

CRISIS & GLORY

A Call to the Churches in the United Kingdom

This is an urgent call, made in the name of Jesus Christ by many thousands of men and women committed to churches of every denomination, throughout the United Kingdom. We are today facing a grave crisis both in society and in the churches. We express our profound concern because we love the Church of Christ. Our hope is that this call to prayer and action will be a blessing to God's people in this land.

A New Situation

The Church in this land is now in a totally new situation. After years of enjoying a comparatively privileged position, we are now clearly facing attack, ridicule and even persecution. We are in a counter-culture situation and our position is increasingly similar to the Early Church.

The Message of Hope

We have a real message of hope to give to the broken society of which we are a part. In a nihilistic, self-destructive culture, it is being recognised that health, wealth, power and popularity do not in themselves bring happiness.

Vast numbers of people are absorbed in a fruitless hedonism. Shopping, sport and entertainment are all-important. There is, however, at the same time, a deep hunger for a spiritual dimension of life. The Church needs to be a clearly visible sign of hope, revealing the love of Jesus, the power of God and the certainty of the Gospel.

The Raw Gospel

The message of Jesus is inherently controversial and is even revolutionary. When the simple and radical demands of Jesus are heard by many – especially the young – there is often an enormous response. However, the manner in which Christianity is often presented today evokes a response of boredom, rejection and even hostility.

There is clearly interest in the dynamic reality of a living Christ. It cannot, however, be denied that there is a very widespread turning away from what are considered to be irrelevant and restrictive ecclesiastical structures.

A Trumpet Call

We believe there are signs of a great movement of God's Spirit and that He is mobilising His people in this land. A warning trumpet has been sounded. The Church of Christ is being called to recognise the battle which is taking place and to rise up in the power of God's Spirit. A growing tide of prayer is beginning to rise in the land.

The Assault

The Church in the United Kingdom is now under what is probably the most ferocious onslaught for centuries. The central truths of the Christian faith are under attack and there is a growing denial of the uniqueness and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Christian values, established for generations, are in danger of being completely swept on one side as our culture enters a moral vacuum.

Relativism and Intolerance

Despite the fact that the foundations of our nation are fundamentally Christian, there is now an insistence that all belief systems have equal validity. The adoption of pluralism has tended to lead to a rejection of the absolute truths proclaimed by the Church.

Traditional reference points for ethical and moral standards have been deliberately removed, so now there is very real confusion about the way in which faith and morality should be presented to our children and young people. Religious education frequently presents the Way of Christ as being one of many equally acceptable beliefs. Young people and children are introduced to the words and teachings of Jesus, but rarely to Christ Himself.

With the introduction of political correctness strong belief in absolutes is equated with intolerance. Any departure from this view is itself not tolerated. Those with deeply held beliefs are often ridiculed and, increasingly in the media, unbelievers are idealised. Agnosticism is presented as being more honest and desirable than belief.

Impotence and Alienation

Far from being missionaries, the churches are themselves often mission fields for the cults, new religions and, more recently, Islam. Because of widespread confusion of belief among many church-goers and a lack of basic Biblical knowledge, the Church has lost confidence in her Lord. There is a failure to recognise the uniqueness of the Christian message and the true nature of the spiritual battle. The powerlessness of the churches is rooted in the lack of personal encounter with the risen Jesus and the failure to embrace fully the power of the Holy Spirit.

The churches have generally failed to understand the radical changes which have taken place in the lifestyle and attitudes of young people living in a self-centred and increasingly commercially-driven 'pop culture'. We are seeing the emergence of a generation which is utterly confused and bored by religious education and Biblical concepts and which does not share the same basic attitude as the previous generations. They believe the church is irrelevant to their lives.

Public Truth and the Rejection of God

The concept of the Gospel being public truth is persistently denied, particularly by the small but very powerful groups of people in influential positions in our national life. There is a growing tendency to privatise religion and to make it a personal, individualistic preference, with no social significance. At the same time we are seeing the suggestion that it doesn't really matter what you believe, so long as it does not impinge into the public arena. Syncretism is freely embraced together with a humanist belief system.

In a secular humanist society, men and women have put themselves on the throne. Almighty God, whose purpose is to redeem the whole of creation, has been displaced by frail human beings, often acting out of self-interest and for self-gain. Our obligations before God have been displaced by self-serving individualism and hedonism, often solely concerned with rights rather than responsibilities.

Manipulation, Mind Control and Unbelief

A powerful and wealthy minority in this land, has wielded enormous influence over recent years through the media of broadcasting, newspapers and magazines, popular music and films. They have imposed what they claim to be acceptable standards of public and private morality. A subtle process of thought-moulding has been taking place so that concepts which would have been unthinkable 20 years ago are now being gradually accepted. This corrosive influence has deeply affected those within the Church, as well as those outside it.

The prevailing culture has led those who want to embrace the spiritual dimension of life to favour a 'pick-and-mix' approach to religion in which feelings rather than truth are all important. Rather than acknowledging a supreme and loving God to whom they can relate, many prefer a designer god who they can control and make in the image of their choosing.

Although many claim to believe in God, the fact is we now live in a culture of unbelief.

A Sick Culture

The casualties of the spiritual battle which is taking place are easily recognised in our dysfunctional society. As always it is the weak who suffer the most. Millions of children are suffering the insecurity of a broken family. There are now large numbers of children and young people receiving medical help on a regular basis and many require psycho-active medication.

Record levels of drug and alcohol abuse and violent crime are all symptomatic of the spiritual and moral desert which is evident today.

The Alternatives

In the face of sickness some are searching for a cure. Where the churches have not led people to the experience of prayer and a real encounter with the living Body of Christ, they have inevitably looked elsewhere. There is an unprecedented interest in Eastern Religions, the New Age Movement and the occult. Where the Church has not exercised its healing ministry, people have turned to countless occultic alternatives.

In a culture in which so much emphasis has been placed upon scientific knowledge, it is significant that there has been a huge growth of interest in astrology and a broad range of occult activities.

The Purpose of Life

There are growing numbers, particularly among the young, who are asking fundamental questions about life and its purpose – where we have come from, where we are going, who we are. They are beginning to recognise the limitations of sociology, psychology and many of the academic disciplines, which have tended to steer them away from a rational Christian faith. If the hunger for a spiritual basis of living is not met by the churches, the masses will look elsewhere and, indeed, are doing so.

Our Decline and Our Retreat

Over the past twenty years the main churches in our land have been in steep decline. Church attendance has diminished, congregations are ageing and vast numbers of churches have closed. Simultaneously, the influence of the Church on our national life has diminished. Numerous church buildings have been sold to commercial buyers or have been taken over by other faith groups. This gives a strong impression that the church has died. Even the newer and growing Churches are not without their problems.

To a remarkable extent churches have withdrawn from the public arena. Although they carry out an enormous range of often unacknowledged service to the community, the influence of the churches has undoubtedly diminished in the political and social life of the nation.

Our Image

The Church in contemporary society often gives the impression of being drab, forbidding and uninteresting. In a culture where great emphasis is given to appearance, advertising, packaging and public relations, the image projected by the churches is often dull, archaic or even naïve. We do not, however, need clever marketing initiatives in which the true image of Christ may be obscured. We need authentic Christian living and effective witness.

Our Divisions and our Disengagement

Viewed from the position of the world, the Church is not a single body giving a clear message, but rather a large number of disparate congregations who each have their own interpretation and presentation of the Gospel message and who appear to be in competition with each other.

There is a very real danger of the churches ceasing to engage with our culture. At the two extremes, we either withdraw and disconnect from it, or run the risk of being consumed by it. God calls us to invade and transform our culture, not to collaborate with it, capitulate to it, retreat from it. This engagement is inevitably confrontational.

Our Confusion

There is clearly much doubt about the central truths of the Gospel in the churches. There is also evidence of some Christians substituting an ethical or a programme of social action for the Gospel. There is a real danger that churches can easily adopt the ways of the world. In recent years we have also seen a growing confusion in the attitudes of Christians towards other religions.

The way of God's Spirit is not through compromise or complex debate and discussion. The way of the Spirit is primarily waiting upon God in prayer and simply being obedient to His promptings.

Admission of Truth

There is a widespread failure within the churches to recognise the magnitude of church decline in the United Kingdom and of the crisis we now face. Our sick society is evidenced in the destruction of families, the corruption of the young, violent crime and lawlessness, the culture of drugs and death and the influence of pornography. None of this can be divorced from declining churches in which there is doubt, dilution, and division. As God's people, we must not cry 'peace' when there is no peace. Neither must we pin all our hopes on dreams of revival round the corner.

Rebuilding

We believe God is calling us to rebuild the ruined walls of our society and our churches, but first we need to recognise and face up to the ruins. Like Nehemiah there is a need for us to start praying and working without delay, because time is short. We need a radical return to the fundamentals of the Gospel. Throughout history the message and life of Jesus has inspired men, women and even children, to take action in the face of injustice, poverty and war. The first step was their sharing in the compassion of Christ for the suffering and the lost.

A call to bring Life to a culture of Death

New religions are spreading and have brought confusion. The occult has left a trail of wreckage in terms of damaged lives. Secular humanism seeks to eradicate all Christian influence on our society and in practice has shown to be a disastrous failure. We face an unprecedented opportunity to present the Gospel of Christ. The radical demands of Jesus now stand in stark contrast to the decadent materialism and spiritual confusion of our age.

Today, we embrace a culture of death, decay and hopelessness, but as Christians we believe God calls us to newness of life. We separate from each other in our selfish individualism, but God calls us to come together as one. We are afraid of change, but God comes to make all things new. We are surrounded by lies and deceit, but God wants us to embrace His truth. The desert of our society is dry, but God wants to water our roots to bring blossom and fruit. We consume poison in what we eat, read and see, but God invites us to feed on the nourishing Bread of Life. We have been contaminated by the attitudes of the world, not recognising our need for repentance, cleansing and healing.

Light in darkness

We are in darkness but God wants His light to shine on us, within us and through us. We look inward, consumed with self, but God calls us to look out, meeting Him in others. We look down in depression and despair, but God calls us to look up and be overwhelmed with His glory. We look back, obsessed with the past, but God calls us to look forward with hope and expectation.

God's Call to Change

We are blind to the reality of dying churches and a dying culture, but God wants to open our eyes. We are

deaf to His Word and the cry of the needy, but God wants to unstop our ears. We are dumb in the face of injustice, idolatry and the denial of life, but God wants to anoint our lips and end our deafening silence.

Our hearts are cold but God wants to bring the warmth of His love into our being. We are half-lovers but God cries out for us to be wholly consumed with passion for His Kingdom. We are half-givers yet God gave all for us and wants us to withhold nothing from Him. We are half-believers but God wants to hear our bold 'Yes'.

The Promise of the Spirit

The Spirit of God comes to awaken us. The Spirit comes to convict us of our sin. The Spirit comes to breathe new life into our being. The Spirit comes to burn up our selfishness and pride. The Spirit comes to set us free – to change us, and to change the world. We urgently need to pray for the fire of God's Spirit to come upon us all. Without Him we can do nothing. Jesus said "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

There is Hope

We believe God is calling His people to a radical renewal of faith – to live and proclaim the simple Gospel. There are many signs of hope as God breathes new life into His Church and as people come to Him in humility and repentance. Our calling is to be the family of God worshipping the ONE Father. Our calling is to be members of the flock of Christ, with Jesus being the ONE Good Shepherd. Our calling is to be living members of the united Body of Christ, which has Jesus as its head. Our calling is to be branches of the ONE true vine. Our calling is to be ONE with the Lord and ONE with each other. Our prayer and dream must be that the prayer of our Lord for our unity is fulfilled. Above all we must be a people of love.

We believe God is calling us to recognise the Crisis facing us and to reveal His Glory.

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Today we face crisis both in society and in the churches. We are called to bring hope to a hopeless world. We are called to reveal the glory of God.

Irenaeus (130-202) said 'The glory of God is man fully alive; and the life of man consists in beholding God'. **John the Elder** (8th Century) said 'Your door is open, Lord, and no-one is entering. Your Glory is revealed, but no-one pays attention. Your light shines out in the pupils of our eyes, but we are not willing to see. Your right hand's extended, ready to give, but there is no-one who takes from it!' **Francis of Assisi** (1182-1226) said 'Bring to the Lord, O you peoples of the gentiles, bring to the Lord glory and honour, bring to the Lord the Glory due to His name'. **Martin Luther King** said 'I have been to the mountain top and I have looked over, and I have seen the promised land...I am not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.' **Basilea Schlink** said 'If the Glory of God is to break out in your service, you must be ready to go out into the night!'. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father." (John 1.14). Jesus said 'I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father'. (John 14.13). **'Arise, shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.'** (Isaiah. 60:1-3).