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“It Feels as if the Soul of Britain is Dying”

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“It took several centuries to convert Britain to Christianity, but it has taken less than forty years for the country to forsake it.” That was the judgment of historian Callum G. Brown in his book, *The Death of Christian Britain*, released in 2001.

Brown argued that, since the 1960s, British society was reshaped, “sending organised Christianity on a downward spiral to the margins of social significance.”

As he explains:

In unprecedented numbers, the British people since the 1960s have stopped going to church, have allowed their church membership to lapse, have stopped marrying in church and have neglected to baptize their children. Meanwhile, their children, the two generations who grew to maturity in the last thirty years of the twentieth century, stopped going to Sunday school, stopped entering confirmation or communicant classes, and rarely, if ever, stepped inside a church to worship in their entire lives. The cycle of inter-generational renewal of Christian affiliation, a cycle which had for so many centuries tied the people however closely or loosely to the churches and to Christian moral benchmarks, was permanently disrupted in the ‘swinging sixties.’ Since then, a formerly religious people have entirely forsaken organized Christianity in a sudden plunge into a truly secular condition.

Just this week, new research validates Callum Brown’s analysis. Christian Research released data on trends in British churchgoing that will reveal a very desperate portrait of Christianity in Great Britain.

As reported by Ruth Gledhill in *The Times* [London]:

Church attendance in Britain is declining so fast that the number of regular churchgoers will be fewer than those attending mosques within a generation, research published today suggests.

The fall - from the four million people who attend church at least once a month today - means that the Church of England, Catholicism and other denominations will become financially unviable. A lack of funds from the collection plate to support the Christian infrastructure, including church upkeep and ministers' pay and pensions, will force church closures as ageing congregations die.

In contrast, the number of actively religious Muslims will have increased from about one million today to 1.96 million in 2035.

By these projections, attendance in Christian churches will drop to just 350,000 by the year 2030. They will be spread among 10,000 churches, each with an average worship attendance of 35. As Ruth Gledhill explains, the Church of England will then lose all institutional viability.

By then, Christianity will have become a minority religion in the United Kingdom, with Muslims far outnumbering active Christians. The same projections indicate that even Hindus will come close to outnumbering active Christians.

England is fast transforming itself into a secular state, even as it holds onto its established church, the Church of England. In a separate editorial, Gledhill expressed her lament, noting that “there is something unbearably sad about the plight of Christianity in this country.”

“It feels as if the soul of Britain is dying,” she wrote.

Britain’s loss of faith is not a new phenomenon, but it is now reaching its terminal stages. The secularization of British society will bring a radical transformation of the culture. The nation will be fundamentally redefined when Muslims outnumber practicing Christians by three to one.

As Callum Brown made clear, the death of Christian Britain does not mean that religion is dying. Indeed, various forms of free-style “spirituality” now proliferate. Britain is experiencing the explicit rejection of Christianity — a belief system fundamental to the nation’s history, culture, and laws. Those achievements cannot long survive the death of Christian Britain.

British Christianity was for centuries a spiritual force that changed the world. The modern missionary movement began with William Carey, who left England for India in order to share the Gospel of Christ. The movement to end the slave trade can be traced to William Wilberforce and his successful pleas to Britain’s Parliament. The Methodists, the Baptists, and any number of other denominational groups emerged out of British Christianity. The Church of England gave birth to a worldwide communion of Anglican churches.

Quite soon, all that may be just a series of footnotes in British history books. The secularization of Britain is not something forced upon the nation, but something the nation has done to itself.

As Ruth Gledhill expressed in her words of mourning: “It feels as if the soul of Britain is dying.”

Photo: London’s Westminster Abbey

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