

The Decline of British Christianity ... Is It Really So? Why Should We Be Concerned?

Selling Well in Japan

Apparently, in the Beatles' early years, just after they had come back from Germany and Brian Epstein had become their manager, things were not going very well. In order to shore-up their morale, when it was badly needed, Epstein assured them that though things were bleak in Britain, their records were selling very well in Japan.

This story might be apocryphal, like many, but I often think about it, and consider that we use many such ploys, in daily life, to revive our own flagging spirits, especially, I'm thinking, regarding the situation of Christianity – particularly the fortunes of the mainline churches – in Britain, Europe, and the West. We know things are grim here – but after all, as we know, the Church is spreading very fast in other areas of the world: China, parts of Africa, parts of South America, etc. The problem is that this can cease to be morale-bolstering, but can become a kind of resting on our (new world, in this case) laurels. We know that the future of the Church – and perhaps of the world – lies south of the equator; but that does not mean that we are entitled to become overly despondent (or indeed, defeatist) about our *own* world. Christian faith – sadly, I sometimes think - does not allow despondency and defeatism, and neither does the knowledge that, in the end we (or rather Christ) will win, allow complacency.

Our job is to struggle hard for authentic Christian belief in a very hostile environment; but it is not the most hostile that ever was, or is, by a long way – and thus I think that we must question the news, announced recently, that the Church of England will cease to exist in a decade or so, when all those aged people (61 is said to be the average age – a few months above my own) have quit this life. When I was confirmed, in 1963, the boy who knelt beside me before the bishop, said, a while later, that the Church was only kept going by old people; in ten years' time, they would all be dead, and so would die the C of E; no, there were new ranks of old people to replace them, and others, till now, when it is our turn. Of course, it is often said that mine (the later-1950s) was the last generation to go to Sunday School – to be brought up with traditional/authentic Christian beliefs; and we all know young children who were often seen (or rather, heard) in church in the 1980s and '90s, but are not to be found anywhere near, as young adults, today. Perhaps, however, young adults never were the backbone of the Church in modern Britain, but rather the older people, as suggested; how many churchgoers, I wonder, have returned, in later life, just having had a gap-decade or two?

But if mid-life crises and reflections might be a cause by which the “dying” church revives, one other factor might be our society's accelerating decline into amorality, immorality, lawlessness, materialism (all kinds) and the dark spirit of hopelessness (only groundless optimism can accuse me of *excessive* exaggeration), all of which is – so obviously – preparing the ground for the creeping ascent of extremist Islam; eventually, large numbers of people might actually wake up to the *real* cause of this situation, and *do* something about it. Such people might come to see that the kind of Christianity which is ascendant at the moment obviously cannot (and perhaps does not deserve to) survive; perhaps, then, they will look seriously at the Christianity which is not like this – which firstly, and only, exists to proclaim the lordship of Christ, and the necessity (and the means, through him) to find eternal salvation - which probably means the Christianity of the southern hemisphere; yes, the Lord is “doing well” there.

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http://www.affirmingthefaith.com/new_page_3.htm [Review 13] (future of the Church)

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2014152/Church-England-extinct-20-years-leaders-tell-General-Synod.html#ixzz1S0Gj1KEJ>

(CofE 20 years' time)