

AlbertMohler.com

Once a Church, Now a Mosque — Europe Abandons Christianity

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The sight is disconcerting at best — beautiful buildings that once housed Christian worship now transformed into bars, restaurants, entertainment clubs . . . and mosques. The cityscapes of Europe are increasingly dotted with church buildings transformed into secular or explicitly non-Christian uses. The abandonment of these buildings is a sign of a much more fundamental abandonment — the abandonment of Christianity itself.

The current edition of *Newsweek's European Edition* takes this transformation as its cover story. As reporter William Underhill recounts:

For the Muslims of Clitheroe, collective worship has never been easy. It's been 40 years since the first Asians settled in the little town close to

England's industrial heartland, but the 300-strong community has struggled ever since to find a suitable site for a mosque. No longer. In December the town council finally approved plans for the conversion of a handsome but derelict structure: a disused Methodist chapel. "There is a feeling of overwhelming relief and joy," says Sheraz Arshad, a local Muslim leader. "Just because it looks like a church, there's no reason why it can't be used as a mosque."

Given the shifting demographics of an increasingly secular Europe, the conversion makes perfect sense. Across much of the continent, churchgoing is in long-term decline, while a swelling—and devout—Muslim immigrant population needs ever more places to worship. According to a forecast by the British-based group Christian Research, practicing Muslims will outnumber practicing Christians in England within a few decades. More than 1,600 churches—about 10 percent of the country's total—have been formally declared redundant by the Church of England. And the English have recognized the new reality: if church buildings are to survive, new uses must be found. While a handful serve as mosques or Sikh temples, many more have found roles as cafés, concert halls, warehouses or chic apartments. The pious may fret but pragmatism will often prevail.

Visitors to British cities can see this pattern at work, with Moslem minarets replacing Christian steeples. For some time, it has become apparent that “practicing” Muslims will outnumber “practicing” Christians within the current century. *Newsweek* now reports that it might be within just a few decades.

While many will mourn the loss of the buildings (and many of the buildings declared “redundant” are indeed beautiful), architecture and real estate are not the truly important issues. The most urgent issue is the abandonment of Christian commitment among the British population. And Britain is hardly alone.

In Catholic France, less than 5% attend weekly services — and the figure is just 3% in the Czech Republic.

Look at this telling assessment offered by Underhill:

For a generation that's rarely set foot in church, preserving the buildings themselves matters more than saving faith.

There can be no question now that this is true, but the really telling aspect of this is that the loss of commitment to the Christian faith is what led to the loss of the buildings — not the reverse.

Underhill places the issue in the larger context of changes in Europe over the past century. The ravages of official atheism under Communist regimes and the impact of changing demography are part of the picture. Nevertheless, secularization is the root cause of the problem.

A tidal wave of secularism has spread across Europe since World War II. In some nations, especially France, the roots of secularization are much older than that. The French Revolution was explicitly and violently secular, installing a statue of Goddess Reason in Notre Dame. The situation varies by region and country, and secularism is less evident as one travels east throughout the continent.

In any event, Europe as a whole has been engaged in a massive experiment in secularization in recent decades, and the problem of “redundant” church buildings is but another reminder of the fact that nations, cultures, and societies can rather quickly abandon Christianity. It all comes down to a matter of whether individuals believe in the Gospel of Christ, of course, but this also happens in a cultural context. In many European cultures, Christianity has lost all binding authority.

As so many have warned, secularism (as an ideology) and secularism (as a social process) create a vacuum in the midst of a society. That vacuum will be filled by something — and in many European nations that something will be a resurgent Islam. In other instances, it may be the decadence of a culture that worships perversity and entertainment.

The churches turned into strip clubs and bars, restaurants and bars, bear mute testimony to Europe’s abandonment of Christian faith. How long before we see the same reality on a similar scale on this side of the Atlantic?

