

THE DECLINE OF CHRISTIANITY

Dr David C. F. Wright

There has always been trouble between churches and within churches but when you get any group of people together there is often discord.

It is the same with most organisations, societies and other groups of people, not just churches. Politicians argue among themselves and cause splits. Countries argue against each other and sometimes go to war. Medical science is divided against itself on many issues. Churches are no different.

It is sometimes asserted that all the wars in the world are due to religion. That simply is not true. War is engendered by greed and the desire for power. The Crimea War, the Boer Wars, the two World Wars were not religious wars but the quest for dominance of one group of people over another.

Sadly, it is true that, in times past, the Roman Catholic Church instituted the dreadful Inquisitions of torture and death for those who would not accept Catholicism and bow to its doctrines. But that is not Christian and so we have to say that such Catholics were not Christians. The Christian teaching is to live at peace with everyone as far as possible (Romans 12.18) and if someone does not accept your faith then you leave him or her alone. 1 Corinthians 14. 38 states that if anyone is ignorant, not knowing the faith or not interested in it, let him be ignorant. It is not for Christians to argue with them. 2 Timothy 2. 24 states that the servant of the Lord, that is to say a Christian, must not strive, that is to say not to try hard to convince another, or struggle to get them to change their mind.

There has been a great deal of hypocrisy in churches. In the Victorian times many clergy were not Christians at all and turned a blind eye to the serious indiscretions of wealthy and important members of the congregation. The lords of the manor and his sons may have been involved in smuggling, crime and serious offences against their female servants but nothing was said, since the lords and his family put money into the collection and helped pay the clergyman's wages and the maintenance of the church.

The first real modern day decline in Christianity was when the clergy did not preach the Gospel and they did not stand for the morals contained in the New Testament. They would not stand up in the pulpit and condemn the lord of the manor's son for getting a servant girl pregnant or committing some other serious indiscretion. They would not preach, "Repent, turn you back on all sin and obey the teachings of Christ." Many clergy wanted to remain popular and some wanted to join the men at the pub and be one of the boys. Catholic clergy were the worst. They were often drunk and swore and blasphemed with such expressions as Jesus, Mary and Joseph or Christ Almighty and other expressions which are far worse. It is often said that people attending confessionals would leave a bottle of whiskey for the priest. Once a confession was made, the priest gave absolution and a penance to the miscreant which often was to recite the Lord's Prayer or some Hail Marys. Then the miscreant could go down the pub again, come home drunk and beat his wife.

Only God can forgive sins (Mark 2. 7) and repentance is the admission of that sin and the determination not to willingly repeat it again.

Today in many, if not most churches, the Gospel and Biblical morality is not preached. Each week the Gospel should be preached which is that unless you accept Jesus Christ as Saviour as Lord and live the life that pleases God you will perish and be lost in eternal hell. There are many who claim the Lord Jesus as Saviour but do not have Him as Lord. If He were Lord they would obey Him.

In many Christian meetings today the emphasis is on the Holy Spirit and it is forgotten that He came to remind us of the words that the Lord Jesus said and not to draw attention to Himself. The other emphasis in meetings today is on self. Preachers and speakers talk about themselves or, at least, make references to self. The personal pronouns of I and me prevail.

We have this sort of gush: I have the gift of tongues. I prophesied. I have had the second blessing. I have been baptised in the Spirit. I have led So and So to the Lord and to salvation.

The gift of tongues were known languages and a temporary gift. Prophecy, that is foretelling the future with new revelations, ceased with the canon of Scripture (Revelation 22), the baptism in the Spirit is the means of conversion since you cannot be a Christian until the Spirit baptises you (Romans 8) and no one leads another to Christ. Salvation is only achieved through the preaching of the Word of God (Romans 10) and not the display gifts of the Spirit or someone talking about self. We are to preach Christ and not ourselves. Salvation is the gift of God through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus. Only He can save.

The second decline was in the invention of the theory of evolution. Charles Darwin was a leading figure in this and it must be remembered that he was a believer, although very limited in his beliefs, until his young daughter, Annie, died at Easter 1851. Darwin was so upset and blamed God for this tragedy and vowed to get his own back.

Evolution states that God did not create the heavens and the earth and that He did not create life and He did not create each species separately. Most evolutionists state that there is no Divine creation and therefore no Divine Being, no God. The worlds came into existence by a explosion of gases in space and all life began with an amoeba in the sea and eventually we had reptiles, birds, cattle, apes and from apes came man and this took millions of years.

The idea that man was formed in 4004 BC was ridiculed, but the Bible does not say this. It was an idea put forward by an Irish bishop.

Evolution also taught the survival of the fittest, and that the weak and useless had no value and should be allowed to die. Only the strong should survive. Evolution said that human beings are merely animals and no different from the animals in the wild. Animals have no morals and are not subject to laws. You cannot take a lion to court for stealing, or a tiger for committing murder and so evolution has the principle of anarchy and disorder. The only law was each person's personal law.

The pop group The Beatles made this clear when they said, "We don't want any laws because we want to do what we want; we do want God because we will follow our own morals".

They also said that they were more popular than Jesus Christ. It is true that their blasphemy and attack upon Christianity made them enemies of God and therefore enemies of Christians.

Evolution now claims to prove that the universe is billions of years old and that DNA proves evolution to be both reliable and true, and that we are descendants from apes. They assert that this proves that the Bible is wrong; that there is no God and, therefore, the Bible cannot be trusted. Evolution teaches atheism.

The churches were in disarray. The non-believers and the scientists rejoiced in the alleged proof that the Bible was unreliable and just a book of stories. Church attendance began to decline.

In British schools today there are severe restrictions on teaching the Christian faith but evolution is taught as a fact with the notion that as it is scientific it is true. Very few schools have a daily Christian assembly.

In America there are militant scientists who break into schools and intimidate children for the purpose of preventing the teaching of Christianity and anything Christian. Many evolutionists want atheism to be preached.

If DNA shows similarities between apes and man, that does not mean man evolved from apes. It shows that man and ape were created by the same Divine Being.

Christianity is a faith. It the belief and confidence in something. Evolution is a faith. It is the belief and confidence in something. The Christian faith cannot scientifically explain the existence of God. Evolution cannot explain how matter came into being such as the gases in space that allegedly exploded forming the universe.

If you ridicule Christianity as a faith, remember, evolution is also a faith. Christianity has evidence, evidence

for the life and death of Christ, the existence of the church and so on. Evolution has theories and axioms, that is to say accepted principles.

The third cause of decline of Christianity came with the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Most of them taught that the charismatic gifts of speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy in the sense of foretelling God's future activities were now available. They taught that every Christians should seek the speaking in tongues which was the proof of the receiving of the Holy Spirit and that if you did not speak in tongues you did not have the second blessing and were an inferior or incomplete Christian.

In the last 1950s and early 1960s this movement exploded. Some clergyman said that there were very young children, as young as three years old, who had the gift of speaking in tongues to praise God, that people with terminal illness were cured by a Pentecostal or charismatic believer. There were even examples of charismatic believers 'dying' and going to heaven and coming back saying that they had seen God and been instructed by Him to preach charismatic doctrine and that only true believers spoke in tongues. This coming back from the dead smacks of the evil nonsense of spiritualism.

The speaking in tongues were said by some to be heavenly speech or the speech of angels and not a known language or dialect as on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. 7-8. Scriptures were interpreted to suit this teaching. These movements also advocated the Biblical text, "to the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1. 15) saying that their members could go to the cinema and watch material on the television which was violent, full of sex, nudity and bad language. Charismatic believers were superior and pure and so to them all things were pure.

These churches emphasize self. Preachers talk about themselves and their experiences. The Bible teaches that we are not to preach ourselves but Christ and Him crucified (2 Corinthians 4. 5). Any preaching or speaking in any church or Christian meeting should not be a session of This is Your Life. The other worrying thing about preaching in these churches is that it is often entertainment rather than the preaching of the Gospel and the use of humour which is irrelevant and sometimes crude. Some pastor at an Abundant Life church, who was in his fifties, announced that he had only just become potty trained.

In some modern churches over 70% think homosexuality is not wrong but the way God has made them. A man and a woman living together who are not married to each other was a sign of the times and if they loved each other then they were doing nothing wrong. Homosexuality is condemned in the Bible (Romans 1. 26 - 27). God calls lesbianism and homosexuality vile affections. It is also adultery since, in God's Will, a man cannot marry a man, and a woman cannot marry a woman. The commandment states Thou shalt not commit adultery (Exodus 20. 14) and we are told to avoid fornication (Acts 15. 20). In 1 Corinthians 6, we read that fornicators and adulterers and those who are effeminate (some homosexuals are effeminate) or who abuse themselves will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Revelation 21 states that the whoremongers will have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone.

The Bible calls David's dancing before the Lord vile (2 Samuel 6. 22). That it was before the Lord does not mean it has the Lord's approval. God sees everything. All that we do is before the Lord.

The Pentecostal and charismatic churches have taken on the ways of the world and used pop music and pop music instruments in their hymns and songs some of which are incredibly daft and in serious doctrinal error.

One song says, "Praise Him with hallelujahs for Jesus is Lord." Translated that means, "Praise Him with praise Hims, praise Hims for Jesus is Lord."

Then there is Shine Jesus shine. One such song tells the performers to play half cut. The expression half cut means drunk! Another tells me to play with bounce which means to jump and move around boisterously.

I have heard charismatics say that if the Lord were here now He would play the drums in a pop band and love it. That thought is scornful of the Holy Son of God.

A lot of modern songs have dance in them. Dance, Jesus, dance and We praise the Lord in the dance. This is

insulting. Can we visualise the Holy Son of God skipping and jumping about, bobbing up and down, gyrating his hips or doing the salsa with a pretty half-dressed girl?

It was Cliff Richard who announced that he was a Christian and, as he was a pop singer, it gave the impression that as he sang pop music it was wholesome and, therefore, it was suitable for Christian worship. That was the early 1960s and gradually new songs were written in various pop music styles and it is true that pop-music-Christian- songs attracted young people who liked pop music and rock-'n'-roll. The origin of such pop and rock-'n'-roll music was in the ghettos of New York and the term rock-'n'-roll refers to illicit sex, fornication and adultery. The whole concept is immoral. It mystifies us that Cliff Richard could appear in shows with other groups performing blasphemous and offensive songs such as Meatloaf singing Bat out of Hell. Cliff Richard also sang a song called Devil Woman.

The very thought of this is offends the respect due to the Lord Jesus. It certainly offends Christians who are being true to the Lord Jesus.

Dancing was introduced by some churches and justified because David danced before the Lord but what David did was sinful and shameful and God punished him for it. There is no Divine permission or authority for dancing in any church service. As we have said, all that we do is before the Lord but that does not mean the Lord approves of it and David's dancing was vile.

To my shame I have seen dancing in church services. Teenage girls in little skirts or see-through skirts and it certainly had a sexual appeal to those that way inclined. I cannot see how this is holy or respectful to the Lord.

If the Lord Jesus would not do it or allow it,, neither should the Christian. To be holy means to be morally correct, to be spiritually excellent, to be reverent, that is to show respect and be obedient to the Lord. To be holy is to be Christ-like.

Many groups broke away from established churches and set up their meetings in homes, halls and theatres. They caused acrimonious splits in churches and much ill-feeling. It has divided husbands and wives and it has split families. Married people go to separate churches from each other and some became involved in illicit affairs ending in nasty divorces and scandal.

This is partly due to the Pentecostal and charismatic practice of kissing fellow believers which necessitates close contact. It is a dangerous practice and one thing can lead to another and often does.

The Christian is called upon to avoid every appearance of evil, not to cause anyone else to stumble and Christians should pray not to be lead into temptation. Kissing a fellow believer could give rise to temptation and the New Testament is clear that every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband. Intimacy, including kissing, is reserved for your own spouse.

The holy kiss was a peck on the cheek and between people of the same sex, the custom of the early church.

All of these Pentecostal and charismatic examples set an appalling example to non-Christians who rightly complained about the moral decline and lack of spirituality among so-called Christians. No wonder the faith is in decline. In the UK in 2006, only 11% have any respect for Christianity and that is minimal.

Such Christians do not know the difference between basic doctrines. Prayer, praise and worship are totally different. Prayer is asking God in supplication and humility, praise is thanksgiving to God in quietness and reverence, and worship is the word worship, the acknowledgement that only God is worthy and that in humility and reverence we learn to admire and love Him realising that His ways are not our ways and that He is vastly superior to anything we could ever be.

But many Pentecostal and charismatic Christians are familiar with God. They refer to Jesus as if He were an ordinary man like the milkman or man next door or one of the boys. He is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus

Christ and certainly not one of the boys. Familiarity breeds contempt.

Christianity has fallen into very serious decline and the Pentecostal and charismatic movement has a very great deal to answer for.

In the Anglican and Methodist churches gay clergy and ministers are accepted and yet homosexuality is condemned by God in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Labour government under Tony Blair has created the offence of homophobia. A phobia is an irrational fear which causes panic, trembling, sweating, raised blood pressure and often terror. Some people are terrified of heights or spiders. I cannot believe that anyone would have a phobia of homosexuals or is terrified of them and having panic attacks and raised blood pressure with trembling and sweating, and therefore to call someone homophobic is wrong. We, as Christians, have a right to uphold what the Bible teaches and the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin.

In all these things the modern Christian has gone astray from the teachings of the Bible.

How could Christians do this?

Why have Christians done this?

In so doing they have been disobedient to the Lord and His Word.

The fourth cause of decline is the ecumenical movement which sought, and still seeks, to bring all denominations together and also to encompass other faiths in a spirit of unity. Then the Pentecostal/charismatic bug hit Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and all other churches in which there are members who have had the so-called spiritual renewal, the second blessing and speak in tongues. This served to unify the ecumenical movement. What the ecumenical movement could not do organically, the Pentecostal/charismatic doctrines did.

The ecumenical movement was called the World Council of Churches and is now called Churches Together. It taught unity in diversity. It said that doctrines did not matter that much. Catholics and Anglicans believe that baptism is christening whereas evangelicals believe baptism is for adults when they have made a personal choice to accept Christ as Saviour and this is born out in the New Testament. People repented and then were baptised (Matthew 3. 2 and 11, Acts 2. 38 and 41). Those who heard the Word of God were then gladly baptised. A baby in arms or a young child cannot repent and receive the Word of God gladly, or otherwise. Doctrines do matter. Many Catholics believe that the wafer and wine at Mass is literally the Body and Blood of Christ. It is not. They are merely symbols. The wine was purchased from Threshers and did not come from the wounds of Christ. Catholics and some Anglicans believe that salvation and eternal life is in the sacraments and in the Church. It is not. Salvation is in Christ and in Christ alone (Romans 10. 13, John 3.16). It is He who saves, not the Church or its rituals. Some churches have lady ministers, vicars and priests and this is against Scripture. It is not a matter of sexism. It is a matter of New Testament teaching (1 Corinthians 14. 34, 1 Timothy 3.2). Many churches have their own rules and regulations such as the Church of England synod and the Methodist Conference and decisions are made by delegates and yet all the rules and regulations, all we need to know, is in the New Testament. The New Testament teaches that women in Christian worship should have their heads covered (1 Corinthians 11. 5) but this is not observed in many churches. Women are not to usurp authority over men (1 Timothy 2.12) but they do.

It is said that the New Testament was written for its own time and that our times are different. It is also asserted that in the days of the New Testament women were not allowed to hold any office but that things have changed in the two thousand years since, and that we live in a more enlightened society and, therefore, these New Testament strictures do not apply today.

The Bible is the Word of God and in the pages of scripture there are many things said about the Word of God. It is pure (Proverbs 30. 5); it will stand for ever (Isaiah 40. 8) and, in the New Testament we read that we

must not make the Word of God of no effect (Mark 7.13) and in the final chapter of the New Testament there is a grim warning that we are not to add to or take away from anything in the New Testament. It follows that we are not to alter anything or change it. This not only refers to the role of women but when a Pentecostal/charismatic gets up and foretells or prophesies a future event, not contained in the Scriptures, saying that God has revealed it to him then they are adding to the Word of God which is forbidden.

Churches and Christians are not obeying the Word of God.

The fifth decline in Christianity today is the absence of holiness which we have briefly mentioned before. Holiness is real spirituality. It is the reverence and quietness which is our strength (Isaiah 30.15, 1 Timothy 2. 2). We are called upon to live a quiet and peaceable life. We are also instructed to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1.16). As the end time approaches there is a greater need for us to be holy in all things (2 Peter 3. 11). Our whole conversation and life must be holy since holiness is Godliness. We must be clean from all things pertaining to the flesh and we are to perfect holiness (2 Corinthians 7. 1). Things of the flesh are things of the world. Things of the world are called worldliness. We are to deny all ungodliness and worldly things (Titus 2.12). We are told not to love the world or the things in, and of, the world (1 John 2.15). We must avoid worldliness. Our strength is in quiet confidence and not giving offence to non-believers or cause a stumbling block to be put in their way.

And so this fifth cause of decline can also be described as worldliness. Years ago preachers would say that we must get the Word of God into the world but now it is the world that has got into the Word. The Lord Jesus told us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. (Matthew 28. 19). We are not to love the world and are not to be worldly (1 John 2. 15). The test of spirituality is that the world hates you (John 17.14) because, as Christians we are in the world but not to be of the world. Indeed the world hates Jesus Christ and His followers. But Christians today are no different from the non-Christians; they go to the pub, watch unwholesome rubbish on the television, go to the cinema to watch adult films, some swear and use bad language, they live together with someone to whom they are not married, some are homosexual or lesbian, they go dancing dressed provocatively, they dance in church, most do not go to a church but to a meeting in a house or secular place and so church attendances have dropped considerably, some smoke, some still take drugs and they are no different.

No wonder people are not reached with the Gospel. No wonder people are not being saved and many who are allegedly saved do not last long but turn their backs on Christ. Most of these casualties are in Pentecostal, charismatic and house groups.

Some who profess to be Christians collect pop music including songs by those who live immoral lives by taking drugs and swearing and singing songs which are immoral advocating free sex and drugs. Some even idolise pop singers and worship them whereas worship is for God alone. I am aware of some who call themselves Christians who admire Elton John. He has been married to a woman, he has abused himself with solvents, he has worn women's clothes, he is now married to a man and he condemns Christianity as it is opposed to homosexuality and, therefore, opposed to him. As he condemns Christianity he is an enemy of God and of Christians. In a recent television interview of thirty minutes he said the f word over 100 times. I cannot see how any Christian could approve of him. For a Christian to admire Robbie Williams is also worrying. He sometimes dresses as a woman, has taken illegal drugs and gone into rehab several times. Of course, we do not hate such people. We pray for them but we are told in the Scriptures to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5. 22). To some so-called Christians, Sunday is not a special day but an ordinary day just like any other.

The sixth cause of decline in Christianity is the proliferation of versions and translations of the Bible. It causes great and unnecessary confusion. I have been at meetings, even small ones where there have 12 versions of the Bible in the respective hands of the congregation. Often you hear, "My version does not say that!" This causes division, arguments and endless trouble.

The Authorised Version of 1611 has stood the test of time for almost 400 years and for most of that time there

was not the confusion we have now. It is true that more people were converted in those days than there are today. In Victorian days 82% of people in Britain went to church regularly. Now it is about 4%.

The Pentecostal/charismatic believers insist that Christianity has never been so strong and vibrant as it is today.

I accept that modern people find some of the expressions in the Authorised Version difficult and archaic such as the wist nots and the thees and thous. Thee and Thou are correct whereas you and yours often is not. You refers to an ordinary person and Thou refers to someone very special, and therefore to refer to God as Thou is correct. To refer to Him as “you” lacks respect and the holiness of which He is worthy and He alone is worthy.

Some of the translations are dreadfully wrong and misleading. The AV says that we are redeemed with the Precious Blood of Christ. The Good News Bible says with a costly gift. The AV makes it clear that the Lord died for us; a costly gift could be a piece of jewellery which is quite different than someone dying for our salvation. Look at what is lost in that translation. There are many books available showing the errors in translation and a major book showing the errors in the New International Version which is all the rage.

This is really a plea for spiritual churches, a plea to bring Biblical Christianity back and to please the Lord not people, to be true rather than trendy, to have the courage to adhere to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. The Word of God is immutable and will stand for ever. What should govern our worship is the Word of God not current trends or modernism.

Copyright David C F Wright 2007. No part of this article, however small, may be reproduced or stored in any system whatsoever. It must not be copied, altered or downloaded. Failure to comply is illegal being theft and contrary to International Copyright law and will render any offender liable to action at law.