

The UK Church through Global Eyes

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A. An Exceptional Case

1. The church in Britain is situated in an atypical part of the world.
2. The church in Britain is shrinking, becoming socially marginal and struggling against decline and despair.
3. This decline has been unrelenting since the 1960s, despite many strategies to reverse it and prophecies that revival was coming.
4. We have become inoculated to this decline but it is entering a terminal stage.

B. A Complex Challenge

1. Within a declining church, evangelicals are a growing constituency but are facing significant challenges:
 - (a) Many postmodern Christians are uneasy in churches run by modernists.
 - (b) Evangelical churches are losing members in droves.
 - (c) The New Churches are struggling to negotiate the transition from first- to second-generation leaders.
 - (d) Evangelicals are digging their heels in over issues about which the Bible says little and remaining silent on issues about which it says much.
2. But all Christians are facing the complex challenge of a fast-changing, fragmented and confusing culture:
 - (a) It is both secular and multi-religious.
 - (b) It is influenced both by modernity and postmodernity.
 - (c) It is increasingly global and increasingly local or even tribal.
 - (d) It is consumerist but spirituality is a popular commodity.
 - (e) It is in transition, as the proliferation of 'post' words indicates.
3. A crucial challenge is encapsulated in the term 'post-Christendom'.
 - (a) Some parts of the world can be described as *pre-Christendom* where the story is *fresh* and the church is *dynamic*.
 - (b) Other places can be described as *Christendom* where the story is *familiar* and the church is holding on to its influence or becoming *dominant*.
 - (c) But in *post-Christendom* the story is *frayed* and the church has grown weary and *despondent*.
4. But there will also be new opportunities to tell the story to those who have never heard it.

C. Signs of Hope?

1. There is no guarantee we will weather this storm.
2. Are there any signs of hope?
 - (a) The arrival in Britain of missionaries from other parts of the world.
 - (b) The proliferation and expansion of many different ethnic churches in our cities.
 - (c) The 'emerging church' scene.
 - (d) Young missional leaders **and** permission-givers in key denominational positions.
 - (e) A new kind of ecumenism in a post-denominational church.
 - (f) Mission organisations that have finally renounced old paradigms.

D. A Global Perspective

1. We must stop importing models of mission and church without reference to their contexts.
3. We must forge strong, mutually respectful partnerships with ethnic churches and missionaries from other nations.
4. We must continue the process of transition from Christianity as an institution to Christianity as a missionary movement.
5. We must embrace our marginality within the world church, rather than clinging on to old power structures, theological systems and colonial attitudes.

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