

## Church Decline

It is no surprise to learn that church attendance in Britain is declining so that “practising Muslims will outnumber Christians by 2035.” This is not some unforeseen catastrophe overtaking the church but a self-inflicted wound which has been festering for forty years.

Over this period the church has diluted its doctrines, ditched the best ever version of the Bible, *The King James*, and effectively abolished *The Book of Common Prayer*. And, rather than resist the social, moral and sexual revolution promoted by aggressive secularists in government and the professions, the church has cheered its progress.

I am old enough to remember a time before the rot set in. I grew up in the 1950s in Armley, an impoverished working-class suburb of Leeds, where the two most prominent buildings were the gaol and St Bartholomew’s parish church. At Bart’s we used the real Bible and the real Prayer Book. We sang traditional hymns from *A & M Revised*. There was no dumbing down. There were no corny choruses, no aisle-dancing, kissing and backslapping, overhead projectors or dancing curate with his perpetual grin on full beam. The altar was in its proper place under the east window and the priest stood there with his back to the people, speaking to God on our behalf – not at some improvised nave altar, facing us, over the counter, like Mr Twelford in his baker’s shop on Armley townstreet.

St Bart’s was a jewel in the grime. More than 100 attended the Sung Eucharist every Sunday and 50 turned up at Evensong. We youngsters loved it – so fervently that three of us went on to be ordained priests.

So what went wrong? Not something vague, not an indolent falling off, the onset of a sullen lassitude. The wound was inflicted suddenly and viciously. I can put a precise date on it – March 1963. Bishop J.A.T Robinson published his fabulously hyped paperback *Honest to God* and claimed “Our image of God must go.” At once the shops were full of five shillings books by leading churchmen denying the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and the miracle stories in the Gospels.

The debunking of traditional faith was accompanied by the abandonment of traditional morality. Chapter six of *Honest to God* smashed the Ten Commandments and replaced them with what Robinson called “situation ethics” and morality was redefined as “doing the loving thing in the situation in which you find yourself.” Of course, this meant little more than doing as you damn well liked.

Within a very short time the country was in the full rush of the sexual revolution, speeded by particular “reform” Acts. The people were persuaded that the decriminalisation of homosexuality meant just that: that two men acting consensually in private would no longer be sent to jail for their sexual proclivities. No one imagined that this would lead to today’s open air pantomime of Gay Pride – the love that dare not speaking its name now shrieking at us in high camp along the high street and sodomy accorded the same moral weight as Christian marriage.

Abortion law “reform” would, we were told, put an end to distressing back-street abortions. Again no one thought this would result in abortion wholesale as a form of

contraception, 190,000 destroyed fetuses last year alone. Suddenly, it was no more trouble to get a divorce than to renew your TV licence. Instead of offering some criticism, putting up some prophetic resistance, to the removal at a stroke of what had been for centuries the guiding ethical principles of British society, the church welcomed the “reforms” and rejoiced in them as “the new morality.” In fact it was the beginning of the demoralising of the nation, the first excited steps down into the antinomian sewer we now inhabit.

To complete the iconoclastic programme, the Bishops and the Liturgical Commission, through the new General Synod, removed from public worship the prayers which had formed our deep unconscious spiritual temperament since the time of the first Queen Elizabeth. The new forms of worship were and are doggerel, banal, bathetic theological and aesthetic failures. There is no such thing as eternal truth expressed in ignoble words. But even if the new forms had not been so utterly awful, there are now so many of them and so various that the result would still have been that no one any longer actually knew any prayers *by heart*. The complete religious fabric of our civilisation has been wilfully destroyed.

What we have seen these last forty years is *la trahison des clercs*: the people appointed to be the guardians of our spiritual welfare have betrayed us. The destruction of all that was wholesome, honourable and the best of us can only be described as tragic. The loss is irreplaceable. I am coming to the view that it doesn't matter if in twenty years time no one at all attends church. Why would any sane, educated Englishman want to spend even an hour of his time on the tomfoolery that now goes on in our church buildings?

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