a monarchy is fairly likely to be government by consent. Hereditary monarchy means that by a natural process every type of human being – including the lazy, the stupid, the obdurate and the insane – has a chance of sitting in the seat of power. Unqualified democratic election, by contrast, discriminates heavily in favour of the energetic, the cunning, the ruthless and the plausible.*

No wonder our modernising, self-aggrandising political class wishes to downgrade the Monarchy!

### **Summary and Outlook**

How has it come about that our great institutions have suffered this unprecedented decline with the consequent disaster for the social fabric of our nation? And all this has happened not in a period of poverty and austerity, but at a time of sustained growth, wealth and plenty. Chiefly it has occurred because of the increasingly intrusive power of the State. The business of government was traditionally defined as the duty to protect us from foreign enemies and to keep the peace in our streets. Now the government encroaches into every area of public and even private life. Never mind the thrice-shouted slogan *Education, Education, Education*; what we have is *Intervention, Intervention, Intervention*, as successive governments seek to interfere in all those areas of our daily existence in which they have no business.

Added to this is a decadent modernism producing an ever more fatuous *modernisation*. I can only define this by hints and gestures. It amounts to a contempt for the past. If you listen to the radio and television, you will hear commentators despising the past all the time – commentators who are utterly ignorant of history. They always refer to anything particularly nasty as *Medieval*. But the Middle Ages have been surpassed in our times by cruelty, wars, genocides and destruction greater than all the wars of the previous centuries put together. What was there in Medieval Europe to compare with the horrors of The Somme, the devastated continent as a result of the Second World War, Hiroshima, napalm, Rwanda?

And yet we persist in the delusion that we are morally superior to our forbears. And we express our new-found moral superiority in the language of political-correctness. When you mention political-correctness, people giggle. But it is not a joke. Political-correctness is the centralised language of control prophesied by Karl Krauss and George Orwell. Political-correctness is *totalitarianism-lite*.

And political-correctness did not arise by some unfortunate accident. It had its origins in the so-called Frankfurt School of Marxist philosophers including Lukacs, Marcuse and Adorno.

Lukacs saw the necessity for the destruction of Christian civilisation and he advocated *demonic ideas* in the spread of *cultural terrorism*. Lukacs was Hungarian, an agent of the Comintern, and he set up a schools programme in which children were instructed in free love, and sexual intercourse while being taught that the family was an outdated institution along with monogamy and all manifestations of religion. His aim was to undermine the family by promoting licentiousness among women and children and so weaken the basis of Christian living.

Patrick J. Buchanan prophesied accurately the means by which the new order would become established:

*Contraception, sterilisation, abortion and euthanasia – the four horsemen of the culture of death.*

Another of these cultural revolutionaries and nihilistic iconoclasts was the Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) who noticed that the Russian people had not been converted to Communism: rather, they hated it. Gramsci called for *a long march through the institutions* – the arts, the cinema, education, theological seminaries, the mass media and the new medium of radio. Gramsci became fashionable among the *radical chic* revolutionaries of the 1960s and 70s, among them Charles Reich who revealed Gramsci's influence on him in his best-selling, *The Greening of America*. Her wrote:

*There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed and it cannot be successfully resisted with violence. It is now spreading with amazing rapidity and already our laws, institutions and social structures are changing in consequence.*

Victory in the culture wars was guaranteed once Christianity had died in the soul of Western man. This was happening at a speed which the revolutionaries could hardly have imagined in their most optimistic moments. I described the conflict as *culture wars*. In fact there was only a phoney war, as Christian civilisation surrendered as soon as the first shots were fired. The method of the nihilists was an ideology of perpetual change, the human spirit the subject and victim of endless malleability. This method found its rationale in the doctrine of *absolute historicism* – which meant that all morals, values and standards were products of the age. There are no absolute moral standards and morality itself should be seen as something which is *socially constructed*

The leading light – one is tempted to say the misleading darkness – of the 1960s revolution was Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) who invented Critical Theory whose supporters repeated over and again the slogans that Western societies are racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, anti-Semitic, fascist and Nazi. The fundamental ambition of Critical Theory was the mass inculcation of *cultural pessimism* and *alienation* wherein, as Buchanan says,

*A people, though prosperous and free, comes to see its society and country as oppressive, evil and unworthy of affection and love.*

Marcuse knew that past revolutions had prospered by the use of rallying oratory and persuasive books, but he believed drugs and sex were better weapons. In his book *Eros and Civilisation* he called for the universal embrace of the Pleasure Principle – derived of course from Freud – and the creation of a world of *polymorphous perversity*. It was like the trumpet call of the pagans and bacchanalians who stirred the Israelites to the licentiousness of the Golden calf while Moses was up the mountain talking with God. Marcuse's famous slogan caught on worldwide: *Make love, not war*

So what dare we hope for in all this mess? There is only one source of hope and it is our historic civilisation, a return to our Jewish-Christian roots. You cannot abolish the Faith and imagine that everything else will remain the same. The most persistent voice crying in our wilderness is Professor Marcello Pera, President of the Italian Senate. This is what he says:

*Will the Church, the clergy and the faithful be able to and want to be purified of the relativism that has almost erased their identity and weakened their message and witness?*

It is a call we must all answer.