

## THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH: 2

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We know from our own hearts how readily we “mind earthly things” (Philippians 3:19). Moreover, we see in others and ourselves the conformity to this world’s mores that is “enmity with God” (James 4:4). Our great concern is to belong to churches where the Lord can walk among us as people “delivered from this present evil world” (Galatians 1:4) and who “shew forth his praise” (Isaiah 43:21).

Last time, we identified some symptoms to show that the title of these articles is warranted. While a boat is in the water, it goes along safely; if the water is in the boat, serious danger looms. We fear the same is true of today’s church. Instead of the church being in the world, the world is too much in the church.

Having seen the symptoms, we need to ask how things have things come to what they are now. “Is there not a cause?” Let us in this second article see that there is more than one.

### **2. Highlight some causes.**

We can identify these in two realms: society and in the church itself.

1] In society.

When this is deeply impressed with a sense of God, it is the beginning of moral wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). This affects the ethical climate in which we live. When respect for the sanctity of civil government, life, marriage, and truth prevails - these absolutes elevate standards of decency and order. Even when the church worships and witnesses in such an environment she finds worldliness challenging enough.

However, when society slides into ungodliness, its secularism bombards the church with pressures and stresses that make conformity to it much easier. We live now in such a time, as the apostle said we would (2 Timothy 3:1-5). How, then, have things become so bad in our society today – and so dangerous to us? We only need consider the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In its second half, some seismic upheavals took place, and much of the church since has succumbed to the changes these have brought.

*a] Emergence of the youth culture.*

This came in the late 1950s. Until then, children growing into adults did not have a separate identity. Older sons and daughters were smaller versions of their parents in dress, tastes, and lifestyle. They were just called a “young man” or a “young lady.” It made for a fairly easy navigation through adolescence into adulthood. This was no different in the church, and respect for parents meant respect for the minister and elders, and older Christians.

However, that began to change in the 1950s, and the catalyst was the advent of Rock ‘n Roll bands. These were spearheaded by Bill Haley, Elvis Presley – and the young Cliff Richard, who modelled himself on Presley. With this new brand of music came a new grouping in society – the “teenager” – aged 13 to 19.

Teenagers had Rock ‘n Roll as their music (which exuded rebellion against conventional standards, parents, authority in general), their own distinctive clothes (which fashion designers would exploit to the full), their own hairstyles, lifestyle, language, etc., all

designed to shock the older generation. By the 1960s, and the advent of the Beatles and the hippie culture, the scene was set for a massive revolution in morality and every other biblical norm. As David Samuel put it: "Popular music was no longer simply a medium of light relief, but a battering ram for moral and social change."

And this change affected the church. "The Young People" became the concern of everybody. The trouble was, the young people often had the teenage attitudes, which wanted change. And for fear of losing "the young people," pastors and congregations pandered to them, flying in the face of Scripture and the wisdom of past generations. It still is astonishing how many seasoned believers can see no further than the "livelier services," "more people coming in," "young people using their gifts" - and fail to assess this biblically and in the longer term.

Worse was to come in the 1990s with girl bands like the Spice Girls. These were the most successful and influential since the Beatles. It was the progression from "teen power" to "Girl Power:" a new *female* attitude. They exploited physical attraction to the full, with bare midriffs, provocative postures, tattooed and pierced bodies, and an obnoxious assertiveness. It produced a generation of pre-teen girls losing their innocence and being sexualised. Teenage magazines fuelled this by encouraging girls to be promiscuous, and female virtue became a laughable anachronism. This too, has spilled into the church, making the notion of female modesty, deference to male headship and leadership out of date for the modern "Ms."

#### *b) The Television.*

Again during the 1960s, the BBC and the new ITV, created a moral upheaval through satirical programmes that challenged traditional boundaries of taste and decency. A liberalising agenda came into every home with a TV. It was the driving force for the permissive society.

Now endless barbarity, foul language, blasphemy, vulgarity, marital infidelity, lewdness can be seen and heard on TV channels. Added to this are programmes that caricature, marginalise, or rationalise biblical Christianity. Add in programmes that promote Evolution as a fact, and TV amounts to a concerted attack on the fundamentals and morality of real religion. It is the world's audio/visual propaganda machine - insidious and potent.

Dr. E.S. Williams, a respected writer on these matters, has recently highlighted another facet of this onslaught,

The BBC has admitted that it is biased against Christianity. In a secret meeting, BBC executives admitted that the corporation is dominated by homosexuals. They acknowledge that ethnic minorities held a disproportionate number of positions and said the BBC deliberately encourages multiculturalism, and is careful to avoid offending the Muslim community, while offending Christians is simply part of the culture. Tossing the Bible into a garbage can on a comedy show would be acceptable, they said, but not the Koran.

The latest affront is that the BBC has appointed a Muslim as Head of Religion and Ethics! With these things in mind, we should be greatly exercised about our use of the media. Television especially, has great potential for worldliness in Christians through its programmes, and its ability to play DVDs and games consoles.

Undisciplined use of TV will undermine biblical thinking, carnalise the affections, and weaken spiritual desire. It can make us desensitised to sin. Another writer expressed it this way,

Do you find yourself desiring to watch, and fill your time with, endless television programmes? Do you "have" to see almost every film that comes out, in order to seek physical pleasures or escape life? If so, you are caught up in the world, caught up in "the lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes." You cannot live your life through television and cinema, which glorify killing, stealing, gambling, seducing and drinking to excess! It will affect your character and produce a worldly attitude.

2] In the church.

The biggest enemy is always within, and, tragically, the church's holiness has been wounded in the house of its friends.

*a] The Billy Graham Crusades.*

Throughout the 1950s and 60s – and into the 80s – mass evangelism burst upon the church. Coming in contrast to the small numbers and slow progress of local congregations, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association could mobilise huge numbers, provide impressive resources, and sport a good-looking, eloquent figurehead. Suddenly the church was taken notice of by the media, as thousands attended the campaigns and came forward as converts in vast numbers.

However, Graham's preaching was Arminian, with its emphasis upon the emotions and free will. The choir conditioned the masses, the preaching culminated in the call to the front, and

those signifying they had been converted were processed accordingly. The “easy believism” of Charles Finney a century before, which blighted the US churches of that time, was repackaged for the 20<sup>th</sup> century and sent to the UK.

Few discerned the new evangelism, and those who raised their voices and pens were dubbed as “not interested in winning souls.” Yet, all these faithful men did was to call for God’s work to be done God’s way – evangelism through the local church. While we concede that numbers were genuinely saved, some even going into the ministry and onto the mission field, yet, God seeming to bless that does not prove that He is pleased. Moses drew water from the rock when he *smote* it instead of speaking to it, and the people were refreshed – however, that was sin, and it cost Moses and Aaron the land of Canaan (Numbers 20:7-13).

The real fruit of the Billy Graham era took longer to be seen. We can see it now very clearly. Many “converts” joined local churches, and even became office-bearers. However, they were unspiritual people whose hearts were not renewed (Ezek.36:26; Gal.1:14). It was a breed of Christian with worldly wisdom and attitudes that brought things down. Generations of unregenerate church members and officers have taken their toll upon the Lord’s work.

After the 1966 Crusade at Earl’s Court, London, the evangelist exultantly said, “It will take a generation to fully assess its impact.” It certainly has, but not in the way he meant. By the *Mission England* crusades of 1984 and 1989, churches were very different, and these later campaigns made things worse still. By now, the ecumenical nature of the crusades was blatant, including Roman Catholics professing conversion being sent back to their own churches. These crusades produced the wretched *Mission Praise* hymnbook – the forerunner of many like it, with the modern, worldly worship that afflicts our churches today.

#### *b] Celebrity conversions.*

At that Earl’s Court Crusade in 1966, the pop singer Cliff Richard announced that he had become a Christian. The world was stunned, and the phenomenon of celebrity conversions began. This is not to say that singers, actors or sportsmen had never been converted before: they had. However, their new life in Christ was deemed incompatible with their professions, and they almost invariably left them. In Cliff’s case, it was different. At first, he was minded to leave show business and become a teacher. However, friends advised him not to give up his career - and the rest we know. The decades of personal compromise shows, for instance, in his recent autobiography, where he states that “... many of my friends are gay – let’s face it, homosexuality has been legal for more than thirty years. For me, the commitment is what counts - and I’ll leave the judging to God.”

Since the 1960s, it has become commonplace for “converted” celebrities not to separate from their tainted professions but to remain there and “witness.” This trend has undoubtedly been a bad example to others who make them role models, particularly the young. In fact, remaining in such sordid circumstances has tended to deny discipleship to Christ. Take, for example, the rock band U2. Steve Stockman, reviewing a book called *The Spiritual Journey of U2*, writes,

There are four members in the band, three of whom are professing Christians: Bono (Paul Hewson), The Edge (David Evans), and Larry Mullen. The fourth member, Adam

Clayton, is still searching. The band members smoke, drink and swear! Can they be Christians? One way of telling is to see if they have changed and touched other people's lives. Bono is a man who believes that grace and love win through Jesus death. He said, 'the Jesus Christ I believe in was the man who turned over the tables in the Temple and threw the money changers out.' He does not believe in a faith that is unaligned to social justice, and has certainly proved that in his life.

With such disgraceful examples, is it any wonder that so many are confused about their relationship to the world?

*c] The Charismatic Movement.*

In the 60s and 70s the Charismatic Movement hit the church scene, with its breaking free of God-fearing, biblically-regulated worship. Multiple musical instruments, catchy songs, emphasis on emotions, man-centred and experience-centred praise were declared evidences of "the Spirit." Everything else needed "liberating." What really happened was this: the *moral* revolution of the 1960s was paralleled by the *spiritual* revolution of the Charismatic Movement. "The Swinging Sixties" in the land became the new worship in God's house. What the permissive society did for lifestyle *outside* the church, the Charismatic Movement did for worship and life *inside* the church. Far from being the Holy Spirit, it was (and still is) simply the spirit of the age.

A shrewd observer of these things, Rob Warner, in his *Reinventing English Evangelicalism* (Paternoster, 2007) refers to their "... exuberant singing – the charismatic equivalent of clubbing." How true this is. Prominent among the new worship leaders is Stuart Townend. He says that influences upon his music include David Bowie, The Beatles, Bob Dylan and Stevie Wonder. And words used in relation to his concerts include "Gigs, lights, DVDs, CDs, song books" etc. And this they call "praising and glorifying God"!

The Charismatic Movement's worldly worship found mass expression in the annual Spring Harvest event. Begun in 1979, when 2,800 attended this holiday week "to learn, laugh and worship," by the 1990s it reached 80,000. It caused endless trouble for churches seeking to remain biblical in their practice. Again Rob Warner,

Churches were exposed at Spring Harvest to contemporary worship, thus increasing the pressure for traditional worship to give ground in the historic denominations. Many guests came from smaller churches, and for them in particular, worship with several thousand was an inspiring experience ... in the idiom of Radio 2 stadium rock ... The contribution of Graham Kendrick in the first decade of SH was immense ... Kendrick's songs facilitated the shift from the traditional hymn sandwich in many churches.

Yet, Warner's book mentioned earlier chronicles at the same time the decline of good Christian reading among evangelicals, and the near-demise of the Quiet Time! (See BLQ October-December 2008 for an extended review with comment of this important book).

*d] Lack of teaching on distinctively Christian duties.*

For generations, preaching in evangelical churches has lacked specific focus upon practical areas of Christian living. Noble exceptions exist, but generally too much has just been assumed because of the better days of the past.

How much preaching, for instance have we heard on matters such as courtship and marriage, the roles of husband and wife, parents and children, daily work as a divine calling, the character of worship and church fellowship, sanctifying the Sabbath? Yet, in Paul's epistles such areas are covered very fully and clearly (e.g. Ephesians chapters 4-6; Philippians; Colossians, particularly chapters 3 and 4). If Christians are not taught the principles of God's word in these matters, and their application worked out for our day, is it any wonder that things are as worldly as they are?

*e] An inordinate activism.*

The slogan "Saved to Serve," while expressing a truth, has nonetheless skewed Christians into thinking that the chief end of our salvation is Christian work. However, scripture tells us that we were predestined "to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Not service but sanctification is the goal here (Ephesians 5:25,26), to be completed in glorification hereafter (verse 27). Whenever living upon one's activities overshadows this, it can become mere carnal exertion. It can be more worldly than spiritual. Let us be sure that in all our labours *for* the Master we spend even more time *with* the Master (Luke 10:42) – lest we prove to have been serving self and the world more than His dear Cause.

(To be concluded)