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## State of British Christianity Today

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# THE STATE OF BRITISH CHRISTIANITY TODAY

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The following is an address first given in Dordt College Gymnasium as part of a Convocation Series on Christ the Light of the World on October 9, 1973.

The secularization of British culture and society which was apparent to me while serving as "vicar" of two English parishes between 1962-1968 has been proceeding apace since then. In the years since I left England to take up teaching duties at Dordt College in 1968, the secular humanists have been able to pass legislation in the British Parliament legalizing abortion for social as well as medical reasons, divorce by consent, and homosexual relations

between consenting adults. Laws have also been passed legalizing gambling and abolishing the death penalty for first-degree murder.

By secularization I mean living and behaving as if God is indeed dead. For the great majority of British Christians it would appear that God has been "dead" for many years, at least so far as British politics, education, business, and cultural life have been concerned. Because of their failure to require that their

government follow Christian principles, British Christians have surrendered the British State to the forces of apostate humanism and scientism. They have done this because they have denied in practice if not in theory that God's Law has any relevance or application outside one's private and personal life. By so doing they have implied that either God is "dead" outside the walls of church buildings or that He is not concerned with such mundane matters as politics and economics. But the Sovereign God of the Bible is by no means dead, and His judgments have been at work in British society to prove it! The Lord has even turned the wrath and disobedience of the British people to His own praise, thereby proving He alone is the one true God (Psalm 76:10).

#### The Social and Political Consequences of God's "Death" in Britain

Any nation which turns its back upon the living God of the Bible may soon expect to suffer the consequences. Such is now the case with Great Britain. Thus the number of divorces in 1971 reached over 100,000 after Parliament passed the bill legalizing divorce by consent. This increase of about 30,000 dissolutions of marriage in one year suggests that divorce will become substantially more common under the New Act. As God's law for permanent monogamy in Britain is disobeyed, so more marriages and families may be expected to break up. A permissive sexual morality now prevails in Britain, with over 200,000 babies being born out of wedlock in 1972, in spite of sex education in the schools, birth control clinics, and free pills handed out by the National Health Service. Even more discouraging has been the consequence of legalizing abortion for social rather than purely medical reasons. Since abortion became legal in 1968, the number of abortions has been increasing, as the following figures prove:

1968 - 22,256  
 1969 - 54,119  
 1970 - 83,851  
 1971 - 126,774  
 1972 - 170,000

The 1972 figure is equal to about 1/9 of those born in that year; less than half of those having abortions were married. In his book Abortion, The Personal Dilemma, the British Christian gynecologist Dr. R. F. R. Gardner tells us that Christian doctors and nurses are now under great pressure to help the humanist-controlled hospitals in their dirty work of murdering unborn infants in their mothers' wombs. Doctors, especially, who refuse to perform their fair share of the quota of abortions each week, are black listed. Dr. Gardner states that there is no future for Christian gynecologists in Britain as long as the present Act remains on the statute books, and advises them to emigrate.

The abolition of the death penalty has seen a significant increase in murders and other crimes of violence. As in America, it has now become unsafe to walk the streets of London and other big cities at night.

The legalization of betting shops and gambling has made London one of the gambling capitals of the world, and it has brought with it the crimes of extortion and blackmail, as well as breaking up homes as "mom" spends the grocery money on bets.

The picture is just as dark in the field of industrial and labor relations. The increase in conflict between workers and management which ends in strikes can be seen in the number of working days lost as a result of work stoppages:

1967 - 2,787,000  
 1968 - 4,690,000  
 1969 - 6,846,000  
 1970 - 10,890,000  
 1971 - 12,619,000  
 1972 - 13,400,000

The British Labor Unions, like their American counterparts, no longer fight for the just rights of the poor workers, but of the rich ones. Instead they are out to grab as big a slice of the gross national income as they can for themselves.

The situation in British television is not much better. Under its former director, General Sir Hugh Carleton Greene, the BBC embarked on a policy where anything goes. No

less a BBC official than Kenneth Adam himself, Director of BBC TV, admitted in the Sunday Times that the BBC had gone too far sometimes by concentrating on kitchen sink drama. He said he was tired of "illicit love on the brass-knobbed bedstead."

Due to this BBC policy, sex, one of God's most beautiful gifts to mankind, has become cheapened and degraded, and Britain's womanhood debased and devalued. Britain's children are being saturated with violence, cynicism, and sadism which are piped into every living room in the land and even into the nursery. The grandchildren of the youngsters who used to weep because Snow White was nearly poisoned by her wicked stepmother now feel cheated if she isn't slugged, raped, and even thrown into a Bessemer steel furnace and treated like Goldfinger in a James Bond novel! Compared to some of the programs which now appear on British TV screens, such novels as James Joyce's Ulysses and D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover now read like the minutes of a Mother's Union meeting.

The British who loved to point the bony finger of scorn at their American cousins over the treatment of the American Negro now find themselves faced by the grim realities of racial discrimination, hatred, and exploitation. There are now over two million Africans and Asians permanently settled in the British Isles. Cases have become known to the Race Relations Board of discrimination within the Churches, and this fact has been documented by Messrs. D. Humphrey and G. John in the Penguin Paperback Because They're Black (1971).

In Britain's political life, as in America's and Canada's, Christian principles of government have long been discarded in favor of government by arithmetic. More attention is paid to the polls than to the Word of God in deciding such issues as abortion, divorce, and capital punishment. The two major political parties of Britain, like the two major parties in the United States and Canada, are now more concerned with numbers than with principles and with winning elections than with upholding the nation's true and best interests regardless of immediate party advantage.

As a direct result of this government by

arithmetic, power has become freed from any respect for authority, opinion from all concern with truth, will from principle. Propaganda and advertising in the service of politicians' lust for power now leads all opinion in the nation to a national worship of the new golden calf of "Gallup pollery" and the greatest possible number.

In this new climate of secular humanism, all questions of right and wrong are studiously avoided. The only thing that now matters in Britain as in the United States is to win the election. Once a British government has been elected, it justifies all that it does by the claim, "We won the election!"

"In Britain's political life, as in America's and Canada's, Christian principles of government have long been discarded in favor of government by arithmetic. More attention is paid to the polls than to the Word of God..."

The cynical view now prevails that any and every question can be for all time answered and settled by the majority in a single election. In other words, the bare majority in any election now decides without further question all matters of truth or error, right or wrong, justice or injustice. Since British politicians no longer recognize God as the origin of all political authority (and power) on earth, they now have no true understanding of its real nature nor of its limits. A majority vote is what the secular politicians of Britain have the audacity to call British democracy. Today the British people, just like the American people, are left with nothing to respect but this horrible idol of power based on appeal to mere opinion or will. So long as it is the will or opinion of the greatest number, it is now considered sacred, no matter how false and con-

trary to God's Word that opinion may be. The voice of the largest number of people has now become the voice of God Himself.

### The Reasons for God's "Death" in British Public Life

Why has Britain been reduced to this sorry state of affairs? The answer is that the salt of British Christianity has largely lost its flavor, and Christians in Britain have become fit only to be trampled down under the feet of humanists as Christ warned his disciples. Our Lord teaches, "Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost his flavor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of man" (Matthew 5:13). According to Christ's own teaching, Christians are people who, mingling in the affairs of everyday life are keeping human society and human life good and wholesome, and giving it added flavor.

Unfortunately, most Christians in Britain seem to have lost their salt, and this explains why they are being trodden down under the foot of humanism. The trouble began during the last century with the rise of Roman Catholicism, Arminian Evangelicalism, and Pietistic Dispensationalism. Whereas Calvinists had tried with all their power to promote God's Kingdom on earth as well as in heaven, the pietists and premillennialists have tended to withdraw from public life in order to concentrate upon their own personal salvation, waiting for the Second coming of Christ. If you believe that the present age is to end in a great apostasy and rebellion climaxed by the reign of the anti-Christ and the battle of Armagedon, after which Christ will return to establish His Kingdom in Jerusalem for a thousand years, you will not waste your time in Christian social and political action. Such teaching gives you a perfect excuse for doing nothing in public life!

Such teaching asserts that it is a virtue to be unconcerned about the problems of this world. Such doctrine expresses a policy of escapism and flight from the world. Hal Lindsey in The Late Great Planet Earth states this policy of surrender exactly when he writes: "We should be living like persons who don't

expect to be around much longer" (page 145). Commenting upon such Christians as Hal Lindsey, R. J. Rushdoony writes in the October issue of The Chalcedon Report (1973): "What was once said of a famous senator can also be said of these men: theirs is a trumpet that always sounds retreat."

Beginning with John Wesley the majority of British Arminians have also tended to divide life into two realms, the sacred and the secular. In the secular realm these British Arminians, like their American counterparts, have preferred to be guided by man's reason rather than God's Word. Their political and economic thought and practice were no longer related to and nourished by the powerful living Word of the Lord, but by so-called natural laws which man's unaided human reason claimed to be able to discover. As a result, Arminian pietists and premillennialists were no longer concerned with witnessing for Christ in business and industry, education and politics. Given this Arminian doctrine of grace and of the Second Coming, it is not surprising that British pietists and evangelicals have tended, with a few notable exceptions, to restrict Christ's redemption to their own private lives.

It is impossible to exaggerate the consequences of this religious individualism and reductionism for modern society. Such pietism and premillenarianism have greatly helped in the secularization of Britain, since their concern with individual salvation and eschatology takes for granted or ignores the structures of society outside the institutional church and seeks to build up religious cells of the "saved" within society, leaving public affairs in the hands of unbelievers. For a good account of the Reformed doctrine of Christ's Second Coming, I strongly recommend Loraine Boettner's work The Millennium, and G. C. Berkouwer's recent book, The Return of Christ.

Instead of thinking that Christians should be concerned with the reformation of business, politics, education, and science, British Pietism, like its American counterpart, has encouraged its adherents to concentrate their attention upon personal holiness. The larger questions of business, politics, and the mass media have tended to be discounted, sometimes because of apocalyptic and premillennial

expectations or because these spheres of life were presumed to be religiously "neutral." Instead of seeking to reform these areas of life, pietists have tended to concentrate upon personal rather than social morals and ills. The sins of the flesh, e.g., drunkenness, smoking, dancing, and above all, fornication, are more feared than the social sins of exploitation of the workers by management, of the consumers by banks and finance companies, the greed of big business and big unions, and the growing bureaucratization and resulting depersonalization of big government.

"Why has Britain been reduced to this sorry state of affairs? The answer is that the salt of British Christianity has largely lost its flavor, and Christians in Britain have become fit only to be trampled under the feet of the humanists as Christ warned his disciples."

As a result, Arminian Evangelicalism and Pietism in both Britain and the United States surrendered to the false spirits of the modern age, first to John S. Mill's and J. Bentham's Utilitarianism, then to Dewey's Pragmatism, and finally to the Fabian Socialism of the Webbs, Keynes, and Harold Laski. Christians gradually came to exercise less and less influence upon the cultural formation of modern Anglo-Saxon civilization. Religion became merely another department of life alongside the other independent and autonomous spheres, such as business and politics and education.

In this way the gates were opened for the triumph first of economic individualism and then, in reaction, of economic collectivism in the business life of our two great nations; for the triumph of pragmatism and evolutionary humanism in British and American education; and above all for the secularization of politics

and the mass media in both lands. Instead of being the Light of the Anglo-Saxon world, Evangelical Christians in our two countries have only succeeded in adding to the darkness. Instead of being the Light of the world, they have become candles hidden under the table. Instead of being the salt, Evangelical Pietists, by and large, have become fit only to be trodden down under the feet of the unbelieving humanists. Thus has Christ's own warning prophecy been fulfilled.

#### Signs of A Calvinistic Comback in Britian

But thank God that is not the end of the story. Our God is still sovereign over America and Britain. He has not turned His back upon us even if we have turned our backs upon Him. In His own sovereign grace and power, He has begun a mighty work of revival and reformation in our two nations. Beginning in the late 1950's a great revival of interest in Calvinistic thought and theology took place in England and Wales. Under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones of the Westminster Chapel in London, annual Puritan and Calvinist conferences began to be organized. The Banner of Truth Trust Fund was set up under the Reverend Ian Murray. For the first time in a hundred years British Christians began to think Calvinistically and Biblically about the issues facing them in an apostate and pagan society. A new Calvinist magazine was published, The Banner of Truth.

The Calvinist International Reformed Association was contacted in 1962 by British Calvinists, and an English and Welsh branch was organized by Dr. David Hanson, London, and by Reverend Geoffrey Thomas in Wales. The Sixth International Reformed Congress was held in England in 1968.

The congress lectures may now be obtained under the title of Education and the Gospel from Dr. Paul G. Schrotenboer, General Secretary of International Association for Reformed Faith and Action in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and editor of the International Reformed Bulletin.

Meanwhile, our God has been at work in the Church of England. He raised up mighty prophets in Drs. James I. Packer and Philip

E. Hughes. In Packer's books, especially Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God and Fundamentalism and the Word of God, the authentic voice of pure Calvinism was once more heard in the land of the great 16th century English reformers, such as Archbishops Cranmer and Whitgift. Due to Packer's and Hughes' witness, the Church of England now has at least three thriving Calvinist seminaries in Oxford, London, and Bristol. In 1972 more Calvinist young men offered themselves for ordination in the Church of England than any other group. It has been said that in another ten years the English bench of Bishops will have a majority of Calvinists! Liberal modernism is now dying out as a significant wing of the Church of England. The only hope for the revival of Britain is for the British Churches to return to their historic roots in Biblical Christianity. The rot began in the Churches as William Cowper observed two hundred years ago: "When nations are to perish in their sins 'tis in the Church the leprosy begins."

Let us then pray for our fellow Calvinists in the British Churches that God will continue to use them to His glory and the advancement of His Kingdom.

Meanwhile, other dedicated Calvinists such as Alan and Elaine Storkey, and Richard and Janice Russell, who both taught at Trinity Christian College in Chicago, are opening up new channels of witness and communication of the Calvinistic-Biblical life and world view. Dr. Storkey in particular began the Shaftesbury Project under the aegis and support of the British Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at 39 Bedford Square, London. The Shaftesbury Project, named after Lord Shaftesbury, who did so much to help the working-class women and children of Britain over a hundred years ago, is dedicated to the task of restoring Christ's Kingship over British political and economic life. It has already published numerous booklets, articles, and pamphlets on the biblical understanding of political authority, the family, work, crime, abortion, and leisure. Every week for the past three years Dr. Storkey has been organizing Prayer Breakfasts with 75 British Members of Parliament to seek God's guidance and to find out His will for British Christians in politics.

Young British Calvinists are now forming prayer and study cells all over Britain to study the biblical directives for every sphere of human life. As these young men and women move out into British industry, politics, the mass media, and education, great things may be expected. When the time is ripe, I have no doubt that our sovereign God will also raise up a British Calvinist political party and a British Calvinist labor union. The people of Britain are crying out for real Christian leadership. They have lost all faith in their politicians, as the people of America are rapidly losing faith in their politicians. The Lord is giving His people in America and in England one last chance to rise up from a century of pietistic indifference and political and economic apathy. Upon our response to this one last opportunity to bear witness politically, economically, educationally, and artistically, may depend the very future survival of the great Anglo-Saxon democracies. Let us then in America and in Britain rise to the urgent challenge of our times, namely to make Jesus Christ not only our personal Savior but also our sovereign Lord and Master in every aspect of our lives. Let us rebuild our nations upon the solid foundations of God's Holy Word for our lives given to us in the Bible. Let us not wait for governments to tell us what to do. Let us start the work of the reformation of America, Britain, and Canada right here and now. May our motto be that of the great Dr. Abraham Kuyper, Prime Minister of the Netherlands:

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which the Bible and the Creation bear witness; until the nation again pays homage to God.